

## Pahadi Ragamala – Romancing the Raga through Lyrical Paintings

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### Abstract

This article examines the Pahadi school of Indian miniature painting, with particular emphasis on Ragamala paintings. Ragamala paintings depict Indian musical modes through art. Each painting represents a specific season, day, and even the time of day, illustrating the ideal setting when a particular 'raga' is sung. These paintings are created with specific colours that evoke certain moods or feelings, often accompanied by poetic text at the top, called 'dhyana' verse, which mentions the name of the 'raga' or 'ragini'. Typically, the paintings focus on love themes, but others depict martial aspects of 'raga', or portray a nayaka or nayika (hero or heroine), or groups of people in a particular state or activity at a specific time, embodying the emotion of the 'raga'. The Pahadi paintings discussed here are analysed in relation to the emotional essence of the 'raga', often involving elements of pathos, longing, anguish, and romance. The paintings are interpreted through the understanding of musicologists regarding the 'raga'. The article concentrates on Ragamala paintings from various sub-schools within the broader Pahadi miniature painting tradition. The 'ragas' associated with feelings and pathos include Todi, Gujari, Gauri, Gunkari, Malasri, Dhanasri, Kakubha, Kamodini, among others; they represent different emotional states such as union and 'viraha', the pain of separation, which are common themes in Ragamala paintings. The Kangra school of painting is renowned for its lyrical expression of emotions, becoming its hallmark, and was notably influenced by texts like the 'Gita-Govinda' of Jayadeva (12th century). Basohli paintings draw inspiration from the 'Rasamanjari' (15th century) of Bhanudatta. The article traces the development of the Ragamala genre, illustrating it with representative examples from the Pahadi tradition.

**Keywords** - Pahadi painting, Ragamala, miniature painting, Indian miniatures, lyrical paintings, Raga, Ragaputra, Kangra, Guler, Basohli, Chamba, Bilaspur, Gita-Govinda, Rasamanjari, dhyana-verse.

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## 1. Introduction: the theme of Ragamala in the Pahadi school

The Pahadi school refers to a style of miniature painting that flourished in the Himalayan hill kingdoms of northern India between the 17th and 19th centuries. While influenced by Mughal and Rajasthani traditions, Pahadi art developed its own distinct characteristics under the patronage of local rulers (Daljeet & Jain, 2006). The style originated in the 17th century at Basohli and subsequently spread to other centres such as Guler, Kangra, Chamba, Bilaspur, Kulu, Mankot, Mandi, Nurpur, and Garhwal (Khandalavala, 1958). Each centre cultivated a unique sub-style. Common themes include Hindu mythology, especially the love stories of Radha and Krishna, as well as scenes from the Ramayana and Bhagavata Purana. Romantic motifs, portraits of royalty, and court scenes were also popular. Pahari paintings are renowned for their exquisite and sensitive portrayal of nature, featuring detailed, realistic depictions of landscapes, trees, and animals. Depending on the sub-school, the colour palettes ranged from the bold, vibrant, and intense primary hues of Basohli to the more delicate and lyrical shades of Kangra. The artworks often beautifully capture the full spectrum of human emotions and expressions with subtlety. Figures are typically depicted with graceful movements and rhythmic flow. Kangra paintings, in particular, are celebrated for their elegant and delicate lines. The Pahari school exemplifies the fusion of various artistic traditions, blending the finesse of Mughal and Persian miniature techniques with the spiritual and folk themes of the region. Notable sub-schools include Basohli, the earliest and most bold of the Pahari schools, recognised for its vivid primary colours, dramatic gestures, and distinctive facial features. The early Basohli style also employed a glowing, gem-like effect using the wings of beetles. This school prospered under Kirpal Pal (r. 1678–1693). Guler, flourishing under Raja Govardhan Chand (1713–1773) and his son Prakash Chand (1748–1820), refined the earlier Basohli style with finer drawings and more subdued colours (Archer, 1973). It signalled a transition towards the more delicate Kangra style, known as the Guler-Kangra phase.

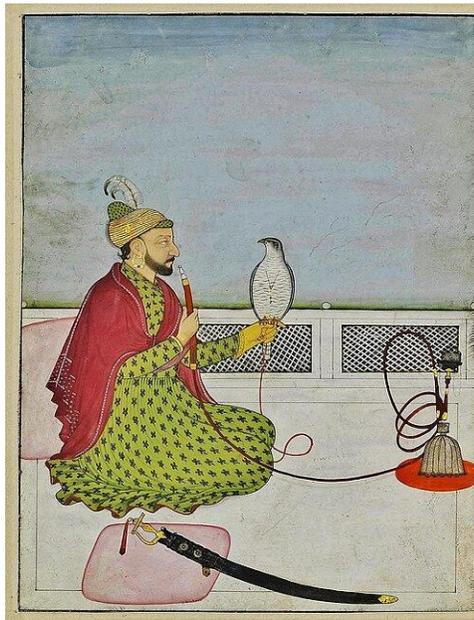
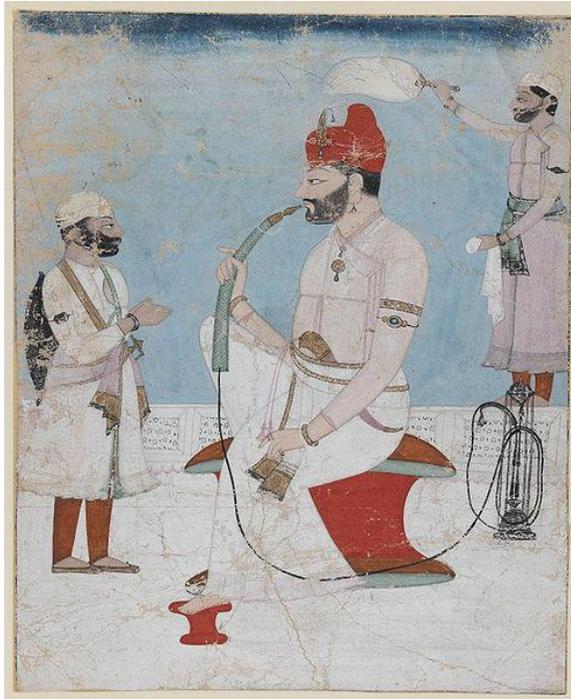


Figure 1 - Raja Govardhan Chand of Guler, circa 1760.

