
UNIT 14 PAINTINGS AND FINE ARTS*

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14.0 OBJECTIVES

Cultural values are often reflected through the medium of paintings and fine arts. After going through this Unit, you will be able to know the following:

- the development of painting during the sixteenth to eighteenth centuries;
- the various styles and techniques of painting; and
- the development of fine arts viz., music, dance and theatrical arts in the courts of the Mughals and other regional kingdoms.

14.1 INTRODUCTION

The sixteenth century, especially its second half, marks a watershed in the development of the art of painting and music in India. Akbar gave liberal patronage to the growth of fine arts during his rule. His successor also showed great interest in these arts, so that

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by the end of the seventeenth century painting and music in the Mughal court reached unparalleled height.

Simultaneously, in the Deccan, was evolving another great traditions of painting and music somewhat independent of the Mughal influence. Later, in the eighteenth century, the patronage to painting shifted from the Mughal court to regional kingdoms, such as Rajasthan and Punjab.

In the following pages you will read details of the emergence of these various traditions of painting along with the growth of other fine arts.

14.2 ANTECEDENTS

In this section we will recap the development of painting in the pre-Mughal period as discussed in **Unit 19 of BHIC-107**.

14.2.1 Painting in the Fifteenth Century

Until recently it was believed that art of painting did not flourish during the rule of the Delhi Sultans and that the illuminated manuscripts of the Mughals were, in fact, a revival of painting after a lapse of several centuries from the end of the tenth. Lately, however, enough evidence has come to light suggesting the existence of;

- a lively tradition of murals and painted cloth during the 13th and 14th centuries;
- a simultaneous tradition of the Qur’anic calligraphy, lasting upto the end of the 14th century, and
- a tradition of illustrated Persian and Awadhi manuscripts originating probably at the beginning of the 15th century.

Of this last tradition, a notable number of illustrated manuscripts from the period between the 15th and 16th century have become known. Some of these works were commissioned by independent patrons in the Sultanate located outside the court. From the former category mention may be made of;

- a) the Bostan of S’adi, illustrated by the artist Hajji Mahud, and
- b) Ni’ -mat Name (a book on cookery)
- c) Miftah al Fuzala by Muhammed Shadiabadi



Pic-1 : Nimat Nama

Courtesy : [https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/file:At-nama_\(Book_of_Delicacies\).jpg](https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/file:At-nama_(Book_of_Delicacies).jpg)

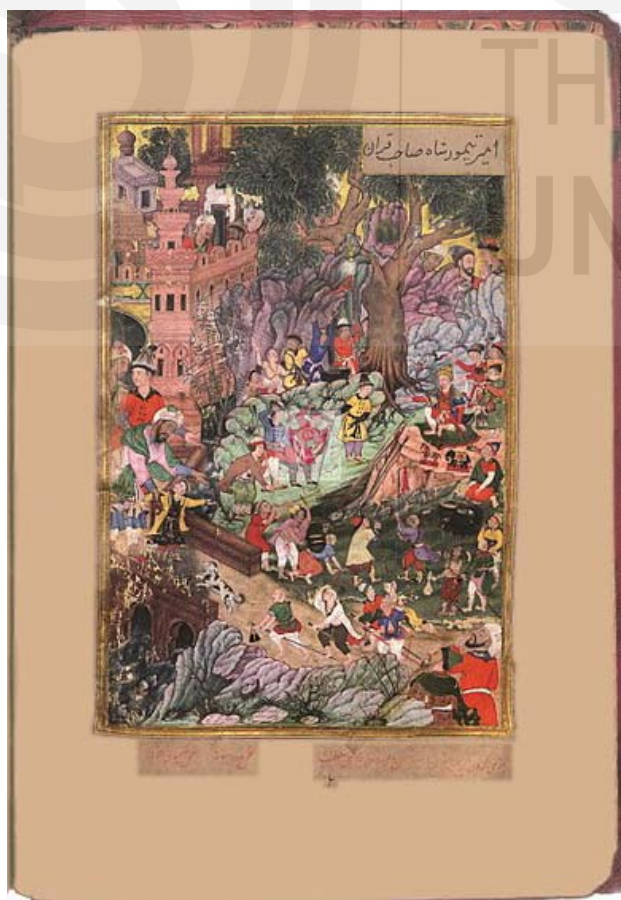
These manuscripts were illustrated at Mandu (Malwa) during the second half of the fifteenth century. A fine example of the latter category is the illustrated manuscript of *Laur Chanda* (in Awadhi) executed for a patron seemingly not related with the court.

