

A Critical Study on the Ragamala Manuscript from the Province of Kutch

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Abstract

The purpose of this article is two-fold. One, to bring to light an important yet lesser-known art work from the museum collection of Bhuj. And second to speculate and understand the art-activity of this region during the early nineteenth century. This period in the history of Kutch is very crucial as the Jadejas of Kutch had established and nurtured an academic institute to encourage art and learning, which was one of a kind in Western India. And the exchange of connoisseurs and students to this institute resulted in an interpolation of works produced which adds to the unique aesthetic. The Kutch Ragamala Manuscript is the result of one such interpolation which is critically studied.

Keywords : Kutch Braj Pathashala; Mesakarna; Muftahusarur; Raga Darpana; Raga-ragini.

Introduction

Ragamala paintings are visual compositions formulated by later medieval Indian painters on the different melodic modes of Indian classical music. These paintings/ visual imageries are aesthetically meant to correlate a classical amalgamation of three art forms - music, poetry, and painting. Significant to note is that such a complex subject of getting melodic mode illustrated became so popular among Indian aristocrats, that today we find innumerable sets of Ragamala paintings attributed to the various court tradition across India. The most frequently painted Ragamala set constitutes of thirty-six Raga-raginis, which include six male Raga (which are Bhairava, Malkaus, Hindola, Deepak, Sri and Megha) and each associated with five wives, referred to as 'Raginis'. Although the possibility of variations in the melodic modes gave birth to many varied structures, one named Mesakarna is studied in great detail while reading the

current Ragamala Manuscript. This manuscript is now in the collection of the Kutch Museum, Bhuj.

Kutch Ragamala Manuscript

Ragamala manuscript found from Bhuj museum collection is a curious text which is un-dated with no colophon details. This bounded album of 106 pages, illustrates a set combination of 78 Ragas-Raginis, which is meticulously painted by an artist who was probably invited to work at the court of Kutch. The cover of the text is bounded in a red striped Mushroom cloth, which is one of the widely used textiles in this region. The text is in Devanagari lipi using *prachin-gujarati* language, which has a high influence of terminologies from Persian and Hindi origin. The body of the text is broadly classified into three sections. The first section describes the musical mode as a personality which is believed to have originated from the voice of animal or the sound of a human activity. The very first page (numbered 1) of the text is missing so the script abruptly begins to read from '*choutha prakaran*' (meaning fourth circumstance), leaving no introduction to the reader. The second section forms the larger part of the manuscript where the paintings of 78 Ragas and their iconographic description appear. The concluding section describes the manner of singing these Ragas on the basis of Pakhavaj. The text abruptly ends leaving the last few pages blank, having discussed about Raga Darpan (a *grandha* inspired from Vedas), and giving reference to Fakir Chand's interpretation. So, the colophon detail to such a meticulously painted text is left unacknowledged limiting the viewers to look at the visual aesthetics of this manuscript.

The Layout of the Manuscript

The visual layout of the manuscript is standardized and can be divided into two sections – the left part and the right part of the leaf. The paintings of the Ragas, appear on the right side of the page with their individual name inscribed above the illustration, for eg like '*raag bhairav ni tasveer jaanba*'. There is a brief summary of the visual iconography suggested on the left side of the page, which give a clear iconographic description of these illustrations. On every left top corner of the page, the page number is inserted as Raga, and the number below it in figures. The empty space below the iconographic description is filled up aesthetically with designs of flora and birds. This very tendency to fill up empty spaces with design is one of the important aspects to look into this manuscript as a work probably supported by a patron in Kutch. These designs have a hint of

symmetry though not strict in terms of mathematical one, but it can be considered as an attempt to bring in a sense of visual balance, not through strict rigid images or patterns but visually appealing elements from nature like stem of a plant with flowers, with birds like parrots and peacocks balancing on either sides. One can state that this marks the emergence of the naturalistic tendency with design orientation. The dominance of the peacock and the parrot as repeated motifs further hints at the local elements as these birds are found in abundance in this region.



