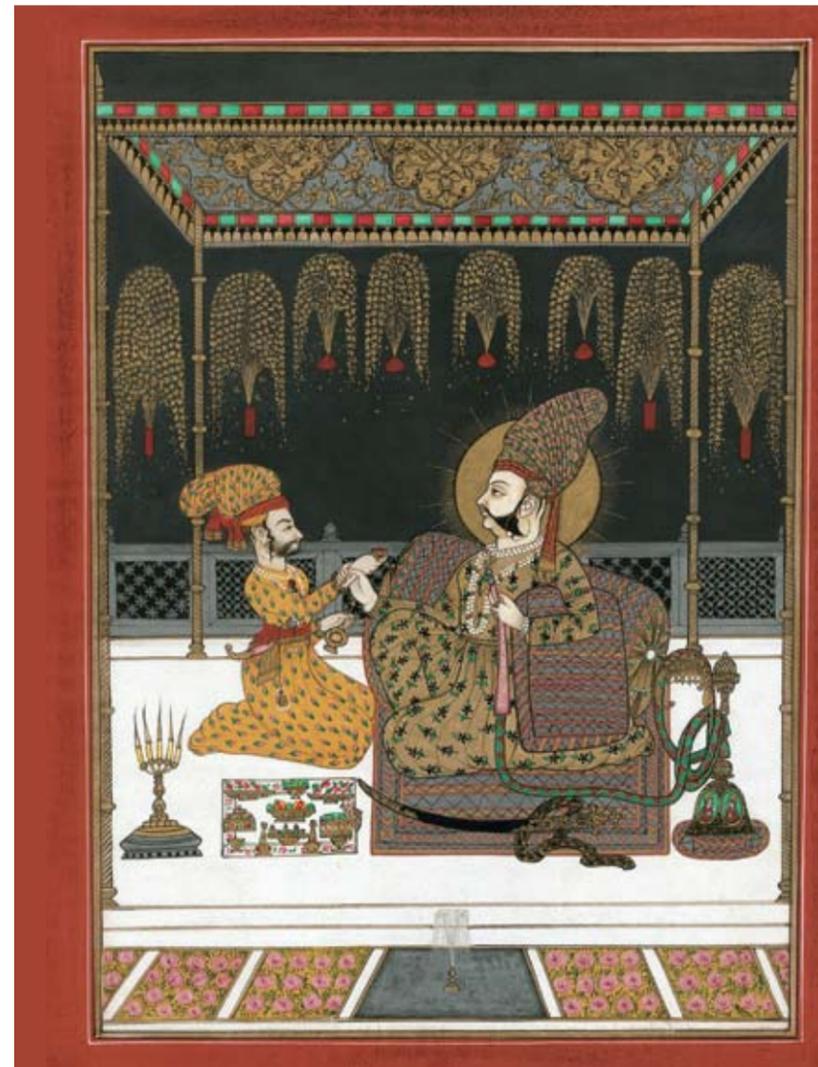
