

## A Historical Study of Mughal Miniature Paintings During Emperor Jahangir's Reign (1605-1627)

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[Abstract : The origin of the Mughal School of Painting is a landmark in the history of Indian paintings. The school originated in the reign of Emperor Humayun. The origin of the Mughal style was a result of the synthesis of the indigenous Indian style of painting and the Safavid school of Persian painting. Mughal miniature paintings were a unique blend of Indian, Persian, and Islamic styles. Son of Emperor Akbar, Jahangir's love for art and painting was no less, and for realism, it was more. Under him, Akbar's energetic naturalism was refined into a calmer and intensely realistic style capable of revealing not only the outer appearance but also its unique inner spirit. The prime purpose of this study is to find out the development of Mughal miniature paintings during Emperor Jahangir's reign.]

Keywords : Mughal, Miniature, Art, and Jahangir.

The history of paintings in the Indian subcontinent is multi-layered and variegated. As the topic indicates, Mughal art, a characteristic of the Indo-Islamic-Persian style, flourished on the Indian subcontinent during the Mughal empire (1526-1857). India is a pluralist country. It has an array of mixed art, culture, history, and heritage which are amply reflected in artworks, paintings, sculptures, and architecture. Even, the three great religions – Hinduism, Buddhism, and Islam – played a pivotal role in reshaping the subcontinent. The rich cultural tradition of art is a happy blending of many variants (Brown, 2007, 18-33).

A major part of history is enlightened with the majestic Mughal art. In fact, Mughal art developed in the royal palace. So, every painting and artwork of the special artistic style has stood the test of time. The Mughal art bears testimony of the then social set-up. Mughal art fast expanded through manuscript illustrations and portraiture. Mughal art is highly regarded as miniatures. Because the paintings during the era were mostly

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book illustrations. Miniature is an art that depicts a scenario or event in detail and on a small scale. So, miniature painting has carved out a niche in Indian art history (Rogers, 2006, 18-21).

The first phase of the Mughal miniatures, which started during the rule of the first Mughal emperor Zahir-Ud-Din Muhammad Babur (1526-1530), had a strong resemblance with the Persian miniatures. Mughal art can be divided into three phases (Hasan, 2003, 291):

1. Primary era [Indo-Persian phase];
2. Golden era [self-styled Mughal art developed during the period] and;
3. Declining era.

In the light of the historic background, emperor Nasir-Ud-Din Muhammad Humayun (1530-1556) got asylum in Persia after a rigorous defeat with Sher Shah. In Persia, dazzling miniatures by the Persian painters – Abdus Samad and Mir Sayyid Ali – fascinated him. Humayun returned to India with the two artists and innovated the Indo-Persian school of miniature art in 1556. It deserves a special mention that the Mughal art form fully flourished during the reign of emperor Abul Fath Jalal-Ud-Din Muhammad Akbar (1556-1605) for his farsightedness and direct patronage (Rogers, 2006, 29-31).

Mughal art and paintings developed and flourished fast during the reigns of Akbar, his son Nur-Ud-Din Muhammad Jahangir (1605-1627), and grandson Shahab-Ud-Din Muhammad Sahib Qiran Sani Shah Jahan (1628-1658). Jahangir had an artistic inclination. During his reign, Mughal painting developed further. The brushwork became finer and the colours lighter. Jahangir used his intellectual prowess in patronizing the development of art. So, historians have duly dubbed the Jahangir era as the “golden age” of Mughal art or “Mughal renaissance”.

Jahangir was a real connoisseur of art and architecture (Brown, 2007, 125-128).



Figure-1 : Jahangir With a Portrait of Akbar, Artist : Abu'l Hasan (Nadir Al-Zaman) and Hashim. Gouache on paper, 1614, Musee Guimet, Paris.



