

## Govind Devjī's Glory: Kṛṣṇa in the History, Thought, Culture and Paintings of City Palace, Jaipur

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**K**ṛṣṇa has created his own niche in the realm of art and culture. He is represented mostly in the form of visuals as well as paintings, sculptures, miniatures and folk images and has been the hero of the subject matter of legends and literature, political and theological dissertations, sculptures, architecture, painting, controversy and conflict. Several festivals are also dedicated to him. He has been considered from the standpoint of Religion as well as Art History; the two academic disciplines that have been the most concerned with representations of Kṛṣṇa in the Indian tradition.

No human-being or divine has ever or anywhere in the world has captured the mind, speech and actions of people over generations and millennium as Kṛṣṇa has done. In that respect he has been incomparable and unique in his diverse personality accepting and absorbing in him everything that life is and represents. His uniqueness lies in his being beyond man's empirical understanding, reaching absolute height and retaining his form as an undisputed religious icon. From age to age his image has changed so much in the minds of the believers and sceptics, poets and artists having reflected the temper of every age and times that it is difficult to separate the historical Kṛṣṇa from the mythical one.

The complexity of the character of Lord has always fascinated me but later on while working on the documentation of the paintings of *Bhāgavata Purāṇa Daśam Skandha* I grew closer with the character and started exploring and unmasking the hidden aspects of those 366 paintings lying in the *Sūratakānā* (Painting department) of City Palace Jaipur.

The first Kacchavāhā ruler of Jaipur, Mahārāja Sawai Jai Singh II was so influenced by Kṛṣṇa that he even dedicated his state to him - 'श्री गोविन्द देव चरण सवाई जय सिंह शरण'. The Govind Devji temple, located in the heart of the city, is the

tutelary deity of the royal family of Jaipur. He influenced the rulers of the state in such a way that they not only built temples for him, but also commissioned the masons and artists to build architecture (Hawā Mahal), temples (Brija Nidhi, Anand Bihari, Pratapeshwar, etc.), sculptures, paintings and even went on to compose poems in his praise in such a way that they have been painting the theme of Kṛṣṇa and his various facets and aspects right from the very beginning. He is omnipresent in all forms of art, be it traditional, folklore or contemporary.

In medieval times the contemporary society, whether it be politics, socio, economic, cultural or religious life, was in chaos with disorder everywhere. That was when *Bhakti* movement tried to reinstate the chaotic society by means of novel ideology. Social, political, cultural and religious movements emerged in various parts of India, which tried to bind the people together with a harmonious cord. The *Bhāgavata Purāṇa* was behind the evolution of the *Bhakti Dharma*. It was through the path of *Bhakti* that the society by then got a new face lift. In a word to say it was from this period that the renaissance of the Vaiṣṇava movement started. The Vaiṣṇava *Ācāryas*, such as Śaṅkarācārya, Rāmānujācārya, Madhvācārya, Nimbārka and others, having strong philosophical base of the concept of *Bhakti* introduced by the Alwars, gave form to four different sects for communities in later times. In this way the Kṛṣṇa *tattva* came to be popularized. Although Mughal rulers like Akbar and Jahangir were liberal with other religions but Aurangzeb, a fanatic Muslim, destroyed several Hindu temples in the north, west and south India to wipe off the historical significance. In the process, the famous Govind Devji temple at Mathura was destroyed, but somehow the presiding deity Govind Devji was saved by Sawai Jai Singh II and was shifted to Jaipur and later on was installed at the famous temple of Govind Devji in 1727. Kacchavāhās, the devout Vaiṣṇavites, dedicated their state to him and started serving the deity; a service that is still exercised in the royal family of Jaipur. The article further discusses how the royal family of Jaipur contributed for the development of religious theology and reviving Hinduism.

India was never ruled as a whole by any single empire; rather it was ruled by multiple kingdoms though they were sovereign. This sovereignty was lost due to the attack of Muslim invaders which first took place in Sindh in 715 CE. During this time Hinduism faced a very stiff competition from Islam. 'Free booters and plunderers from the harsh plains of Central Asia and Persia descended upon the

Indian subcontinent carrying in their hands the flag of Islam and in their hearts dreams of looting the vast and legendary treasures of the country and establishing great empires'.<sup>1</sup> They occupied vast territories in northern India, plundered and destroyed many Hindu temples, their traditions, practices, native kingdoms and tried to introduce the new religion among the local people with zeal and enthusiasm that was totally alien to the native people. After the first Muslim attack, the second surge of Muslim aggression led by Mahmud of Ghazni began in 980 CE. His campaigns across the Gangetic plains are often cited for their iconoclast plundering and destruction of temples. The third wave of Muslim invasion was led by Mohammad Shah Gori that took place between 1191 CE and 1205-06 CE. This was the time when Muslims extended their occupation to Delhi. This Muslim surge brought East Punjab, the Gaᅅgā valley and Bengal under Muslim occupation. The Sultanate period witnessed an era of extreme religious violence in various parts of India at the hands of Sultan's army.

Amidst this political turmoil and religious bigotry, the followers of Hinduism tried to remain intact. The destruction of temples and educational institutes, the killing of learned monks and the scattering of students led to a widespread decline in Hindu's religious practices, their traditions and culture. The struggle of Hindus to resist the Muslim aggression into India was spread over a period of 600 years, from 715 CE to 1328 CE. The next 400 years, from 1328 up to 1720, were marked by a valiant and ceaseless struggle for independence by them. The Muslims aimed to totally destroy the super structure associated with the Hindu period and replace with the typical Muslim one. Towards this end, they, the Muslim invaders, undertook the desecration of places of worship, destruction of universities, like Nalanda, and the wholesale slaughter of the monks and priests to wipe out the intellectual bedrock of the people they overran. Such tyrannical policies for 700 years of Muslim rule left a trail of bitterness in the regions which passed under their domination. The rulers also succeeded in imposing additional taxation on the people of other faiths inflicting undue suffering on Hindus through persecution and biased treatment as a part of their religious propaganda and thereby reducing their families to utter penury and social degradation. During this political turmoil and religious bigotry, the Hindus were facing sufferings and social disabilities. They wanted to heal their desperate hearts that resulted into the

