Chapter-II

Raga, Ragini and Rasa

So far, the thesis has been through initial formulations and ragamala taxonomies. Let us now look how raga, ragini and rasa create a veritable potential for artists and aesthetes to work upon. Paintings which deal with the visual depiction of the primary sentiment in musical modes are termed a ragamala. Each raga has a primary sentiment or emotion. It is this primary emotion, sung in a raga, that is visualized in a painting. A series of such visualizations of the primary sentiment of one raga after another, would be a set, or chain, or garland of the visualized sentiments of that set or series of ragas. When it all began, it may have been a mala or set of beads of the primary sentiment of ragas painted in sequence. However, as time went by, even the visualized primary sentiment of an individual raga acquired the ragamala epithet. Thus, without there being a set, series, beads or sequence of paintings, a single raga-painting came to be called a ragamala painting. A raga itself is a selection of musical notes, set in progression, with some notes more emphasized than others, as Dr. Karunamaya Gosvami explains. The notes are not less than five and not more than seven. Their order is either ascending or descending and their purpose is to communicate some sentiment. As Gosvami herself explains—

A raga is the product of arranging some notes, not less than five and more than seven in ascending and
descending order in an active direct to communicating some sentiment.

What is being repeatedly emphasized is once again re-emphasized, being very significant in the context of Indian music as distinguished from the music of the West. The word *raga* is derived from a Sanskrit word root *'ranja'*, which means 'to be dyed or coloured; to glow; or to arouse feeling' or simply 'to colour or tinge', or be 'elated', as soon the *raga* is heard, for it gives 'pleasure to all'...^1

A *raga*, therefore, is 'concrete', though its sonal features are abstract. Dr Karunamaya Gosvami finds 'its essence is abstract'. It cannot be seen but felt; for, it is an expression which colours the soul. It is the expression of the soul voiced through the throat in its different nuances. These interpretations of *ranja* have abundant significance. They associate Colour, Emotion and Sound.

*Raga* is thus a composition that arouses emotion, and even passion. Brij Bhusan also agrees with Dr Karunamaya Gosvami. A condition or state of the soul is expressed through a series of throat sounds—

The state of the soul is expressed by a series of sounds emanating from the throat.^[2]

There are six *ragas* and thirty variants called *raginis*. Each *raga* has five *raginis*, the total thus is thirty six. *Ragas* are also

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1 Article from Internet, www. raag.com
3 Brij Bushan, J, *The World of Indian Miniatures*, Kodansha International Ltd., p. 34.
connected with seasons of the year, and there are six different musical instruments named after different seasons. According to Coomaraswamy, as already mentioned, *ragas* have originated in more ways than one. Folk-songs, poetical works, devotional songs of *yogis*, and the composition of professional musicians have all helped *ragas* to develop and flower. However, Shyamla Sharma attributes their origin to devotional songs and *vedic* hymns, and, describes *ragas* as a science of *shrutis*. Infact, she traces even a line of development—

The Vedic text provided the content, and the form suggested itself to these singers as a matter of discovery. They found out that the sound produced from the different parts of the body – the abdomen, lungs, throat and head, made a system by itself. The ratios and proportion, which the sound pattern displayed, were discovered and the science of *srutis* was developed. The musical scales were standardized after certain controversy and laws were framed to regulate the practice of singing. The forms of melodies were further evolved and the system of *ragas* established.4

The *sama-vedic hymns* and Bharat’s *Natyashastra* are the primary sources of Indian music. Two different classical traditions developed from this, one in the South and the other in the North. The concepts and tradition are the same, they differ only in detail. As O. Gosvami says in relation to Southern music—

It has a common origin and tradition with the northern music and defers from it only in detail though in their fundamentals they are very near to each other.

The next step was note-structure and structural-affinity. This classification involved grouping similar melodies under a single group or a group of *ragas*. Gangoly describes this classification as it was done in the North as well as in the South which is as follows—

The Northern and the Southern systems of classification, originally, involved no fundamental difference of principles. In the Southern system, the derivative melodies were called ‘janyas’ or derivatives of the major melodies which were called janakas or ‘father’s (later called melakas, or unifiers). In the Northern system, the minor melodies were picturesquely called ‘wives’ of the major melodies, and the later derivatives, designated as sons (putras), just as in the Southern system the ‘janyas’ are in the position of the sons of the ‘janakas’ (the fathers).

Thus, musical scales were formed according to the ratio and proportion discovered in sound patterns. These scales were standardized and laws developed to facilitate the practice of singing. The ratio and proportion of scales result in melodies, and, different melodies constitute *ragas*. Though musicians refined *ragas* through technical *finesse*, they also underscored the human emotion these

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finer musical tones communicated, singing and turning melody into pure aesthetic emotion. Mathanga writes in *Brihadeshi*—

a raga is that which gets ornamented by the excellent tonality and swara combination which produce pleasure to the intellect of the audience.

Mukund states the definition of a *raga* as ‘that which pleases’. However, there have to be *swara*-groups and sequences—

....The appropriate swara groups and sequences constitute the *raaga*.

Thus, melodic movement, i.e., the audible pattern and design formed by different arrangements of notes are called *varnas*. Though the *varnas* are four, yet emphasis is given to the *arohi* and *avrohi*, i.e., the ascent and descent in a scale. Besides this, another important element in music is the *vadi*. *Vadi* is considered as the ‘prince’ among the notes in a *raga*. It is the connecting device between two *ragas*. And it maintains a relationship with other *ragas*. The *vadi* also helps maintain ‘accuracy of intervals between the notes of its own tetrachords’. Thus, O. Gosvami writes of its power—

It has the power to bring out a particular mood inherent in the raga.

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8 Ibid. p.16
9 Ibid.
Mukund describes the relationship of the notes as vadi-samwaadi, and, anuvaadi/ vivaadi which in translation would be sonant / consonant, and assonant / dissonant.

