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Themes on Nobility and Saints in Hyderabad Miniature Paintings

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ABSTRACT

In the History of medieval Deccan, Hyderabad School of Miniature Paintings had its unique style of approach and depiction.They highlight the significant development of Indian art forms presenting a new situation of stylistic approach and variety of creative trends. The study of miniatures provides illustrative picture of human endeavour in historical and artistic world.Hyderabad School illustrates Rulers along with nobility likestanding alone discussing with his ministers,watching dance performances or listening to music with nobility as well individual portraits of nobles and other local rulers of samasthanas In most of these paintings, the complexions of the characters have delicate features highlighting the dressing pattern, ornaments and personages of the then-times. Hindu officials are also seen in some paintings, which give us idea that they are most probably executed under the patronage of Hindu officials who got themselves painted with the ruler.But one very important and striking feature of Hyderabad School of painting is that innumerable paintings on nobility and religious themes were executed when compared to earlier Medieval Deccani art hence this school acquired recognition and identity in this field.Several divergent styles on religious persons like saints, ascetics, mullahs, dervishes etc were also painted and coexisted.

Key Words : Miniature Paintings, Hyderabad, Nizams, Asaf Jahis, Nobility, Nawab, Saints, Samsthanas

INTRODUCTION

Deccani painting started at Hyderabad which developed into Hyderabad school of painting with its allied kalams of Kurnool, Cuddapah, Shorapur, Gadwal and Wanaparty principalities later on, depicting mainly themes on royalty, nobility and religious scenes. These miniature paintings reflect a rich glorious past with an equally colourful and dynamic expression of artistic traditions of Medieval Hyderabad. They testify to the brilliance of the aesthetic endeavors of Asaf Jahis or Nizams.

Variety of paintings on nobility-related aspects were depicted during Nizam's rule which throw light on the fact that more than royalty, the local nobles gave more patronage to the artists. This artistic tradition of encouraging artists by nobility continued mainly after the fall of Golconda, when there was absence of strong royalty. Moreover medieval Deccan was under the control of Mughal hegemony their noble representatives before Nizams, indicating the transition from rulers to nobles not only in political-administration but also in artistic-patronage. Hence this patronage by nobility remained with same pace even during Asaf Jahi's or Nizam's time. Among the nobles both communities, Muslim and Hindu commissioned many miniatures in which they enjoyed themselves being represented which can be evaluated as follows.

Among the paintings of early part of 18th century a portrait represents Deccani Nawab of Hyderabad smoking from a beautiful gilt huqqa. [1]Another painting depicts nawab Mohatram Khan Bahadur Jung dated to 1725 AD. [2]In it nawab holding a long sword stands elegantly in a portico of a noble house.

A miniature of 1784 AD depicts nawab Himmat Yar Khan smoking a huqqa and listening to a lady singing.[3] The painting captures the nobleman's mood of pleasurable

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concentration with brilliant design work of various objects seen in the painting. Smoking-huqqa remained a common feature in most of the paintings on nobility in Hyderabad School.

A painting of noble Aziz Khan Chaghata datable to 1784 AD depicts the noble seated on a white terrace holding a bow and arrow dressed totally in white. His sword, spittoon, pan box and 'katar' lie on the terrace beside him. There is a grey sky with clouds at the top. An interesting miniature depicts nawab Saif-al-Mulk, son of the Prime Minister Azim-ul-umara of Nizam Ali Khan dated to 1795AD. The picture depicts nawab inspecting a plate of jewellry which throws light on the material-richness of his noble palace which is also visible in the long chains of jewellry and emerald ornaments worn by the nawab Excellent features of palaces with its interior decorations and dress patterns are visible. Strong colours of green, gold and mauve give dazzling effect to the theme depicted. It was attributed to the painter Venkatachallam.[4]

Another fine miniature painting of Saif-al-Mulk depicts him as hawking on camel back. Beautiful cranes are illustrated flying across the sky, while well-disciplined retinue follows him. Once again a falcon is seen resting on nawab's right hand as if guiding the ride under taken by the nawab or waiting for an opportunity for a hunt. This painting is in private collection.

