

Mughal Miniature Paintings: An Analysis

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Abstract

The origin of the Mughal miniature school is a key milestone in the history of Indian art with its unique blend of Islamic, Persian, and European styles. The subject of these Mughal miniatures ranged from hilly landscapes, flora, fauna, military expeditions, birth, weddings, and scenes of life that provide information on various aspects of history. The miniature paintings are illustrations in the books Akbarnama of Akbar, Baburnama of Babur and Tuzk-e- Jahangiri of Jahangir. This paper is an attempt to interpret the historical significance of Mughal Miniature paintings and highlight their enormous contribution to our heritage.

Key Words: *Miniature painting, Mughal painting, Mughal art*

Analysis of Mughal Paintings

Indian paintings historically revolved around the religious deities and kings. India is a country that has a long tradition in art, and painting as a medium of expression. Traditionally Indian paintings can be classified into mural Paintings and miniature paintings. Mughal paintings began to emerge in the 16th century having a fusion of Indian and Persian styles of paintings. Many Mughal paintings have been painted from the time of Emperor Babur. Babur's life with all its exciting adventures and romantic details, and his expressions of delight in the works of God, are graphically preserved in his autobiography, the Baburnama, or Tuzuk-i-Bamburi. The memoirs reveal his personality and give a vivid account of his daring exploits, of the places he visited, and things he observed. Although Babur had to pass much of his time in tents and could not lead a peaceful life like some of his descendants, his love for natural beauty and landscape is revealed amply in the art created during his reign, as with many an emperor who leaves his mark in the paintings done during his reign. Babur contributed a lot to the artistic development in India.



Figure 1. Babur's Hunting Scene

Source: Commons.wikimedia.org

Humayun was the second Mughal Emperor. He was the first documental patron of Mughal paintings. The versatility of Persian compositions accommodates the maximum amount of descriptive detail, whilst responding to the need for recession and depth. Interlocking and overlapping figures, painted in vivid flat colours, and the extensive use of gold, give the painting a heightened intensity. The green hills above the battlefield are finely etched, giving a convincing suggestion of mass and volume.



Figure 2. Emperor Akbar on an Elephant Hunt

Source: Akbarnama

This is a miniature painting from Akbarnama. This picture shows the elephant and people crossing the river from one side to another side. Many people are in danger as they are in the river because the road has broken and many people are about to fall. Natural scenes especially hunting scenes and portraits were the favourite of Jahangir's paintings. These were painted with vivid realism. Jahangir was a great lover of nature and ordered such artists as Mansur and Murad to paint beautiful specimens of birds, animals, and flowers. Painting of plants, creepers, flowers, animals, birds, animals, and numerous other natural subjects reached the highest stage of artistic reproduction. Unusual flowers and rare animals were ordered to be copied or painted by Emperor Jahangir.

Jahangir was also deeply influenced by European painting. During his reign, he came into direct contact with the English crown and was sent the gift of oil paintings, which included portraits of King and Queen. He encouraged his royal atelier to take up the single point perspective favoured by European artists, unlike the flattened multi-layered style used in traditional miniatures. He particularly encouraged paintings that depicted events of his own life, individual portraits, and studies of birds, flowers and animals. The Tuzk-e-Jahangiri or Jahangirnama written during his lifetime is an autobiographical account of Jahangir reign and has several paintings, including some unusual subjects such as the union of a saint with a tigress, and fights between spiders. Jahangir's painters who accompanied him everywhere made drawing of birds and animals which caught the emperor's eye. The great love of the Mughal for creating gardens gave the painters a chance to study and paint various species of flowers. To these paintings, he brings botanical expertise as well as an elevating sense of colour and rhythm. Flower studies were made in large numbers during the reigns of Jahangir and Shah Jahan.



Figure 3 Mughal painting from Jahangirnama, Source: <https://pixels.com/>

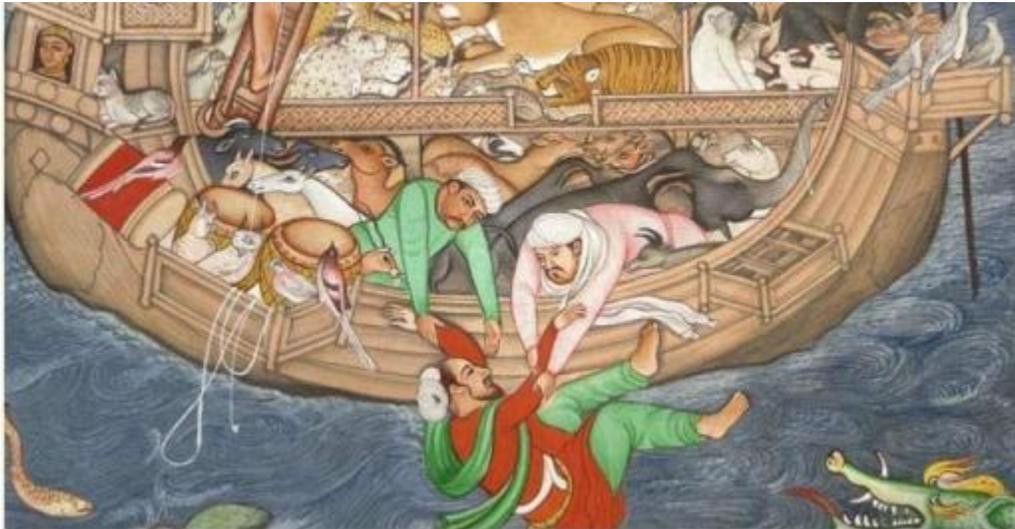


Figure 4 Mughal voyage, Source: <https://scroll.in>

This is a miniature painting of a voyage. The painter has tried to recreate a painting depicting Mughal people travelling on a boat. Several animal and human figures have been portrayed in this silk base painting. The artist has used bright colours like blue and red contrasting with the much lighter tones used for the boat. The artist depicts a scene where they are sailing when one person falls from the boat. Two people are helping him to get back in the boat, out of the sea. The boat and the sea are filled with many animals. It has wild and domestic animals but they are painted in separate sections. The message of the artist in this painting might be that every creature on earth has a right to its place in the earth and the will to live.



