
Bishan Das-The Incomparable Portrait Artist Of Jahangir's Court

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How to cite this article: Farha Deebea (2024) Bishan Das-The Incomparable Portrait Artist Of Jahangir's Court. *Library Progress International*, 44(3), 2928-2933

Abstract

This research paper presents study of the painting of Bishan Das, a great portrait artist in the court of the Mughal Emperor Jahangir. Jahangir always praised his work and said in Tuzuk-e-Jahangiri "*He was incomparable in the art of portraiture. He had some exceptional skills which made him unique*". His paintings were very informative with lively details. His painting skills were completely mastered and the vivid details of the background of his paintings made them very distinctive. Bishan Das has majorly contributed to the book of fables, Anwar-e-Suhaili (The Lights of Canopus). The paintings of Bishan Das were popular among women; his extraordinary skills won him praise at the major Harem events.

Mughal Emperor Jahangir was a great art lover and a great patron of painting. Although, Mughal Empire in India was established by Babur, the painting reached its peak only during the Jahangir period. He gave complete freedom to the artists in his court. Also, provided necessary materials to the artists. During his time, portraits, court scenes, allegorical portraits, animal paintings, and border decorations got special encouragement.

Keywords: Painters. Mughal Emperors, Miniatures, Portraiture.

Introduction

Mughal Painting was introduced in India by Emperor Akbar and further developed during Jahangir's period. Jahangir loved painting more than architecture. He kept alive the artistic interest of his father Akbar. During Jahangir's period, art attained excellence and reached its peak. It's no surprise that Jahangir's period is called the "Golden Age" of Mughal painting.

Nature lover Jahangir followed his father's traditions very well and established art studio during his father's time. "*He established the Art studio in Allahabad when he was a prince and the president of this studio was Aqariza*". (Verma , Art & material culture.1978,Page 88).

Certainly, under the patronage of Jahangir, human portraiture, animal bird portraiture, and court scenes got special encouragement. After the death Akbar in 1605, Jahangir carried forward his passion and established a studio to be known as the "Salim Studio". "Muqeeb Khan" was the custodian of the library and Salim Studio. It was a gift for artists and art lovers. Many painters worked in this studio. Jahangir has written in his autobiography Tuzuk-e-Jahangiri - "*When he was a prince, the famous painter Aqariza of Herat was his employee*." Another important name in this context is that of Abul Hussan the son of Aqariza (Tuzuk e Jahangiri, Translation by S .Rogers, volume II, Page 20)

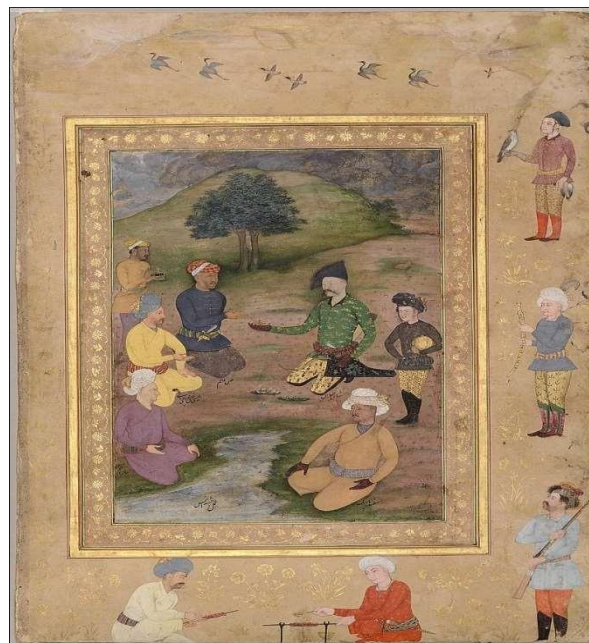
Jahangir was a high-level art connoisseur. He was kind-hearted and elegant, a herpetologist, and a great inquisitive person. *He has written in Tuzuk-i-Jahangiri, "As far as my vision is concerned, my interest in painting and my ability to judge it have reached such a height that whenever a painting comes in front of me, even if It may have been painted by a great artist and his name have not been told me, yet I can tell immediately that it is the work of someone special*