The painting of nawab Ihtisam-al-Mulk Bahadur by Venkatachallam is attributed to 1795 AD.[5] In it nawab rides an elegantly painted elephant, accompanied by his huge army carrying arms. Courtiers too follow him discharging their duty of serving him. Brilliant colours of blue, green and orange are used. But a controversial point regarding this painting was that the inscription, which identifies the nawab as Ihtisam, is not known Deccani nawabs during this period. The person in the painting must be most probably Nizam Ali khan when he was young. More over the grouping of the army in parallel lines represent the influence of Ottoman Turkish miniatures, which the Nizams could have acquired as a result of their matrimonial alliances.

A Miniature of Iqramul Mulk Bahadur, eldest son of mir Bahadur, eldest son of Mir alam, the diwan is dated to 1800 AD.[6] It depicts him seated enjoying the fragrance of a flower, while a courtier conveys him some message. The scenery depicted at the background is exclusive of Hyderabad region with todi trees' banana trees, etc. both interior and exterior decorations of palace architecture can be perceived. A Miniature painting of different style is executed between (C 1804- 1808 AD.). It depicts Mir Alam Diwan of Asaf Jah-III and Raja Chandulal Peshkar in a conversation. They are seated in chairs in a beautifully located architectural setting and elegantly dressed floor.

Similar miniature painting with a theme on nobility depicts Muniaral-Mulk or Aristu Jah, the Diwan of Nizam Sikandar Jah executed between (C 1809-1810 AD). Proud, elegant and reserved, the nawab is splendidly isolated from his attendants upon a plane green ground crowned by a glorious ridge of orange clouds and white birds flying. A courtier behind him carries huge huqqa which nawab smokes. Two persons before him are illustrated as if communicating something related to the kingdom, which nawab listens attentively. The dress trends and jewellery fashions are very much related to Hyderabad.

Another painting depicts Munir-al-Mulk folding his hands in front of him as if worshipping. He got a noble look with flowing costumes.[7] Similar painting of Chandulal, Diwan of Nizam of Hyderabad dated to 1808 AD, were he kneels facing right with his hands placed together in reverence. [8]Another miniature is of a Hindu noble riding a horse with his retinue. The painting gives a feeling of the beginning of a war scene. It is datable to 1840 AD.

Several other paintings on nobility were also illustrated mainly of Sikander Shah's court mainly 35 in number. They were collected by Sir Henry Russell, who became the assistant secretary to the resident of Hyderabad and secretary in 1802 AD. [9] Among them important are portraits of Nural-umara, Sharaf-al-umara, Sayyid omar Khan, Sulaiman Jah, Izzat Yar Khan, Ismail Khan, Nadi Ali Beg khan, Husain yawar Jang, Teghjang, Akbar Yar Jang and others who were depicted in various poses like seated or standing but mostly enjoying the fragrance of flowers which they hold in their hands. Most of the pictures have depiction of swords which were placed beside the nobles or carried by the nobles indicating their majestic personality next to the rulers.

Though themes on courtiers were engulfed with the themes of royalty or nobility, few themes exclusively of commoners were also depicted. Genre scenes are rare but if painted were related to the Deccan or telangana area. For instance a painting depicts a telangana shepherd dated to mid-18th century. [10].The costumes worn by him are peculiar to medieval Deccan.

All these paintings on nobility and commoners are

generally depicted against a fine setting on terrace with finely designed and worked carpets, cushions and jamas that at once reflect the refined tastes and rich life of the Deccani nobles.

Few themes on religion were also depicted which includes both Muslim and Hindu religions indicating the secular attitude of not only the reigning Nizams but also of artists whom they gave patronage.

A miniature painting depicts a dervish dated to 1792 AD. [11]He was illustrated as a poor monk of Muslim religious order whose devotional exercise is generally expressed in frenzied whirling and dancing often accompanied by loud singing and shouting. In this he is represented walking philosophically carrying a 'morchhal'.

