

# Artistic Representation of Women and Music in Medieval India

**Bennabhaktula Lavanya**

Department of History, University College of Arts and Social Sciences, Osmania University, Hyderabad, India

**Email address:**

[lavanyabenna@rediffmail.com](mailto:lavanyabenna@rediffmail.com)

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**Abstract:** An Artistic styles with a musical flavour, particularly miniature paintings, become tuneful and delightful to look at. A beautiful visual representation of the feminine essence is offered by these artistic musical themes if the concept of women is conveyed in them. Originally regarded by musicians and poets as divine or human representations of Indian musical modes, ragini paintings are a visual expression of those modes. Five, seven, or twelve musical modes are commonly used to portray the various moods depicted in episodic paintings in music. Ragas are the musical creations. Ragamala, or garland of tunes, has six groups of six Ragas, each with a representative man (Raga) and six ladies that are widely used to arrange the Ragas (Raginis). Ragas can be specialized and illustrated in a variety of ways. 'Shakal' refers to a wide range of Ragas in the musical tradition. Indian miniature paintings depict Ragas as melodic forms that relate with the artistic feminine spirit and promote creative activity through the use of Ragamala paintings. The application of certain sets and symbols is an important component of Indian music. They typically depict sensual or spiritual moments in aristocratic settings. The miniature paintings of women as Raginis are full of emotion and splendour. They depict various aspects of feminine life and create beautiful pictures of immense emotions, the spring period, the driving energies of the monsoon, the talents of artists, the reasonable disposition, and knowledge.

**Keywords:** Art, Deccani, Golconda, Hyderabad, Music, Ragamala, Paintings

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## 1. Introduction

In the latter three decades of the sixteenth century, Ragamala art emerged and flourished, a tradition that was carried in the 17th century by the Golconda School of painting and in the 18th century by the Hyderabad School of painting. The women in these pieces of art are shown in a wide variety of settings, situations, and conditions. Ragini's paintings display the effects of the Local sub-schools' impact on her work. In point of fact, the number of miniatures that show Ragamalas has been steadily growing throughout the course of history.

Paintings illustrating Ragamala or musical compositions in Deccani miniature painting were based on the Nayika Nayaka poetic paintings, a re-adoption of the former concept. These paintings by Ragini represent women like Nayika or Abisarika waiting for Nayaka in various love scenarios, such as impatiently wanting to wait, writing to Nayaka with grief and another who is depressed or betrayed in a psychological and emotional manner. Nayika's love is depicted in the

Ragamala paintings. These artists depicted love by portraying ill women in a vulnerable state while conveying the depth of their feelings and anguish. Several indigenous musical systems, such as Ragas and Raginis, were illustrated as women in historical Deccani kingdoms, and paintings depicting their themes were made [1].

Royal families throughout the period of the Sultans established a culture of leisure in the royal cities. As a source of long-term consolation, music appears to have been an important aspect of their culture, which they cultivated during periods of peace. Artists were encouraged by the courts of the sultanates to portray women in raga - raginis – or a musical form depicting women in paintings. They desired to see music depicted in visual representations with colours influenced by the Raga and Raginis compositions of the medieval period [2].

Indian music's Ragas, or melody patterns, emerged primarily as a result of the ardent heart's desire to sing rather

than to recite [3]. Indian musicians and poets originally saw the musical modes depicted in ragini paintings as manifestations of divine power or human figures.. Aristocratic or classical settings are frequently used to express themes of desire or devotion. Most of these paintings are included within folios that are arranged in a family structure of thirty-six or forty-two. Raga Putras (sons) and Raga Putris (daughters), the wives of the sons are also present in each family [4].