Kangra school is considered the most sophisticated and developed of the Pahadi styles; it is characterised by exquisite delicacy of line, lyrical grace, and a naturalistic, poetic feel. It reached its peak under the patronage of Raja Sansar Chand (1765–1823). Garhwal school is known for its poetic representations, often featuring love stories and devotional themes.



**Figure 2 - Raja Sansar Chand of Kangra, circa 1800 - 1810, Brooklyn Museum, New York, U S A.**

The Ragamala theme has been well depicted in the schools of Chamba, Garhwal, Guler, Kangra, Jammu (Basohli), Mandi, and Nurpur among the Pahadi schools. As mentioned, the Pahadi schools developed in the hilly regions of North India during the 17th to 19th centuries, spanning from Basohli in Jammu to Garhwal, Himachal Pradesh. The range is wide, varied, and highly interesting. The Basohli school is known for its bold colours, while Kangra is celebrated for its Radha-Krishna depictions and its lyrical quality, greatly inspired by Jayadeva's *Gita-Govinda*. Other miniature painting schools depicting Ragamalas include those from Central India — the Malwa, Datia, Bundelkhand schools, and the Deccan school. Notable artists of the Pahadi school include Pandit Seu, an early artist whose sons, Manaku (c. 1700-1760) and Nainsukh (c. 1710-1778), significantly influenced the school. Nainsukh was renowned for his mastery within his family's continuous workshop and his thoughtful contributions to the Guler school. Manaku, also a celebrated artist from the pre-Kangra phase, is well known for his work on the *Gita Govinda* series.

## **2. Ragamala – a garland of painted melodies**

Ragamala paintings exemplify a remarkable blend of music and visual art within Indian tradition, where 'ragas', musical modes, are depicted through intricate, symbolic imagery. This distinctive tradition developed over centuries, influenced by various texts on Indian classical music and the contributions of numerous musicologists and scholars. "A raga has been defined as - a

permutation and combination of notes or frequencies illustrated by melodic movements which are capable of producing a pleasant sensation, mood or an emotion in the mind of the listener (Kumar, 1994). The concept of 'ragas', musical frameworks that evoke specific moods and times of day, can be traced back to early Sanskrit musicological treatises. The 6th-century text *Narada Shiksha* is among the earliest to mention ragas. The 7th/8th-century *Brihaddesi* by Matanga provided detailed descriptions of ragas. The *Ragasagara*, attributed to Narada and Dattila in the 8th century, rendered visual form to these musical modes through iconography. In 1131 AD, Someswaradeva's *Manasollasa* also made significant contributions to musical understanding. The monumental *Sangitaratnakara* by Sarangadeva, composed between 1212 and 1247 AD during the Yadava dynasty in the Deccan, became a pivotal work in Indian music theory. During the Delhi Sultanate, Amir Khusro, a Sufi poet at the court of Alauddin Khilji (r. 1296–1316), enriched the 'raga' tradition by incorporating Persian and Arabic influences. The *khanqas* (Sufi hospices) served as centres for musical innovation, where many 'ragas' and 'raginis' were performed.

The pictorial descriptions of melodic modes were first documented in *Sangitopanisat-saroddhara* by Sudhakalasa (1324). We also find these paintings in the *Kalpasutra* manuscript (1475) from the Jayasimhasurji collection in Indore, illustrating specific 'ragas', which correspond to the 'dhyanas' of the *Sangitopanisat-saroddhara*. This marks the earliest known series of *Ragamala*," states an essay by Mathur, P (2022,11,24). *Evolution of Ragamala Paintings - Ragas visualised through a painter's eye.* (Esamskriti, n.d.)

Mughal emperors Akbar, Jahangir, Shah Jahan, and Muhammad Shah actively patronised music, further encouraging the evolution of 'raga'-based compositions and their visual counterparts. The legendary musician Tansen, from Gwalior, played a pivotal role in shaping the *dhrupad* tradition, which flourished under the rule of Man Singh Tomar, who also authored the treatise *Man Kautuhal*. This was later translated into Persian by Faqir Khan in the late 17th century. Although Tansen is believed to have written a treatise on *Ragamala*, no copy of it has ever been found. Several key figures and texts helped shape the *Ragamala* tradition, blending music theory with visual and poetic expression: Rana Kumbha composed *Sangita Mimansa* in 1450. Kshemakarna (also known as Meshkaran Mishra), a priest from Rewa, compiled a *Ragamala* treatise in 1509. Pundarik Vitthal authored *Sadraga Chandrodaya* in 1590, discussing both North and South Indian raga systems and their classifications. *Sangita Darpana*, a Hindi text by Harivallabha, was compiled in 1673. During the reign of Aurangzeb, the Mughal court withdrew support for music and painting, leading many artists and musicians to seek patronage in regional courts across Rajasthan, Deccan, and Eastern India. However, music saw a revival under Muhammad Shah (r. 1719–1748), during whose reign the *khayal* composition gained popularity {Daljeet, 2014}.

*Ragamala* paintings transformed the abstract musical ideas of 'ragas' into rich visual narratives. Each 'raga' is depicted as a human figure, often divine, noble, or romantic in nature, with specific attributes, moods, and settings. The paintings pay close attention to the time of day, season, and emotional essence (*rasa*). Colours, symbols, and background elements are used deliberately to evoke the feeling and personality of each 'raga' or 'ragini'.

According to most musicologists, the traditional *Ragamala* system includes six main male 'ragas' (parents), thirty 'raginis' (wives), and forty-eight 'ragaputras' (sons). A simplified structure of this musical-visual family includes a Parent Raga - *Bhairav raga*, whose wives are *Bhairavi*, *Velawali*,

Punyaki, Bangali, Aslekhi, and sons: Pancham, Harakh, Disakh, Bangal, Madhu, Madhava, Lalit, Velavala. Another Parent Raga is Malkaus raga, with wives Gaundkari, Devagandhari, Gandhari, Seehute, Dhanasri, and sons Maru, Mustang, Mewara, Parbal, Chand, Khokhat, Bhora, Nad. The Parent Raga Hindol raga's wives are Telangi, Devkari, Vasanti, Sindhoori, Aheeri, and its sons include Surmanand, Bhasker, Chandra-Bimb, Mangalan, Ban, Binoda, Basant, Kamoda. The Parent Raga Dipak raga has wives Kachheli, Patmanjari, Todi, Kamodi, Gujari, and sons Kaalanka, Kuntal, Rama, Kamal, Kusum, Champak, Gaura, Kanra. The Parent Raga Sri raga's wives are Bairavi, Karnati, Gauri, Asavari, Sindhavi, and its sons are Salu, Sarag, Sagra, Gaund, Gambhir, Gund, Kumbh, Hamir. Lastly, the Parent Raga Megh raga's wives include Sorath, Gaundi-Malari, Asa, Gunguni, Sooho, and its sons are Biradhar, Gajdhar, Kedara, Jablidhar, Nut, Jaldhara, Sankar, Syama. It is important to note that variations in classification exist between different texts and musicological traditions.