Two paintings of saints are in Johnson album dated 1730AD. One depicts Saint Hafiz Abdallah, with a full white beard and dressed in white with a beige shawl, kneels facing right. There is a green background with sky above. Another painting depicts Saint Shah Ahmad Naqshvand with a full white beard kneeling against a mauve cushion holding a rosary. Another miniature painting represents a noble man in conversation with a saint.[12]It was executed about 1800AD. The saint as an aura behind his face, which indicates, his spirituality. He has a rosary in his left hand and looks as if offering huqqa to the noble man and making him to undergo some sort of spiritual test. The architecture in the background gives a look of a mosque. A painting depicts a Muslim saint with full beard and green costume sitting on a patterned terrace holding a rosary. It is dated to 1820 AD.[13]

A painting of Hindu origin depicts Krishna, playing the flute. He stands on a rock under a tree playing his flute to a peacock and cattle. [14]His followers kneel in worship in the right. Similar painting of Johnson album collection illustrates Krishna standing beneath a tree playing his flute to Caparisoned oxen and a devotee waves 'chauri'. He has four arms of which three hold attributes of Vishnu, the conch, the disc and a lotus indicating in one sense Krishna as the avatar or another form of Vishnu. They are executed around 1770 AD. Such depiction of religious themes became more popular under the sub Schools of Hyderabad like Shorapur, Wanaparty etc.

Main figures are depicted usually as tall and of fine built. Costumes of long plain or flowing muslin jamas and small pagirs depicted are typical of Asaf Jahi style. Men were depicted generally wearing half sleeves jacket was known as Neem-Astin. Asaf Jah – I and Nasir Jung generally used it. It was given as gift to men of very high position by them.[15]Different kinds of jewellry were own by men like pearl chains, thus the 'dust band' or 'asumram'.

Muslim officers in Aurangazeb service Pathan-Afghan in origin established themselves as nawabs of Kurnool, cuddapah during the early 18th century later they became tributary to the Nizam who were independent from Delhi. Hindu rajas who also became tributary to the Nizam mainly the Telugu speaking Reddy caste ruled at shorapur, wanaparthy and Gadwal. All these rulers remained as prominent artistic patrons. [16]

The Mughal governors, as well as the rulers of Hyderabad not only extracted revenue but also military assistance from these samsthanas, the system which continued till Nizam Ali Khans reign. From then onwards smaller chiefs were reduced to tax paying over lords known as Deshmukh. All of them in totality became a part of revenue administration.

This political – Economic influence Nizams on samsthanas also let to artistic influence on them. Many of the rulers of these samsthanas patronized artist who depicted pictures related to their overlord lifestyles and psychological emotions which can be evaluated because they contained many characteristic features of Hyderabad as well as Deccani school of medieval era miniatures retaining local idioms and folk cultures which can be analyzed as follows.

At Kurnool, which is situated at the Banks of River Tungabadra many portraits were illustrated depicting themes like pictures of like Nawab or their relatives, smoking Huqqa listening to music or visiting saints. After 1700 AD., a Pathan general in Aurangazeb service established himself as a semi- independent Nawab at Kurnool.[17]During the rule of Siddi Masud, influence of Bijapur paintings was seen on Kurnool school due to his relation with Bijapur Sultan Sikander. [18]Hence Kurnool, school of painting is related not only to contemporary Hyderabad trends but also to 17th Century Bijapur portraiture as well. This connection suggests that Bijapur painters had accompanied Siddi Masud to Kurnool, in 1683 AD and founded a school of painting, which continued to be patronized by the Patan Nawab during the 18th Century.

The earliest painting of this school depicts durbar scene in which Ghulam Hazrat Akbar Khan Bahadur with other nobleman and courtiers. [19] Nastaliq inscription

identify the nobleman facing the ruler as Muhammad Akbar Khan, Hoshdar Khan and Hasan Muhammad, behind the ruler as Osmun Khan, Hafiz Lutfullah and Ghulam Muhammad. A sword and a shield are placed in the front of Nawab on a well decorated carpet. The garden foliage at the top of page consists of tiny birds, butterflies and squirrels. Blue gold couloirs are used extensively. These decorative details throw light on the lacquer industry for which Kurnool was famous. [20] Once again coconut trees of Deccani landscape are visible in the background.

Another durbar scene depicts Mahmud Khan Dawudi smoking a bidri huqqa and his son-in-law Abdul Razzaq Khan facing him wearing white Jama while to the left Bandi Khan Dawudi dressed in bright orange is seen. Orange flowers, blue background and provincial earthiness mark the painting. The Muslim noble man must have Kurnool, painters to do their portraits. It in the connection of Riedberg Museum, Zurich dated to C 1750 AD.

