

Vangala Ragini of Bhairava Raga

Artist unrecorded

Rajasthan, Marwar/Jodhpur, c.1605

Gouache on paper

Vangala Ragini, the oldest painting in the collection, depicts a melody meant to be sung in the morning, during the autumn season, as shown by the hot red background.

The central painted area of a *ragamala* is often surrounded by a border that serves both as a frame and as a means to protect it from the wear and tear of handling.

Gauri Ragini of Shri Raga

Artist unrecorded

Rajasthan, Bikaner, c.1680–90

Gouache on paper

Sadness and loneliness pervade this *ragini*, the 'wife' of a *raga*, as the heroine gathers flowers in a forest, awaiting the return of her lover.

A brush made of fine squirrel hair was most likely used to paint this detailed pastoral scene. Notice the town tucked beneath the golden sky, and the *sadhu*, a holy man, and his spiritual follower deep in discussion beside a fire.

Kaffi Ragini of Panchama Raga

Artist unrecorded

Rajasthan, Sirohi, c.1680–90

Gouache on paper

Established in the early 15th century, the palace at Sirohi and the surrounding city may have been named for its location at the head (*sir*) of the desert (*rohi*). During the second half of the 17th century a vibrant painting culture flourished in Sirohi under the long rule of Akheyraj II (1620–73) and his grandson, Bairisal (1676–97).

Since most of the surviving paintings done in the Sirohi style are *ragamala* paintings, it is clear that this miniature genre was a special favourite.

Deshavaradi Ragini of Bhairava Raga

Artist unrecorded

Rajasthan, Bundi, c.1680

Gouache on paper

In *Deshavaradi Ragini* the heroine expresses her anguish and need to be reunited with her lover by raising her arms into a contorted circle – a stance described in another Deshavaradi painting as a ‘body twisted as the creeper’.

Deshakhya Ragini of Hindola Raga

Artist: Isa

Rajasthan, Bikaner, dated 1714

Gouache on paper

Deshakhya Ragini is one of two paintings in this exhibition featuring gymnasts. The physical prowess of the pole climber was a part of the fairs held in villages throughout India. Another gymnast proves his strength in suspending a pair of round wrestler's hand-weights above his head. Poetry associated with this image succinctly captures the sights and sounds of the athletic arena:

'... with quick resounding slapping of body, hair topknots standing on end, long arms held back and checked, tall, fierce... splendid as the moon.'

Bhaskar Ragaputra of Hindola Raga

Artist unrecorded

Pahari, Chamba, c.1690–1700

Gouache on paper

Bhaskar means 'sun', and the melody associated with this *ragaputra*, the 'son' of a *raga*, should be sung just as the sun rises. The painting captures an early morning scene, before anyone has awoken.

In the sun above, a woman gives a lotus petal to the Hindu sun-god Surya as he rides on his seven-headed white horse.

Chandra Ragaputra of Hindola Raga or the Hindu deity Vayu

Artist unrecorded

Pahari, Bilaspur, c.1700

Gouache on paper

In Hinduism, Chandra, meaning 'shining', is a lunar deity. Here he rides an antelope across the new moon while clutching a lotus flower.

Most of the red margin originally accompanying this painting, on which a description may have been placed, is now lost.

Panchama Ragaputra of Bhairava Raga

Artist unrecorded

Pahari, Basohli, c.1680

Gouache on paper

A figure sits in a landscape with his pet deer, a black buck, and two does. The painting is typical of a style of Pahari *ragamala* produced in the mid to late 17th century: relatively square in format, with borders of either red or yellow.

The luminescent Indian yellow pigment was most likely made in rural India from the urine of cows fed on a diet of mango leaves and water. It would have been collected and dried, to make a solid ball of pure pigment, which was washed in water and purified. Indian yellow fluoresces under ultra-violet light.

