Indian Art: Materials, Techniques and Artistic Practices
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Lecture – 32
Paper

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Pages from *Ni'matnimah-i Nasirshahi* (Nasir Shah's Book of Delights), Recipes for samosas with illustrations showing cows being milked (right) and Sultan Ghiyas al-Din seated on his throne, Delhi Sultanate, late 15th century, Image: https://scroll.in/article/822109/a-samosa-recipe-and-other-culinary-delights-from-a-rare-15th-century-book

Hello everyone. We are continuing on our material on paper and we have already looked into some of the initial utilization of paper in the Indian subcontinent and we are moving forward with it. Now when we think about paper in the Middle East, so writing books and having this prominence of having book as part of the devotion, as part of like the daily rituals and practices, we find that to be prevalent in the Abrahamic religions, for example, Judaism, Christianity and Islam.

And since we know that in the Middle East, and at the same time in the 14th-15th century for the Sultanate rule and later on for the Mughal rule, we find that the prevalence of Islamic culture, at the same time the Islamic culture of bookmaking and reading book that had also been prominent in the Indian subcontinent. So, we find that there have also been a number of manuscripts and books those were made in the sultanate courts and those practices were taken forward by the Mughals.

So, this is one of the examples in which in the Delhi sultanate we find that how some of those manuscripts were produced. So, this is a very unique manuscript that was produced in the Delhi

sultanate it was the late 15th century and it is called Nimatnama-i-Nasiruddin-Shahi. And so this is a book and that is Nasir Shah's Book of Delights. So basically, it is a cookbook, it has many recipes. And so we have again this strategy for securing one space for writing and then one space for making the images.

And as we can see that this is a book of recipes, so for that reason having the images to illustrate what has been written here is really important. So, that is the reason the images and the text they complement each other. And here since this is a book in which we find that the sultan Ghiyas-ud-Din has also been depicted and it has perhaps been made for this particular sultan. So, it was dedicated to Ghiyas-ud-Din and it was commissioned by Nasir Shah.

So that is how we find that how this this particular manuscript it says something about the recipes, its prevalence in the sultanate court, at the same time its uses in terms of understanding some of the other connotations in terms of the use of material and then how books were compiled, how recipes were compiled, how knowledge was distributed and it was produced in the royal courts as well.

So, these are the reasons we find these kinds of books to be very important. So, we have looked into different kinds of this manuscripts, so starting with the religious manuscripts like Kalpasutra, Kalakacharya katha in the Jain context, then some of the other manuscript like they have more a secular point of view like Chaurapanchasika, then the other kind of manuscript like Bhagavata Purana or Gita Govinda or the Ragamala folios.

So, we will come into the details of Ragamala in the later lectures. So that is another section in which we find how the literary works, the works of poetry and all those were translated into the visuals. And then here we have another set of manuscripts like this one the Nimatnama which is a book of recipes or the Book of Delights. So, this is something that we find how differently this particular medium of making manuscript, making books was treated in the Indian subcontinent.

And how different kinds of subject matters and different kinds of imagery they were produced by the artisans during this time period in the 15th and 16th century. So, even though we have been talking about diverse range of subject matters and so on, we find the pictorial strategy to be somewhat established how the calligraphers would work on the same page where the

painters are also painting, so this is how the religious texts have also been produced and here Nimatnama at the same time Gita Govinda and so on.

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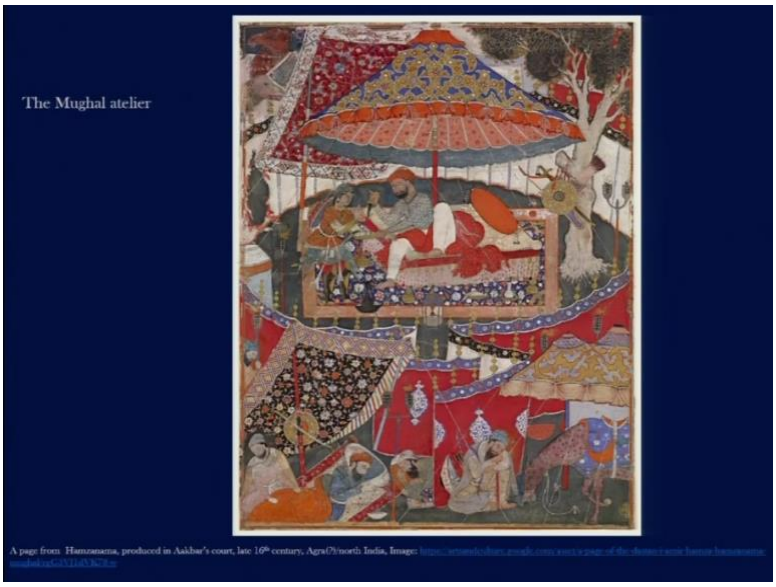

