



Cover Page



## DEPICTION OF *ABHISARIKA NAYIKA* IN PAHARI MINIATURE PAINTINGS AND HER PICTORIAL VALUES

Dr. Kanu Priya

Assistant Professor, Department of History of Art (Faculty of Arts)  
Banaras Hindu University, Varanasi, Uttar Pradesh, India

### Abstract

Woman as a theme has remained favourite amongst artists. And thus artists chose the subject matter of *nayika-bheda* as they had abundant texts talking about them and poems speaking on *nayikas*, their pain of separation, enjoyment during union and many more. The present research gives a detail account to the artists who worked upon the very popular theme *nayika-bheda* focusing on the pictorial representation of *Abhisarika nayika* and her types belonging to three different places of Pahari region (Kangra, Basohli and Garhwal) depicted in three different situations. So this reading revolves around the pictorial elements that are used to create *nayika* painting like composition, line, space, shape, texture, distribution of lights and darks, various gestures and postures, decreasing or increasing sizes of figurative or architectural forms and applying variant colours that possess a deeper meaning behind etc. The paper elaborates the art of miniature artists from diverse regions who used these unnoticed elements as fusing factors in depicting *Abhisarika Nayika* and tried to take the viewer's eye along the painting's corners.

**Keywords:** Abhisarika, Miniature, Nayika, Pahari, Painting

“A woman, who due to love or infatuation is attracted to her lover and gives up modesty for going out to meet him, is called *Abhisarika*, a heroine secretly moving to her lover” (Ghosh 469).

“*hita tain kai mada madana tain piya son milai ju jaai  
so kahiye Abhisarika barani trividhi banaayi*”

(Coomaraswamy 25)

A woman who knows how and when to do *abhisaran* or convergence, can only play the role of *Abhisarika*. A classification of different kinds of women who goes out to meet their lovers has been given by several sources such as *Bharata's Natyashastra* and his successors of dramaturgy, *Kama-shastra* texts on erotic and whole *Kavya shastra* tradition of poetics which “resulted in many different typologies of *nayikas* being variously classified” (Hawley, Stratton, and Wulff 91). *Abhisarika* has been seen beautifully painted in Pahari paintings. And thus *Abhisarika* who represents the aroused *nayika* appears most frequently in Kangra art. The Kangra artist uses the well knit phrases written for her to portray a love-driven *nayika* who is rushing against all probabilities to meet her *nayaka* in very beautiful manner. She has been depicted with her common and renowned characteristic of wearing the dark coloured *dupatta* or a veil generally blue, revealing deeper levels of her love. Beautifully ornamented she walks with elegance, sometimes shown turning and looking back for a moment at the snake or something else, but do not get frightened by it. The chirping crickets and glittery lightning in the clouds complete the threatening darkness of the night complementing the *Abhisarika* in her audacious journey. In number of paintings she comes into sight as a pale figure that is painted in such a manner that she appears diminishing the dimness of a stormy, demon-infested night and glowing to draw the attraction of the spectator. In other few paintings she could appear calm and serene as the moonlight through which she journeys, resolves her task. Of course the outer landscape she passes through is a metaphor of the inner, the flimsy and fast beating heart of the *nayika*.

The literatures analyzed the real feelings of love and organized the central character *nayika* on basis of her relation to the lover, her passion and power and depth of love, expression and experience into various types. These



