

# Looking through *The Baramasa* by Madan Meena

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## Abstract

The paper discusses the re-interpretation of *Baramasa* and the icons used by Dr Madan Meena that is different from the notions of traditional *Baramasa* found in paintings of the Bundi-Kota-Uniara region. *Baramasa* is a lyrical genre that portrays the twelve months and their associated seasons in poetic verses. Most *Baramasas* are romantic, portraying the emotions of the female protagonist. The texts show separation and occasionally unification. This paper is a study of *Baramasa* in a contemporary context concerning the artworks of Dr Madan Meena, made between 2018 and 2021 and sponsored by the MAP, Bangalore. These works are made in collaboration with two Kota traditional Kota artists- Lukman and Wasim.

**Keywords:** Art of Rajasthan; Baramasa; Contemporary art; Contemporary baramasa; New iconography.

## Acknowledgements

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Dr Madan Meena is a researcher and a visual artist born on October 13, 1974, in the village of Sawai Madhopur. He is currently the Honorary Di-

rector of the Adivasi Academy, Tejgarh and trustee of Bhasha Research and Publication Centre, Vadodara. He is also an executive member of the Kota Heritage Society, Kota. In his childhood, he moved to Kota with his family and presently lives in New Delhi. He completed his graduation and post-graduation with drawing and painting as his specialized subject from Kota. During this time he worked on the Indian railway which gave him an opportunity to travel and look at the outside world. He regularly visited exhibitions, galleries and museums that also helped him to expand his horizon along with academics.

In 2006, he completed his PhD in the Art of Meena Community from the University of Jaipur, Rajasthan. His thesis throws light on the Mandana art of Meena women that was first documented by Jyoti Bhatt and Raghav Kaneria in the 1970s. *Nurturing Walls: Animal Paintings by Meena Women, Tejaji Gatha, Ajarakh of Barmer*, and projects with Rupayan Sansthan are some of his notable achievements. His research focuses on tribal art, textiles, and folklores of Rajasthan that is also visible in his artworks. He started working at the ground level after entering academics and research, and as a result, his art style and themes evolved. (Meena, 2021).

The paper will focus on his *Baramasa* series, which was made in conjunction with two Kota miniature artists, Luqman and Wasim, and was supported by the MAP Museum, Bangalore. But before going directly to his artworks the paper will brief about the *Baramasa* and also simultaneously understand the *Baramasa* of Madan Meena.

*Baramasa* is a twelve-month poetic genre in which each stanza depicts the month and the seasons associated with it (Singh, 2009). Scholars have divided them into categories based on themes, beliefs, and languages (Vaudeville, 1986). The majority of *Baramasas* are romantic, focusing on the feelings of partners, (usually a woman) throughout their separation and reunion. Some *Baramasas* such as the *Bara Maha* of Sikhs, discusses the separation and unity with the divine. Total detachment from the worldly things is highlighted in Jain *Baramasas*. Some *Baramasas* tells about the relation between the seasons, months, farming activities and festivals (Vaudeville, 1986). The seasons and months have a strong relationship which shows the human emotions in changing environment. Among various writers and poets *Baramasa* of Keshavdas is most renowned and frequently depicted in miniature paintings of North India (Dwivedi, 1980).

In the Indian calendars, twelve months are divided into six seasons. Each season spans two months.

Indian Month	Georgina Calendar	Indian Seasons
1. Chaitra	March- April	Spring (Vasant)
2. Vaisakh	April- May	
3. Jyestha	May- June	Summer(Gharma)
4. Aasadh	June- July	
5. Shravan	July- August	Monsoon (Praved)
6. Bhadon/ Bhadrapad	August- September	
7. Aswin	September- October	Autumn (Sarad)
8. Kartika	October- November	
9. Aग्रahayana	November- December	Winter (Hemant)
10. Paush/ Posh	December- January	
11. Magh	January- February	Cool (Sirsa)
12. Phagun	February- March	

(Singh, 2009) (Dwivedi, 1980)

Visual depictions of *Baramasa* texts can be predominantly found in the Rajasthan miniature tradition, which were created under the patronage of the elite class. As the traditional *Baramasas* highlights the lives of the elite, Madan Meena rejects this aspect of it (Meena, 2021). His series is based on his careful observations of ordinary people responding to the changing seasons in the contemporary environment.

