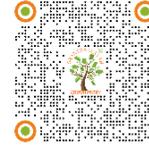


Original Article

## SYNTHESIS BETWEEN PAINTINGS AND MUSIC

Ragini Upadhyay <sup>1\*</sup> 

<sup>1</sup> Associate Professor, Drawing and Painting, Government Mankunwar Bai Arts and Commerce Autonomous College, Jabalpur, India



### ABSTRACT

Synthesis of the visual and musical worlds of the arts have a longstanding history. Goethe, Walter Pater and Wassily Kandinsky, famous Western scholars believe that the union of music with art exists. Similar synthesis exists in the Indian subcontinent as well in the form of miniature paintings for nearly 400 years. Similar kind of synthesis can also be seen in jugal Bandis, which are organized from time to time by organizations which know that such a bonding exists.

**Keywords:** Synthesis, Painting, Music

### INTRODUCTION

Synthesis of the visual and musical worlds of the arts have a longstanding history. Goethe, Walter Pater and Wassily Kandinsky, famous Western scholars believe that the union of music with art exists. Similar synthesis exists in the Indian subcontinent as well in the form of miniature paintings for nearly 400 years. Similar kind of synthesis can also be seen in jugal Bandis, which are organized from time to time by organizations which know that such a bonding exists.

### FUSION OF PAINTINGS WITH MUSIC IN INDIAN CONTEXT

Ragmala, in Indian context is an apt example of fusion of paintings and music. A Ragamala—meaning a 'garland of ragas' in Sanskrit—is a set of miniature paintings depicting the ragas, a range of musical modes arranged in specific sequences.

Each painting, therefore, represents a specific mood—often love—in its different facets and devotion<sup>1</sup>. There are six main ragas—Raga Sri, Raga Vasanta, Raga Bhairava, Raga Panchama, Raga Megha and Raga Natta Narayana—each associated with specific themes on which musicians, painters and poets create variations<sup>2</sup>.

#### \*Corresponding Author:

Email address: Ragini Upadhyay ([raginiupadhyay.816@gmail.com](mailto:raginiupadhyay.816@gmail.com))

Received: 15 December 2025; Accepted: 09 January 2026; Published 26 February 2026

DOI: [10.29121/granthaalayah.v14.i2SCE.2026.6726](https://doi.org/10.29121/granthaalayah.v14.i2SCE.2026.6726)

Page Number: 76-79

Journal Title: International Journal of Research -GRANTHAALAYAH

Journal Abbreviation: Int. J. Res. Granthaalayah

Online ISSN: 2350-0530, Print ISSN: 2394-3629

Publisher: Granthaalayah Publications and Printers, India

Conflict of Interests: The authors declare that they have no competing interests.

Funding: This research received no specific grant from any funding agency in the public, commercial, or not-for-profit sectors.

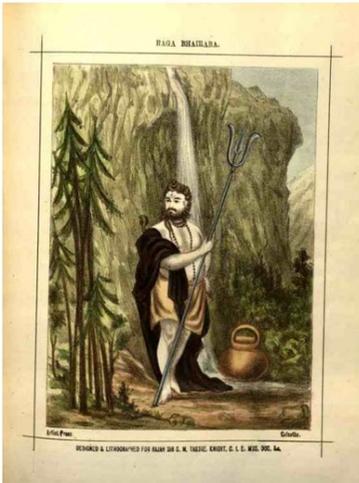
Authors' Contributions: Each author made an equal contribution to the conception and design of the study. All authors have reviewed and approved the final version of the manuscript for publication.

Transparency: The authors affirm that this manuscript presents an honest, accurate, and transparent account of the study. All essential aspects have been included, and any deviations from the original study plan have been clearly explained. The writing process strictly adhered to established ethical standards.

Copyright: © 2026 The Author(s). This work is licensed under a [Creative Commons Attribution 4.0 International License](https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/).

With the license CC-BY, authors retain the copyright, allowing anyone to download, reuse, re-print, modify, distribute, and/or copy their contribution. The work must be properly attributed to its author.

**Figure 1**



**Figure 1**

Organised as a family, each principal raga then has derivatives/relatives called raginis (imagined as the raga's consort or wife), ragaputras (sons) and ragaputris (daughters). A Ragamala, therefore, is a series of miniature paintings depicting the moods and variations of not only the main ragas but the derivatives as well. They're usually a set of 36, but this can go up to 110 parts too.

Starting from the sixteenth–seventeenth centuries, Ragamala paintings used images of Hindu deities to personify the musical notes in the raga. In that vein, Raga Bhairava became Lord Shiva, with his vaahana (vehicle) Nandi<sup>3</sup>. Raga Megha was pictured as Lord Vishnu wearing a garland of flowers, with a peacock sitting at his feet<sup>4</sup>. The ragas, are also associated with the six seasons—summer, monsoon, autumn, early winter, winter and spring; and different times of the day—dawn, dusk, night, and so on<sup>5</sup>.

Thus, it is no surprise that the music of the ragas/raginis—and their paintings—inspire a connection to a time of day, year, mood or God<sup>6</sup>. The iconography in Ragamala paintings went through a shift in the mid-sixteenth century, from the depiction of a singular divine icon to chronicling human beings (mostly women) in relation to their environment. This change can also be due to the influence of the popular Hindu Bhakti Movement that encouraged the expression of love, longing and devotion for God<sup>7</sup>.

