INTRODUCTION

Let us call this ‘initial formulations’; because, the word ‘ragamala’ as a genre-nomenclature needs clarification. Let us, therefore, begin with a simple question. Whatever is after all a ragamala? Poetry and religious texts can be visualized as paintings or a series of paintings, but how a raga, and still more, many ragas together?

That clarification was necessary too, because the dhyan concept had yet to be understood. And so had the fact that sound-patterns could be thought divine! And not only that, there was the proposition of a neyeka-nayika-bhed, of shringar rasa and of a nayika with myriad moods, and, of the theme of romantic emotion being called rasa; also, that there could be rasa or emotive values. Furthermore, that the theme of love had a range-spread which spanned the secular and the spiritual. Also, there were to be nayikas, gopis, sakhis, yakshis and yoginis, and Radha and Krishna and finally, Raas Lila, that ecstatic heavenly dance brimful of spiritual love. There were aesthetes like Bharata who wrote Natyashastra for plays of male and female characters. And, there were poets like Nandadas, who having had a profound love-experience, could not only trail the family of the beautiful woman he had fallen in love with, but who could, the love-god having already struck, be initiated into bhakti by Vallabha-charya, and sing peans of Krishna with equal and more emotional intensity. And, Nandadas was not alone in this. He had forebears of the fame of Jayadeva, Bhanudatta and Kesava das. Bhagvata Purana
in the 9th century had sung early Vaishnav emotions, followed in that order by *Geet-Govinda*, *Rasamanjari* and *Rasikpriya*. This was the ethos. And as to the beauty of the female form, the 10th century Rajshekhar play, *Karpurmanjari*, had even put it to a consistent and proper debate. The play had a king in it, argue with his court-jester, whether the unadorned youthful female body was itself not beautiful enough to need ornamentation as additional embellishment? Further still, the play was performed as part of a celebration of *Vasant* the Spring festival. Still more, the female character *Karpurmanjari* fascinated painters, as well as, sculptors.

This ethos had to be read about and understood, for, till this had not been done, the questions, 'What was *ragamala*?', and 'How could a *raga* be painted? persisted. Coomarswamy helped see that there was neither any 'mystery' nor any 'confusion' about *ragamala* paintings. Rather, that *ragamala* paintings should not be made into a 'mystery', and, all 'confusion' about them should be removed. But still, as already mentioned, the 'confusion' did persist and *ragamala* did remain a 'mystery'. For, how could an abstract phenomenon like a *raga* is 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. 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* were put into a series, made into a *mala*, or garland, as it were! How would a whole string of *ragas* be visualized, and, at what

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points in their flow, and that too, one after the other? It was easy enough to call 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 chapter on ragamala in Coomarswamy's Rajput Painting Vol I (Text) (1976) helped solve the problem. For, from Coomarswamy it was confirmed that each raga had to it a specific sentiment or emotion. It was this that the painter visualized in a particular human situation, thus giving to it, a particular human context. In due course of time, the concept of dhyān was also understood. However, for the moment the immediate step was to hold on to Coomarswamy's way of putting it, that each raga had to it a specific sentiment or emotion. Therefore, in a ragamala painting it was this specific emotion that was visualized as transpiring in a human situation. What gets painted then is the specific emotional burden in a raga. Consequently, if we speak of a ragamala it is to be understood as a series of visualizations of a set of some ragas, the specific sentiment of each 'raga, painted one after another. Each painted visualization will be different because each raga in the set will have a specific sentiment sonalized in its sound-drama. It is thus that Coomaraswamy speaks of unwarranted 'confusion' and unnecessary 'mystery'. And, Coomarswamy is quite matter of fact about the recognized sources of the ragamala genre. He names four—

1. Folk-songs
2. Poetical works
3. Devotional songs of yogis
4. The composition of professional musicians.  

2 Ibid. p. 67 d.
Further, that the origin of a raga is often indicated in the raga names. Thus, there are—

1. raga pahari,
2. raga hindola,
3. raga jogi, and,
4. raga-sarang².

