

Portrayal of Woman in Marwar School of Miniature Painting

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Abstract

Marwar, a region of Rajasthan with scanty vegetation and desert and a land of brave kings and warriors who also patronized the art and artists to a great extent. The art works painted in this school, created a niche for them in history of art because of the unique representation of themes with extraordinary skills. Portrayal of woman or nayika is also an important feature of miniature paintings of this school which needs more specific study and attention as depiction of female figures is an integral feature of Marwar school of miniature painting.

Keywords: Portrayal, Depiction, Woman, Beauty, Ideal, Arched, Receding, Facial Formulae

Introduction

Marwar School is also known as Jodhpur School. Jodhpur, Bikaner, Kishangarh, Ajmer, Nagaur etc. are sub schools of Marwar school. The capital of Marwar, Jodhpur was founded by Rao Jodha in 1459. Marwar region is a land of desert with scanty vegetation. During 15th and 16th centuries, the paintings executed at Marwar school were influenced from Jain school of painting just like other states of Rajasthan. As Mewar school, the Marwar school also continued the tradition of Ajanta style. Subsequently Marwar school began to furnish its own style and some prominent initial painting series which showed this new trend were 'Bhagwata' (1610), 'Pali Raag Mala' (1623), 'Dhola Maru' (1630), 'Rasikpriya', Bilada (1653). These showed an influence of regional folk art style. The colour scheme was different from the Apbransh style and compositions were also different from the previous ones. Mughal influence was also seen under the patronage of Jaswant Singh (1638-81), Ajit Singh (1707-24) due to good relations with Mughal rulers. Gradually between 1760 and 1780, Mughal influence also vanished and Rajput elements became protruding in the Marwar School.

Objective of the study

The objective of this paper is to study the depiction of woman in Marwar school of miniature painting. Some prominent sub-schools of Marwar school i.e. Jodhpur, Bikaner and Kishangarh have been undertaken as the area of focus in this study.

Review of Literature

M.S. Randhawa, Indian Miniature Painting, Roli Books International, New Delhi, 1981, M.S. Randhawa, an eminent scholar of Rajasthani and Pahari schools of Miniature painting presents a beautiful and useful collection of Jodhpur and Kishangarh schools of miniature painting along with other schools. Dr. Ramanuj Pancholi, Tales of Love in Rajasthani Paintings, Publication scheme, Jaipur, 2005. The book is a study of love tales illustrated in Rajasthani school of miniature painting. Chitrlekha Singh, Drawings of Rajasthan, Aryan Book International, New Delhi, 1993. The book provides a detailed study of drawings of different schools of Rajasthan. She writes in the book that the artists of Rajasthan painted men as warrior and women beautiful, shy and decorated. Partha Mitter, Indian Art, Oxford University Press, Hong Kong, 2001. The book provides a brief description on Rajasthani miniature painting. डॉ. रीता प्रताप, भारतीय चित्रकला एवं मूर्तिकला का इतिहास, राजस्थान हिंदी ग्रन्थ अकादमी, जयपुर, 2011. This book provides a detailed description of Marwar school of miniature painting along with historical perspective. प्रेमचंद गोस्वामी, राजस्थान की लघुचित्र शैलियाँ, राजस्थान ललित कला अकादमी, जयपुर, 1972, The book throws light on important schools of miniature painting of Rajasthan and proved useful. ई. कुमारिल स्वामी, भारतीय कला और कलाकार, प्रकाशन विभाग, भारत सरकार, नई दिल्ली,

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1996. A brief description about Bikaner school and Kishangarh school of miniature painting is given in this book.

Portrayal of Woman in Marwar School of Miniature Painting

Marwar school reached its zenith during the rule of Raja Man Singh and the style of painting during the later years can be called the genuine product of Marwar school. Illustrated paintings of Dhola Maru, Shiv Puran, Nath Charitra, Durga Charitra, Panchtantra, Raag Mala and Kamasutra were painted. Many paintings of personal life of Raja Man Singh were also painted. Paintings like Man Singh bathing with his queens, swimming in pond and swaying on swing were painted. During his time, a kind of maturity and variety of subjects can be seen in the paintings. During the reign of Maharaja Takht Singh (1843-1873) paintings on Krishna's life were painted. Excellent depiction of woman is also seen during this time. At many places in paintings of adornments with women, Maharaja Takht Singh himself was painted instead of any other hero, for eg.- painting with ladies on the occasion of Holi. Maharaja Takht Singh was a debauch and we can see him surrounded by crowds of women in many paintings. Many shringar paintings of Marwar school are now on display in different museums.