Although the precise origin of Ragamala painting remains uncertain, over 130 documented sets from various schools are known. Some scholars trace its development to the 'Kitab-i-Nauras', a lyrical treatise composed by Sultan Ibrahim Adil Shah II of Bijapur (r. 1580–1626), which celebrates ragas through both verse and imagery. Ragamala paintings thus exemplify a synesthetic tradition—a blending of sound, poetry, and colour—creating a vivid, imaginative bridge between the audible and the visual, between spiritual emotion and artistic expression. It is also believed that the 'ragas' first originated from the throat of Lord Shiva, who possessed a synesthetic dimension (Daljeet, 2014).

### **3. Pahadi Ragamala – echoes from the hills**

Pahadi Ragamala refers to a series of Indian miniature paintings, part of the larger Ragamala tradition, that originated in the Pahadi region (meaning 'of the hills')—referring to the Himalayan hill kingdoms of North India during the 17th to 19th centuries. These paintings visually represent classical Indian musical modes, or Ragas, personifying each raga with specific colours, moods, emotions of lovers, the nayaka and nayika, associated seasons, and times of day, often incorporating regional deities and landscapes to create a detailed kaleidoscopic scene (Gangoly, 1935).

These paintings are created in the 'Pahadi' style, characterised by miniature forms and developing in the sub-Himalayan states under Mughal influence, eventually merging with local traditions. They focus on visualising music; the visual depiction of musical Ragas, capturing the emotions and essence of the music through colour and imagery. Specific colours and emotional atmospheres are used to evoke the 'raga's' feeling. Verses about a hero and heroine (nayaka and nayika) are often included, telling a story related to the 'raga's' mood. The associated time of day and season are depicted, further grounding the 'raga' in a specific context. Hindu deities related to particular 'ragas' are often illustrated, such as Shiva for Bhairava. Pahadi ragamala paintings exhibit a blend of the Mughal technique of painting with the unique folk traditions and styles of the northern hill states. Styles vary within the Pahadi tradition, with groups like the Basholi School characterised by expressive faces and primary colours, and the Kangra school known for more sensuous and sophisticated compositions (Daljeet and Jain, 2006). In essence, Pahadi ragamala is a distinctive artistic expression from the northern Indian hills that harmonises classical Indian music, poetry, and painting into a single, evocative visual experience.

#### 4. Romancing the 'Raga' – paintings from the Pahadi school

Paintings from the Pahadi school often depict a scene that evokes gentle tenderness and devotional calm, characterised by a lyrical quality. The Ragamala tradition has captured this essence, as demonstrated through examples of depictions of 'ragas', especially those related to love and longing.

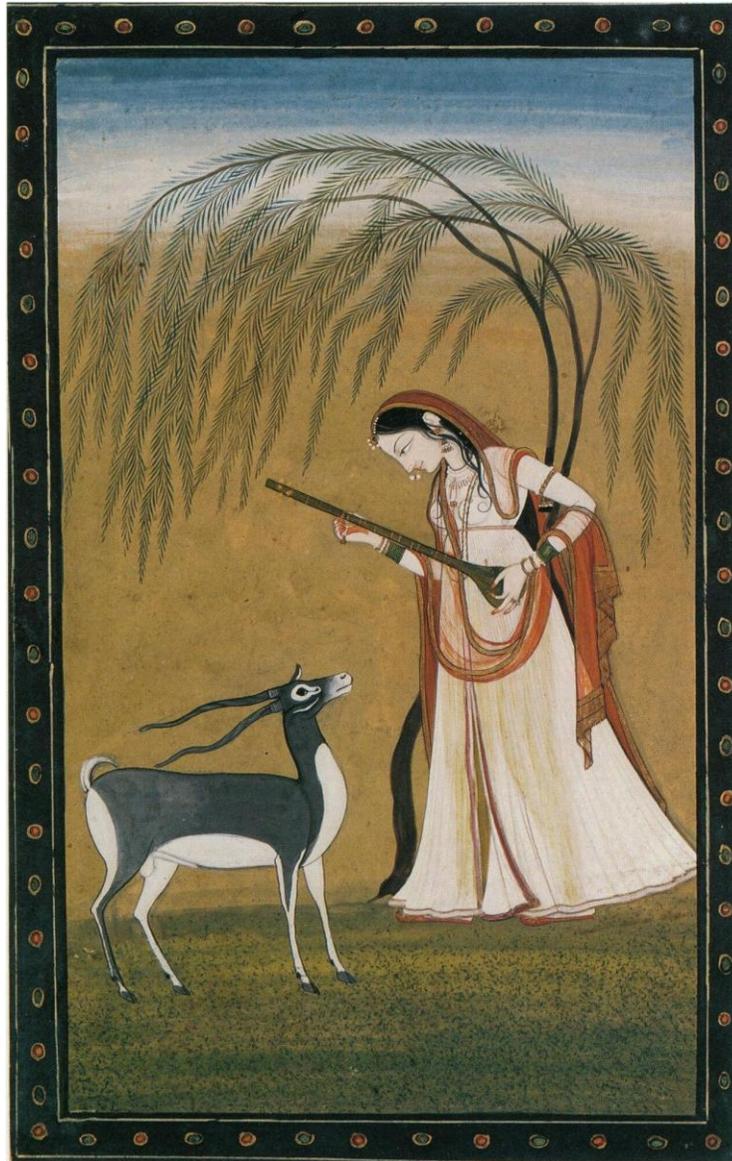
##### 4.1 Todi Ragini

Todi Ragini, also known as Ragini Todi, is one of the most evocative and poetic figures in the Ragamala tradition. She is often depicted as a beautiful, melancholic woman whose music enchants the natural world around her. A traditional verse describes her as having "sharp eyes and a tender body, radiant as the frost." Separated from her lover, she wanders alone through the forest, transforming her sorrow into melody. In Ragamala paintings, Todi is frequently portrayed with piercing eyes and a delicate, graceful form, dressed in yellow robes that symbolise warmth, longing, and purity. She is sometimes shown as a 'yogini' (lady ascetic) or a woman in emotional distress, smeared with saffron and camphor, giving her a soft, luminous, frost-like glow. Typically, she holds or plays a stringed instrument—most often the 'vina' or sometimes the 'bin' (a pipe instrument)—which becomes a vessel for expressing her deep yearning and sorrow. Her music is so moving that it captivates the forest's creatures; deer pause in awe, drawn by her sound, and even cobras are said to rise and listen, suspending their instinctive behaviour.