It is thus, evident that at the time of the advent of the Mughals in India, there did exist a live tradition of painting focused mainly on illuminating manuscripts, made possible by the use of paper as the new material.

14.2.2 Painting Under Early Mughals

Babur, the founder of Mughals rule in India (in 1526), ruled for four years only. He was not able to contribute anything to the growth of painting. His successor Humayun was mostly engaged in containing his rivals till he was forced out of India by Sher Shah in 1540. It was, however, during his refuge at the court of Shah Tahmosp of Persia that Humayan acquired love of the art painting. Humayun was so influenced by the art practiced there that he commissioned Mir Syed Ali and Khwaja Abdus Samad, two Persian masters, to illustrate manuscripts for him. These two painters joined Humayun's entourage on his triumphant return to India.

Humayun's contribution to the evolution of Mughal painting is very important. There are several important features of the Mughal school which seem to have originated in the painting done during Humayan's period. An important painting from Humayan's period is titled 'Prices of the House of Timur' and dated c. 1550. It has been executed on cloth, quite large in size, measuring approximately 1.15m. square. Such a large format is unusual even for paintings in Persia, and it has been suggested that it probably relates to the Mongol tradition of having in their tents.



Pic-2 : Tarikh-iKhandan-I Timuriya

Courtesy : https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/file:Childhood_of_Timur.jpg#file

14.3 EVOLUTION OF MUGHAL SCHOOL UNDER AKBAR

The emergence of the Mughal School of painting as distinct from all other styles was mainly due to the deep interest Akbar took in the promotion of this art.

Akbar's views on The Art of Painting

Drawing the likeness of anything is called *tasvir*. His majesty, from his earliest youth, has shown a great predilection for this art, and gives it every encouragement, as he looks upon it as a means, both of study and amusement. Hence the art flourishes, and many painters have obtained great reputation. The works of all painters are weekly laid before His Majesty by the Daroghas and the clerks; he then confers rewards according to excellence of workmanship, or increases the monthly salaries. Much progress was made in the commodities required for painters, and the correct prices of such articles were carefully ascertained. The mixture of colours has especially been improved. The pictures thus received a hitherto unknown finish. Most excellent painters are now to be found, and masterpieces, worthy of a Bihzad, may be placed at the side of the wonderful works of the European painters who have attained world-wide fame. The minuteness in detail, the general finish, the boldness of execution, etc., now observed in pictures, are incomparable; even inanimate objects look as if they had life. More than a hundred painters have become famous masters of the art, whilst the number of those who approach perfection, or of those who are middling, is very large. This especially true of the Hindus; their pictures surpass our conception of things. Few, indeed, in the whole world are found equal to them.

Ain-i Akbari

14.3.1 Establishment of Royal Atelier

The first major project undertaken during Akbar's regime was that of illustrating the *Hamza Nama*. It began in 1562 for which several artist were employed at he court.

The place where the painters worked was known as *Tasvir Khana*. Although Abul Fazl enumerates the names of only seventeen artists, we now know that the number was very large. S.P. Verma (*Art, Material Culture in the Paintings of Akbar's Court*, Vikas, New Delhi, 1978) has prepared a list of 225 artists who worked at Akbar's atelier. These artists belonged to different places, but among them the majority were Hindus. Interestingly, several low caste people, due primarily to their artistic skill, were also raised to the status of royal artist. The case of Daswant, who was the son of a Kahar (palki-bearer,), may be especially cited. The patiners were assisted by a set of gilders, line-drawers and pagers. The artists were salaried employees. S.P. Verma opines that the lowest paid worker in the atelier received an amount between 600 to 1200 dams. (40 dams = one rupaya).