direct outcome of the *Bhakti* movement\* out of the emergence of Islam in India. *Bhakti* or devotion to a particular God became the central theme of many social and religious reform movements of this period. The movement laid particular emphasis on devotion and surrender to God as the best way to attain salvation. The rise of *Bhakti* was very timely and momentous in the religious history of Hinduism because it not only protected the religion from degeneration but also enabled the masses to participate in it. In all fairness we must say that instead of destroying Hinduism, Islam strengthened it. It helped Hindus to come together and regroup themselves silently and religiously. By challenging its tenets, it helped them to look at their religion afresh and strengthen its weaker aspects and brought the Hindus a hope, support and inner strength to save their religion. The movement which started in 8<sup>th</sup> century CE by Ādi Śaṅkarācārya\*\* was continued up to 16<sup>th</sup> century CE by a number of Hindu devotees, preachers and religious reformers. Prominent saints like Śrī Rāmānuja, Rāmānanda, Nimbārka, Vallabhācārya, Basava, Lord Caitanya, Mīrābāi, Tulasīdāsa, the Nayamar and Alvars of South, Śrī Nāmadeva, Śrī Caṇḍī Dāsa and Vidyāpati, Santa Tukārāma and many more played a key role in the *Bhakti* movement.<sup>1</sup> Through their sincere efforts and total devotion to God they raised the religious favour of the masses, bringing God closer to their homes and hearts. They completely relied upon simple faith and the total devotion as the best means to protect the Hindu *Dharma* from destruction. This movement also contributed to the rise of devotional literature. Many of the scriptures and epics were translated into native languages as Sanskrit was slowly losing ground to the other languages due to the absence of royal patronage. In South, Hinduism found great patronage among some strong and powerful rulers like the Rāyas of Hampi and Gajapatis of Orissa. These rulers who were aware of the political situation in the north did their best to prevent the Muslim rulers from entering deep into the South and also worked for the welfare of Hinduism. Themselves great devotees, they encouraged religious activities among their subjects and were responsible for the construction of many temples in their kingdoms.

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\* *Bhakti* movement is the spiritual evolution trend that emerged in old fashioned Hinduism.

\*\* Ādi Śaṅkarācārya was an early 8<sup>th</sup> century Indian philosopher and theologian who consolidated the doctrine of *Advaita Vedānta*.

Mughals, who came to power subsequently in 16<sup>th</sup> century and established their domain far and wide in the subcontinent except for some parts in the South, were little different from the previous Muslim rulers in their attitude towards the native rulers whom they killed quite mercilessly and forced a great number of people to convert to Islam. Bābar, the founder of the Mughal dynasty, was more keen on empire building and started it on top of an existing Muslim Sultanate but did not have much time. Humāyūn, who succeeded Bābar, was not a zealous religionist. Akbar's period saw some changes as he was quite liberal in his religious outlook. His Mughal Empire also included both Hindus and Muslims and he also let non-Muslims be in powerful positions like Rājā Mān Singh of Amber, Ṭoḍarmal, Bīrbal, Tānsen, etc. Up to the time of Akbar the non-Muslims were excluded from all jobs of responsibility and prestige. He showed great respect towards Hindu sentiments and maintained good relations with Rājputānā also. He not only maintained the marital alliance with Rājputās, but also appointed them as governors of various provinces (Rājā Bhārmal, Bhagwant Das, Rājā Mān Singh, etc.) and also put them in charge of many military expeditions. He appointed the great Hindu Rājput chiefs to an active partnership in his government. Eventually it became an accepted practice for high profile Hindu kingdoms like Amber and Jodhpur to be the governors of major provinces or commander-in-chief of an army composed largely of Muslims. Though Muslims, Akbar and Shāhjahān had no quarrel with the Hindus they ruled and both tried to blend in with the Hindu majority for political and sentimental reasons. 'Akbar appointed the great Hindu Rajput chiefs to an active partnership in his government. Eventually it became accepted practice for high profile Hindus like Amber or Jaipur to be the Governors of major province or commander in chief of an army composed largely of Muslims. The Hindus were able to practice their own religion without disturbance'.<sup>2</sup>

The reign of Akbar was of pacification. He employed the Hindu kings on high posts and played off his Hindu generals and Hindu ministers alike against the Mughal party in upper India and against the Afghan faction in lower Bengal. 'Raja Man Singh of Amber was appointed as the Subedar of Bengal, Bihar, Jharkhand and Odisha. He was not only an outstanding military General of the Mughal Empire but he was also a great lover of art and architecture. His constant

engagement in warfare and other state activities did not prevent him from developing a taste for artistic objects. Raja Man Singh built a large number of imposing buildings in the shape of temples, mosques, palaces and forts. During his tenure as a Governor of Bengal he brought the famous idol of Shila Devi to Amber whose temple is still preserved in the Amber fort.<sup>13</sup>

Rājā Mān Singh was a devotee of Kṛṣṇa and constructed a seven-storied temple of Govind Devji in Vrindavan; five miles north of Mathura in the state of Uttar Pradesh. F.S. Growse considered it to be the most impressive religious edifice that Hindu art has ever produced at least in upper India. To Fergusson 'It appeared to be one of the most interesting and eloquent temples in India and the only one perhaps from which a European architect might borrow a few hints'.<sup>4</sup> There is some confusion with regard to the date of the construction of the temple. Growse and V.A. Smith affirm that the temple was built in 1590 CE, but the stone inscription on the Govind Dev temple states that it was erected in *Samvat* 34 (i.e. 1634) or 1577 CE.