Varvala Ragaputra of Malkosh Raga

Artist unrecorded

Pahari, Nurpur, c.1690

Gouache on paper

Most figures in early 17th-century *ragamala* paintings, whether male or female, are idealised forms of *nayakas* and *nayikas*, heroes and heroines, adopted from earlier volumes on poetics and dramatic arts. The two male figures in this painting represent these typical male types.

Bhairava Raga

Artist unrecorded

Pahari, Nurpur, c.1690

Gouache on paper

Bhairava, the first *raga*, is named after a fierce manifestation of the Hindu deity Shiva. Here, the crowned and bearded blue deity rides on the sacred bull Nandi. The mounted figure is smeared with holy ash, holding two of his principle attributes, the trident and a red skull cup.

Kamala Ragaputra of Dipak Raga

Artist unrecorded

Pahari, Chamba, c.1690–1700

Gouache on paper

Kamala means 'lotus' in Hindi and paintings of this melody usually include an abundance of lotus symbolism.

Though it is common to find the hero standing or sitting amidst a lotus pond, holding lotuses in each hand, this painting is relatively unusual because it includes seven yellow and white bees swarming around his turban. The presence of the bees emphasises the power of Kamala.

Gajadhara Ragaputra of Megha Raga

Artist unrecorded

Pahari, Chamba, c.1690–1700

Gouache on paper

Within the Pahari *ragamala* tradition there are a number of compositions that feature athletes, including this painting. The main athlete may be accompanied by one or two attendant figures and in most cases he carries a long lance or spear, an essential tool for his acrobatic exercises.

Like many of the compositions from this Chamba *ragamala* set, the surface is arranged in three parts: the upper sky and the lower grass flank the larger central section, in which the narrative is performed.

Lalita Ragaputra of Bhairava Raga

Artist unrecorded

Pahari, Chamba, c.1690–1700

Gouache on paper

In describing this melody, the accompanying text compares the sound to the voice of a swan. Clearly, when the scribe's text was visualised by the painter, cranes became a substitute for swans.

The Lalita melody is performed pre-dawn.

Shyam Kalyan Ragini of Shri Raga

Artist unrecorded

Deccan, Hyderabad, c.1760

Gouache on paper

The heroine is seated adjusting a garland of flowers around her neck, while a maidservant places a lighted oil lamp in front of her. It is likely that the painting refers to a musical mode to be sung in the evening.

Madhumadhavi Ragini of Hindola Raga

Artist unrecorded

Deccan, Hyderabad, c.1760

Gouache on paper

The young heroine is received by a *duenna*, an elderly female companion, as she rushes in from a monsoon storm to escape the snake-like lightning in the clouds.

Perspectival recession, following the lines of the buildings, draws the viewer into the scene. The wild fluttering of the birds falling towards the fish pond also contributes to the sense of agitation and turmoil. Texts describe a woman full of passion for her lover, braving the terrors of a dark and stormy night in order to reach their meeting place.

Kakubha Ragini of Megha Raga

Artist unrecorded

Deccan, Hyderabad, c.1760

Gouache on paper

A heroine deserted by her lover wanders dejectedly in an open landscape, holding garlands and surrounded by peacocks and peahens.

This is the monsoon season, when male peafowl perform their seasonal mating dance to attract females. Other birds in the painting exhibit similar behaviour patterns that contrast with the heroine's feelings of separation and loss. The paired cranes passing overhead in their autumn migration symbolise fidelity and the male wagtail dancing in the branches of a tree pleases his mate.

The name Kakubha implies 'a summit, splendour, or beauty' but also the garlands of champaka flowers which hang from her hands.

Dhanashri Ragini of Shri Raga

Artist unrecorded

Deccan, Hyderabad, c.1760

Gouache on paper

In almost all examples of Dhanashri, as represented in north Indian *ragamala* paintings, the heroine is shown drawing a portrait of her lover, but in this case she is writing a letter.

Interestingly, this corresponds with the Persian translation of a *ragamala* text found on another earlier Deccan painting of Dhanashri, beginning:

'... because of the lover's absence she has become pale-featured and thin so she writes a letter to him about the agony of separation.'