A good musician has to follow the right kind of mannerisms and discipline, so as to be able to create and convey various luminous meanings in the singing. Also, a raga has a psychic value, suiting the requirements of a particular emotional situation and interpretation. Infact, each raga and ragini has its own psychic form, corresponding to its sonal body over which presides a nymph, deity or devata. These deities or devatas are believed to descend on earth through the melodious entreaties of the performer. It is a belief in Hindu Brahminical thought that wrong singing by the musician would displease the nymphs and deities. The worshipper, is therefore, considered successful if the divinity, as an image, descends on earth. Each deity has its unique aura and can be invoked through prescribed incantations which have the inherent quality of invocation. This method, according to O.C. Gangoly, is the seed formula or the dhyana mantra. A raga, consequently, becomes a religious meditation. This further leads to the concept that ragas and raganis have forms, i.e., audible sound-forms and visible image-forms, which in Hindi would be nada maya rupa. First, the soul or essence is sound, and next, the soul or essence is a visual image incarnating the deity. Gangoly explains the doctrine. The belief is that the presiding deity may be induced to come down through entreaty and incarnate in its physical sound-form. If the deity cannot be induced to descend and incarnate in its physical sound form, the musical rendering by the devotee is supposed unsuccessful. The entreaty would be considered successful.
if its persuasion makes the deity descend and reveal its visual image in the vocal rendering or the instrumental performance. *Avatirna* means to descend in physical sound-form, and, the sound-form is called *nada-maya rupa*; *tasvir* is to reveal the visual image—

According to the doctrine, it is believed that the presiding deity,- the spirit, or ethos of a raga or ragini can be induced to come down and incarnate (*avatirna* – lit. made to descend) in its physical sound – form (*nada- maya rupa*). If the presiding spirit cannot be induced ‘to descend’, the rendering, or interpreting of that particular melody cannot be pronounced to have been successfully achieved. A successful interpreter of a particular melody is complimented with the phrase that has succeeded in pursuing the deity of the raga or ragini to descend (*avatirna*) and to reveal its visual image or picture (*tasvir*) and to live in his vocal song, or his instrument of performance.\(^{11}\)

In India, Hindu and Buddhist iconographic myths and beliefs, act as essential components in the evolution of music and art. The belief is that singing to the gods is the nearest path to the highest bliss and ecstasy. God is the *Nada Brahman*, and he has created images for melody. The function of these melodies and images is therefore, to help worship the supreme deity. Music in Hindu thought gets extensive philosophical attention. The concepts of sound-forms and visual image-forms helped develop creativity. The concepts

extend to actualization, depiction and formulation of a *raga* into a painting.

Furthermore, *raga*-compositions and forms have an added predilection to evoke nebulous moods and associations. They are supposed to influence the psyche. Therefore, they have the capacity to cause specific emotional response. The power of a *raga* to arouse this emotional response is measured in terms of this emotive response. Gangoly calls it ‘the ethos’ of a *raga*. An identical ethos can be experienced in poetry too. Gangoly, therefore, actually names the emotions themselves, calling a *raga* the language of the soul, which, he says can express itself variously. This variety includes sorrow, joy, the storm of passion, the thrill of expectation, the throes of love, as well as, the pain of separation—

Ragas may be said to stand for the language of the soul, expressing itself variously, under the stress of sorrow, or the inspiration of joy under the storm of passion, or the thrills of the expectations, under the throes of love – longing, the pangs of separation, or the joys of union.\(^{12}\)

The characteristic feature of emotion is *rasa*. *Rasa*, *or the kind of emotion*, therefore, defines the character of a *raga*. It is as important to a *raga* as a soul is to a body. *Rasa* covers a very wide gamut of human emotions, and, Indian music assigns specific notes to them to interpret them. Dominant notes are assigned to certain basic emotions in a melody. Heroism, wonder, resentment, disgust, terror, humour and love, are considered basic to human disposition.

\(^{12}\) Ibid. p. 8
Emphasis is put on a dramatic representation, because moods are best expressed in dramaturgic form, be it in poetry, music or a *ragamala* painting. *Rasa*, thus is a state of mind which can be expressed effectively in a dramatic-form rather than in symbolized iconic-images. In other words, *rasa* in the mind helps concrete picturization of emotion. Gangoly explains this well. The sound-form is the medium, he says, through which the *raga* manifests itself. Its theme and subject-matter is the aesthetic emotion that manifests itself in the sound-form of the *raga*. This theme is its motif also, the motif of its melody. The *rasa* is incarnated in the *rupa* or form of the *raga*. Thus, to invoke the *rasa* one must meditate upon the *rupa*. Particular kinds of *rasa* need particular kinds of forms (*rupas*) of a *raga*. Thus, again, specific emotions or *rasa* get associated with specific *raga* *rupas*. The *rasa* or emotion is the characteristic ethos of a *raga rupa*. Once again, an entire quotation from Gangoly will help these statements—

...the sound form of a raga is the medium, - its kernel, or, body, so to speak, through which the spirit of the raga manifests itself. The objective of raga is the *rasa* - the aesthetic emotion, the theme, the subject - matter, - the motif of the melody. As the soul must inhabit a body, so every *rasa* is incarnated in the *rupa* (form) of particular raga or ragini. To invoke the *rasa*, one must meditate upon the rupa. Each particular form of raga - is suitable for the expression of a particular type of *rasa*, that is to say, each raga is associated with and is the
medium of a particular sentiment, or emotion—its characteristic and definite ethos.¹³

And, therefore, rasa is emotion, which, as the foundation of a raga, is its basic sentiment. And a ragamala being a string of musicals modes, is in effect a series of ragas, each raga in the series being in it for its known specific aesthetic emotion. In fact, all forms of Indian art have, as their basis, some variety of rasa. This is most true of poetry and a ragamala series. Finally, it is the artist who effectively co-ordinates the rasa or the aesthetic emotion with his medium, be it in poetry, music or painting. It is the successful imaginative co-ordination of the rasa or aesthetic emotion with the medium, be it sound, language, line or colour, bringing out and creating the proper ethos, that determines an artist's success or failure.

