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INTRODUCTION

If the title *Mughal and Rajput Painting* suggests a simple historical tradition to be investigated through its year to year development, then it is misleading. The subject is, instead, a rich interweaving of varied and sometimes contradictory interests and traditions.

An initial unity is provided by format, for the earliest paintings to concern us were book illustrations. This means that the works were small (although books can, of course, vary dramatically in size), usually on paper, and closely linked to a literary narrative. The physical arrangement of volumes, however, evolved from two quite distinct sources: the cultural traditions that surrounded Hinduism and Islam. These were the major religious systems in India during the years included in this study, approximately 1500–1850. The earliest Hindu books, and related Buddhist and Jain volumes, were usually on pages made from leaves of the talipot palm; long and horizontal in format, the pages were pierced and threaded onto cords tied between wooden covers. The occasional illustrations were small and usually square. Islamic books, on the other hand, were on paper, bound along a spine, and often encased in leather covers. They were almost exclusively vertical, and were close to the shape of European books, except that they were read from right to left – the reverse of the European system. While paper became plentiful in India after about 1400, so entrenched were traditional attitudes that Hindu artists and craftsmen only slowly took advantage of the freedom that the new material allowed, to vary the size and shape from the severely restricted palm-leaf format. And even then the folios were seldom bound. Kept in stacks, the loose paper pages were wrapped in cloth and tied in bundles.

Hinduism was indigenous to India, whereas Islam arrived in the eighth century, growing to dominate the north politically by the thirteenth century. Muslims arrived on the subcontinent from throughout the Near East, bringing with them different cultural backgrounds and expectations, and an often militant antagonism to Hinduism. This was one reason why the existing mural tradition of painting in north India, public proclamations of Hindu identity, rapidly declined. Books were portable and easily hidden, however, and at a time when Hindu temples were being attacked and razed, manuscripts served as hideable repositories of doctrine and imagery for the worshipper. As the Hindu–Muslim relationship became more complicated and subtle, the Muslim love of books, especially elaborately illustrated books, inspired Hindu patrons

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and artists to be more inventive. When the patrons of either group were particularly eager or sensitive, this could include borrowing from the distinctive styles evolved within each other's cultures. Muslim and Hindu artistic ideals, after all, were very different.

The works we will discuss here are almost totally confined to court patronage. While folk and village traditions existed, such works were seldom saved or "collected," and little material earlier than the nineteenth century remains today. We are also excluding significant reference to the magnificent earlier tradition of Buddhist, Hindu, and Jain wall-painting, of which the caves at Ajanta provide the most profuse and brilliant examples (fig. 2). While these relate to book illustrations, they should properly be studied separately, along with the architecture that they decorated.

The most important artistically active Muslim dynasty was that of the Mughals, who ruled from 1526 to 1858 and almost unified the subcontinent. The name is a variation of Mongol and, between 1555 and about 1630 especially, Mughal patronage of the arts was incessant and radically innovative for the Indian context. The Mughals also profoundly altered the character of painting in the Hindu areas of north India. These initially independent territories were ruled by Rajputs, Hindus of the warrior caste, and this name is given to the second of the major artistic complexes that we will discuss. Whereas Mughal painting is defined by the styles and subjects popular at the imperial court, Rajput painting consists of many different court styles, corresponding to the various Hindu kingdoms, each with different tastes and aspirations. Geographically, too, Rajput painting is more scattered. The imperial court centered on Delhi or the Agra area, with a brief interlude in Lahore, whereas the Rajput kingdoms were found throughout Rajasthan, the Punjab Hills, and Central India. Each of these areas forms a separate subdivision of Rajput painting, which can then be further divided into individual states and, later, even into baronial holdings within these states. It is complicated, but while the complexities will be noted, a full definition and study is hardly appropriate here.

Rajput and Mughal, then, can be equated with Hindu and Muslim, or even with indigenous and foreign: and the study of these paintings allows us to see how two quite different cultural systems react to the same visual stimulus – to India – as well as to each other. Other complexes are referred to briefly, but only for comparative purposes. The kingdoms of the Deccan, south of the Mughal heartland, for example, were Muslim, but not Mughal; and they combine traditional Islamic attitudes, receptivity to Hindu India, and awareness of Mughal taste into yet another distinctive type of painting, which in turn influenced both Mughal and Rajput artists. Other regional artistic styles existed throughout the subcontinent, each with its own balance between local characteristics and awareness of pan-Indian traits. Gujarat, Orissa, and Bengal

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provided particularly important centers. And as if this were not enough, we must deal separately, and at the beginning, with types of book-painting in India preceding the Mughal arrival. This too will provide comparative material against which the achievements of Mughal and Rajput artists can be judged.

