DELIVERATIONS IN THE CAMP ON RAJASTHANI PAINTINGS

Dr.Sridhar Andhare

Among several in-depth study courses held by the Jñāna Pravāha, a camp on Rajasthani painting was conducted from the 12th-22nd of December 2001, co-ordinated by two experts in Rajasthani painting, namely, Dr. Asok Kumar Das from Shantiniketan and Dr. Shridhar Andhare from Ahmedabad.

Dr. Asok Das delivered the following lectures : 1) Mughal tradition in Rajasthan 2) Amber/Jaipur 3) Bundi 4) Kotah 5) Shekhavati 6) Alwar 7) Uniara etc. while Dr. Shridhar Andhare talked on the schools of 1) Mewar 2) Devgarh 3) Bandore 4) Bikaner 5) Mathen painters 6) Marwar 7) Ajmer 8) Savan, Ghanerao, Sirohi, Raghugarh etc. 9) Nathadwara 10) Kishangarh. He also gave an extensive lecture on the 'Science and Art of Calligraphy and Painting' explaining the technique of calligraphy and picture making to the participants.

The inaugural lecture on the 'Origin and Development' of Rajasthani painting was delivered by Prof. Pramod Chandra of Harward University, USA while Dr. Das started with Mughal tradition in Rajasthan, bringing to light, particularly the Amber/Jaipur relationship with the imperial atelier at Delhi during Akbar's and Jahangir's reign citing examples of certain dated paintings. Emphasizing the artistic activities of the reigns of Raja Bharmall, Man Singh and the later rulers of Jaipur. He laid special emphasis on the Mughal influence perceived in costume and turban types, the imperial fashions of textile and carpet designs as also the laying of gardens and planting of floral plants and bushes. While dealing with architecture he discussed some of the prominent edifices like Jahangir's garden pavilion at Bairat, Bharmall's and Man Singh's *chatrīs* located at the foot of the Amber fort as well as the extant remains of wall paintings and drawings on the walls of mān mandir and *bhojaśālā* at Amber fort. He also brought to light several archival documents from the Jaipur *pothī khānā* which included names of several painters and their genealogies which were hitherto unknown.

While discussing the schools of Bundi and Kotah painting, Dr. Das particularly dealt with the present status of Bundi painting in view of the latest discovery of the Chunar Rāgamālā of A.D. 1591, and the view of some of the western scholars on it, in so far as the origin of Bundi painting was concerned. Making his points, he showed several slides and brought out the salient features of Bundi *kalam* such as pink flesh tints, dominating cast shadows behind the profile faces, its tumoultous skys and exuberance of lush green vegetation etc. Kotah painting of the adjoining sister state which resembled Bundi painting in many ways, posed problems of identification even for scholars. It gained special identity in the light of two major publications; namely,

the first monograph entitled '*The Kingdom that was Kotah*' by Brijraj Singh of Kota, Lalit Kala Academi, 1985, and the second, a catalogue of an exhibition entitled 'Gods, Kings and Tigers,' *The Art of Kotah*, Asia Society, 1997, not only brought to light many unpublished paintings from the royal collection but also propagated a fresh view point to determine the individuality of Kotah *Kalam*, giving it a status of a full fledged school of Rajasthani painting.

The wall paintings of Shekhāvati (near Jaipur) appearing mainly on the exteriors of *hāvelīs* and houses of wealthy people, came in to prominence due to recent restoration and conservation programmes conducted by INTACH conservation teams there. Dr. Asok Kumar Das based his lectures on the slides made from a latest publication on Shekhāvati murals. Frankly, the Shekhāvati paintings do not confirm to any class of miniature style as such but they certainly justify to the socio-cultural scenario of the time dictated by the whims and fancies of the rich Jaina and Vaiṣṇava community which patronized these wall decorations. The variety of subjects painted by the painters are glaring testimonies of the trends and fashions of the late 19th or the early 20th century in Rajasthan.

