

Amalgamation Of Painting And Music: The Ragamala Paintings

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Abstract

In India, the history of performing arts has examples, where nature has inspired man to compose musical melodies and paintings based on these melodies called Ragamala Paintings. Ragamala paintings are visual interpretations of Indian musical modes previously envisioned in divine on human form by musicians and poets. Ragamala Paintings are a series of illustrated paintings from medieval India. These paintings are based on Ragamala or the 'Garland of Ragas', depicting various Indian musical modes, Ragas. They stand as a classical example of the amalgamation of art, poetry and classical music in medieval India. Ragamala Paintings were created in most schools of Indian Miniature Painting. All known surviving examples of this art were painted in the 16th through 19th centuries in Rajasthan, in Central India, in the Deccan, in the Ganges- Yamuna plains, or in the Pahari region and are today named accordingly, as Pahari Ragamala, Rajasthan or Rajput Ragamala, Deccan Ragamala and Mughal Ragamala.

In these Paintings, each Raga is personified by color, mood, and a verse describing a story of a hero and heroine (Nayaka and Nayika). It also elucidates the season and the time of the day and night in which a particular Raga is to be sung and finally most paintings also demarcate the specific Hindu Deities attached to the Raga, like Bhairava or Bhairavi to Shiva, Sri to Devi etc. Ragamala Paintings express intense emotions and transport the viewer to the scene itself, evoking a specific rasa (mood) in him. This fusion of music, poetry and painting provides harmonious pleasure to all its viewers as Music, a performing art transforms into Visual art in the Ragamala Paintings. Thus appreciating and visualizing the Ragamala paintings an integration can be established between Music and Fine Arts.

Keywords

Amalgamation, Ragamala paintings, Music, Miniature painting, Pahari Ragamala.

“श्रावणात धननिलाबरसाल, रिमझिम रेषिम धारा,
उलगडलापानातूनअवचितहिरवामोरपिसारा!”

(In the month of Shravan, a dark blue cloud drizzled in the silky streams, and amazingly, the trees unfurled their foliage like the Green plumage of a peacock!)¹

These lines by the famous Marathi poet Mangesh Padgaonkar describe the picturesque state of nature during the monsoon, and indeed this natural phenomenon has the capability to conjure up passion, excitement, bliss and a strong desire for creation in our mind. In India, the history of performing arts has examples, where nature has inspired man to compose musical melodies and paintings based on these melodies called Ragamala Paintings.

Ragamala paintings are visual interpretations of Indian musical modes previously envisioned in divine or human form by musicians and poets. They show most frequently romantic or devotional situations in the somewhat stereotyped, aristocratic setting. These paintings were created in albums containing most often thirty-six or forty-two folios, organized in a system of “families”. Each “family” is headed by a (male) Raga and contains five or six Raginis (wives), sometimes also several Ragaputras (sons), even Ragaputris (daughters), wives of sons.²

Ragamala Paintings are a series of illustrated paintings from medieval India. These paintings are based on Ragamala or the ‘Garland of Ragas’, depicting various Indian musical modes, Ragas. They stand as a classical example of the amalgamation of art, poetry and classical music in medieval India. In Ragamala Paintings, the mood and sentiments behind the traditional forms of Indian music are portrayed. Narda, the author of Sangeeta Markaranda, written in the 11th century A.D., classified the Ragas, or musical modes into masculine and feminine according to the moon first to be invoked. The masculine musical modes were called Ragas, and the feminine Raginis. The Ragas were visualized as kings and the Ragini as their queens. There are six main Ragas, each with six queens, thirty-six in all. In Rajasthani Ragamala Painting thirty-six ragas and Ragini are usually painted. With the development of music, further elaboration took place, and each main Raga was provided with eight sons thus raising the number of Ragas and Ragini to eighty-four.