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CHAPTER 1

PAINTING IN NORTH INDIA BEFORE 1540

At the beginning of the sixteenth century, painters in India were already heirs to an unbroken artistic tradition of great antiquity and extraordinary brilliance. Hindu, Buddhist, and Jain religious sanctuaries had long been decorated with carved and painted figures, and these were often accompanied by illustrative wall murals and ornamental designs. The libraries and treasuries of these temples usually housed religious manuscripts; often illustrated and decoratively embellished, these books preserved religious teachings for the use of devotees. As early as the fifth century, the *Kama Sutra* had mentioned that painting was an established and expected social accomplishment,[1] and contemporary paintings at the Buddhist site of Ajanta are among the most sensuous and sophisticated visual images known from any source (fig. 2). Even today, both unpretentious village houses and royal palaces are decorated with paintings on ceremonial occasions, a longstanding practice, while village storytellers continue to perform in front of narrative scrolls painted in traditional style. Painting, therefore, was never an exclusive or elitist activity, nor one limited to a particular social or religious community.

The majority of the paintings from Ajanta evoke that sense of three-dimensional volume that is so distinctive of Indian sculpture. By the sixteenth century, however, the wall-paintings at such shrine sites as Lepakshi (near Vijayanagar) were instead most expressive through two-dimensional surface design (fig. 3). This was due in part to the relative decline of the sculptural tradition in India, as well as to greater specialization among artists – painters no longer felt obliged to create sculptural effects. The Indian climate has not been kind to wall-paintings, however, so the vast majority of the paintings remaining to us today were made to illustrate books, even though books too were a fragile medium. With the acceptance of paper and its greater flexibility of format, the potential, even the need, for compositional innovation was increased. Changes, however, were achieved slowly. For centuries, the painters of Jain manuscripts on paper placed decorative circles on still horizontal pages to approximate the threading holes once necessary for palm-leaves (plate A).

A second important stimulus to innovation in this later period was the

[1] *The Kama Sutra of Vatsyayana*, translated by Sir Richard Burton and F. F. Arbuthnot, New York, 1966, p. 75.

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2. Lovers. Wall-painting from Ajanta (Cave no. 1), ca. 475

patronage provided by the Muslim rulers who came into north India after the late eleventh century. Indigenous Indian religious communities had been highly conservative in their artistic attitudes, often encouraging painters to repeat faithfully illustrations and compositions as familiar and unalterable as the texts to which they related. The Muslims, however, were interested in illustrated copies of Persian texts, and in styles of painting that recalled their homelands. They therefore commissioned – sometimes from these same painters – illustrated volumes of texts unfamiliar to the artists, thereby forcing them to abandon their familiar formulas. Moreover, these rulers provided a new class and type of patronage. Painting was a court art for the Muslims; and being created for a class conscious of its superiority, books became a prestigious emblem of wealth and power. Muslim patrons often demanded opulence of materials (papers and pigments), fine craftsmanship, and continual stylistic and narrative novelty, for painting was also a form of personal entertainment. We have no evidence that Hindu or Jain painters had earlier worked exclusively for particular or single patrons; this may not have been economically feasible. The Muslim rulers, however, formed *kitabkhanas* (library workshops) within their palaces, and artists and artisans often worked exclusively for specific employers. (A sixteenth-century Mughal *kitabkhana* is depicted in fig. 1, and a Persian example is shown in fig. 8.) Thus they painted

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to please a single person, rather than to reflect the general needs of a community, and this demanded sensitivity and responsiveness to a patron's individual and often highly idiosyncratic taste. The interplay of these differing attitudes towards patronage continues throughout subsequent developments. It is of major importance for any understanding of the varying traditions in India.

The artistic style developed by one specific Muslim dynasty, the Mughals, eventually came to dominate, even if briefly, the arts of north India. It drew from and unified earlier, highly diversified, local traditions. These local types of painting are most usefully termed "pre-Mughal," and can be divided into three basic categories: Hindu, Jain, and Muslim – the Mughals were the most important, but not the first of the Muslim dynasties in India – and particular stylistic traits are associated with each of these culturally distinct communities. This factor can be as important to the style of the works as geographic provenance. Jain paintings made at different times and places may have more in common with one another, for example, than with illustrations to Muslim and Hindu texts made contemporaneously in the same city. Furthermore, styles indigenous to India, but of differing cultural affiliation, share traits not found in the early, imported Muslim traditions of the subcontinent.

Pre-Mughal Hindu painting is best represented by a series of *Bhagavata Purana* illustrations datable to about 1540. The text is among the most popular of all Hindu works, and this specific copy can be compared eventually to other versions of the same text from different provenances and periods. The narrative recounts the adventurous career of the god Vishnu. The most popular episodes, however, relate to his incarnation of Krishna, seen first as a mischievous child, then as an amorous youth, and finally as an ideal princely ruler.

