

Chapter 56: Painting

A. Introduction

It is difficult to distinguish Muslim contribution to painting from the history of Muslim painting. An assessment of Muslim contribution to this art would involve a consideration of the changing and growing attitude of Muslims towards painting and a study of the historical background which determined this attitude. Both these considerations are necessary because they imply each other, an understanding of the one without the other is bound to be inadequate and lopsided. Let us first consider the Muslim attitude towards painting.

It seems that Muslim attitude towards painting in the early history of Islam was hostile. This was justifiable because Fine Arts had at that time an uncanny association with pagan beliefs and rituals. Painting was reminiscent of polytheism which Islam had come to fight against and destroy. Islam then needed an extraverted attitude – an attitude in which the soft and feminine qualities of artistic creation and appreciation could find little room. The social consciousness of man at that period of history did not have sufficient insight into subtle differentiation of various aspects of life. Being a facet of pagan polytheism painting was prohibited by Islam in its zeal to break idols.

Profound aesthetic possibilities inherent in Islam had to lie dormant to be realized only when was ripe for their realization, i.e. after Islam had succeeded in its mission to make monotheism an effective force in the development of human consciousness and to foster and nourish the scientific impulse so that man could become master of his history and responsible for its vicissitudes. Once this attitude was fairly established in their history, the Muslims began to pay attention to those pagan pursuits which they had neglected before which were now shorn of their polytheistic associations. Painting was no longer the art of making images but the art of breaking images. Through painting one could now cast out the devils of one's heart and thus prepare one's soul for direct encounter with God. There was no longer any question of worshipping the gods one painted, for no longer did they remain the objects of worship for the Muslim mind. [1](#)

Orientalists have always seen Muslim paintings through coloured spectacles. They enumerated the influence which moulded the character of Muslim art and maintain by deft implication that Muslim art could be reduced to these influences, that there was nothing original in this art. They do not see that Islam not only absorbed external influences but also modified them to suit its own native genius. Muslim painting was only an aspect of *Muslim* life. It was an expression of the spiritual explorations of sensitive minds. These sensitive minds, rooted in their own culture, had their own peculiar longings and yearnings, aspiration, and conflicts. It was out of these dynamic forces that peculiar idioms and patterns which we call by the name of Muslim Art.

B. Characteristics of Muslim Painting

Muslim painting began under a shadow – the shadow of taboo on pictorial representation of material things. Islam started its career as an iconoclastic missionary religion to the main aim of which to establish a social order based on reason. It propounded laws, made institutions, and fostered organizations that the ideal could come to earth. It not only enunciated values and principles but also tried to demonstrate that they could be realized in this mortal life of ours. In this endeavour, Islam had to suppress the pagan orientation not only of the Arabs but of all the peoples it conquered. Paganism had an uncanny and almost an internal relation with idol-worship, and Fine Arts were the only means by which idols could be raised and formed in such a way that they could, by their beauty and elegance, induce in the beholders a mood of devotion and emotional abandon.

The aesthetic sense among the pagans was the religious sense. Devotion to beauty and worship were identified in the pagan mind. Paganism was the cult of the irrational. It was based on the bond between the primitive man and the forces of nature that he faced in his daily life. Islam came with the message that there is only one God, that He alone is worthy of worship, and that the forces of nature can be subjugated and bent to serve man's will and desire. It was necessary for Islam at that stage to subordinate the aesthetic to the moral and the beautiful to the good. It was, therefore, a historical necessity which led early Muslims to prohibit the art which fostered representation of gods, goddesses, and national heroes as objects of worship. It did not mean that such a prohibition is inherent in Islam.

Muslim painting, therefore, began with a handicap. Without this handicap its individual and unique character is not conceivable. Some of the unique characteristics of Muslim painting are as follows:

1. Muslims loved their Holy Book, the Qur'an. In their attempt to copy it they tried to write it beautifully and gracefully. They developed new forms of writing and created novel movements in calligraphy. The forceful and lyrical language of the Holy Qur'an induced them to write it with passion and warmth to introduce cadence and grace to the form of the written word. Muslim painting is the result of these movements in calligraphy. Thus, we find that Muslim painters emphasize line (*khat*) more than anything else. A powerful and colourful line and a forceful stroke can create a ravishing form, pulsating with charm and fascination. It is the "line" that matters, everything else would take care of itself. Whether it is a

straight line or curve, the stroke alone is responsible for the aesthetic forms; it provides the criterion of beauty.

