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DEPICTION OF PATRONS IN RAJPUT PAINTING: A THEMATIC APPRECIATION

KEY WORDS: Rajput Miniature Paintings, Patrons, Portraits, Hunting, Court

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ABSTRACT

Rajput Miniature paintings, a reference to the paintings between seventeenth to early nineteenth century from Mewar, Marwar and surrounding regions in present day Rajasthan, are rich source of historical information about the times—the patrons, their interests, their faiths, the dominant literary sources, and much more. The themes of the ranged from the courtly—portraiture, hunting, royal festivities, zenana scenes, etc., to the literary—illustrations to Ramayana, *Bhagavata Purāna*, *Gīta Govinda*, *rāgamālā*, *bāramāsā*, etc. This paper looks closely at how the patrons liked to see themselves – the different ways in which they got themselves painted—in court, or hunting, solo portraits, in festivities, etc.

Introduction

Mewar, Marwar and surrounding regions were key centers of painting from seventeenth century to early nineteenth century. Rajput Miniature paintings, as the paintings from the region are now called, were an amalgamation of indigenous traditions and those borrowed from Mughal courts. Themes ranged from the courtly—portraiture, hunting, royal festivities, zenana scenes, etc., to the literary—illustrations to Ramayana, *Bhagavata Purāna*, *Gīta Govinda*, *rāgamālā*, *bāramāsā*, etc. The paintings, made on paper, increased in size with time, started with as small as a few inches across the diagonal, to as much as three feet in later Rajput painting. Patronage of painting was the norm, rather than an exception, with generations of rulers from the courts and thikānās of Mewar, Deogarh, Bundi, Kota, Marwar, Kishangarh, Amber, Bikaner, Jaipur, etc. In the world where there were no selfies, it perhaps is no surprise that the patrons wanted to see themselves painted, all by themselves, holding a flower or on a horse or at a window, or with their courtiers, families or mistresses, or worshipping, hunting, etc. This paper studies the sub-themes within portrayal of patrons. To this end, about 1500 paintings were reviewed from books and online collections of museums. A thorough classification of the paintings led to emergence of seven key sub-themes within the 'Patron' theme. From each sub-theme four representative paintings have been selected from the prominent regions of patronage. Mindfully, the paper uses the language of elements and principles of design to describe the paintings, an area that is of close interest to the authors.

Portraits of Patrons

Hari Singh with water-pipe and attendants, ca. 1710, Marwar¹: Here we are presented with a bright and lively painting of Hari Singh in courtly glory. The painting is adorned in warm colors and intricate patterns on the pillow, pillars and arches. The white of the dresses immediately catches the eye. Line-work on the dresses is detailed and refined. In the background we see the auspicious plantain tree over a blue flat background. Snake-like clouds are shown near the upper margin, topped by theatrical, drape-like, roughly rendered clouds.

An equestrian portrait of Kunwar Fateh Singh of Fatehgarh. ca. 1745, Kishangarh²: Kunwar Fateh Singh is shown here astride a horse framed completely by a green rolling vista; near the upper edge is shown some habitation; at the feet of the horse are tiny flowers. The sky is pale blue with streaks of orange near the horizon. The horse's mane has been elegantly rendered in strands ending as points—a style that developed with Kishangarh painters around the 18th century.

A standing portrait of Ram Singh of Mewar holding a sword, ca.1750-73, Udaipur style³: We are presented here with a delicately painted portrait of Ram Singh. The rendering is immaculate. The colors bring about a surprising amount of brightness. Colors have been applied with a lot of restraint and

finesse – the colors of hands and face is reflected echoed by the color of the upper garment. Depth is brought out by the light green ground below and the blue wash behind, and a semblance of light colored clouds on the top. The eye depiction is realistic. Pose is inspired from Mughal royal portraits. The artist seems very enamoured by the sword which he did now want hidden by the fluting lower garment – the sword is shown right in front.

