

Symbolic Use Of Animals In Mughal Miniature Paintings: An Analysis



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Abstract: *This study investigates how animals were used symbolically in Mughal miniature paintings, a rich creative legacy that reflected a fusion of Central Asian, Persian, and Indian cultures. Animals were integral to the Mughal Empire's unique visual language, which was used to communicate intricate stories. This study investigates the intentional use of animals as symbols for power, religion, and sociocultural relationships. The study illustrates how representations of tigers, elephants, birds, and other animals conveyed political power, religious symbolism, and the nuances of courtly life. For example, gazelles or deer frequently feature in scenes of love and beauty, reflecting the aesthetic values of the time, whereas lions stand for authority, power, and dignity. Peacocks, which in Hindu symbolism stand in for Krishna, serve as another example of the Mughal court's religious hybridization. The research uses visual analysis of Mughal miniatures kept in museums in addition to primary texts including the Akbarnama, Baburnama, and Tuzk-e-Jahangiri. In order to reveal the rich meaning hidden in these artworks, this study's methodology combines formal art historical analysis with multidisciplinary viewpoints in a qualitative manner. The results highlight the complex interactions between politics, religion, art, and culture in Mughal miniature paintings and provide a clearer picture of how the court's ideals were reflected in and reinforced by animals*

Keywords: Iconology, Symbols, Mughal, Depiction, Miniature Paintings, Heritage, Significance

Introduction

Art has long been contemplated a means of expression and aesthetic gratification for mankind. They supported art while taking time to acknowledge it. Foreign artisans and painters were solicited and permanently appointed to their courts. In India, art bloomed during the rule of Mughal emperors and their courtiers. The art of painting and portraiture thrived during the tenure of the Mughals. Mughal art, notably painting, dates back to Babur, the founder of the Mughal Dynasty's rule in India (Cleveland, 1992).

The Mughal dynasty had a deep interest in the arts (Goswamy, 2012), and each emperor interpolated their own personality into the paintings created throughout their reign. Babur's Memoirs display his appreciation for nature, scenery, and flowers. His aesthetic eye motivated him to write about the beauty of the gleaming campfires below. Humayun lacked his father's administrative credentials. After Humayun Akbar and his son Jahangir produced great contributions in promotion of miniature paintings. Jahangir was a nature lover emperor not only employed artist of the time but by himself was a keen observer and great painter.

During Shah Jehan's reign, Mughal painting lost its patronage. In Aurangzeb's time Mughal dynasty came to its end. Along with this, in Mughal miniature paintings the symbolic use of animals can be understood through the eye of courtly culture and imperial ideology. Animals were often employed as emblems of power, virtue, or specific qualities attributed to rulers and their realms (Goswamy, 2012). In numerous artworks a collection of exotic animals depicted curated by Mughal emperors, also contributed to the symbolic language (Welch, 1978). By delving into the works of art historians such as B.N. Goswamy and Som Prakash Verma, one can gain insights into the multifaceted symbolism attached to animals within the courtly context of the Mughal Empire (Verma, 1994). Animals have been used to convey messages, and morals have been taken from them. Such painting arouses the interest of the viewers to know more about the painting. It also conveys the psychology of people about their understanding and interrelation of the characters of animals (Chaitanya, 1979)

Objectives

The main objectives of the research are to,

- Know about the history of Mughals
- Investigate the role of animals as emblems of power, virtue, and specific qualities within the context of courtly culture and imperial ideology.
- Explore the contribution of artists, painted animals to present their symbolic role.

Methodology

The research is conducted employing a qualitative analysis, with a focus on the careful observation and appraisal of Mughal miniature paintings.

1. Data Collection

The goal of this research is to gain a deep knowledge of the symbolic language hidden in Mughal miniature paintings. This is achieved by thoroughly going over primary sources such as the Akbarnama, Baburnama, and Tuzk-e-Jahangiri, along with secondary sources

like as books, articles, and miniature paintings, and gaining visual evidence through museum visits.

2. Analysis Technique

Mughal miniature paintings are closely examined to reveal their political, cultural, and religious dimensions. The study uses formal art historical methodologies as well as multidisciplinary approaches to uncover the rich symbolism hidden within the represented creatures. The findings have been documented for future research purposes. Such paintings not only capture viewers, but also represent their psychological beliefs and the relationships between animal figures.

