

TREASURES OF INDIAN PAINTING

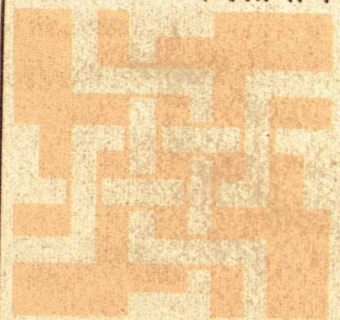
SERIES ONE



MAHARAJA SAWAI MAN SINGH II MUSEUM
CITY PALACE, JAIPUR



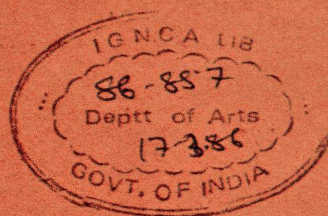
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TREASURES OF INDIAN PAINTING FROM THE MAHARAJA SAWAI MAN SINGH II MUSEUM, JAIPUR

The Kachchhwaha rulers of Amber and Jaipur took active and lively interest in miniature paintings. They were good patrons and started their own ateliers where skilful painters were engaged to prepare paintings and illustrations of manuscripts. At the same time they were great collectors who built up a splendid collection of Persian, Mughal, Deccanese, Central Indian and Rajasthani paintings in their *Suratkhana*. A substantial part of this valuable heritage forms the nucleus of the collection of the Maharaja Sawai Man Singh II Museum.

The most important treasures of this Museum are the illustrated manuscripts of the *Razmnama* and the *Ramayana*, the Persian translations of the Hindu epics, the *Mahabharata* and the *Ramayana*. These were specially commissioned by the Mughal emperor Akbar for his personal library and the four-volume manuscript of the *Razmnama* and the single volume *Ramayana* were calligraphed, illustrated and bound by the finest masters of the age. The former contains 168 miniatures and the latter 176 miniatures painted by such famous painters as Daswant, Muhammad Sharif, Basawan, La'l, Mishkina, Kesav, Madhav, Sanwala, Hari, Banwari, Bhavani, etc. The *Razmnama* is the only work which contains almost all the surviving examples of Daswant, who achieved phenomenal fame before his suicide in 1584 A.D. The *Ramayana* was completed in 1588 A.D.

There are many more interesting Mughal paintings—albums and portfolio pictures—from the times of Akbar, Jahangir, Shah Jahan, Aurangzeb, Farrukh Shiyar and Muhammad Shah. These include rare and important portrait studies, natural history drawings, genre scenes by La'l, Manohar, Mansur, Bishandas, Hunhar, Balchand, Hashim, Payag, etc. These were mostly collected by Mirza Raja Jai Singh (1622-1667 A.D.), Maharaja Sawai Jai Singh (1699-1743 A.D.) and Maharaja Sawai Pratap Singh (1778-1803 A.D.).

The number of Deccanese paintings in the Museum is modest but their importance in the study of Deccanese painting is undeniable. Some portrait studies and court assemblies from Bijapur and Golconda, six large *pichchhwais* prepared at Hyderabad are worthy of mention. Paintings from Bikaner, Mewar, Bundi-Kotah, Jodhpur, Malwa and the Thikanas with whom the Kachchhwahas were in close social and cultural contact are also preserved. The most interesting example amongst these is the large painting of Radha and Krishna from Kishangarh painted in the second half of the 18th century A.D.

Unfortunately no definite information about the foundation and early growth of the Amber-Jaipur school is available. So far only three illustrated manuscripts and one unusually long *janmapatra* of Kanwar Kishan Singh, all dated in the seventeenth century, have been identified. Two of these are *Krishna Rukmini-Veli*, and *Rasikapriya*, both written in 1696 V.S./1639 A.D. for Maharani Chandravati, queen of Mirza Raja Jai Singh, and contain folkish paintings of dancing Krishna and Krishna with Rukmini and Radha. The style of these miniatures have very little in common with contemporary Mewar or Datia or Malwa works, but there is close similarity with the faded wall-paintings discovered in the older buildings of Amber Palace, in the so-called Bhar Mal-ki-Chhatri and at Mozumabad, etc. The third is a fragmentary work on massage prepared in 1692 A.D. for Raja Bishan Singh. The illustrations are stereotyped and show a prince and his dark-complexioned masseur wearing loin-cloth—thus there is no scope to study landscape or costume details. The 456 feet long and 13" wide *janmapatra* completed in 1736 V.S./1679 A.D. is copiously illustrated with very chaste and schematic type of drawings in the Mughal model. It appears that during the long and eventful reign of Mirza Raja Jai Singh a separate art style with folkish elements was developed. In course of time it became more and more refined with traces of the impact of Mughal court style.