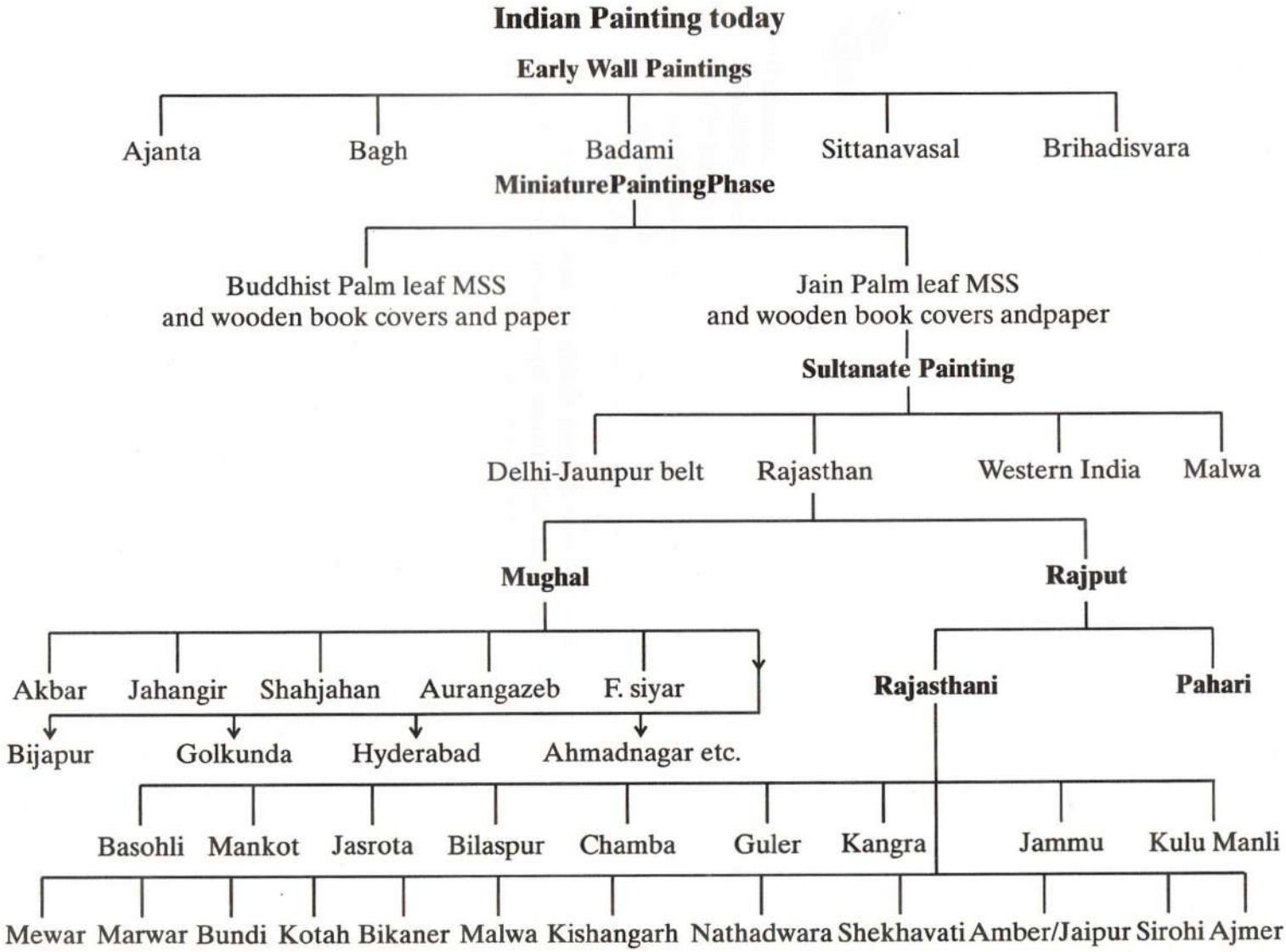
The styles of paintings done at Alwar and Uniara were also discussed briefly giving four examples. Alwar, though in Rajasthan, showed marked Mughal trend in its **Rāgamālā** paintings and Darbar scenes while Uniara, a small *ṭhikānā* of Bundi, created a slightly different trend and style, overflowing with minute details and lush green vegetation like Bundi *kalam*.