Image 1, Painting illustrating Ragini Bhairavi

There is one depiction that is observed as exceptional from the rest of the format, where an attempt is made to depict two Ragas on the same page (Raag Sandhu and Raag Maru). The two Ragas are depicted on one page by dividing the frame into two halves, the upper half is of Raga Sandhu and the lower half is of Raga Maru. This doesn't seem like an intentional attempt, but by mistake, the scribe must have missed out on Raga Maru while compiling the text and hence the painter must have added on later in the free space which is usually left for the floral design. This strongly suggests that the text was incorporated first followed by the individual illustrations.

The Visual Iconography as suggested in the Manuscript

Raga Bhairav	The Raga is a seated figure (in ardhha matsyendrasana posture) depicted in white skin, adorn wearing white garments. Like lord Shiva he holds a Trishul in his right hand and blows a buffalo horn instrument with his left hand. His throat is coloured blue with poison. He has a crescent on his forehead, and long locks of hair. Although seated in a pavilion, the steep cliff amongst wilderness at the background represents Shiva's abroad in the mountain ranges.
Ragini Bangali	A representation of a beautiful women standing in a pavilion, holding her <i>dupatta</i> in her left hand and right hand rests on the hip. She has sandalwood paste applied on her hand and skin which is indicated by the yellow dabs on hand and skin.
Ragini Bhairavi	A fair women standing in a pavilion wearing a white garment and has a halo around her head.
Ragini Bilawali	Blue skinned female standing in a pavilion holding a white feather in hand.
Ragini Punaki	A women wearing a yellow attire standing in a pavilion holding her <i>dupatta</i> which runs through her head. She has a halo around her head.
Ragini Nayangi	A women seated in a room adorn in a purple attire, resting her back on a drum pillow. She has a halo around her head.
Raga Bengal	A young man in white garment, seated in a room reading holding an inscription in his right hand and holding a pot on the other.
Raga Pancham	A blue skinned young man seated in a chair, wearing yellow garments, and has four hands like Vishnu. Two hands are shown holding a dual flute and one holding a leaf (betel) in hand and the other resting on his thigh.

Raga Madhur	A fair man adorned in red garments sitting in a pavilion, resting his arms on a pillow which is placed on his lap.
Raga Lalita	An elegantly dressed man wearing a white garment standing in a room. He has a long yellow flowered garland around his neck.
Raga Megha	A young man dressed in blue garment is standing in a courtyard. He is being watched by ladies from behind the screened Zanana.
Raga Bilawal	A young king dressed in white garments, seated on a chair in a pavilion. He is depicted playing a pair of Manjira (hand cymbal).
Raga Malkauns	Depicts a blue coloured man wearing yellow garments, playing flute by the banks of a river.
Ragini Gunakali	A women in red garment walking by plantain fields. She has a halo around her head.
Ragini Badhali	A blue skinned women seated in a room resting on a large bolster. She is attended by three other women who is offerings their services to her.
Ragini Nati	Women dressed in blue standing in a balcony playing a string instrument like Veena.
Raga Maru	A man depicted in a garden standing adored in red garments, holding a flower in one hand and a long lance in other. He wears an unusual round red cap on his head.
Raga Nanor	Depicts a man dressed in red garments standing by the forest. He adorns flower ornaments.
Raga Dhodhar	A man dressed in yellow garments, dancing in ecstasy, playing a pair of Manjira at the balcony.
Raga Chandarhasa	Lord Shiv seated in a pavilion, resting his back on a pillow. The distant background has steep mountain ranges.