A standing portrait of Raja Pratap Singh of Jaipur, ca. 1780 ca, Jaipur style⁴: Here we have a very stylized depiction portrait of Raja Pratap Singh, with the conventional nimbus and a raised hand holding a motif. The portrayal is very doll-like, rather than realistic, as seen in Ram Singh's portrait. There is heavy use of gold decoration and ornamental motifs on the main dress and turban. The background is flat, showing a token ground, but no sky. "More attention is paid to the opulence of garments than the characterization of personality."⁵

Patrons in Court

Maharaja Jaswant Singh I, ca. 1640-42, Marwar⁶: This painting is a superb example of minimalistic rendering. It makes very little use of gold and ornamentation that was characteristic to Rajasthani painting. The shades of brown, on a red ground, ornamented by the very bare white turbans and bands over the bodies make for a very refined depiction. The faces are in the delicate Mughal style, rather than the usual Marwar style heavily set faces, with large moustaches and sideburns. "Details such as the hands and the folds of the garments are more technically perfect than in previous Jodhpur paintings of drawings."⁷ Jaswant Singh is shown literally in the center and top of the hierarchy of officials in the court.

Maharana Amar Singh II Is Shown Two Silver Elephants, ca. 1705, Mewar⁸: Here we are presented with a painting that must have been an adventurous feat for its time – the style is evolved. Rendering is a mix of grisaille and watercolor along with extensive use of stippling (the series of similar paintings was referred to by Stipple Master <reference>). Sparing use of color and some use of gold. Representation is iconized rather than natural. The vegetation in the front is reduced to recognizable patterns. The garden itself is a plan of a *chārbāgh* style garden, with waterways and a fountain. The scale of depiction varies as per the importance the artist accorded to the subjects.

Darbar of Maharaja Bijai Singh of Jodhpur, Mid 18th century, Marwar⁹: In this large painting, Maharaj Bijai Singh is shown sitting on a lemon yellow, patterned carpet, supported by a large mauve bolster, under a bright red, frilled canopy. Like most Marwar paintings this painting too is soaked in bright colors. Patches of yellow and red, and the black of the shields stand out. The plain white of the clothes is well contrasted by the heavy ornamentation of the carpets and the canopy. The deep green luxurious vegetation of flowering plants and trees are in sharp contrast to the dry and dusty environment of Marwar¹⁰. "The exuberant mood

and bold use of backgrounds like trees or carpets is reminiscent of the Kutch group of paintings." The figures are shown from bottom of the painting to high up, with no view of the sky.

Thakur Balwant Singh Presides at a Dance Performance, ca. 1890, Jaipur^{vi}: This well balanced and composed painting was done by artist Mohan Lal in late 19th century when cameras were taking over and painting had fewer and fewer patrons. The work is very detailed and meticulous. Saffron, white and emerald green are the prominent colors, along with some gold used for embellishment. The painting is heavily textured in parts – the carpet, some dresses and curtains—giving it a busy feeling. Elements have been rendered to bring out depth, with very little use of delineation. Depth is brought about by the composition and placement of figures in the camera-like field of view. Representation is naturalistic. Scale of the figures is as per their importance. The faces have a far-away look, detached from the actual dancing.

Patrons Engaged in Hunting

Rao Madho Singh of Kota Hunting Wild Bear, ca. 1720, Kota^{xv}: In this very dynamic composition, Rao Madho Singh is shown chasing boars. The artist depends on line-work to bring out shapes and depth of elements, especially the vegetation. Converting drawings into full-fledged paintings while keeping the essence of drawing was a style that was developed in Kota. The painting is heavily textured, brought about by the rendering of grasses and leaves. Depth is shown by overlapping figures and their scale. Representation is naturalistic as well as iconic; while some trees are realistically rendered, the Rao himself has been rendered in a cartoon-like manner. Scale is inconsistent through the painting. A mood of blood and gore is set by the composition and sparing use of red.

Maharana Jagat Singh Hawks for Cranes, ca. 1744, Mewar^{xiii}: This painting features in continuous narrative, Maharana Jagat Singh hawking cranes, where "the concern... was with the reproduction of moments as they unfolded, not with a story."^{xvii}. The hunting scene starts from top right with the Rana releasing the hunting hawk. The hawk chases and nails a crane who is just taking off. The crane is brought to the Rana, who then awaits with his troupes. Food is served, along with the the roasted crane. A palanquin party waits at the bottom right. This is a large painting created in a collage-like manner; many elements of the landscape have been shown—mud hills, grassy patches, cultivated fields, etc. The sun streams in with authority. Curiously, Maharana and his troupe, at bottom right, have been rendered obliquely.