Under Maharaja Sawai Jai Singh the Amber-Jaipur style found its own distinctive character. The Maharaja was interested in building up a specialised library containing rare and unique manuscripts on

astronomy, astrology, religion, philosophy, poetics, literature, etc. He attached equal importance to the ancestral collection of paintings which were reorganised and mounted in large *mashru*-covered albums in and after 1725 A.D. Stray paintings from *Ragamala*, *Baramasa* and *Sada-ritu-Varnan* by Govindaram, etc. prepared in the earlier years of his reign have been discovered in the Kankroli Art Collection and in Jaipur. The illustrations of the *Sarasa-rasa-grantha* composed in the later years of his reign represent the ultimate refinement achieved by the Amber-Jaipur painters. Their style bears closeness to the 'revivalist' style of the Muhammad Shah period. This is not unexpected as we come to know from official records about his recruitment of two Mughal painters, Fazil Muhammad and Sadeq Muhammad from Delhi. During the reigns of Isvari Singh, Madho Singh I and finally Pratap Singh the creative force of this school expressed itself in hundreds of portraits, hunting scenes, genre scenes and illustrations of Vaishnava and Sakta texts. Pratap Singh, himself a poet, writer, composer, and musician of good standing, stretched the ultimate capacity of this school and with his death its productive phase also ended.

Amongst all the painters working in Jaipur, Saheb Ram was no doubt the most talented and capable. He developed his curious personal style in which the life-size portraits of his patron Maharajas Sawai Jai Singh II, Isvari Singh, Madho Singh I, Prithvi Singh, Pratap Singh, Jagat Singh and Jai Singh III, now displayed in the Art Gallery, were painted. La'l specialised in large paintings of elephant fight in the Chaugan, tiger hunting, pig-sticking, etc. drawn during the reigns of Isvari Singh and Madho Singh I. A large number of portrait studies of Madho Singh I were made by his painters, who also decorated the walls of the old Madho Nivas in the Chandra Mahal, much of which have, alas, crumbled into dust! The atelier worked in full capacity during Pratap Singh's time when large illustrated sets of *Ragamala* (Plate 4), *Bhagavata Dasama Skandha* (Plate 5) and *Durga Patha* (Plate 6), etc. were painted.

ILLUSTRATIONS

Plate I. *Jahangir hunting in a hilly country.*

Illustration to the *Jahangirnama*, c. 1612 A.D.

Mughal School; 20.4 × 33.7 cm; No. A.G. 646

This is a newly discovered painting apparently from the dispersed copy of the *Jahangirnama*, illustrating one of the numerous hunting expeditions of Emperor Jahangir (1605-1627) during his leisurely return journey from Kabul in the autumn of 1607 A.D. In this fine work the hilly countryside, dark green forest and stretches of blue streams and pools have been painted with great care. Antelopes, mountain goats, Indian ibexes are running for their lives from the arrows of the sharp-shooting Emperor riding on a galloping well-caparisoned white horse inside an elaborately prepared *qamargah* or ring-hunting ground. Men, animals and nature all have been painted with great technical competence. The painting is not signed but it appears to be a work of 'Abu'l Hasan Nadir-uz-zaman who earned great encomium from Jahangir.

Another painting depicting the curious event of a fight between a spider and a snake near 'Ali Masjid and Gharib Khana in course of the same journey is preserved in the Raza Library, Rampur.

The painting is rubbed, flaked and retouched in some places.

Plate II. *Nawab Conferring with Officials in a Garden*

Deccani School; c. 1720 A.D.

25.5 × 34.6 cm; No. A.G. 656

This superb miniature from the Deccan shows a heavily built young Nawab conferring with two nobles—one a high ranking official holding a piece of folded paper and the other a general carrying sword, shield and dagger. The Nawab is fair complexioned and richly attired with fine costume, jewelled ornaments

and gold-embroidered turban. He is followed by four Abyssinian attendants, two carrying the *morchhal*, one a large shield and the fourth a curved sword with golden handle. The first official is dark-complexioned and bearded, wearing a long white *jama*, pink *patka* with printed floral *pallav* and a mauve-and-gold turban. The second official is also bearded but dressed in a simple manner.

The most interesting feature of this miniature is the garden. Fruit-laden mango, coconut, and betelnut trees, beds of white, yellow, pink and red flowers and small cypress and banana trees, lush green lawns full of peacocks, parrots, deer, squirrels, butterflies and dragonflies and silver-gray water-courses fed by fountains abounding in ducks and fish—create an atmosphere of colourful liveliness not generally found in paintings of this period.