Research Hypothesis

- H1: Lions and elephants are shown in Mughal miniature paintings as symbols of imperial authority and strength.
- H2: Certain animals in Mughal miniatures, such as peacocks, are religiously significant, reflecting the Mughal court's syncretic beliefs.
- H3: The representation of animals in Mughal miniatures reflects cultural ideals, such as courtly life, love, and authority.

Literature Review

Babur was a philosopher, hunter, wanderer, and spectator of animal and bird behavior. He was ardent about nature and its enchantment, including flowers and gardens (Welch, 1978). Babur Nama depicts the pivotal events in his life. He passed away at the young age of 47 in 1530 A.D. He was succeeded by his descendant Humayun (Koch, 2012).

Humayun was immensely fascinated by his host's aesthetic sensibility. During his excursion to Persia, Humayun obligated with scholars, musicians, and poets. He also went to the studios of eminent Persian artists (Welch, 1995). When Humayun reclaimed his empire, a group of servants and artists besiege him. He started a unique painting academy led by skilled masters. In Tabriz, he met a young illustrator. Mir Syed Ali was highly esteemed by the Shah and his

people. He prevalent the manner of his father, Mir Mansoor, a native of Badakhshan. Both artists were engaged with Behzad (Verma, 1994), an outstanding artist in Tabriz. Syed Ali, like (Okada, 1992).

Following Humayun's untimely death, Akbar, his minor son, was promptly enthroned. He firmly quelled Shah Abdul Maali's rebellion. This event is specified in 'Akbar nama' and portrayed in a sketch by Persian artist Abdus Samad (Brown, 1924), who was most likely present at the display. Mir Syed Ali continued to work on Amir Hamza's artworks. The illustrations in Amir Hamza demonstrate the character of painting during the early phases of Mughal administration. A small number of budding painters from Persia were associated with the Mughal Court. While Hindu painters specialized in wall painting, they were not given the same acknowledgement as Persian painters. Thus Akbar heralded a generation of truce coupled with literary, artistic activities of his people. The artistic prowess of Akbar is distinctly manifested in his stately capital Fatehpur Sikri. Akbar was engrossed in pictures and he disliked those who decried painting. He held that painting, for a well-regulated mind, is a source of intelligence and an antidote against the venom of ignorance 'Aine Akbari deals with every facet of Great Mughals administration'. Akbar's deep relationship with Hinduism led him to commission artists to portray its epic stories. The depicted Mahabharat, known as Razmnama, is still kept safe in Jaipur's palace museum. Mughal miniature paintings, which are best recognized by intricate design and brilliant colors, give a spellbinding look into the innovative and cultural setting of the d'In 1605 Jahangir concluded Akbar as the emperor of India' (Randhawa, 1981). He inherited a politically sound and substantial empire and never bothered to magnify it. The Mughal School of painting which was in a improving state was handled with care and Jahangir infused new definition, denizens, and refinement in it. His onerous mind and refined taste, love for intricacies helped in progressing the quality of painting. The portraits created in his atelier mirror his mood and attitude. Jahangir's

Muraqqas (Albums) depicts his personal taste and collection of resources. He was specifically interested in precious stones, peculiar creatures, and birds. He was interested in all arts, but painting was his predilection. During this period, there was a shift away from earlier Mughal traditions and a emphasis on remarkable drawing and unique colors. A school parallel Rajput and Mughal traditions was flourished. Mughal painting was massively influenced by European art styles, particularly color fusion. During Jahangir's regime, portraiture was established. Noteworthy illustrated manuscripts from this tenure include *Ayar-e-Danish*, an animal fable book, and *Anwar-i-Suhaili* (Seyller, 2002). The *Tuzuk* is a comprehensive manifesto of Jahangir, detailing all elements of his life (Beach, 1992). Aqa Riza, a Persian painter, conducted the Saleem Studio. He was proficient in Persian Safavid miniature painting. His son Abul Hasan and another painter, Mansur, were given the titles Nadiruzzaman and Nadirul-Asr, correspondingly (Verma, 2013). During Shah Jehan's reign, Mughal painting lost its charm and prestige, and painters were seldom recognized. He admired architecture above painting (Koch, 1997, p. 78). Mughal painting was decentralized and free of royal monopoly, resulting in a dramatic withdrawal from the prior regime's conditions (Losty, 1982). In 1658, Shah Jehan was furloughed by his son, Aurangzeb (Gascoigne, 1971). The Mughal school of painting's golden age is passed. The Mughal school of painting declined when it was no longer sustained by royal patronage. The portraiture of humans were whitewashed and transformed beyond recognition. His successors, due to their political proneness, were unable to conserve their ancestral art, allowing it to vanish into obscurity (Layden and Erskin, 1926).