Maharana Bhim Singh of Udaipur Returns from a Boar Hunt, ca. 1810^{xv}, Mewar: Maharana Bhim Singh, identified by the halo around his head, returns from a boar hunt, seated on a horse. Attendants carry fly-whisk, hookah and the symbol of the clan. The colors are earthy. Much of the background is a shade of yellow ochre. The symbol of the clan stands out prominently, as do the white of the dresses. The sky obligatory sky is shown as a regular rectangular blue band, outlined in white.

Rawat Gokul Das Hunting Deer, ca. 1811, Devgarh^{xvii}: Here we are presented with balanced composition with two clear area of focus – on the left is Rawat Gokul Das, the hunter, and on the right are the two deer, the hunted. Delineation is very subtle; form is brought out by shading and mixing of colors. The painting's high degree of texturing is attributed to the individualistic rendering of leaves. Depth of space is shown through overlapping placement of the trees and the hill and sky in the background. Leaves of trees have been rendered in fantastic patterns – growing from within or as non-overlapping cutouts. Scale is arbitrary for trees – some of the trees in the foreground are tiny, while some in the background are large; the key points of interest in the painting – the hunter and the hunted are shown as largest. The greenish blue hues, on a whitish background, in the light of a faint moon give a very surrealistic look to the painting.

Processions and Festivities

Maharaja Jagat Singh II in Procession, 1745 CE, Mewar^{xvii}: Maharaja Jagat Singh II on horseback, attendants with fly-whisk, hookah,

chattri, arms, symbol of the clan—all the conventional symbols are present in this processional rendering. The background is divided into three sections – a yellowish green ground, a bluish green featureless background and a blue-white sky. The attendants are dwarfish in proportion. Their clothes are colored, a departure from many other similar paintings, where clothes are all-white.

Captain James Tod, ca. 1817, Mewar^{xvii}: In this strikingly well composed processional painting we see James Tod on an elephant accompanied by attendants on horseback or walking. All figures are diminutive in size regardless of their importance, giving the painting a quaint look. An intense blue fills the background bringing out the figures in clear contrast. Line work is minimal; it is mostly flat colors and a bit of shading that differentiates one figure from another or affects a show of mass. Texturing has mostly been eschewed, avoiding an overcrowded look to the painting. Depth of field has been realized by the way the figures overlap and the hanging clouds near the top margin. Representation is naturalistic. There is a sense of warmth and activity in the painting, set by the colors and actions of the animated figures.

Maharaja Man Singh of Jodhpur, ca. 1820-30, Marwar^{xviii}: Maharaj Man Singh stands out in his orange clothes, on a similarly henna colored horse, accompanied by diminutive attendants dressed in all white. Man Singh and his retinue is neatly positioned in front of a greenish-blue mound. As with most miniature paintings, care is taken that the main figure is completely framed within a single color or backdrop. A flat yellow hue brings up the background, signifying the sandy nature of the region. A thin strip of white with a wavy regular pattern denotes sky and clouds. "The paintings of the reign of Maharaja Man Singh are characterized by an exuberant and colourful vitality, in both secular and religious illustrations..."^{xx}

Ram Singh II, ca.^{xix} 1850, Kota: Here we are presented with a processional painting that is dynamic and well balanced. The figures are diminutive and lively. Delineating lines are steady and refined. Colors are warm and exuberant, but not over the top – they retain a pastel-hued feel. Patterning has been tastefully applied to ladies' dresses. Volume has been suggested through careful shading. Space has been divided into three planes – the processional plane in the front, the architectural plane in the middle and the blue sky in the background. Architecture is extremely plain, which is a rarity when royalty has been depicted. Scale is more or less uniform except for the dancing woman, who seems smaller. The joyful mood is reflected in the riot of colors.