Raga Mistanga	A young man dressed in yellow garment, depicted standing in a flowering Champa garden. He holds a <i>chatri</i> (ceremonial umbrella) above his head and adorned pearl necklaces.
Raga Bardhar	A man standing in a pavilion playing a musical instrument which looks close to a Veena. He wears an unusual yellow <i>dhotar</i> .
Raga Aai-Nandana	A man standing in a pavilion with a squirrel resting on his head.
Raga Mewad	A warrior depicted in a pavilion, kneeling on floor. He holds a sword on one hand.
Raga Hiyelsud	A king seated in a pavilion holding a bow in one hand and an arrow (crescent shaped) on the other.
Ragini Abhiri	A blue skinned lady standing and admiring herself holding a mirror in her hand.
Ragini Shri-Hari	A blue skinned lady depicted dance at the balcony. She is beautifully dressed in a blue and red coloured rich garment.
Raga Mangal	King seated in a pavilion resting both his hands on his knees. He has a royal <i>chatri</i> above his head.
Raga Chandarnat	A man on his knees playing an unusual string instrument.
Raga Sunarang	A man seated playing a Manjira, attended by three other men with joint hands as if offering prayer.
Raga Ananda	A young man depicted in white attire holding a blowing instrument in one hand. He is accompanied by four women, and all have sandal wood paste applied on their skin.
Raga Basant	A King in red attire, standing in a Champa and plantain garden surrounded by many bees.
Raga Binash	Man standing in an interior space, with a parrot resting on his right hand.

Raga Baraddhana	A man in white garments, sitting next to a tree in a lawn by a river side. He holds a sword in one hand.
Raga Rayvinod	A king wearing white garments seated in a room, in the company of another man. His fingers are depicted pointing at another man standing before him.
Raga Deepak	A man dressed in white depicted seated in a private chamber, playing a string instrument like Veena.
Ragini Kamodi	A beautifully ornate lady seated in a balcony, holding a lotus petal in one hand.
Ragini Pata-manjiri	A beautiful lady dressed in white, seated on a pavilion playing a Veena.
Ragini Todi	A beautiful ornate female depicted seated in a pavilion playing two instruments. In one hand she holds a Veena and in the other Manjira.
Ragini Gavi	A lady seated outside her chamber, adorning a long floral garland. She has sandal-wood paste applied all on her skin.
Ragini Gujari	Lady seated outside her chamber.
Raga Champak	A man in white attire, standing under a tree.
Raga Phula	A man dressed all white is seated in a pavilion holding a betel leaf in one hand.
Raga Namal	Man dressed in white seated in a pavilion, accompanied by four other female attenders.
Raga Kannat	A man sitting in a room all dressed in yellow, holding a flower in his right hand. He is accompanied by a male attendant who is swaying an air whisk for him.
Raga Gosavat	A king seated by a pavilion holding a lotus in one hand and a flower in the other. He is also shown attended by three other men who are standing at his service.

Raga Kalahang	A man standing in an open landscape holding a sword in one hand and a shield in another.
Raga Rama	A blue skin man standing under a tree holding a bow and arrow in his right hand. The quiver and shield are hung on his shoulder.
Raga Shimal	A King dressed in white garments is seated and smiling holding a lotus in hand.
Raga Shri	A man dressed in white garments seated in a pavilion surrounded by bees.
Ragini Patamanjari	A women playing a Vina dressed in yellow and blue garments. She is accompanied by five other female companions.
Ragini Karnadi	A women dressed in yellow dancing in the pavilion.
Ragini Ramakali	A beautifully adorned lady standing in a balcony holding a rooster in hand.
Ragini Sindhuri	A lady standing by the balcony, in red and blue attire, attended by a <i>sakhi</i> (female attendant).
Ragini Sanupari	Lady standing in a balcony holding a lotus leaf in hand.
Ragini Gaudi	A dark skinned lady in orange and white garment standing feeding a deer.
Raga Sandhu	Depicts a man fighting two soldiers. One soldier depicted fighting riding on a horse and the other collapsed on the ground dead.
Raga Maru	A man seated in a balcony dressed in blue garments.
Raga Garas	A king dressed in white garments conducting a religious ceremony. He is accompanied by many men surrounding around him.
Raga Gauni	A man depicted seated offering prayers to Shivalinga and six women behind him probably chanting prayers.