A later Rajasthani inscription at the back gives the name of the Nawab as Allahvardi Khan. A general of that name took part in the siege of Parenda along with Mirza Raja Jai Singh and other Mughal generals of Shah Jahan.

Plate III. *Krishna playing Holi with the Gopinis*
Illustration to the *Sarasa-rasa-Grantha*, 1737 A.D.
Jaipur School; 15.2 × 24.3 cm; MS No. 7743 (J.5), folio 85

This delightful painting is one of the thirty-nine full-page illustrations from a unique copy of Sivadas Rai's important work on Poetics, *Sarasa-rasa-Grantha*, composed in 1794 V.S./1737 A.D. Sivadas Rai was a favourite poet of Maharaja Sawai Jai Singh and normally resided at Agra.

The manuscript is unusual as it is written in two scripts: the *Brajhasa* text of the work is written in beautiful *Nasta'liq* within the normal margined area of the folio with the same text in *Nagari* script on the three outer margins. The space between the lines of the text in either script is embellished with an overlay of gold. The folios are thick and cream-coloured. The volume suffered extensive damage as a result of which the original bindings have been destroyed, the folios detached and the top half of most of them eaten away by termites.

According to the colophon the date of composition is Vaisakh Sudi 6, 1794 V.S. at Agra, but in what year the present volume was calligraphed and illustrated is not clear. It appears from the exquisite quality of the illustrations, calligraphy and lavish scale of ornamentation that the volume was prepared for a royal patron not conversant with the *Nagari* script. The paintings reveal the highest achievement of the Amber-Jaipur school. At least four painters seem to have taken part. The colour and mood of the Holi festival is admirably rendered through a rejuvenating combination of green, yellow, violet, mauve and gold, all converging in the bluish face of Krishna.

Plate IV. *Ragini Todi*
From a *Ragamala* set., c. 1785-90 A.D.
Jaipur School; 18.5 × 31.5 cm.; No. A.G. 555

The painting is from a set of 43 fine miniatures illustrating five Ragas, 30 Raginis and 34 Ragaputras following the *Ragamala* of Mesakarna's text. The set was painted by two painters Mangal and Jivan apparently for Maharaja Sawai Pratap Singh (1779-1804). The style of Mangal and Jivan's work is crisp and simple but conventional. They foresee the large sets of *Bhagavata Dasama Skandha* (Plate V) painted in 1792, and *Durga Patha* (Plate VI) painted in 1799.

The iconography of the Ragas, Raginis and the Ragaputras closely follow the Maharaja's own compilation, *Sangita Sastra*. Sawai Pratap Singh himself was a great devotee as also a poet, composer and musician

of considerable repute. His delicate ivory-inlaid *tanpura* and an *anrakha*, said to have been designed by him at the time of his wedding, are preserved in the Museum.

Plate V. *Yasoda and Nanda*

Illustration to the *Bhagavata Dasama Skandha*, dated 1795 A.D. Painter: Jivan.
Jaipur School; 40.5 × 29.5 cm; No. A.G. 415

This is a typical illustration from a large profusely illustrated manuscript of the *Bhagavata Dasama Skandha* containing 366 paintings prepared for Maharaja Sawai Pratap Singh in 1849 VS/1792 A.D. A large number of painters worked in his *Suratkhana* and some remarkable paintings of the Amber-Jaipur school were produced by them under his active patronage. These include Jivan, Ramsevak, Ghasi son of Sitaram, Ghasi son of Dayaram, Chiman, Raju, Gopal, Saligram, Udai, Hukma or Hukamchand, Hira, Lakshman, Radha Kishen and Ram Kishen.

Bhagavata Dasama Skandha was a favourite subject to the Maharaja as he was an ardent devotee of Radha and Krishna, and the painters took much delight in painting the miraculous incidents of Krishna's life. There is in the Museum an early copy of *Bhagavata* with nearly one thousand illustrations in the northern Gujarati style prepared in 1599 A.D. Later copies and illustrated sets dealing with the same subject are also available in the Museum.

Plate VI. *Devi Piercing the Buffalo Demon by a Trident*

Illustration to the *Durga Path*, dated 1799 A.D. Painter: Ramsevak
Jaipur School; 40.5 × 30 cm; No. A.G. 41

The 102 large miniatures of the *Durga Path* set, though painted within seven years of the *Bhagavata* set, express a lively vigour and pulsating energy which is strikingly different from the simple and stereotyped compositions of the latter work.