So from there, we move on to the next step of utilizing paper and cloth and that will be the Mughal atelier. So, the Mughals as we have already noted in our earlier lectures, the Mughals have been prominent in the Indian subcontinent from the 16th century and under their patronage we find that the art of making books, manuscript and the painting tradition had flourished extensively.

So we find that after the rule of Padshah Babur, Humayun was exiled in Persia for around 15 years and this is the time when Humayun was acquainted with the literally at the same time the visual practices and traditions in the Persian courts. And then from there when he moved back to the Indian subcontinent, and slowly during Akbar's time period, we find when the Mughal sultanate was much more sort of a unified and then it was strengthened further.

So during this time, we find that Akbar had made this atelier in his royal court in Agra and there we have the court artisans and the master artisans, some of the master artisans we find them to be invited from the courts of Persia, and the Persian artisans, they have travelled to the court in Agra. And then they were also in charge to train the local artisans, the painters, so that is how this eclectic form of painting that came into being in the Akbar's court.

And it was a combination of the Persian traditions, the local Indian traditions and a combination of both. And later on, we also find that the European manuscripts and the European prints, they

have also contributed to the development of this Mughal atelier. So why is the atelier because it is a workshop process or the karkhana process in which the entire work takes place. We will go into the details of karkhana slightly later.

Now, what we find here to be slightly different or maybe significantly different, I should not say slightly different, significantly different from the Chaurapanchasika style or the ones we have seen in Bhagavata and so on. So here we definitely have the kind of registers that was also prevalent in the earlier paintings from central and northern India, but here we find the figures that have different kinds of elements, they have been treated much more naturalistically the way we see them around us.

So, it is not really the stylization that gives the prominence, but this naturalistic orientation and then the depiction of the figures and how they can be close to the life that we see. Now, here we also find something very similar to some of the paintings that we have studied in the context of Ajanta and some of the other murals in which many things happen at the same time in one pictorial plain that is something we find to be prevalent in the Mughal paintings as well.

So, this particular characteristic we also find that to be there in the miniature paintings in Persia as well. So, we know that how these different kinds of traditions, some of the tradition might have derived from the practices in the Indian subcontinent and the other ones they have also derived from the practices in Persia and other parts of Middle East and all of them were combined together in this Mughal miniatures.

Now the ones we have on screen here this also depicts this cosmopolitanism, which was also prevalent in the Mughal atelier. And I must also remind the viewers that this cosmopolitanism is not something that is unique to the field of paintings, but it had already been there as we have studied the architecture in the Mughal times, for example in Fatehpur Sikri in Agra and in Delhi we have found how the Iranian Iwan that came in contact with Rajput chajja and chhatri, also the Bengal style roof.

So, all these different kinds of things, Makara Torana and so on. So how all those different kinds of elements were brought together, so this is also not an exception in the Mughal miniatures. Now, the one we have on screen this comes from this particular manuscript that is called Hamzanama or the or the travels and adventures of Amir Hamza who was uncle to

Prophet Muhammad. And Hamzanama the journey and the stories of Amir Hamza was one of the favourite stories of Emperor Akbar.

So, he commissioned this unusually large paintings on cloth and mounted on paper. So those images and some of them their size comes around like 81 to 64 centimetres. So, they are unusually large in comparison to the manuscript paintings and even the other miniature paintings those we find to be produced in the Mughal atelier. However, we find here the kind of the colours those are used, the kind of space division, the eye for detail, each and every detail the way they have been executed.