Since Indian art is focussed on religion, it is almost obligatory to understand the significance of the deity-manifest in a raga. The devatas symbolize and personify each rasa, which becomes the theme, ethos and essence of a raga. This deity—manifest, its plastic representation, that is, has its own dramaturgic-form. Different features in individual forms or mudras were created to communicate this dramaturgy. Gangoly is specific. He says that each iconography required differentiating features—

In the iconography of images, it was necessary to distinguish the bewildering conceptions of Brahmanic gods by devising differentiating features

¹³ Ibid. p. 99
of heads, arms, weapons (ayudha), vehicles (vahana), and poses (mudras).  

Hence, through the bhava, the emotive-value and significance of the rasa is made manifest in both numeric and other arts. There are nine kinds of rasa and each rasa has a unique trait or characteristic. They are as follows—

1. shringara rasa – It is one of the most important rasas and is called rasa raja. It portrays love in all its variety, be it separation, loss, expectation, proximity, pursuit, a quarrel, a meeting, or a re-union.

2. veera rasa– The word veer implies valour – This rasa conveys majesty, heroism, enthusiasm, and victory.

3. karuna-rasa indicates pathos. It is associated with longing, grief, sorrow and deprivation.

4. hasya rasa depicts humour, laughter, playfulness, cheer and happiness.

5. raudra rasa is fury and stands for anger, hatred, contempt, and jealousy.

6. bhayanaka rasa is fear. It includes terror, humility, anguish and helplessness.

7. bheibhathasa rasa is disgust, sorrow, and forlorn feeling.

8. adhbutha rasa portrays wonder, surprise, amazement, and happiness.

9. schaantha rasa is peace, contentment, serenity, tranquility and calm.

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14 Ibid. p. 100.
15 Ibid.
In music, the emotive qualities of *rasa* get associated with specific notes or *svaras*. Every note or *svara* has to it an emotive quality. Gangoly lists these combinations, confident that particular notes have the quality of interpreting particular emotions. There are seven notes, *sa, ri, ga, ma, pa, dha*, and *ni*. Thus, *sa* and *ri* are said to interpret heroism, *dha* suits disgust and terror; *ga* and *ni* suit sorrow; and *ma* and *pa* are appropriate for humor and love. In Gangoly's own words—

Particular notes (*svaras*) have peculiar quality of interpreting particular emotions. Thus the notes 'sa' and 'ri'(*c* and *d*) are said to be appropriate for interpreting the emotions of heroism, wonder, and resentment; the note 'dha'(*a*)is suitable for emotions of disgust and terror; the notes ‘ga’ and ‘ni’ (*e* and *b*)are suitable for emotions of sorrow, and the notes *ma* and *pa*(*f* and *g*)are suitable for emotions of humour and love.¹⁶

*Rasa* depends on *bhava*, and *bhava* on expression or mood. Therefore, when it comes to either poetry, or music, or even painting, *bhava* becomes the expression of a particular mood.

Hindu aesthetes believe that *rasa* encompasses all basic human emotions. Furthermore, that it is passion, sentiment, and mood which become the efficient cause of human surrender to the Divine. And thus it is that music, as well as, lyrical poetry has satisfaction and even ecstasy transformed into prayer and worship.

¹⁶ Ibid. p. 98.
Each emotional expression is intricately woven its the six *ragas* and thirty *raginis*. Originally, male *ragas* were associated with heroism, courage, strength, anger and fury, while female *raginis* were associated with exuberance, pathos and extravagance. More often *shringar rasa* is considered suitable for depicting a *ragini*. *Shringar rasa* is the *rasaraj*. It has affinity to feminine nature in its behaviour, appearance and posture. It has almost always been the first choice of musicians, poets and painters, particularly, for depicting *ragini* female forms. Thus, the six initial *ragas*, according to Brij Bushan, remain the same across the entire country. The six ragas are-*bhairava, malkaus, hindola, dipak, shree* and *megha*. However, *raginis* vary with region and tradition, and therefore, their numbers increase, and even multiply.

Apart from *ragas*, Indian music has other components. These are *bhava, thala, laaya* and *schruti*. *Bhava* is mood or expression, *thaala* is rhythm, and *laaya* is tempo, while *schruti* is pitch or key. A delicate balance needs to persist among these components in order to make the resulting sound tantamount to music. As parts of *ragas* they tenderly combine to arouse the aesthetic emotion, feeling and passion that the human soul strives for. These constituents contain the singular ability to incarnate the deity of a particular *raga*. Together, these components determine the characteristic of a melody, transforming the whole world of music into a celebratory moment.

These fundamental constituents apart, *ragas* are also always associated with time and season. Time and season stand on the threshold of emotion in a *raga*. Time-theory in this context is very
significant. It matches and co-ordinates with the times of a raga effectively and smoothly. Indian aesthetes have believed that emotions change with time, since time does not halt but instead keeps changing. Moreover, it was also observed that human emotions do not remain constant. They also change. Certain ragas are sung at specific hours of the day with a specific emotion in mind. According to O. Gosvami—

Different moments of the day arouse and stimulate different moods and sentiments.\textsuperscript{17}

Therefore, it was thought inferior and even dreadful if a raga was not sung at its allotted time. If sung otherwise, a melody was thought and even found to lose its beauty and art. If the time-prescription was not followed the raga had to fail, in as much as, the stipulated aesthetic emotion that was supposed to affect the soul was not aroused. Brij Bushan appears to agree—

The full flavour of a raga is experienced only at its appointed time. To sing or play it any other time is not only evidence of a lack of taste and knowledge but is also considered inauspicious.\textsuperscript{18}

O. Gosvami goes further and describes music as a ‘psychological’ and ‘physiological’ condition of expression. There is risk of losing health if a raga is ill-timed—

But the ancients believed in the diurnal and nocturnal effects of the music and therefore it has

\textsuperscript{17} Gosvami O., Op. cit. p. 89.
been said that ‘one loses his health both by singing and listening to a Ragaa,’ not executed in its proper time^{19}.

