

Study of Ramayana through Indian Miniature Paintings

Dr. Akanksha Verma
HOD, Assistant Professor,
Department of Fine Arts,
Dasmesh Girls College, ChakAllaBaksh,
Mukerian, Punjab

Ramayana is a compilation of the glory of *shri Rama*, the son of king Dashratha. This *Epic* has elevated the Idealism in Indian Culture. In the *Epic* the character of *Rama* has narrated as an ideal king, son, husband, brother and friend. Infact he(*Rama*) has shown as the protector of humanism. The characteristic of *Rama* is deeply rooted in man and woman of India and that has manifested in Songs(folk, classical), Dance, Paintings, Sculptures, Poetry, Drama, etc. in all the genres. The glory of the *Rama Chandrais* refined from day by day through the centuries. Even in the materialistic world these characteristics can be found in society. *Rama* still exists in the life, behavior and aims(Goals) of Indian human being.

Ramayanahad become a renowned theme for Paintings in the Miniature school of Rajasthani, Mughal and Pahari. Medieval time period of India, art was flourished on the walls followed by a strong tradition of Pat-Chitra, had spread not only in India but also in China, Korea, Japan, Cambodia, Java, Sumatra, Lanka, Nepal, Tibet and Afghanistan. These pat-chitra had made on the palm leaves, cloth and paper and helped to spreading out the religion beliefs in different countries in interesting and effective way (medium). Artist has left the religious staunch and painted *Kalpasutra*, *Kalka Charya Katha*, *MarkandeyaPuran*, *DurgaSaptshati*, *RatiRahasy*, *Kaamsutra* with generosity. Later style of painting has also impacted with the previous depictions.

Art has flourished completely till the Gupta period and the caves of Ajanta, Elora and Bagh are the example of this development. Gupta period has elaborated as the Golden period of Indian art by the historians and art critics.

Further the growth of various art has interrupted because of political imbalance due to attack of

invaders. But slow and steady arts have maintained the developing process. In this journey glimpse of the developing style of Rajasthani miniature painting has flourished in various principalities of Rajasthan.

Rajasthani paintings are also known as “Rajput Paintings” “The term Rajput is employed because all the works discussed have been produced under the patronage of Rajput princes; it conveniently summarizes the fact of board distinction from Mughal; and its preferable to any sectarian name such as Hindu, because that would have too wide a geographical application. Rajputpainting is a counterpart of the vernacular literature of Hindustan.”ⁱInheriting diverse traditions, Rajasthani School has displayed a rich range of expression.“Mewar, Bundi, Kota, Jaipur and Kishangarh in eastern Rajasthan and Joadhpur, Bikaner and Jaisalmer in the western region became the important centers of painting. The Rajput belonged to the warrior class and claimed descent from Rama, the hero of the epic Ramayana”ⁱⁱ

Often the Rajput patrons often commissioned their painters. In Rajasthani Miniature paintings each school has presented a special facial structure. As a region Rajasthan have a rich culture and tradition of costumes, patterns, jewelry that can also seen in the miniature paintings. Thus Rajput paintings have provided the encyclopedia about the information of customs, costumes, architecture and religion.

In the earlier style of paintings the two-dimensional effect was enhanced with flat application of colour. Some of the night scenes are depicted as if in the full sunlight. In the painting interior and exterior of Rajput places has been painted. Rajasthani painters has inspired with the religions and secular literature sources. For the painting theme were selected from Puranas, Epics, BhagvataPurana, and Devi Mahatamya. From the PuranasVishnuPurana, BhagwatPurana is one of the favorite subject to be painted.

Ramayana and Mahabharata the both celebrated Epics are painted with versatility in different styles of Rajasthani miniature paintings. Some other themes were also painted that are BarahmasanadRagmala. In Barahmasa artist has depicted the changes of twelve seasons of India with keep observance and minute details and how that affected the human in a pleasant way. Artist has elaborated different musical moods according to specific iconographic rules in

Ragamalapaintings. "Popular Love Ballads namely, Dhola-Marua, Sohni-Mahivala, Madhavanala-Kamakandala, Nala-Damyanti, Hammira-Hatha, Laila-Majnuetc"ⁱⁱⁱ all are the provided themes which were frequently taken up by the painter.

