

CUET · FINE ARTS · CLASS XII · CODE 312

# The Rajasthani Schools of Painting

CUET unit: The Rajasthani and Pahari Schools of Miniature  
Painting

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## Snapshot

- Painting flourished in the princely kingdoms of Rajasthan and parts of Madhya Pradesh (Mewar, Bundi, Kota, Jaipur, Bikaner, Kishangarh, Jodhpur/Marwar, Malwa, Sirohi) between the 16th and early 19th centuries.
- The terminology shifted from Coomaraswamy's 1916 term "Rajput Painting" to the now-standard regional categories — Rajasthani, Pahari, Malwa.
- The technique (waslis, mineral pigments, agate burnishing, teamwork) served literary themes (Gita Govinda, Rasamanjari, Rasikapriya, Kavipriya/Baramasa, Bihari Satsai, Ragamala, bardic tales).
- There are eight sub-schools — Malwa, Mewar, Bundi, Kota, Bikaner, Kishangarh, Jodhpur, Jaipur — each with key patrons, artists and dated works.
- Detailed picture-studies (Bhagvata Purana, Maru Ragini, Raja Aniruddha Singh Hara, Chaugan Players, Krishna Swinging, Bani Thani, Rama at Chitrakut) are often turned into image/case-based MCQs.
- Highest-yield chapter of Class XII Fine Arts and the principal source of NTA's painter-painting-school triplet questions.

## Detailed Notes

### 2.1 Core concepts

The term "Rajasthani Schools of Painting" refers to painting in the princely kingdoms and thikanas of present-day Rajasthan and parts of Madhya Pradesh — Mewar, Bundi, Kota, Jaipur, Bikaner, Kishangarh, Jodhpur (Marwar), Malwa and Sirohi — between the sixteenth and the early nineteenth centuries (NCERT §Intro, p. 10). The terminology has a historiographical background. Anand Coomaraswamy coined the term "Rajput Paintings" in 1916, because most patrons were Rajputs, in order to differentiate the indigenous tradition from the Mughal School; he included Malwa and Pahari within his Rajput category. Coomaraswamy's umbrella term is now obsolete, and current scholarship uses the specific regional categories Rajasthani, Pahari and Malwa (NCERT §Intro, p. 10).

NCERT then describes the technique of Rajasthani miniature painting in detail. Paintings were executed on waslis — layered, thin handmade papers glued together to give the desired thickness. Outlines were drawn in black or brown; pigments came mainly from minerals and from precious metals (gold and silver) mixed with glue as a binder.

Brushes were made from camel and squirrel hair, and the finished painting was burnished with an agate stone to give it a characteristic sheen. Painting was a teamwork process: the master artist composed the picture and drew the preliminary outline; pupils specialised in colouring, portraiture, landscape, animals and other elements; the master gave the finishing touches; and finally a scribe wrote the textual verse in the reserved space (NCERT §Intro, pp. 10–11).

The thematic universe of Rajasthani painting was rich. By the sixteenth century, Vaishnavism focused on Rama and Krishna had spread across western, northern and central India through the Bhakti movement. Krishna in particular had a special appeal — worshipped as God and cherished as the ideal lover — and his persona generated themes that synthesised sensuousness with mysticism (NCERT §Themes, p. 11). A series of literary texts became the canonical source of subject matter for painters. The **Gita Govinda** of Jayadeva (twelfth century, court poet of Lakshmana Sen of Bengal) is a Sanskrit lyrical poem evoking the **shringara rasa** about the mystical love of Radha and Krishna (NCERT §Themes, p. 12).

The **Rasamanjari** — "Bouquet of Delight" — was composed by Bhanu Datta, a Maithil Brahmin of fourteenth-century Bihar. It is a Sanskrit treatise on *rasa* that classifies **nayakas** and **nayikas** by age (**baal, taruna, praudha**), by physiognomy (**padmini, chitrini, shankhini, hastini**) and by emotional state (**khandita, vasaksajja, abhisarika, utka**). Krishna does not appear by name, but painters cast him as the archetypal lover (NCERT §Themes, p. 12). The **Rasikapriya** — "Connoisseur's Delight" — was composed in Brajhasha in 1591 by Keshav Das, court poet of Raja Madhukar Shah of Orchha, and explores emotive states between Radha and Krishna. **Kavipriya**, also by Keshav Das, was written for the celebrated courtesan Rai Parbin of Orchha; its tenth chapter, the **Baramasa**, describes the twelve months and how the *nayika* persuades the *nayaka* not to leave on a journey. The **Bihari Satsai** — 700 verses by Bihari Lal, composed around 1662 at the Jaipur court of Mirza Raja Jai Singh — was mostly painted in Mewar (NCERT §Themes, pp. 12–13).

