

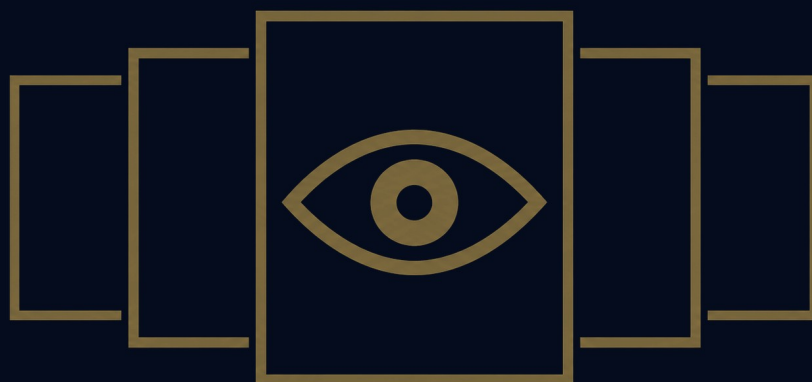


THE EYE OF THE BEHOLDER

INDIAN MINIATURES • CATALOGUE NOTE

THE POETRY OF MONSOON LONGING

A Kishangarh Baramasa Painting of the Month of Āṣāḍha
Inscribed with a Savaiyā Attributed to Matiram



THE EYE OF THE BEHOLDER

कालिदास • मेघदूतम्

तस्मिन्नद्रौ कतिचिदबला-विप्रयुक्तः स कामी
नीत्वा मासान् कनकवलय-भ्रंशरिक्तप्रकोष्ठः।
आषाढस्य प्रथमदिवसे मेघमाश्लिष्टसानुं
वप्रक्रीडापरिणतगजप्रेक्षणीयं ददर्श॥ २॥

तस्य स्थित्वा कथमपि पुरः कौतुकाधानहेतो-
रन्तर्बाष्पश्चिरमनुचरो राजराजस्य दध्यौ।
मेघालोके भवति सुखिनोऽप्यन्यथावृत्ति चेतः
कण्ठाश्लेषप्रणयिनि जने किं पुनर्दूरसंस्थे॥ ३॥

TRANSLITERATION

*tasminn adrau katicid abalā-viprayuktaḥ sa kāmī
nītvā māsān kanakavalaya-bhraṁśarikta-prakoṣṭhaḥ |
āṣāḍhasya prathamadivase megham āśliṣṭasānuṁ
vaprakrīḍāpariṇatagajaprekṣaṇīyaṁ dadarśa || 2 ||*

*tasya sthitvā katham api puraḥ kautukādhānahetoḥ
antarbāṣpaś ciram anucaro rājarājasya dadhyau |
meghāloke bhavati sukhino'py anyathāvṛtti cetaḥ
kaṇṭhāśleṣapraṇayini jane kiṁ punar dūrasaṁsthe || 3 ||*

MEGHADŪTA, PŪRVAMEGHA 2-3



THE EYE OF THE BEHOLDER

महीनो आषाढको ॥ सर्वेया ॥ पीतम आये प्रभात प्रिया मय क्यात
 ठीदगसों दगजोरे ॥ आये है आदर कै मतिराम कहै मृदु बैनसुधा
 यबोरे ॥ ऐसे सयानसुभायन हीसों मिली मन भावनसों मन भोरे ॥ मा
 तगोजानित बै सतिया अगिया कीतनी न छटी जग कोरे ॥ ४ ॥



The Poetry of Monsoon Longing

*A Kishangarh Baramasa Painting of the Month of Āṣāḍha. Inscribed with a Savaiyā
Attributed to Matiram*

Author: Dr. Anirban Sadhu. www.anirbansadhu.com

**Kishangarh, Rajasthan
Circa 1820
Opaque pigments and gold on paper
23 × 15 cm**

Introduction

Among the great poetic traditions of Indian painting, few possess the emotional richness, lyrical elegance, and enduring collector appeal of the Baramasa tradition — the “Songs of the Twelve Months.” Combining poetry, music, romantic longing, seasonal symbolism, and devotional sentiment, Baramasa imagery occupied a central place in the visual imagination of North India for centuries. The present painting belongs to that refined world.