2. Islam implies a serious commitment to history. For Islam, nature is interesting only as a background to human personality and human deeds. Muslim painters are intensely alive members of Muslim society. For them wars and battles, rise and fall of dynasties, destruction and construction of cities are not matters to be observed with a spiritual nonchalance and complacency but events of vital interest. For a Muslim artist, human personality has supreme value. We, therefore, find that it is the human drama, the human action, which occupies the centre of Muslim paintings. Vast spaces, mountains and valleys, storms of wind and rain which characterize Chinese paintings are conspicuous by their absence in Muslim painting. The principal reason for this attitude seems to be the realization that for a painting of nature to be vital and vivacious it has to employ human symbols.

The storms must oppress and plunder, the wind must be caught unawares in a tree, the valley must sing songs, and mountains must radiate human, maternal warmth. One cannot enjoy a landscape painting unless it is perceived animistically, unless it is human in some way. Not that Muslim painters did not paint landscapes, they did sometimes far more effectively than the impressionistic painters of France and Holland. What they eschewed, however, was painting a landscape for its own sake. A human being must be there to give actuality to natural scenery. Without human beings nature is dead and insignificant. For Muslim painters a scene of natural beauty is incomplete and incomprehensible with the observer being there in the painting in one form or another. It is a new mode of perception; seeing nature as an inter-play between natural stimuli and the human eye. Western critics of Muslim art do not see this point. They dismiss the entire Muslim painting as sentimental and romantic because it is not interested in nature *per se*.

3. Muslim painters did not introduce perspective in their paintings. Their paintings seem almost all – except those made in the time of Jahangir under the impact of Dutch and Flemish painters – to be lacking in depth. The third dimension and the changes it causes in human perception are ignored by the Muslim painters. Perhaps the reason is that they are interested in distant objects as well as in near objects. An object far away is as much relevant to the central figure as the object in the forefront. Why not bring it forward in imagination, observe it telescopically as it was and paint it in its full magnitude?

One finds a similar spectacle in some of the illustrations of the *Shah Nameh*. There in a single painting several episodes are brought together to make a complete story. The Western critic is baffled, and even when he praises such “erratic” paintings he does so condescendingly. The reason he does not understand this style of painting is that he is alien in spirit of the Muslim conception of time. For a Muslim, time and eternity are only two facets of the same reality, he does not have to create a dichotomy between time and eternity, he does not have to make time illusory in order to satisfy his longing for eternity. A Muslim is expected to try constantly to create eternity out of time. No wonder then that Muslim painting tried to combine all dimensions in a single unity and all phases of time in one whole.

4. Muslim painters did not paint darkness. In their painting all is light and colourful. The resplendent sun seems to cover their canvas and paper. There are no dark shades or black shadows haunting the painting like ghosts threatening life with primordial dangers. Their painting is a painting of luminous tints and hues and colours. This again reflects a singularly strange attitude, especially to the Western, for he can wallow in darkness.² Darkness and fondness for darkness are typically pagan characteristics.

It connotes qualities which emanate from a state of pre-consciousness. You cannot be conscious and remain in darkness. Darkness is a dragon which devours distinctions, discriminations, and differentiations. Darkness also characterizes a condition of stark individualism, when the individual is sundered from society and finds himself in the grip of absolute helplessness. Modern Western sensibility which is completely unconnected with Muslim culture cannot appreciate the absence of darkness. It seeks an external representation of the black despair within. But black individualistic despair was no part of Muslim consciousness.