Ragamala paintings are pictorial interpretations of ragas and raginis. Albums contain 36 or 42 folios, and each family is headed by a male raga with six raginis. The six main ragas listed in NCERT are Bhairava, Malkos, Hindol, Dipak, Megha and Shri — a list that CUET routinely tests as a recall MCQ (NCERT §Themes, p. 13, yellow box). Other themes include bardic legends — **Dhola-Maru, Sohni-Mahiwal, Mrigavat, Chaurpanchashika, Lurchanda** — the **Ramayana, Bhagvata Purana, Mahabharata, Devi Mahatmya**, plus **darbar** (court) scenes, hunts, picnics, festivals, processions, portraits and animals.

The Malwa School (c. 1600–1700 CE) is described as the most representative of Hindu Rajput courts: its style is two-dimensional and simplistic, a culmination of Jain manuscript painting and the **Chaurpanchashika** idiom. Malwa lacks a precise central court; sporadic mentions place it variously at Mandu, Nusratgarh and Narsyang Sahar. Early dated sets include the **Amaru Shataka** of 1652 and a **Ragamala** by Madho Das in 1680. The Datia Palace collection in Bundelkhand provides further evidence that this

region was a significant centre of painting (NCERT §Malwa, p. 14). NCERT provides a useful chronology box: Mughal School (16th century, at Delhi, Agra, Fatehpur Sikri, Lahore) → Provincial Mughal and Deccani schools (Ahmednagar, Bijapur, Golconda, Hyderabad in the 16th century) → Rajasthani Schools (late 16th to early 17th century) → Pahari School (late 17th to early 18th century).

The Mewar School's emergence is associated with a Ragamala set painted at Chawand in 1605 by the artist Nisardin. The school was decisively reformulated under Maharana Jagat Singh I (1628–1652) by two virtuosos — Sahibdin and Manohar. Sahibdin painted a Ragamala in 1628, a **Rasikapriya**, a **Bhagvata Purana** in 1648, and the **Yuddha Kanda** of the **Ramayana** in 1652. Manohar painted the **Bal Kanda** of the **Ramayana** in 1649. Jagannath painted the **Bihari Satsai** in 1719. Sahibdin's **Yuddha Kanda** employed what NCERT calls "oblique aerial perspective" — multiple narrative episodes layered into a single folio (NCERT §Mewar, pp. 15–16). Nathdwara, a town near Udaipur, became a Vaishnava centre in the late seventeenth century, where large **pichhwai** backdrops were painted on cloth for the deity Shrinathji (NCERT §Nathdwara, p. 17).

The Bundi School flourished in the seventeenth century, distinguished by its unblemished colour sense and excellent formal design. The **Bundi Ragamala** of 1591 was painted at Chunar (near Benares) in the reign of Bhoj Singh (1585–1607). The Chunar Ragamala inscription names the artists as Shaykh Hasan, Shaykh Ali and Shaykh Hatim — pupils of the Mughal masters Mir Sayyid Ali and Khwaja Abdus Samad, signalling the direct Mughal-Bundi artistic transfer. Successive patrons were Rao Chattar Sal (1631–1659, governor of Delhi under Shah Jahan), Rao Bhao Singh (1659–1682), Aniruddha Singh (1682–1702), Budh Singh, Umed Singh (1749–1771, the accomplished phase), Bishen Singh (1771–1821) and Ram Singh (1821–1889, who decorated the mural-painted **chitrashalain** of the palace). The Bundi feminine type is petite, with round faces, receding foreheads, sharp noses, full cheeks, sharply pencilled eyebrows and a "pinched" waist (NCERT §Bundi, pp. 17–19).

The Kota School emerged after Jahangir split the Bundi kingdom in 1625, giving one part to Madhu Singh. Kota's own school properly began in the 1660s under Jagat Singh (1658–1683). Kota excels in hunting scenes; landscape became the real subject of compositions during the reign of Ram Singh I (1686–1708). Umed Singh (1770–1819) was placed on the throne at the age of ten, and his regent Zalim Singh kept him absorbed in hunting — a circumstance that produced a flowering of Kota hunt paintings. The Kota stylistic signature is spontaneous, calligraphic, with marked shading, double-lid eye and mastery of animal and combat depiction (NCERT §Kota, pp. 19–20).