Ragamala Paintings were created in most schools of Indian Miniature Painting. All known surviving examples of this art were painted in the 16th through 19th centuries in Rajasthan, in Central India, in the Deccan, in the Ganges- Yamuna plains, or in the Pahari region and are today named accordingly, as Pahari Ragamala, Rajasthan or Rajput Ragamala, Deccan Ragamala and Mughal Ragamala.

Many paintings are inscribed with their title or even a poem, which renders a verbal interpretation of the theme more or less closely related to the painted version. In

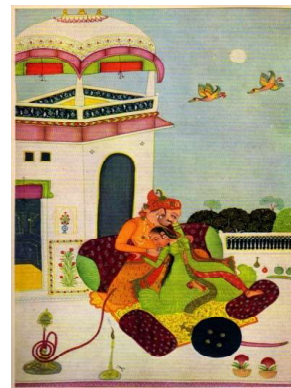
these Paintings, each Raga is personified by color, mood, and a verse describing a story of a hero and heroine (Nayaka and Nayika). It also elucidates the season and the time of the day and night in which a particular Raga is to be sung and finally most paintings also demarcate the specific Hindu Deities attached to the Raga, like Bhairava or Bhairavi to Shiva, Sri to Devi etc. The paintings depict not just the Ragas, but also their wives (Ragini's), their numerous sons (Ragaputra) and daughters (Ragaputri).

The six principal Ragas present in the Ragamala are Bhairava, Dipika, Sri, Malkaus, Megha and Hindola and these are meant to be sung during the six seasons of the year – summer, monsoon, autumn, early winter, winter and spring. Six male (parent) Ragas and their Ragini are listed as follows:

- 1) **Parent Raga: Bhairava Raga:** with the Raginis Bhairvi, Nata, Malavi, Patamanjari and Lalita.
- 2) **Parent Raga: Malkaus Raga:** with Raginis Gauri, Khambhavati, Malasri, Ramkali and Gunakali.
- 3) **Parent Raga: Hindola Raga:** with the Raginis Vilaval, Tori, Desakhya, Devagandhari and MadhuMadhavi.
- 4) **Parent Raga: Dipaka Raga:** with the Raginis Dhansari, Vasanta, Kanhra, Varari and Purvi.
- 5) **Parent Raga: Megha-Mallara Raga:** with the Raginis Bangali, Gujjari, Gauramallara, Kakhubha and Bibhasa.
- 6) **Parent Raga: Sri Raga:** with the Raginis Pancam, Asavari, Seta mallara, Kedara and Kamodini.

Coomaraswamy describes the Ragamala as “profoundly imagined pictures of human passion.” All must show either joy of love in union or the pangs of love in separation. In Ragini's showing love in separation, lovesick heroines pine for their lovers. They watch peacocks, entranced black bucks with their music, or play with cobras, rams and tigers. All of these are the symbols of the absent lover. Doubtless in Rajasthan, this theme has something to do with the fact that lovers were so often absent from fighting each other.

But many Ragas and Raginis depict love in union. Ragini Lalita is represented as a lady sound asleep, with the satisfied lover shown departing. Raga Malkaus (fig:1) is represented by a prince and princess seated on a throne making love, as illustrated in the accompanying picture.³



**Fig 1: Raga Malkaus,
Bundi**

Red, the color representing passion is used lavishly in these paintings. This representation of the RaginiMadhavi (fig:2) is one of the finest examples of Bundi Painting of the middle of the 18th century, where in the delightful season of the rains a lady rushes toward the pavilion after hearing the screams of a peacock, expecting her lover may come.⁴

In Ragamala Paintings certain of the best known ragas represented in such a way that they are easily recognizable: Bhairava is the form of Siva, and Bharti is Siva Puja. Khambavati is a Brahma puja. Hindola, as indicated in the name is a swinging scene, the swingers are usually Radha and Krishna. Tori is a woman playing the veena, and deer are attracted by the music. Desakhya is an acrobatic scene.