Executed in the highly recognizable idiom of the Kishangarh school, the work depicts the month of Āṣāḍha (Ashad), the beginning of the monsoon season, accompanied by an inscription in Braj Bhasha identified as a savaiyā associated with the celebrated poet Matiram. More than merely a decorative miniature, the painting represents a sophisticated synthesis of literature and image — a visual embodiment of poetic emotion rendered through the elegant aesthetic vocabulary of late Rajput court painting.

The work preserves many of the defining visual ideals that made Kishangarh painting one of the most beloved and internationally recognizable schools of Indian art:

- elongated feminine beauty,
- lyrical vegetation,
- musical atmosphere,
- poeticized landscape,
- and emotional refinement.

While executed during the later flowering of the Kishangarh tradition rather than its earliest “golden age,” the painting remains a highly attractive and intellectually engaging example of the enduring vitality of the Kishangarh aesthetic. It stands as a compelling collector’s object at the intersection of:

- poetry,
- painting,
- seasonality,
- music,
- romance,
- and Vaishnava court culture.

I. Visual Description of the Painting

The painting is vertically composed within a deep red border framing a monsoon landscape animated by female figures, peacocks, flowering vegetation, and darkening skies. At the top appears an inscription panel in Devanagari identifying the month and containing the associated poetic verse.

The scene unfolds within a carefully orchestrated garden landscape.

At the center stands the principal heroine beneath a stylized flowering tree. Her body curves gently in a posture suggestive of emotional absorption or romantic anticipation. One arm rises gracefully toward the foliage, while the other rests near the trunk. Around her gather female companions carrying musical instruments and engaging in song.

The emotional atmosphere is immediately apparent.

This is not a scene of dramatic action. Rather, it is a painting of mood — precisely the central aim of the Baramasa tradition. The gathering of women, the musical instruments, the peacocks, the

approaching monsoon clouds, and the lush vegetation all function together as visual metaphors for emotional awakening.

The peacocks are especially important.

Distributed rhythmically throughout the composition, they appear:

- in the foreground,
- along the ascending pathways,
- and near the distant horizon.

Their placement creates visual movement through the landscape while simultaneously reinforcing the monsoon theme. In Indian aesthetics, the peacock is among the most potent symbols of the rainy season. Its cry announces the arrival of rain and intensifies the emotional charge associated with longing and romantic expectation.

The palette is remarkably harmonious. Soft monsoon greens dominate the composition, balanced by muted pinks, pale saffrons, cool greys, and deep blue-black water in the foreground. Unlike later commercialized Rajput paintings that often rely on harsh pigments and overcrowded compositions, this work retains tonal restraint and atmospheric coherence.

The landscape itself is highly stylized yet emotionally persuasive. Trees rise rhythmically like architectural forms. The distant hills recede gently beneath bands of darkening clouds. Flowering creepers frame the figures delicately. Water occupies the foreground like a reflective threshold separating the viewer from the poetic world within.

The female figures preserve the unmistakable physiognomy associated with the Kishangarh school - elongated lotus eyes, refined noses, sharply arched eyebrows, graceful necks and attenuated proportions.

These are not portraits in a realistic sense. Rather, they belong to the idealized feminine archetype developed in Kishangarh painting during the eighteenth century and perpetuated well into the nineteenth.

Most importantly, the painting succeeds atmospherically.

It evokes humidity, fragrance, music, anticipation, and emotional delicacy — exactly the qualities expected of an Āṣāḍha Baramasa painting.

II. Attribution to the Kishangarh School

The attribution of the present work to the Kishangarh school rests upon several highly characteristic stylistic features.

Most immediately recognizable is the treatment of the female figure. The elongated eye extending dramatically toward the temple is among the defining signatures of Kishangarh painting. Likewise, the narrow chin, the curved profile, the delicate fingers, and the refined bodily posture - all derive from the visual vocabulary established in the eighteenth century under Raja Savant Singh and the painter Nihal Chand.

The lyrical treatment of landscape further supports the attribution.

Kishangarh painters developed a highly poetic approach to nature. Trees, clouds, lakes, and gardens were not rendered naturalistically but emotionally. Landscape became an extension of rasa — aesthetic feeling. The present work preserves this tradition beautifully.

