



Dhola-Maru in the Mewar Style: A Study of Sahibdin's Painting

Dr. Ritambra Saxena¹, Dr. Saroj Bhargava²

1. Principal, Junior High School, Basic Education Council, U.P.

2. Former Principal, Baikunthi Devi Girls College, Agra and Director, Lalit Kala Academy, Agra, U.P.

Dr. Bhimrao Ambedkar University, Agra, U.P. INDIA

DOI : <https://doi.org/10.5281/zenodo.18647012>

ARTICLE DETAILS

Research Paper

Accepted: 24-01-2026

Published: 10-02-2026

Keywords:

*Dhola-Maru, Mewar,
Marwar, Bundi,
Kishangarh*

ABSTRACT

This paper looks at a miniature painting of the Mewar style by the great artist Sahibdin circa 1920 of the famous Rajasthani lovers Dhola and Maru in a desert scenery. Although, at first, it seems to be a romantic scene, the piece of art carefully incorporates the aspects of folklore, symbolism, and sophisticated Rajput decorations. One of the most popular folk stories in Rajasthan, the Dhola-Maru story describes the adventures and the meeting of two childhood lovers who were separated by circumstances. With the help of this story, the theme of love, perseverance, and victory reverberates with the experience of desert communities. This oral tradition is visually reinterpreted in Sahibdin painting and shows how miniature art was used as the carrier of cultural memory and local identity. The article contextualizes the painting within the stylistic and historical context of the Mewar school in contrast to Mughal naturalism with its coarse lines and bright color, as well as its focus on local subjects. Formal examination of composition, colour and ornamentation demonstrates how the technique used by Sahibdin adds closeness and allegory to the story. The camel, the desert and the lovers are turned into symbols of perseverance, devotion and the barren beauty of the Rajasthan itself. Lastly, through the comparison of aesthetic principles of Mewar miniature with Mughal influences, the research highlights the blending

of narrative and decoration as the characteristic features of the art of Sahibdin. And, after all, this very picture is not just a drawing of a folktale, but a serious artistic work, the glorification of the stability of love and the eternity of Rajasthani tradition and culture.

1. INTRODUCTION

1.1 Painting as Cultural Expression

Indian art has traditionally been used as a form of narration. The arts of painting were not confined to either decorative or representational uses, but ran so deep in the life of the cultures, the religious life, and even the sense of community. Since the frescoes of temples up to the illustrated manuscripts, Indian art traditions had invented visual languages that did not only convey themselves through their looks. The miniature painting tradition, especially in Rajasthan, was a unique folklore and courtly mingle.

The miniature painting schools of Rajasthan -Mewar, Marwar, Bundi, Kishangarh and others- were developed during the 16th century up to the 19th century under the patronage of the local rulers who wanted to have their cultural pride and historical background represented pictorially. Among these, the Mewar school has received a particularly strong reputation because of its exaggerated color, solid lines and the adherence to local subjects. Unlike the Mughal style, inclined to naturalism and the elegance of the court, the artists of Mewar preserved a local taste, which was too deep rooted in the oral and folk culture of the country.