Illustrations in this sixteenth-century series relate to specific passages of the story, but several sequential episodes are often combined as one illustration: *Krishna Defeats the Demon Whirlwind* (plate B) is an example. In an especially dynamic composition, Krishna is shown both in the whirlwind's power and returning to his mother after defeating the demonic force. The architecture, tree, and figures are placed in compartmentalized units, bordered by solid lines and filled with unmodulated, flat planes of strong color. (These background areas are as positive and strong in shape as the figures of the narrative.) There is no attempt at a three-dimensional space, and there is nothing extraneous to the defining elements of the narrative. All figures are in profile. They are strong, angular shapes whose gestures (important to the story) are emphasized and easily read, and each figure is constructed according to the same formula. We are dealing with types, not individualized depictions, and the execution is rough. The artist is indifferent to technical expertise or the subtlety and variety of colors. And while we are presented with multiple moments or aspects of the event, the successive episodes are not in a visually linear sequence. The Hindu

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3. A Group of Women. Wall-painting from Lepakshi, ca. 1540

artist is not attempting to make the moment seem unique, nor to separate and distinguish individual forms in an empty space.

A second series of illustrations has given its name to this broad stylistic category of pre-Mughal Hindu painting in art-historical writings, however; it was the first of this group of works to be discovered, and it remains the most often discussed. The *Chaurapanchasika* (Fantasies of a Love Thief) (fig. 4) is an illustrated volume of erotic verses, and can be dated to about 1550. The text, by Bilhana, was written in the eleventh century, and while it has no overt religious meaning, neither is it purely secular. The page reproduced here illustrates the following verse: "At this moment of my death, nay, even in my next birth, I shall ever remember that swan in the cluster of lotuses of love, with her eyes closed in the ecstacy of love, all her limbs relaxed, while her garments and the tresses of her hair were strewn in disorder."[2]

In this scene, too, the visual elements do not stress a single or unique moment in time. They celebrate instead an amorous situation, and not even in the most dramatic way possible. Space is used metaphorically, not to provide a convincing physical setting. The lotus leaves that outline the architecture emphasize and intensify the beauty and fertility of the heroine, whose enormous breasts, tiny waist, and ample hips perfectly accord with traditional Indian ideals of physical beauty. The scene is spatially flat, but we are nonetheless aware – as

[2] Leela Shiveshwarkar, *The Pictures of the Chaurapanchasika – A Sanskrit Love Lyric*, New Delhi, 1967, p. 26.

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we are in the murals from Ajanta (fig. 2) – that the figures have substantial volume.

The geographic origin of the style represented by these two sets is highly disputed, but information given in the colophon of a manuscript closely related in style to the *Bhagavata Purana* is important. The *Aranyaka Parvan* (Forest Book) is one section of the great Sanskrit epic *Mahabharata*. In a copy dated 1516 and made near Agra, the inscription names the patron who commissioned the work as "Bhanadasa Chaudhuri of Chandrapuri."[3] While not otherwise known, his name indicates that he was the headman or foreman of a *pargana* or other small administrative unit or market area. It seems, therefore, that the general *Chaurapanchasika* style was not necessarily or exclusively royal in origin or execution. However, while the *Bhagavata Purana* is very close in style and conception to the *Aranyaka Parvan*, the *Chaurapanchasika* seems to be from a different (if related) workshop. Many of its pages are far more sophisticated – even self-conscious – in style than the *Aranyaka Parvan* or the *Bhagavata Purana*, and lack the roughness and resulting power of those sets. Here again we do not have enough information to know whether these differences are due to historical development, to a difference of provenance, or to variations in the level and type of patronage. (These are essential questions to keep in mind for comparisons made throughout this study.) It is the *Bhagavata Purana*, rather than the *Chaurapanchasika*, however, that was eventually most influential at the Mughal court.

A second localized stylistic category is usually termed Jain, or Western Indian. While Gujarat (on the west coast, north of Bombay) is the major center of production, the style is in fact geographically far more wide-ranging. The texts illustrated usually relate to Jainism, a religion that grew up in India contemporaneously with Buddhism. However, a few illustrated manuscripts to Hindu texts in this style are also known.[4]

The Siege of Ujjain and the Magic She-Ass comes from a Jain *Kalpasutra* and *Kalakacharyakatha* (Scripture of Right Conduct and Story of Kalaka) manuscript, dated 1411 (plate A). The narrative relates a tale in which the heroic Kalaka defeats the evil King of Ujjain, whose power resides in a mechanical donkey placed on the walls of his fortress; the donkey's brays force any enemy to fall to the ground vomiting blood. Kalaka's troops, however, fill the donkey's mouth with arrows before it can make any noise, and thereby defeat its master.