In Mughal dynasty between the 16th to 19th century in South Asia (Beach 1992). Among the detailed images of palaces, landscapes, and events in history, the symbolic application of animals comes out as an alluring element of Mughal artistic vision (Welch, 1978). Animals in Mughal miniatures were more than just ornamental; they played a significant symbolic role, adding to the era's full visual language

(Goswamy, 2012). This symbolic use of animals in Mughal art represents the empire's cultural fusion, spiritual influences, and the Indian subcontinent's broader artistic traditions (Koch, 2011).

In exploring the symbolic significance of animals in Mughal miniature paintings, one must consider the influence of diverse cultural and religious elements. The Mughal emperors such as Akbar, Jahangir, and Shah Jahan, witnessed the synthesis of Persian, Central Asian, and Indian artistic traditions (Beach, 1992). This fusion is particularly evident in the symbolic representations of animals, where each creature carries layers of meaning drawn from Islamic, Hindu, and indigenous belief systems (Welch, 1978). Scholars like Milo Cleveland Beach, Ebba Koch, and Stuart Cary Welch have extensively analyzed Mughal art, shedding light on the complex interplay of cultural influences in these miniature masterpieces.

By the patronage of Mughal rulers, a colossal painting depository was built. The list of the painters was so lengthy. Some famous painters were Mir Sayyid Ali, Abd Al-Samad, Farrukh Beg, Daswanth, Basawan, Abu Al-Hasan, Bishan Das, Govardhan, Ustad Mansur, Mir Hasan, Anupchitra, Mahammad Nadir, Chitramoni, Daulatetc(Rogers,2006).

There are so many other miniature paintings, in which animals are symbolically used that shows the circumstances, in which the action happens. Some of them are as follows. (Welch 1985). Some conceptual ideas such as Jahangir shooting poverty are also humorous (Jariwala 2010)

Analysis and Discussion

Figure-1: Akbar is standing holding a tasbeeh in his hand in his hand

In this miniature painting (Fig. No. 1), Akbar is standing with a “tasbeeh” in his right hand showing his unyielding belief in religion, and his left hand lies on his sword, which is a symbol of worldly influence (Welch 1985). There is a calf to the right and a lion to the left near his feet within the picture frame. The body of the lion is facing towards the left border and he has bowed

his head to the right and is awestruck at the calf. Though the lion is roaring as its mouth is open, the calf does not feel threatened at all. The calf is facing towards the lion, and his action exhibits how delicate, minuscule, and in jeopardy he is, but under the just precedent of the king, he feels guarded (Kossak 1997). As Akbar is facing to the left direction, that’s why the lion is placed on that side before the emperor. It demonstrates his sovereignty and leverage, which he keeps under command, and the calf denotes his citizens who feel safe under his rule. The white color of the calf atones for the white in the king's shirt and the loftiest part of the painting. The color of the lion is in thorough concurrence with the surrounding greens and browns. The turn of the calf’s backbone has been exhibits very cautiously. In order to keep the flies away, the calf’s tail is lying on top of its lower body. There is a harmless and kind display on its face. Shading is very subtle. The lion is proportionately less watched. Its representation is comparatively serene and according to the rules of prospect, its right forelimb must be smaller. Its eyes are fairly alluring. They articulate the asymmetry of his look and convey his prestige and puissance (Welch 1985).





Fig.1: Akbar **Fig.2:** Miserable Horse, with a Lion and man and Dog Calf (Welch (Beach1992:Pl.114) 1985: Pl.9)

Figure-2: Miserable Horse, man and Dog

In this miniature painting (Figl. No. 2), a ravenous horse is traced by a very thin man with a branch in his hand as however, he is using it to order the horse to go ahead. Between the horse and the man towards the bystander near the lower border of the portrait is a slender dog looking down zealously at the ground as if seeking for something to eat. The scene in which they are painted is an sterile land or a swamp with a few parched branches apart. The horse is gasping for air as its mouth is open and dry with thirst. There is a puny figure of a fox hastening forward, which in contrary to other subjects of the miniature painting is quite vigilant and robust. It is relatively minute than the horse and dog. This miniature painting portrays two meanings. It might represent the mortality of the human body, which is destined to decline as anticipated in the poetry of Sufis. It has a lesson for the viewer, that they should not omit the day that they have to die and their bodies will decompose. They should not indulge in the material world(Seyller, 2002). It produces a pathetic and a apologetic picture of human beings. On the other hand, this drawing insinuates to the famous and ardent anti-hero of Arab-Persian literature (Okada 1992) the Majnun. When he unsuccessful to meet his enthroned, the magnificent Laila, he decided to