"Rajput paintings have unveiled a forgotten world of beauty which had been created in a forgotten span of time. To admire Rajput painting was not enough. No significant art has ever been created in vacuum. It is the outcome of a cultural synthesis, contemporary with its production and is the manifestation of the sum total of emotions in which religious beliefs, human and divine love and secular aspirations have all played their part."^{iv}

"The Mughal School evidences an assimilation of various traits of the art of the schools that flourished in India, Persia, Central Asia and Europe."^v Mughal paintings are social art indeed embraced religious and legendary themes and without any doubt represented the inclusive source of reconstruction of native life, works, and beliefs.

Mughal painters have constituted the environment, plant and animals too. So it is quite true that Mughal miniature art is as much social as the other school of Indian miniature art *i.e.* Rajasthani and Pahari etc. Mughal paintings have developed various sections of art like portrait, narrative arts, historical, mythological, calligraphy, margin paintings etc.

Mughal School of miniature art has widespread in country and flourished at Awadh (Lucknow and Faizabad), Lahore, Patna and Delhi. Influence of Mughals can be seen not only in arts but also in the form, shapes, patterns and decoration of architecture, utensils, furniture, carpets and textile fabrics.

Mughal art has flourished in different manner under the patronage of various emperors- Babur, Humayun, Akbar, Jahangir, Shah Jahan, Aurangzeb, etc.-

Babur was the first ruler of Mughal dynasty in India. As a good art critic he analyzed the art works of Persian painters Bihzad and Shah Muzaffar. "Babur had illustrated manuscript in his royal library, demonstrateing his intrest in painting. The illustrated copies of the Shahnama (Timurid School, c. 1440) and the Zafarnama of 1467, containing Bihzad's painting, were previously in Bahadur's collection."^{vi}

Panting has flourished and developed its distinct style under the independent vision of Mughal

Emperor Akbar. He never support the conservative elements and beliefs of Muslims but (infect) he claimed the revelation of divine wisdom. In the paintings of his time-period it seems that artists have tried to explore external and internal quality of the objects. Hamzanama or Dastan-i-Amir Hamza, Anwar-i-Suhaili, Khamsa of Nizami, Gulistan, Tutinama, Chandayana, Nimatnama, Darabnama, "Razmnama (Maharaja Sawai Man Singh II, Museum, Jaipur, c. 1584), Ramayana (Maharaja Sawai Man Singh II, Museum, Jaipur, ad. 1587)"^{vii} are some of the well known illustrated albums of Mughal miniature paintings.

In his (Akbar's) time period artist has intermingled Persian, Indigenous and foreign elements of art. During Akbar's reign a number of Hindu epics texts- Ramayana, Mahabharata, Harivansha, Nala-Damiyanti, Panchtantra were translated into Persian and often illustrated with paintings. Through the translation and paintings of Indian classical works into Persian language shows Akbar's interest in Indian cultural values.

"Mughal paintings, freed from religious association, renounced iconic and symbolic representation in favor of non-symbolic and descriptive visual documents of contemporary life. While depicting themes relating to the legends and myths of Islam (for example, in the illustrations of the Hamzanama), the artist's visual narratives are simply interpretative and their choice of subject matter to represent the themes is only functional. Similarly, in the treatment of themes illustrating great Hindu epics like the Ramayana, Razmnama, Harivansha, the Mughal artist's approach to the subject matter is purely documented, their descriptive visual narratives do not calculated to arise religious sentiments."^{viii}

"In the history of Indian paintings, Pahari miniature paintings convey a specific meaning: the paintings produced in the north-western Himalayas- the region which roughly comprises the present Himachal Pradesh Jammu and TehriGarhwal (Uttar Pradesh); and the art got the patronage of the local chiefs who were mostly Rajput. The word 'Pahari' is the adjectival from of 'Pahar', which is hill, meaning something coming from or belonging to the hills."^{ix}

Pahari Miniature Painting has flourished at various centers Basohli, Guler, Chamba, Mandi, Kangra are the major and at Garhwal, Hindur, Jammu, Kullu, Bilaspur, Srinagar are the major centers of Pahari miniature school.

Despite stylistic diversities, Pahari miniature school is renowned for softness, tranquility, spontaneity, lyricism, inherent symbolism, minute details and deep feeling of human emotions that denote the miniatures.