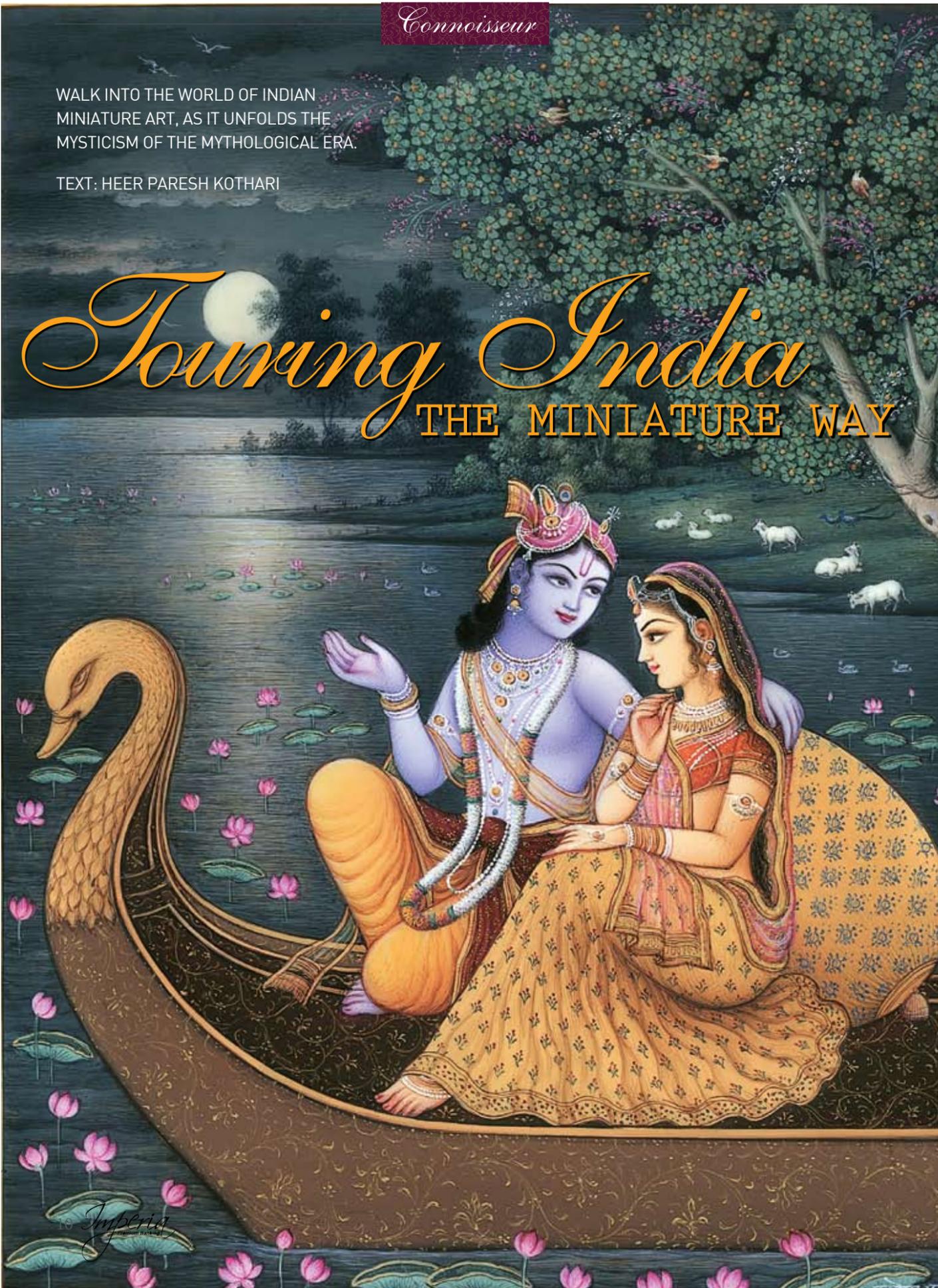