In the past, women stayed indoors while men worked and travelled outside, as depicted in traditional paintings. He opposes the idea of a conventional *Baramasa* text because, in today's world, genders are working in both spaces. In every verse of Keshavdas' *Baramasa* text, a woman urges her partner not to leave (Dwivedi, 1980), while in Madan Meena's *Baramasa*, there is a sense of freedom.

(Image 3) According to the text of Chaitra, a woman requests her lover/partner not to go in the spring season. (Image 1) Madan Meena has depicted a woman surrounded by Mathania chillis, which are dried on a terrace or the ground by women during this month. Viewers can visualize the red land or terrace, the afternoon, and women relaxing after finishing their labour when looking from Ariel view. The woman stretching her limbs is found in the traditional paintings as Aalas kanaya. (Image 2) He used the Aalas Kanya figure from the mural at Chitrashala of Bundi Fort.

He has directly used figures from traditional paintings, including murals and miniatures which are seen in his other works of this series as well as in other series in miniature *kalam*. He has re-contextualized figures from traditional paintings, including murals and miniatures, which may be seen in other works of this series. (Image 4) Madan Meena has depicted a woman holding a flower as a sign of spring, is relaxing amid trees and peacocks in the month of Vaishakh, when the land is filled with the aroma of flowers and the breeze is blowing pleasantly. Peacocks are plentiful in Kota and Bundi. Similar peacocks are seen in Rajasthani traditional paintings including murals and frescos. Madan Meena has also rejected the romantic text descriptions present in traditional paintings such as Kamadeva with an arrow pointing towards the lovers in this month. (Image 5).

Jyestha and Ashadh are the months of summer. (Image 6) Because many institutions are closed in Jyestha, people travel, as portrayed here -a man riding a bike with binoculars. Tigers in Ranthambore have come out to drink water and catch prey. This month, even the monkeys have become active. (Image 7) In traditional paintings, this is the month when all creatures are drowsy and like to be in the shade. Madan Meena represented something different here. Regardless of the weather, one might discover a desire for travelling to his village or home here. It is also possible that the man travelling is Madan Meena himself, who visits Ranthambore on his way to Sawai Madhopur during his vacations. Because of the rapid advancement of technology and changes in lifestyle, staying inside for a longer duration is not possible; people can easily enjoy and work, as shown by the women shooting selfies during the Ashadh month (Image 8) and men riding in Jyestha.

The birds swim and the peacocks dance. (Image 9) During Shrawan women celebrate Teej which is shown through the women swinging or climbing on a tree which is depicted by Madan Meena without any changes as this celebration is still observed similarly. The crows represent the arrival of loved ones. (Image 10) This depiction is also found in the Jodhpur and other schools of painting. Crows in the background indicate good fortune and the arrival of loved ones.

(Images 11 and 13) In traditional paintings, where the woman is afraid of the weather and asks her lover to not leave her, here the woman in Bhadrapad month is shown enjoying the rain. Unlike traditional paintings, she is not depicted with attendants or a partner. Rainfall can be imagined in the background, with dark clouds in the sky and cranes in the background. (Image 12) Chitrashala of Bundi Fort has a woman in a similar pose.

The months of Aswin and Kartika are associated with autumn and joy. (Images 14 and 15) In Aswin, Nav Durga is celebrated, while in Kartika, the couple is portrayed celebrating Diwali with their relatives. He had shown common people heavily dressed as it is the festive season when people wear new dresses and spend time with their loved ones.

(Image 16) In the month of Aghan Red Avadavat (Red Muniya) is spotted in Rajasthan and a woman is seen playing with her in the centre. (Image 18) The Red Avadavat motif is from Sanganer print which he observed while working with Anokhi Museum (Meena, 2021). (Image 20) In traditional paintings all are inside the house, one couple is with fire and the sun is shown moving from east to west in the month of Posh. (Image 19) He has shown a woman relaxing beneath the imagined sun, a water pond with fishes and lotus leaves is seen below with parrots in the background.