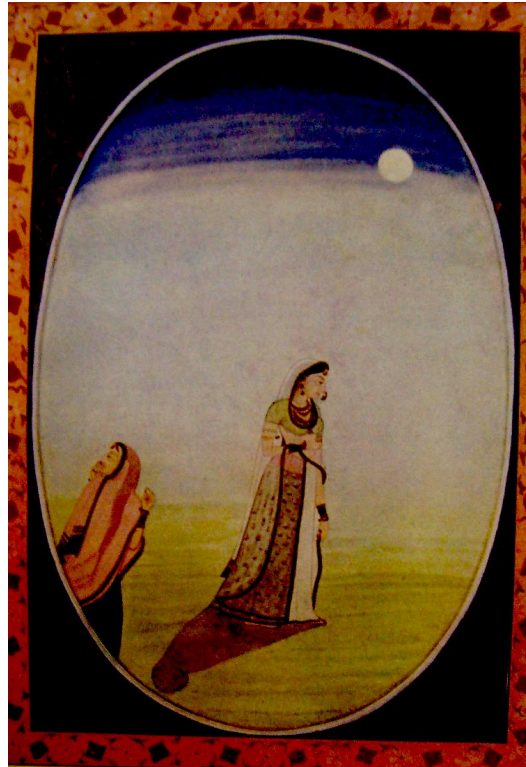
Cover Page



DOI: <http://ijmer.in.doi./2022/11.12.20.3.4>  
[www.ijmer.in](http://www.ijmer.in)

Digital Certificate of Publication: [www.ijmer.in/pdf/e-CertificateofPublication-IJMER.pdf](http://www.ijmer.in/pdf/e-CertificateofPublication-IJMER.pdf)

typologies or categories were given appropriate names and thus a categorization of *nayikas* emerged through the literatures on the basis of their birth, age, physical and sexual characteristics, behaviour, nature and situation and many more. *Abhisarika* is the one who has been categorized according to her meeting time too, the time she goes out to meet her beloved. Three of these types are: *Jyotsnabhisarika*, *Divabhisarika*, *Tamobhisarika* (Rahi, *Pahari Miniature* 176). Pahari School developed and flourished during 17th-19th centuries stretching from Basohli, Mankot, Nurpur, Chamba, Kangra, Guler, Mandi, and Garhwal regions. "Each one produced striking differences within the genre, from the bold, intense Basohli Painting, which originated in Basohli in Jammu and Kashmir, to the delicate, lyrical Kangra paintings, and finally to the poetic, cinematic depictions in Mola Ram's Garhwali Paintings" (Pahari Painting). Interesting is noticing the appearance of one particular *nayika* like *Abhisarika*, belonging to three different places of Pahari region (Kangra, Basohli and Garhwal) depicted in three different situations i.e. when she goes out on a bright moonlit night to meet her lover and is named as *Jyotsnabhisarika* or *Suklabhisarika*, when she goes out in the day light and is named as *Divabhisarika* and when she goes in the darkness of the night to meet him and is called as *Krishnabhisarika*.



**Figure 1**  
*Suklabhisarika Nayika, Quest for the Lover*  
in Moonlight, *Bihari Sat Sai*, Kangra,  
(Pahari) Himachal Pradesh

*Jyotsnabhisarika* or *Suklabhisarika Nayika*: One who goes out in goes out on a bright moonlit night to meet her lover.

Kangra *Suklabhisarika* from *Bihari Sat Sai*, is clothed in white to vague her existence. This painting is an illustration of the *doha* of *Bihari* in which he describes the beauty of *nayika* who goes out on a bright moonlit night to meet her lover.

जुबति जोन्ह मैं मिलि गई नैकु न होति लखाइ। सौधे कैँ डौरैं लगी अली चली सँग जाइ ॥315॥

(Black Peacock(Bihari Sat Sai))



Cover Page



DOI: <http://ijmer.in.doi./2022/11.12.20.3.4>  
[www.ijmer.in](http://www.ijmer.in)

Digital Certificate of Publication: [www.ijmer.in/pdf/e-CertificateofPublication-IJMER.pdf](http://www.ijmer.in/pdf/e-CertificateofPublication-IJMER.pdf)



