Sangeet Galaxy e-Journal **UGC-CARE Listed**
Vol. 14, No.2 (July 2025) pp. 217-223 ISSN: 2319-9695

Interwoven Arts: Exploring the Legacy of Ragamala Paintings, Hindustani and Carnatic Music Traditions, and Carpet Weaving during Rajput and Mughal periods

Dr. D.V.K. Vasudevan
Music Teacher, Campus School,
University of Hyderabad, Telangana
Google Scholar:
https://scholar.google.com/citations?user=xHW22t4AAAAJ&hl=en&authuser=2

Abstract

This paper explores the rich, intertwined cultural heritage of medieval and early modern India through the lenses of Ragamala paintings, the evolution of Hindustani and Carnatic music traditions, and Mughal-era carpet weaving. These three art forms, developed under royal patronage and religious movements, exemplify a confluence of aesthetic expression, spiritual devotion, and political power. The study traces historical trajectories, examines artistic styles, and highlights the socio-political contexts that shaped their growth and subsequent decline. Through detailed analysis of visual motifs, musical innovations, and textile designs, this work illuminates their interdependence and calls for renewed scholarly and institutional attention toward their preservation.

Keywords: Ragamala Paintings, Carnatic music, Hindustani music, Carpet Weaving

1. Introduction

Indian classical arts have long been characterized by a remarkable synergy between music, painting, and crafts. The intricate relationship between visual and performing arts is vividly exemplified by Ragamala paintings, which translate musical ragas into visual imagery; the rich traditions of Hindustani and Carnatic music; and the highly sophisticated carpet weaving practiced during the Mughal and Rajput periods. These forms thrived under royal patronage, responding to evolving religious philosophies and social dynamics.

Despite the distinct geographic and stylistic domains of these arts, they share a common cultural substrate grounded in devotional themes, courtly aesthetics, and evolving patterns of patronage. This paper delves deeply into each art form, emphasizing their origins, developments, and interactions, while also addressing the challenges they face in contemporary times.

2. Ragamala Paintings: Visualizing the Essence of Musical Ragas

2.1 Origins and Iconography

The term *Ragamala*, meaning "Garland of Ragas," refers to a genre of Indian miniature paintings that visually interpret musical ragas—melodic frameworks integral to Indian classical music. These paintings originated in the medieval period, flourishing under Rajput and Mughal patronage. They serve not only as artistic works but also as didactic tools, illustrating the moods (rasas) and times of day associated with specific ragas.

Each raga is personified, often as a heroic male figure accompanied by his consort, the ragini. Together, they form a "family" of ragas—comprising ragas, raginis, their children (ragaputras), and daughters (ragakanyas)—reflecting an intricate symbolic taxonomy (Kossak, 1997). These figures are embedded in evocative settings, such as moonlit gardens, forests, or palatial courts, emphasizing the emotional and temporal contexts of the ragas they represent.

2.2 Stylistic Variations and Symbolism

Distinct regional styles of Ragamala painting emerged, including the Rajput, Pahari, and Mughal schools. The Rajput style is noted for its vibrant colors and narrative storytelling, while the Pahari style emphasizes delicate brushwork and lyrical landscapes.

A quintessential example is the painting of Kedar ragini by Ruknuddin from Rajasthan. This work depicts a yogini playing the veena under a moonlit night, embodying a serene yet sorrowful mood. The composition blends masculine and feminine attributes: the yogi's ash-smeared skin and meditative posture suggest asceticism, while the veena's delicate strings and the woman's grace evoke emotive sensitivity. The setting—shaded trees, a luminous moon, and a silent garden—captures the raga's tranquil nocturnal atmosphere (Kossak, 1997).

Such paintings were not mere illustrations but vibrant performances frozen in time, inviting viewers to experience the sonic moods through visual narrative.

Figure 1: *Kedar Ragini, painting by Ruknuddin in Rajasthan. Now at Metropolitan Museum of Modern Art, New York [1].*

3. Musical Traditions: From Northern Courts to Southern Kingdoms

3.1 Emergence and Flourishing of Hindustani Music

The early foundations of Hindustani music were laid during the Delhi Sultanate (13th-15th centuries), notably under the influence of the poet-musician Amir Khusro (1253–1325). Khusro's eclectic linguistic and musical background brought Persian, Arabic, and Turkic influences into the Indian soundscape, enriching vernacular poetry and music (Bhatkhande, 1974). His innovations include the creation of new forms such as qawwali and the *Chaturdandi Sampradaya*, which integrated multiple musical traditions across the northern plains.

King Mansingh Tomar of Gwalior played a pivotal role in developing the Dhrupad style, focusing on devotional themes and refined compositions meant for court performances. The cultural environment under Mughal Emperor Akbar (1542–1605) marked a golden age for Hindustani music. Akbar's court welcomed musicians regardless of religion or ethnicity, fostering a syncretic musical environment. Tansen, Akbar's court musician and disciple of Swami Haridas, is legendary for popularizing ragas such as *Miyan Malhar* and *Miyan Ki Todi*. His mastery on the Rudra veena and the development of new ragas and compositions set a precedent for future generations (Gaveesh, 2015).

Akbar's patronage extended to the musical instruments themselves. The tanpura, a drone instrument fundamental to Indian music, was prominently used, alongside other instruments like the sarmandal (a zither-like instrument), the ney (flute), and the pakhawaj (barrel drum). The Surmandal, a type of Indian harp, was particularly favored in the courts for its ability to sustain melodic drones, providing a rich harmonic texture.

The Mughal musical court, as chronicled in contemporary writings and paintings, was a vibrant confluence of diverse traditions, blending Persian sophistication with indigenous Indian aesthetics.