WALK INTO THE WORLD OF INDIAN MINIATURE ART, AS IT UNFOLDS THE MYSTICISM OF THE MYTHOLOGICAL ERA.

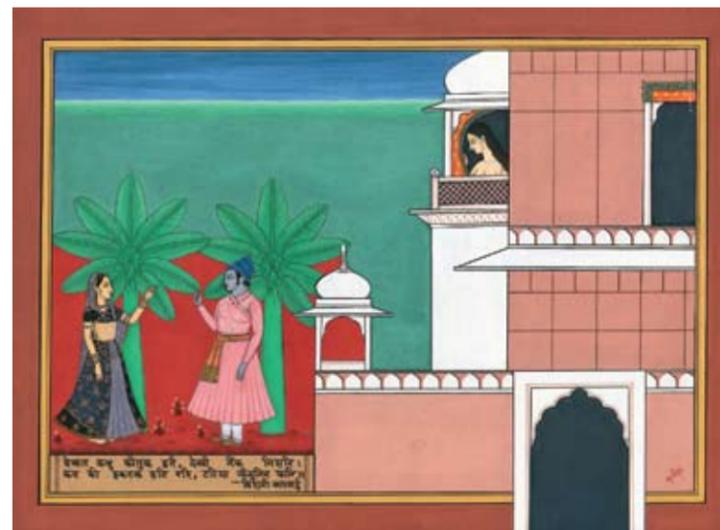
TEXT: HEER PARESH KOTHARI

# Touring India THE MINIATURE WAY



ARTISTS HAVE ENHANCED THEMSELVES BY DABBLING IN AN ARRAY OF TECHNIQUES, GIVING RISE TO A TERRIFIC RENDEZVOUS OF THOUGHT, COLOUR AND EXPERIENCE.

the art of Indian Miniatures), but the crux of the art form, even today, lies in the fineness and detail, as some paintings cannot be viewed with the naked eye. In several pockets of the country, we have come across artists who are as old as 76 years, practising this splendid form of art — an heirloom they acquired from their forefathers. Seniority is apparent in the



FACING PAGE: *Noka Vihar* by Kamlesh Shankar Sharma.  
ABOVE (LEFT): *Festival of Light* by Vijay Mukesh.  
ABOVE (RIGHT): Folio from *Bihari Satsai* by Kanhaiyalal Verma.

# I

ndian artists, with western influences, find themselves in international limelight today. They have enhanced themselves and their repute by dabbling in an array of techniques, giving rise to a terrific rendezvous of thought, colour and experience.

“With the impact of globalisation, our artists have been rooting upward by using traditional Indian art with contemporary leanings from time to time,” adds Tina Ambani of *Harmony Art Foundation*.

### UNDERSTANDING THE ROOTS

Traditional schools of art are spread across the country. In fact, there are many artists who have been practising traditional Indian art forms, over generations. “It is interesting to know how artists have kept our history and tradition alive over centuries,” states Nandini Singh of *Studio Napean*. Over a period of time the art form may have evolved (specially

richness of detail each painting encompasses. “It sometimes takes the artists weeks to conclude the work,” confirms Usha Bhatia, director of research, *Harmony Art India*. Many of the younger artists take up to the métier out of sheer passion for the art form. “The youth infuse a certain kind of freshness that has made the art of Indian miniatures more global in a way,” adds Nandini.

With various schools of art spread across India, we will be concentrating on five forms of Indian miniature art.