Hindu thought divided the day into ‘light praharas watches’, each prahara with duration of three hours. And, ragas too are classified and constituted according to the specific time that they are to be sung. O. Gosvami lists the hours of day and night assigned to various melodies. They are as follows—

1. The morning twilights or dawn which begins at 4 am and lasts till 7 am.
2. The first watch begins at 7 am and ends at 10 am.
3. The second watch is from 10 am to 12 noon.
4. The third watch is from 1 pm to 4 pm.
5. The evening twilight hours are from 4 pm to 7 pm.
6. The first watch of the night is from 7 pm to 10 pm.
7. The second watch of the night lasts from 10 pm to 12 midnight.
8. The third watch of the night is from 1 am to 4 am.\(^{20}\)

However, some Indian authorities on music do not restrict the impetus of a raga to particular times of the day, and instead, time and again have moderated it. Infact, aestheticians have often systematized and organized the ragas. Musicians too have extended the hours of the day and seasons, and synchronized and complimented them with different moods and emotions, and in doing so, extended the fringes of interpretation.

The traditional association of music and poetry with seasons is said to be very old and often still continues. Some authorities

\(^{19}\) Gosvami O., Op. cit. p. 90
\(^{20}\) Ibid. p. 91
associate seasons with agriculture and cultivation. Legends believe that seasons related to farming, cultivation and harvesting were celebrated with great fervour, thrill and joy. Actually, the Aryans are believed to be the source of the whole idea of celebrating and enjoying farming and agriculture. Hence, each season or seasonal festivity, had its proper divinity and melody associated with it. Again, the concept of worship and a path to religious bliss often becomes the liet motif. Gosvami writes about Aryans also adapting themselves to indigenous fertility cults—

When agriculture came to occupy a place of importance in the lives of the Aryans newly settled in India, they began to adopt many of the seasonal rites and festivities connected with the fertility cults and agriculture from the indigenous people.  

Since the concept of ragas centers itself on sentiment, poets and musicians, and later painters, tried to capture the subtle nuances of the sentiment of each raga and matched it with the subtleties of moods of nature. They enhanced the spirit of each melody into subtle emotion, making it seem a human reaction to time and nature in a particular human situation. Thus, the moods have been depicted according to seasons best suited to them in all three forms of art: music, poetry and painting. Therefore, some ragas are common to both music and poetry. And Gangoly emphasizes this convergence of season and human emotion as a common factor—

1. *Vasanta raga* is the human reaction to the joy of life in spring;

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21 Ibid. p. 82,
2. *Megha raga* is a response to the advent of rains, with all the exuberance of desire and opportunity for enjoyment;

3. *Puravi raga* as the evening melody, is the lamentation of nature for parting day.

4. *Bhairavi raga* is the melody of love and devotion;

5. *Madhumadhavi* bespeaks the peace of love and contentment;

6. *Lalita* stands for unsatiated love, and the sorrow of separation at daybreak;

7. *Todi* is the surrender of animal life to the magic and enchantment of the beauty of nature.

8. *Nat* is the symbol of the heroic or martial spirit in man.

9. *Asavari* is the melancholy pleading of a grievance for a just redress.

In Indian art, particularly when it comes to the *ragamala* genre, the three genres poetry, music and painting are equally significant. The underlying sentiment common in all the three forms of Indian art was love, which could be for the divine as well; like secular poetry there was religious poetry too, with the secular often having the potential of expressing religious sentiment. Thus, entire treatises on music and the arts, like prayer-formula verses were in Sanskrit. Poetry had further scope, in as much as it could be descriptive as also narrative. Even *Bharat’s Natyashastra* and *Mathanga’s Brihadeshi* are religious verses but are at the same time descriptive and narrative too, based on *natya* or drama. Dehejia says that the prototypical art-form in the days of Bharat was *natya* or

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dance-drama. Romantic emotion in it had religious, as well as, moral overtones, and drama notwithstanding, it could be in narrative also—

...the prototypical art form in Bharat's time was natya or dance drama and the romantic emotion in this was not only subsumed in a larger narrative but equally under dharma or a certain moral order.

Furthermore, these religious dance dramas were transformed into iconographic images. The moral behind these iconic dramas had a lasting influence on the audience, among whom successful Indian traders along with their trade, patronized this aspect of natya as story-telling religious drama, and passed the concept on from place to place, as they travelled.

Still furthermore, the combination of religious verses and romantic emotion with drama gave rise to romantic poetry. Prakrit in the North and Tamil in the South, had a penchant for the romantic. This had a liberating influence. And the change-over from Sanskrit to Prakrit, and to Tamil, created an ethic of emotional sentiment. Dehejia emphasizes the romantic element, as he had, writing of Bharat's days, the religious and moral aspects—

Both traditions produced a rich genre of mukataka kavya or miniature romantic poetry where the romantic heroine pulsated with heart-throbbing life and vitality, where glances were more powerful than arrows and gestures.


24 Ibid.
This apart, *Vaishnavism* and *Bhakti* influences which emphasize divine love over ritual practice, also hastened religious and cultural activity. *Prakrit* languages like *avadhi* and *brij bhasha* absorbed the classical conventions of Sanskrit literature and contributed tremendously to *Vaishnava* literature. What flowered in terms of art were vernaculars and pictorial forms. Other than this, Sufi poets also motivated this act of 'passionate devotionalism.' Anjan Chakraverty writes—

Relevant here is the role of Sufi poets, who introduced nuances of the Perso-Arabic literary tradition into the vernacular.