Each painting has its title or sometimes a poem inscribed on it that describes the subject matter, creating an amalgamation of music, poetry and art. Ragas are the terms used to refer to the individual miniatures, and they are arranged in a garland form.. Ragas and Raginis, a group of categorization or classification within the musical modes, were prominent features in medieval Deccan paintings of musical forms. The Nayika-Nayaka lore, a legacy of ancient poetry in all its facets, from separation to unification, was incorporated into the visual art of the period, combining these male and particularly feminine qualities of music. Hindola Raga, SriRaga, Goudi Ragini, and others that express both male and feminine melodic modes are among the more intriguing miniatures of these Ragas. For example, Raga Bhairava has wives named Puniyaki, Sanchi, Bilawali, and Bhairavi. Malkos has Gunkali, Gandhari, Dhanasri as wives, while Hindola Raga has Bhim Palasi, Basanti, and Sandhuri as women. Similarly, Sri Raga has spouses like Vairati, Gauri, Karnati, and Saveri, whereas Megha Raga has wives like Sorath, Kunkunni, Suhi, and Asavari, etc.

The melodic and lyrical roots of Ragamalas precede those of these Ragini paintings by many centuries. Between 1450 and 1550 AD, paper and miniature painting flourished in several Indian locations, including the Jain, Hindu, and Muslim groups [5]. The need for such renderings of current local developments has progressively risen over time. It was at Ahmadnagar (C. 1580 – 1600 AD) that the Deccan's earliest Ragini miniatures were largely drawn, with brilliant colours and bold figures. At the Mughal court, these kinds of images were also common. Ragamala art was introduced to the Mughal court by Burhan II of Ahmadnagar, who returned from exile in 1591 AD [6]. Before the reign of the Nizams of Hyderabad, this method of execution spread to other Deccani kingdoms such as Bijapur and Golconda. The occurrence of these paintings in Deccan is influenced by a number of other elements. The Hindu impact of Rajasthan was clearly visible [7]. Many of the Ragini paintings have a Sanskrit poem that may be connected to the period where the greater percentages of Gujarati merchants were in the area [8].

Numerous feudatories in the Northern Deccan were also ruled by semi-independent Hindu Rajas of the Rajput clan. There must be at least one of these Rajas who was interested in Ragmala paintings. Paintings like this are likely the product of Rajput noblemen's stay in the Northern Deccan, where they mixed Rajput grandeur with a strong Deccani colour scheme of pink and blue. For political reasons, Mughal and Persian influences may be seen in Ragini art. New Ragini representing women were created as a result of the confluence of all of these factors. Some examples of

Ragini paintings illustrated in Golconda and Hyderabad schools may be seen follows.

## 2. Golconda Phase

Abdullah Qutb Shah had some Ragini paintings made in Golconda during his reign. Gurjari and Sarangi Ragini are shown in a Khawar Nama text, which dates back to about 1645 and 1649 AD [9]. Two Gujarati Raginis appeared in Ragini paintings at the same time [10].

Miniature painting depicts Gurjari Ragini relaxing and playing the *ektara* as another Ragini observes her from the home. Trees and branches of various colours mix into the forest's constant humming. They wear bindis, bangles, and other Hindu-style jewellery, giving the Raginis a distinctive look. Sporting Rajasthani clothing can be seen. Another Miniature portrays Gujarati Ragini sitting on a lotus as other creatures, including deer and cranes, watch on [11].

Tana Shah, or the "King of Taste," Abul Hasan Qutb Shah, the final Golconda sultanate, was a passionate patron of art. During his reign, he created a vast range of miniature paintings of women. Several Ragini paintings were commissioned for his court during his reign (C 1672 – 1687 AD). Todi Ragini's portrait, which originates from 1680 AD, is one of the most remarkable Ragamala pictures or paintings based on musical patterns [12]. The Ragini is depicted in the colours orange and light green. Several animals and birds accompany Ragini as she plays the *ektara* while she explores the rocky landscape.