There are paintings which bear the names of two artists. Sometimes even three artists worked on a sigle painting. On one painting from Akbarnama four artists have worked. The painting was thus a collaborative team work. The sketching of figures and colouring were done by a team of two different artists. In cases where three artists have worked the outlining was done by one artist, the other artist coloured the faces and a third one

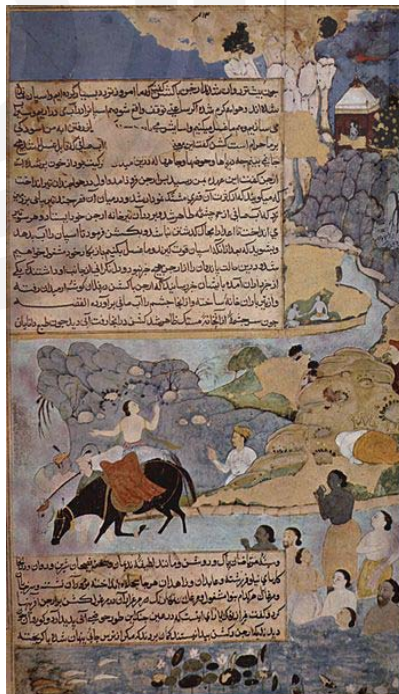


Pic-3 : Baburnama

Courtesy : https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:A_banquet_for_Babur.jpg

coloured the remaining figure. It is however not known to us to how was such a complex arrangement worked out. Probably in such a team work the sketching and colouring were done by separate artists. (Cf. S.P. Verma, op. cit)

As has been noted above, the atelier was supervised by *daroghas* with the assistance of clerks. They were responsible for making materials of painting easily available to the artists and to oversee the progress of their work. They also arranged for periodical presentation of the artists' works before the Emperor.



Pic-4 : Razmnama:

Courtesy : https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Meister_des_Razm-N%C3%A2ma-Manuskripts_001.jpg

14.3.2 Style and Technique

The illustration done at Akbar's court are considered as representative works of the Mughal art. Notably, however, in these painting, there is evident a gradual evolution in

the style and technique. The illustrations of the early phase are clearly influenced by the Persian tradition, the identifying features of which are listed below:

- symmetrical compositions;
- restricted movement of figures;
- fineness of the lines of drawings;
- flat depiction of architectural columns; and
- profuse embellishment of buildings in the manner of jewels.

Later, the paintings acquired a distinctive character of their own. They assumed a more eclectic character composed mainly of the Persian and Indian traditions with touches of European influence.



Pic-5 : Razmnama:

Courtesy : https://commons.wikimedia.org//An_illustration_from_a_Razmnama_manuscript.jpg