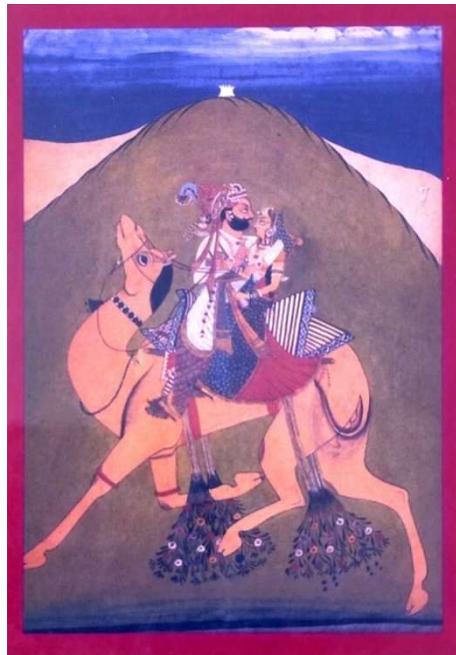


Fig :- Dhola-Maru Travelling image



1.2 The Dhola-Maru Tale in Context

Dhola-Maru Tale is a very popular love story in Rajasthan. It is a story about Prince Dhola of Narwar, who was a child bride to Princess Maru of Panagal and set in the desert region (desert land). Many years later, Dhola, who does not know about his childhood marriage, is still separated with Maru until he recalls how they got married. His quest to reunite with Maru takes over the narrative, full of tribulations, deception and finally victory. Dhola and Maru are not just an image of individual love in the collective imagination of Rajasthan; they are a symbol of the perseverance in the challenging situations, faithfulness even at the far distance, overcoming the barriers of social and natural environment by the power of love. Their travel in the desert is an indication that they were struggling with the real life communities in the desert that were struggling with tough times and survival had to be through tolerance and loyalty. It is thus not strange that the Dhola-Maru tale has been repeatedly used by artists. In the art of painting just as it did in oral poetry and folk performance, the story was an entertainment and a form of moral education; it represented the principle of loyalty, endurance, and cultural pride.

1.3 Sahibdin and the Mewar Style

One of the most popular representatives of the Mewar style is the painter Sahibdin (1628-1658). Even though his active career is usually regarded as the 17th century, the painting in question, which was created at approximately the same time, the year 1920, illustrates the way in which his stylistic heritage still inspired future generations of artists. Sahibdin was especially ingenious in changing literary works into pictorial narrations, and his paintings of the Ramayana, Rasikapriya, and the Bhagavata Purana can evidenced this. His knack of striking a balance between narrative coherence and emotional appeal ensured the great influence of his style throughout centuries. The Dhola-Maru painting under consideration, though painted long later, bears marks of the influence of Sahibdin: there are the definite lines, the bold colors, the careful use of the decorative elements and the profound emotion to the human feelings.

1.4 Objective and Scope of the Study

This paper uses the Dhola-Maru painting as a case study to explore broader questions related to painting and drawing in the Mewar tradition. The main questions are:

1. This painting visually represent the Dhola-Maru legend.
2. stylistic and technical features make it a product of the Mewar style.



3. Motifs such as the camel, the desert, and the lovers function symbolically.
4. This work reflect the tension between folk tradition and court art.

This paper tries to reveal the interdependencies between the art, culture, and story on the miniature painting of Rajasthani. Concentrating on one picture we may see in a better way the depth of technique, the symbolic richness, the cultural echo of painting and drawing in early modern India.

2. HISTORICAL CONTEXT

2.1 Mewar Painting Style

Known as the Mewar painting style, it is one of the most colorful forms of the Rajasthani miniature painting style. It originated in the Udaipur region of the 16 th century and was encouraged by the Sisodia rulers of the Rajput who had decided to retain their cultural identity in the face of the Mughal expansion. Whereas other Rajput courts were adopting Mughal naturalism, Mewar created a more regional style bold and colourful in its approach and deeply rooted in local subject matter.

The distinctive peculiarities of Mewar painting are:

- Good linework that brings out clear figures.
- Planes of vivid colors, usually in primary or earthy colors.
- pattern decoration, particularly in textile, jewelry and landscape.

The trait of symbolism over naturalism is also a characteristic feature of the novels, as is the preference given to emotional or narrative perception, as opposed to realistic point of view.

The artists of Mewar, though not always following the imperial taste, unlike the Mughal miniatures, which tended to employ shaded modeling to suggest the illusion of three-dimensionality, adhered to flatness and stylization, imparting a rhythm and directness to their work that showed folk as well as imperial influence. Emotional intensity in Mewar is mentioned in the larger Rajasthani tradition. Whereas Bundi and Kota stressed fertility and scenes of hunters, and Kishangarh their fertile themes in allegorical Rada and Krishna, Mewar artists focused on folk songs, epics and religious subjects and they were of particular interest to local audiences.



2.2 Folklore and Visual Narratives

Another distinctive feature of the Rajasthani painting is that it is closely related to oral tradition. Not only did bards sing folk songs and recite them at village meetings, they were also recorded on manuscript and on separate pages, to be read not only to the court, but to the general populace. Dhola-Maru epic and the stories of Pabuji, Devnarayan and Amar Singh Rathore are some of the folklores in this category. These ballads fulfilled a number of functions:

- Entertainment - They were frequently sung to music in the courts, fairs and during village events.
- Moral education - Social values of loyalty, sacrifice, and tolerance were strengthened.
- Cultural identity - They maintained the history and folklore of the region and created the uniqueness of the Rajasthan.