Though the religious element in Amber-Jaipur painting is dominated by the *bhakti* cult accentuated by the presence of the deity of Radha Govinda Devji within the precincts of the Chandra Mahal, the tutelary deity of the Kachchhwahas is the Goddess Silamata at Amber. However, no work of art worthy of mention dealing with a Sakta subject was prepared before this remarkable set of *Durga Path* was sponsored by Sawai Pratap Singh. As a whole the illustrations express boldness and power that go with a traditional subject of heroism achieved through clever compositional unity and a highly effective colour scheme.

In this painting Devi Durga, resplendent like the rising Sun, is shown in all her fury piercing the ferocious Mahishasura, the Buffalo Demon, with the help of a remarkable array of weapons, including a long trident, held in her eighteen hands.

— Asok Kumar Das







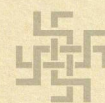


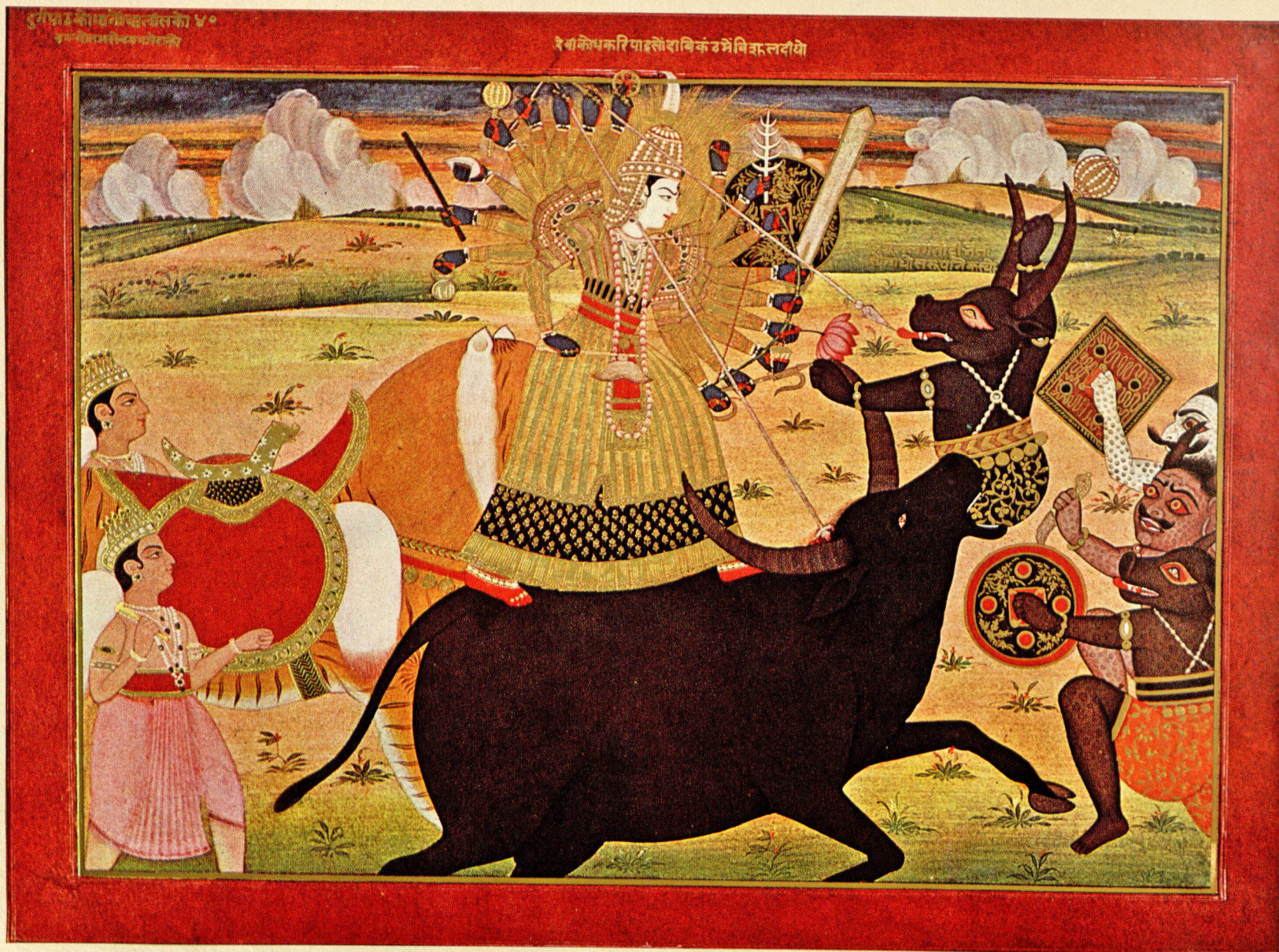
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दशमस्कंध उन्नयनपातो २२

अश्वमेध





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Notes by Asok Kumar Das

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