The setting is typically a forest or secluded grove, emphasising her emotional isolation and strong bond to the natural world. The deer, in particular, become symbols of the sensitive, emotional depth of her 'raga', gentle, alert, and inspired by beauty. Her wandering in search of her absent lover acts as a metaphor for longing, a central theme in both the painting and the 'raga' itself. A notable painting of Ragini Todi, abundant in these elements, is attributed to a master of the second generation after Nainsukh, circa 1825-30. This work belongs to the later phase of Pahadi painting, where emotion, refinement, and lyrical elegance are expressed with great subtlety and technical skill.

A translated verse on the Todi Ragini says (Gangoly, 1935) -

*"Ragini Todi is a woman with sharp eyes and a tender body, radiant as the frost, smeared with saffron and camphor from Kashmir. She is separated from her lover and wanders the forest thinking of him. The deer accompanies her as she waits for him".*



**Figure 3 - Todi Ragini, Kangra school, circa 1825, Chandigarh Government Museum and Art Gallery, Chandigarh, India.**

#### **4.2 Vasanti Ragini**

Ragini Vasanti, one of the consorts of Raga Hindola, is personified as a young woman of exceptional beauty, elegantly dressed and adorned with delicate floral ornaments. She embodies the spirit of spring, a season of renewal, joy and blossoming life.

In Ragamala miniature paintings, Ragini Vasanti is often depicted amidst the lush greenery of gardens or terraces, gently picking flowers. Her presence evokes the playful charm and vibrant energy of the season. In a notable depiction of Ragini Vasanti, the artist captures the essence of spring's arrival with newly sprouted leaves, blossoming flowers, and the songs of birds filling the air. Set along the banks of a serene river, two young women are shown gathering flowers among trees bursting with yellow and white blooms. The artist skillfully conveys rhythm and movement through the flowing garments, graceful postures, and expressive faces of the figures. The scene

radiates a melodic joy, celebrating the beauty of nature and the harmonious mood of spring. This visual rhythm mirrors the musical essence of the raga, blending sound, season, and emotion into a single poetic image.

A verse from the 15th century *Sangitadamodara* captures the imagery of the 'ragini' -

*"The maiden, ever-present with flowers,  
dwells before the blossoms with her companions,  
her leisurely steps adorned by a garland of many flowers,  
clutched in her hand like a bud".*

