



WOMEN IN RAJPUT MINIATURE PAINTINGS

Lavanya B*

Department of History, University College of Arts and Social Sciences Osmania University,
Hyderabad. India

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ABSTRACT

Rajasthan is famous for its paintings, art and folk dances. In particular Miniature Paintings flourished widely in this region and established a distinct form called Rajasthani Paintings or Rajput paintings which originated, developed and flourished around the late 16th, early 17th and during 18th century in the royal courts of Rajasthan. Rajput School of Miniature Paintings depicted Women in variety of themes like themes on royal court and palace life, themes on dance and music, themes on poetry, aesthetic themes, romantic themes, themes on nature, themes on separation, themes on medicine, themes on nature, spiritual and religious themes, European themes, themes on other ordinary women, themes on yoginis, themes on Raginis, themes on anger, themes on anxiety, etc. Rajasthan with its art activity scattered over the entire land with Mewar, Bikaner, Jodhpur, Kotah, Uniara, Kishangarh, Jaipur and Bundi as its principal centers.

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INTRODUCTION

Rajput miniature painting developed in the courts of the Hindu Rajputs between the 16th and 19th centuries. Rajput paintings were made for the princes of Rajasthan and Punjab, who were ruled by the Mughal Empire. There are four Schools in this style which have to be studied namely the Mewar School, the Marwar School, the Hadoti School, and the Dhundar School.

The Mewar School is associated with the courts of Chavand, Nathwara, Devgarh, Udaipur, and Sawar and produced a large number of devotional paintings. The Marwar School is associated with the courts of Kishangarh, Bikaner, Jodhpur, Nagaur, Pali, and Ghanerao.

The Hadoti School is associated with the courts of Kota, Bundi, and Jhalawar and is best seen in depictions of hunting and sports scenes.

The Dhundar School is associated with the courts of Amber, Jaipur and Shekhawati and is characterized by formal but rich portraits, very large paintings of the deeds of Krishna, and Western influences in the 19th century.

Themes Represented in Rajput Paintings Were

Vishnu Sharma's Panchatantra in Sanskrit means 'Five (Pancha) Principals (Tantra)'. Which is based on an older oral tradition and fables of talking animals conveying important moral stories.

***Corresponding author: Lavanya B**

Department of History, University College of Arts and Social Sciences Osmania University, Hyderabad. India

Bhagavata Gita, a Sanskrit text from the Bhishma Parva of the Mahabharata epic consists of 700 verses. The content of the text is a conversation between Krishna and Arjuna taking place in the Kurukshetra war.

Veli Krishna Rukmani Ri, that is Lord Krishna's marriage with Rukmini has been a fascinating subject among the medieval poets and the artists of northern India. Rukmini, the princess of Kundinpur was in love with Krishna, but her brother called Rukma was not in favour of it and invited Shishupala to marry her. On hearing of this Rukmini sent a message to Krishna who rushed to Kundinpur and eloped with her. On their way back they encountered Shishupala and his retinue. A battle took place in which Krishna defeated Shishupala. Many works were composed upon the theme, in different regional dialects and formed the basis of paintings.

Harivamsha and Vishnu Parva, deal with the creation of the Universe, incarnations of Lord Vishnu and Lord Krishna's life in Gokula, Mathura and Dwarika. Such scenes became the main theme in miniatures.

Kadambari, a romantic tale in Sanskrit credited to 7th century poet Banabhatta, who thrived at the court of the Emperor Harsha. The poet imaginatively uses the medium of a parrot with the power of human speech to recount the tale.

Themes on Ekadashi Mahatyam. Ekadashi fasts are dedicated to Lord Vishnu. According to the legend Lord Vishnu was slumbering in a cave. A demon pursuing him thought this a good opportunity to slay him. Before he could put this into action, a glorious power in the form of a goddess arose from

the slumbering god and slayed the impertinent evil force. The goddess is worshipped as Ekadashi, the benign force that emerges each 11th Tithi twice in the lunar month, removes obstacles for the devout who fasts according to the given disciplines of the particular Ekadashi.

Ragamala or garland of melodies was a favourite theme of Rajasthani painters. The concept represents imaginative synthesis of three disciplines – music, poetry and painting. There are six ragas; each having five wives – Raginis, thus a set of thirty six is often painted in Rajasthan. Its popularity started in the late 16th and continued up to the 19th century.