Where pahar is a mountain, hindola a swing, jogi an ascetic, and Sarangdev, a musician. Also, seasons, and the time of the day, as well as, the effects of a raga give to a raga its name. Thus, there are—

1. raga vasanta, and
2. raga dipak⁴

Where vasant is the spring season, and dipak is the lamp that gets lighted as the effect of the raga when sung.

Coomaraswamy concludes the paragraph re-iterating that each raga and ragini has a definite association—

Thus it is that each raga and ragini has more or less definite associations.⁵

On the same page he writes of a trend from the second half of the sixteenth century—

.... from the second half of the 16th century, or even earlier onwards, it became a fashion to compose Ragamalas or sets of verses describing ragas and

³ Ibid. p. 67 d.
⁴ Ibid.
⁵ Ibid. p. 67 d.
raginis in Hindi and those works are constantly illustrated.⁶

The sentence that follows also needs to be quoted as an immediate follow-up, but separately, to emphasize Coomaraswamy's apprehension of 'confusion'—

Many of the illustrated Ragamalas are full of confusion but the early examples are more authentic and it would probably be easy to compile a 'correct' edition of the more important correct and frequent types.⁷

What follows is even more important, for, Coomaraswamy immediately after, in the first sentence of the next paragraph writes that 'mystery' about ragamalas is unnecessary—

These illustrations have been made the subject of unnecessary mystery.⁸

He had earlier written that if the mystery is about how one passion can be expressed in so many genres, then it should be made clear that art being expression of passion, different genres can express the same passion in their own ways—

Nor is there any mystery; since art is essentially expression, it follows that one and the same passion may be expressed in every art.⁹

The matter-of-fact tone of the author of Rajput Painting continues—

⁶ ibid. p. 67d.
⁷ ibid.
⁸ ibid. p. 66
⁹ ibid.
The representation of the best-known ragas is fairly constant.¹⁰

And Coomaronamy even lists the easily recognizable ragas, which for convinence are numbered below—

1. *bhairavi* is a Shivapuja
2. *khambavati* is a Bharama puja
3. *hindola* is indicated by a swing scene
4. *tori* is a woman playing veena, with a deer getting attracted by the music.
5. *dhansari* shows a girl drawing the portrait of a man she knows and recognizes as her lover.
6. *vasanta* is a dance or the representation of a Holi festival.
7. *megh malhar* shows Krishna dancing in heavy rain
8. *gujari* depicts a woman playing music to a peacock
9. *bibhasa* is a love-scene, the man shooting a flower arrow from the bow of love.¹¹

But when Coomaraswamy says that 'one and the same passion may be expressed in every art',¹² some explaining needs to be done, for, in the specific Indian context, that was not only a possibility about almost a venerable practice. It was a practice, repeated and recurrent. It almost tantamounted, without conscious or organized effort, to a complementing and a re-enforcement of each genre, be it

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¹⁰ Ibid.
¹¹ Ibid, p. 66
¹² Ibid.
poetry, painting, music, sculpture, or architecture. This had a lot to do with the ancient Indian ethos of looking at Nature, Man and Woman in specific ways, and thereby, giving to philosophers, aesthetes and artists, the opportunity to work in complementary re-assertions of ideas, feelings, emotions and passions. It was thus, that in the Indian context particularly 'one and the same passion got expressed in every art'.

It is the phenomenon of romantic love, secular as well as spiritual in Indian art, that has made this thesis focus first on 'the ragamala ethos', and even its 'Hindu essence', for, there was almost a similar and very pervasive view of Nature, Man and Woman, and the way the three interacted, across the entire geographic expanse of the territory called 'India'. There were interaction with the outside world too. How that interaction worked itself out in thought, religion, and art, shall also be focussed upon at its appropriate place. For the moment this idea of different genres, in Indian art, re-enforcing and complementing each other shall be given a little more attention. Let us begin this effort with some questions in the context of Rajashekhar's Karpurmanjiri, and, ragini todi—

Why could ragini todi be only be painted, and not sculpted also, when Karpurmanjari, a 10th century play, was not only performed to celebrate spring, but, its leading female character Karpurmanjari, was painted as well as sculpted as an emblem of feminine beauty?