Some other paintings depict Nawab's listening to music or visiting saints. One such painting depicts Nawab Ghulam Ahmad Khan visiting the saint piran sahib. He was the brother of the ruling Nawab Munnawwar Khan.[21] The young nawab wearing a distinctive long jama and low turban of Kurnool, area, stands obediently before the saint and his son Ibrahim who was seated next to his father Piran Sahib. A courtier in respect behind the Nawab and was depicted as offering a flower to the saint. This throws light on the fact that Kurnool must have remained as important centre of Islamic –culture and that nawab of the time was religious oriented person. Warm green, blue and yellow Colours give spiritual look to the picture.

Similar painting dated to (C 1815 – 1823 AD) depicts Nawab Ghulam Ahmed Khan visiting another saint Burhan Uddin Sahib, who is seated in a cell like room with background of white – washed mosque. A courtier stands in respect behind the Nawab who is seen with a sword and shied tied to his waist. The religious saint seems to be communicating a spiritual message to the Nawab.

Thus these paintings of Kurnool reveal that Deccani traits continued at local levels with elegance and decoration.

The rulers of Gadwal, a place near to Kurnool were also patrons of art. This school of miniature paintings achieved a local flavour particularly during the reign of Raja Soma Bhoopal Rao. The slender figures and delicate Islamic patterns of Hyderabad school are visible in most of the paintings like massive physical personalities. However Indian icons of fertility spirits and plain expanses of brilliant Colours are local flavours.

For instance a painting depicts Raja Soma Bhoopal Rao practicing archery at his court suggesting the talent and the energy of the ruler. It is in the collection of state Museum of Hyderabad. Another portrait of the same prince is in a private collection dated (C 1840-44 AD) [22]It depicts him as if engaged in a mystic thought. The majestic personality, jeweler, costume style and noble look of the Nawab are clearly visible in the painting. Islamic arabesque and red and white Colours are used in the painting.

Several other portraits of Gadwal rajas sitting in a court, listening to music, conversing with courtiers, smoking huqqa and watching dance performances are found in the collection of Salar Jung Museum and state Museum Hyderabad. They were executed with extraordinary care and detail. The shorapur and Hyderabad influences on few paintings indicate that some of the artists of these Schools must have stayed at Gadwal for certain time and executed them.

In the paintings of the royalty, the glory of the monarchs is portrayed with certain accomplishment and sincerity. Use of kalka shaped guldastas was common in them. Indigo, blue, green and red Colours were generally used with various inter-mixing shades on a white background. Dravidian style of wooden pillars is used for verandas. Once again mango, coconut and palm trees of Deccan are depicted. These trees are generally depicted laden with fruits blooming with birds and squirrels. Men wore Maratha type of long pagri, transparent white jama and pyjamas. Floral decorations and shining pictures can be perceived in them.

Rajas of Shorapur, a region to the south western border of Hyderabad proffered religious themes in portraiture as the place was an important centre of Sanskrit scholarship which was even depicted in the arts of the time. They are dated to mid-18th century and were mainly painted for aristocratic Hindu nobility like marriage of Vishnu to Lakshmi, Krishna and the gopis etc. in the collection of Bharatha itihasa samshodhaka mandala of Pune and Prince of Wales Museum, Bombay.

A painting depicts Krishna, the lord of Hindus and avatar of Vishnu, dancing with Radha. Another depicts Ram and Ravana in a fierce battle. [23]Similar painting on religion depicts devotees worshipping Shiva Bhairava and Devi attributed to 1775 AD. Most of these paintings of

Shorapur are themes on Hindu religion with depiction of rich palette of deep vibrant Colours produced by a bigger brush than the fine Hyderabad Kalam.

The iconography of the gods, the gorgeous aberration with gold work and the picture of rajas wearing Maharastrian attire, etc. can be seen. Though several paintings were inspired by the legend of Krishna, Shiva and other episodes from Shaivaite mythology also formed the subject matter of the paintings. The borders of men dhotis are of red colour. Portraits of several Maharastrian saints like Virupaksha swamy, Gundeva baba and others were prepared for local rajas and other devotees at Shorapur. Finally when the place was occupied by British in 1858, many painters took refuge at Hyderabad and continued to paint for the Hindu noble men and rich temple priests. However majority of depictions revolved around folk-culture of the times.