take retreat in the desert with the wild animals and birds. Horse and dog are his trustworthy friends in the desert, who decided to suffer with him rather than leave him all alone in the wild land. "In Basawan's touching work, a Majnun emaciated by years of dismissal, essentially stimulated by love, walks after the skeletal horse, itself governed by a malnourished dog. Occasionally did Mughal painters establish such fascinating images (Okada 1992). This painting portrays the expressions of a agitated lover very dramatically. He leaves the human race and aids animals and birds instead. These wild animals are more humane towards him than the barbarous men.

Figure-3: Jahangir and his father Akbar

This miniature painting (Fig. No. 3) produces one of the images of the array of "dynastic portraits", which were intended to establish the applause of influence and reliability of the dynasty. Painter Balachand has conveyed a post mortal and emblematic relation between Akbar and Jahangir (Okada 1993). In the specified miniature painting named as" Jahangir and his father Akbar", volume taken from Shah Jahan's album, Akbar has a falcon sitting on the wrist of his right hand, which shows worldly power. He is about to give the falcon to Jahangir who is standing in front of him. Jahangir has lifted his both hands in an indication accepting the power he is about to receive from Akbar. The animal portrayed is a regal white falcon. Balachand has used Mughal iconology by representing the falcon as an emblem of power. It has been shown infrequently in royal portraits and depictions of the Mughals in a analogous way. In this miniature painting Jahangir has tried to validate his extension to the royal cathedra by ordering this illustration and is trying to coax the audience that he enjoyed good relations with his father and that his father regarded him as his only heir. The falcon is looking at Akbar, which suggests that Akbar is still the emperor and takes all the jurisdiction and power.



Fig.3: Akbar and **Fig.4:** Killing Malak Jahangir (Welch 1985: Pl.81) Pl. 11)

Figure-4: Jahangir and the great Mughals

The above miniature painting (Fig. No. 4) "Jahangir and the great Mughals", Jahangir is standing on a globe delineating the earth, as he had the title of the "World-Seizer" (Jahangir). He strings his bow and lets an arrow fly, which hits the target i.e. the decapitated head of the Peshwa, on the top of a pole. There are two owls near the target and a ominous inscription is added. The writing means, "The rebel's head is the abode of owls." The orb on top of, which Jahangir is standing, backed by an ox standing on top of a large fish. This iconography is said to be of an Islamic tradition but this is not true (Welch 1985). The globe has the classic figures of a lion and a lamb denoting serene co-existence of the wild and the docile animals under the just rule of Jahangir. The fish

supporting the globe has a human figure of an ascetic resting on its back and is reading a book. Jahangir strings an arrow and is shooting the bare, feeble, and old figure of deficit symbolized by the old man (Welch 1985). To further improve the artistic view illustrated by miscellaneous painters, various themes were discussed. These themes were specifically used for ornamental purposes.

Figure- 5: Monkeys playing-1570-anwar-l-suhaili

The Mughal artisans have now and then turned to lighter moods in painting by illustrating scenes of animals and birds in their natural habitats, in lively moods rather than just for the sake of providing information. The monkeys (Fig.No.5), are located in a rocky landscape, with trees growing out of the borders and a river in the foreground, besides which rocks are found. Monkeys of distinct sizes perform different acts in the picture and a lot is happening within the frame. Two small monkeys are climbing a tree trunk near the left border. While another monkey swings from the long loose hanging branches of the same tree. A big monkey is sitting on the rock in front of the tree and is talking to another of its breed standing ahead of it. Their gestures are very human like and their manoeuvre of hands seems as if they are reasoning on a important subject. A monkey standing beyond the one sitting on the rock has a branch in its hand and is either going to smack the sitting monkey with it or it is using it to whisk away flies from its head. It is utilizing its other hand, i.e. the left hand to scratch its right arm. Another one standing beside the rock to the right left is listening eagerly to their conversation. A monkey, standing on all four limbs upon a rock near the right border, is also listening to these monkeys, acting as the core of attraction of the two monkeys in front of the large rock. The one standing to the right is offering a coconut to the one sitting on the left, with its back to the audience, and a small monkey behind it is wickedly pulling the thin long tail of this monkey. Another one is lying on its stomach by the side of river and is drinking water from it. A monkey sitting to its right, on a small rock adjacent to the river, has also turned

its back to the observer and has raised its left hand in a gesture as if it is conversing with the one standing far off besides the huge rock, near the left margin. The last monkey is sitting on another rock alongside the river, near the right edge and is carrying a baby monkey on its back and is facing to the left side, attentively perceiving its other counterpart (Verma,2013).

