

## Book Review

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### Paintings in Delhi And The Regional Courts Under The Later Mughals.



Dr. Barbara Schmitz, an eminent American art historian, has edited a beautiful, scholarly book on the illustrated albums, paintings and manuscripts pertaining to the 18th and 19th centuries. In addition to contributing the Introduction, she has also co-authored two chapters; the remaining seven chapters have been contributed by specialists in their respective fields.

In her Introduction, Dr. Schmitz states that under the patronage of the great Mughals, from Humayun to Shah Jahan, illustrated books and albums, filled with portraits and paintings of court activities, attained a high standard seldom equalled and never excelled in world art. But painting under the later Mughals during the period 1707-1858 can only be reassessed keeping in view the changed pattern of patronage. Multiple invasions of India by the Persian armies under Nadir Shah and the Afghan Ahmed Shah Durani between 1739 and 1772 were particularly devastating to the Mughal capital at Delhi. The attacks of the Rohillas, Marathas and Jats further resulted in the migration of the court artists to the safety of new eastern capitals at Lucknow or Faizabad in modern U.P. or Murshidabad in Bengal.

Terence Mcnerney's essay on the chief painters of Muhammad Shah (1719-48) offers a clear chronology of several large paintings of the Shah and his Court. A number of these works are assigned to the artist Chitarman *thani*. Three other painters, Nidha Mal, Hunhar thani, and Govardhan thani, were prime artists in Muhammad Shah's employ. Traditional Mughal Court style continued at least through the early years of Muhammad Shah's reign, but later paintings usually show a reduced number of figures, who are then reproduced in larger scale. Discussing the development of paintings in the Deccan from the conquest of Bijapur and Golconda by Auranzeb in 1687 and his death in 1707, it is noted that the larger scale of a main figure, a less colourful Palette emphasizing white and greens, and figural clusters centred on the page, are common to the Chitarman style.

In the second article, J.P. Losty addresses what he perceives as a crisis of composition of the paintings produced in eastern India around 1750. The importance of portraiture and the ensuing neglect of landscape, had led to an inability of artists to produce naturalistic and spatially integrated paintings. Losty believes that one type of landscape, with a deep plain dotted with small trees, was developed by Deep Chand, an artist who travelled with his patron Mir Quasim, Nawab of Murshidabad, to Patna and then Lucknow in 1764. Subsequently, similar landscapes appeared in many works of Mihr Chand and

Bahadur Singh, the painters of Avadh. This flat landscape is often found on the other side of a body of water, sometimes identified as the river Ganga.

As landscapes were evolving in the period 1750-80, so too were depictions of the human body to different styles of representation. Two different styles of representation of the human body that developed at Murshidabad and Lucknow are next discussed, giving graphic descriptions of the paintings.

In the second half of the 18th century, the English governing elite of the East India Company, started commissioning Indian artists to paint subjects of interest to them. The subjects related to the splendid life style of the foreigners in India, their houses and possessions, botanical and Zoological studies, and Indians in their typical dresses pursuing their crafts and professions. This type of work is called Company art. Besides the English, the French and Portuguese had earlier commissioned Indian artists to paint similar themes. The three Indian artists, Zayn-al-Din, Bhawani Das, and Ram Das came from Patna, where they had been trained in the Mughal painting techniques. They produced albums of Indian birds and mammals painted on large sheets of European-made paper, in opaque water colour, in the last quarter of the 18th Century, at Calcutta for the wife of Sir Elijah Impey. Similarly, two painters of Delhi, Ghulam Ali Khan and Lallji were commissioned by the Fraser brothers in about 1815 to paint water colours of the inhabitants of Delhi. A third group of accomplished painters worked in Lahore for French Generals in the employment of Maharaja Ranjit Singh in the second quarter of the 19th Century. They are discussed here in an article by Dr. Jean Marie Lafont and Barbara Schmitz. Imam Baksh Lahori, the most talented of the artists, worked both in European style, drawing soldiers and common Indians, as also fine landscapes from observation for his French patrons. Painting in the traditional miniature style, he produced many illustrated books.

These three groups of Company paintings have considerable aesthetic merit, documenting the life in India. In her article, Dr. Mehr Afshan Farooqi documents crafts practised in and around Bareilly in the 1820s, including paintings of craftsmen with detailed drawings of tools, a furnace for glass making, etc. In the article contributed by Dr. Aditya Behl, historical portraits of Begum Samru and her Court illuminate the text, but again prompted by a popular Company theme, the artist has given pictures of the monuments of Delhi, such as Jantar Mantar, Nizamuddin's *Dargah* etc.

While Dr. Barbara Schmitz and Nasim Akhtar describe several important illustrated manuscripts in the National Museum, New Delhi, in one article, the former, in another essay, takes up the subject of later Indian paintings and illustrated manuscripts in two Libraries in New York. The National Museum, New Delhi, has a rich and varied collection of 18th and 19th Century Indian illustrated manuscripts, the authors have chosen to take up the seven most important ones, painted at different places in western and northern parts of the country. Six of these manuscripts are in Persian language and all are penned in *nastaliq*, and painted in seven different *qualams*, each representative of one of the newly disengaged Indian states.

The second article deals with the American holdings in the Pierpont Morgan Library, New York, and the New York Public Library. Both collections were formed in the 20th century, but they typify two very different collecting styles. The Morgan Library purchased the most outstanding art available and six of these paintings housed in the Library are discussed here. The New York Public Library, on the other hand, concentrated on acquiring complete manuscripts that demonstrated the art of books rather than individual miniatures as examples of different painting styles. The policy adopted by the New York Public Library was to form a broadly representative collection of illustrated books that emphasized the range of regional and vernacular styles. Dr. Schmitz has given detailed description of these books.

The last article in the volume contributed by Dr. Robert J. del Bonta throws light on the Reproductions of the 17th Century paintings. Karl Khandalavala was probably the first art historian to point out that a number of paintings attributed to the 17th century, were, in fact, copies made during the long reign of the Mughal ruler, Shah Alam (1759-1806). Commenting on the way Indian artists have traditionally worked, Dr. Del Bonta feels that copying or simply basing works on earlier ones or combining parts of pre-existing

paintings was always the *modus operandi*. Besides copying works from other sources, an artist working in a traditional Hindu atelier, may copy Mughal works, or a Mughal artist can copy works done in European style. Any visual source, he feels, is fair game. He has discussed these paintings, available in various Libraries, Museums, and Collections, available in the United States.

Concluding, both Dr. Barbara Schmitz and Marg Publications deserve to be congratulated, the former for putting together a scholarly Collection of essays and the latter for maintaining its high standing as India's premier publication house specializing in books and magazines on the arts.

*Book reviewed by Dr. Lalit M. Gujral, Hony, Advisor, Kalakosa, IGNC.*

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