There is a Hindi inscription in the western corner of *Bārādarī* in the Govind Dev temple of Vrindavan which is as follows:

“संवत् 34 श्रीन्राकादन्थ अकव-॥ सा  
ह-॥ ज्ये श्री कर्मकुल श्री पृथ्वीराजाधि  
राज वंश महाराज श्री भगवंतदास सु  
त श्री महाराजोधराज श्री मन सिं  
हदेव श्री बृम्दावन जोग पीठ स्था  
न मंदि-। कराजौ श्री गोबिन्द देव कौ”।<sup>5</sup>

*'This temple of Śrī Govinda Deva in the Yogapīṭha of Brindābana was constructed by Śrī Mahārājādhirāja Śrī Māna Singh, the son of Śrī Bhagavanta Dāsa jī descendant of Śrī Karmakula Śrī Emperor Pṛthvī Rāja during the reign of Śrī Akbar Śāha in Samvat 34'.*<sup>6</sup>

The temple is a huge red sandstone (commonly used in the buildings of Akbar's period) structure of imposing dimensions. In any case we may safely assume that though the construction of the temple was started in 1577 it was completed in 1590 by which time Rājā Mān Singh had been able to establish preponderant influence in the Mughal court and was reckoned as one of the powerful grandees of the Mughal Empire. It is mentioned in *Jahāngīranāmā* that

Akbar donated some of the red sandstone for the construction of the temple at Vrindavan which he had brought for red fort. The temple was maintained for the idol of Govind Devji which was discovered by Rūpa Goswāmī; the disciple of Caitanya from a site called Goma *ṭilā* in Vrindavan. The deity was kept in this temple from 1590 onwards. 'It seems likely that sometimes between 1667 to 1670 the idol of Govind Devji was taken out of the temple for fear of desecration by the emperor Aurangzeb who was a fanatic Sunni Muslim. His period saw the intolerance towards other faiths especially Hindus. Even as a Governor of Deccan he had pulled down several temples including the important Chintamani temple of Ahmedabad which he replaced with a mosque. He followed this practice vigorously after becoming the emperor of India. The temple of Govind Devji was plundered in 1670 by Aurangzeb and hidden away either somewhere in Vrindavan itself or perhaps as is believed by the family of the priests of this image in Kama in Bharatpur district'.<sup>7</sup>

Since the temple of Govind Dev was the largest temple in Vrindavan, it is unlikely that it escaped the furry of the Mughals. The image was saved but the temple was destroyed. From there the idol travelled and ultimately it was reinstalled at Govind Devji temple at Jaipur by Mahārājā Sawāi Jai Singh II in 1727 as he shifted his capital from Amber to Jaipur.

The Govind Devji temple located in the Jai Niwas garden of City Palace Jaipur is a flat roofed building which is situated within the precincts of the City Palace. The worship of the deity is carried out here in the Gauḍīya Vaiṣṇava manner since the priests of the temple belong to this sect only. The temple from the very beginning was maintained with the cost of the rulers of Jaipur from the time of Sawāi Jai Singh II. 'Although Kachhawahas are the descendants of Rama, Jai Singh was initially inclined towards his worship and the reason he collected and compiled the works dealing with the supremacy of Rama. But during his first visit to Vrajamandal in his early age Jai Singh had become interested in the frolics and playful life of Krishna. Afterwards when he stayed at Mathura and Agra as governor his contacts with the influential exponents of Gaudiya sect attracted him very much and on account of his natural coordination disposition he found himself inclined to follow the life of devotion to Radha and Krishna as a redress to all worldly binding factors.'<sup>8</sup>

Sawāi Jai Singh II, attracted by the philosophies of Gauḍīya *sampradāya*, invited views of the leading *Goswāmīs* of Vrindavan on the origin of the faith and the controversies therein. After a critical and thoughtful study of all these sects Sawāi Jai Singh II was disposed to dedicate his state to the feet of Śrī Govind Devji and to act as his *Dewan*. Since then his official seal bore the inscription 'श्री गोविन्द देव चरण सवाई जय सिंह शरण'. This epithet is being observed by his descendants up to date. He installed the idol of the deity in the palace premises in the Jai Niwas gardens laid down by him prior to the foundation of the new city of Jaipur. After the installation of Mahārāja Kumār Ishvarī Singh as *Yuvarāja* in 1792 CE, Sawāi Jai Singh passed all his time in devotion of Śrī Govind Devji.

Besides enriching general literature and contributing to the development of religious theology, Jai Singh's personal interest in art is no less important. His rich collection of paintings in *Sūratakhānā* speaks a lot about it. Though his closer contact with the Mughal court influenced art to a great extent, yet the local traditions and patterns of a Rājput house seems to have been maintained in the paintings executed at his court. In addition to the large collection of paintings made by him through various sources (which bears the seals of his keepers and is dated in his reign) a considerable number of illustrations on *Rasikapriyā*, *Kavipriyā*, *Gīta Govinda*, *Bārāmāsā*, *Navarasa* and *Rāgamālā* set represent the hero's figure in the striking resemblance with his person.

Sawāi Ishvarī Singh inherited intelligence and love for art and literature from his father but this promising ruler did not get much time during his reign of seven years. He was continuously on the loggerheads with his younger step brother Sawāi Mādho Singh I. The reign of Sāwai Mādho Singh I too did not see major inclination towards the Gauḍīya *sampradāya*. He seemed to have been interested in Śakti sect.