And also not only just the details of the ornaments, not only just the detail of every figurative motifs, but also the details of the expression, the bodily gestures, creating a mood with all these different kinds of narrative elements in one picture that we find that to be establishing in the Mughal atelier and some of the early signs of this kind of establishment of this new idiom or style we find that to be prevalent in the paintings of Hamzanama.

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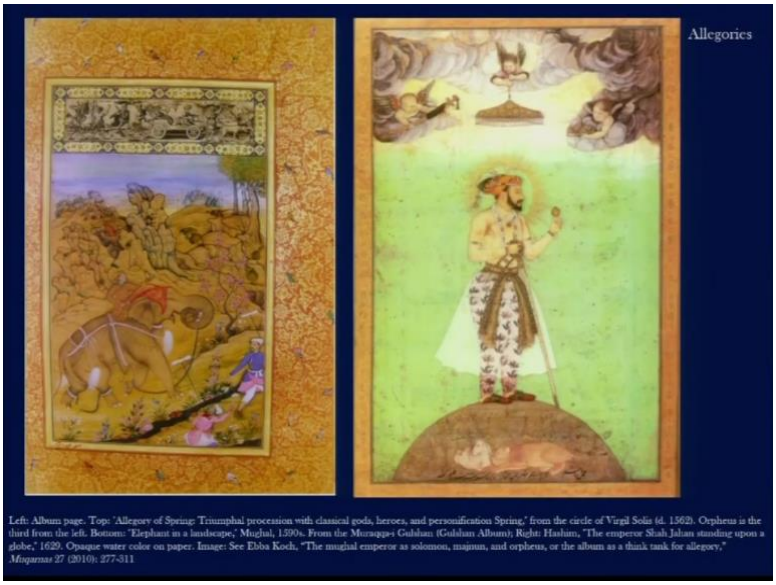

In the Mughal paintings, another characteristic feature we find that is the use of allegories. And the use of allegories or the implementation of allegories that we find to be there from the time from Jehangir who was son of Akbar and then later on during the time of Shah Jahan and so on. So, this particular issue about the use of allegory as we find that was also addressed by scholar Ebba Kock in her essays.

And what we find here to be interesting is that there are different kinds of these motifs, some of them they came from the European sources, some of them they came from the Indic literary traditions and some of them of course they had their roots in the Persian miniatures. So for example, the one we have here and both these images that we have on screen, they have their allegories.

So, the one we have on the left side that came from one of these albums and this is called the Allegory of Spring, the triumphal procession with the classical Gods, heroes and personification spring. So, this is where what we find that how these allegories and allegories have manifested in these images. So, in this image as we can see and as I have already mentioned they were made as the manuscripts, so all of them were put together in form of one manuscript or in one folio.

And so they were not really meant for displaying them onto the wall, but they have always been made for reading them like this, to hold them close to the reader, see them, read them and that is the reason miniature paintings also have tremendous amount of details so that people can take them in front of them and see them or engage with them over time. Now, what we find in this painting in the upper register there is this one particular panel.

Which is perhaps a copy of a European print or it is also possible that a part of this European print was pasted onto this pictorial plane. And here we find the Greek god Orpheus and who was seemed to have extraordinary musical skill. Also, he was considered to have this prophetic quality and his deep relationship with the arrival of spring. And then we find in the lower register of this image, there is this rocky terrain.

And this is distinctively an Indian landscape and in which we find this elephant is running and then there is this person who is sitting on the top of the elephant. And this perhaps also says something about the triumphant run off the spring in this rocky terrain in this barren land. And so there is a kind of the similarity we can find how the procession is going on in this direction as well as here it is also going on in this direction, the narrative flow is moving towards the same direction.

And so, one is in the European context, one is in this Indian context and how those two things are blended together in this one pictorial plane. So we know that the Mughal emperors, for

example Jahangir and Shah Jahan, they were also obsessed with this idea about the Solomonic kingship and at the same time how the Messia or the Messiah will appear to save the humankind and which has also very much been addressed and acknowledged in the Abrahamic religions.