Ragini is seen in the painting of Sarangi reclining on a cushion in a dancer's expression and posture [13]. The general mood of the image is quite pleasant. Ultramarine ash clouds are seen against a bluish grey sky. Colors like pale mauve, crimson, and white are very frequently seen in the environment. The golden green colour in the foreground is a great contrast to the rest of the scene. Ragini's clothes are full of parallel lines. She wore anklets, bangles, necklaces, and golden flowers as jewellery.

Five musicians are playing Sri Raga miniatures as Krishna sits on a terrace, surrounded by an attendant holding a garland and *chauri*. Beautiful scenery beckons beyond the lotus pond [14]. A three-pronged peacock feather was widely used to depict Krishna with deeper skin tones in spiritual themes. Often, he explores his emotional desires in a more direct fashion by dancing and playing his flute to entice ladies. For example, the passion between Radha and Krishna was shown in Ragini Paintings as a exchange of ideas between Ragas and Raginis, which give them the identity as Radha and Krishna.

## 3. Transitional Phase

Between Golconda's demise and Asaf Jahi's arrival, a small number of paintings depicting Raginis was produced in Hyderabad in the early 18th century and have since spread throughout the country. A Deccani atelier has produced these paintings, which are mostly for Hindu clients. Only a few

large-scale Ragini paintings have been depicted during this time period [15].

### 3.1. Themes on Music

Three ladies are seen in Asavari Ragini's painting against a forest landscape, with a castle in the distance. It appears that one of them is a princess, and she was pleased by a vina-playing musician in front of her. Asavari Raginis are usually represented as lovely young women dressed in red and yellow with a chauki or chauki. An Indian musical style known as Hindola Raga is depicted in another picture that embodies the original spirit of the music [16].

Paintings of the Hindola Raga generally feature a young prince on a swing, surrounded by beautiful women. At a royal court pavilion, an attractive young woman plays several musical instruments such as the tabla, vina, and tambura while a young prince swings. In addition to the woman behind the royalty, another lady maiden is fanning him with morchhal while he swings. The painting has a variety of colours, including green, black, and tan, which creates a courtly atmosphere. Hindu women's attractive looks and colourful attire evoke a pleasant mood.

### 3.2. Aesthetic Theme

One of Paraj Ragini's miniature paintings depicts a woman enthroned in the centre of the scene, adorned with a turban and a halo. In a palace mansion, she was surrounded by royal maidens and other females. Deccani environment is depicted in the picture through the clothing and jewellery worn by local ladies, as well as their facial expressions. Dhanasri Ragini, a miniature painting from the first quarter of the 18th century, is another remarkable work of art. The painting depicts two aristocratic ladies seated in a pavilion of a palace court, one of them gazes into a mirror while the other sits on the ground in front of them as if they were exchanging information. The aristocratic women are offered the mirror by a maiden in the background, while the other women look at the visitor who's arrived. A maiden stands behind the women who are sitting, fanning them. All of these women are dressed in intricately crafted costumes with basic jewellery peculiar of Hyderabad. The leisurely lives of aristocratic ladies are depicted in this painting., which are connected with nature and rhythmic vigor.

### 3.3. Romantic Theme

Intimate and romantic, the Ramkali Ragini painting is a beautiful piece [17]. Ragini is the name given to a woman who is enraged with her lover for having an affair with another woman and then being late for their tryst. Finally, he cries out for her repentance by kneeling down at her feet. In popular culture, Ramakali Raginis are depicted as lovely, dark-skinned women having fun.

## 4. Hyderabad School

Between 1760 and 1785, the Asaf Jahi rulers of Hyderabad

commissioned a huge number of Ragamalas series miniature paintings, mostly in Thirty-six sets with a variety of subjects. Ragas and Ragins, two main types of Indian music, were among their favourite subjects to portray [18]. Despite the fact that these themes are intertwined with music, one can perceive themes such as love, art, spirituality, solitude, and anger and anxiety within them.