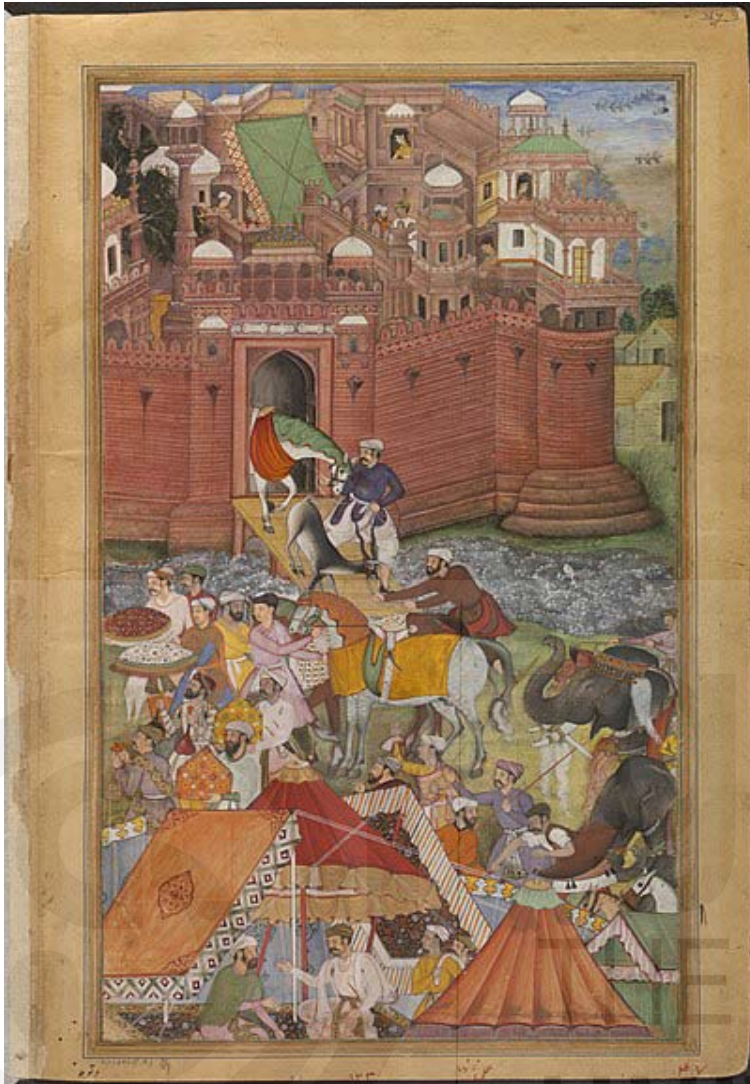
14.3.3 Distinctive Features

The Mughal style became recognisable within a span of fifteen years since the setting up of royal atelier under Akbar. In the next decade or so, i.e. by about 1590 it acquired a distinctive form which was marked by;

- naturalism & rhythm;
- clothing objects of daily use assuming Indian forms;
- picture space having subsidiary scenes set in background;
- extraordinary vigor of action and violent movement;
- luxuriant depiction of foliage & brilliant blossoms.

It should be emphasized here that the identity of the Mughal paintings under Akbar was as much made of an original style as a fusion of the Persian and Indian traditions. Specific mention may be made here of the depiction of action and movement which is

not to be found in either the pre-Mughal art of India or the art of Persia. (S.P. Verma in *Art & Culture*, eds. A.J. Qaiser & S.P. Verma, Jaipur, 1993).



Pic-6 : Akbarnama:

Courtesy : https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Episode_in_Karah._Akbarnama._V%26A_Mus_IS_2.51-1896.jpg

Painting under Akbar's period distinguished itself as a tradition from Persian painting as well as from Indian styles particularly by the presence of historical subject matter. The two most commonly used themes are:

- daily events of the court, and
- portraits of leading personalities

While portrait painting was known in Persia, painting as a chronicle of actual events was certainly a new emphasis. Painters used familiar formulas for hunting or battle scenes regardless of the fact that the literary reference for the scene was historical or purely imaginary. Moreover specific events illustrated are frequently reworkings of scenes 'recording' quite different events in the earliest known historical manuscript of this period, the *Timur Nama* of about 1580 A.D. Possible, painters conceived scenes according to a repertoire of types e.g. the seize of a fortress, crossing a river, an audience or battle scene. In the working of whole volumes such as the *Akbarnama*, the artists seem to have reworked or adapted these compositional types. Painters usually created new compositions only when no prototypes existed, and only a few artists were capable of such invention.

We have listed below, in chronological order famous illustrated manuscripts of this period

Manuscript	Date
Hamzanama	c. 1562-1580
Anwar-I Suhaili	1570
Tutinama	c. 1570-1580
Tarikh-i Khandan-i Timuriya	c. 1570-1590 (Pic-3)
Baburnama	c. 1570-1590
Akbarnama	c. 1570-1600
Tarikh-i Alfi	c. 1570-1600
Razmnama	1582 (Pic-4)

Check Your Progress 1

- 1) Write a note of 50 words on the art of painting under early Mughals.

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- 2) How did the concept of teamwork operate in the Royal Atelier?

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- 3) List four distinctive features of Mughal School of painting.

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14.4 DEVELOPMENTS UNDER JAHANGIR AND SHAHJAHAN

During Jahangir and Shahjahan, Mughal painting achieved its zenith. Jahangir took a deep interest in painting even as a prince. He maintained his own studio apart from Akbar’s large, atelier. Jahangir’s preference was paintings of hunting scenes, birds and flowers. He also continued the tradition of portraiture. Under Shahjahan the colours of the paintings became more decorative and gold was more frequently used for embellishment. In the following sub-sections, we shall study the introduction of new styles and thematic variations in Mughal painting during Jahangir and Shahjahan’s reign.