So, these emperors clearly like, for example Jahangir and Shah Jahan, they have tried to draw a comparison between themselves and these messianic figures and that is the reason we find that how their portraits were put side by side either with this Greek god Orpheus or in some of the other cases we also find that their images were put side by side with the image of Majnun and Majnun being this another celebrated literary character we find that who seem to have his power over the wild animals.

So that kind of supernatural powers, that kind of extraordinary power and their divine connections those things were celebrated in these allegorical paintings in the Mughal context in the Mughal courts and some of the paintings that we find them to be manifested in this way. Now, apart from these paintings, we also find there are those elaborate borders which are kept around them.

For example, here the borders which are also called hashiya and sometimes the border became more and more elaborate, so elaborate that the borders could depict their own stories. And the borders have also been done with outmost details and as we can see there are also narrative elements, there are also figurative elements in the borders, it is not just the creepers and ornamental motifs.

So that is how there was a kind of this idea of the pictorial frame, moving beyond the frame, how the relationship between the elements within the frame, outside the frame can be set up. So, all these different kinds of experimentations we find them to be prevalent in the Mughal miniature paintings and how they have also contributed to making and nurturing the allegories which the emperors were interested in.

Now moving on to the image on the right side, here we have another image and this one shows the emperor Shah Jahan. So, this is an image which is painted by Hashim and Hashim shows that the emperor Shah Jahan standing upon a globe. It was painted in the early half of 17th century, it was painted in 1629 and it is an opaque water colour on paper. And here what we

find, there is also inscription onto this painting, for example here and few other places in this image as well.

So, we see that there was a shift during Jehangir's time and it became more and more apparent during Shah Jahan's time period as well that in some images it was deliberately the narrative elements like the high narrative qualities and different kinds of narrative details in every part of the image that we have seen in some of the early miniature paintings, for example, the one on the left side of the screen or the one we have seen earlier in Hamzanama, those things were avoided and attention came in to be in the figure at the centre.

So here we have the image of prince Khurram who had been the emperor by the time and when he was the emperor, he was newly named as Shah Jahan or the shah or the king of the entire world and that is the reason he was interested to show himself on the top of the globe. So, we see the idea of the globe that also has this European connection that how in Europe by that time in the early 17th century, this idea of globe being this spherical, this entity instead of being something that is flat, so those things have already been established.

And with the arrival of the European prints with the European travellers and ambassadors in the Mughal court in Agra, we find those knowledge has also been transmitted to the royal court and how those knowledge was seamlessly merged into the miniature paintings in the Mughal context. So, these are some of the things we find that if this globe that we find to be one of the European elements.

Some of the other elements will be the utilization of this cloud, the cloud that we also find during this time in the Italian frescoes and the other paintings in the canvas paintings as well. This dramatic cloud and angels of the putti, they are appearing from the cloud to greet the central figures. So, in the Christian context we find that either there is the image of virgin or Jesus or the important Christian saints or the royal figures who will be greeted by these putties.

And here we have how the putti they are greeting this emperor right and who is standing at the centre of this image. So here we have this figure who is carrying the crown, the royal crown, here we find this figure who is carrying the sword of Shah Jahan. And at the centre stage, we find that there is this figure who is carrying this chhatra or the umbrella on the top of this head.

So having a chhatra or having an umbrella, this also comes from a very Hindu idea of being a chakravartin or someone who is elected as the emperor.

So, in this image in this way we find that there is an acknowledgment of these different kinds of customs, practices those were prevalent in the Indian subcontinent and they were seamlessly merged with the European notions of kingship, at the same time the glorification, the glorification of the central image how that that also owes a lot to the European traditions of depicting this divine figures.

And then the other European character will also find that to be this Halo round the head. Even though we have seen halo in the earlier context in the sculptures of the Indian divine figures, but here you can see that how the halo it is almost like emanating the light from it, the treatment of this halo that is much more subdued, but at the same time it glorifies the central figure that is something we find though that had a lot to do with the contemporary frescoes and other paintings in part of western and southern Europe.

The other things apart from the European influences, we also find there are some of the other very important political messages, so for example in the globe we find there is a close correlation between this lion and a sheep. So, these two are sitting there together. And here what we find that the lion and sheep they are not just there as animals, but lion was a symbol of the Mughal dynasty whereas sheep was a symbol of the Safavid dynasty of Persia.