*Vaishnavism* was humanistic and egalitarian, says Sita Sharma, and popularized *Puranic* myths and legends among the common people—

With the waning of Sanskrit, *Prakrit* and *Apabhramsa* tradition, the vernacular literature took the prominence. The humanistic and egalitarian movement bringing different sects and creeds of Hinduism and Islam together in common mystical worship and the popularization of *Puranic* myths and legends among the common people.

Consequently 'passion' and 'dramatic overtone', became primary sources of inspiration for both the artist and the artisan. Again, as has been repeatedly said, it was *rasa* that was depicted. *Rasa* as love initiates the key, be it for music, poetry or painting.

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Love-themes, therefore, captured various aspects of human emotion as depicted in poetry. As a result, music, poetry and painting became modes of worship. Shanti Rati Mishra writing about poetry says that love-poems cover a wide span of the love-situation—

These love poems cover the multifarious aspects of love and love situation, clandestine, pre-marital, marital, extra-marital that continues to have a universal relevance and appeal even to this day. Despite the simplicity of contents these poetic works displayed a sophistication of style that earned them the respect of the literati27.

However, Gangoly says that 'intrusion of literary ideas' into music proved 'disastrous'. He believes that—

...music begins where the language of words fail28.

Still, Gangoly accepts that the poetical expression and personification of musical ideas that arose were grounded in Indian classical conventions. This lent consistency to Indian art. Gangoly even speaks later of a unification of literary and musical ideas—

The introduction of these poetical ideas has not only enriched the significance of the musical expressions, - but, also helped to achieve a happy and a subtle unification of literary and musical ideas29.

29 Ibid.
The classical conventions of Indian art, specifically poetry, included the nayek-nayika tradition, the rasikpriya, and rasmanjari parampara, as also love – lore eroticism. These, together with the symphonic forms of nada maya rupa in music, and, the iconographic images of love –lore poetry, opened a new thrust area for Indian artists and aesthetes. Finally, the basis in all the three forms of Indian art was rasa or emotion, and this phenomenon remained a common factor in all three forms of expression.

According to Gangoly, the dhyana formulas in Sanskrit verses and quatrains represent the devata maya rupa, that is, the image-form of the raga or ragini. The dhyana formulas became the source of all pictorial representation of Indian melodies. The verbal descriptions contained in them the essential emotion and spirit of the ragas and raganis. Thus, to quote Gangoly—

These dhyana–formulas in the shape of Sanskrit verses and quatrains represent the devata maya rupa, the image forms of the raga and raganis. They are the sources and the bases of pictorial representations of the Indian melodies—the well-known ‘Ragamala’ pictures. In these verbal descriptions—the essential character – the spirit, - the rasa, – the emotional objective of each raga or ragini is indicated.

O. Gosvami focusses on the unique blending of the emotions in music with painting—

The Raga murtis in the form of Dhanyas have led the Indian mind to depict the circumstances, moods and

30 Ibid. p 101
appropriate environments, in a unique blending of music and painting in a harmonious whole.\footnote{Gosvami, O, Op.cit. p.239}

Alka Pande in an article entitled \textit{Myriad Moods of Love}, defines \textit{ragamala} painting as inspired by music—

\begin{quote}
\textit{Ragamala are the musically inspired Indian miniatures.\footnote{Pande Alka \textit{Myriads Moods of Love}, included in \textit{A Celebration of Love} (ed., by Harsh V. Dehijia) Roli Books, 2004, p. 48.}}
\end{quote}

Pande says that the \textit{raga} system is specific to Indian music, and \textit{ragamala} paintings are a synthesis of poetry, music and painting—

\begin{quote}
\textit{Ragamala paintings as the name implies, was inspired by the raga system specific to Indian music and is a synthesis of music, poetry and painting.\footnote{Ibid.}}
\end{quote}

The origin of these gratifying painted expressions can be traced to Kohala, an authority on music before Bharat, who in \textit{Silparatana} instructs that sound images, and rhythm and tones should be stored in a painter’s memory before the painter embarks on the visualized composition—

\begin{quote}
The sound images, the rhythm and the tones should be stored in the memory of the painter before it is visualized into a composition.\footnote{Gosvami, O, Op.cit. p.239.}
\end{quote}

However, Gangoly is particular about musical values and says that descriptive ideas remain descriptive, and therefore, at best are indicators of \textit{rasa} only and not of musical values—
They are by no means, a description of musical values but an indication of the *rasa* – the nature of the emotions for which the melodies stand\(^{35}\).

Gangoly cautions against degrading musical values. It could reasonably be insisted on, that *dhyana* formulas and their pictorial illustrations were an interpretation of *rasa*, the environment and atmosphere being proper. The formulas and their illustrations were embodied in the melodies. However, it is not yet exactly clear when were the iconographies of the *ragas* and prayer verses began. It is certain though that all the iconographic Schools, i.e., Hanuman's, Narada's and Brahman's, had been established. In fact, any two Schools could have identical iconographies and Gangoly points out that—

Where the conception of a particular *raga* in any two schools is identical, - a similar or closely analogous iconographic formula is used\(^{36}\).

Further effort was made to give *ragas* a graphic form, while maintaining their 'individuality'. Emotion or *rasa* definitely has an inherent dramaturgic potential, therefore, *rasa* values or emotive values were assigned to specific dramaturgic situations. Sound too was dramaturgic, and so was a melody's emotive drama which unfolded when a particular *raga* was sung. This association of *rasa* or emotion helped create the appropriate sonal dramaturgic ethos specific to a melody. Gangoly gives priority to this association, rather than to ancient discoveries—

\(^{35}\) Gangoly, OC. Op.cit. p. 102

\(^{36}\) Ibid.
The *rasa*-value and their application (viniyoga) with reference to a situation in a drama, are indicated for each melody described. Therefore, the presiding principle of the melodies may be ancient discoveries, but its association with *rasa* and emotion helped create the proper dramatic condition. Ancient authorities have much to say about music, drama, poetry and painting generally, and more particularly on the association of *rasa* /emotion with the rest. Therefore, the presiding principle of the melodies may be ancient discoveries, but its association with *rasa* and emotion created the proper dramatic condition best suited for each melody.

