

Appraising the Portrayal of *Virahotkanthita Nayika* through the Artist's Eye

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The Indian art tradition visualizes women as the flaming torches of love, affection and companionship. But the one that is creatively and amorously the most celebrated and illustrious in art is called as '*nayika*', who held the central focus of poets and painters from very early ages. The literary tradition of analyzing the emotional states of *nayika* with passion and precision was laid down by *Bharat Muni*, the author of *Natyashastra* dating almost to the 1st century B.C., and the first authorized treatise for Indian poetics dealing primarily with dance- drama or *natya*¹. Through such literatures of the medieval Hindi dialects only, religious and cultural aspects and social values that remained essential through the centuries have been passed down, which made accessible to modern generation of writers, poets and painters. The scholars and artists presented the moods of love in idealized form as they perceived them from the texts and the daily life experiences like emotion of sorrow, passion, compassion, regression and expression of eroticism. Such work laid emphasis on *shringara-rasa* which is associated with a *nayika* and her state of love.

Poets of later medieval literature such as *Bhanudatta*, who wrote the *Rasamanjari* and *Keshavadasa*, who wrote *Rasikapriya* elaborated on the *nayika* theme giving a new direction to the literatures talking about *nayika-bheda*. These two literatures are considered as ageless standard texts that arose plentiful romantic situations to be imagined by the artists and thus provided immense number of paintings containing the theme of love. According to poet *Dev* and *Matiram*, '*Nayika* is one on beholding whom erotic feeling or the feeling of sexual attraction is aroused and one loses his balance completely². Such descriptions given by many poets of the period provided unparalleled splendour and sensuousness to the *nayika*'s portrayal. Her attribute embodies physical beauty and piety, selflessness, as also of offering or giving herself completely. While she is sometimes revealed and then portrayed a consort, or a symbol of fertility and abundance, at other times she is a compassionate figure - lovable and desirable, and still at others she is intolerable. She is illustrated with veneration in the Indian arts of paintings rendered with beautiful sharp facial features, almond shaped eyes, transparent bulging out veil, warm sensuous countenance, slim deer-like waist, captivating gait and a voluptuous figure. A striking depiction of *nayika*'s elegance is the noteworthy feature that can be seen in all the schools of Indian painting presenting a pleasant amalgamation of the sumptuous and the spiritual. Diverse are her manifestations and names that every scripture, every art and artist felt and created in their own imaginative style.

Nayikas are given a large number of classifications which provides miscellaneous themes for the poets and artists to work upon. 'Sanskrit scholars have classified *nayikas* according to situations as being of eight types'ⁱⁱⁱ. Amongst those eight,

this paper speaks of *Virahotkanthita nayika*, who is also named as *Utka* or *Utkanthita*. She in various texts is discussed as the one who being alone desires for reunion as she is separated from her lover and thus melancholic. To find her characteristics in art, a painting of her in Rajasthani style has been selected here to search out the deeper obscure connotations and richness of their details that need serious contemplation. It is an attempt to evaluate the skill of an artist who expertly gave life to a vivacious verbal image transferring the colour to each component with specific meaning to add to the innovative dimension of the *nayika* theme.

In the oldest literature *Natyashastra*, *Utka* or *Virahotkanthita nayika* is explained as follows: '*aneka kaarya vyaasangaad yasyaa naagachhati priyah tadanaagata dukhaartaa virahotkanthitaa tu saa* (24:213)⁴. *Dhananjaya* also describes her as '*cirayaty avyalike tu virahotkanthitonmanah*⁵. She is sad by her lover's absence and gets disturbed when her lover lingers on without her being at fault. And due to the non-arrival of her lover or hero, she openly demonstrates her distress, exhaustion and discontent. However, she does not doubt her hero and thinks of the various reasons - he may have been unduly delayed, such as being detained by duty or the king.

And here in the painting, *nayika* is seated on a bed placed at some exterior where lush green forest exists. The bed is given prominence as it is enhancing the condition of *nayika* in *viraha*. It is well prepared by the *nayika* and garland placed at her side is for the welcome of *nayaka*. The artist used motifs and metaphors of birds, trees, clouds, blinking lightning, stream and many more in the environment just to convey the emotions and feelings of *nayika*.

And to do that, he might have followed few lines of poet *Keshavadasa* while illustrating the *utkanthit nayika* as following lines fits to the picture:

'The creepers enchant the eye, embracing young trees lovingly.

The lightning flashes restlessly as she sports with rolling clouds.

The peacocks with their shrill cries announce the mating of the earth and sky'⁶

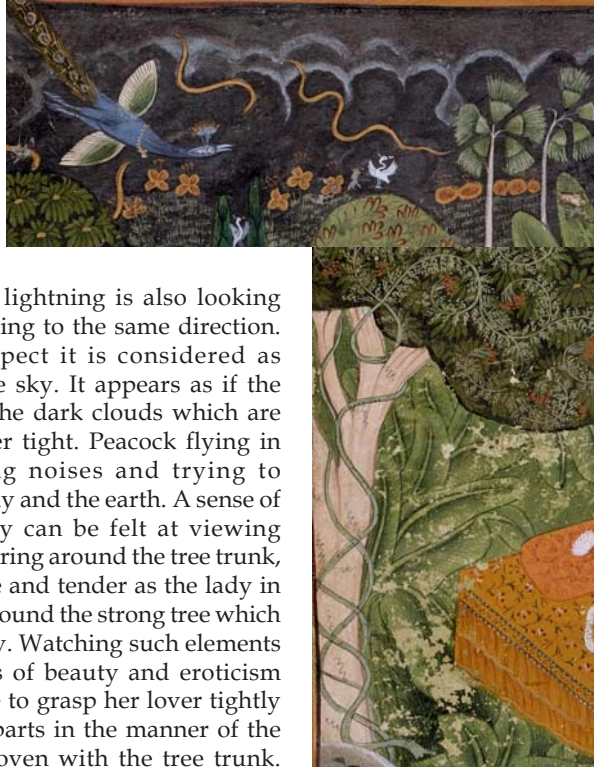
Here, very interestingly painter rendered the *nayika* waiting for her beloved longingly at the trysting place in dark illumined centre of the grove, under threatening whirling clouds of the evening hours in which nature seems sweeping