artist. If a painting is created in which multiple artists work together and even if there are multiple faces and each face is created by a different artist, I can know which face is created by which artist. Even if the eyes and eyebrows of the same face were created by another artist. I will recognize who is the artist who created this. (*Tuzuk e jahangiri*, Translation by Rogers, Edited by Hennerly Beveridge. London 1904, Vol.3rd page 12). It is clear from this statement that he observed the works of artists with great interest. Jahangir, like his father, also used to give suggestions to artists and the artists worked according to the Emperor's taste.

A large number of artists were present in his art studio who were specialists in their own styles. Important artists like Mansoor, ManoharMiskin, Govardhan, Aqariza ,AbulHasan, Bishandas etc. were working in his court. Bishan Das was a talented artist and one of Jahangir's favorite artists. He used to paint with confidence. Jahangir was greatly impressed by his artistic talent. Beautiful drawings and deep emotions were the main qualities of his artworks. He had expertise in coloring.

Jahangir has written in his autobiography *Tuzuk-e-Jahangiri* that “When I sent Khan Alam to Persia, I also sent the painter Bishan Das along with him. The portrait he made of the Shah of Iran and the members of the royal family is very lifelike.” According to Jahangir, “The portrait he made of my brother Shah was the best.” Pleased with the achievements of Bishan Das, Jahangir gave him a gift of an elephant from the royal treasury. BishanDas's sketch was of high quality. He painted many paintings not only during the reign of Jahangir but also during the reign of Shah Jahan .(*Tuzuk-e-Jahangiri* translation by Beveridge ,vol.1 , page 116,117)

He created many important paintings not only during the reign of Jahangir but also during Shahjahan’s reign. BishanDas's signature can be seen on the paintings of *PadshahNama* especially on double-page paintings. The paintings “Marriage Celebration of Prince DaraShikoh was painted by Bishan Das in which he gave a very realistic and poignant depiction of all the marriage rituals performed in the royal family. Although his figures have considerable differences from artists like Aabid and Bulaqi. But the kind of figure depiction, especially female depiction, dancing women, and emotional depiction of musicians performing music, done by Bishan Das, is unique.



Shah Alam meets Shah Abbas

Historical Background:

Jahangir, the Emperor sent his diplomats to different countries to strengthen his political relations. Shah Alam was sent to Persia to establish good relations with Shah Abbas of Persia. Due to this Shah Abbas had to bow his head. Jahangir also sent Bishan Das, an important artist of his court, to Persia because Jahangir wanted to make a portrait of Shah Abbas and his courtiers and present it to them. In this regard, Jahangir has written in his autobiography *Tuzuk-e-Jahangiri* –“ When Khan e Alam was sent to Persia in 1619, he brought along with him the painter BishanDas, who was a specialist in making

amazing portraits". Bishan Das, drawn portrait of my brother Shah. When I showed that portrait to the shah and his nobles, everyone praised it and called it excellent it was lifelike. .(ibid)

It is worth mentioning that being pleased with the achievements of Bishan Das, Jahangir gifted him an elephant from the royal treasury, which was considered a symbol of prestige in the medieval period.(Verma ,Mughal painters and their work: A biographical survey and Comprehensive Catalogue 1993 ,India)

Painting Description –

In this painting Shah Alam, Shah Abbas and the courtiers sit in the palace's courtyard. Shah Abbas inspecting a gold wine goblet sent as a gift by Jahangir. At the same time, another courtier presented hookah to Shah Alam. It is noteworthy that tobacco was banned in those days during the reign of Shah Abbas. If a person smoked he was given the death penalty, but here, in a departure from tradition, Shah Alam presented a hookah as a gesture of hospitality. The background of the painting depicts Indian-style hills and nature. Beautiful border decorations have been created all around, which are essential parts of Jahangir's painting. Five servants have been depicted on the outside of the border. Two servants are making kebabs. Third servant is holding a gun, fourth is holding a sword in his hand, and in the fifth servant's hand a bird is sitting, Which was a Persian tradition adopted by Mughal artists. The names of the five present guests are below them, and "Amal e Bishan Das" is also at the bottom. In the background, the artist tried to depict the outdoor environment through Indian-style landscapes and birds flying in the sky.