Dr. Shridhar Andhare started his lectures with a chart showing chronology of Indian painting in the beginning with a view to place before the students, the current status of Rajasthani painting in the context of the whole of Indian miniature painting.

Giving a brief introduction of the origin and development of early Rajasthani painting he proceeded with the Mewar style with its centre at Udaipur.

The issue of the origin and development of Rajasthan painting was traced for the first time by A. Coomaraswamy who based his arguments on the then available material to study. Further studies by a few European scholars were limited to a certain extent by two reasons. Firstly, that they had very limited material to study and secondly, that their conclusions often reflected inadequate understanding of the inscribed material they studied and published. In contrast, to-day, not only there is more material to study, but also more comprehensive research is done, based on inscribed material which throws more light on several aspects of social, religious, cultural and political life of the people of Rajasthan mirrored in the brightly coloured miniatures of Rajasthani schools.

Coomaraswamy made the first discrimination of Indian miniatures into Mughal and Rajput, perhaps in a wider sense of the Muslim and Hindu subject matter.

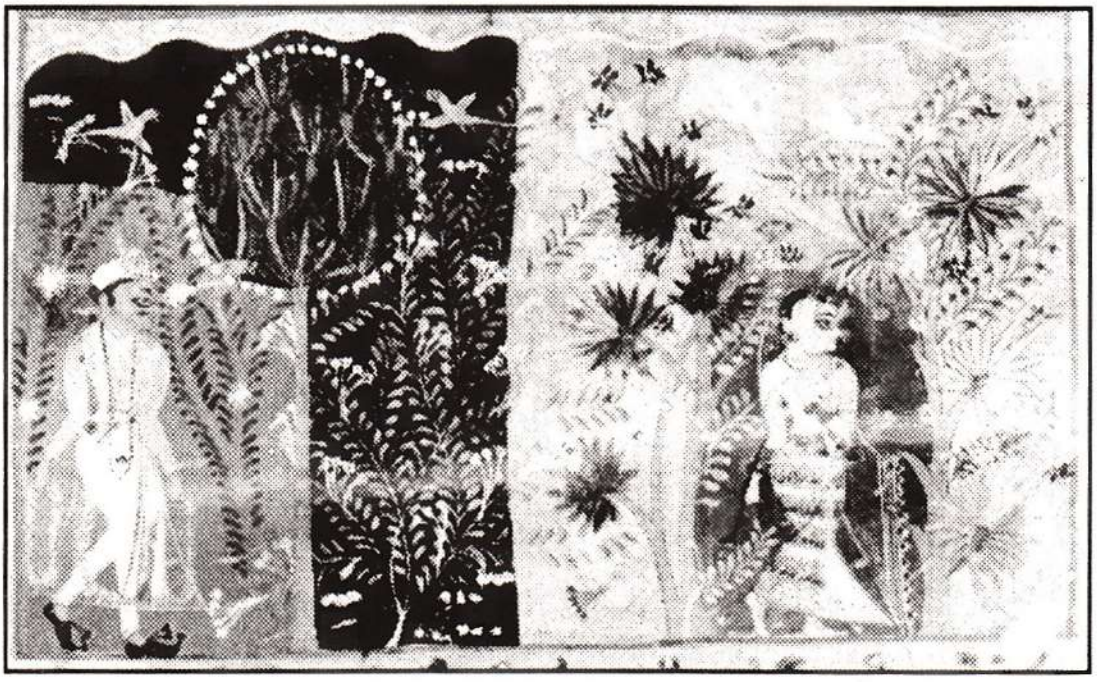

Indian Painting today
Early Wall Paintings
Ajanta
Bagh
Badami
Sittanavasal
Brihadisvara
MiniaturePaintingPhase
Buddhist Palm leaf MSS
and wooden book covers and paper
Jain Palm leaf MSS
and wooden book covers andpaper
Sultanate Painting
Delhi-Jaunpur belt
Rajasthan
Western India
Malwa
Mughal
Rajput
Akbar
Jahangir
Shahjahan
Aurangazeb
F. siyar
Rajasthani
Pahari
Bijapur
Golkunda
Hyderabad
Ahmadnagar etc.
Basohli
Mankot
Jasrota
Bilaspur
Chamba
Guler
Kangra
Jammu
Kulu Manli
Mewar
Marwar
Bundi
Kotah
Bikaner
Malwa
Kishangarh
Nathadwara
Shekhavati
Amber/Jaipur
Sirohi
Ajmer

The Muslim-Mughal strand was divided into Delhi Mughal and the Deccani Mughal. While the Rajput strand was divided into Rajasthani and Pahari. The former encompassing Rajasthani states of Mewar, Bundi, Marwar, Bikaner, Amber, Jaipur, Malwa, Bundelkhand, Kishangarh, Nathadwara, and the *ṭhikānās* or the smaller feudatory states while the latter dealing with smaller hill states of the Himachal Pradesh such as Basohli, Mankot, Jasrota, Bilaspur, Mandi, Kulu, Kangra, Guler, Nurpur, Chamba, Jammu and various others.

However, Khandalavala's pioneering article entitled 'Leaves from Rajasthan' appearing in (Marg.Vol.III No.18-1952) focussed attention of scholars to the newly discovered illustrated MSS. from Gujarat and Western India on the one hand and the impact of contemporary Mughal painting on the other. The famous discoveries of this period namely the early **Rāgamālā** from Pali of A.D.1623[1] and the **Rasikapriyā** series of A.D.1634[2] from the National Museum Delhi, gave a broad base to the problem which warranted inclusion of there regions into Rajasthani sphere on the whole and broadened its scope beyond its physical boundaries of Rajasthan alone.