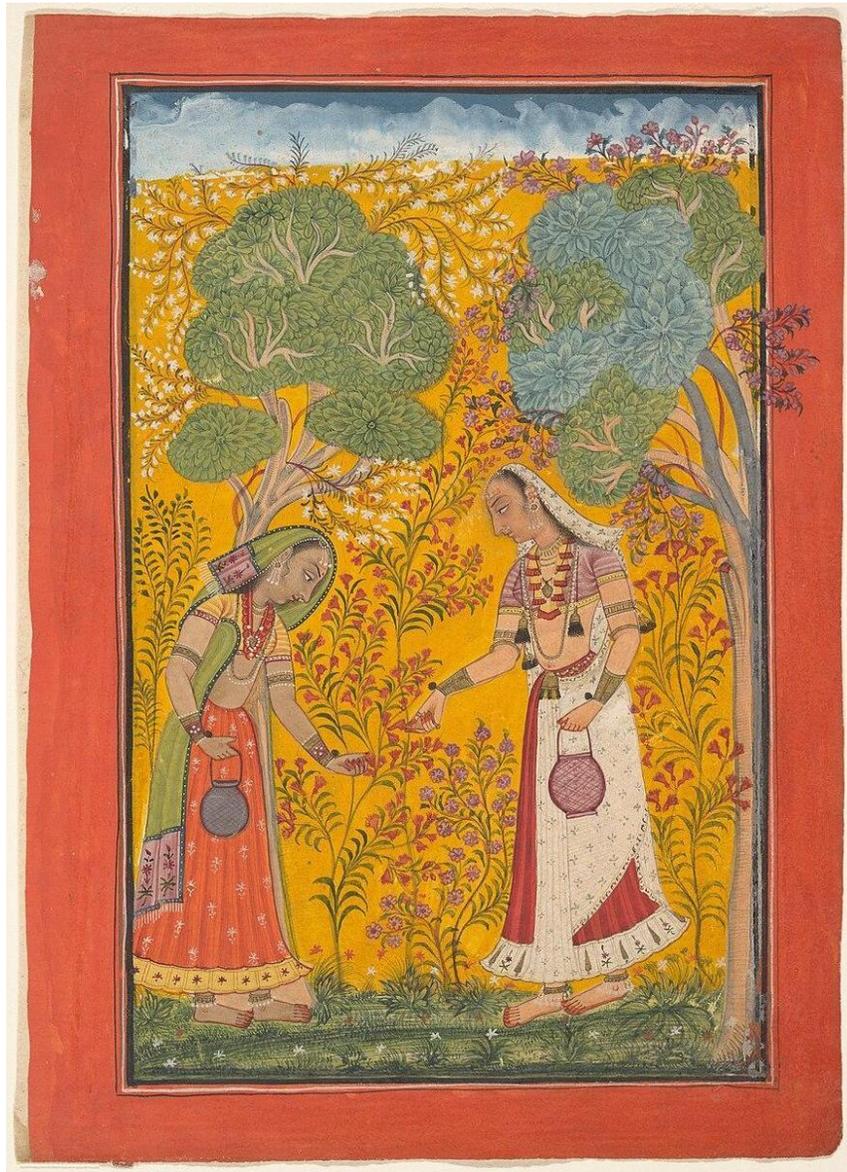


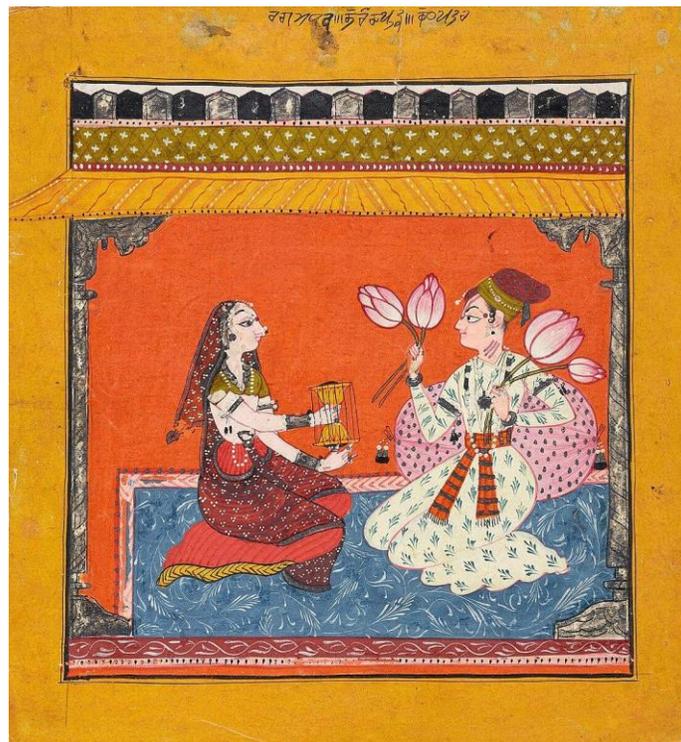
Figure 4 - Vasanti ragini, Bilaspur school, circa 1710, The Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York, U S A.

### 4.3 Madhava Ragaputra

Madhava is a 'ragaputra' or "son of a raga," belonging to the family of the parent raga Bhairava. Madhava is often depicted as a nobleman dancing to the music of two ladies. Another interpretation portrays him as a young prince, seated on a throne and wearing a garland of flowers, gazing at his own handsome reflection in a mirror. Alternatively, he is shown with his lady companion. This posture suggests a mood of youthful pride, self-contemplation, or enchantment. Some visual traditions depict him as a lover waiting for his beloved.

A poem by Sri Aurobindo describes the 'ragaputra' aptly as -

*"A prince so comely, more fair than the god of love,  
He gazes in a mirror, a gift from the heavens above.  
With flowers in his hair, a garland at his breast,  
His reflection fills him with a deep and quiet zest.  
Seated on a throne in a forest glade so green,  
He is attended by a maid, a most beautiful scene.  
Lost in silent wonder at his own graceful form,  
He finds the joy of beauty in the midst of sun and storm".*



**Figure 5 - Madhava ragaputra, by the Bahu masters, Pahadi school, circa 1720, Museum Rietberg, Zurich, Switzerland.**

#### 4.4 Ragaputra Velavala

This painting depicts a Ragaputra, a son of Raga Bhairava, in a tender and romantic scene that embodies the essence of shringara rasa, the mood of love and beauty, a central theme in many ragas. Rendered in opaque watercolour with gold on paper, the artwork captures an intimate moment: a man, gently playing the 'rabab' (a traditional stringed instrument), is seated with a woman who offers him 'paan'—a betel leaf delicacy with spices symbolising affection and courtship. The composition beautifully conveys the emotional resonance of the 'raga' through its delicate gestures, rich detailing, and harmonious atmosphere, blending music, romance, and visual artistry into a single lyrical expression.

A verse on the 'ragaputra' reads thus -

*"A beautiful lover, surrounded by friends, holding a plate of betel nut.*

*He plays a stringed instrument like a vina, and his beloved attends to him".*

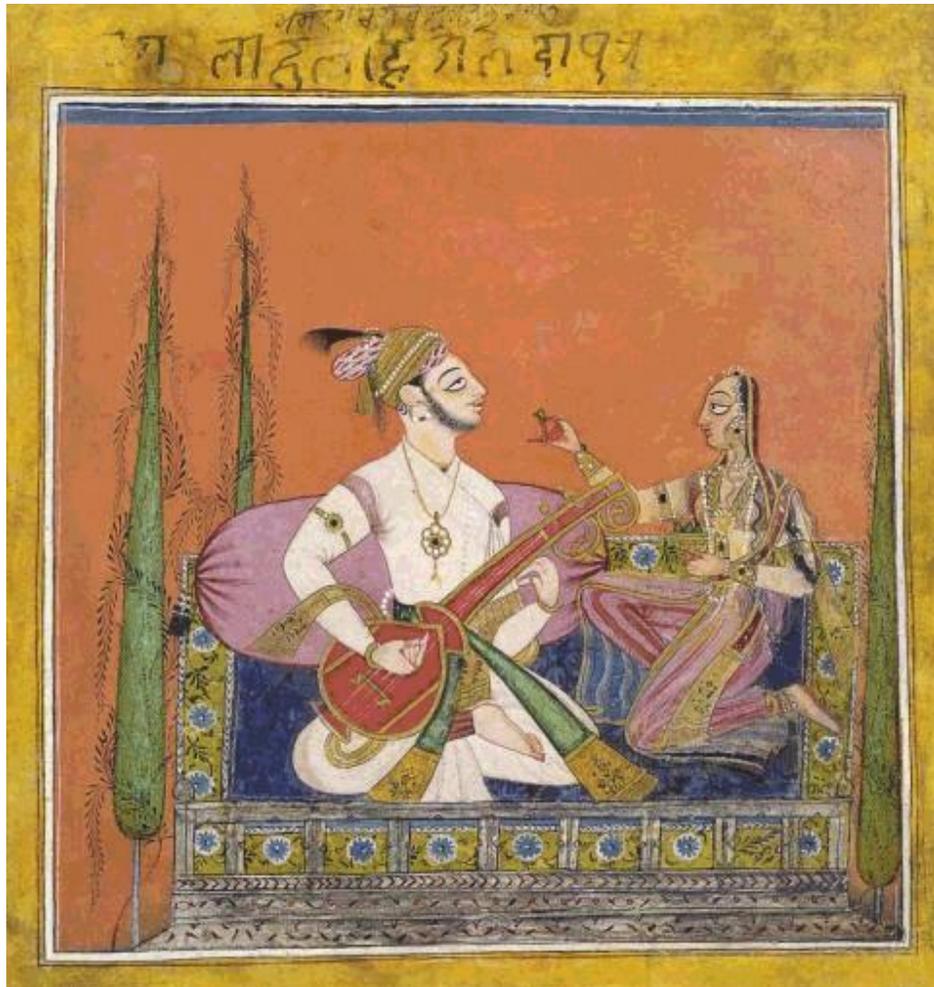


Figure 6 - Ragaputra Velavala, Basohli school, circa 1710, Art Gallery of New South Wales, Australia.