Dhanasri is a girl drawing the portrait of a man, which she shows to the heroine, who recognizes her beloved, as in the story of Aniruddha and Usha, where Chitrarekhapaints his picture. Vasanta is a dance, or the representation of the Holi festivities. Megha-mallara is a dance of Krishna in heavy rain. Gujari is a woman playing music to a peacock. Bibhasa is a love scene, the man shooting a flower arrow from the bow of love.⁵

This is a richly imaginative painting of RaginiDhanasri (fig:3) in Basohli style. It shows a lady holding the branch of a tree and carrying a lotus bud as she yearns for her absent lover. It is spring and the exuberant mood of nature is in contrast with the suffering of the woman.

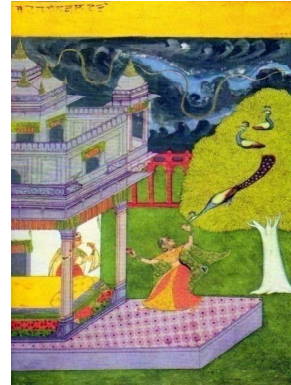


Fig 2: RaginiMadhavi, Bundi



Fig 3: RaginiDhanasri, Basohli

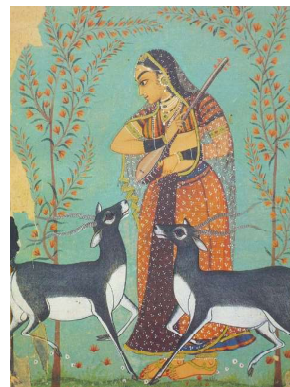


Fig 4: RaginiTodi, Pratapgarh, Rajasthan, circa A.D. 1710

RaginiTodi (fig:4)⁶ is a damsel of dazzling complexion separated from her lover and like a yogini renounced the world, abides in the grove and charms the deer (blackbucks)

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with her melody. In Rajasthani paintings, this symbolism is used for portraying Ragini Todi, as painted in this painting of Pratapgarh, Rajasthan. The motif of deer enchanted by music is very well-known and familiar throughout in the old Indian classical literature.

KhambavatiRagini (fig:5) is an early-evening melody associated with autumn and cool, post-monsoon weather. Khambavati is commonly depicted as a beautiful young woman performing a solitary fire ritual to Brahma, the creator god, as illustrated in the accompanying picture of Malwa style.⁷



Fig 5: KhambavatiRagini,
Malwa, circa A.D. 1660

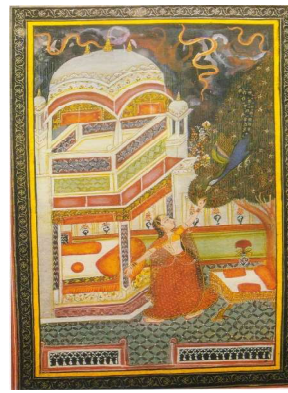


Fig 6: RaginiMadhu-Madhavi of Raga Megha,
circa A.D. 1770

Ragini Madhu-Madhavi of Raga Megha (fig-6) is a visual depiction of an Indian musical mode of Uniara Thikana, Kotah, and Rajasthan. The painting illustrates beautifully, as the lightning strikes the sky and there gathers dark deep clouds, the large-eyed and round-faced delicate nayika rushes back, but before she can enter her house, a loving peacock draws her attention. She seems to assure the bird that the moment the rains stop she will come back and feed it, honey.⁸

Ragamala Paintings express intense emotions and transport the viewer to the scene itself, evoking a specific rasa (mood) in him. The Ragamalas facilitated memorization and classification for musicians who associated an individual Raga with the Deity to whom the Ragas were dedicated. Fascinated by the deification of Ragas, poets then contrived situations involving the characters the Deities which later served as an iconography facilitating the painters to visualize the theme of a particular Raga. This fusion of music, poetry and painting provides harmonious pleasure to all its viewers as Music, a performing art transforms into Visual art in the Ragamala Paintings. Ragamala Painting thus appears to stand at a crossroads of Indian music, poetry and miniature painting.

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