14.4.1 Introduction of New Styles

In the period of Jahangir’s rule (1605-27), manuscripts became less important than individual pictures. Milo Cleveland Beach (*Mughal and Rajput Painting*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 1992) is of the opinion that Jahangir, with his personal involvement, may have functioned effectively as the head of the royal studio. Therefore,

artistic decisions were made by the Emperor himself consequently introducing his own stylistic preferences in the paintings. Two important new elements in the style of Mughal painting during the first half of the seventeenth century have been identified as below:

- Jahangir's paintings seem to accentuate a formalist styles, i.e. making the work realistic and preferring the precise recording of contemporary reality.
- The paintings of this period have broad margins which are gorgeously decorated with the depiction of flora and face of human figures, etc. designs from plant motifs.



Pic-7 : Portrait of Jahangir

Courtesy : https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:15_Abu%271_Hasan_Jahangir_with_a_Potrait_of_Akbar_1614%D0%B3_Musee_Guimet,_Paris_-_%D0%BA%D0%BE%D0%B8%D1%8F.jpg

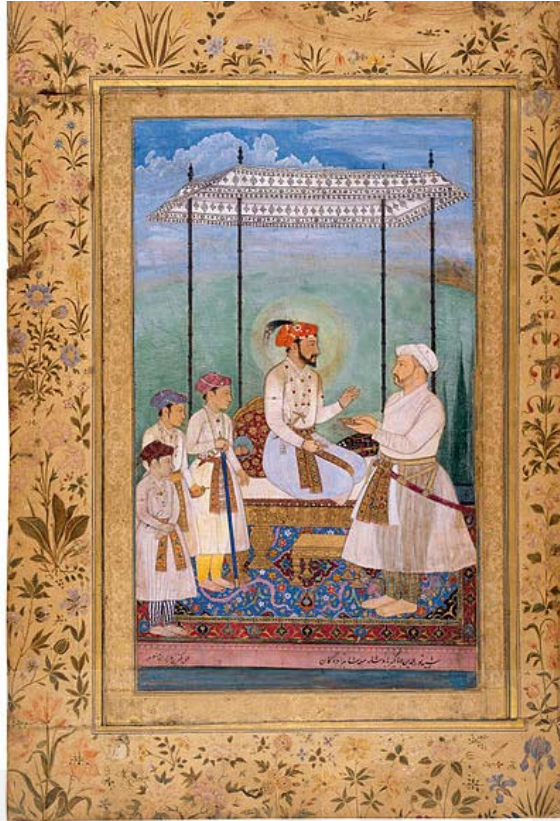
14.4.2 Thematic Variation

Jahangir was a keen naturalist. Whenever he came across a strange animal or bird, his artists painted the same immediately. We have paintings of birds and animals in the most realistic fashion.

Shah Jahan was a great patron of architecture, but he did not neglect the painting. Under him, the previous tradition of doing portraits, preparing albums, and illustrating books, was continued. Additionally we find the paintings depicting charming love scenes and portraits of female members. Another important theme chose for painting was super imposition of animals and the scenes of performing acrobats.

14.4.3 Final Phase

Aurangzeb, who succeeded Shahjahan, had begun his rule on a bitter note by executing his brothers and imprisoning his father. The acts were ignored during his regime. Painting did not stop altogether, though it lost the patronage of the Emperor and became confined to the studios of nobles. There exist some commissioned portraits of the nobles and their relations from the courts of the Rajput principalities. Large number of *karkhana*



Pic-8 : Portrait of Shahjahan

Courtesy : https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Emperor_Shah_Jahan_1628.jpg

records (on paintings) are located in the Rajasthan state Archives, Bikaner. There also exist a few interesting pictures of the emperor himself during his campaigns. The skill of the painters is evident, though the paintings are more formal and seem to have lost their earlier liveliness.

Later, under Muhammed Shah (1719-48), interest got renewed in depicting pleasure loving scenes. But by this time many of the painters of imperial studio had begun migrating to provincial courts. The loss of the Mughals, thus, was the gain of the provincial styles.