Bhairavi Ragini of Bhairava Raga

Artist unrecorded

Deccan, Hyderabad, c.1760

Gouache on paper

In this painting, the sun is just about to rise indicating when this melody should be performed. Bhairavi, the first *ragini* of Bhairava Raga, sits worshipping a *linga*, a representation of the Hindu god Shiva. Her *duenna*, an elderly female companion, rests behind her.

If the text written on the back of the image were correct in identifying this as Bangali Ragini, she would be accompanied by a tame tiger. However, the artist seems to have misinterpreted the text and replaced a tiger with Shiva's vehicle, the white bull Nandi.

Gauda Ragaputra of Shri Raga

Artist unrecorded

Sub-imperial Mughal, c.1610–20

Gouache on paper

The painter has followed the main element of the Sanskrit text above, which describes the *ragaputra*, the 'son' of the *raga*, as one who takes delight in worshipping the god Vishnu, shown here on the left in a small shrine. He is four armed, holding his usual attributes: the discus, mace, lotus and conch shell.

A temple priest, or *pujari*, is holding a garland and performing the rite of *arati*, in which the flame from a metal lamp is waved before the image. Upon the rocks are vessels of offerings to Vishnu, including a number of ornate water pots, or *lotas*.

Vinoda Ragaputra of Hindola Raga

Artist unrecorded

Northern Deccan, c. 1630–50

Gouache on paper

The central figure is shown holding an aromatic leaf, *betel*, with the crescent moon in his hair and a crown on his head. His royal status is confirmed by the presence of an attendant with a fly whisk. The sound of the musician playing a *vina*, a popular Indian stringed instrument, has attracted creatures of the forest who share his enjoyment.

The curious dragon-like creature, which belongs to the repertoire of decorative motifs that travelled from the Far East via Chinese porcelains and Persian tile work, is a unique addition in this painting of Vinoda.

Shankara Ragaputra of Megha Raga

Artist unrecorded

Sub-imperial Mughal, c.1610–20

Gouache on paper

Shankara, meaning 'auspicious' or 'causing happiness', is usually associated with Shiva, the Destroyer in the Hindu trinity in his role as Shankara, Chief of the Rudras, or storm gods.

Yet in this case he is represented as Vishnu, the Preserver, being praised by fellow deities: the four-headed creator Brahma; Shiva, in his five-headed manifestation wearing a tiger skin skirt and cobra necklace; the elephant-headed Ganesha; and Indra, the thousand-eyed King of the gods.

Interestingly, the verse above does not describe him as Vishnu but merely mentions his appearance: he wears a splendid garment, crown and ornaments; that he has lotus-like eyes and holds a piece of *betel*.

Bhairava Raga

Artist unrecorded
Nepal, c. 1650–75
Gouache on paper

Bhairava, an angry manifestation of Shiva, is depicted striding, with protruding teeth, fiery red hair, a garland of skulls adorning his torso, snakes entwined as bracelets and anklets, while his hands hold a skull cup, the blood it holds spilling over.

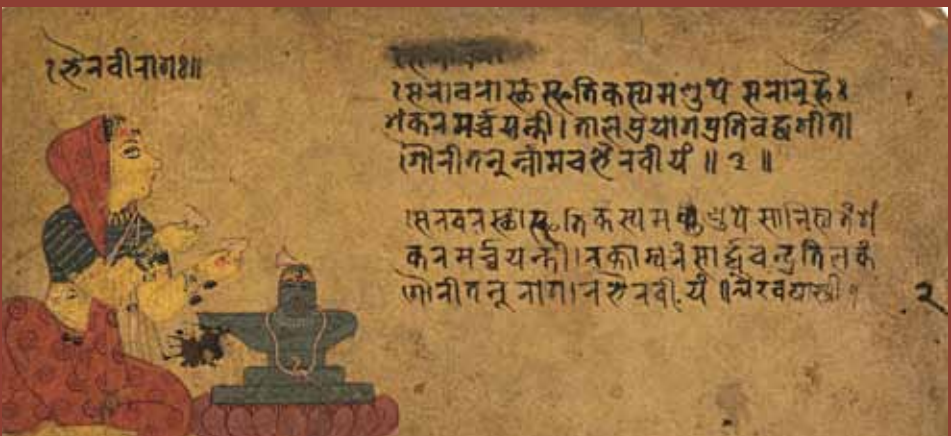
The inscription accompanying this melody, commonly performed at dawn, translates as follows:

May all be well.

