ABSTRACT

This thesis formulates the ideas of colour, form, raga, rasa and raagmala ethos, apart from placing them in the context of Deccan and Rajasthan Schools of raagmala painting. It also includes examples of the application of these formulations in the reading of colour and form, including their comparative studies, focusing attention on some Deccan and Rajasthan raagmala illustrations. These formulations form the substance of this Abstract.

Paintings which deal with the visual depiction of the primary rasa, emotion or sentiment in musical modes, are termed raagmala paintings. Each raga has a primary sentiment which is sung in the raga, and visualized in a painting. The emotive quality is the rasa. Significance of rasa is made manifest in poetry, music and painting. Rasa determines the emotion of the raga. It is of nine kinds and covers almost all varieties of emotion. Action as well as reactions of the nayika in different seasons, and the time of the day are depicted. Nayika herself was sourced from Bharat’s natya shastra, a dance-drama, therefore, one of raagmala painting primary feature was taxonomic characterization. The manifestation of the particular rasa is equally important in the depiction of the raga or ragini.

Added to this, were the dhyana formula and the Sanskrit quatrains that provided the pictorial representation of Indian melodies. Sufi poetry, together with bhakti sentiments and prakrit languages, also contributed in building up the ethos of raagmala painting. But both musical and poetic versions of raagmala are centuries old. Raagmala texts, according to Gangoli, provided detailed visual pictures of a particular raga or ragini. Raagmala
treatises in the North had become a tradition. *Ratanmala, Sangeet-mala, Sangeet-darpana, Raga vivodha*, are good examples. *Raga* and *raginis* contemplations were also written by Ibrahim Adil Shah-II in *Kitab-i-Nauras* in the Deccan.

Emergence of paper as the surface to be painted had its impact also. Its use made brush-work more elaborate and detailed. The supple and vigorous line, for which Indian art, and more particularly, a miniature is reputed, helped make the miniature painting more appealing and refined. And so, miniature illustrations in India flourished, as did the *raagmala* miniature painting, so much so, that by the sixteenth century it had acquired enough importance to be recognized as a genre on its own.

The established notions of a *raga*, namely, the microtones, the *vadi, vivadi* and *annuvadi*, which in translation are sonant, consonant and dissonant, blended and matched with the wavelengths of colour. The similarity and resemblance between music and colour affect both the eye and the ear drum. Gosvami presumes this correspondence as motor center excitations. Also, the seven notes in Indian music go with the seven colours. This, association as Gosvami says, was itself an ancient Indian practice. And so, Indian musicologists, from ancient times, have had their seven notes of music go along with seven colours. Both, Gangoly and Gosvami describe the theory of colour and music well. Gangoly writes of:

...the seven colours answering to the seven notes of the musical scale.

Even *rasa*, i.e., the emotive quality of a *raga*, has seven colours associated with it. A particular emotion has an appropriate colour for it. Havell provides a list of colours with its corresponding
emotion. However, there was a specific technique used to mix colours in India. A procedure was required to give colours variety, and shade, to give quality to a miniature, and more particularly, a raagmala miniature.

Colour has many qualities. It has the potential to attract and appeal. However, colour is personal and its appeal is different for different people and different cultures. Today, after research on the construction and the functions of the human eye and the responses and reactions to light, one comes to understand that what is being said at present, was earlier practiced without this knowledge. The new information that Whelan gives is that the ‘retina simultaneously mixes and sorts these reflected colours into thousands of tints and shades’.

Wavelength of colour and music are similar. Quoting Kohala, Gosvami says that in ancient days, Indian painters had to store in memory sound images, rhythms and tones. Moreover, it is rasa that becomes the link, entwining colour and music. This apart, in Indian art, various genres re-inforce each other. Thus, poetry and music get illustrated in painting. In any case, the Indian art-thrust has its initial propulsion and later momentum from its solid foundation in legend, myth and religion. Sound itself was supposed to originate from Brahma. Furthermore, in India, there has always been a tendency to deify ideas, emotions and even music. Consequently, the fact that music, poetry and painting got associated was hardly thought strange.

Added to these conventions of colour and music in raagmala paintings, is also the concept of form. Form is explained as ‘total structure’ in its widest sense. Form is created in an artist’s mind as a ‘mental image’. The artist’s perception gets materialized into a
‘form’ via a line. Indian miniature art is known for its sensuous outline. This line possesses suppleness, rhythm and strength, which give to form mythic dimensions. This archaic and definite outline acts as the basic ‘language’ of form. Along with this, Indian art has its own principles. Balram Srivastava writes of the ‘six limbs’ which Yashodhar prescribes to art in this context. An Indian artist had, since ancient days, to follow these principles while visualizing a painting.

Form is created in an artist’s mind as a ‘mental image’. The intellect, as well as, emotional involvement is required. Coomarswamy says that Indian art is divided into segments which are kama-loka, the sphere of phenomenal appearance; rupa-loka, the sphere of ideal form; and arupa-loka, the sphere beyond form. These segments help the artist concentrate on rupa, for rupa-loka determines the select kind of the form-manifest. The image-form is spiritual and divine. It has to transcend the world of illusion, i.e., maya has to reach ‘the real’.