Birth of Saleem

Historical background:

Although, birth of Saleem was painted in Akbar's time. During the reign of the artist Bishan Das, the same subject was depicted in a different form. All the activities after the prince's birth were depicted in this painting.

Painting Description:

This is one of the important paintings painted by artist Bishan Das. The artist has divided the painting in three parts by architecture and activities. In the upper part of the painting, the presence of women has shown in Zanankhana and presence of infant prince is depicted.

Prince's mother Maryam Uz Zamani and his grandmother Hamida Bano begum hold an important place in the history of Mughal painting. Probably the personal portrait of Hamida Bano Begum is not found anywhere else.

Hamida Banu Begum is sitting on a chair wearing a crown on her head. The prince's cradle is also kept near her. In the zamankhana, a crowd of women are busy feeding the baby. Some women are playing drums and singing songs. The main attraction of the painting is the realistic depiction of Hamida Bano Begum and the women present in the Zanakhana. The cheerful expressions and happiness can be seen on the faces of the figures.

In the middle part of the picture, some pundits are looking at the horoscope of the child. Some servants are taking donations of coins and other things to distribute among the poor. The painting features a large neem tree in front of large red stone walls and depicts the splendor of the Mughal court.

The drapery has been shown according to European manner. The use of light and dark colors and beautiful tilework increase the attractiveness of the paintings.