#### 4.5 Gujari Ragini

Gujari Ragini, a personified form of a musical mode in Indian classical music, is often depicted in Ragamala paintings as a graceful, longing young woman, immersed in the sorrow of love and separation. She is generally shown seated by a riverbank or in a natural setting, playing a 'vina' or 'tanpura'—traditional stringed instruments whose gentle tones mirror her inner melancholy. Her music captivates the natural world around her. In many images, deer or peacocks are illustrated as mesmerised by her mournful melodies, pausing to listen in silent sympathy. A variation of the theme includes her confidante or 'sakhi' beside her, offering emotional support and amplifying her sense of longing. Gujari Ragini is a recurring and evocative figure in the Ragamala tradition, symbolising the torment of unfulfilled love, emotional separation, and the deep yearning of the soul. Her image combines poetic sorrow with musical expression, embodying the emotional depth that characterises the visual language of Indian classical 'ragas'.

A translated verse on her physical and emotional condition reads thus (Gangoly, 1935)

*"Very lean and thin in figure she plays on the 'vina' and a peacock dances in front of her*

*She always meditates on the face of her beloved*

*A companion sits by her, in this way is pictured Gujari, the ragini of Megha Malhar, as visualised by mental contemplation".*

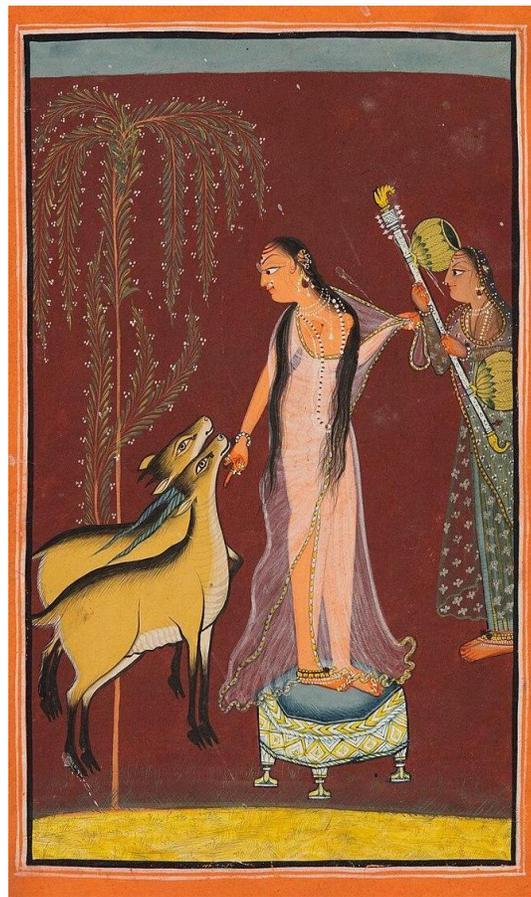


Figure 7 - Gujari ragini, Chamba, circa 1710, Cleveland Museum of Art, Ohio, U S A.

#### 4.6 Hindola Raga

The word hindola means "swing" in Sanskrit, and the term raga refers to a melodic framework in Indian classical music, each associated with a specific mood or season. In Indian painting, a raga can also inspire a visual expression of emotion, often as part of a series where each artwork reflects the atmosphere of a particular musical mode. In depictions of Hindola Raga, a recurring motif is that of a hero or a pair of lovers seated on a swing, gently pushed by attendants or maidens—a poetic image that captures the youthful passion and longing of springtime love. In this painting, the lovers are identified as the blue-skinned Hindu god Krishna and his beloved Radha, a cowherd maiden. The vivid yellow background, the vibrant red swing, and the blooming trees all enhance the fervent, romantic energy associated with Hindola Raga. By portraying Krishna and Radha in this scene, the artist links the emotion of the 'raga' to a divine love story. For many followers of devotional Hinduism, the bond between Krishna and Radha symbolises the ideal relationship between the divine and the devotee. Through this visual narrative, the emotional resonance of Hindola Raga is both intensified and spiritualised.

A translated verse on the raga (Gangoly, 1935) -

*"Gently rocked by damsels with fine hips, he enjoys the sports of the swing  
He is full of passion and his complexion is like that of young pigeons  
Hindola is thus described by the best of sages".*

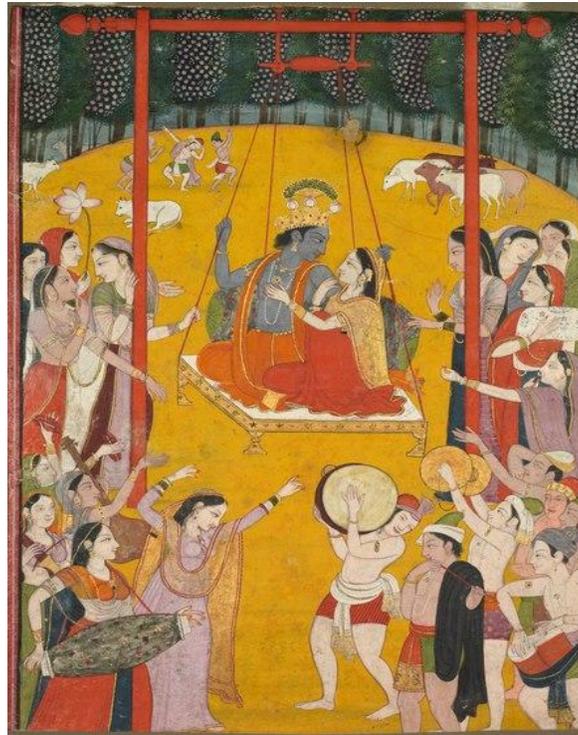


Figure 8 - Hindola raga, Kangra, late 18th century, Cleveland Museum of Art, Ohio, U S A.