Figure-2 : Celebrations at the Accession of Jahangir, *Tuzuk-i-Jahangiri*, Artist: Abu'l Hasan (Nadir Al-Zaman), Gouache on paper, Circa 1615-1618, The Saint Petersburg Album, Institute of Oriental Manuscripts of the Russian Academy of Sciences.

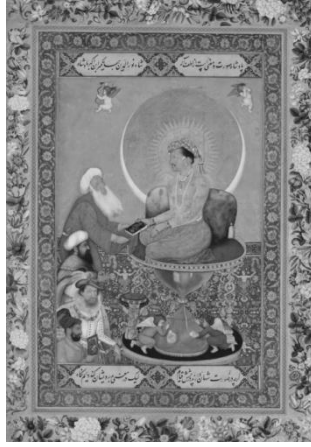


Figure-3 : Emperor Jahangir Preferring a Sufi Sheikh to kings, Artist: Bichitr (borders by Muhammad Saddiqi), Gouache on paper, Size: 25.3 × 18.0 cm, Circa 1615-1618, Page from the Saint Petersburg Album, Freer Gallery of Art, Smithsonian Institute, Washington DC.



Figure-4 : Portrait of Jahangir, Artist: Abu'l Hasan (Nadir Al-Zaman), Gouache on paper, 1617.

But Mughal art and portrait paintings faced a setback during the reign of Shah Jahan, son and successor of Jahangir, as he was engrossed in architecture. The style of Mughal architecture found expression of exceptional splendor during his reign. Shah Jahan is, thus, called the “architect of Mughal architecture”.

Later, Muhi-ud-Din Muhammad Aurangzeb (1618-1707) did not actively encourage Mughal paintings, but as this art form had gathered momentum and had several patrons, Mughal paintings continued to survive, but the decline had set in. It may be mentioned that the development of Mughal art would have been hampered without the royal patronage. The art form Humayun imported from Persia changed its shape in the Indian environs

when Akbar was in power. The art form did not flourish fully, it was not able to evolve as a complete fine art. It must be acknowledged that Mughal art developed under the auspices of Akbar (Figure-1). Percy Brown justifiably said, “Jahangir hatched the egg [symbolises the development of Mughal art] that Akbar lay” (Brown, 2007, 70).



Figure-5 : Allegorical Representation of Emperor Jahangir and Shah Abbas of Persia, Artist: Abu'l Hasan (Nadir Al-Zaman), Gouache on paper, Size: 23.8 × 15.4 cm, 1618, Freer Gallery of Art, Washington DC.



Figure-6 : Jahangir Holding a Picture of the Madonna, inscribed in Persian, Gold, and gouache on paper, Size: 33 × 49 cm, National Museum, New Delhi.

The artworks in Akbar's well-established art gallery were not the perfect combination of the Indo-Persian style. Abdus Samad and Mir Sayyid Ali established the gallery and the key source of artworks was Persia. Emperor Akbar was not as far-sighted and virtuoso as Jahangir for a number of reasons. He thought that artists from different parts of this empire and the outside could be able to practice artworks. If one artist is an expert in Persian sketch, the other was adroit in Indian style while another was skilled in Persian colour composition, making everything a mess. In addition, he had a huge collection of illuminated as well as illustrated Farsi (Persian) manuscripts. So, artists were also influenced by Persian art (Schimmel, 2004, 270-273).

However, a brief revival was noticed during the reign of Muhammad Shah 'Rangila' (1719-1748), but by the time of Shah Alam II (1759-1788), the art of Mughal painting had lost its glory. By that time, other schools of Indian painting had developed, especially by Hindu artists, in the royal courts of the kingdoms of Rajputana, Rajput painting, and in the cities ruled by the British East India Company.



Figure-7 : Jahangir and His Vizier, Artist: Manohar, Gouache on paper, 1615, Page from the Kevorkian Album, Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York.



Figure-8 : A Domestic Turkey-Cock, Artist: Ustad Mansur (Nadir-ul-Asr), Gouache on paper, 1612. Victoria and Albert Museum, London.