Who wears earrings on both ears, the moon on the forehead, [and] has matted hair, holds [a] human skull in one hand and trident in the other – this form of Shankara is Bhairava.

Cat. 22a

On the reverse, **Bhairavi Ragini of Bhairava Raga** depicts a woman worshipping a representation of Shiva with flowers. She punctuates her prayers with the rhythm of the cymbals.



Cat. 22b

Panchama Ragaputra of Bhairava Raga

Artist unrecorded
Nepal, c. 1650–75
Gouache on paper

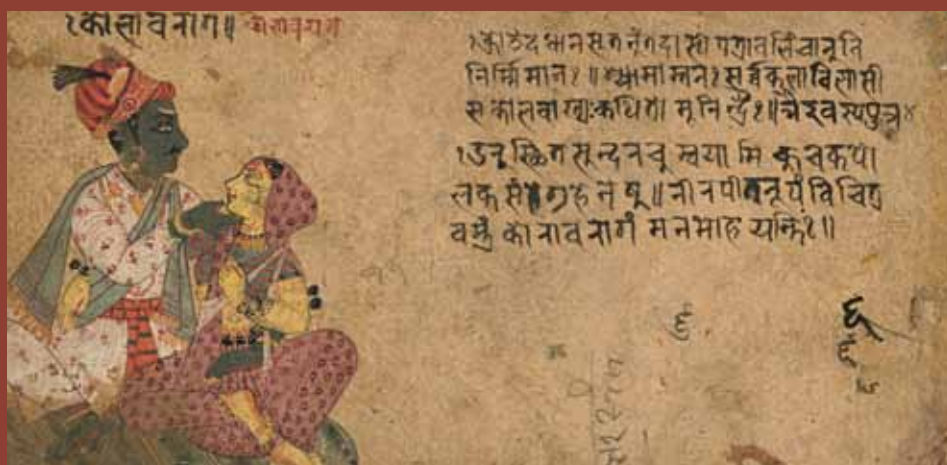
A golden-skinned woman swings lighted candles in front of the *shivalingam*, a representation of the Hindu god Shiva, while the other women raise their hands in enthusiasm. This is a rare composition for Panchama, which is usually illustrated with a musician entertaining a single man or a couple. The inscription translates as follows:

May all be well.

Shankara is worshipped with flowers, incense, arati, song by Panchama Raga, which is in the form of five colours. The son of Bhairava.

Cat. 23b

On the reverse is **Kolava Ragini of Bhairava Raga**, which was included in one of the earliest *ragamala* sets in western India. Based on the inscription accompanying this image, the sentiment and emotion are those of love in unity.



Cat. 23a

Malashri Ragini of Megha Raga

Artist unrecorded
Nepal, c.1650–75
Gouache on paper

The heroine is in a state of emotional indecision as she plucks the leaves of a flowering tree. Comparable to 'he loves me, he loves me not', she will allow fate (the number of leaves) to make the decision for her. The inscription reads as follows:

May all be well.

Worshipped with flowers by the god and goddesses, big hearted, is my Sarthika. Wise thinker [and] in a pure form is Malashri Raga.

May all be well.

Sitting on a lotus below a mular tree in [the mood of a] divine play [and] in contemplative pose, possessing soft lap, is Malashri [Raga].

The female counterpart of Megha.

Cat. 24a

On the reverse **Sarthika Ragini** is unique to Nepalese *ragamalas*. The heroine walks boldly through the trees, holding her headscarf to protect herself against the wind.