#### 4.7 Ragaputra Madhu

Ragaputra Madhu, regarded as the son of the primary raga Bhairava, is usually depicted as a handsome and elegant prince. He is often shown wearing red garments—symbolic of passion—and decorated with flower garlands, highlighting his youthful charm and romantic nature. In a painting from around 1715, originating from Chamba in the Pahari region, Madhu is portrayed in an intimate moment with his beloved, gently caressing her, which conveys an air of sensuality and deep affection. In some portrayals, the couple may also be seen sharing wine, further enriching the scene with romantic indulgence and emotional intimacy.

A verse on Ragaputra Madhu reads -

*"A prince in robes of ruby red, on velvet throne is seated,  
With mirrors held to admire the form so perfectly completed.  
A knowing smile, a handsome grace, reflected in the glass,  
With eyes that hold the weight of all the love that's come to pass.  
The air is thick with fragrant musk, the season's blossoms soft,  
And songbirds in the garden sing a melody aloft.  
He is the joy of Bhairava, the springtime's sweet refrain,  
A scholar of the heart's delight, untouched by worldly pain".*



Figure 9 - Ragaputra Madhu, Chamba, circa 1715, Cleveland Museum of Art, Ohio, U S A.

#### 4.8 Vasanta Ragini

Vasant Ragini is traditionally seen as the second consort of Dipak Raga and is closely connected with the joyful spirit of spring—a season of renewal, celebration, and vibrant colours. This mood is beautifully depicted in paintings through blooming flowers, lush greenery, and scenes of festivity. Vasant Ragini is often associated with the Hindu god Krishna and the lively celebrations of the Holi festival. In these images, a central figure—whether a prince, a dancing nobleman, or Krishna himself—is usually shown surrounded by gopis (cowherd girls) and musicians, engaged in music, dance, and playful interactions. The most iconic portrayal of Vasant Ragini features Krishna joyfully celebrating spring by playing Holi with the gopis, capturing the raga's essence of love, merriment, and the vibrant energy of the season.

A translated verse on the 'ragini' taken from Jayadeva's Gita Govinda --

*"When the tender Malayan wind touches the lovely clove creeper,  
and the grove is filled with the sound of the cuckoo,  
intermingled with the sounds of swarms of honey-making bees,  
Hari [Krishna] plays in the amorous spring time".*



Figure 10 - Vasanta ragini, Guler, circa 1770, Cleveland Museum of Art, Ohio, U S A.

#### 4.9 Megha Malhar Raga

Raga Megha Malhar is a visual representation of the monsoon season, capturing the joyful anticipation of rain through scenes of dancing Lord Krishna with Gopis, dark clouds, and lightning.

These miniature paintings embody the musical Raga Megha Malhar, which is believed to invoke rain. The overall mood is one of joy and celebration, often depicting the divine couple Krishna and Radha revelling in the arrival of the rains.

Lord Krishna is often depicted dancing, blowing a conch shell, or accompanied by Gopis (cowherd girls) who frequently appear alongside Krishna, holding musical instruments that enhance the musical and festive theme of the raga. Birds, such as cranes, are sometimes shown in the sky, further accentuating the monsoon theme. A translated verse on Megha Malhar (Gangoly, 1935) -

*"His body, blue like a lotus, is filled with cupid...*

*His beauty captivates the heart of young damsels...*

*His wrap is more shining than the moon beam.*

*His waist is tied up by yellow silk robes.*

*Under the stress of his ripe and precious youth, his smiles light up his moon-face.*

*This is Megha Malhar, the picture of great glory.*

*The sight of gathering clouds gives him deep pleasure."*



Figure 11 - Megha Malhar raga, Kangra/Guler, circa 1790 - 1800, Freer Sackler Gallery of Asian Art, Washington, U S A.

#### 4.10 Ragini Asavari

The Asavari ragini depicts a woman or ascetic living in a forest, seated in a sandalwood grove, enchanting snakes with her music. She embodies a mood of renunciation, sorrow, and longing. This image can be interpreted as expressing the pain of separation from a beloved or a deeper spiritual yearning and detachment from the material world.

A translated verse captures her essence (Gangoly, 1935) -

*"On the top of the Malaya Hill she has made her home*

*She has made a fine rope of 'elephant pearls' her necklace*

*She has a complexion of bright blue hue and*

*She tempts and binds the snake which like bangle encircle the sandalwood trees, such indeed is Asavari"*



Figure 12 - Asavari ragini, Mankot circa 1700 - 1710, The Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York, U S A.

#### 4.11 Sanveri Ragini

Ragamala paintings and poetry depict Sanveri Ragini as a musical mode that conveys longing and separation. The accompanying verses and artworks frequently show a royal woman waiting for her beloved in a peaceful, wooded retreat. The dhyana verse for Sanveri Ragini establishes a melancholic mood, describing a woman consumed by the pain of her lover's absence. At the heart of these depictions is a nayika (heroine) patiently awaiting her lover's return. Her expression displays deep yearning and emotional intensity. She is usually shown in a forest setting, emphasising her solitude and introspective mood. The natural surroundings create a serene yet lonely atmosphere, heightening the sense of quiet reflection. Although immersed in nature, some images portray her seated on a throne or accompanied by a falcon, signifying her noble status and adding a layer of poignancy to her isolation. Sanveri Ragini is traditionally a morning raga, perfectly capturing the reflective and tender atmosphere of the early hours. The 'dhyana' verse from the Sangitadarpana offers a specific description of Sanveri Ragini.

*"A beautiful woman, adorned in fine clothes and jewels, sits on a silver throne. In her left hand, she holds a conch shell, and on her right hand sits a falcon. She is separated from her lover and sings a lament of love."*



Figure 13 - Sanveri ragini, circa 1700–1710, Basohli or Nurpur, The Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York, U S A.