Sawāi Pratāp Singh sat on the throne of Jaipur in 1778 CE at the tender age of fourteen following the untimely death of his elder half-brother Pṛthvī Singh. Widely acknowledged as a great devotee of Kṛṣṇa, he was also a great patron of arts. Although during twenty-five years of rule, Sawāi Pratāp and his state underwent many vicissitudes but he managed to devote his time in the development of art and culture. His reign is marked by great cultural

achievements and can be considered as the golden age in the history of Jaipur. Pratāp took keen interest in various activities of fine arts and architecture and invited many artists to his court. As a person of impeccable taste he patronized fine arts like music, painting and literature, as well as ornamental architecture which flourished in leaps and bounds in and outside his court and won him praises from far and wide. He showered substantial rewards upon the miniaturists and painters who extensively decorated a number of memorable manuscripts, mainly related to the life and miraculous deeds of Kṛṣṇa. Poetry was perhaps his first love. He himself was a poet par excellence as he made a significant contribution to literature by writing and composing over 30 literary works under the pen name of 'Vrija Nidhi' in Sanskrit, Hindi, Urdu and Brijabhāṣā. He invited several scholars of high order, notably Ānandaghana, Jagadīśa Bhaṭṭa, Padmākara, Devakavi, etc. As he was the staunch devotee of Kṛṣṇa, most of his works are dedicated to him. Be it the poetry (प्रीति पचीसी, प्रेमलता, मुरली विहार, होरी बहार, पद टीका, श्रंगार मंजरी, वैराग्य मंजरी, रास का रेखता, स्नेह संग्राम, इत्यादि), temples built by him in the different sectors of the city (Anand Bihari ji, Madan Mohan ji, Brija Nidhi ji, Pratapeshwar ji, Gyan Gopal ji, etc.), ornamental architecture (Hawā Mahal) or paintings (*Rāsalilā*, *Bhāgavata Purāṇa* - tenth canto, *Rāgamālā*, *Bārāmāsā*, etc.) (Figs.1, 2, 3).



Fig.1 : Brij Nidhi Temple, Chandni Chowk, Jaipur



Fig.2 : Brijā Nidhi Temple, Chandni Chowk, Jaipur



Fig.3 : Deity in Pratāpeshwar temple

The school of painting at Jaipur took a new turn during his reign. The common themes of painting executed at his time were the love episodes of Rādhā and Kṛṣṇa, *darabāra* scenes, *Rāgamālā*, illustrations of *Bhāgavata Purāṇa*, *Durgā Pāṭha*, *Gīta Govinda* and other works dealing with Rādhā and Kṛṣṇa. In most of these paintings Pratāp Singh himself is portrayed as Kṛṣṇa. Some poets have also described him as identical with the Lord. A similarity in the background and the colour scheme is noticed in some paintings with Devagarh sub-school of Mewar paintings. This is due to the fact that Sawāi Pratāp Singh's mother Chandrā Kunwar Chudāwat jī came from the house of Devagarh. Sawāi Pratāp invited approximately 37 to 50 artists to work in his court. Among them were Sahibram, Lichhman, Ghasi, Ramsevak, Uda, Jeevan, Mangal and many more. Sahibram who had started to paint from the time of Sawāi Jai Singh II continued till his time. During this period he executed three large paintings. One is a bust of Mahārāja Sawāi Pratap Singh (dated 1793 CE) with lacquer and metal colours. The second one is the life size portrait of Mahārāja (1793 CE) with the same material and colour. The third painting is that of Rādhā and Kṛṣṇa in dance. *Bhāgavata* was illustrated jointly by as many as 10 artists.

Sawāi Jagat Singh (1803-1818 CE) succeeded Sawāi Pratāp after his death in 1803 CE. During his time the art and technique of painting at Jaipur had started declining with the coming of foreign influence, though some artists like Sahibram

and others kept up the tradition, style and technique. 'The Maharaja got paintings of himself and Durbar executed. Though he did not share the talent of his father yet he extended patronage to the scholars, poets and artists. *Gita Govind* (1803) and *Vishnu Sahasranāma* (1807) are some of the noted works of his time. The local style thus could not last for long after the arrival of British and Jaipur having signed a treaty with them in 1803'.<sup>9</sup>

The painting tradition further suffered during the reign of Sawāi Jai Singh III.

The reign of Sawāi Rām Singh (1835-80) saw all round development of the *kārahānās* and department of his state. Many social and administrative reforms were introduced in his time. 'The paintings carried out were related to common folk traditions, acrobatic feats, dancing scenes and portraits. In 1848 AD the *Mahabharata* set containing 71 paintings and in AD 1850 the *Bhagvat Gita* set containing 10 paintings were painted. The painting has evolved a little and the painters had now started paintings in realistic style and were different from the prevalent tradition as most of the works of the native artist got hybridized with foreign technique.'<sup>10</sup>

The tradition of painting continued up to the time of Sawāi Mādho Singh I (1880-1922). The traditional artists employed in the court carried out the paintings of Śrī Gopāla jī and Gaṅgā jī and a few other illustrations from *Bhāgavata* and other *Purāṇas*. Other paintings that were gifted to Mahārāja deal with multiple subjects but these paintings proved to be very weak in style, colour scheme and composition.

After the death of Sawāi Mādho Singh I, Mahārāja Sawāi Mān Singh II (1922-1970) sat on the throne of Jaipur. Though the last Mahārāja mostly moved in military and other diplomatic circle, he let the *Sūratkhānā* function as an important *kārahānā*. He wanted to revive the old *kārahānā* systems in City Palace but fate had altogether different plans. He died in 1970 while playing polo in UK.

The Jaipur paintings; sacred and secular catered to the spiritual and aesthetic needs, depicted romantic love in all its sensuous elegance and super mundane symbolism, portrayed religious myths and poetic imagery. While Mughal paintings were modern in its recording of subjects; peculiar to the Muslim

rulers, Jaipur painting remained largely traditional in its illustration of the Indian epics, Vaiṣṇava literature and musical modes. The development of Jaipur School of painting was a pictorial counterpart of the classical vernacular literature of India. It occupied the pride of place within a cultural continuum. Thus, it may be said that the sources of inspiration were religious and cultural.