Cat. 24b

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Wrestler's Weight

Deccan, Golconda / Hyderabad, 17th century

Black basalt stone

Francesca Galloway, London

Indian hand-weights or *nals* are made of stone. These heavy objects can be lifted up by holding the inner handle carved in the stone as illustrated in the nearby *Deshakhya Ragini of Hindola Raga*. Gymnastics, martial arts and physical training were important to the warrior class and nobility of the different courts of India and scenes of physical prowess became a popular subject of *ragamala* painting.

Floral Lota

Northern Deccan, late 17th century

Cast and engraved brass

The Simon Digby Collection

Lota with the Avatars of Vishnu

Deccan, Tanjore, 18th century

Cast and engraved brass and copper

The Simon Digby Collection

Lotas or water vases were frequently used in Hindu ritual for the fetching of holy water. They are especially associated with the river Ganges, although examples are found throughout India, to hold water from local sacred rivers.

The characteristics of these vessels vary greatly, from globular forms to tall tapered necks, signifying a regional or functional variation. *Lota* vases frequently feature in *ragamala* paintings of devotion.

Have a closer look

Please return to hooks at the
end of the exhibition

Indian Connections

Tilly Kettle was the first of a wave of British portraitists to seek patronage in India. Arriving in Madras in June 1769, he left behind a highly competitive art market in London that was dominated by Sir Joshua Reynolds and Thomas Gainsborough. Within two years of arriving in India, Kettle had completed commissions from both British residents and the Indian rulers of the Carnatic region in the south, and had gained the respect of several members of the Indian nobility. When in Faizabad from late 1771, he obtained the status of court painter to Shuja ud-Daula, the Subedar Nawab of Oudh, who would have also commissioned local artists to produce *ragamala* sets. The presence of European artists such as Kettle and Johan Zoffany gradually came to influence Indian artistic production: *ragamala* sets, for example, began to display European traits in attempts to convincingly represent space, volume and perspectival recession.

Disillusioned by the lack of acknowledgement he received upon his return to London, Kettle left for India again in 1786, taking the onerous overland route. Shortly after reaching Aleppo in July, however, he perished in the desert.

Tilly KETTLE

(London 1734–1786 Aleppo, Syria)

Portrait of a Lady (above)

Oil on canvas
c.1760

This work demonstrates the strong influence of Reynolds on Kettle's early career. Kettle's artisan background meant that he was unable to embark upon the 'Grand Tour' to study European Old Master paintings first-hand, but when Reynolds returned from his tour of Italy, the techniques he acquired there were absorbed by young artists like Kettle.

The influence of Reynolds is clear here in the subtlety of line and the soft lighting effects. The lady's velvety complexion is hinted at with elegant touches of pink and her facial features executed with a smooth, delicate hand. The treatment of the lace in her headpiece and bodice indicates, however, that Kettle had not yet reached the level of skill he would later attain after becoming familiar with the Scottish portrait painter Allan Ramsay's work.

This enigmatic portrait is thought to have been the only painting Kettle ever exhibited at the Free Society of Artists, in 1761.

DPG583 – Fairfax Murray Bequest, 1911

Eliza and Mary Davidson

Oil on canvas
c.1784

Shown here are the daughters of Alexander Davidson, an East India Company servant whom Kettle had portrayed in Madras. This work is likely to have been painted in London, to which Eliza and Mary had returned from India with their mother in 1784. Upon his own return to London, Kettle relied on commissions from British acquaintances he had made in India. Kettle had first met the Davidson family when Eliza, on the right, was a baby.

Both girls wear 'turbans' in their hair, an accessory that became fashionable for western women from the mid-eighteenth century, when trade with India was expanding. The turban became increasingly popular in the 1780s, having been sported by Marie Antoinette on several occasions. It is likely that the girls' headdresses and their clothes here were brought back with them from India, where they would have been made by the family's *dirzee* (tailor) – a standard feature of British households in India – who bought fabric for the family and made and mended their clothes.

DPG582 – Fairfax Murray Bequest, 1911
Adopted by The Leche Trust, 1998