Yuvraj Daniel said, “The episode of love between Shirin and Farhad is now a hoary tale. When we read the saga, we do not get anything new from the stories we heard about them” (Coomarswamy, n.d., 9). Under the patronage of Jahangir, miniature form continued to decrease, because artists were more busy doing paintings of live things rather than illustrations. So, it can be easily surmised that the style of portrait paintings freed the Mughal art from manuscript illustrations.

Jahangir’s ascension to the throne of the Mughal Empire opened a new leaf in the history of Mughal art. Jahangir himself was also an artist. The court artists were greatly influenced by the emperor’s connoisseurship and committed patronage of art. The Indo-Persian style then continued to shrink fast paving the way for the grounding of the Indian art form. It happened only because of Jahangir’s affection for art and political stability. Emperor Akbar was too busy in warfare and other strategic issues to give time for the development of distinctive Mughal art. He commissioned a wide array of skilled artists, but he was not able to coordinate their artworks. But Jahangir was a great success in creating a congenial environment for practicing fine arts smoothly.



Figure-9 : Portrait of Abu'l Hasan (detail), Artist : Daulat, Gouache on paper, Circa 1610.

Jahangir's connoisseurship is widely known from his autobiographical sketch *Tuzuk-i-Jahangiri* (Figure-2). He ascended the throne of organized sovereignty only at the age of 37 and inherited an art gallery from his father. As a young emperor, Jahangir devoted himself to the overall development of Mughal art (Beveridge, 1914; Brown, 2007, 70-71). According to the illuminated manuscript of *Akbarnama* of Abul Fazl, Jahangir donated the book to the royal library (archive) in 1605. *Zafarnama*, which was collected from a garret, cited that there was a handwritten note of Jahangir. In the note, Jahangir showed his profound love for his father and had an appreciation of the beauty and artistry of six pairs of miniatures.

Jahangir inherited all the sterling traits, which an emperor needs, from his great grandfather emperor Babar, the founder of the Mughal dynasty. Both the personalities had identical features in their characters. Both had strong acumen as well as efficiency and a strong penchant for fine arts and craftsmanship. They loved nature, gardening, flowers, traveling, and deer as well. Both the emperors had a strong desire for an alcoholic drink, but they were real music lovers. Music, literature, and science were widely cultivated during their rule (Figure-3 & 4). Even, they showed equal sympathy to animals. Studying the genealogical tree, Jahangir was



hyphenated by birth. He had both the Mongoloid-Chagtai and Indian blood in his veins because he was the son of a learned woman Jodhabai. But Babar had a blood connection with Mongol-Chagtai lineage. Percy Brown said that a radical change was marked in Jahangir's mindset as he had both Central Asian and Indian blood. We cannot term it non-Indian, because Jahangir pioneered the development of Mughal art in the Indian subcontinent. He was able to blend Persian-Turkey and Rajput styles in the Mughal art (Brown, 2007, 71-72).

Three forms of paintings were drawn in Jahangir's art gallery –

- 1) illustrations or miniatures
- 2) portraiture and
- 3) drawing of flowers and natures.

A painter named Aqa Riza came to the court of emperor Jahangir from Hirat. Aqa's son Abul Hasan set a mark of distinction in fine arts. After his assumption of power, Jahangir followed his father's footsteps. He was engrossed in collecting huge illustrated books for the royal archive. He sent delegates to a different area of the empire to gather precious illustrated volumes and solo artworks. Various schools used his gallery to display their artworks. Even, royal painters had every reason to be influenced by the activities (Figure-5 & 6) (Hasan, 2003, 322).

