



The Assessment Of Miniatures Of Mughal Era: Women And Their Portrayal

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Abstract

The encounters related with female projection develop a different perception from the historic times till the modern age. The development is vigilant from the mark of miniatures. The woman is the most depicted subject which is considered benevolent and magnificent. The thesis and antithesis of the same project a different form of narratives where woman is mostly considered a non-significant subject as compare to men. The flourishing of Miniatures of the Mughal reign which covered almost every aspects of life and day to day activities of emperors and their interest, somehow showcasing the absence of significant roles of women in the portrayal. The study critically examine the portrayal of women in the miniatures of Mughal time period. The miniature and its association have been explored through taking images as data to form a critical overview.

Introduction

Indian paintings from the 13th century, when Delhi was taken by Muhammad Ghori (in 1192), a Turkish successor, and administered by his Viceroy Kutb-ud-din Aibak, show the influence of the Persian culture. With the blending of various styles, Islamic tradition has already begun to impact Indian paintings. Under the Pathan dynasty, Mandu, a citadel in Malwa, developed into a powerful kingdom, and it was about this time when sexual paintings first appeared. "The women have big hips and breasts, slim waists, and flowing skirts." (Randhwa & Galbraith 1982).

The aesthetic development of Persian style in India was begun by Babur, the founder of the Mughal Empire (1526–30), and carried on by his successors until the 17th century. Manuscripts, which are extremely rare, had been used to depict women in Mughal paintings. Intricately detailed and depicting court scenes and social life, the Mughal miniature paintings

also emphasize the representation of political rank. Additionally, the king's enjoyment of himself and his possessions, notably his ancestries, contributed to the focus. In addition, several paintings were created specifically for manuscripts of many religions, including Hindu mythology (Lewis 1976). The veil was a fairly common and carefully observed rule in Islamic culture, making it very challenging to find women in courtly paintings and portraiture, with the exception of a few sexual images. Many of the Mughal miniature paintings depict ladies performing sensual acts, such as a man surrounded by numerous women in a bathroom scene. Many paintings show dancers, maids, and concubines at courtly scenes. On the other hand, the women are also depicted, but to a lesser extent, as a mother or a princess having fun or relaxing. The Ramayana, the Mahabharata, and other Hindu epics and legends were drawn in manuscripts under the reign of Akbar. The women in these tales were also depicted in accordance with their function in the narrative. The scene from the Ramayana in which Sita is put to the test by fire to prove her purity after being kidnapped by the demon king Ravana was depicted in a painting (Randhawa, 1981). Because Jahangir loved the outdoors, he favoured paintings of animate and inanimate objects as well as other rulers' courtly admiration. The subjects of paintings under the reign of Jahangir were mostly flora and fauna, animals, everyday life, courtly life, etc. In contrast to Akbar, Jahangir's paintings featured women more prominently and in a variety of representations, including European, Persian, and Hindu. One such image, dubbed "the sensuous painting of the Jahangir period," depicts a young man having sex with a woman (Randhwa & Galbraith, 1982). With the sensual display, the scenario of an elopement and a love encounter is also depicted. There is an artwork called Jahangir playing Holi in which numerous women with angular features are portrayed. (Okada, 1992).

