

RAJASTHANI MINIATURE PAINTING

Miniature painting, like many other great arts, was brought to India by the Mughals. In 1555 Humayun, returning from exile in Persia, brought painters along with him. His son, Akbar, established an atelier where serious work of painting began. As Hindus joined the atelier, bringing in their own style, the particular Miniature that is known as *Rajput* or *Rajasthani*



Radha Krishna sitting, Painting on cloth 40^{3/4}" x 37" ca. 1760 A.D.
Courtesy- Philadelphia Museum of Art.

came into being after the sixteenth century. The painters who had moved from Moghul courts to Rajasthan settled themselves in the Rajput kingdoms. Inspired by the royal and romantic lives of the Mughals, these paintings were done with utmost care and in minute details with strong lines and bold colours set in harmonious patterns. The court artists, who captured the moments on canvas, painted scenes from everyday life. The pioneer scholar of Rajput painting, Ananda Coomaraswamy, divided the Hindu style into two distinct schools based upon areas of provenance, that is Rajasthani from the Central Plains, and Pahari from the Himalayan foothills. The main schools for Rajasthani Group are: Mewar (Udaipur), Bundi, Kotah, Marwar (Jodhpur), Bikaner, Jaipur, and Kishangarh. The Pahari Group included schools like Bosohli, Jammu, Guler and Kangra. Expressions similar to Miniature paintings are also seen in the Deccan Groups and other local Hindu schools like Malwa, Patna, and Bengal. Each school had a distinct style and identity of its own. For example, the school of Mewar had bold lines and burning colours, whereas Bundi was gentler, and more lyrical, as seen in the famous Ragamala paintings. The soft colours and melting forms of Bikaner found a counterpoint in the elegance of Kishangarh.

History of Kishangarh painting

Rajasthan is situated on the northwestern part of India, near the Pakistan border. Kishangarh is a province in Rajasthan and has contributed immensely in the field of painting. It is situated between Jaipur and Ajmer. It is picturesquely situated on the side of a lake called *Gundolav*. The fort, *Mokham Vilas*, and the palace, *Phool Mahal*, overlook the waters. The miniature artists have beautifully depicted this palace, fort, lake, bridges, gardens and the Kishangarh town in the background of their paintings.

Maharaja Kishan Singh, the ninth son of Uday Singh, chief of Jodhpur, founded Kishangarh in 1594. He made a palace bearing his name. Right from the time of Kishan Singh, the rulers worshipped *Nritya Gopal*, an idol of Lord Krishna in dancing pose. The influence of Vaishnava religion encouraged the *Bhakti* or faith for the Divine. Expressions of faith adorn the works of Kishangarh painting, literature, music and dance.



Krishna and Radha, painted by Nihal Chand, ca.1750 A.D.,
Courtesy - Ex-Maharaja, Br ij Raj Singh of Kishangarh



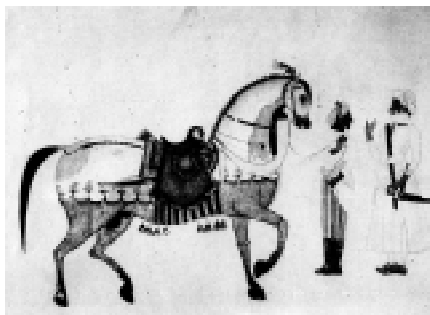
Union, Drawing ca. 1775 A.D.

While in most of the Rajasthani states, painting had come to a close by the end of the eighteenth century, a new school of painting emerged in the small state of Kishangarh. Its ruler Raja Sawant Singh (1748-1757) was well versed in Sanskrit, Persian and Marwari languages, and had also studied music and painting. He was a great devotee of Krishna, and wrote many poems under the pen name Nagaridas. Paintings were mostly based on his poems. He played an important role in the creation of Kishangarh masterpieces.

Sawant Singh fell in love with a slave girl who was brought from Delhi by his stepmother. She was a singer, poetess and was attracted towards the love songs for Krishna. Since she was elegantly dressed and remained decorated and well behaved, she was known as *Bani Thani*, meaning well dressed. King Sawant Singh commanded his artists to paint her portrait and since then *Bani Thani* is portrayed as Radha and Sawant Singh as Krishna. The court artist Nihal Chand produced the best Kishangarh paintings. The paintings obtained a new style for Radha and Krishna figures. The golden era of Kishangarh paintings was during the time of Sawant Singh. He developed new expressions and forms that propagated this splendid style of Kishangarh.