During the sixteenth–nineteenth centuries, Ragamala paintings spread across the Mughal empire as painters accompanied their rulers to various parts of their kingdom. The theme of Ragmala changed to depict the female actress in a state of longing and loss—a virahini separated from her soul mate. This was connected with the Bhakti Movement, as the allegory of 'love in separation', akin to the separation of the soul from God was much used. In the early nineteenth century, Ragamala miniature paintings also developed a distinct style in the court of Oudh under the patronage of Nawab Shuja' ud-Daula and his son Asaf ud-Daula. Court artists such as Johan Zoffany and Tilly Kettle (painters of European origin) incorporated Judeo-Christian imagery and devices (such as angels above clouds)<sup>8</sup> into this distinctly Indian genre of miniature painting<sup>9</sup>.

The existence of Ragamala paintings across the Indian subcontinent, and even Nepal, attests to its widespread popularity spanning over several centuries. The paintings represented a rare mix of three distinct Indian artistic traditions: poetry, classical music and miniature painting<sup>10</sup>. It is no surprise, therefore, that the imagination of the music that accompanied the imagery of the paintings continues to captivate connoisseurs of art.

#### **FUSION OF PAINTINGS WITH MUSIC IN EUROPEAN CONTEXT**

“Our hearing of colours is so precise ... Colour is the keyboard, the eyes are the hammers, and the soul is the piano with many strings. The artist is the hand which plays, touching one key or another, to cause vibrations in the soul.” The quote by Wassily Kandinsky, in: *Concerning the Spiritual in Art*, 1912 very aptly establishes connection between music and painting.

Music and art have long been closely tied together, each taking inspiration from the other. Some remarkable music has been inspired by great works of art. For example, Italian composer Ottorino Respighi (1879-1936) used as his source of inspiration three paintings by Sandro Botticelli, an Italian painter of early Renaissance (*Spring*, *The Birth of Venus*, and *The Adoration of the Magi*) when composing his *Botticelli Triptych: Three Botticelli Pictures for Orchestra*.

**Figure 2**



**Figure 2 Sandro Botticelli, Primavera, Ca. 1482, Uffizi Gallery, Florence, Italy**

On the contrary, many paintings have been created with particular pieces, or types, of music in mind. Artists such as Paul Klee, a Swiss-born German artist and Wassily Kandinsky, a Russian painter and art theorist who is considered one of the pioneers of abstraction in western art, were fascinated by the interrelation between music and painting. The idea that music is capable of evoking, through sound alone, images in the listener's mind, became a big part of their artistic process.

**Figure 3**



**Figure 3 Harmony in Grey by Whistler**

There are instances when an artist would choose a musical title for their painting because it aptly fitted the narrative or the composition: Symphony in White, or Harmony in Grey and Green for example by James McNeill Whistler.

**Figure 4**



**Figure 4 Harmony in Grey and Green by Whistler**

Music is a dynamic art; its impact is realised over time. A painting can be absorbed in one moment. The idea of capturing a single mood has influenced painters to break all the rules. As mentioned above, the mood that is created by music as it unfolds and imparts its secrets has long been a goal for painters to achieve too. Kandinsky explored ideas relating to synaesthesia, a condition in which senses that are normally separated become confused and overlap with one another. This essentially means that, for example, something seen with the eye can have a taste, or something heard with the ear can have a colour. The process is involuntary, and the primary sense continues to function. So, someone might hear a chord in D Major+, and as a secondary sensation see the colour orange.

One may look at one of Whistler's nocturnes and hear C Minor because the colour blue is in that key. It is not surprising that this idea is incredibly engaging.

The title of the art may be instrumental in invoking the right musical mood: perhaps when a painter creates a beautiful night scene while listening to a nocturne, and then also gives it that title, he hopes that other will also hear a nocturne when they watch his work. This seems very logical, and yes, even one might hear Chopin's Nocturne Op.9, No.2 on viewing Whistler's Nocturne: Blue and Silver.

## CONCLUSION

There is enough empirical evidence to prove that there exists a strong synthesis between music and painting both in the Indian context and the western context. There is a further scope of research on the topic especially in Indian context. The budding researchers may explore the Jugal Bandis which have taken place in Indian context. The outcome of collaborative research definitely would make the study of Music and paintings very interesting. The research could lead to proliferation of inter-disciplinary research between painting and music, enriching both subjects.

## REFERENCES

- Dulwich Picture Gallery. (2020, April 4). Ragamala: An Introduction.
- The Metropolitan Museum of Art. (2020, April 4). Exhibition Overview: Ragamala: Picturing Sound.
- Wiener, E., and Wiener, M. (2020, April 7). Ragamala Painting of Dhanasri Ragini, c. 1690, Indian. Kimbell Art Museum. Exhibition Overview, 'Ragamala: Picturing Sound', The Metropolitan Museum of Art, accessed (2020, April 4).
- Exhibition Overview, 'Ragamala: Picturing Sound', The Metropolitan Museum of Art, accessed (2020, April 4).
- 'Ragamala, An Introduction', Dulwich Picture Gallery, accessed (2020, April 4)
- Hancho. (2017, March 30). Music to my Eyes: Indian Ragamala Paintings. Off the Wall: Frances Lehman Loeb Art Center at Vassar College. (2020, April 4).
- Mills, S. (2025, November 24). The Sound of Painting : Music and Art.