Barahmasa – Twelve Months representing the seasons and their changing atmosphere and flora and fauna is an ancient tradition along with men and women. The six seasons are Sharad (autumn), Hemanta (early winter), Sisir (winter), Vasanta (spring), Grishma (summer) and Varsha (rainy season). Barahmasa illustrations are a part of this tradition and they are based on the poems in Hindi and Brajhabhasha.

Geeta Govinda – A collection of melodious songs, scripted in Sanskrit by Jayadeva in the 12th century, echoing love that flourished between Radha and Krishna.

Krishna Avtar Charitra

Rajput painting remained as "popular, universal and mystic". Rajput painting varied geographically, corresponding to each of the various Rajput kingdoms and regions. In the late 16th Century, Rajput art Schools began to develop distinctive styles, combining indigenous as well as foreign influences such as Persian, Mughal, Chinese and European.⁽¹⁾ The stylized Indian woman has come from the Rajasthani tradition, specifically the small town of Kishangarh. Raja Sāvant Singh (1748-57) fell in love with a beautiful courtesan and created the "ideals of womanhood" on her beauty.⁽²⁾

The stylized features are seen as an elongated face, arched eyebrows, lotus-like eyes, sharp nose and pointed chin and an added flair in the hair curled on her cheek, these all contribute to a specific facial formula. This "exaggerated facial type" is most often applied to Radha, the consort of the god Krishna, and this has become the norm. Radha and other goddesses were the only named women in imagery; she also represents an ideal of beauty.⁽³⁾

Other themes of Bani Thani paintings include portraits, court scenes, dancing, hunting, music parties, nauka vihar (lovers travelling in a boat), Krishna Lila, Bhagavata Purana and various other festivals like Holi, Diwali, Durga puja, and Dussehra.

In Rajput culture, scenes of the Holy family in domestic bliss were a popular theme. In Shiva and His Family, Shiva is transformed and humanized from the wild and powerful god to a doting husband and father though he retains accessories of the divine. Pavarti, as the consort of Shiva, is perceived as not only his lover, but completely as his wife. Like the love scenes of Krishna and his consort Radha, gods were often depicted in mortal settings. They, although identified as gods, had scenes of domesticity such as Krishna and Radha's romantic encounters, often occupying the same space of mortals. The Holy family consists of Shiva and Parvati with their sons Ganesha and Karttikeya (Skanda).⁽⁴⁾ In Rajasthani miniature paintings, the depiction of women is found mostly in every painting. The most famous art School of that period was

Kishangarh, famous for bani thani paintings. It is different style with highly exaggerated feature like long neck, large almond shape eye and long fingers. It's reached a peak in the 18th century during the rule of Raja Sancar Chand who falls in love with her slave and then the portrait of that slave is found in Kishangarh miniature paintings.⁽⁵⁾

The tiny paintings of women standing alone are also derived from Rajput paintings of Ragamalas. Moreover the presence of Deccani paintings, perhaps Deccani artists at Bikaner influenced the local style, but it is also possible that Rajasthani painters accompanied their patrons to the Deccan where they popularized Bikaner conventions. Ladies excessively long eyes, distinctive foliage composed of tiny *dabs* of bright colour arranged in circles are identical to convention in 17th and 18th century Bikaner painting.

However elite Rajput women were not individually identified as particular women because they were hidden behind the wall of *pardah*, instead they were physically indistinguishable, sharing one archetypal, stylistically determined face.⁽⁶⁾ Understanding Rajput as translated to mean "son of a king" shows a profound undertone of a male dominated culture that kept the elite women behind a wall of *pardah* that made them visible only to a select few men, typically just kings and princes.⁽⁷⁾

The standard Ragamala (garland of ragas) is a set of thirty-six paintings depicting possible relationships between a man and a woman, categorized according to the emotional potential of different times of day (for example dawn or sunset) or seasons of the year (pre-monsoon heat, for example, or the rainy season). Each of these is a separate raga, or its variant, a ragini. Vasanta Raga (Plate H), for example, shows the man and woman dancing together in spring. Their physical union is foreshadowed by wild jungle plants, whose rich buds and blossoms are emblems of divine creativity. Nature is still used in such works to intensify the human situation, not to provide a spatial backdrop.⁽⁸⁾

Depiction of Women in Rajasthani School

Bikaner Style was of drawings of slim and attractive women with eyes resembling those of deer.

