

CRITICAL ANALYSIS OF MINIATURE IN THE COURT OF MUGHAL ERA

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Abstract

This style of painting with original Iranian painting subjects was still serving Persian poetry and literature because Indian kings at that time were Persianspeaking. In the paintings of the Safavid era the magnificence and greatness of this age which is affected by the dramatic cultural, social and economic revolutions is observable. This revolution manifests in depiction of various figures that are tall and in fantastic clothes as well as delicacy and diversity of vibrant colors. Safavid era paintings at the beginning of formation of this empire were the continuation of the Timurid art but gradually due to communication with the western world and presence of numerous tourist who were customers for art works among other reasons, in order to produce more works artists first turned to scarcity of elements and objects and then to reduction of decorations.

Babar

Babar was a skillful painter and he had inherited this characteristic from his Timurid ancestors in Herat in the 15 century an exquisite Shahnameh which is Persian epic poetry was prepared for Mohamamd Juki, the eldest son of Timur the Lame in 1440 which is now kept in Royal Asiatic Society in London and bears the seal of Babar and the date 906 H.G. / 1501 A.D. that is, the year he captured Samarkand for the first time and apparently he advanced as far as India.

According to his memoir, more than once did he have to dispose of his property which included a library of illustrated books.

However, Babar found the opportunity to become the ruler of Samarkand and he hoped that the circumstances would help him in other places so he started painting.

According to his memoir Babar Nama, his interests had a deep influence on Mughals in India.

With the emergence of naturalism, a gradual transformation occurred in the attitude of Muslim authors towards painting- in spite of the general belief that Islam has prohibited painting human figures.

In the 15th and 16th centuries, this old idea suddenly changed. According to Babar, in the middle of the 16th century, authors such as the Safavid librarians such as Dust Mohammad and Qazi Ahmad whose father, EbrahimMirza served the Safavid princes in Mashhad, in evaluating works of miniature considered being lifelike as the major criteria, that is; they believed a miniaturist must enliven the forms and this was exactly the aspect that Islamic leaders deemed as blasphemous in regard to God's power of creation.

Humayun

Besides all his pleasure-seeking, Humayun Shah was interested in collecting books and it is said that his death in 1456 was due to collapse of books in his library and this library is still located in Puranakila, Delhi.

Contemporary historians disagree as to the cause of his death and some have mentioned unusual biases or alcoholic drinks as the cause of his death and some call his anniversary the day "when the king fell of the roof". Apparently this name is given to the day when Humayun Shah died.

In many respects, Humayun Shah was not a competent successor. Due to consumption of narcotics and alcoholic drinks, which was common among the Timurid, he has a weak personality and military defeats during the first decade of his rule were brought up as a result of this.

Yet for Mughal historians and for the future of Mughals in India his years in Iran were an auspicious coincidence. In the early 1540s, Shah TahmasbSafavi, who had the best and most specialized style in the Islamic world in Tabriz, doubted the authenticity of the illustrated manuscripts which had been created so beautifully to the extent that this led to losing some of the best miniaturists at his workshop.

Two of them, Mir Seyed Ali and Abdosamad, who were famous calligraphers, were employed by Humayun in Kabul in a timely manner in 1549 and accompanied him till his return to India. For the first time they became mainly responsible for organizing the Mughal Indian school.

C. Sivaramamurti in his book Indian Painting has briefly referred to the presence of Humayun Shah in Iran:

"Humayun's misfortunes drove him to Persia as an exile and Sher Shah's triumph saw Humayun looking for refuge with Shah Tahmasp of Persia. This was indeed a godsend for the artistic inclination of Humayun, as the Shah was a great patron of art, and among his court painters were Behzad, Mirak and others."

Akbar

It can be said that founder and the real creator of Mughal painting was Akbar and it is ridiculous if, based on the words of his son, Jahangir, as well as historians, call him an illiterate person.

Discovered paintings of the first decades of his long reign (1556- 1605) include pages of an album which show a wandering dervish with blue eyes and odd costume.