These oral stories were translated into pictures by painters. The dilemma was to portray the flow of story of the narrative in one frame. Artists did that by relying on visual codes: a trip, which is described by camels and horses; intimacy, which is signified by physical closeness; conflict, which is represented by weapons or aggressive gestures. The camel, specifically, was a significant theme of Dhola-Maru themes and was associated with difficult journey through the deserts and the endurance of love.

Such themes portrayed by painters such as Sahibdin, proved that court art and folk tradition were not two opposites that could not go together. Rather it became a bridge which converted oral narratives into a refined pictorial tradition; it also established the basis of elite art in cultural scene at Rajasthan.

2.3 Sahibdin's Artistic Contribution

Sahibdin (active 1628-1658) is regarded as one of the best masters of Mewar painting. His work was employed by Maharana Jagat Singh I of Udaipur, and some of the most renowned illustrated manuscripts in Indian art were the products of his work. His works include:

Ramayana series (1649-1653) - which was known because of its dramatic portrayals of the epic story which focused on the aspect of devotion and heroic fight.

The Rasikpriya paintings (1630s) - a treatise on love as a poetic text, in which Sahibdin showed his attentiveness to human feelings.

Bhagavata Purana paintings - show his power to unite narrative detail and the devotional passion.

The style of Sahibdin can be characterized by:



Expressive figures - his characters frequently have strong emotions expressed in their posture, gesture and face.

Narrative clarity - the plot is easy to read even in the complex compositions.

Ornamental opulence - designs on fabrics, wearables and design produce visual luxury.

Integration of landscape - hills, rivers, and sky are also symbolic and represent human drama.

Though the Dhola-Maru painting under consideration dates back to the time of 1920, long after Sahibdin had died, the fact that its style is stylistically similar to his works shows that his artistic legacy was not lost. The style used by Sahibdin was later on consciously emulated by many later artists of Mewar and continued to maintain the visual vocabulary that Sahibdin perfected. Therefore, this painting has a witness of the tradition continuity of the Rajput painting, with the master of the 17th century continuing to the 20th century.

2.4 The Dhola-Maru Tale in Painting

The local identity and the universal appeal of the subject can be seen in the selection of Dhola-Maru. This story about lovers shows the themes known to the viewers throughout India: early marriage, separation, love, the infidelity of the opponents, and the victory of reunification. Dhola-Maru was relevant unlike mythological tales because it had a religious bearing, which was based on human experience.

- This story was painted in a variety of situations:
- The setting of Dhola out of Narwar.
- Maru waiting on him in Panagal.
- The betrayal of the competitors such as Umar Sumro.

Their journey is symbolized in the meeting of the lovers which is frequently shown on the camelback. The given painting is centered on the time of the union, as Dhola and Maru embrace each other in a camel ride. The artist highlights romance fulfilment in isolating this moment which is in marked contrast to the other paintings that center on conflict or separation.

2.5 The Painting as a History of the Past.

In addition to the artistic beauty, this painting is also a historical document of the cultural values of the early 20 th century Rajasthan. In India, photography and modern art movement were already disseminated by the 1920s. However, the persistence of the miniature painting practices attests to the



persistence of the regional art. Patrons and artists alike still considered the miniature aesthetic as one of the ways of cultural continuity. Moreover, the subject, chosen, Dhola-Maru love, proves that even during the period of modernization, the community of folk tradition found identity and pride. Painting therefore was not only an art but also a symbol of cultural conservation amidst the changing times.

3. STYLISTIC FEATURES OF THE PAINTING

3.1 Composition

One of the distinguishing features of miniature painting is that it allows sharing a rather complex story with a small space. The painting of Dhola-Maru that is under examination illustrates this principle with respect to a balanced but lively composition.

A camel occupies the middle part of the picture, and its long body forms a diagonal motion and directs the eyes of the viewer around the artwork. The emotional focus of the painting is formed by Dhola and Maru, who are on the camel. Their bodies are towards each other in an intimate position attracting the theme of loving union.

The Mewar style, in contrast to the Mughal style, did not develop a sense of depth by the use of perspective. Figures, camels and the background items are on the same plane and cause clarity as opposed to illusion. This style has a didactic intent of painting: it serves to describe, but not to reproduce reality.

The scenery is not much but symbolic. The background has rolling sand dunes and there is a dark blue strip of sky on the horizon. The simplicity of the environment is used as a stressor of the main characters, which maintains the level of attention of the viewer on Dhola and Maru.

In this way, the composition is very subtle in its balance between motion and immobility. The movement of the camel gait is forward movement which symbolizes travel and the embrace of the lovers stabilizes the image emotionally, which implies permanence and union.