The cult of God-Love, Nayaka-Nayaki-Bhed, Ragmala Paintings, Baramasa, Krishna Lila, Legend of Shiva, MarkandeyaPurana, Epics- The Mahabharata, KiratArjuna, The Ramayana and some other stories *i.e.*- Aniruddha and Usha, Malti-Madhu, Sohni-Mahiwal, Laila-Majnu, Sassi-Punnu, Nala-Damyanti, Erotic depiction, portraits, animals and birds are the subjects of depiction in Pahari Miniature.

The epic Ramayana is well depicted in artworks (Painting) from the pat-chitra to Pahari School. Different incidents of epics were painted in various sub-school of miniature. The story was indifferent according to Valmiki Ramayana, TulsiRamcharitmanasand other regional versions of the epics.

Here the description of text from the epic is presented through the visual manner in the form of Miniature Painting.

- **Sage Narada requests Valmiki to write the story of Rama (Fig.no.-01):** Kangra style, Pahari Paintings, early 19th century, Paper, 40.6 x 55.7 cm, Acc. No. 49.49/276 Collection – National Museum. In this painting artist has narrated one of the very first scene, from BalKand of the epic Ramayana Artist has depicted sage valmiki and sage Narada sitting at the hermitage of sage. There Valmiki has urged him to write about the story of Rama after narrating the story to him.

Artist has depicted the scene so beautifully as it seems a exotic landscape. At the centre point of the space artist has placed a thatched hut, inside that some clothes are hanging on a rope. One sage is sitting in front of the hut but sage Valmiki and sage Narada are sitting at the right side of the hut. A holy river has shown flowing both side of hermitage. At the foreground some small mounts has depicted at both the right and left side with light colour grass and red and white forest flowers. Artist has depicted the environment in light colours, trees in dark colours and so the environment seems to be very pleasant and divine. In such peaceful and spiritual surroundings, the red cloth of sage Narada has become the central point for the viewer.

The Death of King Dasharatha, the father of Rama (Fig.no.-02):Folio 30r, 30 x 18 cm.

Inscribed : tarahBasawanamalMiskin

This is very important painting but has distorted from the left side and from the bottom side. Here artist has depicted the inside view of royal palace and the human forms has composed in the foreground. IN the painting artist has narrated the episode of king Dasharatha's death due to the departure of his favourite son Prince Rama with brother Lakshama and newly wed wife sita, to the exile for fourteen years.

Artist has placed the dead body of king Dasharatha at the floor, covered with white clothes. He was surrounded by his three queens Kaushaliy, Sumitra and Kaikayi. All three queens have depicted here with loose haris.

One queen is sitting at the head side and other two queens are sitting at the feet side space on the low high bed. On the right side space two female servants are standing in the front of a wall. One of them has astonished after seeing the mourning environment in the royal palace and other woman has shown holding a utensil in right hand and a fan in the left hand. Artist has shown the emptiness of the environment beautifully. In this miniature painting artist has made floral design all around in the background but that design was not overloading the composition.

- **Lakshmana, seeing Bharata's approach, tells Rama that he intends to slay their brothers(Fig.no.-03):** Folio from a miniature of the Ramayana, Sub-Imperial Mughal, C. 1600, sheet, size- 289x178mm

Artist has depicted Lakshmana's doubt, Bharata and Shatrugna's approach and Rama's faith in a single miniature. Artist has blocked the sight of characters by a line of trees and set apart in two sections: in one Rama and Lakshmana in other section Bharata and Shatrugna with the army.

This picture is a good example of Mughal style of depiction. The rich, deep colour, rock, natural rendering of trees and humans, the lively moment, the unified composition are some remarkable qualities of the miniature. The rhythm and ponderous grace has maintained in the whole miniature.

- **Lakshmana cuts the nose off the demonessSurpanakha(Fig.no.-04):** Leave from the Aranyakanda (Book-3) of the Ramayana series, Kangra, c. 1750-80, size- 210x311mm

In the beautiful landscape of hills, artist has narrated the story in different scenes. In one scene Rama-Sita-Lakshmana are interacting with a peacock and demoness Surpanakha watching them behind the hill. In second scene Rama and Sita shown sitting in a hut and in third scene Lakshmana has cut off the nose of demoness Surpanakha.

Artist has used the ancient technique of continues narration to present in a single composition events that take place at different times.

- **Surpanakha instigates her brother Ravana to abduct Sita**(Fig.no.-05): Leave from the Aranyakanda (Book-3) of the Ramayana series, Kangra, c. 1750-80, size- 210x311mm

Artist has depicted Surpanakha in the royal court of Ravana, franking up the situation against Rama-Sita-Lakshmana and convincing him to abduct Sita a the revenge for her insult.