But the first and largest of Akbar's orders is the illustrated version of an epic story entitled Hamzehnameh which is inspired by the life of Hamzeh, prophet's uncle, who was very well-known in India. This story had been recounted orally by professional storytellers and based on the works of Badaoni in 1556 his year of accession young Akbar really wanted to relate parts of Hamzehnameh for those in the harem or everybody as if he were a professional storyteller.

Hamzehnameh order was performed in a large size and finished in fifteen years. Writing this work started in 1562 or probably 1567. Its large scale and the amount of work were beyond the physical capability of the painters. Employing Muslim and Hindu painters together was the most important factor behind formation of an independent identity for Mughal painting and gradual evolution of Mughal taste in Akbar's era.

Wonderful Mughal painting collections from the time of Akbar show that he has been one of the most active and enthusiastic patrons of the art of illustration in history.

Jahangir

The significance of miniature at the time of Jahangir, just like the time of Akbar, is revealed through redecoration of Jahangir mansion in Lake Dal gardens, Kashmir in 1602. A glorious place which has been decorated with pictures of Humayun, Akbar and Shah Abbas I.

Jahangir had previously sent Bishn Das the royal miniaturist on a diplomatic mission to Isfahan in order to paint a portrait of Shah Abbas. His portraits of Shah Abbas have degraded him to the low level of a miserable person.

Jahangir was not just a simple collector of paintings but rather was an expert who had a prospective insight on paintings. In his memoirs he relates that:

“My interest in painting and my expertise in recognizing these works is such that if they merely show me a work by a past or contemporary artist without naming him, I can immediately recognize its creator. If a picture includes several figures and each figure has been painted by a painter, I can say which figure has been drawn by which of the masters and

even if another person has painted the eyes and eyebrows I can say who has painted them (Figure 23).”

Jahangir claimed that his painters were very adept in copying paintings. Sir Thomas Row presented him with the portrait of a woman by the English painter Isaac Oliver painted on a cow hide. Jahangir asked one of the masters (perhaps Abolhasan or Mansour) to make a copy of the painting and then asked

Row to distinguish the original from the copy. When these two were prepared, he was shown them in the candle light. But in spite of the weak light, as he says, he simply distinguished the original from the copy and explained to Jahangir how he had come to that conclusion and reluctantly told him that the work of his painters had been also excellent and faultless.

Shah Jahan and Aurangzeb

When Shah Jahan came to power in 1628, Mughals' progress diminished. Establishing order in the vast territory of the Mughals became increasingly difficult and their struggles against neighboring competitors and enemies were futile and cost them more on human resources and military equipment. Controlling the increasing financial expenses could mean limiting the activity of royal workshops.

Shah Jahan's only great calligraphic order was a chronicle named Padshahname which related the events of his reign in detail and is now kept at Windsor Royal Library.

Nevertheless, this magnificent volume has been inordinately illustrated and most of the paintings focus on the first decade of his kingdom.

At the time of Shah Jahan extravagant amounts of money were spent for building mansions throughout the Mughal territory. For instance, he not only built TajMahal between 1632- 47 but also new palaces inside Lahore and Agracastles, the great mosque of Agra and in 1369 an entirely new central palace in Delhi which was his capital as well as the Red Castle.

The works painted for Jahangir are well-known for their flower-patterned margins and their subject matters have a more limited scope and in them personal and formal portraitures attract more attention. Sometimes even new heads were added to previous bodies. This could lead to the misleading similarity of a dynasty. Few works appeared to be artificial and the naturalism intended by Jahangir Shah gradually turned into a secondary subject matter. Over time, the number of painters at the workshop decreased and images which often used to be multiple and successive changed to disconnected and separate pictures.

For example, Manohar, who was one of the favorite painters of Shah Jahan was entrusted to his son, Dara Shikoh, and Bishn Das to Zafar Khan. Besides, artists left the royal workshop in order to work for commercial customers including Indian courtiers (Figure 24).