### 4.1. Themes on Music and Dance

As his companion massages him with sandal paste, Bhairava is seen wearing a yellow dhoti and green robe in Bhairava Raga. Two girl musicians play tambur and drum in the background, while one of the two attendants is making sandal paste in the front.. This is Megha Raga's miniature. On a rain-soaked terrace, Lord Krishna is seen dancing with five female musicians who are each holding a lotus. Peacocks fly around a young woman in a musical setting depicted as Sohini Ragini [19]. A young lady sits on a cliff and plays the vina amidst a golden light and perfect tranquility. It appears as though the peacocks encircling her and are enjoying the music.

There is another picture of Todi Ragini in which a tambur-playing Todi reclines behind a tree, palaces standing in the distance. Several herds of white deer assemble to listen to the music that attracted them all together. During the latter of the eighteenth century it was executed [20].

### 4.2. Romantic Themes

Malkos Raga is shown in a miniature representing a Prince and a woman on the balcony. Two female musicians are performing on a rooftop in front of them at night, under the stars. Just as the clouds began to gather, a brilliant crescent moon emerges. Malkos Raga is often depicted as a reclining couple. While waiting for her lover, a lady is seen in Varari Ragini's painting creating floral arrangements on her bed. Archery equipment is held aloft by someone who appears to be training her in the art of combat [21]. It is said that the Ragini symbolises Kamadev and Rati's unending love. In his excitement, Kamadeva seemed to have no desire to be disturbed. There is a strong bond between the Ragini and Kamadeva and the Rati. Radha and Krishna's love is symbolised by this raga.

### 4.3. Aesthetic Theme

In a Trivani Ragini painting showing a woodland full of dense trees, a lovely woman sits contemplating the splendour of nature. Peacocks are in full flight in this tree. In the front, there are a few plants that resemble those in an Iranian painting [22].

One of Shyam Kalyan's Ragini paintings depicts a lady's attendant bringing a light to her while covering the flame with one hand. A garland clings around the lady's neck as she sits. Todi Ragini is seen in a picture adorned with jewels, longing for her beloved. A black gazelle may be seen lurking in the distance [23].

Ragini, a young woman shown in miniature, lies down and relaxes on a mango tree while gazing at the countryside with

two gazelles as if was waiting for her lover. She appears to be dreaming. Painting's special attractiveness comes from its wonderful usage of blues, turquoises, and greens in varying shades. It was done out in Deccan around 1725 AD [24].

Miniature painting by Gormalar Ragini depicts a woman lounging in a lotus pool while holding an arrow and bow. The cuckoo is traditionally shown as a lone woman who is startled by the sound it produces [25]. It portrays a woman wandering amid peacocks with garlands of lotus flowers dripping from her hands in the background.

#### **4.4. Spiritual Themes**

The Bangali Ragini depicts a woman kneeling in prayer before a Shiva temple with a lioness curled up behind her and a candle lit in front of her in honour of the goddess. Two female ascetics represented as Asavari Ragini are shown in a meadow. In Devgandhar Ragini, an aged saint is seen sitting under a Banyan tree, being fanned with a morchhal by a devotee. Sitting on the hide of a tiger or black deer, these ascetic ladies are perfect messengers between faraway mates or lovers, as well as between political adversaries, because of their religious virtue and their detachment. A village with a church in the distance indicates European involvement in Hyderabad's Deccani Empire. Most depictions of Devagandhar Ragini show her worshipping before a Shiva shrine.

#### **4.5. Themes on Separation**

While seated in the garden canopy, Patamanjari Ragini depicts a woman extra training from an elderly companion who gestures with her hands. She appears to be offering advice to the woman, who is clearly unhappy at the fact that she and her lover are no longer together. Often shown is a young woman playing the sitar in Patamanjari Ragini.

#### **4.6. Themes on Anger**

Another Ramakali Ragini image depicts a lover bowing down to his beloved. Two maids and the duenna all turn their gaze away from him indicating their distress with their hands in their laps. On the left side of the garden, there is an open door through which the lover enters. When the Lord returns to the home of Khandita Nayika after a night away, she blames him brutally. Ramakali Raginis are reminiscent of this scene.