Figure 5 Royal Mughal, Source: <https://scroll.in>

This miniature painting is from the time of Babar. This painting shows Babar on his way to ascending the throne. This painting looks brighter than other paintings of the time. The artist uses

a bright pigment for the sky which makes the miniature brighter to contrast with the white pigment that is painted on the walls; they also used this pigment to get pastel shades. For the painting of the elephant, the artist has paid a lot of attention, mixing grey pigment and white pigment to produce a realistic feel of the original elephant present in the painting. In this painting, soldiers wear red turbans and their costumes are of different shades like lavender, olive, turquoise, ivory, etc. black pigment is used for shoes. The artist has used metallic gold for the ornament. They have also used maroon and forest green pigment cloth to decorate elephants.

The following painting shows that the king seated on an elephant with a gun for hunting. Many animals are running away scared. In this painting, we can see the elephant carrying the king is not caparisoned in gold ornaments which clearly shows that the elephant is out for hunting and not for a festival. The elephant is led by the man sitting on top who is shown with a stick in his hand controlling the elephant. One can also see five members paying homage to the king. One person is seen with a rhinoceros and another is with a bird in his hand depicting the splendour of the royal court and the royal hunt.

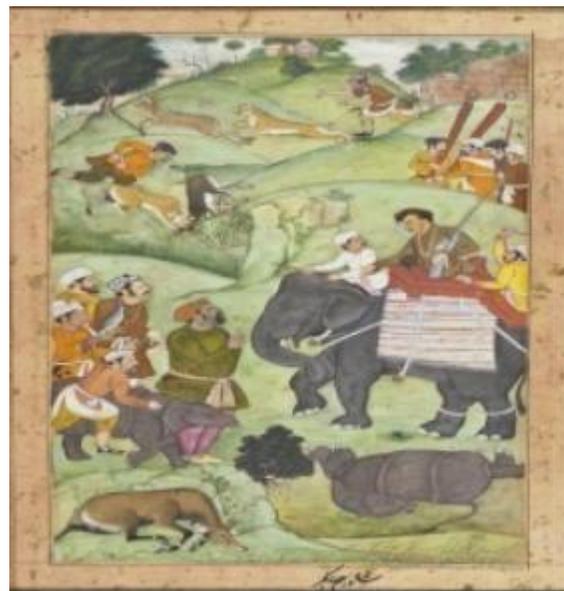


Figure 6. Muhammad Nasir al-Munshi. Prince Salim at a Hunt, Shikarnama

source: <https://www.artsy.net>

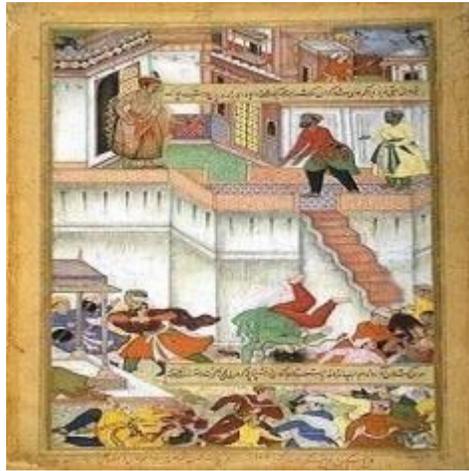


Figure 7. Akbar orders the punishment of Adham Khan, by throwing him twice, down the terrace, Akbarnama

Source: <https://commons.wikimedia.org/>

This is the scene where Akbar orders his soldier to punish Anwaruddin by throwing him from the top until he dies. The painting skill was more developed and nuanced in the period of Akbar. The artist had developed many techniques in miniature painting. We can see soldiers walking down where Akbar is standing up on a higher level. The drawing of the staircase can be seen perfectly. The artist used light pigments for the wall and gave dark pigments for clothes and faces to accentuate their presence. The artist had used metallic leaf pigment for the borders and they provide a detailed image of the walls and designs of the royal court.

Conclusion

Mughal Miniature Art flourished in India primarily because of its unique capacity to accept and incorporate the existing traditions and culture. The Mughals sought to create a kingdom with a secular ideology that patronised art, thanks to their benevolence Art was a flourishing field at that time. The famous Mughal kings from Babur to Shah Jahan nurtured the field of arts with a fervent passion and devotion that bordered on love until Emperor Aurangzeb who repudiated the distinguished position that Art had hitherto held. Interestingly Mughal miniature paintings survived and even flourished as they had carved a niche for themselves during the reign of Akbar, Jahangir, and Shah Jahan, such that there was no dearth of patrons and lovers of this

particular and unique genre of art. The Mughal artists also migrated to other cities and courts in search of patrons. The true historical value of the miniatures is understood by its interpretation. Miniatures do not just narrate a tale of the heroes of History but also portrays the nature, social and economic fabric of life and is a beautiful and standing testimony to the rich cultural heritage of India.

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