A painting "Woman drinking Hukkah" painted in 1816. The painting is a work by artist 'Shivdas'. Fully laden with ornaments the woman is sitting on a stool. Depiction of her eyes is just like Kishangarh style. During the reign of both Maharaja Man Singh and Takht Singh, erotic paintings of their luxurious lives were done in major quantity. King and queen themselves were depicted in place of hero and heroine. Paintings of different activities like enjoying music in palace, playing Holi with ladies, playing in pond with ladies, enjoying swing with queen and other ladies, enjoying drink by hands of Queen, The artist peeped into the every corner of the harem and delineated a vivacious view of eroticism in the paintings of this period of Marwar school.

Dhola and Marvani riding their favourite camel, Jodhpur, c.1820, Chandigarh Museum, Chandigarh (photo courtesy- M.S. Randhawa, Indian Miniature Painting, New Delhi, 1981 Plate- 46) - There are series of paintings illustrated in Jodhpur school on this romantic folk story of Dhola and Marvani. "Dhola Maru belongs to the artistic expression of the society contemporary to Maharana Pratap's period(1572-1597 AD)."¹ The description of story is -"There was a famine in Poongal around the tenth century. Raja Pingal goes with his family to Narwan, where Raja Nala welcomes him heartily. Nala's son, Dhola is liked by Pingal's Rani, who marries him to her young daughter, Marwan, affectionately called Maru. When Dhola is older, he is married to Malwan, a princess of Malwa, who does not know of his earlier marriage. Maru sees him in a dream and becomes obsessed with a desire to meet him. After many difficulties she find him, despite Malwan putting many obstacles in her way. Finally, the two wives start living together amicably. It is a universally known epic in Rajasthan, where it is

regarded as the ideal husband wife relationship."² In the painting Dhola and Maru are riding on their favourite camel. They are looking affectionately and confidently into the eyes of each other. Dhola is painted in a princely attire holding sword on his waist and Maru is shown clad in beautiful dupatta or odhani along with blouse and lehenga. Their camel is also in a swaging posture, camel's head is tilted towards the sky and decorated with different ornaments. Maru's body posture painted by the artist conveys a message of her firmness and confidence over her love Dhola. Her eyes manifest her faith on his partner.

In Marwar school, lady figures are painted in emotional and eloquent manner and body structure is attractive due to perfect and stiff postures. Pearls are used in excess in ornaments of women. At some instances, women are painted with a turban on their heads, and at some places, women are painted with dupatta on their head. In paintings influenced from Mughal style, women are painted wearing churidar pyjama and thin white jama. In Rajasthani attire they are painted in lehenga, odhani, baseda, kanchli. Skirts/lehenga of women were bell shaped. Beautiful designs of henna are decorated on hands. Traditional bindi on forehead and long black hair are painted up to waist. Portrayal of women in exotic paintings seems alive. Facial expressions and body movements are beautifully painted with dexterity.

Bikaner school – An important school of Rajasthani painting flourished at Bikaner. Ruler of Marwar, Rao Bikaji, son of Rao Jodha established Bikaner in 1488. Like other states of Rajputana, in Bikaner also, an original painting style comprising of regional features flowered here. Being a part of Marwar school, and descendant of Jodhpur clan, this artistic heritage of Bikaner is considered an important gradation of tradition of Marwar school. In spite of many outside persuasions Bikaner school of painting is cardinal in creativity in the tradition of painting of Marwar school. The credit for the birth of Bikaner school is given to Usta family of Bikaner.

"A lady playing with child" (photo courtesy- डॉ. रीता प्रताप, भारतीय चित्रकला एवं मूर्तिकला का इतिहास, राजस्थान हिंदी ग्रन्थ अकादमी, जयपुर, पृष्ठ सं – 200) The painting imbibes the traits of Bikaner school perfectly. A woman is sitting on a chair. Another woman is standing behind her and the third woman is holding child in her hand in standing position. Their attention is towards the child. The lady on chair is progressing her hand towards the child. The ladies are painted slim and beautiful. They are wearing transparent lehenga which is a unique feature in this style of painting. And odhani is also transparent and blouse. There are trees in background which adds to the beauty of painting. The child is shown very tiny in the woman's hands. The sky is shown a little cloudy.

"Bikaner school is a hybrid of the Mughal and Deccan styles in the former stages and within the course of time, it imbibed the Jaipur and Jodhpur influences."³ In Bikaner school, the main subjects of paintings were portraits of kings, queens, prince, princess, paintings of royal court and hunting which were realistic depictions of the subject. Paintings of Raga-raginis, Rasikpriya, Bhagwat Purana, Nayika

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Shringar, Ladies playing with crackers etc. Geet – Govinda and other shringara based literature have been painted in Bikaner school.