From the 11th century, Jain religious paintings make their appearance first on the wooden book covers and their palm leaf MSS[3]. These paintings were extremely repetitive and stereotyped, predominantly meant as illustrations to Jain religious and rigid subject matter which had little scope for themes of love and romance. Their extremely symbolic and stylized nature proved utterly unsuited for the sensuous and emotional content of the non-Jain romantic subject matter of the Vaiṣṇavas[4].

The subsequent phase of pre-Akbari painting, now termed as sultanate painting of the (ca 15 16th centuries) has thrown open a store house of both, Hindu and Sūfi (non-Hindu) subject matter which not only includes Sūfi romances in poetry



Folio from the series of ***Gita Govinda.*** *Perhaps painted in Mewar. Ca. 1550 courtsy. P.W.M. Mumbai*

but also dwells upon Vaisnavite and Saivite themes and also the epics. In so far as the vocabulary of the pictorial imagination of the early poetic works is concerned, it is the **Gīta Govinda**[5] (the song of the cowherd boys) of Jayadeva (ca.12th century) that caught the eye of the Gujarat artist as early as the 15th century.

It is, however, not clear as to when exactly the poetic themes began to be translated into visual art by artists, but it is apparent that this development might have been simultaneous with the spread of Vaisnavism in Rajasthan, some where in the middle of the 15th century. Then follows the era of the great saints like Caṇḍīdāsa and Vidyāpati who gave prominence to the love of Rādhā and Kṛṣṇa through their creations. At this time Vallabhācārya (1478-1563) emerges as one of the greatest exponents of the cult of **Śri Nāthaji** at Nathadwāra[6] whose primary doctrine was *bhakti* towards Kṛṣṇa. Towards the end of the 16th century, Keshavadasa, the court poet of Raja Madhukar Shah of Orchha, provided abundant thematic material to painters through his poetic creations. His main contribution of the *Rasikapriyā* (connoisseurs delight) and the *Kavipriyā*, elucidating the quarrels and reunions of the divine couple and the *Nāyaka -Nāyikā bheda*, the classification of heros and heroines became the prime source of inspiration to Rajasthani painters. The **Sūr-Sāgar** of Surdas and the **Satsai**[7] of Bihari found visual expression in Rajasthan and the hill states of Himachal Pradesh. Among the other popular subjects painted by the painters were the paintings of **Rāgamālās** (pictorial representations of musical modes in colours) and the *Bārahmāsā*[8] sets, illustrating the beauties of the twelve months of the year.

