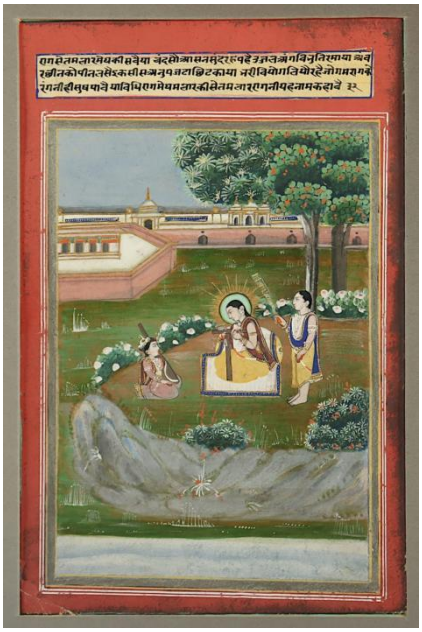


Seth-Malhara Ragini Miniature Painting, Watercolour on Paper, Jaipur, Rajasthan, c.a. 1820-1840

Rāgamālā paintings are a unique art form that visually represent Indian classical music. They became important during the Indian painting Renaissance from the 16th to the 18th centuries. The Jaipur School of Art, which thrived in the 18th century, is well-known for its special style of Rāgamālā paintings.

In Indian music, rāgas are the basic principles of music. A rāga is a way of arranging musical notes, called svaras, each with its own meaning.[1] Today, we count the six principal rāgas as follows: Bhairava, Mālakaunsa, Megha, Śrī, Hiṇḍola, and Dīpaka. The feminine aspects of these rāgas are called the rāgiṇīs, while their offshoots are to be known as rāgaputras, culminating in varying numbers of eighty-four to one hundred and eight.[2]

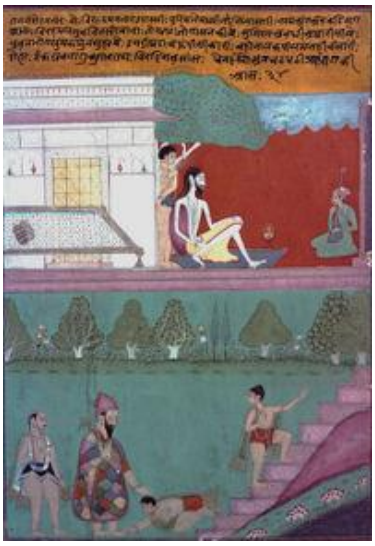
Malhara is intricately linked to the enchanting monsoon season and is classified under the principal rāga known as Megha. This exquisite miniature painting from Jaipur, titled Seth-Malhara Rāgiṇī, vividly illustrates the essence of this musical lineage. It is believed to be a derivative of the Malhara family, capturing the spirit and vibrancy of the rains through its intricate details and vivid colours, evoking the charm and beauty associated with the lush landscapes of the monsoon.

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[1]O.C. Gangoly, *Ragas and Raginis: A Pictorial and Iconographic Study of Indian Musical Modes* (Bombay: Nalanda Publications, 1935).
[2]Klaus Ebeling, *Ragamala Painting* (Basel: Ravi Kumar, 1973).

We do find a few familiar miniature paintings of the same region, i.e., Jaipur, preserved by various digital collections like Umma[3] (LEFT) and UCLA[4] (RIGHT).





The painting features a captivating canto rendered in Devanāgarī script, meticulously arranged in a structured numerical order. Set against a vibrant yellow background, the text is enclosed within a rectangular box that is elegantly bordered in rich blue.

Canto:
राग सेतमलार मेध की सवैया बंदसोआसन सुंदर रूप है उजस अंगविभुतिरमाया अव रखीनको पीनस सेइकसी सन्अनुप जटा चिटकाया जरी वियोगत्तियोर है जो गमरागको रंगनी ही सुष पावे याविधि राग मेघमसार की सेतम तारागनीयस्नामक हावै ३२

Translation:
The raga Seth Malhara, born of the great rāga Megha,
It is described in a savaiyya verse with a beautiful, noble form.
His limbs shine with divine ash, his yellow robe glows like lightning.
He wears charming curls, his matted locks artistically tied.
There is a trace of sorrow, a longing in his presence—

[3]University of Michigan Museum of Art, *Ragamala: Sethmalar Ragini*, Accession No. 1981/2.42, accessed July 31, 2025, https://umma.umich.edu/objects/ragamala-Sethmalar-ragini-1981-2-42.
[4]UCLA Digital Library, *Seth Malhara Ragini*, Manuscript page from a Ragamala series, accessed July 31, 2025, https://digital.library.ucla.edu/catalog/ark:/21198/z1ps7t3z.

A mood akin to the colour of deep Rāga Gam (possibly referring to “Gambhira” or gravity).
In this way, Seth Malhara is known as the rāga’s rāginī, An embodiment of Megha Malhara’s emotional essence.

The numerical annotation "no. 32" likely refers to the sequence of the folios, positioning this painting within the chronological framework of 32 distinct works.

The painting is elegantly framed within a deep red rectangular border that enhances its significance. The scene is composed of one smaller canto alongside a larger, box-like shape featuring scenic elements. At the heart of this composition is a central seated figure, gracefully positioned beneath an intricately stylised tree canopy that adds to the serenity of the setting. This figure is attended by a second standing figure, while a third companion occupies a seated position, creating a balanced triangular arrangement that underscores a devotional or allegorical theme.

The central figure, depicted on a larger scale, radiates spiritual importance with a luminous halo encircling his head, suggesting he may represent a mystical or divine entity. Dressed in a vibrant yellow pītāmbara dhoti—as referenced in the accompanying verse—his portrayal lacks the ash markings or matted locks traditionally associated with such figures. This omission leads one to speculate that the canto might draw inspiration from a Rāgadhyāna of medieval texts. Behind him, his attendant holds ritual objects, such as a fly-whisk, indicating their reverence and adherence to ceremonial practices.

Opposite the central figure, a regal individual is depicted seated and playing a vīṇā —an instrument whose sound is described as "gambir," a tone suggestive of depth and emotion. His attire and ornaments signify an aristocratic lineage, further establishing the hierarchical relationship within the narrative.

In the background, a palace emerges as a prominent feature, hinting at the royal prince's origins and his journey to express his devotion and spiritual connection to the aesthetic. The clear blue sky above adds to the tranquil atmosphere, while below, a river flows in striking ice blue hues, woven through lush greenery and scattered shrubs that adorn the mid-level area, alongside thoughtfully rendered rocky formations.

On the back of the painting, there is a handwritten note that says, "Sitā and Ram Chandra, the eighth incarnation of Viṣṇu." However, the painting does not clearly show Sitā or Ram, making it unclear how they are connected to the artwork and raising questions about why the note is there.