As in the *Chaurapanchasika* style (fig. 4), colors are very limited and applied in flat, clearly bounded areas; profiles, postures, and gestures are sharp and

[3] Karl Khandalavala and Moti Chandra, *An Illustrated* Aranyaka Parvan *in the Asiatic Society of Bombay*, Bombay, 1974, p. 24.

[4] See W. Norman Brown, *Vasanta Vilasa*, New Haven, 1962, for a manuscript dated 1451–1452.

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4. Bilhana Makes Love with Champavati. From a *Chaurapanchasika* series, ca. 1550

angular; and compositions are broken down into small compartments with strongly colored flat backgrounds. These can be taken as general characteristics of indigenous Indian painting styles of the time, however, for the *Chaurapanchasika* style could be described with the same terms. Distinctive traits of Western Indian painting include the wiry, and at its best extremely vital, line drawing; compositions and colors far less robust and energetic than those of the *Chaurapanchasika*; and the very repetitive character of the scenes in many manuscripts.

There is only modest variety in the choice of texts illustrated within the Jain tradition. Copies of the *Kalpasutra* and *Kalakacharyakatha* were commissioned most often, especially by wealthy merchants wishing propitious gifts for temple presentation. Few of these reveal any distinctive character. In addition to the 1411 *Kalpasutra* and *Kalakacharyakatha* (plate A), important exceptions are a *Kalpasutra*, dated 1439, from Mandu – illustrated in a style very close to that of the 1411 manuscript – and a *Kalpasutra* copied and illustrated at Jaunpur (Uttar Pradesh) in 1465. (See the Appendix for further references for all dated manuscripts mentioned here.) Within the context of Western Indian painting as traditionally understood, these three volumes are uncommonly lively and vital in effect. This is due less to compositional

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inventiveness, however, than to the enthusiasm, talent, and freshness with which an established style and compositional format were executed. That painters were nonetheless familiar with other styles is proven by the figures of West Asians demanded by the narrative illustrated in plate A. In the battle shown, Kalaka has been joined by an army of West Asians or Scythians (*sahis*). These foreign men are depicted with the three-quarter profile and formulaic facial features common in Persian painting (see fig. 6). Jain painters were therefore sufficiently aware of other styles to draw upon such sources when useful to the narrative. However, this did not necessarily lead to the development of new attitudes to pictorial space or compositional format.

While Jain or Western Indian painting generally kept its distance from Muslim styles, recent important research by Dr. Saryu Doshi has transformed understanding of the overall character of painting for Jain patrons.[5] By gaining access to Jain temple repositories (*bhandars*), Dr. Doshi has extended awareness of the range of stylistic variation that did in fact exist, especially for copies of manuscripts less central to the faith than the *Kalpasutra* or *Kalakacharyakatha*. Manuscripts dated 1441, 1454, 1540, 1596, and 1606 show a slow but inevitable interplay of traditional Jain and pre-Mughal Hindu styles. Just as Jain and Hindu temple sculpture was often stylistically interrelated so Jain and Hindu paintings in some areas were also inextricably intertwined.

Western Indian painting – and thus the Mandu *Kalpasutra* – is not to be considered a court art. Mandu was the capital of an important sultanate (or pre-Mughal Muslim kingdom) in the area of Central India called Malwa, however, and a contemporary Muslim court art did exist there. Its character, very different from the Western Indian style, allows us to discuss the third pre-Mughal category: sultanate painting.

The most important royal manuscript from Mandu is the *Ni'matnama* (Book of Recipes) (figs. 5 and 7), an illustrated collection of recipes begun for Sultan Ghiyath ad-Din Khalji (r. 1469–1501) and finished by his son Nasir ad-Din (r. 1501–1512). The Sultan was one of the most eccentric rulers in India, his court the perfect model for an Arabian Nights fantasy. Khwaja Nizamuddin Ahmad, a sixteenth century historian, allows us to glimpse the social milieu within which the work was created. He wrote of the events following Ghiyath ad-Din's accession to the throne:

> When he had finished the festivities and rites of the accession, he sent for the amirs one day, and said, "As I have spent 34 years at the stirrups of my father in labours and expedition, it now comes to my mind, that I should endeavour to guard what has come to me from my father, and should not give myself the trouble to acquire more; and should open the door to peace and rest, and pleasure and enjoyment on me, and those depending on me. It is better to keep

[5] *Masterpieces of Jain Painting*, edited by Saryu Doshi, Bombay, 1985.

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