### **Panorama Manifested in the Miniature Paintings**

The new patrons of painting with the decline of the Mughal Empire were provincial governors of Rajasthan. Unlike Mughal artists, Rājput artists were anonymous and did not enjoy the high status of their Mughal counterparts. Thus, while the stylistic evolution of the Mughal School is traced by the patronage of the respective Emperors, geographical categories are used to explain the evolution of styles of Rājput paintings. Miniatures were profoundly influenced by the Indian literature and were executed as illustrations to texts or as individual paintings. They were small scale, highly detailed pictorial compositions often providing the record of the social and cultural life of the time. 'As the renaissance masters turned to the Bible, Indian painters turned to our epics and saw as their task bringing these stories into visual reality for those who may not be able to read. They mostly flourished under generous and sensitive patrons'.<sup>11</sup>

At the beginning of the 18<sup>th</sup> century, painting developed in the Jaipur courts. The rulers of Jaipur were chieftains. Though some of the artists from the Mughal atelier did come to Jaipur court and executed a few commissioned works. The lively school of Jaipur miniaturists produced some of the finest religious or legendary scenes offering a glimpse of Indian life with sentimental and psychological understanding. The painters have produced some master works and sets of *Bhāgavata Purāṇa*, *Rāgamālā*, *Bārāmāsā*, *Gīta Govinda*, apart from secular and court paintings.

### ***Kṛṣṇalīlā***

In Indian paintings Kṛṣṇa became the central figure, especially in Rajasthan cities like Mewar, Jaipur, Jodhpur, Kotah and Bundi. The kings of

Jaipur were devotees of Kṛṣṇa; therefore, he is greatly adorned and exalted by the artists. Themes related to him were the most popular ones which also inspired these artists. It's a matter of fact that Kṛṣṇa is depicted everywhere during the time of Sawāi Pratāp. He is seen in the architecture, sculpture, poetry, and paintings like *Bhāgavata Purāṇa*, *Rāgamālā*, *Bārāmāsā* and other *Kṛṣṇalīlā* themes as well.

### ***Bhāgavata Purāṇa (Daśam Skandha) Paintings***

*Bhāgavata Purāṇa* is one of the most popular texts of Hindus which is read, sung and illustrated; and the uniqueness of *Kṛṣṇakathā* can be judged from the fact that a series of 366 paintings was commissioned by Mahārāja Sawāi Pratāp Singh in 1793 CE. These paintings illustrate scenes from the tenth canto of *Bhāgavata Purāṇa* written around 5<sup>th</sup> century CE. The manuscript relates to the glories of the benevolent Kṛṣṇa and his divine sports played to protect his creatures. As in the case of others, *Bhāgavata Purāṇa* is also treated in the form of dialogue, hence, it is interesting to note that in several of these miniatures the narrator and the listener are both included in the composition. Paintings with the amazing details are large in size with several episodes depicted in one painting. These miniature paintings represent different styles of great aesthetic sense painted by the well-known ten artists of Jaipur, like Ghasi, Jeevan, Lichhman, Chiman, etc. The same sized paintings are horizontal in format and decorated with a plain red border. 'All the folios display free flowing imagination in the composition though restricted within limits both metaphorical and literal for they have very regular borders. The course of events is described in small precise phrases (in golden and white ink in Devanāgarī script and Dhundhari language inscribed within the composition and not in separate colophons'.<sup>12</sup> It is clear that the miniatures from the collection of City Palace Jaipur represent oral tradition in the written form and contain numerous Hindu myths, religious instructions, and hymns in the praise of Kṛṣṇa. These illustrations are complete by all means, excellent in quality and quite interesting iconographically. The paintings depict episodes, characters and the intriguing landscape of Vyas's text in vibrant colours like red, green, yellow, black, golden, etc. (Figs.4 & 5).