Ancient authorities have much to say about music, drama, and poetry, specifically on all these three forms of Indian art in relation to *ragamala* paintings. The *Natyashastra* had initiated categories and classifications of love. Dancers, dramatists, and Sanskrit poets alike, utilized these classifications. Thus, much before *ragamala* paintings were begun, treatises and books specifically ascribed as ‘*ragamala texts*’ were written. Mathanga, Dattila, Bharat and Kohala are considered ancient authorities on ‘*ragamala texts*’. Initially, these texts were in Sanskrit. The concept of these texts centers around *dhyana slokas* and *dhayana murtis*. The former creates an ‘image’ and the latter puts in details. The *dhyanas* are descriptive prayer verses. They formulate and create an ‘image’ which is ‘divine’ and ‘sacred’, besides being the same for a particular *raga* that is the image invoked when that *raga* was sung. The divine ‘iconic’ image, therefore, held an important place in the world of Indian music.

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37 Ibid. p. 103
Thus, it was thought necessary to unfold the images inherent in the dhyanas.

As has been already said, every raga had its own invoked image. Also, these dhyanas gave final shape to that image in a raga. Gosvami calls it the 'mental picture' of a raga or ragini. It is invoked, takes shape and develops. And, dhyana formulas were really intended to help this as the singing of the raga proceeded.

Thus, the mental picture helped the human mind instantly associate and relate the image to the contemplative verses. Again, Gosvami also talks about the source of giving ragas a human form. And, the source he believes comes from the creator himself, since it is a belief that 'a creator can be imagined from its creation.' Gosvami quotes Julian Huxley—

> Theistic belief depends on man's projection of his own ideas and feelings into nature. It is the personification of non-personal phenomena, and this personification is God's major premise.

Vedanata also stresses this point—

> ...that man who himself is the subject of creation creates even God.

Now, it depends upon the artist, be he a musician, a poet or painter, as to how beautifully he is able to re-create the image of the raga. Ancient writers succeeded in portraying and capturing 'images' and 'forms' in contemplative verses. And, ragamala texts played an

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39 Ibid.
important role in the visualization of the images or iconographies associated with ragas.

Gangoly has dedicated a whole chapter on 'rathamala texts' in his book Ragas and Raginis. Gangoly has listed authorities and their contributions. Kohala, for the first time in Sangitratnakara indicated the presiding deities of each melody. Gangoly refers to bhima-sadja, an ancient melody described in a prayer formula. In the context of musical iconographies it is the earliest. Gangoly describes the archaic melody—

...the Bhinna-sadja an archaic melody, is described in a prayer-formula in the text of Raga-Kutuhala, which from the point of view of musical iconography, must be regarded as one of the earlier texts.

Gangoly further lists contemplative verses from Sangita-sarasamgraha. Every single detail has been put in these verses. And an illusionary image appears and strikes the mind in each case. Gangoly's list includes the 'contemplation' of the following three, namely ghurjari, todi, and desi—

Contemplation of Ghurjari:

Covered with a white mantle (armour) playing with her companions with balls in her hands, swaying in a dance (?) worship, in the region of my heart Ghurjari.

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41 Ibid. p. 109
Contemplation of *Todi:*

With a glass cup filled with the wine called Kadaumari, with her beautiful face supported by her left and with right hand, carrying a portion of the silken scarf of her lover, I also think of Todi, in my heart.\(^2\)

Contemplation of *Desi:*

Living in a hut of *Usira* grass, holding a wreath of flower in her hand of a very fair complexion, clad in attractive robes, I contemplate of the youthful Desi.\(^3\)

The visual picture in *Ratanmala* is drawn as follows—

With the slow movement of a king of elephant’s, with eyes like that of a fawn, with a complexion like the lotus, with heavy hips, with her plaits dangling like a serpent, with a frame quivering like a delicate creeper, this comes into view, the ragini Desi, sweetly smiling. This is Desi.\(^4\)

Individual interpretations may differ (of the dhyanas) but the image of a beautiful lady comes clear into mind. And then rasa, as sung with raga identifies its emotion.

The practice of composing *ragamala* texts continued till the fifteenth century. A complete series of this kind was composed by Narada as *Pancama-sara- Samhita*, dated 1440A.D. The concept of

\(^2\) Ibid. p. 109  
\(^3\) Ibid. p. 110  
\(^4\) Ibid.
ragini was introduced for the first time in this treatise. The tradition of composing a text based on ragamala continued during the Mughal period, and out of these, Mesakarna's texts were considered the earliest, which Gangoly also endorses—

The earliest landmark during the Moghul period is the work called Raga-mala by Mesakarna composed in 1509 A.D.

Pundrika Vithila is another important name amongst writers of ragamala texts. He composed a ragamala text in 1576 A.D. Gangoly thinks this composition more 'iconological' and 'hieratic' than others.

Yet another text-series named Ragavividha was written by Somanth. Gangoly considers the series 'inadequately descriptive', as the writer uses the name of the nayika to suggest the emotive qualities of the melodies. Still another text-series is by Damodara Misra called Sangit Darpana. Its author follows the School of Hanuman in its compilation. Bhanu Datta too has quoted early ragamala texts. Besides these known treatises, there are works by anonymous authors also.