This source of divine material not only inspired the painters but also compelled them to find a suitable mode of expression. The prevailing jain idiom with its heiratic and rigid features could hardly cope up with the lyrical and expressive element of the Vaiṣṇava poetry. And therefore a new but fluid mode of expression had to be evolved which could combine the Vaiṣṇava devotion on the one hand and its tender romantic appeal on the other. It achieved for itself for the first time a proper synthesis of colour, draughtsmanship and appropriate landscape for the enactment of the visual drama which could circumscribe different schools of painting that sprang up at this juncture. Thus, the Rajasthani school was born.

Although Gujarat became the forerunner of Kṛṣṇa illustrating the legend in the 15th century, it was initially the Mewar artist, who with his attractive stylization of nature and objects and juxtaposition of bright colours created a role model of ideal Rajasthani stage for the performance of the divine drama of love and emotion between Rādhā and Kṛṣṇa. Very soon, by the early 17th century, a huge repository of devotional and secular material was created in the form of illustrated manuscripts and pictorial series of paintings on all subjects. The **Daśama Skandha** (10th chapter) of the **Bhāgavata Purana**[9] is one such subject which found its visual expression not only in the schools of Rajasthani painting but also in the Pahari styles of the hill states.

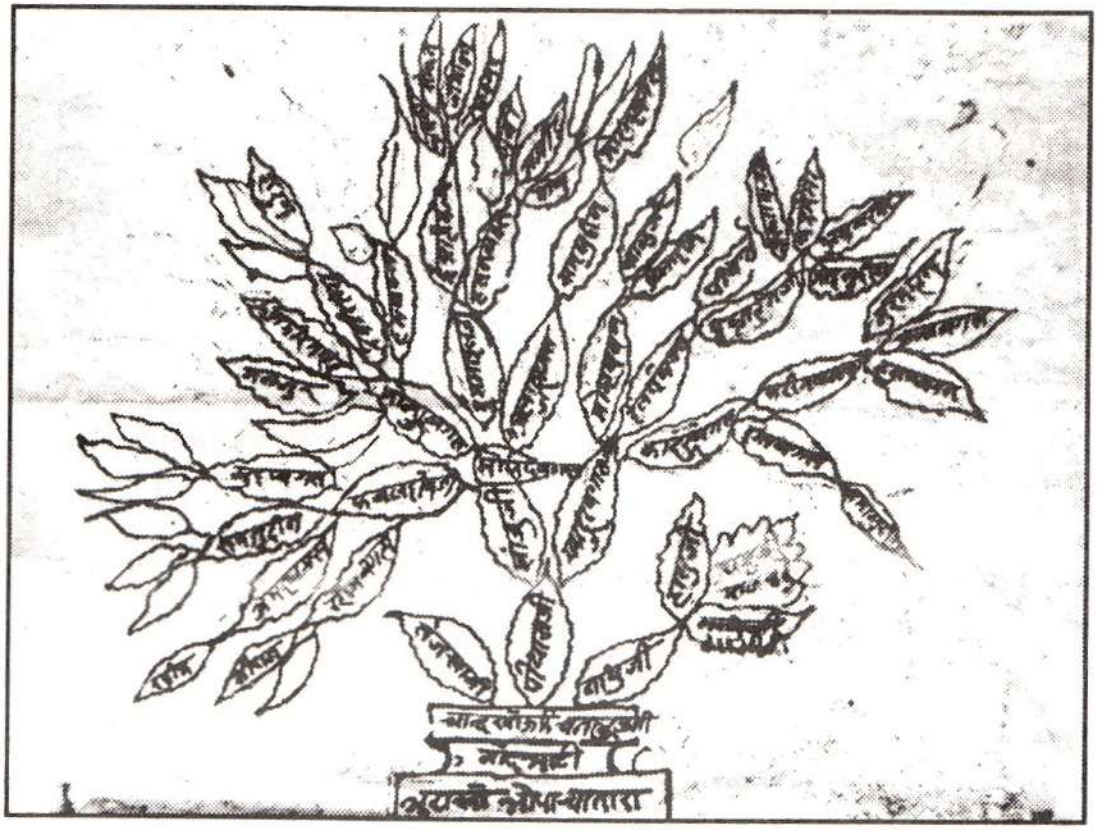
Sukhadeva's penance folio from the Bhagwata Purana Ms. Mewar. Dated 1648 A.D. painted by Sahabdin. Courtsey : B. O. I. Pune.