Raga Aakrutrang	Two men seated and having a conversation in an inner compartment.
Raga Kalpan	A man seated in on a chair, attended by another man swaying a fly whisk at him.
Raga Shatarni	Man seated on a crocodile holding a veena like instrument in one hand and Manjira on the other.
Raga Gudsagarni	Man seated in a pavilion holding two lotus in each hand. He is attended by two other men.
Raga Shudh-medh	A blue skinned ascetic who looks like lord Shiv is depicted holding a pointed arrow in one hand and a sword in another. He is also surrounded by peacocks.
Ragini Surti	A beautiful lady seated in her balcony.
Ragini Ahiri	A dark skinned female standing in a room.
Ragini Malhari	A dark skinned female dancing in a balcony surrounded by peacocks. There is also dense clouds and thunder striking in the sky.
Ragini Asawari	A dark skinned female with a snake around her neck is standing by a plantain forest, she had a piece of yellow cloth held in her hand. Flying Gandharvas (celestial beings) have gathered behind the clouds.
Ragini Gunkali	A Lady seated in a balcony having adorn long lotus bud garland. She holds a betel leaf in hand.
Raga Jalandar	A blue skinned man in white garment is playing flute by a river bank. He is accompanied by a deer, doe and a peacock.
Raga Malhar	A blue skinned man barely dressed holding a bow and arrow, climbing mountain ranges with a female companion.
Raga Natnarayan	A dark skinned man dressed in yellow garment walking in a yard holding a sword in hand.
Raga Kedar	A blue-skinned man seated in padmasana posture holding a stick, are being attended by noblemen/ devotees seated in a row on either sides.

Raga Kanada	A blue skinned man dressed in yellow, standing by a river bank raising a sword in his hand.
Raga Sarang	Garuda shown walking carrying Vishnu and Laxmi on a belt.
Raga Shankara	Man standing by a balcony dressed in yellow garments, holding a lotus in one hand.
Raga Gundni	A dark skinned man depicted standing on a tree holding bow and arrow in his hands.

The Paintings

The visual formats of these illustrations are simple and interesting. Unlike other painted Ragamala sets which depict the Ragas with their individual accompaniments. This could be read as a stereotypical representation, since the visual format are more or less uniform for all the Ragas in this manuscript. The Ragas are rarely depicted with accompaniments. The figures are mostly depicted standing or seated on a carpeted balcony with drum-shaped pillows to recline and rectangular once accessorizing their carpets. The male Ragas have a characteristic feature of an eighteenth-century Jaipur portraiture, which is noteworthy for its simplified modelling. The figure also closely resembles with the portrait studies of Maharana Pratap Singh (1778-1803) of Jaipur. The carpets range from orange, blue, pink, yellow and green and unlike most of the other schools having the carpets left plain or have an intricate pattern, these have block-like motives on them which appear at a regular calculated distance like in block prints.

This carpeted floor is for many a time an interior of the residence or a terrace opening. The terrace is marked out by a fence with a filigree design on either side. The front fence at times is shown with an opening with a couple of stairs leading to a garden space. The view from the terrace is usually of a distant landscape, which varies from lush green lawns, to lotus ponds or a green pastures. There are few illustrations where the architecture is prominently depicted. This structure is a simple one-room space with a pointed roof. The interior of this room is ornate with intricate golden murals and colorful door curtains rolled up above. All these features visually resonate strongly with the early nineteenth-century Jaipur school artist work. Stylistically, we can state with a level of certainty that this is an exact format that a 19th century Jaipuri artist would follow if asked to work on a Ragamala manuscript in Kutch. The last flourishing

of Ragamala paintings on an extensive scale occur in Jaipur and was even appreciated by many patrons in other localities. So there is a possibility that this manuscript was produced in the province of Kutch having hired a Jaipur artist for a brief period.

Even as one can trace a stylistic overlap in terms in of paintings, with that of Jaipur style, the classification of Ragas, hints at a departure. The Jaipur School largely preferred the painterly system (ie a set of 36 Ragas, which compiles the six male Ragas, with their respective wife's). There are hardly any text found from Jaipur which follows such an extensive system. One exceptional text from Jaipur, which followed a compilation of 84 illustrations, had a very different visual format. In this set all the Raga-putras of one family of Raga are pictured on one folio, separated by small sections. So, the possibility of a Kutch artist using a Jaipur manuscript as a reference source seems less convincing



Image 2, Painting illustrating Raga Aai-Nandana

The Classification of Ragas in this set:

RAGA	RAGINIS	RAGA PUTRAS
Bhairav	Bangali, Bhairavi, Bilaval, Punaki, Nayangi	Bangala, Pancham, Madhur, Lalita, Megha, Bilawal
Malkauns	Gunakali, Badhali, Sri Nati	Maru, Nanora, Ghodhara, Chandrahasa, Mustanga, Baradhara, Aai-Nandana, Mewad, Hiyelsud
Hindola (Missing)	Abhiri, Shri	Mangala, Chandranat, Subharanga, Ananda, Basant, Vibhasa, Baradhana, Raivinoda
Dipak	Kamodi, Patamanjiri, Todi, Gavi, Gujjari,	Champak, Kula, Bamala, Kannat, Gosavat, Kalavanga, Rama, Shimala
Sri	Patamanjiri, Karnadi, Ramakali, Sindhuri, Sanupari, Gaudi, Sandhu	Maru, Garas, Gauda, Akrutarang, Kalanu, Shatar, Gunasagar
Megha	Surati, Abhiri, Malhari, Asavari, Gunakali	Jalandar, Malhar, Natnarayan, Kedar, Kanada, Saranga, Shankara, Gudni

Although the classification of Ragas in this manuscript clearly indicates that the set follows the Mesakarna system. Mesakarna, also referred to as Kshemakarna, is a 16th-century court priest from Rewa, whose verse, had had a large influence on the beginning of the whole of Ragamala paintings (Ebeling, 1973). It had a system of classifying Ragas into a sets of 84 Raga-raginis; comprising of six male Ragas, each Ragas having five Raginies (wives) and eight Ragaputras. The present text follows a similar elaborate system of 78 Ragas with some alterations. Such an alteration could largely depend on the preliminary reference that the patron and artist selects, which here is unacknowledged. Surprisingly if not stylistically, this set combination of Ragas matches closely with a dated manuscript from Rad-

hanpur, which was commissioned by Nawab Joravarkhan Babi. (Parimoo, 1981) The description for the Radhanpur Ragamala hints the source to have been inspired by a combination of two Persian musical texts named Muftahusarur and Raga Darpana.

Some Speculations

This system of illustrating Ragamala was usually followed only by a small number of ambitious painters and patron, who did not shrink from the task of assembling more than 80 paintings in an album. Given which the appearance of this single example of Mesakarna system from Kutch is a matter of surprise. However, Mirza Maharao Lakhpat's (r.1741-1760) contribution to the patronage of art and literature in the court of Kutch had a great impact on the court culture from mid-eighteenth century. The Braj bhasha institute set up by Rao Lakhpat under the supervision of Jain Yati Kanaka Kaushalji, was largely involved in literary activity. This was a unique institute in Western India where students from a distant land would come to learn in the court of Bhuj. This institution was so popular and well-established that it survived and continued to mentor students even after Rao Lakhpat's reign. Infact, there are references that the Pathashala continued to train students till Rao Pragmal II's reign (r.1860-1875), and about an average of fifty students from Kutch, Saurashtra, Rajasthan, Punjab, and Maharashtra would join to get trained. (Mallison Francoise, 2011) After Kanaka Kaushalji's period the institute was under the supervision of his disciple Kavi Kubar Khuashal who worked at the court between the years 1764-1821. We could largely assume that it is around this period that a Jaipur court artist was invited to Kutch to compile this Ragamala manuscript.

Conclusion

Critical study on a Ragamala manuscript from the Province of Kutch is a monograph in which one could narrow down to strong ways of looking at it: 1) Primarily, comparing the text with the Jaipur style based on the pictorial format - like the similarities in character of figures, placement of images, architectural settings, ornate decorations, physical appearances of the dominant entities, etc. 2) And the departures of the text from its Jaipur context - incorporation of floral designs into empty spaces and the selection of Mesakarna text scribed in Prachin Gujarati language. Considering the role of Braj Pathashala of Bhuj as an important center for art and learning in Gujarat we may categorically place this manuscript to have been commissioned at Bhuj during the early nineteenth century.

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