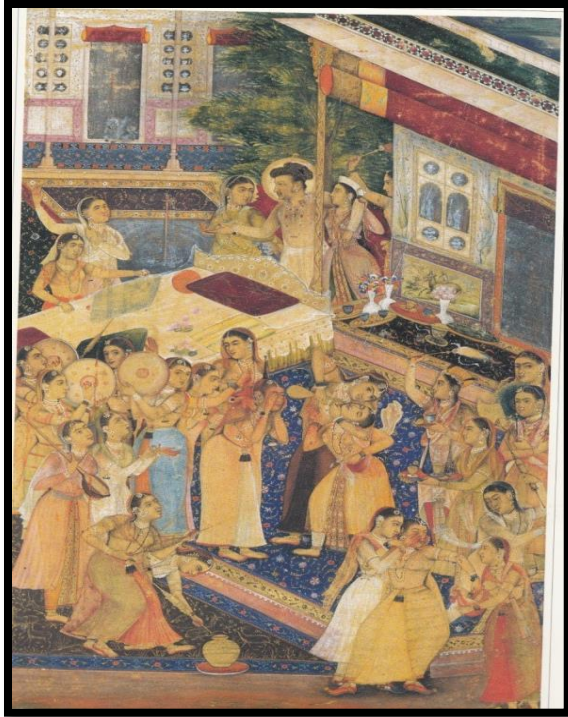


Fig.1. Jahangir Playing Holi Beloved

Fig.1. Jahangir Playing Holi, circa 1615-1625, signed by Govardhan, a page from the Minto Album, Chester Beatty Library Dublin, Source- Okada

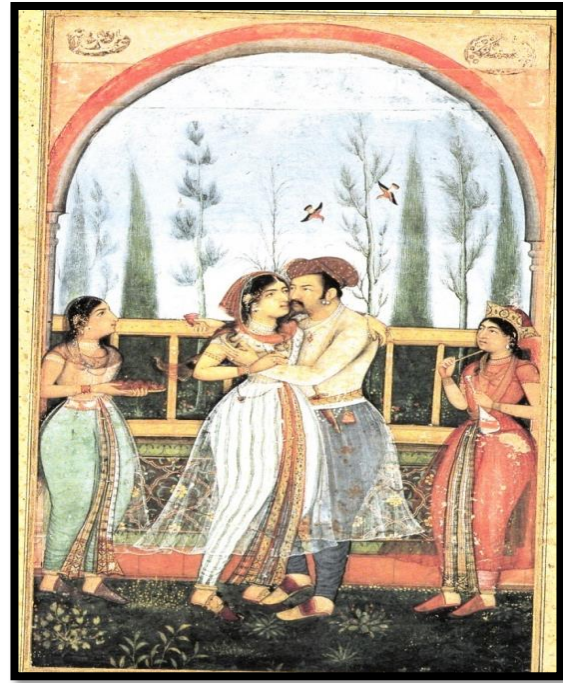


Fig.2. Shah Jahan and his Beloved

Fig.2. Shah Jahan and his Beloved, circa 1632, signed by Govardhan, a page from the Kevorkian Album, Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York, Source- Okada

Shah-Jahan, who succeeded Jahangir as the emperor and made contributions to both art and architecture, ruled from 1628 until 1658. Women are typically portrayed as having lovely appearances. Romanticism was at its height when it came to capturing the splendor of the king's court life and another peep into his private life in the royal apartments. In transparent clothing, the women are depicted in a sensual atmosphere, either waiting for their lovers or having fun with their female maids. According to a study, "It was to repeat, an age of pleasure and calm. Other paintings showed princesses in transparent Muslim blouses seated on terraces surrounded by their female servants listening to music"; during the later Mughal paintings, this romantic topic was more popular, displaying feminine purity and grace. (Randhwa & Galbraith 1982). Women's talents in singing and dancing were immensely popular. Women who worked as performers for the general public practiced this occupation. These performers employed bells, drums, and other instruments. They frequently served as the guests' entertainment by singing, dancing, and playing musical instruments. In the Mughal era, musicians and dancers played a significant role in court life. This entire list of

participation indicate the involvement of women as a source of entertainment like the old age manuscripts of India. A woman should have all the skills related with such activities which can engage her surrounding persons. She most of the times depicted sensuous when it comes to major roles like queen, princess, dancers etc. The slave and attendants have not been explored in such way by the artists.

During the 15th century, certain independent provinces began to form in India's western and southern regions. The three most affluent of the five kingdoms established by the Muslim Afghan monarchs (also known as the Bahmani Kingdom) were Ahmednagar, Bijapur, and Golkonda. These regions had developed into important hubs for the replication of the art form thanks to their patronage of the miniature painting style. Miniature paintings are used to enhance manuscripts like *Anvar-i-Suhayli* (the lights of Canopus), *Tarif-i-Husayn Shahi*, and *Najum-ul-ulum*. The Rajput and Mughal styles also had an impact on Ragamala painting, which peaked between the 16th and 19th century AD. The impact is evident in women's portraits, where the same sensuality persisted at numerous drinking establishments with music and dance.