Patrons in Prayer

Madho Singh Worshipping, 1680, Kota.^{xxii} Madho Singh is shown worshipping a dancing image of Krishna, while two ladies shower flowers. The colors are bright and flat. Krishna's blue and yellow is framed by a red hue. Madho Singh, draped in light hues has a deep earthy green as background. The white cow and calf are brought out by the green ground, and their own sense of animation reflected in Krishna's spirited posture. Features such as the Krishna's garlands and pedestal, Madho Singh's patkā, the fly-whisk, rendered in white, help bring out the freshness of the work. "The brilliant red background color, exuberant figure of dancing Krishna... simplified palm trees are... all features from Bundi and Kota."^{xxiii}

Maharao Kishor Singh Worshipping Brijrajji, ca. 1830, Kota.^{xxiv} The composition looks slightly lopsided – leaning to the right, due to the skewed vertical lines even though Kishor Singh "one of the most devout and religiously knowledgeable of all Kotah rulers"^{xxv}) is shown prominently on the left. Heavily textured as seen in repetitive use of inlaid stones in a silver frame. Space is flattened – the background tiles, the stepped *chowki* on which deity is placed, the carpet below and the cloth covering – all seem to be in the same plane. Border—rendered in warm hues—has yellow thickly laid paint over red creating a distracting effect. The text on top looks like an adornment. The emphasis seems to be on decoration.

Kunwar Ragho Dasji and sons worshipping Girdharji, ca. 1770, Mewar.^{xxvi} The emphasis in this painting is clearly on the central two

figures – Ragho Dasji in yellow dress, and his son with larger proportions, on his right, in red. All faces are modelled differently, most probably based on reality. The textured background framing the central figures compositionally brings them to the forefront. The deity is provided some prominence by the red background and the white frame. The offerings and other things in front of the deity are much smaller in proportion reflecting their importance in the painting.

Maharana Jawan Singh of Mewar worshipping, ca. 1830, Mewar^{xxvii}: In this painting we are presented a balanced composition with static figures installed on two sides of a deity in the center. The colors are unsaturated, deep hued, from warm to neutral. Line quality is taut and hard. The painting is heavily textured, the emphasis being on decoration. Space is imaged as flattened – the deity, figures, the drapes, the worshipping artifacts - are all seem to be in the same plane. The border – in yellow and maroon, separated and overlaid by a black and white lines- some thick, some thin, overlaid with grey leaf-like pattern, complements the painting's somber mood.

With Family, At Leisure

Maharana Sangram Singh With His Children and Courtiers, ca. 1720, Mewar^{xxviii}: In this large painting, sensitively colored figures have been placed in an all-white architectural setting. Our eye is naturally drawn to the right hand side of the painting, along with direction in which the figures are facing. The clothes of many courtiers, near the shoulder, sport a darker color. Presence of ladies and courtiers in the same space is a rarity, as seen in this painting. "Everything has an appointed place, it is to be understood, but every now and then the stiffness of protocol, the rigidity of procedures, is broken."^{xxx}

Maharaja Jagat Singh II Watching Rās Līlā, ca. 1736-40, Mewar^{xxx}: A composition in white and red and gold, with diminutive figures seated on the courtyard of a palace. Line quality is soft and steady. Colors are subtle and startling. The glowing soft colors of the figures stands out in clear contrast to the white of the architecture. Texture is efflorescent in the dresses of the maharaja and courtiers. The courtyard is rendered in one point perspective. Spatially, the painting is divided into three planes – the foreground has attendants, the middle has *rās līlā*, while the background is brought up by the sky. "...the overwhelming feeling is of the scene being bathed in moonlight"^{xxxi}. A deep red well-proportioned border complements the energy of the painting.

Rao Budh Singh With His Sons, ca. 1743, Bundi^{xxxii}: In this painting rendered in the characteristic bold colors of Bundi painters, Budh Singh and his sons have been depicted on a carpeted terrace, with a receding flat background. In this well-proportioned painting, the figures are huddled together, pushing over the frame of the painting for a little more space. Bundi painters painted faces as oval and hair in great detail. A lone flowering plant peeping over the terrace wall creates an element of interest. Multiples borders differently hued and textured—golden of the carpet, black of the frame, red outside, give the painting a sense of solidity and stability, reflective of the relation between the father and sons. Names of Rao and his sons have been inscribed on the border – a custom followed in many miniature paintings.