Mewar, with its capital first at Chittor and then at Udaipur, was the strong hold of the Sishodia Rajputs who were the descendants of the solar race, since the early medieval period. It had reached the zenith of culture during the reign of **Rana** Kumbha (1433-1468) and the cultural history of his victorious reign speaks volumes of his interest and patronage to arts and literature. In the huge genealogy of the rulers of Mewar, there have been a few who carved a niche for themselves in arts in general and miniature paintings in particular. During that period Mewar became the fountain head of painting activity from where most of the Rajasthani schools sprang.[10]

After the treaty with the Mughals in (A.D.1615), the relationship between the contemporary Mughal and Mewār rulers became cordial. Its impact was at once perceived on the costume and customs in Mewār. Interest in visual arts grew up considerably, the result of which was visible in the miniature painting activity during **Rana** Jagat Singh's reign (A.D.1628-52). Among various other subjects painted by the *kārkhānā* (the royal studio), an extensive set of **Ārṣa Rāmāyaṇa** was produced between A.D.1649-1653. All the chapters are profusely illustrated by two most important painters from Mewār, namely, Sahabdin and Manohar. Out of the total of seven chapters, five are preserved at the British Museum while two only remain in India. All of them bear colophons with dates, place names and also the names of painters. Thus, these chapters (*Kāṇḍas*) not only contribute mythological text but also provide other socio historic information apart from their special pictorial quality. In these paintings there are at least three hands of painters visible. The hands of Sahabdin and Manohar are unmistakable. This phase of Mewar is therefore undoubtably the best which placed Mewar painting on a high pedestal.[11]

Though the tradition continues in the 18th century, the rulers by and large fell a prey to the prevailing Mughal fashions. In Udaipur, the *Chitaron Kā Kārkhānā* the artists studio, continued, but its accent on subject matter changed from mythological subjects to court scenes, celebration of festivals, hunting expeditions, indoor scenes and portraits which glorified the activities of the king.

The aesthetic quality of the pictures depended more on their attractive stylization of landscape, brightness of colours such as vermilion red, orange, yellow, greens of various shades, blues, greys and other beautiful combinations. Incidents appear against monochrome patches of colour and there appears a kind of continuity of narration as one sees in a cartoon animation strip. There is a definite balance of colour and form in which prominence is given to the principle theme of the picture.[12]



Genealogy of Muslim Painters in Mewar.

The later Mewar artist on the other hand enlarged his vision, perspective and details on larger paintings, at times measuring one meter by one meter, where he displayed number of figures in a kind of semi stylized landscape and setting of the city palace as backdrop to enact the visual drama of festivals and darbar scenes. The large pictures of this period represent the Rana playing *Holi* with his courtiers in front of the Palace, large marriage processions, and elaborately drawn and painted hunting scenes. These pictures were invariably inscribed on reverse which yielded valuable information. As many as 50 new names of artists and their genealogies have been worked out lately with Hindu and Muslim painters working together and the share of their remuneration etc. This kind of research with personal narration with the senior members and artists was not attempted earlier.