(Image 21) Basant Panchami is celebrated in the month of Magh and is shown with a woman wearing a yellow saree. The mild wind blows during this month, which is reflected in the flowing pallu of a woman's saree. Here he has used the photograph of Sumiran Kashyap, a content writer and social media influencer from New Delhi for the reference for the artists (Image 22). Parrots can be found in both the Posh and Magh months in North-Western India.

(Images 23 and 24) Holi is featured in art in the month of Phagun. Young people riding with their vehicles, touring the city, and throwing colours along the way – this is how the young people enjoy Holi in present times.

The works also remind us of the decorative crafts as well as the Rajasthani textile prints, especially Bagru- Sanganer because of the arrangement of trees that tells about his observations from his textile research projects and travels to heritage sites. His works have simplified flora and a limited colour palette that according to him came from the Mandana art of Meena women which can be seen visually. The placement of the figures in the composition breaks the monotonous pattern and creates interest among viewers. His works also remind me of the works of Olivia Fraser in terms of composition and breaking the pattern by creating one motif different.

In contemporary art practice, many artists have come up with collaborative projects with traditional artists like Waswo X Waswo and Alexander Gorlizki with different approaches. Madan Meena, a native who works with artists, has distinct perspectives and reasons for such collaborative projects. His Baramasa series is more inward because he is looking at tra-

ditional paintings as a resident of Rajasthan and then re-contextualized them by observing the different aspects of the region. He acknowledged that he had a special fondness for Bundi-Kota miniatures, but he couldn't develop the necessary set of talents required due to time-consuming research projects and other duties despite having his distinct art style that was widely acclaimed. He has endeavoured to connect the traditional art practice, which has thrived for generations but is now in decline, with consumers who seek both traditional and contemporary. This can be seen through his use of traditional forms directly without changes and also by re-contextualizing the theme. But for some like in Vaishakh, Jyestha, Asadha, Posh, Magh and Phalgun he used photographs of real people and asked his artists to portray them in traditional style as reference. He tries to preserve and retrieve the heritage by incorporating it into the contemporary environment. He also is attempting to bridge the gap between traditional art creators and consumers.

### Images



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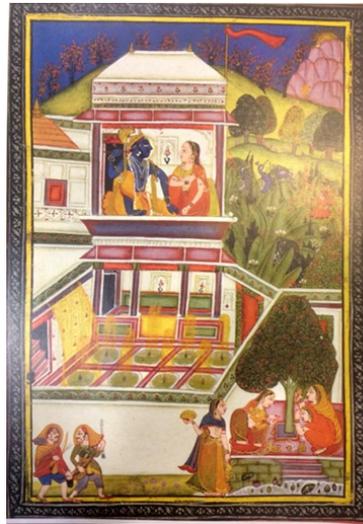
2)

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- 1) Meena Madan. Chetra. 22 x 30 inches. 2020. Silk-screen printed and hand painted. MAP, Bangalore. Image shared by Madan Meena.
- 2) Alas Kanya. 17<sup>th</sup> century A.D. Chitrashala. Bundi
- 3) Chetra. 18<sup>th</sup> century A.D. Bundi. Prince Wales Museum, Bombay. Image of reproduction from Faculty of Fine Arts Archives, MSU, Baroda.



(4)

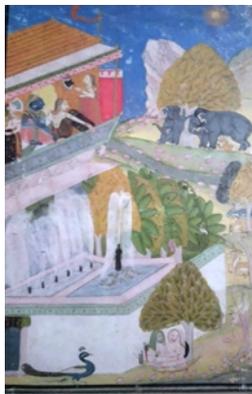


(5)

- 4) Meena Madan. Vaisakh. 22 x 30 inches. 2020. Silk-screen printed and hand painted. MAP, Bangalore. Image shared by Madan Meena.
- 5) Vaishakh. Uniar. National Museum, New Delhi. Image from Baramasa: The Painted Romance of Indian Seasons by Daljeet Singh.