14.5 EUROPEAN IMPACT ON MUGHAL PAINTING

The electric nature of the Mughal School of Painting has been discussed in the Unit earlier. In its later phases, especially during the Seventeenth Century, the Mughal painting was influenced by the European art. Some of the themes of European art were incorporated by Mughal painters and they also adopted a few of the techniques of European artists. According to A.J. Qaisar a large number European paintings were either copied or adapted or even reinterpreted, sometimes, by Mughal painters. At the same time many original prints from Europe were collected and preserved in the albums of Jahangir and Dara Shikoh and several Mughal nobles. (*A.J. Qaisar, Indian Response to European Technology & Culture*, Oxford University Press, Delhi, 1982).

The contact Mughal court painters had with European paintings prompted them initially to make exact copies in their own hands. Such imitations, as noted by contemporary European travelers, were impeccably done. But Mughal painters also made experiments by making new paintings on the subjects chosen from European paintings.

One important feature that becomes noticeable in some Mughal paintings is the attempt to make them three dimensional. Clearly it speaks of the impact of European technique.

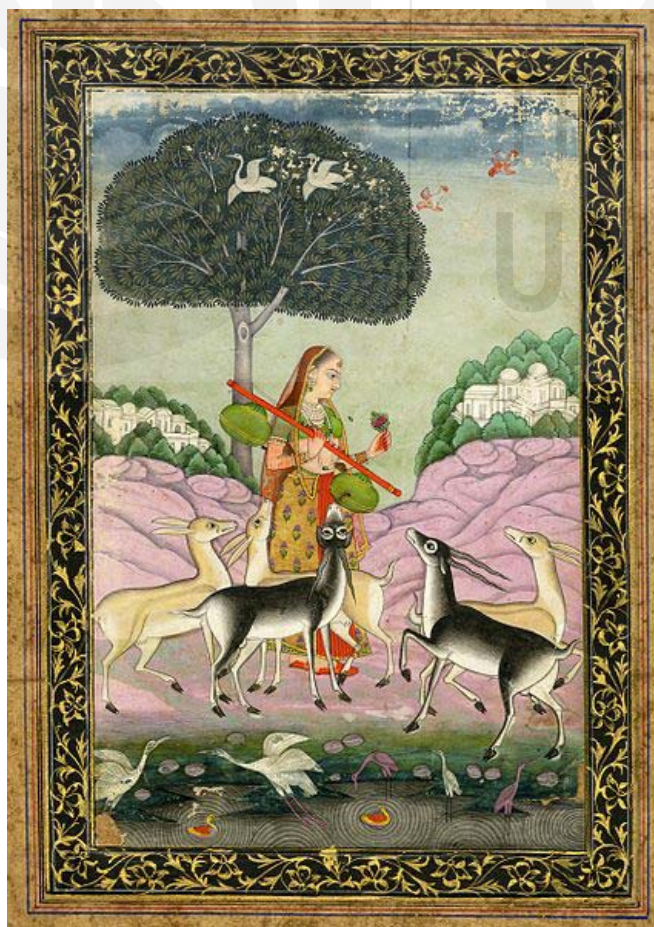
Another European convention acceptable to Mughal painters was the effect of light and shade, mostly utilized in fight scenes. The depiction of motifs like 'hals', winged angles and roaring clouds in Mughal paintings was again under the influence of European paintings. One important technique that of oil painting from Europe, somewhat did not attract the Mughals. There is no work from this period that was executed in oil.

14.6 FINE ARTS

Fine arts during the 16th-18th century seem to have developed more in the regional kingdom than in the Mughal state. However, historical information on the development of fine arts is scanty, and the following narrative is based on piecemeal records.

14.6.1 Music

Centres of musical study and practice, as stated above, were located in regional kingdoms. In the South, a system of parent and derivative modes, i.e., Janaka and Janaya ragas, existed around the middle of the 16th century. The earliest treatise which deals with this system is titled *Swaramela Kalanidhi*. It was written by Ramamatya of Kondavidu (Andhra Pradesh) in 1550. It describes 20 Janak and 64 janya ragas. Later, in 1609, one Somanatha wrote *Ragavibodha* in which he incorporated some concepts of the North Indian style. It was sometimes in the middle of the 17th century that a famous treatise on music, called *Caturdandi-prakasika* was composed by Venkatamakhin in Thanjavur (c. 1650). The system propounded in the text has come to form the bedrock of the Carnatic system of music.