However, there are no clues about these verses having been painted as early ragamala paintings. Nor have there been any pictorial illustrations that show these verses painted earlier than the estimated date positioned in early fifteenth century. Gangoly is not prepared to go earlier than the sixteenth century to date ragamala

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45 Ibid. p. 111
painting, and in no case earlier than the fifteenth century. To quote Gangoly—

It is difficult to suggest, if pictorial illustrations, answering to these descriptive word pictures, had been painted very much before 16th century, the estimated date of the earliest ragamala pictures. Although no pictorial representation as early as the 15th century have yet come to light46.

Thus, Sangita-mala, written by an anonymous writer, has the latest datable ragamala text. It provides for the first time an elaborate description of verses, followed by a visualized image of the melody, its rasa, its note structure, as also, the time suitable for its singing and even some old examples. Gangoly gives the details—

Each verse is followed by a note in Hindi under the title of sahitya gudhartha (i.e. implicit rhetorical significance of each melody) in which the nayika (the heroine), nayaka (the hero) and the rasa (emotional flavour) of each melody are specified, and is accompanied by two or three examples of old songs in which each melody has been appropriately sung47.

Infact, Gangoly even quotes some from Sangeetmala, as examples, and also gives the ‘rhetorical interpretation.’ Thus, he chooses raga dipak as the example from the book—

Dipak-raga: Born from the eyes of the sun; by the effulgence of his complexion scolding the flower of

46 Ibid. p. 110
47 Ibid. p. 116
the pomegranate; ravishingly graceful as he rides on a rutted elephant; accompanied by female attendants, carrying round his neck an incomparable necklace of pearls. The melody is centred on the note sadja, it is sung at noontide in summer season.\(^48\)

Rhetorical interpretation: The hero is a wily and faithless person. The heroine is a married spouse of the middling type, in the fullness of her youth. The prevailing emotive flavour is enjoyment of love-passion. This melody should be applied to emotions of this quality.\(^49\)

The image in the above paraphrase is clearer than those described earlier in this thesis. Gangoly ends the Sanskrit section of *ragamala* texts with Tagore’s *Sangit-sara sangraha*, which Gangoly believes provides varieties of *ragamala* texts based on the three known schools of thought. Gangoly says that Sanskrit literature, not available to the common man, had even the details of rasa-value, that is, the innovative quality of the descriptive verses, as also of note-structures.

Sanskrit being the language of the *ragamala* texts, the necessity of translating the texts into a vernacular was also felt. Of course, the transition from Sanskrit to Prakrit had begun. This has already been noticed earlier in the thesis. Hindi, Avadi and Brijbhasha were the dialects generally spoken. These were the languages into which the Sanskrit *ragamala* texts were translated. This apart, the advent of the Mughals and their interest in Indian art,
particularly music and painting, further strengthened the process which completely unlocked the ‘key’ of Sanskrit musical texts into Hindi. Gangoly explains how ‘short popular recessions’ in Hindi verses make the secrets of musical theory available to all and sundry—

In this way short popular recessions in Hindi verses opened to all and sundry the secrets of musical theory and sciences hitherto locked up in learned treatises in Sanskrit.\textsuperscript{50}

As time went on, sheer curiosity, as also, the popularity of the musical verses encouraged further translation into local dialects and Hindi couplets and dohas. The Hindi version of the literary verses was welcomed by the community. It also established a fresh genre for Hindi poets. Availability of ready emotive-values proved a facility for these poets. The poets did differ from the originals, and often apprehended more elaborate situations. It all depended upon what the poet interpreting the raga ragini emphasized in action, emotion, and colour. Gangoly cites a compilation by Maharaja Swai Pratap Singh Deo of Jaipur as an example—

Now the picture (image) of velavali is written: For the purpose of meeting her beloved in the trysting-place, she is putting on her jewels, (sitting) on the terrace; and she is repeatedly recalling and involving her favourite deity—the God of love; her complexion

\textsuperscript{50} Ibid. p. 118
is like the colour of blue lotus. A ragini visualized as above, one should recognize as Velavali⁵¹.

The poets of Prakīt languages maintained the emotive value of the ragas and created distinct and accurate images of the melodies, which were more readily amenable to pictorial illustration. According to Gangoly, the concepts, being in Prakīt, were easier to apprehend; this apart, the emotional rendering was now more elaborate and more dramaturgic—

...but in their popular Hindi versions, these original musical images are each amplified and elaborated in an emotional situation, in an appropriate dramatic form which makes it easier to apprehend their inherent emotive concepts⁵².

Thus, iconographies of the dhyanas conceptually remained the same, as did the rasa-value in the dramatic situation. It was the musical image that was elaborated just for pictorial purposes.

These literary forms of melodies thus poemized the pictorial motifs later visualized in a ragamala picture. And, though it is still not exactly clear when the iconographies were painted, this much is certain, that on popular demand the literary forms were visualized as love stories in which Krishna and Radha, the ideal lovers, were very often the leitmotif. This apart, Indians being profoundly religious, other myths and legends were also sung and painted. Alka Pande in her article entitled Myriad Moods of Love, included in A Celebration

⁵¹ ibid. p. 136
⁵² ibid. p. 140
of Love (ed., Harsha V. Dehejia) not only lists the *raginis* but also elaborates the legend or iconography attached to each. Thus, her list name fourteen *raginis*. The information she provides needs to be fully quoted being essential to the present thesis. Pandey says that *raginis* as described by authors and as portrayed through song and painting alike, were as follows. They are quoted entire—

*Ahiri Ragini*: The legend behind this Ragini tells us that Basu Nag (a male divinity) abducted a woman and then set her free telling her that she would give birth to eighteen Nagas whom she must feed daily. Once they were born she did as instructed and kept them in an earthenware pot taking care of them everyday. The iconography of this *ragini* is associated with the cult of Nagas. The name *Ahiri* probably has some co-relation to the tribal cult of the *Abhiras*.

*Asavari Ragini*: The iconography of this ragini also supports the theory that it has its origin amongst the snake charmers. She is primarily depicted playing a wind instrument or the *Nagaswara*.