Because of Bikaner state's close ties with the Mughal court all salient characteristics of the Mughal style are quite visible in early paintings of the Bikaner style. Many critics therefore term it a provincial Mughal style. It was during the middle of the 17th century that a few artists from the Mughal School visited Bikaner and worked there under its patronized. Ali Raza, a master painter from Delhi was amongst them.

In Jodhpur style paintings women wear bell-like skirts. Jodhpur Style has a very strong folk tradition and here the figures are mainly robust warriors and dainty women. The elongated women figures and oval faces reflect the Mughal style of the Muhammad Shah period.

Jodhpur style are based on the text of a folk poet and the paintings generally depict husband going inside to bid farewell to his wife but she asks him not to leave her alone, while his horse is saddled and ready to go.

The Kishangarh style possesses some distinct features which maintain its unique identity. To express tender sentiments of Radha-Krishna artists often used light colours. The principal

colours were white, rose, cream and deep red. Drawings of limbs of males and women, illustrations of themes connected with the Radha-Krishna cult are some distinct features of this style. Attractive physique with blue aura-like bunch as of hair, thin lips and wide and attractive eyes stretched to the ears, are some unique features of the Kishangarh style. Women figures are fair in complexion, and their wide eyes are adorned with kohl. The most common theme of Kishangarh Style of Painting consisted of the depiction of the love between lord Krishna and Radha.

In Bundi style the shape of the limbs of nayak-nayika, tall human figures with slim and graceful bodies are striking qualities. Women have deep red lips, small noses, round faces and small chins. Rag-ragini, Nayika-bhed, Barah-masa, Krishna-Lila, royal court, festivals, wars are the major themes of the Bundi style. Paintings were greatly influenced by the southern style in representing women faces.

The Kota artists also drew attractive hunting scenes and beautiful women. Stout bodies, long hooked nose, shining faces, bulging eyes are special features of the Kota style.

Dhundar School of Paintings portrays fine-looking women with round faces, large eyes, long neck and pointed nose.

The Amber style possesses its own characteristics, in which the structure of bodies of both male and women has been much influenced by Rajasthani folk art.

In Jaipur paintings women figures are depicted with large eyes, bunch of long hair, stout physique and pleasant mood. Like other Rajasthani styles, in this style too women figures adorned with various ornaments like necklaces, anklets, bangles, earrings etc. were shown marked by the simplicity of composition and the delicate features of women. The Jaipur style of paintings excelled in life-size portraits, depiction of myths, ragas, astrological principles and different amusing and erotic themes. Lord Krishna and Radha, Rajput princes, fierce camel fights, Pomp and ceremony of the Mughal court, the Bhagwat Purana, the Ramayana and the Mahabharat are some of the favorite themes of Jaipur style paintings.

Alwar style Paintings depict drawings of yawning nayikas removing a thorn, nayikas and maidservants engaged in beautification are very pleasant and lovely. Krishna Lila, Ram Lila, religious conversation with saints, Raag-raginis had been extensively painted.

The Rajput style embodied the culmination of the classical Indian aesthetic tradition⁽⁹⁾ Maharanl Chundavat, Maji, Jadam, Rathor, Ma Khichani, Vikawat, was active patron and collector of Rajput painting⁽¹⁰⁾ Elite women generally married outside their father's kingdom and had to leave home for their husbands 'courts, where they would have encountered artists working in a different court idiom.

Both in Muslim and Hindu elite society's women led a sheltered life and rarely revealed themselves before strange males. Thus, there was no question of their portraits being taken, unless they were favourite dancing girls, musicians or courtesans. Realistic portraiture of individual women of either the Mughal or Rajput families is rare indeed...Only one depiction of a woman is included here as a possible portrait, almost certainly of a beautiful courtesan⁽¹¹⁾

In Raikapriya, Keshav Das describes the moods of lovers and the places and situations in which they meet.⁽¹²⁾ Women were

depicted as Jaya deva's Gita Govinda is depicted which remained as a symbolic love song based on poet's spiritual experience. In many paintings of Radha and Krishna, Radha is represented as Divine heroine.