13 Ibid. p. 66
Ragini todi, as visualized by painters, can also be imagined and done in stone, bronze, or, even wood! It very well could! The fact of the matter is that Indian art does have its many genres: poetry, painting, sculpture, and, music and architecture, which often compliment and re-enforce each other. For, Indian art has always appeared to have expressed life as lived, that is, as an over-all experience with Man, Woman and Nature in full participation. And therefore, if ragini todi was only sung and painted and not sculpted, the reason lay in the fact that no patron, that is, ruler, king or rich merchant, ever thought of getting the sentiments of the various ragas sculpted also!

In any case, ragini todi did find expression in three genres: poetry, music and painting, which in doing so, as is being repeatedly emphasized, re-enforced and complemented each other. Furthermore, illustrating religious texts was too an Indian tradition. The painted illustration had the text written either at the top, or, at the back of the painting, and the text enjoyed the prestige of a religious text. The painting along with the text, expressed in drawn and painted art, what the words could only subtly suggest. But then, the painter-artist had his freedom too, to use his imagination as best as possible. Very often a raga had poets giving words to it, and, these the painters painted as artfully as they could.

From Coomaraswamy’s ‘one and the same passion’ getting ‘expressed in every art’, let us focus on the nature of that passion that in India found itself expressed in poetry, music, and painting. This would help understand the ramifications of the ragas themselves and of ragamala as a distinct Indian art-genre. Nayeka-nayika-bhed,
shringara rasa, and raas lila, all in their respective ways deal with a single passion. It is the romantic emotion of love which has a range covering the entire colourful span between the secular and the spiritual. For the moment, only a few points shall help explain the situation. Thus, one very important point that helps understand a raga and ragamala is that sound itself was and is considered a divine phenomenon in India. Also, that a raga was a matter of dhyan, a focusing and concentration upon an image. Furthermore, that sound had patterns, permutations and combinations constructed out of its basic seven expressions, sa, re, ga, ma, pa, dha, and ni. Also, that all varieties of emotion can be expressed, including the most subtle, through the microtones or schrutis. Further still, that the expression of the slightest nuance of an emotion, be it between man and woman or between a human being and divinity, was within the power of expression. Chapter three, under its caption Raga Ragini and Rasa studies this phenomenon, with O.C. Gangoly as the primary source, as also, O.Goswamy's The Story of Indian Music. Finally, nayika-bhed was itself quite an intriguing phenomenon, fascinating to its very core, given attention to by philosopher, aesthete, as well as, artist. Infact, a few words about the Bhagwata Purana would be apt at this juncture, and, being important shall be repeated later too. It would further help clarify a few ideas. First, that Bhagwata Purana, considered a 9\textsuperscript{th} century early Vaishnav work, is a seminal text that sees ‘the evolution of lilas of Krishna where he is the nayeka or the prototypical romantic hero and the gopis are the nayikas or romantic heroines’.\textsuperscript{14} Next, that its tenth text has Krishna lifting the

\textsuperscript{14} Dehejia, Harsha V., The Vaishnava Ethos and Shingara Bhakti included in A Celebration of Love (ed.,
Govardhan to inaugurate ‘the ethos of shringara bhakti’, admonishing ‘the people of vraj not to become a prey to the ritualistic Vedic worship but instead engage in a more humanistic dharma of love’. And that, while still remaining within Hindu orthodoxy the Bhagwata Purana sounded an anti-Vedic note, a move that was, to ‘encourage and buttress shringara bhakti’. Bhagwata Purana was ‘a text that was to become the fountain head of two major Vaishnav sects, the Pushti marg and the Gaudiya’.