Vasiṣṭha Greets Shiva and Parvati

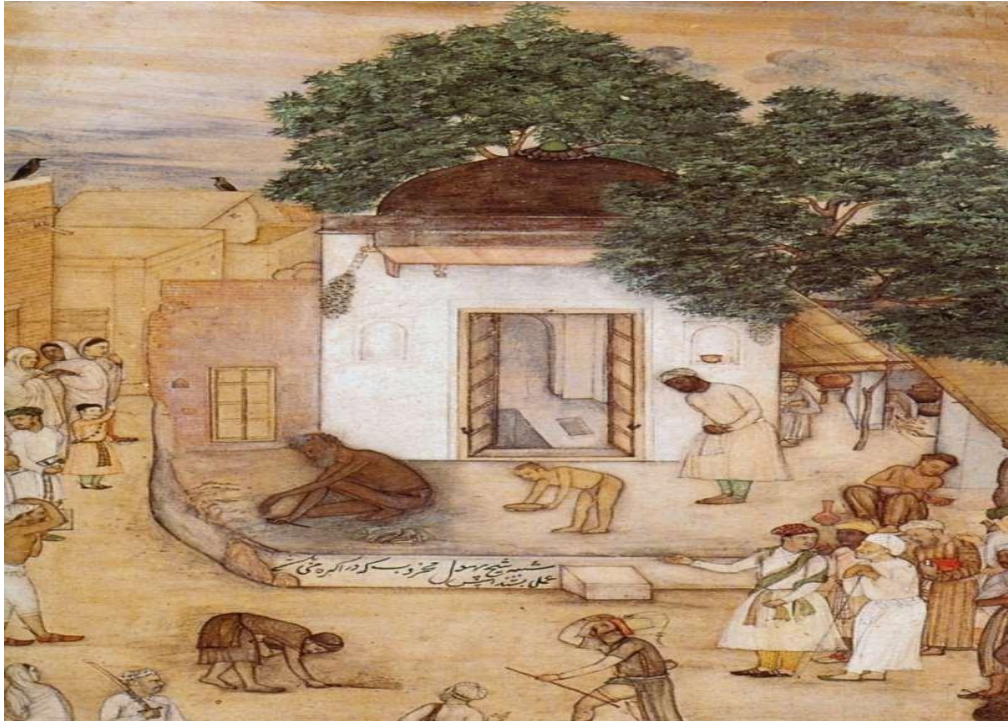
Historical background

Rishi Vashishtha is known among the oldest and most revered of the seven Vedic saints. Vashishtha was the main author of Rigveda's Mandala seven. Vashishta and his family are also mentioned in the Rigveda and many other Vedic texts. His ideas have been influenced by Hindu philosophy and AdiShankara called him the first saint of the Vedanta school. Vashishta Sanhita, as well as Agni Purana and Vishnu Purana are attributed to Yoga Vashishtha. *According to Ramayana, he was the family priest of the Raghu dynasty and the teacher of Rama and his brothers and Rama got his education in the Gurukul of Vashishtha only*

Besides it, Vashishtha was the one who inspired Dasharatha to send Rama to the forest and Rama accompanied Vishwamitra to the forest to kill the demons who were not allowing the sages to perform the Yagna. Later Rama married Sita. In ancient Hindu texts he is usually described as a yogi. He also wrote several hymns which are ancient sources of Vedic text.

Description

In this painting, Shiva and Parvati are depicted taking blessings from Guru Vashishtha after their marriage. Vashishtha was the brother-in-law of Lord Shiva, who was married to Goddess Sati, the second daughter of Daksh Prajapati. In a cave in the middle of the mountains, Lord Shiva and Parvati are seen blessing sage Vashishtha and Ganga is shown emerging from Shiva's locks. Shiva is depicted wearing a skeleton garland and the moon near Usha Nish. Goddess Parvati is wearing a transparent saree. In the central part of the picture, Persian-style hills have been created in the background on which lush green trees have been depicted and deer have been shown eating grass on those hills. The contour lines of the hills and the leaves of the trees are highlighted with dark colors. Ganga is shown flowing in the lower part of the painting. The Ganas of Nandi and Shiva are shown in dark blue color. One Gana is blowing the conch, the other Gana has a begging bowl in his hand and the other priest is performing puja with folded hands. Dark colors generally predominate in the painting.



Sheikh Phool in his Hermitage

Historical Background:

Many paintings of Sufi saints were painted during the reign of Jahangir because the emperor himself was greatly influenced by Sufi Saints from 1610 to 1620. Like his father Akbar, Jahangir also had great respect for Sufi saints, whether Hindu or Muslim. Jahangir used to talk to them about his empire's betterment and informative talks. The artists of the Jahangir's made the subject of their paintings – 'conversations with Sufi saints'. At this time, artists started showing halos on the heads of emperors and Sufi saints, which was completely influenced by European art.

Painting Description:

This is a picture of the early period of the Jahangir period in which Sheikh Phool is shown in his shrine (Dargah). In the background of the painting artist has shown the architecture of the Sultanate period, which proves that this painting belongs to early period of Jahangir's reign. A simple dome and residences have been shown on both sides of the shrine. No perspective has been used in this painting because roof has been shown from the ground which means that there was a lack of maturity in the painting. Two birds are sitting on the architecture which can be seen in most of Mughal paintings. A big banyan tree is shown behind the shrine. The mason workers have been working on the platform of the shrine. The mason worker spreading mortar on the platforms of the shrine and a laborer is helping him. In the lower part of the picture, a servant is sweeping on the floor. On the right side of the painting Emperor Akbar and his chief Wazir Khan I Khan are talking to each other. Behind them nobles are standing. On the left side of the painting, presence of women has been shown and servants are standing informing about the arrival of the emperor. Court's etiquettes are completely visible in the painting. Mostly light colors have been used in the painting. Out line with dark color have been depicted on the architecture, drapery and faces of the figures.

Along with the respect and inclination of the Mughal emperors towards Sufi saints, a glimpse of their daily life is also visible in this picture. The drawing of this picture shows that this picture is from the early parts of the Jahangir period, as per the inscription written in the painting.

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