It is important to see that Shiva's family includes not only Shiva, Parvati, and sons but also Shiva's vehicle Nandi and his snakes, Parvati's lion, Karttikeya's peacock and Ganesha's mouse. These animals are almost always inseparable from them individually and including them in a domestic scene places them, to some extent, into the role of family pets. The Beloved Mother the presence of house pets are just as important to the scenes of domesticity as the family unit.⁽¹³⁾ KesavaDas, the Poet of the Rasikapriya, said extensive metaphors transmute his heroines:...her teeth as seeds of sweetpomegranate: Her laughter bright as lightning, feet like lotuses; her neck and arms, as jars and belly as betel-leaf: as swans her gait and limbs that shone as burnished gold-and her smell sweet as does from earthen vessel rise when water first is poured inside⁽¹⁴⁾

A more rigid patriarchal structure, such as the Rājasthān court, used the concept of sexuality according to the ultimate union of the holy that was implied in religious scriptures.⁽¹⁵⁾ Rajput painters draw on the aesthetics developed by their ancestors. Rajput ranis (queens), such as Kundan Kumari, were collectors of paintings and kept them widely circulated.⁽¹⁶⁾ The visual tradition of presenting women's morality signified the identity of women within their society. In patriarchal society's references to sexual purity or impurity were indications of a woman's reputation in her culture. If it is understood that sexual purity an essential virtue then the display of their romantic rendezvous seems counterproductive. However, it seems that the depiction of the varied phases of romance was primary among Rajput 'love-paintings' that presented longing for romance⁽¹⁷⁾.

One of the main reasons that these images seem so foreign is that they are submerged poetical metaphors, simply nothing meanings nothing in these complex scenes. Since the intense study of these paintings was only discovered in the twentieth century, a lot of the poetical comprehension has been lost.⁽¹⁸⁾ Rajput women were independently wealthy and often quite powerful.

The portraits they painted of absent lovers were for personal use, a craft. Also, these portraits still glorify their male counterparts just as Lady artists would be studying old masters and glorifying classical male artists⁽¹⁹⁾

Dhanāśrī Rāginī is of the only examples of a woman shown involved in the arts. Her posture is in the traditional Indian artist's style.⁽²⁰⁾ Here the Rajput woman paints her lover for her own longing, she is not meant to be admired for a talent in the arts. The elite women of the Rajput courts were visible only to a select few men. They observed *pardah* and lived in walled and screened portions of Rajput palaces called *zananas*.⁽²¹⁾

Even dancers and concubines were depicted as ideals though most could show their faces.⁽²²⁾ In case of a particular Queen Regent from Jaipur named Rani Chundavat, an active patron and collector of Painting S.⁽²³⁾

The bulk of Rajput paintings involve Hindu scripture that depict the god Krishna and his consort Radha in romantic meetings. As told, Radha was one of the herd-girls called *gopis*

that flocked around Krishna; however Radha, the loveliest, was the one that Krishna loved the most. Images of these scenes depict Krishna with several gopis, or milkmaids gathered around him, but sexual unions are only depicted between Krishna and Radha. Understanding the poetical connotations behind their romantic love recognized that Radha was the soul while Krishna was the god, and their ultimate union "expressed the utter priority which must be accorded to love for God."⁽²⁴⁾

Rajasthan is a legendary land of chivalry, sacrifice, romance and heroism. It is a place where colours, too, assume the magnitude of legends making it also the legendary land of India's miniature paintings. Rajasthan and colours are symbolic, be it the colours in the eyes of a coy maiden; the glowing gold on the countenance of a youth; the brilliant colours of Rajasthani costumes; or the colours scattered on the leaves of paper.⁽²⁵⁾

Many important museums like National Museum, New Delhi, Maharaja Sawai Man Singh II Museum, The City Palace, Jaipur, Central Museum, Albert Hall, Jaipur, Government Museum, Ajmer in Rajasthan, Lalbhai Dalpatbhai Museum, Gujarat, (also known as L. D. Museum), N.C.Mehta Gallery, Ahmedabad, B.J. Institute Museum and MSS Collection, Ahmedabad in Gujarat, Himachal State Museum, Shimla, Museum of Kangra Art, Dharmashala. Bhuri Singh Museum, Chamba in Himachal Pradesh, State Archeological Museum, Bhopal, Madhya Pradesh, Central Museum, Indore in Madhya Pradesh, Prince of Wales Museum of Western India (Presently, Chhatrapati Shivaji Vastu Sangrahalaya), Mumbai, Jehangir Art Gallery in Maharashtra, Karnataka Government Museum and Venkatappa Art Gallery in Karnataka, Salarjung Museum, Hyderabad, Department of Archeology and Museums, Hyderabad and Telangana State Archaeology Museum, Hyderabad in Telangana State contain large number of Rajput paintings.