### THE MUGHAL SCHOOL OF ART

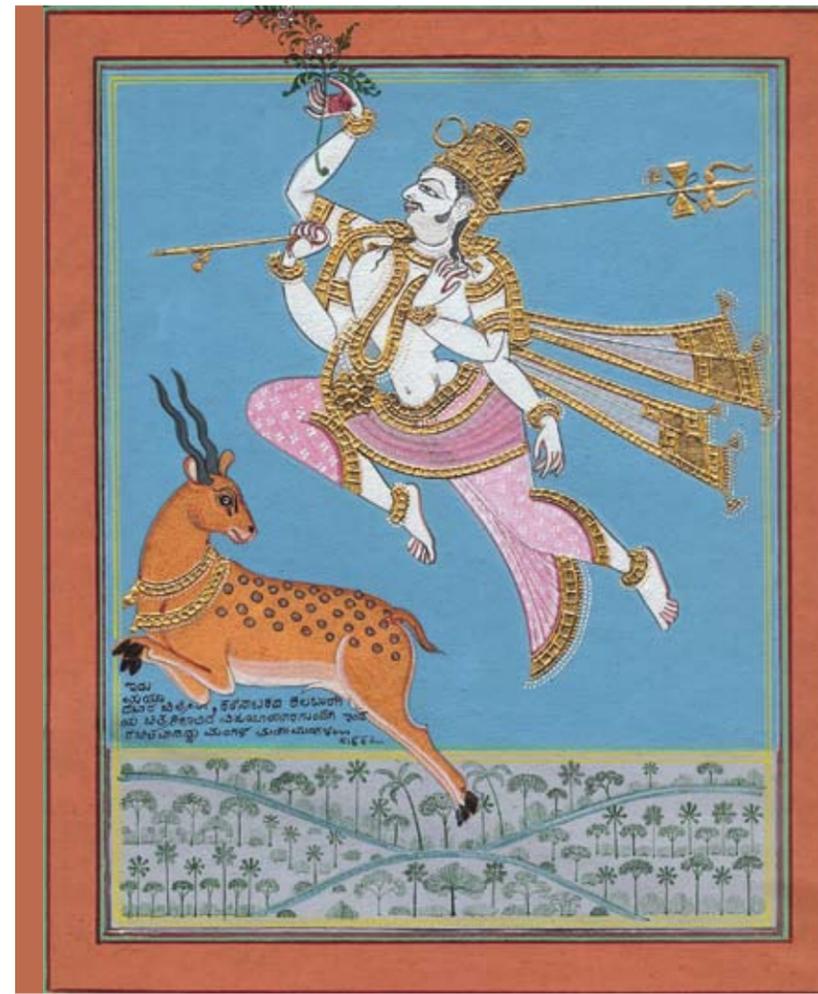
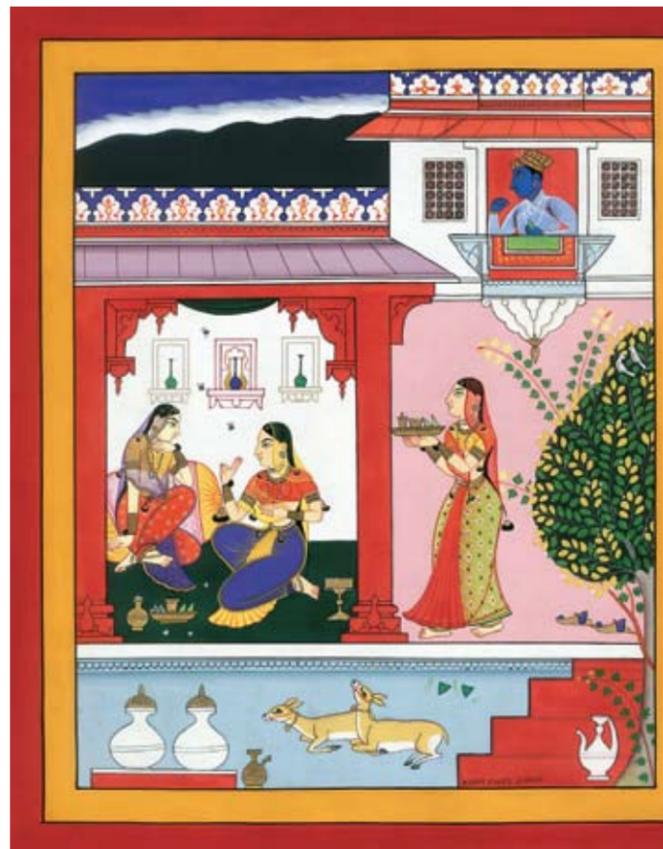
Starting with the Mughal Style, the name aptly suggests that this form blossomed during the 300-year rule of the Mughal dynasty. The illustrations on palm leaf graduated to paper during this era.



As history records show, the use of paper came into being during the 12th century AD; illustrations back then assumed a larger format. Dynasties such as the Khilji, Tughlaqs, Sayyids and Lodhi's witnessed the development of this art. However, we must not forget Humayun, son of Babur, who had taken the initiative of developing up an atelier by welcoming two celebrated Persian artists to his court. After Humayun's death, Akbar continued patronising art. In spite, of being consumed by literature and music, Akbar's inquisition in art was fired when a courtier read out the legendary story of Amir Hamza to him. His imagination fired him to commission the illustrations of the *Hamzanama*, to an artist. This way, Akbar's era saw a wealth of religious texts being converted to illustrated manuscripts. These included Hindu scriptures as well. The Mughal miniature art form is markedly acknowledged for the use of calligraphy. The elaborate use of flora and fauna in the borders is a typical trait of the Mughal art form. Artists usually documented court scenes, war scenes and festivals.