The rhythmic arrangement of figures and peacocks is also highly characteristic. Kishangarh compositions often privilege elegance and musicality over dramatic narrative. The present painting unfolds almost like a visual poem.

The decorative sophistication of the border, inscription panel, and palette similarly align with later Kishangarh atelier production.

III. Why the Painting Does Not Belong to the Earliest Nihal Chand Tradition

The painting clearly inherits the visual language associated with the great Kishangarh masters, yet it belongs to a later phase of the tradition.

This distinction is important art historically, though it should not be understood negatively.

The finest eighteenth-century Kishangarh paintings associated directly with Nihal Chand and the court of Savant Singh possess extraordinarily refined lines, highly nuanced facial modeling, translucent pigment application, complex spatial sophistication, and an almost ethereal spiritual intensity.

Those masterpieces represent one of the supreme achievements of Indian painting and today reside largely in museums and major collections.

The present work belongs instead to the mature continuation of that tradition during the nineteenth century.

Several features suggest this dating:

- slightly firmer and more decorative line work,
- somewhat flatter spatial construction,
- greater emphasis on ornamental harmony,
- and more stylized vegetation patterns.

Yet these later works possess their own considerable appeal.

Indeed, many nineteenth-century Kishangarh paintings are among the most attractive objects available to modern collectors because they preserve:

- the lyricism of the earlier school,
 - decorative elegance,
 - emotional accessibility,
 - and refined poetic atmosphere
- while remaining comparatively attainable within the market.

The present work exemplifies precisely that category.

IV. The History of Kishangarh Painting

The Kishangarh school emerged in Rajasthan during the seventeenth century but achieved its greatest artistic flowering during the reign of Raja Savant Singh (1699–1764), who ruled under the poetic name Nagari Das.

Savant Singh was not merely a ruler but also a poet, aesthete, devotee, musician, and patron of extraordinary refinement. Under his patronage, Kishangarh developed a uniquely lyrical artistic identity deeply influenced by Vaishnava Krishna devotion and Braj poetry. At the center of this artistic flowering stood the painter Nihal Chand.

Nihal Chand transformed Kishangarh painting into one of the most poetic schools of Indian art. His works depicting Radha and Krishna in dreamlike landscapes became iconic. The idealized feminine type associated with Kishangarh — often identified with Bani Thani — became one of the most recognizable visual archetypes in Indian painting.

The influence of Kishangarh spread widely. Its combination of romantic refinement, devotional symbolism, musical composition, and emotional atmosphere ensured its lasting popularity long after the decline of political patronage.

Today, Kishangarh paintings remain among the most desirable categories of Rajput painting internationally.

V. Baramasa: The Poetry of the Twelve Months

The term Baramasa literally means “twelve months.”

In Indian literary tradition, Baramasa poetry describes the emotional moods associated with each month of the year. These poems often center upon:

- separation,
- longing,
- reunion,
- changing seasons,
- and the psychological effects of nature upon human emotion.

The tradition stretches back centuries and flourished in:

- Sanskrit literature,
- Braj Bhasha poetry,
- folk traditions,
- and Vaishnava devotional literature.

Each month possesses distinct emotional associations.

Āṣāḍha, the month represented here, marks the arrival of monsoon clouds.

It is traditionally associated with longing, anticipation, erotic awakening, and emotional turbulence. The cry of peacocks, the smell of wet earth, and the darkening sky all intensify emotional experience.

One of the great literary influences on later Baramasa painting was Keshavdas, whose Rasikapriya became foundational for Rajput court aesthetics.

The Rasikapriya explored types of heroines, emotional states, romantic psychology, and the aesthetics of love. Its influence on Rajput painting cannot be overstated.

For example:

“बरसत मेघ चहुँ ओर घहराए
विरहिणी नैन नर भरि आए”

Translation:

*“Clouds gather heavily on every side;
The eyes of the longing heroine fill with tears.”*

Such poetry formed the emotional foundation of Baramasa painting.

VI. The Matiram Savaiyā and the Discovery of the Inscription

One of the most fascinating aspects of the present painting lies in the decipherment of its inscription.