These Rajput paintings in Museums illustrated large number of Ragamala paintings like Megha Raga, Lalita Ragini, Bhairavi Ragini, etc, women with slender bodies and uplifted eyes, girls playing kites, women with large eyes, sharp chin, long and narrow eyes, slightly upturned nose or nose in straight line with forehead, Krishna with gopikas, Ornaments and costumes with black tassels and stripped skirts, Maiden pressing the feet of princess, Prince with garland in his hand near princess, Women wearing four corned pointed skirts and transparent muslin veils, Erotic postures, Cow-girls wearing sensuous layers, Nayakanayika, Baramasa, Ragamala, Krishnalila, portraits, harem and zanana scenes, Women taking bath near a lake with black long hair kept loose. Women with long strands of pearls, emeralds, rings bracelets, earrings and head pin, transparent fabrics draped around their bodies, with full long skirts with bright coloured panels, with slenderized faces and elongated limbs. Doll-like women with small feet and short chinned faces. Women worshipping lord Shiva. Women along Landscape, Stream, Overlapping Trees, Architecture. Etc.

The most popular themes included Malti Madhava, Panchatantra, Krishna Avatar Charitra, Vali Krishna Rukmani, Kalpsutra Rasik Priya, Kadambari, Prabodh Chandrodaya hagavata gita etc. Ragamala Paintings, Barahmasa, Malti – Madhva Shahnama Sur Sagar Harivamsha; Prithviraj Raso, Panchatantra (Panch Aakhyan) and Geeta Govinda. In general Women figures are depicted with large eyes, bunch of long

hair, stout physique and pleasant mood. Women figures adorned with various ornaments like necklaces, anklets, bangles, earrings etc. were shown. Popular themes include the life of the god Krishna, scenes from Hindu epics, pictorial representations of the Ragamala (musical modes), women, lovers and romantic portraits.

Rajasthani or Rajput Paintings depicted both royal and ordinary women and themes from mythology and literature like Royal Ladies hunting deer, Women playing tossing a flower, thorn being extracted from the foot of a lady, Lady with attendants in garden, Hero and Heroine proceeding to the bedroom, A woman reading a letter, Erotic scenes in royal court, Lady at her Toilet, Lady playing on Tanpura, Radha writing a letter, Woman at worship, Baramasa paintings, Raga Malhar, Danalila, Gita Govinda, Panaghata Lila, Ragamala, Raga Shri, Mother of Mahavir, ladies playing a game, reverse of Portrait of Mughal Lady, Chaurpanchaska, Nakhshikhna Metaphors for Nayika's beauty. Illustration from Rasikapriya of Keshavdas, Ragini Asavari, A lady Flying Kite, Krishna making love with Radha, a lady relaxing and being offered a cup of wine, bathing scene, Mehandhi, a Family with playing Children, a seated lady with a fan, Raga Dipak, Guru preaching Rani, portrait of a Lady, a Group of Ladies celebrating Diwali, Royal couple with Attendants, a Lady with a mirror, six Ladies riding on Elephants, Durga Killing Mahishasura, Ragini Desa varari, Radha with maids, Horse Riding, ag Bilawal, Murali Krishna with Radha, Yasoda and Krishna, Krishna and Radha dancing, Kambhavati Ragini, Krishna and Radha on a swing, Portrait of a Lady, Shri Ram, Lakshman, Sita on river bank, Nayak and Nayika sitting on throne, four friends bathing on river side. A horse rider stands in banana grove, Nayika seated, Night walk, Rajasthan School, lovers Playing With Fireworks, Utka Nayika: a Lady Awaits Her Lover in the Forest, A folio from the Dhola Maru love-legend of Rajasthan, Radha and Krishna playing blind man buff., etc

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