Pic-9 : Todi Ragini

Courtesy : https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:An_illustration_of_Todi_Ragini_from_a_Ragamala_series_ca._1750_Jaipur_British_Museum._London.jpg

The development of music in North India was largely inspired and sustained by the bhakti movement. The compositions of the 16th and 17th century saint poets were invariably set to music. In Vrindavan, Swami Haridas promoted music in a big way. He is also considered to be the teacher of the famous Tansen of Akbar’s court. Tansen himself is considered one of the great exponents of North Indian system of music. He is given credit for introducing some famous ragas viz., Miyan ki Malhar, Miyan ki Todi and Darbari. Raja Mansingh of Gwalior (1486-1517) played a distinguished part in the growth and perfection of Dhrupad, a variant style of the North Indian music.

In the 18th century, music in North style received great encouragement at the court of the Mughal emperor Muhammad Shah. Sadarangana and Adarangana were two great composers of Khayal gayaki at his court. Several new forms of music such as Tarana, Dadra and Ghazal also came into existence at this time. Moreover, some folk forms of music were also incorporated in the courtly music. In this category mention may be made of Thumri, employing folk scales, and to Tappa developed from the songs of camel drivers of Punjab.

In passing, it should be noted that while in the South the texts of music enforced a stricter science, in the North the absence of texts permitted greater liberty. There were thus several experiments in mixing the ragas carried out in the North. A loose code of North Indian style of music is a feature that had continued to the present day.

14.6.2 Dance and Drama

Evidence on dance and drama in the medieval period is scattered. The more important sources are the texts on music, dance and drama, and the creative works of literature in the different languages of India.

The textual material is mainly from Orissa, South India and from the court of the Mughal Emperor Muhammad Shah. *Abhinaya Chandrika* by Mahesvara Mahapatra and *Sangit Damodara* by Raghunatha are the two 17th century texts on dance and drama from Orissa. From South India we have *Adi Bharatam*, *Bharatarnava*, Tulajaraja’s (1729-1735) *Natyavedagama* and Balaravarman’s (1753-1798) *Balaramabharatam*. There is the *Sangita Malika* treatise on dance and music from the court of Muhammad Shah.

Check Your Progress 2

- 1) What important thematic variations became noticeable in Mughal painting in the seventeenth century?

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- 3) Which European motifs were incorporated by Mughal painters?

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14.7 LET US SUM UP

We have seen how painting and fine arts came to prosper under the Mughals. The keyword in the development of these arts during this period was eclecticism. Painting assimilated indigenous traditions as well as from Persia. In the seventeenth century another significant influence, that from Europe, made an impact on Mughal paintings.

Music and dance, and the theatrical arts were the other subjects that received royal patronage. Tansen adorned the court of Akbar and propelled music to unprecedented heights. In comparison dance and theatre remained only at the initial stages of development.

14.8 KEYWORDS

Accentuate	: intensify
Atelier	: workshop or studio of artists
Calligraphy	: the art of decorative writing
Embellish	: beautify
Gilder	: artist working with golden colour
Mural	: wall painting
Palette	: flat board used by painter to arrange and mix colours for painting
Portrait	: painting of the face or bust
Sketch	: line drawing
Theatre	: drama

14.9 ANSWERS TO CHECK YOUR PROGRESS EXERCISES

Check Your Progress 1

- 1) See Sub-section 14.2.2
- 2) See Sub-section 14.3.1
- 3) See Sub-section 14.3.3

Check Your Progress 2

- 1) See Sub-section 14.4.2
- 2) Halo, Winged Angels and Roaring Clouds See Sec. 14.5

Recommended Readings

Basham, A.L. (ed.). 1975. *Cultural History of India*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Beach, M.C. 1982. *Mughal and Rajput Paintings*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press

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