Detail of Figure 1

The verse says that *Suklabhisarika* wearing a white costume is shining so much like the moonlight that she is not even visible and overlooked when seen with the white moon. Hence her *sakhi* holding the thread of fragrance-taking the support of the fragrance of her body (back and forth) went with her. Shown at the top left of the picture here, *nayika* is going out in the moonlight followed by her *sakhi*. The lady is shown with her shadow for which the direction of moon above her is perfectly placed. The *nayika* portrayed here seems quite simple and somber yet she appears sumptuous and opulent, which makes artist skillful. She appears sensuous with a large bosom, raised breasts, thin waist like a tigress, etc. The jewellery included precious necklaces of multiple strings, armlets, bangles, ornate headgear, earrings and a big nose ring that is illustrated projecting out because she is in full profile face with her right side appearing. Artist has felt essential to paint big round nose ring half visible, just to give the viewer an idea of her status. All the ornaments are of golden colour which is absolutely opposite and different from those of Basohli that had white dotted pearl like jewellery with less or no gold. With a very few pigments used hereby, artist extracted the essence of mood and emotions of a love pining woman which unlike the other *Abhisarika* discussed in literatures and portrayed in bulk appears tranquil walking elegantly in moon light. Soft green and pale blue colours are used for her costume and in contrast, the same palette is used by the painter to fill in the background with green grassy land below and bluish at top for the sky. The middle white tone goes with the veil of the lady and small round and bright full moon with her glowing face. The way she draped herself and carrying her clothes including the transparent veil from the front holding with the right hand in royal fashion gives the hint of her class. Her body is beautiful sensual, slender, refined, introverted and stylized, that evoke a tender eroticism, providing a new canon of feminine beauty. There is delicacy in drawing which is noticeable in the features of *nayika* having nose almost in line with the forehead, the long eyes, narrow and sharp chin and hair treated as flat mass. Emphasis is given on the graceful flowing rhythmic lines and beautiful female forms. The soft treatment of palette is the characteristic of Kangra style. The style of the paintings were of poetical types known for the most charming paintings and one of the greatest style in Indian art which is clearly noticeable. The artist gave visual expression to the poetry with the help of rhythmic lines and glowing colours.



Cover Page



DOI: <http://ijmer.in.doi./2022/11.12.20.3.4>  
[www.ijmer.in](http://www.ijmer.in)

Digital Certificate of Publication: [www.ijmer.in/pdf/e-CertificateofPublication-IJMER.pdf](http://www.ijmer.in/pdf/e-CertificateofPublication-IJMER.pdf)



Detail of Figure 1

Using minimal use of props and flat background, painter successfully brought charisma in the whole scene and cleverly centralizing the *navika* trapped the attraction of the spectator on her. The maiden at the corner is half portrayed which is providing a perspective and viewpoint to the picture. From the oval cutout, she emerges in very ordinary dress having checked pattern in the lower garment and pink *odhni* covering full body. She is looking behind that suggest her attentiveness and deliberation for her lady because she seems sure of the *navika*'s present condition and state of lost in the thoughts of her lover. The maid chases her only due to sweet fragrance of her and wanders as if brightness of the light itself is going away to seek out *navika*'s beloved.



Figure 2

*Divabhisarika Nayika*, Rasamanjari, Basohli, Pahari, Nurpur, A.D. 1695,  
Collection- Dogra Art Gallery, Jammu



Cover Page



**Divabhisarika Nayika:** One who goes out in the day light, wears any clothes and pretends to go to draw water or perform her daily chores but actually she goes to meet her beloved.

“Keshavadasa described numerous places and occasions where lovers meet like the homes of a servant or companion, or other lonely house, other places like forests or other forlorn places that are unseen by others” (Bahadur, *The Rasikapriya* xxv). And here too as the name suggests *Divabhisarika Nayika* who is generally *praudha* or mature *nayika* and boldly takes step to move out by giving some false reasons to their family and friends to meet at their pre-decided trysts and make them fool.