Initially, the inscription appeared difficult to interpret due to the compact Devanagari script and the painterly rendering of the text. However, closer examination revealed:

- the month heading,
- the identification of the poetic metre as savaiyā,
- and strong correspondence with the poetic tradition of Matiram.

This discovery significantly elevates the painting’s literary importance.

The heading reads:

“महो आषाढक”

Meaning:

“The Month of Āṣāḍha”

The inscription itself appears substantially as follows:

प्रीतम आए प्रभात प्रिया, मुसक्याय उठी दृग सों दृग जोरै।
आगे है आदर कै 'मतिराम', कहै मृदु बैन सुधा रस बोरै॥
ऐसे सयान सुभायन हीं सों, मिली मनभावन सो मन मोरै।
मान गो जानि सुजान तवै, अंगिया की तनी न छुटी जब छोरै॥ ॥

Transliteration

Prītam āe prabhāt priyā, musakyāya uṭhī dṛg soṃ dṛg jorai |
Āge hvai ādar kai 'Matirām', kahai mṛḍu bain sudhā ras borai ||
Aise sayān subhāyan hīṃ soṃ, milī manbhāvan so man morai |
Mān go jāni sujān tavai, aṅgiyā kī tanī na chuṭī jab chorai ||

Translation

*"At dawn the beloved arrived; the lady rose smiling, joining her eyes with his.
 Stepping forward with graceful courtesy, says Matiram, she spoke soft words overflowing
 with nectar-like sweetness.
 Meeting such a wise and charming lover, her very heart became enchanted and
 overwhelmed with affection.
 Knowing well the delicate play of love and modesty, even when he embraced her closely, the
 knot of her bodice scarcely loosened."*

Literary Interpretation

This is a superb example of late Rīti-kāvya Braj poetry — elegant, sensual, psychologically refined, and deeply attentive to gesture and emotional nuance.

Several things make the verse particularly beautiful:

- The scene unfolds at dawn (प्रभात) — symbolizing emotional renewal and reunion.
- The joining of glances (दृग सौ दृग जोरै) is treated as emotionally significant, almost more intimate than physical touch.
- Matiram emphasizes refinement and cultivated femininity: the heroine welcomes the beloved not with overt passion, but with grace, sweetness, and controlled emotion.
- The final line is especially sophisticated: even in embrace, the heroine maintains modesty and composure — a classic Rīti ideal balancing desire with restraint.

The poem therefore belongs to the refined courtly aesthetic world that also produced Kishangarh painting itself:

- lyrical,
- romantic,
- aristocratic,
- emotionally intelligent,
- and aesthetically restrained rather than overtly dramatic.

It is precisely the kind of poetry that Rajput painters loved to visualize in Baramasa and Krishnaite miniature traditions. This is classic Rīti-kāvya poetry: elegant, refined, emotionally charged, and deeply concerned with gesture, glance, and emotional nuance.

VII. What Is a Savaiyā?

The savaiyā is a highly ornamented poetic metre popular in Braj Bhasha court poetry.

It was especially favored in Rajput courts, in Krishnaite literature, and in refined romantic poetry.

Unlike folk Baramasa verses, savaiyās are highly cultivated literary compositions intended for sophisticated audiences familiar with poetic ornament, emotional subtlety, and rasa theory.

The metre became closely associated with poets such as Matiram, Bihari, Dev, and Keshavdas.

The present inscription therefore places the painting within an elite literary culture rather than merely a decorative seasonal tradition.

VIII. Matiram and the Rīti Tradition

Matiram was among the important poets of the North Indian Rīti tradition. No other poet of Reet-Kaal has depicted the domestic vein as Matiram. He was the court poet of Aurangzeb and the King of

Bundi, Bhav Singh. He enjoyed the patronage of the King of Orchha, Swarup Singh, and King of Kumayun, Udyot Chandra's son Gyanachandra. His jurisdiction was Tikwanpur (Kanpur) and the language was Braj. His major compositions are Alankar Panchashika, Chhandasar Pingal, Barwai nayika Bhed, Matiram Satsai, Rasraj, Lalitha Lalabh and Sahityasara.

The Rīti period emphasized refinement, aesthetics, romantic psychology, and poetic ornamentation.