The Bikaner School was founded as a territory by Rao Bika Rathore in 1488; Anup Singh (1669–1698) instituted a library. Bikaner is influenced by Mughal elegance and a subdued palette. Karan Singh employed Ustad Ali Raza from Delhi, working around 1650; Ruknuddin (active under Anup Singh) was the master artist who combined indigenous, Deccani and Mughal idioms, painting the **Ramayana**, **Rasikapriya** and **Durga Saptasati**. Other named Bikaner painters include Ibrahim, Nathu, Sahibdin and Isa. Bikaner studios were called **Mandis**; the master-finishing practice was **gudarayi** (lifting a

pupil's work and inscribing his own name on it); **marammat** meant repair; **nakals** meant copies. **Bahis**, the royal archival daily diaries, plus Marwari and Persian inscriptions on the paintings themselves, make Bikaner the best-documented Rajasthani school (NCERT §Bikaner, pp. 20–22).

The Kishangarh School was founded by Kishan Singh (son of the king of Jodhpur) in 1609. Its mature style emerged under Sawant Singh, with his celebrated artist Nihal Chand (working c. 1735–1757). The Kishangarh facial type is uniquely stylised: arched eyebrows, lotus-petal eyes tinged with pink, drooping eyelids, sharp slender nose, thin lips. Raj Singh (1706–1748) was initiated into the Pushtimargiya cult of Vallabhacharya, which made Krishna Lila the central subject. Compositions emphasise divine lovers in vast panoramic landscapes (NCERT §Kishangarh, pp. 22–23).

The Jodhpur (Marwar) School's earliest dated set is a **Ragamala** painted at Pali in 1623 by the artist Virji. Maharaja Jaswant Singh (1638–1678) patronised documentary portraiture and Krishna themes, following the Vallabha cult of Shrinathji, with the **Bhagvata Purana** prominent. Ajit Singh (1679–1724) — during whose reign Veer Durgadas Rathore recaptured Marwar — saw the rise of equestrian portraits. Man Singh (1803–1843) commissioned the **Ramayana** (1804), the **Dhola-Maru**, the **Panchatantra** (1804) and the **Shiva Purana**; he followed the Nath Sampradaya, and a **Nath Charita** was painted in 1824 (NCERT §Jodhpur, pp. 23–24).

The Jaipur School originated in the former Kachwaha capital Amer, the nearest of the large Rajput states to the Mughal capitals. Raja Bharmal (1548–1575) married his daughter to Akbar; Bhagwant Das (1575–1592) and Man Singh had close Mughal ties. Sawai Jai Singh (1699–1743) founded the new city of Jaipur in 1727 and reorganised the **Suratkhana** (workshop and store). Sawai Pratap Singh (1779–1803) led the second flowering, employing around fifty artists; the portraitist Sahibram and the painter Muhammad Shah were among them. By the early nineteenth century, Jaipur used gold heavily and preferred large formats and life-size portraits (NCERT §Jaipur, pp. 25–26).

A series of picture studies are often turned into image-MCQs: a **Bhagvata Purana** folio (Malwa, 1680–90, killing of Shaktasura); **Maru Ragini** (Mewar, samvat 1685/1628 CE, by chitara Sahibdin under Rana Jagat Singh at Udaipur, depicting Dhola-Maru on a camel); **Raja Aniruddha Singh Hara** (an equestrian portrait by Tulchi Ram, 1680, Bundi); **Chaugan Players** (Jodhpur, by Dana, 1810, in Man Singh's reign, showing a princess playing polo); **Krishna Swinging and Radha in Sad Mood** (Bikaner, 1683, by Nuruddin, from the **Rasikapriya**); **Bani Thani** (Kishangarh, by Nihal Chand, Sawant Singh's muse, based on Sawant Singh's own poem **Bihari Jas Chandrika**); and **Rama Meets Family at Chitrakut** (Jodhpur, by Guman, 1740–50, a continuous narrative composition) (NCERT §Picture Studies, pp. 27–34).