3.2 Use of Color

The visual effect of this painting is based on color. Mewar style has been characterized by the use of saturated colors, which are deep, and this work is not an exception. All colors are symbolic as well as aesthetically appealing:



Dominating colors **include red** in the clothing of Dhola and Maru - In Indian culture, red is linked with love, energy, and auspicion of marriage. The artist connects the figures by means of dressing them both in red, which contributes to emphasizing the romantic theme.

The use of **Yellow** is apparent in the clothing of Maru - Yellow is a color of fertility, happiness, and divine blessing; it is a color that is complementary to the red color of passion, which gives the impression of harmony.

The **background** sky is done in **blue**, but it is flat and vivid, making a strong contrast with warm colors of the figures and the camel, which is also Mughal. It expresses tranquility and immortality, and human struggle is based on a cosmic scheme.

The desert land and the camel are painted in brown and beige, reminding of the smell of the earth in Rajasthan, which is quite dry. The natural sounds of the camel are highlighted by decorative sounds of blue and red implying realism and adornment too.

White is not in common use, usually in decorations or patterns. Its light attracts attention to details, as well as, it represents purity and divine approval.

The difference between the color palette of Mewar and other ones is that it is emotionally immediate. The colors are not naturalistic or dull, they are exaggerated to communicate passion, devotion, and symbolism. This treatment is such that a small piece of paint has a visual energy.

3.3 Ornamentation and Detail

Though simple, the composition gives much attention to ornamentation by the artist. The camel is also richly adorned, the saddle has blue and red fringes and tassels. These decorations do not only increase the visual pleasures, but also show the royalty of the riders. Camels were useful desert animals and a sign of affluence in Rajasthan, a camel fitted out was commonly synonymous with partying and aristocracy.

Even the figures are covered with gorgeous jewelry and garments. Maru has elaborate jewelry, such as necklaces, bangles and anklets with fine lines. The clothes that she wears have patterns indicating a woven or embroidered feel. The dressing of Dhola is also well sophisticated, and his turban and waistband are very well detailed. These aspects show how the artist was able to express opulence in miniature.



The decoration is also a narration. The decadent embellishing of the camel and the clothes is in contrast to the bleak desert setting in that love can make even barren environments prosper and become beautiful.

3.4 Expression of Emotion

It is perhaps the emotional resonance of this painting that is the most striking. Mewar paintings, unlike the Mughal paintings, are very good at portraying intimacy and passion.

Both Dhola and Maru are seated together with the arm of Dhola wrapping Maru. Their physiques are turned towards one another, though their eyes have an almond shaped and their features sharp. This position portrays physical intimacy as well as emotional solidarity.

The camel is also walking to further highlight the shared experience of the couple and the story of moving love is further reinforced. Conversely, the unchanging background of dunes and sky indicates that the lovers have been proceeding in the same direction even at a time when the world is not progressing. There is also the use of color and ornamentation which adds to the intensity of emotions. The coziness of red and yellow, the exuberance of details and the isolation of the setting are all elements that lead to this feeling of belonging. There is also the use of color and ornamentation which adds to the intensity of emotions. The red and yellow warmth, the abundance of the details and the isolation of the place all help in concentrating on the relationship of the lovers. The removal of attendants, distractions, or side actions, by the painter induces a certain psychological closeness which was not a feature of miniature art of the same period, where crowd scenes and multiple scenes were frequently seen. In this case, rather, it is the power of peace and intimacy, and the victory of personal love.

3.5 Comparison to Other Styles

Those stylistic peculiarities of this picture are even more obvious in comparison with such traditions of miniature painting:-

Dhola and Maru would have been painted **in Mughal** with naturalistic modeling, architecture and detailed backgrounds. It would have been with an emphasis on realism and courtly elegance.

Kishangarh, with its Radha-Krishna pictures, would have stressed the beauty of the ethereal, and the elongation of the forms, and would have made the lovers the ideal forms of the divine.

The scenery would be probably leading in **Bundi** and **Kota** with a lot of green vegetation and the skyline casting a dramatic effect over the figures.



The Mewar version, on the contrary, removes other details to concentrate on human emotions. The lovers are admittedly the subject of focus and their union is stated in a very straightforward and simple manner.