In Bikaner school, woman is portrayed in a slim figure, having deer shaped eyes and delicate body structure. The artists of Bikaner school paid special attention to the prettiness and elasticity of the woman in paintings. During the rule of 'Maharaja Gaj Singh', facial formulae of woman in paintings modified a little. The face became more round, and nose and eyes became more sharp. Forehead became round and nose a little long and wrinkles have also been painted between the nose and chin area. As a result the face appeared exuberantly divine and stretched. Small but beautiful modifications in the portrayal of women in Bikaner school enhanced the beauty of women in its own way. Kishangarh school – Kishangarh school is considered paramount among other schools of Marwar school as well as among other styles of painting of Rajasthani painting. Kishangarh is a small district situated between Ajmer and Jaipur. Kishangarh school flourished in the former estate of Kishangarh royal court. Two scholars, Eric Dickinson and 'Dr. Faiyaz Ali' are given the credit of introducing this school to the world. 'Kishan Singh', the eighth son of the king of Jodhpur 'Raja Udai Singh' kept the foundation of Kishangarh in 1609. He himself was a scholar and art lover. Maharaja Roop Singh's contribution in the development of Kishangarh style is the foundation stone of its advancement. He was a devotee of Vallabh community and represented that devotion and faith in the paintings. To attain salvation through Krishna bhakti, during his rule, paintings of Krishna's childhood, adolescence and young, paintings depicting romance of all phases. Because he believed that salvation can be achieved by hearing, chanting and seeing visuals of these Krishna leelas. 'Raja Man Singh', (1658-1706) the successor of Raja Roop Singh was a Vaishnav devotee and paintings related to Vaishnav devotion have been painted during his rule. His heir 'Maharaja Raj Singh' (1706-1748) was a religious person, excellent poet and painter. He have written thirty three books and developed the art of painting a lot.

'Raja Sawant Singh' inherited the attributes of great poet, art lover and painter 'Maharaja Raj Singh'. In 1748, a remarkable ruler ascended the throne of Kishangarh. As he grew up in an artistic environment, he had obvious interests in this direction and training of the same built a man of extraordinary love for art and culture and patronized artists and scholars to a great extent. Raja Sawant Singh was famous from the pseudonym Nagaridas, by this name, he wrote poetry on Krishnaite themes. Not much interested in administrative works, but extreme devotion towards Krishna bhakti. The paintings painted in the middle of the eighteenth century in the tiny state of Kishangarh are of the same style. The romance of Radha-Krishna is the main theme of these paintings. Raja Sawant Singh fell in love with a girl who served as a maid servant to his stepmother. This girl was known as 'Bani thani', her real name is not known. Bani thani became the mistress of Raja Sawant Singh and also became the ideal of Radha in

paintings due to her unprecedented beauty. She herself was a proficient singer, poet and an art lover. The artist of Kishangarh painted Bani thani in the role of Radha and Sawant Singh in the role of Krishna for depicting the love of Radha-Krishna in paintings.

"Nihalchand was the chief artist of Sawant Singh. His fame rests on the invention of a highly stylized facial type for the portrayal of Radha. This type is characterized by an elongated face with a receding forehead, arched eyebrows, lotus like eyes, a sharp, pointed nose, thin sensitive lips and a pointed chin."⁴ Nihalchand painted 75 poetry books of Nagaridas, known as 'Nagar-Samuchay'. This depiction of poetry was done between 1735 and 1757. Sawant Singh left the throne and spent the last years of his life in Brindavan with his mistress Bani thani.

Portrait of Radha, Bani thani, Kishangarh, c.1760, paint on paper, Nihalchand (photo courtesy-https://en.m.wikipedia.org/wiki/Bani_thani) - A famous painting by Nihalchand from Marwar School, Kishangarh. Bani thani, according to legends was King Sawant Singh's mistress and she later became one of his wives. Bani thani was one of the maid of king Sawant Singh's stepmother. King Sawant Singh met her and got attracted towards her because of her beauty and voice. She was known as Bani thani or 'lady decked out' for the exquisite manner in which she wore herself after becoming the queen. She wore layers of beautiful jewellery and makeup. Bani thani became the ideal of beauty in portraying woman. Government of India also issued postal stamps in 1973 on this painting. While portraying hero-heroine and Radha-Krishna, the artists of Kishangarh school portrayed Bani thani as heroine or Radha and King Sawant Singh as hero or Krishna. Though an idealized version of feminine loveliness and a form so strange to be real. The painting is a side view of the face, the face is a little elongated with an elongated neck, arched eyebrows, lotus like eyes, a pointed chin. The portrayal of Radha is astonishingly beautiful and charismatic. The most talented painter of Kishangarh school Mordhwaj Nihalchand drew his inspiration from Bani thani for portraying Radha in the painting which became the ideal of feminine beauty in subsequent years. The importance and excellence of this painting can be imagined with the fact, that many scholars and art critics compared it with Mona Lisa of Leonardo da Vinci. The place that 'Mona Lisa' holds in European art is held by 'Bani thani' in Indian Art. It's a matter of great reverence for the painting as well as the artist. Bani thani or Radha is painted in ek chasm posture. Her facial formulae is so stylized and each and every facial feature is unique and elegant. She is holding two buds of lotus in her left hand and holding her transparent muslin 'odhani' from her right hand. She is shown wearing all the ornaments like tika, nath, large earrings, a heavy white pearl necklace, bangles, hairs are a bit curly and long. Her deep thoughtful eyes, graceful costume and rich but elegant jewellery beholds the viewer for admiring her beauty as well as the painter's excellence in representing women in her idealized form. "Within the Ashta Nayika classification system of heroines, the Bani thani is identified as the Vasaksajja Nayika type, with the