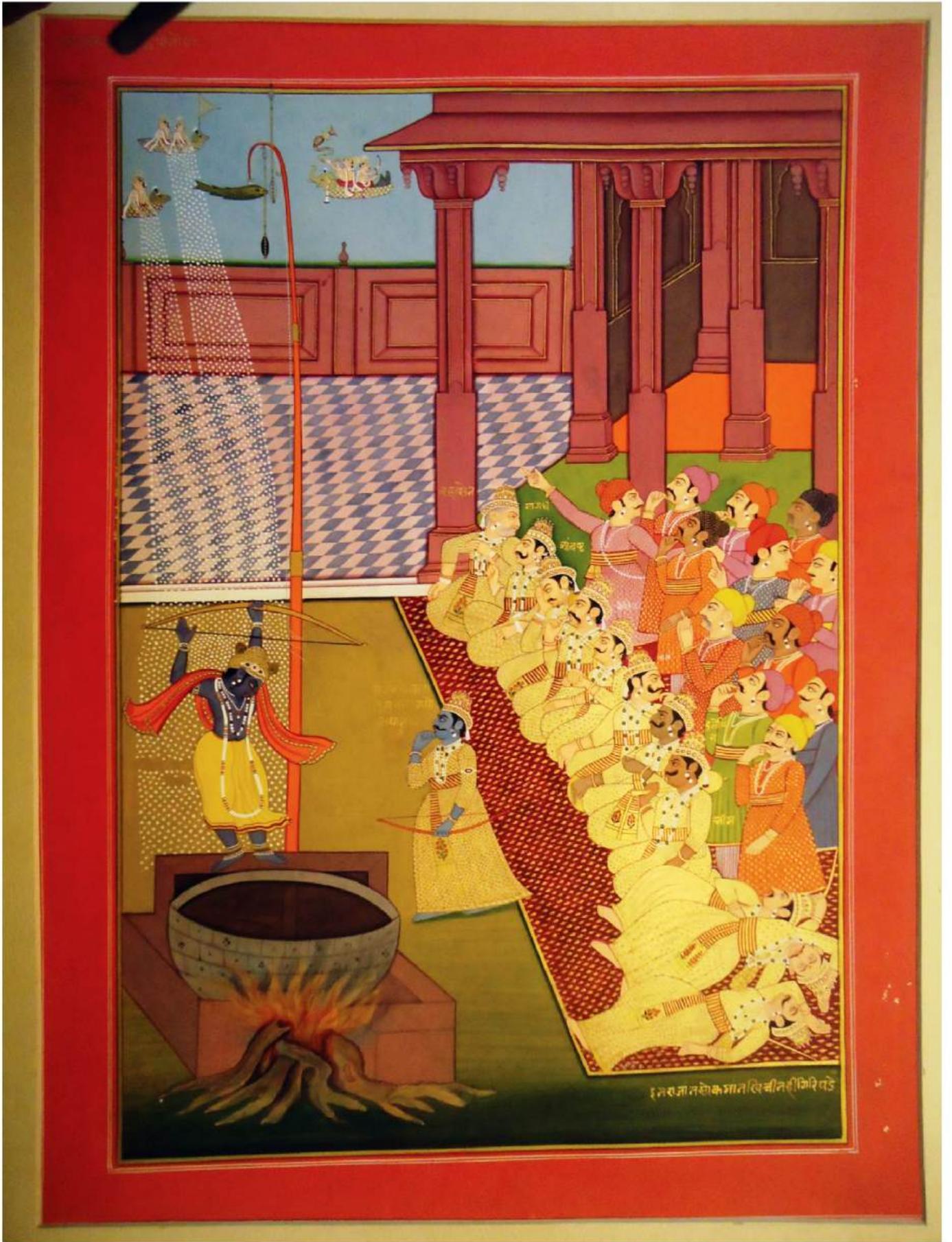


Fig.4 : Kṛṣṇa in the *svayamvara* of Lakṣmaṇā (AG 250)



Fig.5 : Marriages of Kṛṣṇa (AG 268)

## ***Gīta Govinda* LB 26**

The painting displayed at the painting and photography section of City Palace Jaipur was commissioned in 18<sup>th</sup> century, probably during the time of Sawāi Pratāp Singh. *Paṭṭacitra* depicts the *mūrtis* in the Govind Dev temple in Jai Niwas, the palace garden. The two figures of Govind Dev himself and those of Rādhā and *sakhī* are all shown in the black and silver costumes worn at the court of Jaipur for the celebration of Diwālī. They stand beneath a flowering branch of the Kadamba tree where Kṛṣṇa plays the flute in a *tribhaṅga mudrā*. The arrangement of the painting is shown as if the theme has been derived from *Gīta Govinda*\* by Jayadeva, which presents an incredibly passionate description of two eternal lovers Rādhā and Kṛṣṇa; it has all the emotions and sentimental elements of a human love story. It's a relationship between a man and a woman, a tale of union, separation, jealousy, agony and the reunion of two souls. Though the characters are divine and enact the play at a very high philosophical plane where Rādhā is the devotee and Kṛṣṇa is the divine cosmic power in whom she is to melt down ultimately, but the sport of love played here is rather human. The third character we see in these dance dramas is that of *sakhī* or friend who plays a very vital role of love and longing. She is the messenger, friend, philosopher and guide; a *guru* showing the path of divine union to both Rādhā and Kṛṣṇa. She is, in fact, the main link between the two (Fig.6).

### **Rādhā and Kṛṣṇa: *Rāsalīlā***

'Painting in two panels depicting Radha and Krishna dancing at centre flanked by singers and accompanists. The figures are set against a shaded green ground that is darker at the base with an intermittent line of small floral shrubs at the very bottom and grows lighter towards the top. The composite work is set within a blue and red floral border set against gold, sandwiched between two smaller and delicate lines of dots and dashes together measuring 2 inches (this is followed by a plain outer red border) this portion has been pasted over a wooden beading to give the painting a finished look and curved edge'.<sup>13</sup> The painting is

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\* *Gīta Govinda* is a work composed by the 12<sup>th</sup> century Indian poet Jayadeva that describes the relationship between Kṛṣṇa and the *Gopīs*.



Fig.6 : Scroll painting of Govind Devji, Rādhā and Lalitā (LB 26)

unusual for its depiction of Rādhā and Kṛṣṇa for several reasons. First as all the figures in it appear female; it means it's a painting of women (probably dancers) in the guise of Rādhā and Kṛṣṇa. Consequently, the painting may well have been based on real people and possibly record a real event at Sawāi Pratāp Singh's court. The left panel depicts a single dancer at right dressed as Rādhā and a group of nine women clustered at left. The Rādhā figure dances looking over her left shoulder with right leg before left, right arm rose with palm facing upward and left hand picking up the folds of her *peśavāz* skirt so as to facilitate her dance. She is lavishly dressed in a red gold bordered *peśavāz* with a sheer red full sleeved bodice ending in broad gold brocade cuffs and a gold blouse worn underneath. A red and gold *oḍhanī* is thrown over the shoulders and one end hangs down on either side. Underneath is gold *cūḍīdāra* with pink primrose *buttīs* fastened with a tie cord with pearl tasselled ends hanging below the navel.

In reality Kṛṣṇa does not represent merely Kṛṣṇa, but whole of the male element in creation, known in Sanskrit as *Puruṣa*. Similarly, the *gopīs* represent the

entire female element *Prakṛti*. The *Mahārāsa* represents the combined dance of *Prakṛti*\* and *Puruṣa*\*\* . To put it rightly it is the dance of the meeting of the male and female energies. But the question is why dance is chosen as the medium for this representation? It is because the medium of dance comes nearest to the mysterious, to the non-dual and to celebration. Nothing can express it better than dance because it is the most primitive form of human language. Gestures make up the whole language of nature. It is used and understood all over (Fig.7).



Fig.7 : *Rāsalīlā*

### ***Bārāmāsā* : Twelve Months of the Year**

Jaipur artists have very deftly drawn out the true spirit of the respective seasons in their *Bārāmāsā* paintings which has a folk origin. Indeed, *Bārāmāsā*, the twelve months (*Caitra*, *Baisākha*, *Jyeṣṭha*, *Āṣāḍha*, *Srāvaṇa*, *Bhādon*, *Āśvina*, *Kārttika*, *Agrahana*, *Pauṣa*, *Māgha* and *Phālguna*) of Indian calendar found recognition in the poetry *Nāgamatī Kā Viraha Varṇana* by Malik Mohammad Jāyasī who has the credit of introducing *Bārāmāsā* in Hindi literature. Apart from it several other poets of medieval India wrote on the beauty of different seasons. They are Senāpati, Datta, Deva, Govinda, Ānandrām, Netrām, Kāshirām and Keshavadās.

\* *Prakṛti* is that which is created. It is nature in all her aspects.