Detail of Figure 2

In the painting *nayika* is centralized in complete self-belief and confidence against a faded pale yellow background. She is overlooking the things other than her lover’s place and thus the painter applied dull background to suggest disregarded surrounding and give highlight to her image and the *nayika*’s place only. She is beautifully dressed in splendid gold coloured *peshwaz*, a tight fitting *pyjami* with the pattern of small *buti* on it in contrast of plain upper garment and a golden transparent veil worn elegantly across her shoulders which recommends her status of high-born lady. The manner she carries her costumes, heavy jewelleryes and her body, she appears mature and well-bred woman. She is adorned with the pearl ornaments studded with beetle wing like cases that looks like the precious gems, a specialty of Basohli jewels. All Basohli features of woman can be seen here in the *nayika* with receding face, long nose, petal shaped large eyes, small red lips and opened hair. Swollen bosoms suggest her passion and lust that arose due to the feeling of union. She is wearing ornament in toe finger which means that she is married woman. In Indian traditional and cultural society it is very difficult for a married woman to leave home for some other man, but boldness appears in her attitude and gesticulation. Else she would have hidden her face through veil but this daring stance can be something else too, like instead of boldness it can be her trick of behaving normal so that nobody can doubt her. Whatever it is but artist characterized her very smartly and cleverly.



Cover Page



DOI: <http://ijmer.in.doi./2022/11.12.20.3.4>  
[www.ijmer.in](http://www.ijmer.in)

Digital Certificate of Publication: [www.ijmer.in/pdf/e-CertificateofPublication-IJMER.pdf](http://www.ijmer.in/pdf/e-CertificateofPublication-IJMER.pdf)



Detail of Figure 2

On the other side *nayaka* stands in the woods is proportionately shorter than the *nayika* to propose the distance in the picture and diminish its flatness. Because of this it appears as if he is standing far away from the lady's residence. He is holding lotus flower in his hand which is very commonly seen in Basohli *Rasamanjari*. In front of him is a short figure of *Kamadeva*, who is rarely seen in miniature paintings. But here artist found his presence so important that instead of showing him symbolically, he gave him significant space in front of *nayaka* stretching his bow of love and lust with his arrow towards the *nayika*. Similarly in the painting, *nayika's* raised hand suggests her conversation with *nayaka* but her gaze does not match with that. It means either she is murmuring herself or preparing dialogues on the way for her meet or may be this is the action just to make people fool of her reason of going out.

The blue flat colour is applied by the painter to fill in the band above which is the horizon and very minute dotted stars are placed surrounding a moon at top. This is not painted as night scene, in fact it's a day. But the artist through the help of a misty horizon above with moon and stars probably want to suggest the feeling of the *nayaka*, who is pleading the sun to set and dimness to take place with the starry night and full moon for its luminosity to create mood during union. Trees also overshadowing the sky at the top right corner and rising and falling land painted at the background diminish the flat pictorial space. The artist not only focused on the above section but also showed richness in its flowering tree types with foliage in greater variety and of different colours appearing either lively, fully developed or in tiny sizes. Greenery helps in creating soothing surrounding for the meeting. The lush green shrubberies beautify the background and it is not overshadowing the main scene, in fact, fulfilling the demand of the composition. The densely grown trees that bear dark or light green leaves of various sizes and some having drooping leaves in bunches, or of mango with broad leaves, others in circular shape like *palash* etc create a look of woods or the grove which is sought from time immemorable in history of love by the lovers for secret meeting.



Detail of Figure 2

Three fourth of the scene is covered by the architectural setting to give it importance as Basohli paintings gave emphasis on both architecture and nature. Like Basohli borders, this painting has strong red border on to which the architectural components overlap. The architectural setting is again same followed by the artist as others did for Basohli buildings, double storey *haveli* with towers, half opened door, ornated canopies, trellis windows and plinths projecting out in monstrous shapes. Use of primary colours like red, orange, green and blue have been used to fill the components of the building with designs in contrasting colours. In the whole composition lot of Mughal elements have been introduced hereby like the white wall reflecting the marble look, the creepers and fauna motifs as the designs on the building sections to give the impression of inlay work and the central position of the *nayika*, which is in Mughal garment from top to the bottom. The exterior wall is painted white and decorated in Mughal fashion pattern on it of foliage. In the minor details, while scrutinizing the painting some continuity of Mughal style under Basohli influence have been observed.