But then, little can be said about Krishna without Radha, for, she being a woman, was in Hindu religious tradition ‘the preferred gender.’ Madhu Khanna in an article refers to this. According to Khanna, dharma shastras outlined the role and conduct of men, giving men ‘rights and privileges’ that invested them with ‘authority and power’. That helped run the state. What of matters other than this? Particularly, in the Gaudiya tradition, therefore, the exemplar is not the male, but the female, who is ‘the ultimate divinity’: she is exalted as ‘the blissful energy’. In the tradition of divine love she is ‘the principal idol’. She it is who is ‘the longing of the human soul’. In Vaishnav sadhna practice, the human soul strives for spiritual evolution, and is therefore conceived of as a woman, ‘a celestial energy of the divine’. She is the supreme Nayika. According to Steven J. Rosen, the mahamantra is a prayer to Radha.

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15 Ibid. p.288

16 Ibid.

17 Ibid. p. 290


19 Ibid. p.245

20 Ibid. p. 246
She is ‘purna shakti or the most complete form of divine feminine energy’.\textsuperscript{21} She is in fact, ‘the divine matrix.’ The manjri-bhav is a unique sadhna in Gaudiya Vaishavisin. And finally, the asht-nayekas, abhisarika, vasaksajja, utkanthita, khandita, vipralabdha, kalahantarita, prositbharitrika, and svadhinbhar-trika, correspond to the various moods of the divine Radha.\textsuperscript{22}

Therefore, love is the theme, the prime romantic passion, the highest rasa, what then if paens be not sung to it in ragas! That is, in ragas that differentiate, as they are sung among the subtle varieties of separation and union, and, what if ragamalas be not painted in its praise, be it secular or religious. The first chapter, therefore, gives detailed attention to two primary areas; nayek-nayika, and shringara rasa, and barahmasa. The same chapter provides the literature on the subject that got illustrated by painters. But then, there was a five hundred years’ and more, of Muslim presence also, very long before Babur- the Mughal reached India, in 1525. Thus, Amir Khusro, who was born in the thirteen century in India and lived till 1325, could, apart from the music he contributed to, tell how the dialect in and around Delhi changed every so many miles!? And Daud’s Chandyan was written in 1374-79, and Qutban’s Mrigavati in 1506, and Jaisi’s Padmavat in 1504. These too have been noticed in their appropriate places in the thesis, for, they too contributed considerably to India’s cultural heritage.


\textsuperscript{22} Ibid. p. 234
As Geeti Sen says that ‘the rich sensibility born of the earth’ does not restrict itself either to religion or to court—

The rich sensibility that is born of the earth that responds to elements did not reserve itself to the Hindu religion, or for that matter restricted itself merely to the court. Folk and popular versions of ragamala paintings do abound.  

Infact, Geeti Sen goes on to write on Ibrahim Adil Shah II, whose passion for music she says was ‘proverbial’—

In the South one of the greatest of patrons of music and of the arts was Ibrahim Adil Shah II of Bijapur.  

She quotes Zuhuri, the poet who took up residence at Ibrahim Adil Shah II’s court. Zuhuri says that the king ‘excelled’ the painter in painting, and was ‘an expert calligraphist’, but he treated his excellences ‘as the effect’ and ‘music as the cause’. The king had a palace built and furnished for the residence of expert musicians. Ibrahim Shah II’s Kitab-i- Navras, a book of songs in Deccani Hindi thus contains—

Numerous descriptions of raga and raginis with accounts of their moods, activities and attributes.  

‘A most exquisite rendering’ of raga hindola is at the National Museum, Delhi, and says Geti Sen, ‘belongs to a remarkable set of

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24 Ibid. p. 32.

25 Ibid. p. 33
ragamalas from Deccan. It would be appropriate to quote Sen entire on this late 16th century remarkable set of ragamala paintings—

Completed in the late 16th century these have been assigned by some scholar’s to Bijapur. The lovers, suffused in saffron clothes are seated on a swing decorated with tunj bejeweled blue flowers. The mango trees above them are shooting out white blossoms against a pale gold sky. Before them stands an attendant with a vina and a bucket is placed with two spray gives for playing Holi. The verve and vibrancy of the painting results from colours and flowers that seem sprinkled, as it were, over the whole page.26

Sen writes of Nasiruddin and Sahibudin, two painters, saying that ‘some of the earliest ragamala paintings at the Rajput courts are by Muslim artists’. She says—