Matiram specialized in feminine emotion, romantic encounter, gesture, bodily movement and emotional intelligence. His poetry was ideally suited for miniature painting.

Indeed, the present painting may be understood as visualized poetry — the transformation of Braj literary culture into image.

IX. Baramasa Paintings in the Market

Baramasa paintings have become increasingly desirable among collectors of Indian miniatures.

Several factors contribute to this:

- strong literary associations,
- emotional atmosphere,
- identifiable seasonal themes,
- and exceptional decorative appeal.

Representative auction examples include:

- A Bundi Baramasa folio depicting Āṣāḍha sold through Sotheby's with estimates around USD 3,000–8,000.
- A Kota Baramasa painting linked to Keshavdas achieved substantially higher levels due to its literary significance.
- Important Pahari and Guler Baramasa series have achieved prices well into the tens of thousands of dollars.

Complete Baramasa sets are exceptionally rare.

Individual folios with identifiable inscriptions, strong condition, poetic atmosphere, and recognizable school attribution remain highly sought after.

X. Rarity, Value, and Market Position

The present painting occupies a particularly attractive position within the current market for Indian miniatures.

It combines recognizable Kishangarh aesthetics, poetic subject matter, identifiable literary inscription, decorative sophistication, and strong emotional atmosphere.

These qualities make it highly appealing both to seasoned collectors and to newer buyers entering the field of Indian painting. Comparable later Kishangarh paintings without literary significance may trade modestly.

However, the present work benefits substantially from the deciphered Matiram savaiyā, the Baramasa context, and the unusually harmonious monsoon composition.

A realistic market assessment today would likely place the work approximately within:

XI. The Future of the Indian Miniature Market

The market for Indian miniature painting has evolved dramatically over the past two decades.

Increasingly, collectors seek intimacy, craftsmanship, literary depth, and cultural authenticity. Indian miniatures offer all of these qualities.

Within this broader trend, Rajput paintings — especially Kishangarh works — have benefited from growing museum interest, expanded scholarship, international exhibitions, and increasing appreciation among younger collectors.

Importantly, collectors today increasingly value the atmosphere, emotional resonance, and decorative sophistication alongside strict questions of age or attribution.

Paintings such as the present work are therefore particularly well positioned.

They offer beauty, poetry, rarity, cultural depth, and excellent display qualities simultaneously.

As exceptional early Kishangarh masterpieces disappear increasingly into museums and major institutional collections, attractive literary nineteenth-century works preserving the core Kishangarh aesthetic are likely to become progressively more desirable.

Conclusion

This painting represents far more than a charming monsoon scene.

It is a poetic object, a literary object, a seasonal meditation, and a refined survivor of one of India's greatest painting traditions.

Through its graceful female figures, musical atmosphere, monsoon imagery, and Matiram inscription, the work preserves the emotional world of Rajput court culture with remarkable elegance.

It stands within the enduring legacy of Kishangarh painting — a tradition in which poetry became image, longing became landscape, and beauty itself became a form of devotion.

For the modern collector, such works possess a rare combination of qualities: historical significance, decorative sophistication, emotional immediacy, and intellectual richness.

The painting rewards prolonged contemplation. At first glance one sees elegance.

Then one begins to hear the music, the approaching rain, the cry of peacocks, the whispered poetry of Braj, and the quiet emotional world of monsoon longing that has animated Indian art and literature for centuries.

That enduring poetic atmosphere is the true achievement of the painting — and the reason why Kishangarh Baramasa works continue to captivate collectors, scholars, and connoisseurs across the world today.

THE EYE OF THE BEHOLDER



THE EYE OF THE BEHOLDER

THE EYE OF THE BEHOLDER

The Eye of the Beholder is a Switzerland-based maison devoted to the printed and painted heritage of the Indian subcontinent.

Through Indian miniature paintings, rare books, maps and works on paper, we bring scholarship, connoisseurship and attentive custodianship to cultural objects of exceptional beauty, history and intellectual life.

Each work is researched as an individual world—placing image beside poetry, material history beside cultural memory, and collecting beside care.

INDOPHILES • BIBLIOPHILES • ICONOPHILES

EYEOFTHEBEHOLDER.CH