

Turning Audibility into Visuality: Narratives in the *Ragamala* Painting with Special Reference to the *Raga Bhairava* and the *Raga Meghmalla*

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Article History: Submitted-15/09/2018, Revised-03/11/2018, Accepted-10/11/2018, Published-20/11/2018.

Abstract:

The dispute over visual art's recognition as a narrative is not new in the field of academics. Some scholars and critics strongly oppose its narrative property as it apparently lacks dimension. But *Ragamala* painting presents a unique trend of visual art in India where the music itself has been given the form of visuality, and has thus attributed divinity by connecting the modes of melodies with the deities. The play of symbols merges and shapes the mythic past, which is sufficient enough to show that the visual art can even incarnate the impalpable (here, the Indian Classical music) to tell the stories once framed and structured by our distant ancestors. The aim of this paper is to analyse the same with a special reference to the raga *Bhairava* and *Meghmalla*. The association of these two ragas with lord Shiva and Krishna respectively has brought the cultural aspects to the fore and produced the visible form of the melodic modes. The temporality associated with the *ragamala* painting has been shown according to the time of performing the particular raga. Usually divine figures have been associated with the features of ragas but once the *Bhakti* movement came into existence, the deification was shifted to the narrative scenes. By discussing all these aspects, this paper tries to justify the argument of the narration through the media of visual art, more precisely in *ragamala* painting.

Keywords: Indian Classical music, *Ragamala*, *Bhairava*, *Meghmalla*, *Sangeet*, *Raga*, *Taal*.

In the domain of visual art, painting has been regarded as narrative in still frame. Today, when the field of humanities has become interdisciplinary, it is quite relevant to investigate the structure and content of separate (in a traditional sense) branches of art, and lay a common ground among them, based on the cultural soil, which germinates the seeds of art.

The study of ‘visual art’, which was born as a child of art history and cultural studies, distinguishes itself from the other forms of art by being spatial or say, two dimensional. The gradual unfolding of time (linear/non linear), which is easily demonstrated in the written words of a page cannot be illustrated in the same way in a piece of painting. Now the core of the controversy whether painting can be a narrative (as narrative connotes a sense of dimension, therefore, time and motion) can only be dissolved by surveying and analysing some authentic pieces of painting, here the *Ragamala* painting of Rajasthan.

It can be observed anywhere that each particular community needs to underlie some rules and regulations for its survival, taking into consideration the geographical and ethnic characteristics, which we can broadly call as culture. It is one of the reasons behind the multidisciplinary nature of the humanities that every art form in some way or the other manifests the cultural codes. Painting at a superficial level may be considered static but with the help of certain masterly techniques they successfully convey the time division even in a single frame. *Ragamala* painting, which can claim its uniqueness of being a distinguishable trend, hardly to be found anywhere else, is a genre holding significant importance to give a substantial answer to the above-discussed controversy of painting’s narratological property.

The *Ragamala* painting, the visual representations of the fusion of two artistic modes- painting and music depict the journey from impalpable to incarnation. The study of history of art

(here painting) shows that in Europe, the interrelation of painting and music had been experimented much before and came to prominence from the Renaissance period:

In the fourteenth century, perspective and and preharmony evolved together out of the basically unperspective and unharmonic world of the later Middle Ages. At the beginning of the Renaissance there was a radical shift to perspective and harmony proper. As long as painting had persisted in a two-dimensional attitude, music had been 'linear, preceeding either in one single unaccompanied line, as in the Georgian chant, or else combining these single lines with other single lines simultaneously in a type of counterpoint essentially different rom the harmonically based counterpoint of the polyphony of the Later Ages. The painter's increasing confidence in perspective is synchronized with the composer's confidence in harmony.

In Renaissance times musical consonance now formed the basis of ideal proportion in painting. Alberti taught that the musical intervals most agreeable to the (Renaissance) ear, the octave, fifth and fourth, correspond to the division of a string in two, in three, or in four-1:2; 2:3; 3:4.....These proportions, universally employed in Renaissance painting, were known as the diapason, diapente, and diatessaron. Raphael, (1483-1520), and Leonardo da Vinci, (1452-1519), were aware of the musical relationships and made use of the ratios of consonance. Moreover, Leonardo, who had a passion for music, one of his many accomplishments, wrote with great subtlety on its relations with painting. (Mane 3-4)

The medieval Europe had a firm belief in the holistic concept of the universe, which was perceived as a cosmic symphony with a proper proportion of harmony among all the constituents in the nature. It can be said that the merging of poetry, painting and music flourished mostly in the age of Romanticism, which was, to a great extent influenced by Germany. The renowned German thinkers like Gauguin and van Gogh also "believed that painting promised to become more like music". (Mane, iii) Broadly speaking, in every movement of art, from Expressionism to Orphism, reciprocal influence of painting and music on each other has been explored. But the occidental approach to this interphase of painting and music is based on certain parameters like