Nasiruddin is the sole artist of a bold and vibrant set painted at Chawand the interim capital of Mewar state in the year AD 1605. In AD. 1628 another ragamala series at Mewar was commissioned from Sahibuddin, who later worked on a Ramayana series in Udaipur in AD 1649.27

On recent evidence, Sen says—

More recently, the inscription on a ragamala set mentions the fact that it was commissioned at chunar

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26 Ibid. p. 32
27 Ibid. p. 33
from three artists who had been trained at the Mughal court of the emperor Akbar.  

That leaves Ebeling and Mittal to be considered for their respective points of view, at the appropriate places. Ebeling focusses on a solid four centuries old Rajasthani iconographic ragamala tradition and discounts Ibrahim Adil Shah II’s contribution ‘as a single, lone, individual interest in the arts’, and Mittal, who while referring to Ebeling, without contradicting him, says that the Deccan too had a parallel ragamala painting tradition of a three and a half century life-span, from the late 16th until the 19th centuries.

After all this, what we have is a vast reservoir of possibilities laid open and bare, for an aesthete’s delight, a poet’s imagery, a sculptor’s hammer and chisel, as, well as a musicians’ shruties, and, a painter’s brush and paint. Line, colour, form, patterns and permutations and combinations, thereafter, await the all-too beckoning nayika. There are then, umpteen physical, emotional and spiritual subtleties to poemize, cut and chisel into stone, sing as a raga, and give line, colour and form to, as a painting. The nayika as Radha, could be the very principle, the female principle on which a world-view focusses all Universe. The nayika and her nayika-bhed, her shringara rasa, her exploits with the nayeka, her innocence, her passion, and, her longing for the joy of a union, or, her trauma of a separation, could each be a veritable store-house, a vast repertoire

28 Ibid. p. 175
29 Ebeling, K., Ragamala Painting. (New Delhi) 1973 p.157
31 Ibid. p.174
for artists of various genres to choose from and exert both imagination and talent upon. Raga-ragini musicians and ragamala painters, therefore, could not have ever fallen short, either of content or material, both being forever available at the nayika's door of that palatial institution called rasa raja.

Thus too, there could be rasa or emotive-values which the sonal-dramaturgy of the primary sentiment of a raga, in its subtle rendering, communicate. In common perception, ragas, raginis and ragaputras have mere names likes bageshwari, jaunpuri, malhar, darbari, or Kedar. However, in scholarly perception they have dhyana procedures and iconographies and are even put into tabular forms. The iconography will be described and discussed at appropriate occasions in the thesis, however, given below in tabular form is an accepted iconography, which Ebeling in his book calls the Hanuman's System. There are only minor differences with other iconographic systems. The table shows that there are six ragas, and each raga has five raginis:

**Hanuman's System**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>S. No</th>
<th>Raga</th>
<th>Ragini</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1.</td>
<td>Bhairav</td>
<td>Madhumadhvi</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Malkaus</td>
<td>Todi</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.</td>
<td>Hindol</td>
<td>Vilaval</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4.</td>
<td>Dipak</td>
<td>Kedari</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5.</td>
<td>Sri</td>
<td>Vasant</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6.</td>
<td>Megha</td>
<td>Malhar</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

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But then, Geeti Sen needs to be quoted again as she prefers caution on the question of iconographies—

Having suggested the fact that there is a given iconography to each raga and ragini, we must be cautioned with the fact that all paintings do not necessarily hold on to one identical image.\(^{33}\)

Geeti Sen’s article entitled *An Art-Historian on Ragamala Paintings: Music Transformed into Image*, is both perceptive and informative. The sub-title to her article is *Music Transformed into Image*. In relation to this sub-title, in particular, she asks a question and answers it herself. Her question is—

How can sound be translated into visual image.\(^{34}\)

And her answer is as follows—

The relationship is not new. To cite just one instance, the Devanagri script is a graphic abstraction of sound: each letter of the alphabet is concerned as a phonetic symbol.\(^{35}\)