element of Sringara rasa (romantic love) predominating.”⁵

We can say that the patronage and love of ‘Raja Sawant Singh’, dedication and excellence of painter ‘Nihalchand’ and their inspiration from ideal woman ‘Bani thani’, this coincidence combination of these three extraordinary souls resulted in a idealised or standard facial formulae of woman in miniature painting which left its mark in history and became famous worldwide later. The background in the painting is flat and artist’s complete focus is on portraying Radha with dexterity. The painting brought glory and fame and Kishangarh school of art received recognition worldwide.

Radha and Krishna recline in a lotus, Kishangarh, c.1745. (Photo courtesy: Partha Mitter, *Indian Art*, Oxford University Press, Hong Kong, 2001, pntg.99) – This painting’s execution is very minutely done by the artist and presentation of nature is admirable. The banana trees are painted in exuberant in this painting. Shades of green dominate the painting. The main element of the work, Radha and Krishna reclining amidst the nature, somewhat at the left part of the painting. Radha and Krishna are painted in an intimate position beholding each other. In the foreground, a pond with abundance of lotus is painted beautifully and a maid is plucking flower from the pond. Some maids are rejoicing there, one maid is playing dholak, one is in dancing pose and other two are looking after the comfort of Radha-krishna. All the maids’ eyes direction is towards Radha-krishna reclining in the lap of nature. All the faces in the painting are ek chasm. Radha and krishna’s love vitalize the whole painting. The light color shown around them, appears like a nimbus indicating their divine love. The colors used in the painting are very soothing and natural. The facial formulae of Radha and other maids are same that of an ideal facial type created by artist Nihal Chand of Kishangarh school. “Nihal Chand created a new, mannered type of slender beauty with curved almond-shaped eyes, arched eyebrows, sharp aquiline nose and pointed chin.”⁶ As a whole, we can say that the painting of Kishangarh school gives visual peace and calmness. The combination of white and pink hues produced miraculous effect in paintings. Green, dark blue and red are also used in excess. In spite of its grandeur and expressive qualities, paintings of Kishangarh school are not much in number. The paintings of this

school are preserved in personal collection of the king of Kishangarh, Delhi Museum, Kala Bhawan, Benaras etc. Some paintings of Kishangarh school are also in big size. Kishangarh paintings excel in creativity.

Conclusion

In Jodhpur school, the lady figures are painted in emotional and eloquent manner and body structure is attractive due to perfect and stiff postures. In Bikaner school, the woman is portrayed in a slim figure and the artists paid special attention to the prettiness and elasticity of the women in paintings. But the Kishangarh school of miniature painting created its own niche in portraying woman in miniature painting due to the extraordinary depiction of woman. In the depiction of women, glamour and tenderness is prominent. Large and attractive eyes, long hairs, pointed nose, receding forehead, lips like petals of jasmine, small but blossomed breasts, this poetry like portrayal of women in painting comes true in Kishangarh school of painting. It shows the proficiency of artist in painting woman. The artist mainly focused on the theme and the portrayal of nayika inhibited a royal touch and their dresses and overall get up was inspired from Rajput’s traditional attire. The Kishangarh artist victoriously painted their mysterious imaginations and dreams in these paintings through magnificent colors and beautiful portrayal of human expressions. A challenge also appears in front of the viewer to understand or identify whether the painting is real or imaginary. Kishangarh paintings are an erotic confluence of art and poetry.

Endnotes

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4. Randhawa, M.S. (1981), *Indian Miniature Painting*, Roli Books International, New Delhi, Pg. N. 82
5. https://en.m.wikipedia.org/wiki/Bani_thani
6. Mitter, Partha (2001), *Indian Art*, Oxford University Press, HongKong, , Pg. N. 150

Picture 1- Portrait of Radha, Bani Thani, Kishangarh, c.1760, paint on paper, Nihalchand



(photo courtesy-[https://en.m.wikipedia.org/wiki/Bani Thani](https://en.m.wikipedia.org/wiki/Bani_Thani))

Picture 2- Radha and Krishna recline in a lotus, Kishangarh, c.1745



(Photo courtesy:Partha Mitter, Indian Art, Oxford University Press, HongKong, 2001,pntg.99)