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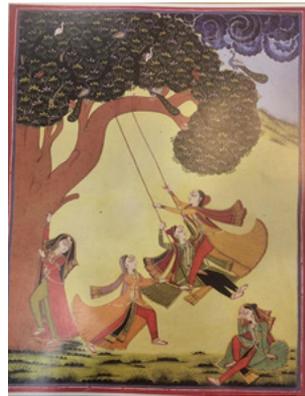


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- 6) Meena Madan. Jyestha. 22 x 30 inches. 2020. Silk-screen printed and hand painted. MAP, Bangalore. Image shared by Madan Meena.
- 7) Jyestha. 18<sup>th</sup> century A.D. Bundi. Prince Wales Museum, Bombay. Image of reproduction from Faculty of Fine Arts Archives, MSU, Baroda.
- 8) Meena Madan. Aasadh. 22 x 30 inches. 2020. Silk-screen printed and hand painted. MAP, Bangalore. Image shared by Madan Meena.



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10)

- 9) Meena Madan. Shrawan . 22 x 30 inches. 2020. Silk-screen printed and hand painted. MAP, Bangalore. Image shared by Madan Meena.
- 10) Shrawan. Jodhpur. 1760. National Museum, New Delhi. Image from Baramasa: The Painted Romance of Indian Seasons by Daljeet Singh.



11)



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13)

- 11) Meena Madan. Bhadrapad. 22 x 30 inches. 2020. Silk-screen printed and hand painted. MAP, Bangalore. Image shared by Madan Meena.
- 12) Painting of a female on wall. 17<sup>th</sup> century A.D. Chitrashala. Bundi
- 13) Bhadrapad.18<sup>th</sup> century A.D. Bundi. Prince Wales Museum, Bombay. Image of reproduction from Faculty of Fine Arts Archives, MSU, Baroda.



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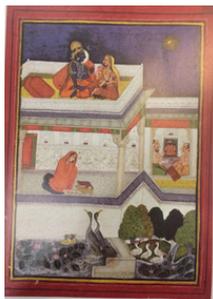


15)

- 14) Meena Madan. Aswin. 22 x 30 inches. 2018. Silk-screen printed and hand painted. MAP, Bangalore. Image shared by Madan Meena.
- 15) Meena Madan. Kartika. 22 x 30 inches. 2021. Silk-screen printed and hand painted. MAP, Bangalore. Image shared by Madan Meena.



16)



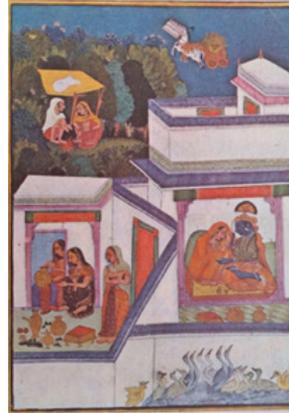
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- 16) Meena Madan. Aghan. 22 x 30 inches. 2020. Silk-screen printed and hand painted. MAP, Bangalore. Image shared by Madan Meena.
- 17) Aghan. Bundi. National Museum, New Delhi. Image from Bara-masa: The Painted Romance of Indian Seasons by Daljeet Singh.
- 18) Detail from a Sanganer Jajam with Red Avadavat motif. From Sanganer. Published by Anokhi Museum of handprinting, Jaipur.
- 19) Meena Madan. Paush. 22 x 30 inches. 2020. Silk-screen printed and hand painted. MAP, Bangalore. Image shared by Madan Meena.
- 20) Paush. 18<sup>th</sup> century A.D. Bundi. Prince Wales Museum, Bombay. Image of reproduction from Faculty of Fine Arts Archives, MSU, Baroda.



21)



22)

21) Meena Madan. Magh. 22 x 30 inches. 2020. Silk-screen printed and hand painted. MAP, Bangalore. Image shared by Madan Meena.

22) Photograph of Sumiran Kashyap. Shared by her on Instagram.



23)

24)

23) Meena Madan. Phagun. 22 x 30 inches. 2020. Silk-screen printed and hand painted. MAP, Bangalore. Image shared by Madan Meena.

24) Phagun. 18<sup>th</sup> century A.D. Bundi. Prince Wales Museum, Bombay. Image of reproduction from Faculty of Fine Arts Archives, MSU, Baroda.

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