The big monkey, introduced before, who is sitting on the colossal rock beneath the tree is probably the eldest of the tribe and is their leader, which is why almost everybody is paying heed to him and is forming the centre of interest in the miniature. This painting is probably inclined from "Kalilawa Dimnah" that was previously illustrated by Abbasids, Mongols and Timurids. In this book of narratives, at many occasions animals have been used for portraying messages to people.



Fig.5: Monkeys playing (Bussagli)

Fig.6: Akbar orders the Slaughter to cease

1966: Pl.14)

(Welch 1985: Pl.89)

Figur-6: Akbar orders the slaughter to cease- c1590- miskin- akbarnama (plate 49)

Akbar often imputed to have visions through which God almighty directed him. All the Mughal emperors, more or less, bestowed themselves as the special or blessed men of God. In the given miniature (Fig. No.6), a sight from the history of Akbar, as narrated by Abul Fazl, is illustrated. According to Akbarnama, the emperor was hunting in an amazing qamargah, near Bhera in 1578 at the age of 36 when all of a sudden Akbar commanded the hunt to be stopped. Akbar who was an enthusiastic hunter himself and used to go hunting more than any other Mughal emperor, is shown in an absurd situation. At first, he is said to have hunted with enthusiasm, but soon, the violence outraged him and he ordered that not another animal should be laid a hand upon. Abul Fazl, addresses that he had vision which forced him to stop the brutality. Abul Fazl records that, "A divine joy took possession of his bodily frame. The allure of cognition of God cast its rays. Then complying to the wishes of the emperor, effective men made every venture that no one should touch the feather of a finch and that they should grant all the animals to depart according to their habits." (Fazl, 2000)

We see Akbar sitting cross legged in a Budha-like position on a carpet and a lifeless Nilgai lies in front of him. He is proposing the sad scene in front of him. The painter has demonstrated the animal with great compassion and as an object for contemplation. Miskin illustrated his animals with incredible observation and empathy. This also represents that the emperor was a peace loving and just monarch who did not like to kill a living being without any reason. In a research journal of K. P. Menon, he records that Akbar was introspective by nature and the hunt was ceased because he had a vision. He was a very gentle and tender person by nature and was not very fond of meat. This may have been the time when he was under Jain leverage that he felt the brutality of killing the animals just for the sake of fun (Menon, 1989)

The dead dying buck lying "in front of Akbar

conjuges sympathies of the newer as well as the emperor. To the left of Akbar is a long trail of hunters concerned about the abrupt change in the emperor's mood. In the background, the animals are once again in their natural habitats according to Akbar's commands and one can feel how happy and at home they feel. Miskin have painted them in such a way that one senses that they praised the emperor. There is an significant message conveyed by the artist that innocent animals should not be devoured for the sake of fun and they should be allowed to live freely in their habitats.

Conclusion

Mughal miniature art blossomed in India chiefly due to its stupendous ability to assimilate and amalgamate existing traditions and cultures. The Mughals anticipated a kingdom founded on secular principles, nurturing art through their benevolent patronage. The Mughals retained various elements in their art, drawing from diverse sources. For instance, stories like "Kalilawa Dimnah," featuring animals as characters, were utilized to impart valuable lessons. Animals such as lions symbolized power, honor, wealth, and authority, while deer or gazelle. Additionally, the peacock held prominence as a symbol of Krishna in Hindu Paintings.

Ultimately, Mughal Miniature Art not only thrived as a result of the Mughals' inclusive approach to culture but also served as a medium through which intricate ideas and culture motifs were conveyed to viewers. Animals such as lions are used to show power, honour, wealth and authority, whereas deer or gazelle, which is quite often used in Indian paintings, and are also painted in paintings having love scenes or beautiful sceneries. A peacock is considered as symbol of Krishna in Hindu paintings.

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