Malwa painting originates from the region of Malwā and Bundelkhand. Since the discovery of a dated set of *Rasikapriyā* of Keshavadas of A.D.1634 (the folios of which are scattered all over the world, in museums and private collections), the school produced stylistically similar sets of **Rāgamālās**, some of which were dated ca.1650, like the one at Bharat Kala Bhavan, Varanasi and others. Ananda Krishna, in his one and the only monograph, on Malwa painting (BKB 1963) has reconstructed a logical chronology of the material he discovered. Needless to stress, that this school was also influenced by the contemporary Mughal school and adopted certain mannerisms of dress. In spite of this, the paintings of Malwā school are recognised by enamel like hues in which red, white, and the blue dominate. It has a bold and frank stylization, the costumes are striped, the domes are painted and men and women wear thick pompons and tassels. Malwa school produced two or more illustrated sets of **Amaruśataka**, hundred verses of the poet Amaru in Sanskrit, that gained popularity to this school. Some extant remains of paintings on the walls of Orchha and Datia Palace present a glimpse of the culture of Bundelkhand of the 18th and the 19th century. Vallabhācārya (ca.15th century), the exponent of the cult of Śri Nāthajī at Vraja stressed on the Bhakti cult, a new dimension of ecstatic worship in which the image of Krishna is considered as *svarūpa*. Later, Vittalnathji, Vallabhācārya's son, introduced the *sevā* or *rāga*, *bhoga* and *śṛṅgāra*. Subsequently the *aṣṭachāpa* poets created a poetry with a rich new imagery which included all arts such as music, dance, drama and painting.

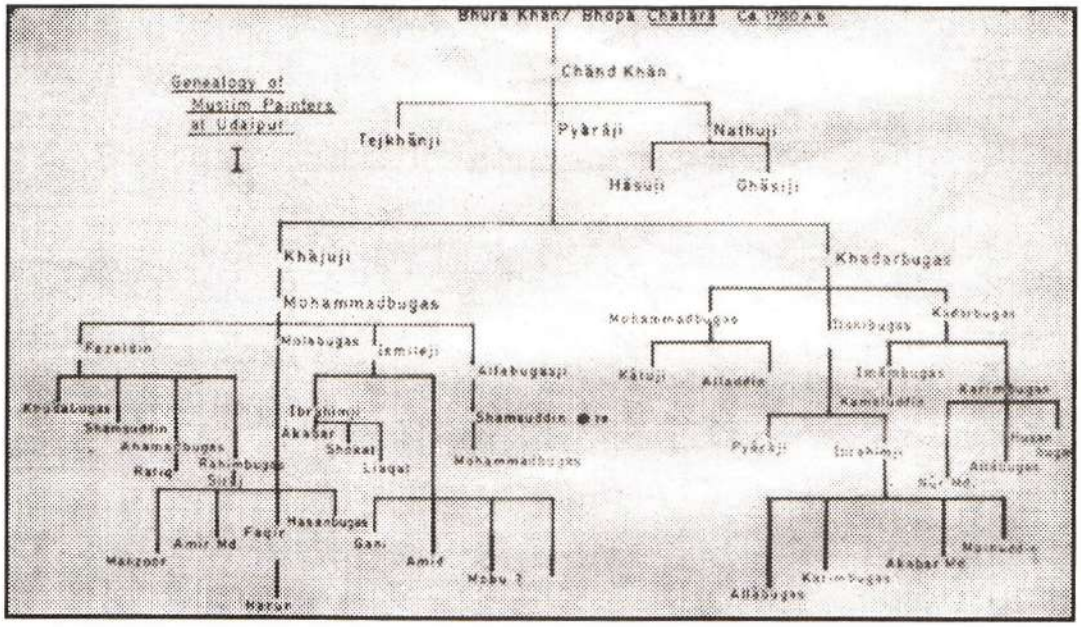
Nathadwāra, a small town near Udaipur, came into prominence due to the installation of the image of Śrī Nāthajī in a big temple. This seat of the Vaiṣṇavas drew thousands of devotees who desired to carry the painted pictures of Śrī Nāthajī with them as mementos. At the same time the various festivals and *darśanas* which formed parts of the traditional *bhakti*, warranted various type of cloth paintings. To cater to this religious need there grew up the tradition of *pichhwais* (paintings on cloth to be placed behind the image of Śri Nāthajī). Some painters who migrated from Udaipur initially started the school with mediacore paintings using commercial colours but later by the beginning of the 19th century, the school produced both, good quality painters and paintings which are now regarded as of Nathadwāra school.