#### RAJPUT MINIATURE ART FORM

Rajput art developed concurrently with the Mughal art. The art was inspired by the Vaishnavite cult. Drawing inspiration from the Ragamala series,



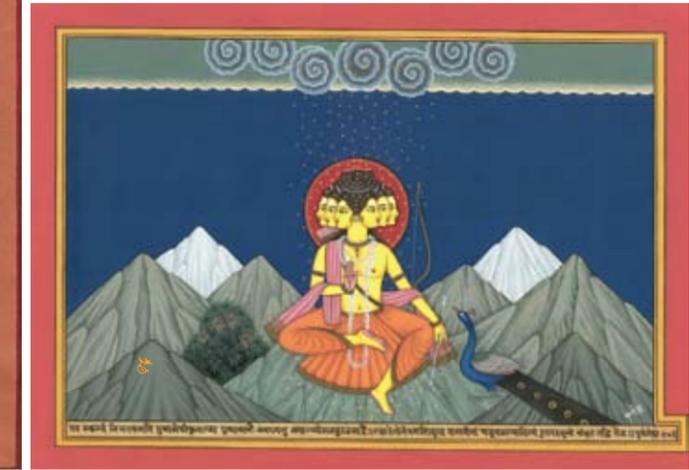
Baramasas, Rasikapriya, Gita Govinda and Radha Krishna Lila, artists incorporated the style of Mughal art form. The Rajput chieftains patronised artists who could not keep up to the imperial standards of the Mughals. In due course of time, these artists developed a style of their own. The Rajput style is categorised by the use of a bright colour palette. The figures have accentuated eyes, panoramic gardens, animals and birds that essentially included peacocks, and last, but not the least, peculiar dressing for both men and women. The art form developed in Mewar, and gradually spread in various pockets. The nitty-gritty of the Pahari School of Art is pretty much based on the Rajput School of Art.

#### PAHARI ART

As the name implies, this art form developed in the foothills of the Himalayas. The Rajput chieftains had a somewhat strong foothold here as well. The miniature art form developed in Basohli during the 17th and the 19th century AD. The first stage of the development saw primitive expressions, full of vitality and emotional intensity. It was only during the second phase that the art form was redefined and spread to other villages like Kangra, Guler, Chamba and Nurpur. The themes are mainly inspired by religious texts like Mahabharata, Ramayana, Bhagwad Gita and the Shiv Purana.

#### DECCAN ART

In Deccan India, art flourished during the 9th century AD after the schism of the Bahmani Kingdom. The artists in the Golconda region worked on a unique style, which was inspired by the Persian style rather than the Mughal style. "Miniatures have a long history in Deccan India. They can be dated back as early as the 9th century. One interesting aspect of miniature art in the Deccan was that they were mainly illustrated as *Gangifa* (card games). The few who own these priceless pieces would consider themselves fortunate," adds Oez Yasin, *Arivar Art Consultants*.



FACING PAGE (ABOVE): Folio from Gita Govinda by Jai Shankar Sharma.

FACING PAGE (BELOW): Folio from Rasikapriya by Hukamchand Sharma.

ABOVE (LEFT): *Vayu* by Vijay Hagargundgi.

ABOVE (RIGHT): *Meghdoot - Kartikeya* by Kanhaiyalal Verma

An inlay of 24-carat gold, and the use of precious and semi-precious stones, forms an inevitable part of Deccan art. Deities and rulers of the land play a prominent role in these paintings, as they occupy a higher pedestal. The primary subjects are exquisitely clad in gold and jewels. The most important feature of Deccan art is that the figures appear head-on; the ear lobe of every figure is very distinct.

#### RUDIMENTS

Traditionally, artists painted on a variety of media like wood, ivory, palm leaves and paper, using mineral colours, or colours sought from natural fruit and vegetable pigments. "In spite of having access to better media, and brighter colours, artists still opt for rudiments, retaining the aura of this age-old culture," opines Nandini.

It does not take time to do away with something priceless, but it takes ages to acquire something natural that can be comprehended and termed as priceless. 🌸