Detail of Figure 2



Cover Page

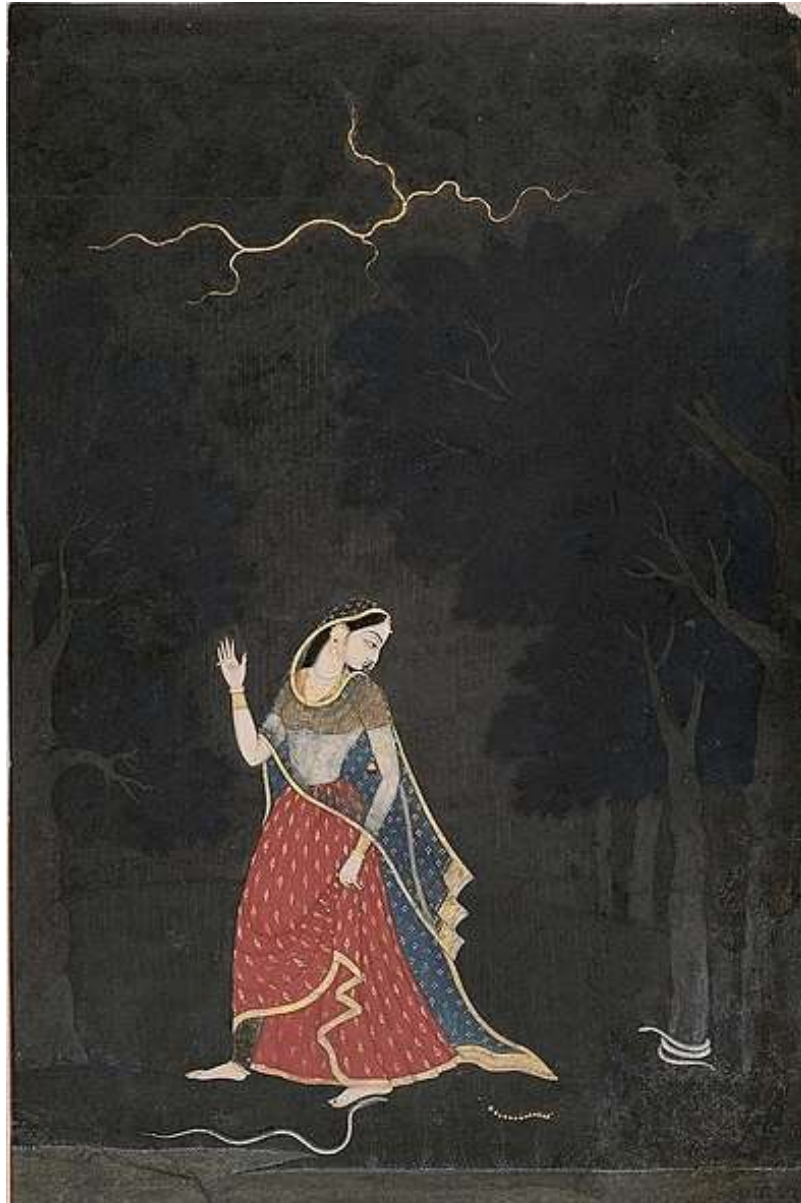


Figure 3

*Krishnabhisarika Nayika* (b), Attribution to *Mola Ram* of Garhwal was made by a descendant of the artist, *Balak Ram Sah*, circa 1800, 24.6 x 16.2 cm, Opaque watercolour and gold on paper, Collection- Ross-Coomaraswamy at MFA

***Krishnabhisarika Nayika***

Ananda Coomaraswamy remarks about Kangra *nayika* that:





Cover Page



“The heroine’s eyes are large as any lotus flower, her tresses fall in heavy plaits, her breasts are firm and high, her thighs are full and smooth, her hands like rosy flowers, her gait as dignified as any elephant’s and her demeanour demure”. (Kangra Arts Promotion Society (KAPS))



Detail of Figure 3



Detail of Figure 3

This *Krishnahisarika Nayika* is attributed to the artist *Mola Ram* who initiated for the Garhwal branch of the Kangra School of painting. Special features of the Garhwal School can be observed here like fully developed bosoms, thin waist, soft twisted and well shaped face, thin eye brows drawn with delicate line drawing and definite nose bridge with a well proportioned thin nose. The *nayika* here is a fusion of confidence and boldness and the conceptualization of ideal beauty and romance. She walks between two groups of trees and looks down over her shoulder with head turned back to watch the snake that is coiled around the base of a tree at the right. Another snake appears at her feet which is not seen by the *nayika* in hasten and is about to be trampled under her feet. Above there is a multi-forked bolt of lightning which is again Pahari characteristic followed by the artists to create dramatic effect in the painting. It is a blend of poetry and passion, an incarnation of the Indian artist’s attitude towards love. In texts it is mentioned that she blames her anklets and bangles making noise, and thus removes them. And thus artist painted her golden anklet placed near her feet to show that she removed it intentionally or which has apparently just fallen off.

These miniature paintings of *Abhisarika Nayika* of three different places of Pahari region depicts ladies in various attires and jewellery, their social status, regional cultures, and local landscapes with a variety of flora and animals, among other things, demonstrating the artists' awareness of and grasp of the regional elements. These small sized artworks are metaphorically rich and symbolic. They offer depth in their intricacies and deeper hidden meanings, which compel careful but attentive investigation. And the creators provided life to these vibrant verbal images, transferring their hues to the theme. The painters gave the world of art in this way a wonderful new dimension. The overall study tries to reveal that the miniatures of *abhisarika nayika* selected from different regions provide a new informative and illustrative study of artistic adventures which tries to give the evidence of artistic brilliant workmanship that created a world of artistic excellence and maintained the charms and elegance of different regions and their culture.



Cover Page



## References

- Bahadur, K.P. The Rasikapriya of Keshavadasa. Ist. New Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass, 1972. Print.
- Black Peacock- Indian art and Vedic philosophy. n.d. Gaudiya Vedanta Heritage Foundation presentation in association with Goloka Productions. English. 16 July 2014.
- Beach Milo, Goswamy B.N., Eberhard Fischer). *Masters of Indian Painting 1100-1900*. University of Washington Press. 2011. Print.
- Coomaraswamy, Ananda K. The Eight Nayikas. 1st. New Delhi: Munshiram Manoharlal Publishers Pvt. Ltd., 2000. Print.
- Beach Milo, Goswamy B.N., Eberhard Fischer). *Masters of Indian Painting 1100-1900*. University of Washington Press. 2011. Print.
- Ghosh, Manmohan. The Natyashastra: A treatise on Hindu Dramaturgy and Histrionics ascribed to Bharat Muni. Trans. Manmohan Ghosh. Issue no. 1559. Vol. II. Calcutta: Asiatic society of Bengal, Calcutta, 1951. Print.
- Hawley, John Stratton and Donna Marie Wulff, The Divine Consort: Rādhā and the Goddesses of India. New Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass, 1982. Print.
- *Kangra Arts Promotion Society (KAPS)*. 2014. English. 11 November 2014. <<http://kangraarts.org> kangra-paintings/>.
- *Pahari Painting*. n.d. English. 11 January 2015. <<http://www.husainiarts.com/pahari-school-paintings-including-kangra-bhasoli-nurpur.html>>.
- Rahi, Onkar. Pahari Miniature Painting: Rasamanjari The Nectarous Ocean. New Delhi: National Publishing House, 2008. Print.