Sardar Singh, ca. 1760, Kishangarh^{xxxiii}: This well-crafted painting dons muted shades of mauve adorned by indiscriminate use of gold. Move towards realism as seen in the rendering of hills and water. The placement of trees in repetitive pattern on the edges of the hills provides the painting a childlike quality. The scale is variable in the background – the plantain-like trees are seen to be much larger in comparison to the hills. The border is purely decorative in nature, rendered in the same hues as the colors of the ladies' dresses. The well positioned large mountains, the waterfall exactly in the center, a clear blue sky with a hint of red, as a backdrop to Sardar Singh and his ladies on a clear terrace, give the painting a larger than life, surreal feel.

Patron with Lover

Raja Raj Singh, ca. 1725, Kishangarh^{xxxiv}: In this painting Raja Raj Singh, mounted on a horse, a flower in his left hand, has been

depicted approaching an expectant lady in a *zenānā*. The approach is from a waterbody, not all that strange since many palaces in Rajasthan were built in lakes, surrounded by water. While the lady is framed in a half open door, three more ladies look inquisitively at the event. The white expanse of the walls, broken by a mango tree laden with ripe fruit, rendered in red and green, add excitement to the painting.

Lovers and an Old Crone, ca. 1780-90, Kishangarh (Cleveland Art Museum): This stunning painting realizes a burst of red-orange color in the sky, complemented by the red of the curtain and the terrace railing. The rendering is supported by sure, elegant lines, refined textures on the curtains, and tasteful use of gold on Krishna's dress. The space is divided into three distinct areas – the foreground with the main characters, the middle ground with vegetation, walls, etc, and the background brings up the sky. The double-storied building is perfectly composed with well-proportioned arches, pillars and walls. The tree has been meticulously depicted in fine detail, in this realistically rendered painting. The streaks of red in the sky set the tone for a romantic evening adventure.

Lovers on a Moonlit Night, ca. 1775, Kota^{xxxv}: In this ordinarily composed picture, line and coloring quality is quite rough. Only a section of the terrace is shown - a daring step by the artist as it moves away from convention of terrace and building representation; sidewalls on the left and right are absent. We get a sense of depth seeing top portion of the frontal wall and the sky behind the back wall. Border is in two parts – the inner golden part seeks to provide gravity to painting, while the outer part is purely decorative in purpose. One can almost feel the cool rays of the moon caressing the bodies of the lovers on a warm summer night. The peeking lady on the left provides an element of surprise to the picture.

Lovers in a Pavilion, Late 18th Century, Jodhpur^{xxxvi}: In this well balanced composition depicting lovers, the toy-like lady is installed on a man's lap, attended by three women—a woman with a fan, another with a drink, while the third is preparing a drink or a lotion. Presence of attendants in a private setting was in keeping with tradition of the times. All our interest is guided to the center of the visual – by the two attendants facing the center, by the two hanging drapery extensions at a comforting angle, and the bright patch of white behind the lovers. The drapery in the pavilion is a distractingly brilliant orange. The trees in the background and the grey sky, dotted with flying birds, bring up the rear without really attracting any attention.

Conclusion

Seven sub-themes under the theme 'Patron' were discussed in this paper: Portraits, In Court, Hunting, Processions and Festivities, Prayer, With Family or At Leisure, and With Lover. The study showed that the first three themes were more common than the latter four, pointing to the patrons' obsession with their own selves. On the whole, the 'Patron' theme was found to be much more prevalent than other themes such as 'Gods,' 'Ascetics,' 'Women,' '*Rāgamālā*,' 'Elephants,' etc. This study discusses only a few paintings, and that too briefly. There is scope for much more detailed study of the individual sub-themes, their frequency of occurrence in different regions, and across time periods, so that an understanding of the trends can be established. The discussion of the paintings from the perspective of elements and principles of art is only touched at; there is opportunity to take just a few elements and do more rigorous study of a particular theme.

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