Style

The Kishangarh school is distinguished by the fine quality of brushwork and there is a distinct feature for women. The high stylisation for maintaining the feminine beauty is the supreme achievement of Kishangarh paintings. Radha is seen highly ornamented with long and heavy garlands of three lines of white pearls decorated with square emeralds. The main figures – Radha and Krishna always appear in a quite island of calm, and seem to always link together by a celestial rapport completely absorbed in each other. The figures of both male and female are tall, slim and have a thin delicate waist. The face and body are always in profile, and the eye is always half closed lending an enigmatic quality, and covering large area of the face. Based on a living model *Bani Thani*, the artists were provoked to change the conventional type of face. Radha is always dressed in *Ghaghara Choli* (Indian dress) with a transparent veil on her head. Krishna who is portrayed with light blue complexion and sharp features always wore a turban on his head with decorated jewels, drooping pearls and without a feather. It is interesting to note that while



Sawant Singh's Horse, ca. 1790 A.D.,
Courtesy - Mayo School Museum, Ajmer

painting Radha and Krishna, Kishangarh painters kept themselves more inclined towards devotional love.

Nature occupies a major role in the paintings. Lotus pond, fountains, lush green groves, rising sun and moon were present in most of the paintings. Animals like horses, elephants, tigers, monkeys and birds like peacocks, parrots, swans, and cranes add life to the paintings. These painters usually concentrated on the main figures and the landscape spotted with gardens, mountains, temple, and magically lit sky were settings for creating the right mood of the painting. The painting is composed in a grandiose scale and the rich *Diwans* with brocaded cushions; bolsters in gold bring in a divine touch. In Kishangarh painting, figures, trees, animals become a symbol to convey an emotion rather than to depict a mere incident; and the surrounding scenery relates to the figures rather than being just a naturalist background. On top of each painting an inscription of the king or name of the artist was mentioned. These paintings were first done on paper, then they extended the technique on cloth (cotton and silk), marble, wood and leather.

Colours

Rajasthan is the great colour belt of India, and colours like red, green, ochre, saffron, purple and magenta, all form a living, moving palette. Rajput painters made as much use as possible of primary colours, which they manage to blend in a single canvas. In the Kishangarh school, the dominant colours are blue, red, yellow, shades of green, orange and white. In the beginning, they used natural dyes. That is, red was obtained from the madder-root, black from iron and vinegar, and yellow from turmeric-root. Colours were also made from plants and fruits. Gold highlights are the last step before varnishing it.

Themes in Kishangarh school

In Rajasthani miniature paintings many sets of Ragamala (garland of melodies visually depicting musical modes), or *Nayaka-Nayaki bheda* (the words of Hero and Heroine) or Baramasa, depicting the twelve months were painted in various schools of Rajasthan. As far as the Kishangarh school is concerned, a large number of portraits, court scenes, scenes of dancing, hunting, music parties, and various other festivals like Holi, Diwali, Durga pooja, and



Godhuli Vela, ca. 1760 A.D.,
Courtesy - National Museum, New Delhi

Dassehra were painted. The artists also drew paintings of Radha-Krishna from Jaya Deva's classic composition *Gita-Govinda*, or Keshavada's *Rasikapriya*. Romance and poetry dominated the Kishangarh paintings. As Sawant Singh and *Bani Thani* were lovers, we find them in most of the Kishangarh School of painting. Themes like Sawant Singh and *Bani Thani* meeting at public places like temple, lake, gardens, or *Bani Thani* offering garland as her passion of love to Sawant Singh from a window from behind the curtain, or both facing each other looking into each others eyes, were profusely painted. Other themes included *Naoh ka vihar*, meaning lovers traveling in the boat, *Krishna Lila* and *Bhagavata Purana*.

Characteristics of *Bani Thani*

Bani Thani is a famous painting of Kishangarh school. The great artist Nihal Chand who was a court artist during the time of king Sawant Singh first painted this painting. In the portrait of *Bani Thani*, her long eye is like a fish, the nose and chin are long and sharp, the tall and thin figure carry extra finesse, grace and beauty. Lips are sharp but turns into a gentle smile. Hair is black and long till her

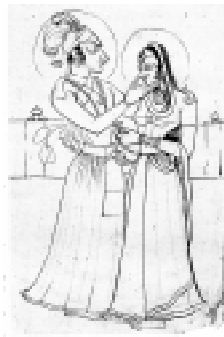
waist, and has soft curls on her cheek. She permanently holds two long stemmed lotus flowers in her left hand and a transparent veil in the right hand. She is heavily decorated with jewels like ruby, emerald and pearls from top to toe, and a *nathani* or ring is worn on her nose. This painting is always in profile and the eye half closed. She is considered to be the perfect beauty and symbolic to all women of Kishangarh. This painting of *Bani Thani* is always compared with Leonardo Da Vinci's painting- *Monalisa*.