\*\* *Puruṣa* is the soul, the self-pure consciousness and the only source of consciousness.

This subject was quite popular in the Rājput School of painting as it gave those artists an opportunity to indulge in his love for landscape. The pangs of separation permeate the spirit of these songs which recall the joys enjoyed by the young lovers and this reminiscence brings comfort to their aching hearts. 'The Baramasa motif in Brajhasha poetry not only gave freshness to artificial classifications of love but also induced the artists from Rajasthan and the hills of Punjab to interpret love in a new meaning'.<sup>14</sup>

According to the Hindu calendar the twelve months of the year have been divided into six seasons and each season consists of two months, i.e. *Vasanta* (spring), *Grīṣma* (summer), *Varṣā* (monsoon), *Śarada* (autumn), *Hemanta* (pre-winter) and *Śisīra* (winter). These can be compared to the parts of the day, i.e. dawn, noon, sunset, and night. They also correspond to the four stages in the life of man, i.e. childhood, youth, middle age and old. *Bārāmāsā* starts with the month of *Caitra* (April) and ends with *Phālguna* (March). The paintings give an account of the months mentioning the delights of the spring months of *Caitra* and *Baisākha*, the heat of *Jyeṣṭha* and *Āṣāḍha*, the showers of *Śrāvaṇa* and *Bhādon*, *Āśvina* when the sky is clear, the bright *Kārttika*, the pleasant *Agrahana* when the cranes shout joyfully, the chilly *Pauṣa*, the pleasant *Māgha* when the four sides are perfumed with sandal and camphor and the delightful *Phālguna*, the month of love and colours. The 22 paintings in the collection of City Palace Jaipur have been given visual life by the artists (paintings do not bear the name of the artists) at the Jaipur court. Each month suggests a different kind of mood or behaviour.

The paintings are colourful and attractive. A human couple in the form of Rādhā and Kṛṣṇa is usually seen. The landscape in the background illustrates the vegetation and the reactions of the animals and man to the changes of the temperature and has a complete harmony of man and his environment. The most common method employed by the artist was to depict some major activity connected with the main festival occurring in the particular month. *Dīpāvalī* is associated with the month of *Kārttika*, *Tīja* (*Śrāvaṇa*), *Holī* (*Phālguna*), etc. are the festivals which found place in the *Bārāmāsā* paintings. The poetry describing the event is written on top with black paint in Devanāgarī script (Figs.8 & 9).

दोहा ॥ भ्रादवमेघनस्थाप्रथिय ॥ जातबदेसी  
नीहारि बचनचातुरीकेकहत ॥ राधेताहि  
बीचार ॥ ६ ॥



Fig.8 : *Bāramāsā* painting showing the month of *Bhādon* (AG 1855.76)

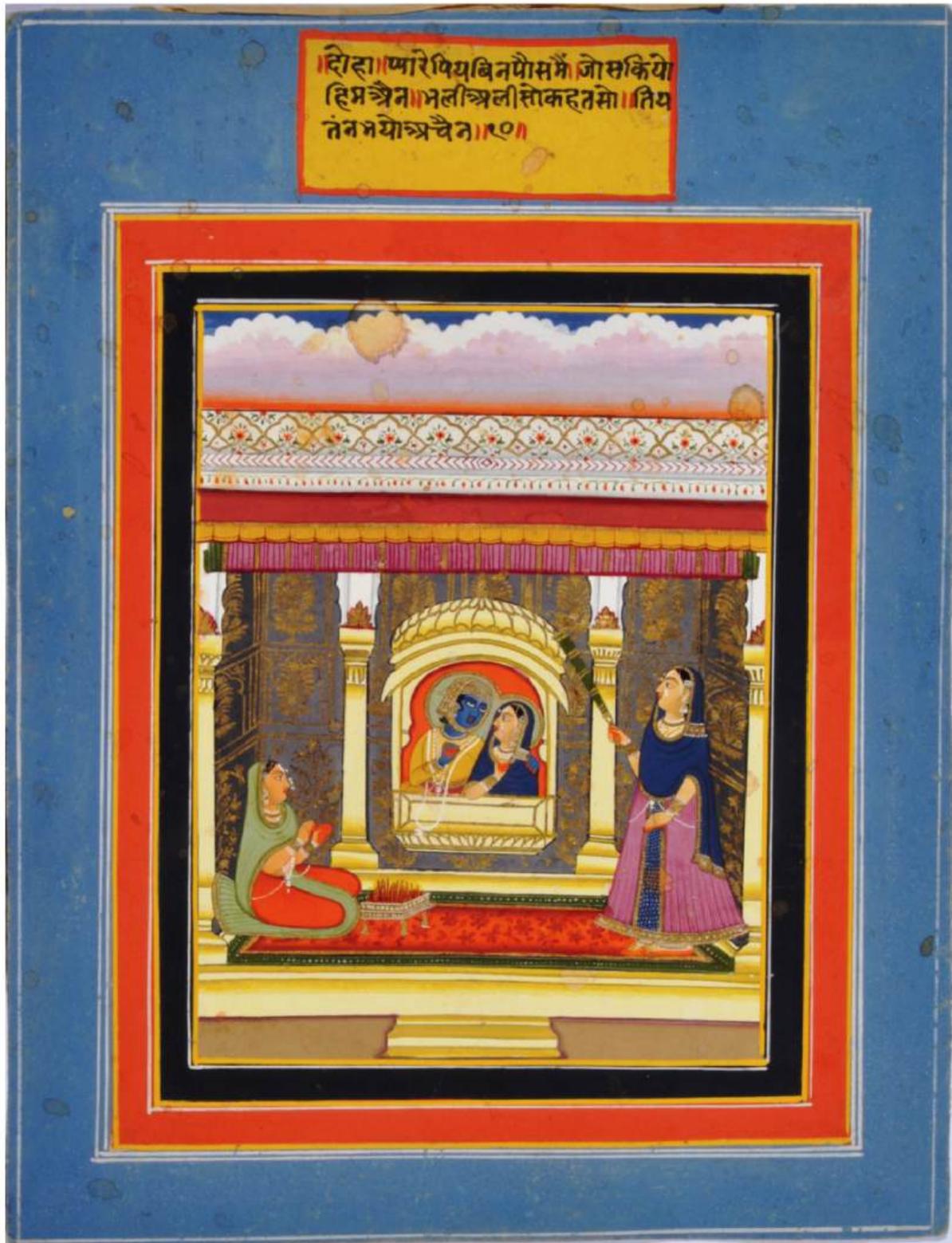


Fig.9 : *Bārāmāsā* painting showing the month of *Pauṣa* (AG 1858.76)