4. SYMBOLIC INTERPRETATION

4.1 Camel as a Symbol

The symbolism of the camel is practical. Being the ship of the desert, it symbolizes survival in the desert that is the state of Rajasthan. The harness of the camel in the painting is decorated lavishly to make it a ceremonial carriage, just appropriate to the royal lovers. Metaphorically, it turns out to be a beacon of persistence, faithfulness, and fate, and the couple endures ordeals of marriage.

4.2 Desert Landscape

The dunes and the desolate land are the symbols of suffering and misery, whereas the green patches of the grass are the signs of hope and regeneration. The deep blue sky symbolizes eternity and puts the love story in the order of universe. There is nothing empty in the desert, it is metaphoric - a land of emotional and spiritual challenges.

4.3 Dhola and Maru as Archetypes

Dhola is a representation of heroic manhood, grandiose courage and ardor. Maru is a symbol of fidelity, patience and respectability of womanhood. Their kiss is the unity of opposites- heroism and beauty, challenge and reward, adventure and destination. They get beyond historical characters and turn into a beacon of perfect love.

4.4 Motifs of Journey

The progressive walk of the camel also represents not only the physical journey, but the emotional and spiritual journey of love. The Indian art has a lot of parallels with the spiritual quests and in this case, the journey of Dhola towards Maru symbolizes the soul in its desire to be united.

4.5 Clothing and Jewelry as Uniforms.

The red turban of Dhola represents valor; the yellow clothes of Maru represent fertility and happiness. Jewelry highlights identity of marriage and royal elegance. The jewelry makes the procession of love a royal one, and the prosaic one a celebration.



4.6 The Role of Isolation

Unlike processional or courtly pictures, this painting shows the couple in a lonely position. They are alone and the loneliness focuses on intimacy and insinuates that in love the world disappears. It is the isolation that actually renders the painting ideal and timeless.

4.7 Cosmic Symbolism

The tiny white crown motif on the mound could mean that it is divine approved. Together with the simplest elements red (passion), blue (eternity), green (renewal), and white (purity), this painting creates an impression that the love of Dhola and Maru is not just human but predetermined by the cosmos.

5. ARTISTIC TECHNIQUES IN MEWAR PAINTING AND DRAWING

5.1 Painting: The Power of Line

Form is defined by exquisite, rhythmic outlines and offers emotion. Stylization- eyes that are in the shape of an almond, sharp contours turn figures into symbols but not individuals. Line is structural and figurative and it contains ideals of beauty and nobility.

5.2 Painting: Color and Texture.

Pigments were mineral and organic; cinnabar (red), orpiment (yellow), lapis or indigo (blue), malachite (green), shellac (white), lamp soot (black). The intensity and symbolism of colors were produced in monolithic layers and not in shades. The textiles of red and yellow contrast with the boundless blue sky and the camel-brown colors provide the composition with the elements that connect it with the earth.

5.3 Materials and Preparation of Surfaces.

Paper was crafted, polished and smoothed. The colors were grounded, mixed with binders and applied using fine brushes. Some gold or silver leaf had been occasionally added, which is not done here. There was also a ritual and cultural meaning of this technique itself.

5.4 Miniature Painting Process

The master sketched it preliminarily.

Fine ink drawing.

Superimposed use of colors.



Ornamentation and detail.

Polishing to a shine.

It was done in stages, one being patient and accurate, yielding gem-like surfaces.

5.5 Discussing and Analogizing as Symbolic Practices.

Every technical decision had its significance: the line = clearness of love, color = figurative states, ornamentation = metamorphosis of hardship into beauty. Therefore, the trade was not only the art but a visual ceremony.

5.6 Compared to Mughal Techniques.

Mughal: shading, naturalism, realism, architecture.

Mewar: symbolism, daring, intimacy, flatness.

Therefore, Mewar emphasized the emotional nature rather than the empirical realism.

5.7 Stress-resistance of Miniature Technique.

By 1920s, photography and academic realism had reached popular tendency. However, the endurance of Mewar miniature technique was a manifestation of cultural endurance, which attests folk identity in the contemporary world.

The technical arts of this painting demonstrate the priorities of Mewar, which included: clarity, symbolism, permanence, and intimacy. In this case, the technique cannot be separated of meaning.

6. COMPARATIVE STUDY

There are other images of Dhola-Maru, but they are not intended as a representation of the man but rather as a statue of the god.

Jodhpur: magnificence of the procession, retinue, and scene.

Bikaner: Mughal culture, naturalism.

Bundi: richness of landscape.

Mewar: emotional focus and intimacy.