#### **4.7. Themes on Anxiety**

The woman runs into a duenna's arms in Madhu Madhavi's Ragini painting, dropping her slippers on the balcony in distress. As soon as a flash of lightning strikes, rain begins to pour, and the storm breaks. Abisarika Nayika, also known as Madhu Madhavi, is a lonely soul in search for a lover.

In totality all these Miniature paintings have a sophisticated style and workmanship, and each Raga was a symbol or representation of a certain topic. Seasons, nature, and the sentiments of lovers are all related with these Ragas, although each Raga has a distinct and unique emotion. Several paintings are arranged in six-painting groups on six paper sheets with

garlands of coloured and gold flower ornamentation. The Ragini paintings of Hyderabad have a softer, more lyrical tone than the Golconda School's depictions of women with music and environment, making them superior.

Similar Ragini paintings were shown at Hyderabad sub-schools as well. In Wanaparthy, for example, a group of thirty Raga and Ragini paintings depicting music, romance, and other subjects were painted. According to Raja Rameshwar Rao of Wanaparthy, these paintings are part of their family library [26]. One of Ragini's paintings shows three women standing in a garden pavilion [27]. They're dressed in a way that's distinctly Hindu in style and appearance. While a few animals observe, another painting portrays a prince gently holding his beloved in his arms inside the royal palace. Individualistic in their approach to colour and drawing, these Ragini paintings preserve a Hindu flavour while being distinct from others. The Telugu inscriptions at Wanaparthy describe the origin and patronage of these paintings.

Between the period 1746 – 1763 AD, the Raja Sawai Venkat Reddy commissioned the paintings. The relationship between forms and colours, as well as the selection of colours, are both great. However, in terms of architectural aspects and technical analysis, the Hyderabad component dominates these South Indian painting elements. As a consequence of the influence of music and love poetry, these Ragini paintings representing ladies from the Golconda and Hyderabad Schools developed.

It was around 18th century that art traditions like Ragini paintings had a revival. They show how intimately poetry, music, and painting are intertwined in the Ragini paintings. When listening to the Ragas, the listener is left with an almost overwhelming urge to follow the lead of the composer and follow in the footsteps of his or her inspiration. As such, the Raga-forms are the physical manifestations of bodily transformations [28].

## **5. Critical Evaluation and Conclusion**

The critical evaluation demonstrates that the true shape of pure tonal form, conceptual music sequence, appears to be significantly different from that of the real visualization. In addition to this, the artists of these Ragini portrayals, like their patrons, were only moderately connected to the subject matter of the paintings. It is true that they were accomplished artists who had a wealth of knowledge and expertise in their chosen fields, but their clients and the poets for whom they created illustrations couldn't see that. Their knowledge was confined to painting, and as a result, only a fragmentary iconography of musical manifestations could be produced, with nothing more than imitations of older Schools. Though there was no full-fledged musical resonance, religious and aristocratic imagery of the patron's individual interests as well as poetic significance and emotional responses as well as the local character of the flora and wildlife were reflected in the paintings. However, despite the fact that the prince and princess of these countries were of Islamic identity, they made their own versions of Ragini paintings and favoured

Hindu subjects because of their common passion in music. They can be seen as excellent representations of music, even if they do not really explore an emotional expression through abstract colour and pattern. Nayika poetry, seasonal melodies, and Krishna themes are all interwoven into this traditional endeavour as an experiment.

In these paintings, the Raginis' notion was reinforced, with each musical ingredient given a definite representation and a painting depicting it presented symbolizing women for each one.. Raginis were painted and named after many flowers, birds, and animals, as well as religious hymns and folk songs. By depicting music's personalities and feminine grace in exquisite colour combinations, these miniature paintings from the Golconda and Hyderabad Schools added additional dimension to earlier works in musical modes.

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