Artist has shown Ravana twice and his horned, yellow charioteer thrice, again utilizing continuous narration. The movement is directed in the painting to the upper right. In the back down to the bottom middle that Ravana goes out in his mule-down chariot.

- **Ravana abducted Sita after sending Maricha in the guise of a golden deer to lure Rama and Lakshmana away**(Fig.no.-06): Leave from the Aranyakanda (Book-3) of the Ramayana series, Kangra, c. 1750-80, size- 206-311mm

Artist has illustrated many chapters of Aranyakanda in a single miniature painting. Artist has started the story from the left upper corner and ends it in the right below corner of the painting. Artist has narrated the tragic episode very sensible as well as beautiful manner. Beautiful in the sense that beautiful landscape of background play very important role by symbolizing the peaceful, pleasant environment of the life of Rama-Sita and Lakshmana before the abduction of Sita. Artist has maintained the stylistic and iconographic continuity in the miniature painting.

- **The Fight between Jatayu, the vulture king and Ravana**(Fig.no.-07): From the Ramayana Series, Gouache on Paper, Pahari, 1st quarter of the 18th century, Bharat Kala Bhavan, Varanasi.

Artist had illustrated the feeling of devotion of Jatayu in the painting through the depiction of their episode.

Jatayu had fought courageously with the ten headed and twenty armed Ravana, the demon king of Lanka. In the battle Ravana has pierced Jatayu's body with a spear and then hacked his mighty

wings with the axe. Artist has depicted Sita in the right corner smaller than Jatayu and Ravana. This painting belongs to a large series (more than 270 leaves) popularly referred to as the “Shangri” Ramayana, with reference to the small place in Kullu.^x

- **Rama and Lakshmana discover the dying crane**(Fig.no.-08):Illustration to the Hindu Epic, The Ramayana, Malwa, Central India, c. 1630, size: 8½ x 6½ inch. Gopal Krishna Kanoria collection, Calcutta.

In the present miniature artist has shown the incident, Rama followed by his brother Lakshmana in the search of Sita. Here the dying Crane is Jatayu, who bravely constrained Ravana's efforts for abduction of Sita. Ravana mortally wounded Jatayu and blood was shedding from its neck. For Rama it was the ray of hope about his wife Sita.

The painting has presented the calm approach of logic with simple composition, dramatic juxtaposition of colours and gentle lines.

- **Rama Pinning for Sita**(Fig.no.-09): Gouache on paper, Pahari, 1st quarter of the 19th Centaury; from a Kangra Workshop, size- 26.5 x 33cm, Collection of Mr. Gopi Krishna Kanoria, Patna.

Artist has depicted Rama and Lakshmana seating side a cave. Rama was identified due to his blue complexion and dress of exile. Lakshmana wearing a headgear of green leafs was sitting with Rama.

Here artist has shown the impatience of Rama through his gesture. In spite the support of monkeys, Rama has depicted in hopeless position;although the character of Rama has explained as the embodiment of dhairya, patience, morality in the Valmiki Ramayana.

Artist has evolved the viewer in the painting through the depiction of state of mind of the principal character.

- **The monkey Prince Angada clasps the feet of his dead father, Vali, at the request of his mother, Tara**(Fig.no.-10): Folio-18 from a manuscript of the Kishkindha Kanda (Book-4) of the Ramayana, Mankot, c. 1700-1710, size- 169x267mm

In this miniature artist has depicted the episode of the death of Vali. Rama, Lakshmana, Sugrive, Hanuman, standing around his motionless body. Tara, wife of dead Vali is lamenting and sitting on

the floor with white cloths and loose hair. Prince Angada has grasped his father's feet in grief. It seems that the tree is bending in sorrow, to give the shelter the sorrowful women.

- **Having told the monkeys that the abducted Sita is in Lanka, the vulture Sampati regains his wings**(Fig.no.-11): Folio-48 from a manuscript of the Kiskindha Kanda (Book-4), of the Ramayana, Mankot, c. 1700-1710, size- 165x266mm

Sugriv has sent the bear king Jambvant, Angada, Hanuman with other monkeys in search of mountain cave. The wings of Sampati were burned off, once when he was shielded his brother Jatayu, as they flew too close to the sun.