Plate-1

Utka Nayika, Folio from *Keshavadasa's Rasikapriya*, Uniara, Rajasthan, circa 1760 or later. Opaque watercolor, gold, and ink on paper- 25.71 x 16.82 cm, Purchased with funds provided by Dorothy and Richard Sherwood, M.72.88.7

and birds returning to their homes. In the same manner spinning formations of clouds are representing the state of *nayika's* heart which is churning into the opposite emotions of doubts and believes about the arrival of her *nayaka*. Ochre coloured lightning is also looking like a pair of snake moving to the same direction. Looking to another aspect it is considered as *ardhangini* or wife of the sky. It appears as if the lightning is embracing the dark clouds which are also bursting to hold her tight. Peacock flying in the sky is also making noises and trying to announce the union of sky and the earth. A sense of tenderness and delicacy can be felt at viewing creepers painted meandering around the tree trunk, which appear as delicate and tender as the lady in the scene. It is winding around the strong tree which symbolizes *nayaka's* body. Watching such elements acting as the metaphors of beauty and eroticism arouses the lady's desire to grasp her lover tightly and touch his all body parts in the manner of the clinging creeper interwoven with the tree trunk. Such sensating props have been used by the artist to display *utka's* arousing craving.



Details of Plate-1



Depiction of the *nayika* is also according to the texts and verses. As to display a lady disheartened or restless, having no interest in her, painter placed *nayika* lonely in the midst in agitated posture to display her restlessness. And to exhibit her craving for the reunion, many objects have been used in the scene like the arrangement of two white lotuses placed apart from each other on her bed, two pair of birds, one on the tree and another near the stream. But in contrast painter set the scene very brilliantly by painting the lonely *nayika* in *viraha* watching curiously at the peacock flying above moving towards the peahen placed on the tree waiting for him. Both the *nayika* and peahen are in same posture of turning behind and raising their heads above. *Bhava* of *viraha*, the pain and longing stemming from the separation of lover⁷⁷,

can be seen in the eyes of both the female counterparts. And artist designed and then arranged a beautiful intense picture possessing all the aestheticism in a single frame. The peacock is a symbol of the lover and *nayika* is thus imagining her lover to be on the way as peacock is flying to meet the peahen. Two white birds are also painted flying at the back separated but trying to meet. The nature is adjusted by sensitive and syncopated arrangements of the elements in singles or twos, as the tree's trunks are also placed apart.

One more element have been observed at close view was a bud of lotus hanging from the left side of the *nayika* which is very unusually placed above when other lotuses are painted in the stream below. Metaphorically full blown bud represents the *nayika's* youth and its isolation is somewhere related to the loneliness of the *Utka nayika*.



Details of Plate-1

The overall study aims at understanding the silent language used by the painter opening up the situation of *utka nayika*. Artist tried to speak through his illustration that was not said by the poet or writer, touching the section of the episode that remained untouched by them to create a world of dreamy thoughts. Artist used numerous elements which are acting as props having some relation directly or indirectly with the narration illustrated. Each of them was found significant possessing hidden meaning behind complimenting the mood of the picture. While viewing a painting, emotions (*bhavas*) that the subject is trying to convey should arouse, and this is the painting which is found spilling over with the aesthetic pleasure. Lushly painted background having plentiful foliage, fauna and blossoming flora effectively arouses the joy as well as craving. Dominance of a sole human figure surrounded by landscape filled with whole lot of elements is actually an attempt by the painter to evolve his painting in the direction of abstraction while planning for the composition in simplified yet rich manner.

It was not the result of just first look, but took a long period to relook the painting repeatedly allowing eyes to absorb the image. This helped in finding the way of evaluating the reasons behind artist's approach towards the whole scene. In doing all this, anybody could go wrong but such efforts of viewing visuals develops a sense of reading a painting and helps to search out the intention behind placement of each component used.

It is easy to say or write about *nayika's* loneliness or craving to meet her lover and feeling of yearning spread all around the surroundings but very difficult to paint. Words can be any but an artist has to be restricted towards setting the whole composition and using any colour of his liking because he has to bring that feeling of hunger and the presence of lust and passion in her figure both

together which was actually a difficult task. Artist executed each detail so delicately and brilliantly that each element helped in serving the atmosphere.

Main point of this kind of study is to see the paintings through the painter's eye and feel each essence of it. To analyze the entire miraculous realm produced by the painters to blend the earthy and celestial or divine love in the painting. The beautiful and elegant forms of the lovers crafted on the paper so meticulously that they seem placed on the surface of the painting as if lotuses floating in the pond. Artists are still working upon *nayika* theme, but I believe that the sumptuous charming *nayika* and her pleasing desirability brought by those artists were for the last time in the history of Indian art. And, perhaps also for the last time, the writer, the poet and the painter all came together working upon such splendid pictures that built an enchanting world of romance in profusion. In fact that pleasure is somehow gone astray in present pieces of art. I believe that the love with such intensity cannot be experienced in today's scenario. And when it cannot be felt, one cannot spare that much time and keen curiosity to write or paint it.

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