Sen also gives a very interesting example of how the various genres in Indian art are related, narrating the story of a Raja who wanted to learn the art of painting. The story is from *Vishnudharmottaram*. To learn to paint the Raja was told he must know how to sculpt, that is, ‘to mould figures in plastic volume’. But to sculpt, he had to learn the principles of dance, that is, ‘stimulated movement and gesture’. To learn the rhythm of dance, he should have

\(^{34}\) Ibid. p. 126
\(^{35}\) Ibid. p. 120
had full appreciation of music, and, music has ‘its natural inspiration in poetry’. Thus, concludes Sen—

Thus he learnt that to be accomplished in one of the arts, he had to be informed and skilled in each of them.36

While earlier, sound was related to visual image by Geeti Sen, a paragraph later, raga was related to colour, and, colour to emotion and passion. For the Sanskrit of raga is ranja which means to colour; so that ‘raga literally means ‘colouring’. And with reference to music, it means colouring or influencing the mind ‘with a definite emotive response’, inflaming it, in fact, to a state of passion—

With reference to music, it implies some means being used to ‘colour’ or influence the mind with a definite emotive response—to inflame it with a certain passion.37

Now Susanne Langer, in Philosophy in a New Key, considering music as ‘pure form’ would not quite agree to put the least emotive drag upon music. With a penchant for ‘significant form’, where ‘form’ could be ‘felt’, but the feeling is best left undefined, Langer has her own understanding of music. She classifies ‘feeling’ as ‘subjective’ and ‘objective’, and wants one to ‘feel’ form putting ‘objective feeling’ to use38.

Sen’s article is however, as has been noted, perceptive and very informative, making point after point, staccato fashion, as it were.
Thus, she describes how the emotive response to music is achieved in a *raga*, so much so, that ‘through the play of *ragas*, the entire range of human emotions can be experienced’. Sen explains the response to music—

...this response is achieved by the selective and sequence of musical notes: by a particular combination of the seven notes of the octave. This structure must consist of at least five notes, or it may compose of all the seven notes. 39

And then, each *raga* is distinguished by its dominating note from other *ragas*. Sen explains—

The essence of each individual raga, distinguishing it from other ragas, lies in the emphasis of a dominating note called *vadisvara* and avoidance of certain dissonant note called *vivadi*. 40

It is this combination of notes that arouses *rasa* or emotion; and thus, the play of *ragas* covers the entire range of human emotions—

This combination of notes, it is believed, evokes within us patterns of joy, of sorrow, of love, of hope, of isolation, of anger, of penitence, of heroism. 41

Indian music has ‘its own specific mythology’. Sen writes about the Indian predilection for personification—

Given the Indian predilection for personification of rivers, of trees, of the sun and Himalayas, it is not

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39 Sen, Geeti, Op. cit. p.120
40 Ibid. p.120
41 Ibid. p. 121
difficult to perceive how these modes of music came to be personified, or rather characterized in pictorial images.\textsuperscript{42}

And, therefore, she says—

The emotive genius of each raga or ragini, the dominant note, becomes its presiding deity, its svaradevata.\textsuperscript{43}

Then, there are the \textit{nayika} and \textit{nayeka}, in given dramaturgic situations of seasons, places, times and emotions—

The hero and heroine (nayika, nayek) appear in given situations, seasons, places- in a forest, before a shrine, besides a river, outside the bedchambers— to enact their part as though in a dramatic situation that may well be observed on stage, to evoke within us the appropriate response to the music as experienced through the painting.\textsuperscript{44}

On classification of \textit{nayikas} on the basis of different states of emotion and situation, Geeti Sen remarks that it may become ‘an obsession’. Earlier Sen had cautioned on iconographies:\textsuperscript{45}

...the classification of the nayika in her different moods and situations become the obsession...\textsuperscript{46}

\textsuperscript{42} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{43} Ibid. p. 120
\textsuperscript{44} Ibid. p. 121
\textsuperscript{45} Ibid. p. 126
\textsuperscript{46} Ibid. p. 122