Bikaner is a desert located state in the north west of Rajasthan. Its development starts with a dated painting by the painter Ali Raza who had migrated from Delhi.

Raja Karan Singh (1631 1674) had a dream, which was conceived by this painter and created this magnificient painting. It is likely that due to retrenchment of artists from the Mughal atelier during the end of the 17th century, he might have migrated to Delhi and started a school which was very similar to being Mughal, than Rajasthani.

Stylistically, it has a cool palette, delicate drawing and a restrained expression. It can be said that Bikaner painting is the least Rajput in character among all the

Rajasthani Schools. Its chain of genealogy of Muslim painters *Ustāds* is pretty long and reaches upto 19th cent. in which a number of painters have come to light. There is yet one more community of scribes cum painters, known as Mathen painters, who catered to Hindu and the Jain clients. Stylistically, their work is not as superior as that of *Ustāds*, but they also contribute a large share of paintings which have come from Bikaner.



English version of the Genealogy.

The most appreciated school of Rajasthani painting is the school of Kishangarh lying on the border of Rajasthan and Madhya Pradesh which became famous due to the excellent female bust of Banithani, the Kishangarh Rādhā. She is personified, visualised painted by Nihal chand and other artists from Kishangarh in a style, which is unique to that school.

As a definite offshoot of the later Mughal painting it preservers the refined quality of drawing colouring and technique. The figures are tall and elongated. Their eyes are up curved with a bow shaped brow, thin elegant features and limbs decked up with jewellery. Kishangarh landscape with a backdrop of a lake with boats, green groves and terraces, is only to be admired in its paintings.

The school of Marwar with its capital at Jodhpur, started with the lone example of Pali **Rāgamālā**, of A.D. 1623 which showed some early folkish and naïve features with bright colour schemes of that region. Red, yellow and green and the sub shades of these became the main hues, which decorated the portraits of **Thakurs**, and chiefs. The accent was mainly on portraits, darbar scenes and festivals. The line is very bold and sure.

In the late 18th end early 19th century, the painters of Marwar style, invariably the members of the Bhati families filled the stores of paintings with their works. A recent publication of Marwar painting by Rosemerry cryll, (1999) throws significant light on this school.[13]

On the liner of the Marwar paintings a number of other paintings with scanty inscriptions have been discovered or re-appraised by some scholars. They came from Savar, Ghanerao, Sirohi, Ajmer, Raghugarh, Sitaman, Isarda and many other *ṭhikānās* from Rajasthan and Central India. A word of caution is solicited at this point. Merely, the discovery of one or two paintings from a place, does not give that place the status of a school. There were a number of *ṭhikānās* (tendatory states) which existed sideby side or in the shade of the main schools of Rajasthan. Due to mobility of labour and availability of patronage, in the 19th cent. painters moved from one place to the other. But on the other hand there are also large groups of paintings stylistically, similar with adequate inscriptional evidence corroborated by local textual documents can constitute a school or a sub-school or a style. The *ṭhikānā* of Deogarh[14] and Badnore[15] are the recent discoveries.

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