Kishangarh painting in the present day

After Sawant Singh's death, Kishangarh painting lost much of its originality, and the bravura of Nihal Chand's works declined from nineteenth century onwards. Today, painters are still working in Kishangarh, but the glory of that period is lost. They are merely reproducing the paintings and mixing the schools and producing a style of their own. Very few have studied and retained various styles of Rajasthani miniature paintings. This art form is taught to anyone without any restriction of religion or caste. Nowadays, the natural dyes are replaced with poster colours. The brushes originally made by the tail of a squirrel and prepared by the artist himself is now forgotten. The



Radha, c.a. 1790 A.D.
Courtesy - Bharat Kala
Bhawan, Banaras.



Radha and Krishna,
drawing ca. 1775 A.D.



Radha in the veil,
drawing ca. 1775 A.D.



Radha playing
Sitar ca. 1780 A.D.
Courtesy - R.G.Vijayvargiya

materials for painting are easily available in the market these days and because of the availability of sophisticated paints and brushes the artists too have adopted new methods.

Acknowledgements

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Online resources

- www.shalincraft.india.com
- www.indiayp.com
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NFSC Endowment Fund

Learning through our public programmes, our fieldwork experience and interactions with the media, the staff and board of National Folklore Support Centre decided to create an endowment fund for making grants to disadvantaged Indian folk artists. An endowment fund is created through donations and the principal amount remains unspent. Recently created Professor K.S Haridasa Bhat Memorial Endowment Fund now has Rs.21960 as corpus. The proceeds of this particular fund will be utilised for making awards to deserving Kannada folk artists. Indian nationals are encouraged to donate for this endowment fund or for creation of new funds. All donations can be paid by cheque or DD in the name of *National Folklore Support Centre*. For more information please contact Director, NFSC, Chennai.



NFSC is a non-governmental, non-profit organisation, registered in Chennai dedicated to the promotion of Indian folklore research, education, training, networking and publications. NFSC aims to achieve goals through cooperative and experimental activities at various levels. NFSC's public programming is supported by a grant from the Ford Foundation.

NFSC in collaboration with Government Museum, Chennai announces its sixth public programme- *Rajasthani miniature painting workshop*- as part of its *Visual Art Traditions of India Series*

DATE: March 28 – April 1, 2001

VENUE: Centenary Exhibition Hall, Government Museum, Chennai

TIME: 10:15a.m. — 4:45p.m.

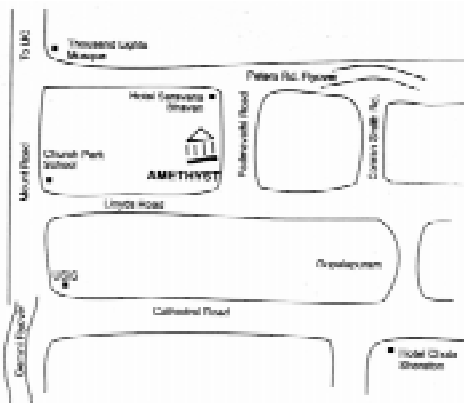
For registration contact: Jasmine / Siva at NFSC, No.65, Fifth Cross Street, Rajalakshmi Nagar, Velachery, Chennai-42. Telefax: 2450553 / 2448589, E-mail: info@indianfolklore.org, Site : www.indianfolklore.org.

Exhibition cum sale

The artists will be exhibiting their work for sale at Amethyst, Sundar Mahal, 14, Padmavathi Road (off Lloyds Road), Jeypore Colony, Gopalapuram, Chennai-600086. Telefax: 8203582, E-mail: amethystkv@hotmail.com, for three days, March 26-28, 2001 from 11a.m. to 7 p.m. All are invited.

Artists

Address of *Rajasthani Miniature* artists who are conducting the workshop and exhibition: Shri Banwari Lal Joshi and Shri Prem Das, H. No.4/190, Panch Shell Colony, Ajmer, (Tel: 0145-642235)



W o r k s h o p – S c h e d u l e

Date 28, March – 1, April 2001

Venue Centenary Hall, Government Museum, Chennai

Time 10.15 am – 4.45 pm

28 March Inaugural function at Centenary Hall, Government Museum, Chennai

10.15 a.m. – 11a.m.

11.30a.m. – 1.00p.m.

Lecture :

Politics of desire in the desert folk paintings by

M.D.Muthukumaraswamy, Director, NFSC

Learning to sketch by B.L.Joshi, miniature artist

29 March Sketching of miniature painting – 1 (theme: elephant)

Painting of miniature painting – 1 (theme: elephant)

30 March Introduction and demonstration by miniature artists

miniature painting-2 (theme: *Bani Thani*)

31 March Continuation of painting-2

2.30p.m. – 3.3p.m.

Lecture :

Rajasthani miniature painting with special reference to

Kishangarh school of painting by K.Lakshminarayan, Curator (Education), Government Museum, Chennai

1 April Finishing touches of painting-2

Valedictory Function at Centenary Hall, Government Museum, Chennai

2.30 p.m. – 3.30p.m.

Paper courtesy : Brochure and workshop painting paper

Courtesy : Workshop materials

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