## 2.2 Definitions to memorise

Term	Definition	Page
Waslis	Layered handmade papers glued together as painting support	10

Term	Definition	Page
Rajput Paintings	Coomaraswamy's 1916 umbrella term, now obsolete	10
Ragamala	Pictorial interpretations of ragas and raginis	13
Six main ragas	Bhairava, Malkos, Hindol, Dipak, Megha, Shri	13
Pichhwai	Painted-cloth backdrops for Shrinathji at Nathdwara	17
Chitrashalain	Mural-painted halls of the Bundi palace (Ram Singh)	18
Mandi	Bikaner studio	21
Gudarayi	Master "lifting" a pupil's work and signing his name	22
Marammat / Nakals	Repair / copies (Bikaner studio practices)	22
Bahis	Royal archival diaries documenting Bikaner art	22
Suratkhana	Jaipur workshop reorganised by Sawai Jai Singh	25
Chitara / Likhitam	Painter / "written" — terms used in Maru Ragini inscription	28
Shringara rasa	Erotic sentiment, central to Gita Govinda	12
Nayika types	Padmini, chitrini, shankhini, hastini	12
Baramasa	"Twelve months" chapter of Kavipriya	12
Pushtimargiya	Krishna-bhakti sect of Vallabhacharya (Kishangarh)	22
Nath Sampradaya	Jodhpur Man Singh's sect; Nath Charita painted 1824	24
Bhakti movement	16th-c. devotional surge that fed Vaishnava themes	11
Chaurpanchashika	Indigenous-style poem and folio	13
Bihari Satsai	700-verse text by Bihari Lal, 1662, Jaipur	12
Rasikapriya	1591 Brajhasha treatise by Keshav Das	12
Kavipriya	Keshav Das's text including Baramasa	12
Rasamanjari	14th-c. Sanskrit treatise by Bhanu Datta of Bihar	12
Gita Govinda	12th-c. lyric by Jayadeva	12
Pichhwai	Nathdwara cloth backdrops for Shrinathji	17

### 2.3 Diagrams / processes to remember

The Rajasthani painting process is a six-step team workflow: (1) prepare the wasli — layered sheets of handmade paper glued together; (2) draw the outline in black or brown ink; (3) apply mineral and metal pigments fixed with glue, using camel- and squirrel-hair brushes; (4) the master gives the finishing touches; (5) burnish the surface with an agate stone for sheen; (6) the scribe writes the verse in the reserved text-box. The schools-chronology box (p. 14) is a single CUET-friendly diagram: Mughal (16th c.) → Provincial Mughal / Deccani (16th c.) → Rajasthani (late 16th – early 17th c.) → Pahari (late 17th – early 18th c.).

The Ragamala family structure is one male raga + six female raginis, packaged in albums of 36 or 42 folios (p. 13). Sahibdin's **Yuddha Kanda** of 1652 (Mewar, p. 16) demonstrates "oblique aerial perspective" with multiple episodes layered into a single folio. The Bundi feminine type (p. 18) is a memorable formula: petite figure + round face + receding forehead + sharp nose + full cheeks + pencilled eyebrows + pinched waist. The Kishangarh facial type (pp. 22, 32) is another formula: arched brows + lotus-petal eyes tinged pink + drooping eyelids + sharp slender nose + thin lips + serpentine curl on cheek + pointed chin. Bikaner studio terminology — Mandi (studio), gudarayi (master lifting), marammat (repair), nakals (copies), Bahis (archival diaries) — should be memorised as a block.

## 2.4 Common confusions / NTA trap points

- Coomaraswamy date — 1916 (not 1906, not 1926); he coined "Rajput Paintings," not "Rajasthani Schools" (p. 10).
- Author-text pairing trap: **Rasamanjari** — Bhanu Datta (14th c., Bihar); **Rasikapriya** AND **Kavipriya** — Keshav Das (Orchha, 1591); **Gita Govinda** — Jayadeva (12th c., Bengal); **Bihari Satsai** — Bihari Lal (1662, Jaipur). Easy to swap.
- Nisardin painted the 1605 Chawand Ragamala (Mewar) — confused often with Nihal Chand (Kishangarh, mid-18th c.) or Nuruddin (Bikaner, 1683).
- Bundi Ragamala (1591) was painted at CHUNAR (near Benares), not at Bundi itself; under Bhoj Singh.
- Six main ragas — Bhairava, Malkos, Hindol, Dipak, Megha, Shri. NTA inserts Megh Malhar, Todi, Sarang as distractors.
- Bani Thani is from Kishangarh, by Nihal Chand, based on Sawant Singh's poem Bihari Jas Chandrika (NOT Bihari Satsai).
- Chaugan Players = Jodhpur, by Dana, 1810 (Man Singh's reign) — not Mewar or Jaipur.
- Kota school began in the 1660s under Jagat Singh — Bundi-Kota division was 1625 (Jahangir to Madhu Singh).
- Kishangarh's mature artist Nihal Chand worked c. 1735–1757; Sawant Singh was his patron.
- The "Yuddha Kanda" of 1652 used "oblique aerial perspective" — not "linear" or "atmospheric" perspective.
- Pichhwais are made on CLOTH, not paper, and are for Shrinathji at Nathdwara.
- Sahibdin worked at Mewar (under Jagat Singh I), not Bikaner — although Bikaner also lists a Sahibdin among its painters.