Further still, feelings get associated with a particular object, image, or form, and an aesthetic develops. In the Indian context, form merges into the ultimate form, which is sublime. From abstraction through dhyana, the artist arrives at a rupa (form) which is personified as a deity. Thus it is, that according to Havell ‘Indian art soars into the empyrean’ and tries to bring to earth something of the beauty above. They are visualized as dhyana rupa and formulated as iconographies.

In a raagmala painting, dhyana is a matter of contemplating a deity-form. The form-manifests, in a raga/ragini contemplation, become the myth and legend in the particular raagmala painting.
Significantly, the visualized 'form' possesses the required iconography of the emotions of a raga/ragini. The aesthetic adds pleasure to it. This is, however, contrary to Western understanding of music, and thus Langer, would not agree. For, Langer believes 'significant form' can be felt but not defined. To feel 'significant form' requires 'objective feeling', that is, any kind of semantic given to music becomes a drag upon it. The emphasis in the West is on 'note structure' and on an 'individual tone'. On the contrary, Indian music, through its dhyana formulae can not only incarnate a deity but also visualize it, rasa or emotion being the prime factor.

These impulses and responses inherent in a raga were exploited in colour-line and-form dramaturgy, to help visualize a raagmala painting. The two Schools, i.e., Deccan and Rajasthan are two examples of it. The Deccan School, had in fact Ibrahim Adil Shah II to establish the tradition of the painting of a raga. Nirmala Joshi says that even as Akbar was the instrument of historical forces of change in terms of a renaissance in the North, so was Ibrahim Adil Shah II in the South working for a Hindu-Muslim fusion. However, the Rajasthan School had its own modus-operandi. In Rajasthan, a School of thought had come to exist, for, Vaishnavism provided love themes. Love-themes, thus, became popular. They acted as a boon for the raagmala ethos. The characteristic Indian tradition was to reinforce different genres. And so, the raagmala miniature got both its theme and content. Colour and Form exhibit and express the emotive quality of a raga, extremely well. The supple, vigorous and archaic line, for which a miniature is famous, gets finely executed. Colour-schemes got applied according to emotive values. Rich and lush, light and dark colours were used to generate the emotions of the
raaga. Rhythmic forms and bright colour-tones helped intensify the raagmala miniature painting. And so, by looking at a raagmala painting, the particular raga was thought recognized.

The thesis has tried to attend to the nomenclature of the expression raagmala also. It has tried to understand this nomenclature as a semantic. For, how could an abstract phenomenon like a raga be ever painted? In any case, a raga was a process and a movement, always at flow, and attempts at its visualization, as a painting, would mean holding it still, at a particular point in its flow. However, the persistent question was just at what point was it to be held still? May be, this attempt to arrest its flow would be when it was at its acme. But, however was that to be done? And what would happen if these ragas as sound-forms were to be put in a series, i.e., made into a mala or garland? How would a whole string of ragas be visualized and at what points in their flow and that too in a sequence, one after the other? It was easy enough to call or consider a raga a flower, and, a series of them a garland. However, how was this to be done? It was at this stage that the piece on raagmala in Coomarasway’s Rajput Paintings, helped solve the problem. For, what Coomarasway said was that each raga had to it a specific emotion or sentiment, and it was this that the painter visualized in a particular human situation. Thus, the painter gave to a specific human context painterly attention in terms of colour, form, and line. In due course of time, the concept of dhyana was also understood. Therefore, what gets painted then is the specific emotional burden that is present in a raga as sonal dramaturgy, which itself was a dhyana or contemplation. Consequently, if we speak of raagmala it is to be understood as a series of visualizations of a set of the specific
sentiment or emotion of some raga, each visualization a separate
painterly effort, and, a sequence of such painterly efforts, as separate
visualizations, were called a raagmala. As centuries passed, the
nomenclature raagmala came to be applied not only to a series or a
string of these painted visualizations, but came to include even one
such painting as a raagmala example.

This entire material has been spread over an Introduction and
Five Chapters. The introduction calls itself 'initial formulations'
and tries to understand a raagmala painting apart from making early
forays into the Deccan and Rajasthan ethos of the raagmala genre.
The First Chapter is on raagmala ethos itself, the Second on raga,
ragini and rasa. The Third Chapter is on the two Schools. Fourth
and Fifth Chapters after formulating the themes of colour and form
try to read raagmala examples from each School for the use of colour
and form in them. Depending on availability the Fourth Chapter
reads sixteen ragini examples, eight from each school, individually
and separately, for their colour and form. The Final Chapter makes
it a Comparative Study of Colour and Form, reading the six main
ragas from both Schools first, and then eleven ragini examples from
each school.

The thesis concludes after focusing on fifty raagmala
illustrations. The readings can not be final, because no two persons
ever respond in similar ways to a work of art, much less to the
raagmala genre.