*Desakhya Ragini*: According to Coomaraswamy she is ‘An accomplished and clever young woman, fragrant of body, in all its parts fixing her heart upon her lord such a lady is Desakhi. The *Sangitmala* states that Desakhi is a beautiful woman but aggressively inclined with an angry expression. The term Desakhya is derived from *desi*, originally used to characterize a whole class of local regional or folk music.
Devagandhari Ragini: The name is composed of two words deva meaning divine and gandhari derived from Gandhara, the third note in the scale, which is the predominant note in this ragini, the theme of which is mostly devotional.

Dhansari Ragini: Here the nayika is depicted painting the portrait of her lover while awaiting his arrival. Reminiscing of him, she displays her skill in painting in addition to describing her love for him with successive strokes of her paintbrush.

Gauri Ragini: In this portrayal the devotional or romantic aspect is not highlighted as much as the loveliness of the woman depicted at the height of her beauty and feminity, playfully gathering flowers in her garden. The dominant flavour is that of vipralabhā shringāra or unrequited love.

Gunahari Ragini: The forest of jealousy is depicted where the courtesan, whose faithful lover returns to her and arouses her jealousy.

Todi Ragini: The nayika is usually depicted with a musical instrument (vina). A melancholy Ragini, popular with both musicians and painters Todi is essentially pastoral in spirit and the paintings usually reflect the loneliness of the heroine as well as the idyllic atmosphere with charming expressiveness.

Vibhasa Ragini: Lovers in the early hours of the morning relaxing in each other's company after the enjoyment of an amorous dalliance. The poetic
inscription on one of the miniatures is an example of the celebration of love.

*Varari Ragini:* The amorous aspect of the *Ragini* is depicted in the *varari Ragini*. It has been depicted as the *Raga* and *Ragini* that embrace one another.

*Sambhoga Ragini:* Represented by two lovers watching a landscape.

*Kannada Ragini:* The simile here is of the pleasing melody of the *Kannada Ragini*. It is to that of a beautiful lady in a lovely garden. The sweetness of a *Ragini* is analogous to sweet love scenes with a *nayika* entwined coyly in the arms of the *nayaka*.

*Sorath Ragini:* This is a melody for royal lovers where the queen or the princess is shown sitting with her spouse enjoying an evening of music.

*Deepak Ragini:* Has also been represented as a melody for royal lovers.

Thus, the thrust area in the *ragamala* ethos being firmly esconsed in the *raga/ragini/rasa* tradition, it can only be comprehended in the profoundly emotive contexts of *rasa* and its perpetual divine undercurrent. But then, this is characteristically an Indian feature and needs complete empathy for it to be understood. However, responses to music being different in different cultures, some understanding of the West’s idea of music is necessary to see why *rasa* value or emotive quality may not be easily acceded to by

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the West. This has been referred earlier, and briefly explained also, particularly in the introduction.

In Indian music it is the primary sentiment or emotion of a raga that is visualized in each ragamala painting. But then, as cautioned earlier two caveats must be kept in mind. Exceptions like Yehudi Menuhin apart, who has been quoted earlier, philosophers like Sussanne Langer, would prefer to treat music as 'pure form'. Therefore, they would consider emotion a drag on it and thus a 'limiting factor'. Western philosophers write of 'significant form' in arte-facts. And 'significant form' it is said, to repeat once more, can only be felt but difficult to define. For, about feeling, Langer says that there are two: objective and subjective. And, the factor important is that it is only 'objective feeling' that can help understand 'significant form'. Thus, 'subjective' feeling being ruled out, emotion and emotive-values would, according to the West, shackle 'pure form', which it is thought that music is\(^5^4\). On the contrary, in Indian music raga{s} are presumed to influence emotion. There are emotive-values which is another expression for rasa-values. This was the first caveat.

The second caveat is as has been already explained earlier, about Western music isolating and individualizing a note. This, in Indian raga music is unthinkable, there being an element of the 'familial' in it, the shrutis or microtones even participating with the dominant note. This too has been explained earlier\(^5^5\).


\(^5^5\) Gosvami, O., Op. cit, p. 244
Today, as Gautam writes in *The Concept of the the Raga in Hindustani Music*, an article published in *Aspects of Indian Music* (2006), which Professor Sumanta Mutatkar edits, the *raga* had ‘acquired a wider definition’. It has—

shed some of its old rigidity and began absorbing some of the aspects of other melodic systems of music.\(^56\)

As Gautam says, musicians ‘began to deviate and diverge’, and the distance between the *shastras* and ‘music as practised’ not only widened, but ‘kept on widening’. While earlier, the *raga* was supposed ‘powerful enough to invoke the elements’, it lost ‘its supernatural powers, as it were, and became more and more a purely aesthetic form’.\(^57\) Thus, earlier, *raga dipak* could heat and inflame, and *raga megh malhar* cause rain, the important condition was that there had to be ‘a devout singer’.\(^58\) Be that as it may, when *ragamalas* were painted, as history records, from the fifteenth to the nineteenth centuries, *raga* as ‘pure aesthetic form’ was a long way to come. For, Raghava R. Menon in *The Sound of Indian Music*, as late as in 1976, could write at p.78 of Kumar Ghandharva’s ‘gleaming quick of the swara’, and would wait for the man or woman, whom ‘you may come across once in a while who you realize suddenly is a musician’, and ‘who is not a sum’ of his or her ‘parts’, but who is ‘also something more’, for such a musician adds an ‘incalculable mysterious element’ to everything. And, it is—


\(^{57}\) Ibid.

\(^{58}\) Ibid.
Him or her you go to hear, not a particular raga or composition...at the end you are left with the memory of a golden voice in fine training, a masterful interpretation of a raga and an attractive singing style...and next time, there could be another musician....a better voice...a surer technique...a fascinating singing style...better than the earlier one and so on for ever and ever⁵⁹.