### *Rāgamālā*

In medieval Rājput kingdoms, several conventional systems of *Rāgas* and *Rāginīs* were apostrophized as humans and pictures were made to indicate their themes. The rulers of the time evolved a routine of pleasure and work in the

provincial capital of their kingdoms. In times of peace they cultivated the arts, especially music, which seems to have supplied abiding consolation with a depth and mastering beyond the superficial connoisseur. It is not surprising therefore to find that among the themes which the Jaipur court preferred the artists to take up were the rendering in paintings - *Rāgamālā* or musical modes depicting human figures. The rulers wished to see the representation of melodies in pictorial images in colours suggested by the tunes of *Rāga* and *Rāginīs*. At Jaipur during the reign of Sawāi Pratāp Singh, certain *Rāgamālā* paintings were executed with variety of themes like music, aesthetic, spiritual, romantic, anxiety and anger, etc. A set of 41 paintings was executed by the artists Jeevan and Mangal in 1778-1803.

These miniature paintings with a theme illustration *Rāgamālā*, painting symbolizing musical modes, constituted the crux of Pahārī style, and in particular, of Jaipur school of paintings. The evolving of the melody moulds of the Indian musical system commenced mainly when the devout heart felt the need to sing rather than to chant. These *Rāgas* have been pictorial visualization in the categories of Indian miniatures as *Rāgamālā* paintings, in which the *Rāgas* as melodic types deal with the artistic feminine essence and stimulate creative activity. Here *Rāgamālā* paintings are visual interpretations of Indian musical modes previously envisioned in divine or human forms by musicians and poets. These paintings are created in albums containing forty-one folios organized in a system of families. Each family is headed by male *Rāga* and contains five or six *Rāginīs* (wives) and sometimes *Rāga-putras* (sons) and *Rāga-putrīs* (daughters) and even wives of the sons. These paintings are inscribed with their titles and even a colophon on top which renders a verbal interpretation of the theme and hence they are combination of music, poetry and paintings.

"These paintings are genuinely concerned with aesthetic symbolism. The musical modes depicted tries to explore a whole new world of pictorial and endeavouring in representing female visuals, iconographic images and episodes within the musical modes a group of classification or distinction namely *Rāga* denoting masculine and *Rāginīs* indicating feminine became popular trend in Rajput paintings. These masculine and particularly feminine nuances of music which began to be used in visual art incorporated the tradition of classical poetry

namely the *Nayak-Nayika* lure which minutely analyses and categories the moods of men and women in all the vicissitudes of love ranging from grief in separation to joy in union'.<sup>15</sup>

These *Rāgamālā* paintings clearly prove how closely the triple arts of poetry, music and painting are interlinked. They aimed at expressing the meanings behind the traditional forms of our music through the medium of pictorial art. Nature was also symbolically represented in these paintings. The cycle of songs had grown upon the seasons and they in turn inspired paintings. Here each *Rāga* centres around one particular emotion that it develops, explains, elaborates and exalts until it creates in the hearer a suggestion almost impossible to resist. The *Rāga* forms are thus the physical transmutations of physical states.

Each *Rāga* and *Rāginī* consists of 5-6 notes of its own mood, personality, *rasas*, aesthetic quality, passions, colour scheme ethos or presiding deity and its unique psychological effects. Because of these multiple associations, each *Rāga* evokes its own aura, time, season and its own mind-pictures. The inter-relation of notes with colour on one hand and emotional expression on the other has made possible the graphic representation of *Rāgas* through poem pictures. Besides symbolizing the emotional qualities of music by personifying each *Rāga* and *Rāginī* as male or female characters it also take note of the powerful associations of mode with particular moods and sentiments, particulars and seasons of the year and even with the special hours of the day and night.

In totality these *Rāgamālā* paintings precisely illustrated the verbal imagery of each *Rāga* and the concept of *Rāginī* is crystallized with each musical form was given a precise expression and a picture interoperating it was depicted symbolizing women. Here art of *Rāginī* paintings aim not only at illustrating poetic descriptions but also at conversing pictorially the mood and senses of music, seasons of the year, hours of the day and different colours are used to depict different themes like pale grey for background, pale blue for sky, white and grey walls for shrines and apartments, red clapboards, pink pillars, dark red doors and canopies, pale green roofs, orange, red, blue, white complexion for the figures and covers all the different *Nāyikā-bhedas* (Figs.10 & 11).

Though these paintings did not explore to fullest extent a motive expression through abstract colour and pattern, they to a great extent can be



Fig.10 : Rāgamālā painting depicting Rāga Bhairava (AG 547)

Fig.11 : Rāgamālā painting depicting Rāgini Basanti (AG 575)



considered as perfect visualization of music. It's a rather experimental of a tradition, endeavour through *Nāyaka* poetry, seasonal songs and Kṛṣṇa themes that are incorporated with them.

In totality these *Rāginī* paintings emerged as a result of the fertilization of the pictorial art by musical mode and a great literary tradition of love poetry that goes back to Vedic period.

To sum up all this account in the foregoing paragraphs bears the testimony to the facts that the rulers of Amber and Jaipur contributed to patronized and preserved art and literature in every generation. Though the ravages of time has now crushed down the crust of princely order in India but the cultural essence infused by them during the last millennium will continue for long to refresh and inspire historians and researchers to scan the ladder by which we have reached the present heights.

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