The unusual feature of Mewar is its focus on emotion, and the lovers are isolated.

Love in Indian Painting Love is a theme depicted in Indian painting as illustrated by numerous artists such as Rashtali, Photra, and Atkinson.

Radha-Krishna (Kishangarh): Goddess, heavenly, spiritual.

Heer-Ranjha (Punjab): Tragic, socially restricted.

Laila-Majnu (Perso-Indian): Spiritual desire.

Dhola-Maru (Mewar): Mortal, lustful, triumphant.

Therefore, Dhola-Maru is a hymn in honor of marriage persistence.

6.3 Travel and Journeys Themes.

Mughal = royal processions.

Bundi-Kota = hunting trips.

Mewar = emotional journeys.

The camel ride of Dhola-Maru is the sign of mutual struggle and fate.

6.4 Intimacy vs. Spectacle

In the majority of other styles, spectacle is underlined. Mewar lays stress on intimacy- personal meetings as opposed to grandiosity.

6.5 Continuity and Change

Dhola-Maru kept on being adapted in other regions. Its permanence attests to the versatility of miniature painting to rework folk narratives with the local aesthetics.

7. CONCLUSION

The Dhola-Maru painting created in the Mewar style circa 1920 and credited to Sahibuddin is an example of the longevity of the painting and portrait as a vehicle of culture storytelling. This painting incorporates folklore in a metaphor of the life of love. Camel= hardiness, desert= difficulty, lovers embrace triumph. It incorporates the spirit of Mewar: vivid colors, powerful background, emotional straightforwardness, and



folk heritage. It does not dwell on Mughal sumptuousness or Kishangarh spirituality but human intimacy. Maintaining miniature painting methods into the 20 th century, the artists preserved the tradition of craft as a cultural opposition and identity. The Mewar version places more emphasis on intimacy as opposed to spectacle as compared to other depictions. It is an ode to human victory, unlike other tales of love that are either tragic or divine. Painting and painting is cultural memory. Miniature art survives over the generations through folk lore.

In the end, the miniature of this Dhola-Maru is not just a couple in love. It is a cultural work, a technical masterpiece, and a reflective philosophical work. To students of the art of painting it shows how the real strength of art is in the ability to illustrate emotional and cultural reality without reference to time and situation.

Bibliography (Selected References)

- At Bundi and Kota, Beach, Milo C. Rajput Painting. Yale University Press, 1974.
- Khandalavala, Karl, and Usha Bhatia. Miniatures: The Art of Asia. Marg Publications, 1963.
- Mathur, V.S. The Folk Traditions of Rajasthan. Rajasthan Oriental Research Institute, 1987.
- Topsfield, Andrew. Painting in Courts at Udaipur: the Art of the Maharanas of Mewar. Artibus Asiae Publishers, 2001.
- Ebeling, Klaus. Ragamala Painting. Ravi Kumar Publishers, 1973.
- Bautze, J. (1995). Miniature Paintings: Indian Miniature 16 th -19 th centuries. Berlin: Staatliche Museen to Berlin.
- Coomaraswamy, A. K. (1916). Rajput Painting. London: Oxford University Press.
- Crill, R. (1998). Indian Painting: The Minor Traditions. London: Victoria and Albert Museum.
- Doshi, S. (1992). Paintings of Indian Art: 1100-1900 A.D. Ahmedabad:Mapin Publications.
- Goswamy, B. N. (2015). Indian Painting: Essays in Honour of Karl Khandalavala. New Delhi: Lalit Kala Akademi.
- Khandalavala, K., & Moti Chandra. (1958). The Miniatures of Mewar. Bombay: Lalit Kala Akademi.



- Losty, J. P. (1990). *The Art of the Book in India*. London: The British Library.
- Mathur, A. (2001). *Rajasthani Miniature Painting: A Tradition and a tradition*. New Delhi: Roli Books.
- Tandan, R. K. (1998). *The Mewar School of Painting*. Udaipur: Prakash Publishers.
- Tiwari, S. (2007). *The Dhola-Maru Tradition of the Rajasthani Art and Literature*. Jaipur: Jaipur Oriental Research Institute.
- Topsfield, A. (2001). *Court Painting in Rajasthan: Indian Miniatures in the Seventeenth and the Eighteenth Centuries*. Zurich: Artibus Asiae Publishers.
- Welch, S. C. (1976). *Indian Paintings and Drawings: 17 th -19 th century*. New York: The Asia Society.