## 2.5 Key artworks / artists

Artwork or Artist	Period	Significance	NCERT page
Anand Coomaraswamy (scholar)	1916	Coined "Rajput Paintings"	10
Nisardin (artist)	1605, Chawand	Painted Mewar's emergence Ragamala	15
Sahibdin (artist)	1628–1652, Mewar	Ragamala, Rasikapriya, Bhagvata Purana, Yuddha Kanda	15–16
Manohar (artist)	1649, Mewar	Bal Kanda of Ramayana	15
Jagannath (artist)	1719, Mewar	Bihari Satsai	15
Maharana Jagat Singh I (patron)	1628–1652, Mewar	Reformulated Mewar School	15
Maru Ragini, Mewar	1628	Sahibdin's documented Ragamala folio	28
Nathdwara pichhwai	Late 17th c.	Cloth backdrops for Shrinathji	17
Bundi Ragamala	1591, Chunar	Earliest Bundi-school work	17
Shaykh Hasan / Ali / Hatim	1591	Painters of Chunar Ragamala	18
Rao Chattar Sal (patron)	1631–1659, Bundi	Governor of Delhi under Shah Jahan	18
Raja Aniruddha Singh Hara	1680, Bundi	Equestrian portrait by Tulchi Ram	29
Tulchi Ram (artist)	1680, Bundi	Painter of Aniruddha equestrian	29
Ram Singh (patron)	1821–1889, Bundi	Chitrashalain murals	18
Madhu Singh (patron)	1625, Kota	Received split kingdom from Jahangir	19
Jagat Singh (patron)	1658–1683, Kota	School began under him	19
Umed Singh (patron)	1770–1819, Kota	Hunting-scene flowering	20
Anup Singh (patron)	1669–1698, Bikaner	Library; Ruknuddin worked under him	21
Ruknuddin (artist)	Late 17th c., Bikaner	Master combining indigenous, Deccani, Mughal	21
Ustad Ali Raza	c. 1650, Bikaner	Brought from Delhi	21
Nuruddin (artist)	1683, Bikaner	Krishna Swinging Rasikapriya folio	31
Kishan Singh (patron)	1609	Founder of Kishangarh state	22

Artwork or Artist	Period	Significance	NCERT page
Sawant Singh (patron)	18th c., Kishangarh	Patron of Nihal Chand; Bihari Jas Chandrika	22, 32
Nihal Chand (artist)	1735–1757, Kishangarh	Bani Thani	22, 32
Bani Thani	c. 1750, Kishangarh	Iconic stylised portrait	32
Virji (artist)	1623, Pali, Marwar	Painted Jodhpur's earliest Ragamala	23
Dana (artist)	1810, Jodhpur	Chaugan Players	30
Guman (artist)	1740–50, Jodhpur	Rama at Chitrakut	34
Sawai Jai Singh (patron)	1699–1743, Jaipur	Founded Jaipur 1727; reorganised Suratkhana	25
Sahibram (artist)	Late 18th c., Jaipur	Sawai Pratap Singh's portraitist	25

## Practice MCQs

## PYQ Alignment

This chapter is one of the most heavily examined in CUET Fine Arts — typically yielding 10–12 MCQs per cycle. NTA's favourite formats are (a) artist–painting–school triplets (Sahibdin / Nihal Chand / Nisardin / Nuruddin / Tulchi Ram), (b) text–author–patron matches (Rasikapriya / Kavipriya / Gita Govinda / Bihari Satsai / Rasamanjari), (c) dated-work questions (1591 Bundi Ragamala at Chunar, 1605 Chawand Ragamala, 1628 Maru Ragini, 1652 Yuddha Kanda), (d) image-based identification using the picture-studies (Bani Thani, Chaugan Players, Maru Ragini, Aniruddha Singh equestrian), and (e) terminology MCQs on wasli, pichhwai, chitrashalain, gudarayi, Suratkhana. CUET 2024 carried a four-painter match; CUET 2025 included Bani Thani identification.