At Wanaparthy, a place 15 km from Gadwal, very few miniature paintings of folk intensity were executed during mid-18th century. [24] Most of these paintings according to Raja Rameshwar Rao of Wanaparthy belong to their ancestral library. [25] They retained individual characteristic in colouring architectural setting and dress pattern. Telugu inscriptions are evident at the top of the most of the illustrations. They are executed around 1750 AD and are commissioned by Raja Sawai Venkat Reddy (C1746-1763 AD).

The preoccupations of the exalted new households, sophisticated folk style and depiction of personal life of Nawabs are main features of few paintings of Wanaparthy School. For instance a painting depicts a Nawab with his companions seated intensively at his private chamber while few birds and peacock watch them. The figures generally appear tall with south Indian Hindu costumes and ornaments. Male costumes are sometimes designed on a Muslim Deccani model.

On the whole during Asaf Jahi rule at Hyderabad, Muslim nobles at Kurnool and Hindu Rajas of the samsthanas Gadwal, Shorapur and Wanaparthy patronized miniature paintings by employing painters. The closer relations with Hyderabad rulers and the frequent visit of these rajas to the state capital led to the further reward, for theses rajas also engaged some painters. Many local styles developed mainly after 1750 AD. Even some Hyderabadi painters were commissioned by the Rajas and in course of time some of them migrated to these samsthanas which show impact of Hyderabad style on these local styles.

While Muslim nobles commissioned pictures of their lifestyles in which head-dress remained quiet distinct with architecture showing cypress like pillars more slender and taller than Hyderabad pillars with ornate walls and depiction of Nawab and their family members.

The local rulers at Kurnool, Shorapur, Gadwal and Wanaparthy mainly Muslim and Hindu nawabs also gave patronage to miniature paintings during early 18th century of note and nativity. The Deccani style was prolonged in modified form during 18th century in the courts of these samsthanas where painting gradates quickly to a popular folk manner. In particular at Shorapur, the slight regression to the folk idiom managed to recover a surprising robustness and vigour of pictorial statement. Most of the paintings were derived from Hindu mythology mainly at Hindu principalities. The facial types, trees, flowers and ornaments are of Hindu nature. The quantity of gold depicted in the picture depended on the status of the patron for whom the particular work was done. In some paintings architectural features are seen in cusped arch on the two sides of which are floral motifs and scrolls with predominantly indigo colour. But many of them were illustrated mainly foe religious purpose rather than for deriving aesthetic pleasure. But few paintings depicted at imaginative impulsive, strong design, fine colouring and excellent drawing skill.

Thus an evolution of themes of Hyderabad school depicts various paintings on royalty, nobility and religion which also included illustrations of courtiers, musical aspects, architectural patterns and social fashions. The migration of new artists from Northern parts of Deccan and imitation of Northern and western styles of paintings also resulted in variety of new themes and abundant production of miniature paintings.

In most of these illustrations, group scenes and individual portraits were depicted on the terrace outside a building or with a pavilion or in a courtyard garden with a fine background behind. The parapets of the terraces are of marble, golden or red wooden balconies. The doors were depicted with light brown with light black veins of wood, and colours, which are peculiar of Hyderabad School. The white terraces are covered with cushions and flowered carpets of yellow, green, red or mauve colour. Even architecture is related to medieval Deccani style. Flower pots of blue and white, china-ware are seen many a times in the paintings. Long big bellied glows are also displayed in the wall niches of some paintings. Both golden floral and simple designs with red colour were

depicted.

Mango and coconut trees with fruits. Champa, plumera and palm trees birds perceived in them gives a distinct Deccani look. In several miniatures there is a decorative type of tree with small conical leaves shown in light green or gold all along the rounded fringes of the tree. Blue clouds with golden streaks in some paintings were depicted. Indigo clouds and other tangled clouds run across on top of the most of the pictures in clear sky of lighter Colours. One significant feature of Hyderabad School was depiction of finely designed carpets and cushions. Though few paintings like those of saints and dervishes were executed with little colouring or proper placements of postures.. In particular variety of clouds trees, birds and animals along with personages place these compositions in the list of medieval Deccani miniatures. Most of these paintings depicted nobility and their outlooks, features and activities. Both themes of Islamic and Hindu nature were executed under the patronage of respective nobles.

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