The first miniature painting titled “Elopement of a Princess with Her Beloved”, which was done in 1606 was kept at Rampur State Library. It was a night-time scene as a slice of the moon was seen at the top left side of the artwork. Even, other attendants and porters fell fast asleep. A famous landscape with a garden was sketched in the form of Persian architecture. But the trees, especially the banana tree, a peacock on the rooftop, visages of women, and dresses were completely Indian. The work of art was an excellent Persian-Mughal blending (Figure -7).

Emperor Jahangir was proud of a collection of four Persian paintings which were done in Bihzad's School in 1499. He bought the artworks at Tk 1,500. He admitted to the fact that it was very tough to collect the masterpieces from famous Persian artists. That's why he had to be satisfied with the miniatures of Bihzad's disciples. Another special collection was the illustrated manuscript of *Yusuf and Zulaikha* by Molla Mir Ali. The nicely carved book was purchased at 1000 mohors. Jahangir in his autobiography also told the story of collecting a 200-years old miniature with the signature of noted painter Khalil Mirza. According to his own account, Shah Abbas' library director Sadeqi collected that Persian masterwork.

But incidentally, the miniature was in the hand of Khan Alam in Irfan. Shah Abbas came to know about it and collected it from Alam. Later, at the special interest of Emperor Jahangir, Abbas sent it to the representative of the emperor in Isfahan, the capital of Persia (Brown, 2007, 76).

Receiving the miniature, Jahangir let out a satisfactory note. It read: “It is really a tour de force and the same as the works of famous artist Bihzad. If no signature was inlaid, anybody could think it might be Bihzad’s. As the artwork was done before his birth, he could easily be Khalil Mirza’s disciple and take artistic finesses from him.” We can easily predict Jahangir’s farsightedness and wisdom from such an art and succinct statement (Brown, 2007, 76-77).

After the deaths of the founders of the Mughal art gallery – Mir Sayyid Ali and Abdus Samad, Central Asian national Farrukh Begh was made the principal of the gallery. In addition, two genius artists from Central Asia – Muhammad Nadir and Muhammad Murad – came to the Mughal palace. Even, during Shah Jahan’s rule, there was only one non-Indian artist in the gallery. Others were Muslim and Hindu artists. In Jahangir’s art gallery, two very rare-born talented painters were Abul Hasan and Ustad (Master) Mansur. Abul Hasan got the title of “Nadir-Al-Zaman” (The wonder of the age) from the emperor in recognition of his frontispiece to *Tuzuk-i-Jahangiri* (Figure-9). The emperor said, “Abul Hasan’s work was the best and the most attractive among the contemporary artists.” As a portrait painter, Abul Hasan earned both name and fame during the period. His bust portrait of Jahangir was a magnum opus of the fine arts. The profile picture of the emperor was an outstanding work of art. In the picture, Jahangir holds the portrait of his father while Akbar presents his son a map, meaning that Jahangir would be the sovereign of the entire world (Brown, 2007, 82).

Jahangir was pleased with the innovative works of Mansur also. The emperor gave him the title “Nadir-ul-Asr” (The Miracle of the age). Mansur shot to prominence for his paintings of the animal kingdom. According to a panel of experts, Mansur was great for his heart-touching portraiture of birds, especially peacock and Turkey cock (Figure-8).

Other paintings were a blue-necked Himalayan bird, zebra, cock, white crane, a herd of buffalos, red-crested water bird, etc. A special soft corner for the member of the animal kingdom is found in Mansur’s artworks. Daulat was the best among the celebrated Indian Muslim artists. Like Akbar’s Hindu painters, Jahangir had a number of skilled Rajput-style painters, including Bishndas, Tarachand, Jagannath, Manohar Das and Govardhan (Rogers, 2006, 95-98).

## **Conclusion**

To sum up, art lover Jahangir's great success was to give a complete shape to the Mughal art that flourished during his 22-year rule. The Mughal art and portraiture were at the height of excellence. Last but not least, Emperor Jahangir's outstanding contribution to the Mughal renaissance or the development of art and paintings remains etched in the history of Mughal fine arts in the subcontinent.

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