The practice of polygamy was very common among Muslims. Every Muslim was entitled to at least four wives or slaves as property. Muslim women strongly adhered to the purdha /Parda system. Due to this social tradition, they had no education. In other ways, nevertheless, they were in a better position than Hindu women. They may file for their portion of their parents' property, divorce their husbands, and get remarried. Sati was not a custom followed by Muslim women. The position of women in India during the Sultanate was therefore significantly lower than that of men, and they experienced numerous social ills in addition to other disabilities. Women were primarily seen as objects of pleasure. Same approach can be seen in paintings too but few artists have been reported by art historians who were active during Mughal period. Due to the Mughal emperors' keen interest in portraiture, portrait paintings reached their highest points but the female portraits are less in numbers. Some portraits which can be largely seen are having the beautiful portrait of the women rather than the significant one. Even in old paintings that showed crowded court situations, the participation of women is less. Most of the time, the narrative-descriptive, dramatic, and true-to-appearance aim and purpose stay consistent. Similarly, the many compositional schemes also keep a common denominator throughout, as does the character of a design and draughtsman ship. All these characteristics behold the right of equality of women as compare to male projection.

In a few imperial paintings from the sixteenth century, primarily those from Oudha, Hyderabad, and Lucknow, ladies were selected as a specific topic. The predominant themes were love poetry, romance, and exquisite romantic encounters. Couples cuddling and making love as well as attractive court dancers are other candidates for representation. (Randhawa 1981).

Following Muslim invasions, India developed the miniature art form, and women in particular were used as a subject for male gaze. It was a time when a woman had been used as a political bargaining chip. The portrayal of women as making love, waiting, in bathroom scenes, engaged with women, and other sexual activities began in the imperial Mughal style. Only the attractive and well-proportioned woman has been much on show through sensual encounters as the so-called Goddess or princess phenomenon, which has its roots in mural tradition, has mostly vanished. Because at that time most of the paintings were made for the emperors' personal collections, the motivation behind this sensual display may have been based on the emperor's personal preferences. These emperors also ordered the artists, or the artists created these works to appease their emperors in exchange for a prize and a higher position under his rule. Compared to Hindu women, Muslim women observed parda (covering of face) with more rigor. For the harem women, rigorous parda is depicted in paintings. The women of the royal harem had nothing to do. They played many of games as a result. These sports were played both indoors and outdoors. These women engaged in a variety of activities, including hunting, chaupar, chandal mandal, hide-and-seek, and polo but the images are very few. The heroine is depicted as being surrounded by attendants who are naked or somewhat naked, which again suggests that ladies are being settled as a spectacle (Aitken 2002). The prestige of a woman, which was formerly honored through imagery of the Goddess, has been transferred to other sensual displays of beauty and projection. The emperor and nobles were frequently depicted as being surrounded by numerous beautiful women, engaging in sexual activity and enjoying music.

Conclusion

The perspective of paintings is particularly related with the life and encounters of Mughal emperors. Akbar had his own opinions and was passionate about painting. Under the sponsorship of Jahangir, it transitioned to single miniatures for albums from manuscript illustrations. It was secular art that included court life, durbar scenes, royal male and female portraits, birds, flowers, and animals as well as scenes from the forest, hunting, daily life, and flora and fauna. It also featured scenes of love. During the Sultanate, women's status was far lower than men's, and they experienced numerous social ills in addition to other limitations. Women were primarily seen as objects of pleasure. The same influence is also seen in Mughal artefacts. The position and status of women were not as high during the Mughal period (age), in contrast to the ancient Indian period. Child marriage and purdah had become prevalent and the paintings narrates a different story most of the times. In paintings, we can rarely see such images as a women having a purdah. The birth of a son was a cause for celebration, while the birth of a daughter was frowned upon. Because of early marriage, our society had a large number of widows. Throughout general, women in the Mughal Period were forbidden from getting remarried. Numerous paintings showcase the trend of polygamy and

concubines. All can be observed through these miniatures which is far from the realistic encounters, it was rather imaginary and decorative.

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