#### 4.12 Bhairavi Ragini

Bhairavi Ragini is depicted as a dedicated female ascetic, often dressed in white or saffron, engaged in her morning worship at a Shiva shrine. The mood conveys profound, solitary spiritual love, reflecting the calming and meditative nature of the raga, which is traditionally performed at dawn. In this particular painting, the heroine appears as a royal lady paying reverence to Lord Shiva's sacred bull, Nandi, accompanied by an attendant. A verse describing the ragini reads thus (Gangoly 1935) -

*"In crystal shine on the crest of the fine Kailasha,  
she worships the great God (Siva) with soft shining petals of lotus,  
she has in her hands ghanas (musical instruments)  
She has large eyes and a complexion of gold,  
Bhairavi - the consort of Bhairava is thus described by all good poets"*

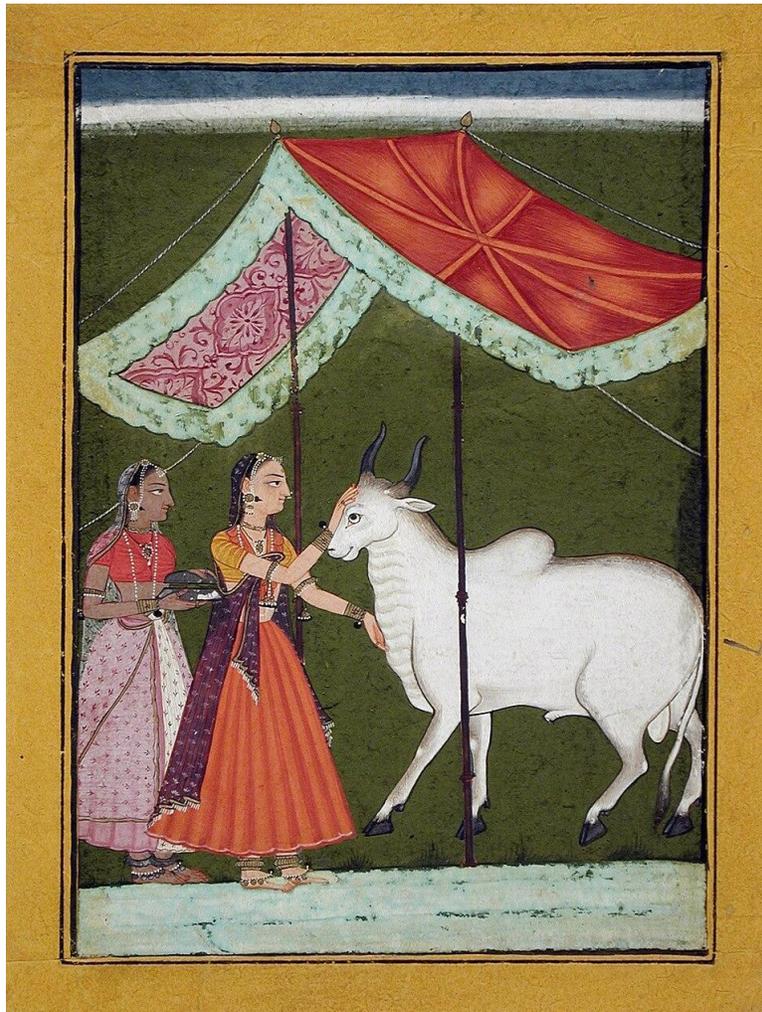


Figure 14 - Bhairavi ragini, circa 1685 -1690, Bilaspur, Los Angeles County Museum of Art, Los Angeles, U S A.

### 4.13 Devagandhari ragini

This elegant painting from Bilaspur demonstrates the outstanding skill of Pahari artists, especially their expertise in depicting feminine beauty with grace and sensitivity. In Ragamala paintings, Ragini Devagandhari is usually portrayed as a peaceful, devotional woman, often an ascetic longing for her absent beloved. She is often depicted with female musicians playing instruments such as the tambura or mridangam, and sometimes accompanied by a companion holding a peacock-feather fan. Although artistic interpretations differ among regional schools, the core themes of spiritual longing, meditation, and quiet devotion stay consistent.

In this particular painting, Devagandhari Ragini is depicted as a young woman, bare above the waist, awaiting the safe return of her lover. She stands on a red footstool, drying her hair—a moment of quiet intimacy. Her beauty is enhanced by delicate necklaces, white floral garlands, and her simple, elegant adornment. The red garment she wears reflects the emotional intensity of her inner state. Various vessels appear in the foreground—a pot, an ewer, and a flask—most likely used for ritual worship. There is usually the inclusion of dhatura flowers, sacred to Lord Shiva, which further emphasises her spiritual devotion and purity. In the context of classical Indian music, Raga Devagandhari is traditionally performed in the morning, echoing the mood of calm reflection and yearning as captured in this composition.

A verse on Devagandhari Ragini (Gangoly 1935) -

*"The lady Gandhari is the picture of an ascetic  
the mark of waves of separation are heavy on the body  
The fire of separation has made her body lean and thin  
Each and every moment increases her passionate love-longing  
Her tresses flow untied for she has assumed the robes of an ascetic  
Her mind is engrossed in meditating on the name of her beloved...."*



Figure 15 - Devagandhari ragini, circa 1730, Bilaspur, Victoria & Albert Museum, London, U K.

#### 4.14 Ragini Patamanjar

Patamanjari is depicted as a consort of Raga Bhairava, often portrayed as a sorrowful aristocratic woman consumed by longing in her lover's absence. These paintings convey the emotional weight of separation, with the heroine shown in quiet despair, gently consoled by a female companion or attendant. Set within palace courtyards surrounded by lush landscapes, the scenes frequently feature elements of the natural world—such as dense trees, a deer, or, as in this painting, a tiger cub—merging royal life with the wild beauty of nature. The heroine is usually shown seated with her head resting on her hand, her posture and expression embodying melancholy and introspection. The overall mood is one of loneliness and emotional vulnerability, often intensified by a dusky or night-time setting. Patamanjari is a musical mode traditionally performed in the early morning or evening, and the paintings inspired by it reflect this contemplative tone, evoking solitude, quiet yearning, and a deep sense of emotional stillness.

A translated verse on her condition reads (Gangoly, 1935)

*“Separated from her beloved her beauty has faded from her body... she carries on her body her garland which has faded... she is assuaged by her favourite comrade. Her body is grey with dust, such is Patamanjari”.*



Figure 16 - Ragini Patamanjari, circa 1740 - 1750, Bilaspur school, Cleveland Museum of Art, Ohio, U S A.

## 5. Conclusion

A closer examination of the Ragamala tradition in Pahari painting reveals a remarkable convergence of sound, colour, and emotion—offering a deeply immersive, multi-sensory aesthetic. This fusion stands as a powerful testimony to the richness and sophistication of Indian miniature art. There is growing hope that contemporary artists will continue to explore and reinterpret this genre, using modern formats and techniques to infuse new life and dimensions into this timeless tradition.

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