Based on the evidence, at the time of Aurangzeb painting had less success and even after his death, the largest royal libraries were gradually destroyed by his incompetent successors. Many of the best paintings were spoiled by the conqueror of Afghanistan, Nadir Shah, who plundered Delhi in 1739. The rest were taken by the employees of the East India Company.

JAIN-RAJASTHANI ART OF PAINTING

- **Jain Painting (approximately thirteenth to sixteenth centuries)**

Along time before the first century A.D., in India painting was used to draw the images on the covers of religious books. These first books had thin and soft pages made of palm leaves whose length rarely exceeded 5 centimeters. These pages were bound together using a string which kept them safe in between the two plain wooden covers. The oldest left forms were Buddhist manuscript volumes of the Pala period from Bihar and Bengal and also Jain copies from the western parts of India which date back to the eleventh century (Figures 1,2).

The calligrapher who directly dealt with the religious book was assigned as the top master and while writing specified the location of the pictures. Following calligraphy, the book would be submitted to a painter. Few remaining images on the palm leaves from Pala period have complicated lines and colors.

The unique characteristic of the early Jain painting is showing both eyes on the profile.

As we know, paper was brought to India from Iran in the latter half of the thirteenth century and using it instead of palm leaf in paintings of the western parts of India became popular from early fifteenth century.



Figure 1: Page from LuarChanda manuscript, Uttar Pradesh, late 15 centuryBaharat Kala Bhavan Banaras



Figure 2: Detail of JanupurKalpasutra

- **Rajasthani Painting (approximately fifteenth to nineteenth centuries)**

AnandaCoomarswamy, the pioneer expert in Rajput painting has categorized Hindu styles based on their origin into two groups: the Rajasthani style of the central plains and the Pahari style of the lower Himalayan hills. How exactly Rajasthani style with all its complicated subdivisions was derived from the early painting of the western part of India and has been further transformed under the influence of the Mughal art is still subject to controversy and there is no evidence to clarify this issue. Popular literary works which have numerously served as subject matter for early Rajasthani painting styles include BhagavataPurana, Gita Govinda, Baramasas, Chaurapanchasika and Rasikapriya (Figures 3, 4).

In order to understand Indian miniature, we must realize that Mughal art is a basically naturalist art whereas Rajput painting, just like Hindu miniature, is symbolic and brimmed with poetic metaphors. Rajput artist considered all men and the entire nature as symbols. When he drew a woman he made no differentiation between her and another woman in the painting and made both stand for all the women. The ultimate ideal of the artist was to clarify the relationship between God and man.

It could be understood that the simplest manifestations of nature, everyday events, and basic emotions and desires were a means of expressing sublime ideas. Different colors conveyed various meanings. Red stood for anger, yellow for wonder and brown for lust. And when we look at Rajasthani paintings we feel that the spirit of Hinduism has been vividly manifested in these works.



Figure 3: Portrait of Radha, Rajasthani, Kishangarh, c 1760; Paint on paper.

KishangarhDarbar, Rajasthan



Figure 4: Two Princesses, Jodhpur, c AD 1775

CONCLUSION

Mughal painting is distinctive but Indian. It has the flavor of the Persian but the inborn charm is of Indian tradition. It seems that one of the most beautiful and powerful miniatures in India, is Indian-Mughal style, which has a closeness to the Iranian miniatures. The point is important that study and discussion in the said style requires many years to do so. Young researchers should not discard the two great cultures of Iran and India so easily. Presence of the Iranian miniaturists and calligraphers beside the Indian artists has led to creation of very valuable and worthy works such as “Shahnameh”. Presence of the Iranian and Indian artists has led to promotion and evolution of the art of miniature. Among common characteristics of the art of miniature we can point out vivacity and colorful clothing of men and women and

use of desirable and vivacious colors in other elements of miniature such as plants, palaces, sky, mountains and animals.

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