Artist has added here that Sampati has regained his wings when he helped monkey in the search of Sita. Range of mountains is creating a balanced space division in this painting.

A simple version of the brightly coloured style associated with basohli and Kullu now practiced in Mankot.

- **Rama destroyed the demon's armies**(Fig.no.-12): From a Ramayana series, Pahari, 1st quarter of the 18th century; from the family workshop of Seu-Nainsukh, size- 22 x 31cm, Chandigarh Museum, Chandigarh.

In this miniature artist has used the convention of continuous narration to evoke a sense of wonder. On the same leaf artist has depicted Surpanakha first as a beautiful persuading Rama, then Lakshmana has cut off her nose and finally artist has depicted her flying off; then she is depicted as the demon, huge, weird, dark, misshapen, with a curling tongue, long fangs, brisling hair and pendulous breasts. Artist has narrated a complete incident in a single artwork.

- **Mother earth receiving her daughter Sita back to her womb** (Fig.no.-13):Kangra style, Pahari, early 19th century, paper, 33.2 x 42.5 cm, Acc No. 76.696, National Museum, New Delhi.

In this miniature painting artist has beautifully project the main event. This painting has shown the episode of when Seeta has left his ideal husband king Rama and her mother earth has appeared to take her back.

For this painting artist has divided the space through the formation of wall and architectural formation. Thus artist has separated the space of royal palace and depicted the inside open area of the royal palace.

Where so many people has gathered for the great ceremony of AshwamedhaYajana performed by there king Rama. Among than sage Valmiki, Sage Vishwamitra, Bharta, Lakshman, Shatrugna, HanumanaSugriva, Jambavana, Queen-Kaushalya, Kaikayi, Sumitra, and the wifes of Prince's, Lava-Kusha, and other family members and people of Kingdom has depicted there. The horse of AshwamedhaYajana has also depicted at the forground. Some women are keeping out from the windows and some others from the tarace to the ceremony.

But instead of the ceremony of AshwamedhaYajana, an unexpected incident has happened when Daughter of King Janaka and wife of king Rama has called her mother earth to appear and took her back in her lape from this earthly world. In the centre artist has depicted Sita folding her hands, sitting in the lape of a lady called mother earth. That mother earth has shown sitting on the thrown with a base of down flower. So many gods and goddess has appeared from the clouds in the sky to witness this incident. Artist has applied white colour in sky and as well as in the wall but separate them with a thine line. Artist has repeated red, yellow and white colour many spaces but he has maintained the significance of each form.

"The invention of a painter consists not in a inventing the subject, but in a capacity of forming in his imagination the subject in a manner best accommodated to his art, through wholly borrowed from poets, Historians, or popular traditions..."^{xi}In miniature paintings artist has not only illustrate every significant event of characters life, but also represent all known art styles of Indian miniature paintings.

Thus it is necessary of understand the expression of mythology in the narration of miniature painting in different time periods.The phase of miniature painting has a very creative phase because it represented in very clear ways, how the narrative artists devised marvelous solutions to their pictorial problems. Such a way of explaining stylistic development brings into prominence several varieties of pictorial evidence of alterations of indigenous conventions.^{xii}

- i Coomarswamy, AnandK., "*Rajput Paintings*", vol. I, p.no.-1
- ii Chakraverty, Anjana, "*Indian Miniature Painting*", p. no.- 53
- iii Ibid, p. no.- 54
- iv Coomarswamy, AnandK., "*Rajput Paintings*", vol. I, p. no.-6
- v Verma, SomPrakash, "*Painting The Mughal Experience*", p. no.-1
- vi Verma, SomPrakash, "*The Making of Indo-Persian Culture: Indian and French Studies*", pp.-226-7
- vii Verma, SomPrakash, "*Painting The Mughal Experience*", p. no.-18
- viii Ray, Niharranjan, "*Mughal Court Painting: A Study in Social and Formal Analysis*", p.- 34
- ix Singh, Chandramani, "*Centers of Pahari Paintings*", p. no.- 05
- x Archer, W.G., "*Indian Paintings from the Punjab Hills*", London, 1973
- xi. Beechey, Henery William", *The literary works of Sir Joshua Reynolds*", To cadell, Strand; W. Blackwood and sons, Edinburge, 1835, (p. no. 307
- xii. Bedekar, V.H. "Stylistic Approach to Indian Miniature", p. 134