Now, Shah Jahan could not really ensure a peaceful correlation between the Safavids and the Mughals and the Safavids were certainly more powerful during this time, so Shah Jahan could not dominate them. So, he had the dream to have this peaceful coexistence with his dominance over the Safavids. So, something that has not really been possible in the actual world, in the reality, he had commissioned that to be made into this painting here.

So, similar kind of exercises we have also seen in the Jahangir's court where we find the Jahangir had also represented the Shah of Persia and also like this allegorical image of poverty and how Jahangir is killing that image. So, there are all those allegorical images in which we find that the unfulfilled dreams of this Mughal emperors they came into reality on paper by the means of this kind of allegorical paintings.

So, this is something we find to be some of the prime characteristic features of this Mughal miniatures. And if we see the central figure, the central figure is again painted in profile and Shah Jahan is seen here who is ornamented and has been wearing fanciful fabrics, textiles, and then he holds, in many paintings we find that either he holds a precious jewel or a flower in his hand and so that that had been one of the established modes of depicting these Mughal emperors in these miniature paintings.

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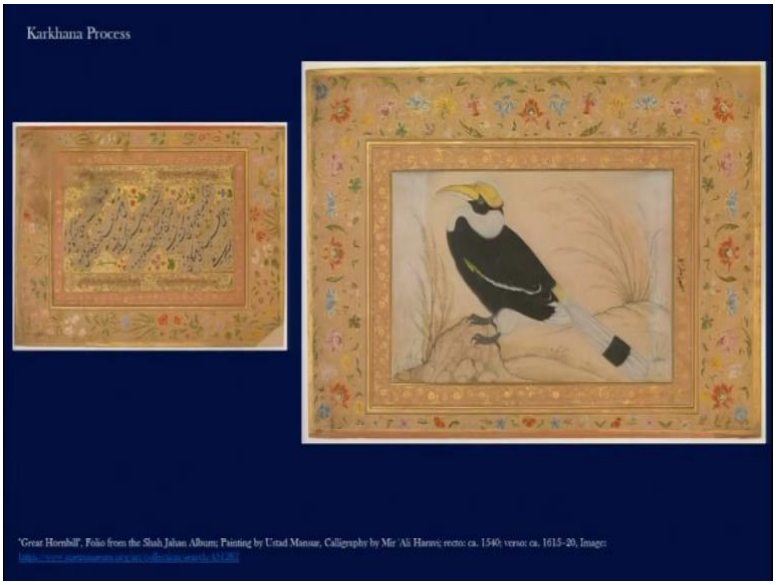

So, the other way in which we find the miniature paintings have also been moving forward and in this one we find that there are a number of those folios which were produced and these folios they marked a shift from all the other images I would say and that is how these images, these folios they had a documentation of the different kinds of flora and fauna from the land which was ruled by the Mughals.

And so we find that kind of folios that started being made from Jahangir's time period. So, for example this one we find that started much earlier and it has perhaps been made around like 1514, the 16th century and then like the writing was added in the early 17th century. And so this is also something that talks about this karkhana process or this workshop mode of working in which one piece of paper is a that moves from one hand to another.

Perhaps there are people who will be appointed to polish the paper to prepare it for making the drawings, then it will be given to the ones who will draw on to them, then it will be given to the ones who will be painting particular parts, then it will be given to the master artisans who

will be doing the finest of the details on them. And sometimes the calligraphy is done beforehand, some time the calligraphy is done afterwards.

So this kind of particular process the karkhana process that we find to be prevalent in the Mughal court and that had persisted for centuries. And so going with the content of this images that we find, as I have already said this marks a shift from the many other kinds of images that we find that they are not really part of a narrative of the royal court, they are not really part of a narrative from religion or from literary sources.

But each folio has one particular flora or fauna and then there are descriptions or there are written records about them in the verso. So that kind of this new mode of making these folios that started during Jahangir's time period that we find to be also excelled in this naturalistic mode of depiction, for example, the one we see here this great hornbill and so there are many similar kinds of images in which the narrative elements had been reduced.

And then all the attention had been given to the central figure that is represented on paper which is also framed by these thick decorative borders are hashiya. Thank you.