3.2 Decline and Challenges under Aurangzeb

The reign of Emperor Aurangzeb (1658–1707) saw a dramatic shift. Known for his conservative religious policies, Aurangzeb reportedly banned music at court, resulting in the disbandment of the royal musicians. According to Herbert Popley's *The Music of India*, musicians symbolically carried a corpse through the streets to represent music's "death" under Aurangzeb's rule. This act signified a cultural rupture, forcing musicians to migrate to regional courts and temples, thereby decentralizing the musical tradition (Popley, 1927).

3.3 Southern Traditions and the Bhakti Movement

In southern India, the musical landscape evolved somewhat independently, with the Bhakti movement playing a significant role in shaping Carnatic music. Poets and saints like Kabir, Tulsidas, Mirabai, and others composed devotional poetry accessible to the masses, often in

regional languages. The movement emphasized personal devotion and direct emotional expression through music and poetry, bypassing rigid caste and class structures.

Patrons such as Sri Krishnadevaraya of the Vijayanagara Empire and later rulers of Tanjore and Mysore supported musicians and composers. The *Saraswati veena*, evolving into a complex 24-fret instrument, became central to Carnatic music's melodic and rhythmic intricacies. Composers like Muthuswami Dikshitar, who was himself a veena virtuoso, developed compositions that combined technical sophistication with deep spiritual content.

The tradition also incorporated courtly forms such as the Telugu opera *Pallaki Seva Prabandham*, composed by Shahji Maharajah of Tanjore, exemplifying the integration of music, drama, and devotional themes (Sambamurthy, 2004).

Figure 2: *Shahji Maharajah of Tanjore (1684 - 1720 A.D) Royal patron and composer and the author of the Telugu Opera; (Pallaki Seva Prabandham)*

Figure 3: *Vinadhara Dakshinamurti from Pudukkottai, showing the reversed posture fretted Vina*

4. Mughal and Rajput Carpet Weaving: Textile Art as Cultural Synthesis

4.1 Historical Context and Patronage

The Mughal and Rajput courts fostered a distinctive tradition of carpet weaving, integrating Persian artistic motifs with indigenous Indian elements. The carpets, often commissioned by emperors and nobles, were not merely functional items but objects of artistic innovation and cultural symbolism.

Two primary design traditions emerged: one inspired by Persian book illustrations, featuring narrative scenes; and another focusing on intricate floral and vine patterns (Walker, 1997). This duality reflected the synthesis of Persian aesthetics with Indian craftsmanship.

4.2 Design and Technique

One of the most remarkable examples from the late 16th century includes patterns of fantastical animals and mythical masks, representing a confluence of imaginative creativity and traditional symbolism. These carpets used an advanced weaving technique with alternating blue and white

knots to simulate the flickering effect of water, revealing sophisticated understanding of color and texture (Walker, 1997).

The use of fine wool and contrasting colors, sometimes mimicking the sheen of silk, enhanced their luxurious appeal. The *millefleur* style, characterized by a multitude of small flowers, was especially popular in prayer rugs from Kashmir. However, the cotton foundation of many such carpets poses conservation challenges, as it is more prone to degradation compared to silk.

Figure 4: *Pattern of fantastic animals from Northern parts of India, during Akbar's reign.*

5. Interconnections among Visual, Musical, and Textile Arts

The interrelations between Ragamala paintings, musical traditions, and carpet weaving are profound. Ragamala paintings visually narrate the moods and times of ragas, often played on instruments like the veena, which itself is depicted in the paintings. The musical styles flourishing in royal courts influenced and were influenced by the cultural milieu that also produced fine textiles and paintings.

The cosmopolitan nature of Mughal and Rajput courts facilitated cross-pollination among artists, musicians, and craftsmen. Patronage networks linked these domains, as royal courts commissioned visual art to complement musical performances and adorned their palaces with exquisite carpets. These arts were expressions of the same cultural and spiritual ethos, often aimed at evoking specific emotional and devotional experiences.

6. Decline and the Need for Preservation

The decline of these art forms coincided with the weakening of royal patronage, colonial disruptions, and changing social priorities. The end of the Mughal empire and Nayaka kingdoms led to fragmentation of cultural centers. British colonial policies often neglected indigenous arts, favoring Western aesthetics and industrialization.

Consequently, musicians, painters, and weavers lost institutional support, leading to a crisis in transmission and practice. Today, many of these traditions survive in precarious conditions, requiring concerted efforts for revival and conservation.

7. Conclusion

Ragamala paintings, Hindustani and Carnatic music traditions, and Mughal-era carpet weaving are intertwined manifestations of India's rich cultural heritage. Each reflects unique artistic mastery yet remains connected through shared aesthetics, devotional themes, and royal patronage.

Revitalizing these arts demands understanding their interdependence, recognizing their historical significance, and fostering institutional and scholarly support. Only through such holistic approaches can the legacy of these interconnected art forms continue to inspire future generations.

References:

1. https://www.metmuseum.org/art/collection/search/37863
2. Bhatkhande, V. N. (1974). *Khusro and the Origins of Hindustani Music*.
3. Dikshita, Subbarama. (1905). *Sangita Sampradaya Pradarsini: Vaggeyakara Charitram Vol. V*.
4. Gaveesh, K. (2015). *Musical Contributions of Tansen*.
5. Kossak, Steven. (1997). *Indian Court Painting 16th-19th Century*. Metropolitan Museum of Art.
6. Popley, Herbert A. (1927). *The Music of India*.
7. Sambamurthy, P. (2004). *Great Composers, Book I*. The Indian Music Publishing House.
8. Walker, Daniel. (1997). *Flowers Underfoot: Indian Carpets of the Mughal Era*. Metropolitan Museum of Art.
9. Pallaki sēva prabandha: a musical opera of King Shāhaji.(1977) India, Geetha Book House.