As we have seen, Islam emphasizes a serious commitment to history. In a growing Muslim society the individual, apart from being an individual, is a social being *par excellence*. Sociality is a *raison d'être* of an individual. The helplessness of an individual and the resulting spiritual darkness, therefore, is a condition alien to Muslim consciousness. Perhaps, when the Muslim individual is faced with rapid industrialization, he may for a time get into despair and thus enter the realm of darkness in order to emerge again with light. Of course, there were Muslim mystics and they did come at times face to face with the phases of inner darkness, but they were people who never painted.

5. Muslim painting, consciously or unconsciously, employed symbols which represent mystical states. Sometimes endless curves with no beginning or end stand for the state of bewilderment in which nothing outside seems to gratify spiritual longings. At other times *mandala*³ forms are used to indicate the state of spiritual wholeness which mystics desire to achieve. Western critics do not see these motifs in Muslim art and like to dismiss it as merely decorative and ornamental. Unless one sees Muslim art in its proper historical perspective and imaginatively flows with the stream of Muslim history and ideology, one is not likely to appreciate the significance of this unique idiom.

6. Muslim painting, especially in Iran, was devoted to the expression of a single emotion in one painting. Every detail of the subject was perceived and made use of for an effective rendering of the subtle nuances of that emotion. The trees and flowers were not there to fill a background; they were there to add to the melody flowing from a painting. Most of the Persian miniature paintings are like orchestras in which each object painted contributes to the symphony. This unique characteristic of Muslim painting may have emanated – as Basil Gray suggests – from the mystical and pantheistic tendencies of the Persians, they, perhaps, regarded every object of nature as manifesting God. But a more plausible explanation of this singular quality can, perhaps, be found in the Muslim conception of time.

Muslims regard duration as continuous and eternal, time as discontinuous, universe for them is new at each moment. One continuously hears the sound of *kun ja-yakun*.⁴ For a Muslim artist, therefore,

simultaneity of eternity is far more significant than succession of events. The emotional meaning of an object is implicitly contained in the total situation. This attitude is hard to grasp for the Occidental mind. That is why we find that the Western critics of Muslim art, by trying to fit its mode of expression in the pre-conceptions and categories of their own culture, misunderstand and distort the essence of its individuality.

The nearest parallel to this conception is the Chinese conception of synchronicity embodied in their religious classics, such as *I Ching*. Since each moment is an act of God, the Muslim painter sees every temporal and spatial situation as somehow transcending serial time and geometrical space. His peculiar perception gives a painting its particular individuality, the fact that his eager vision selects a peculiar array of objects imparts to its uniqueness. But the fact that this array is the manifestation of the Divine gives it an aura of universality. Both particularity and universality are, thus, combined and synthesized in a single work of art.

7. Muslim paintings – again especially miniatures – are illustrations of literary and religious classics. Several explanations of this peculiar characteristic have been advanced. But the only explanation which is consistent with the general Muslim attitude is that for a Muslim nature is itself in illustration of the Word of God. *Kun fa-yakun* are the words which translate themselves into the sensible world. The world is Logos in matter and motion. Muslim consciousness is rooted in the awareness of a profound inter-relationship between word and fact. Word seems to be the life blood of the universe.

This point will become clearer if we attend to a parallel recently drawn by Dr. W. C. Smith between the Christian “Eucharist” and the memorization of the Qur’an by Muslims. Dr. Smith writes, “The Koran, in formal Muslim doctrine pre-existent and uncreated is for the Moslem the one tangible thing within the natural realm that is super-natural, the point where eternal has broken through into time. By Koran one means, of course, not the ‘ink and paper’ but the content of the Koran, its message, its words, ultimately its meaning. The *hafiz* (freely, the ‘memorizer’, but, more literally, the ‘apprehender’) has in some sense appropriated this himself, has interiorized it in a way that could conceivably suggest to a Christian some analogy with what happens when the Christian in the Communion service appropriates God, the super-natural, the embodiment of eternity in time.”

This parallel is extremely valuable. For where Christians have to incorporate the body of Christ in order to have communion with the God-head, Muslims have to incorporate the words of the Qur’an so that they would have communion with God. The eternal Word and its meaning are one, they cannot be separated. And it is the Word which gives spiritual sustenance to the believer.

If we look at the artistic illustrations composed by Muslim painters from this point of view, we may appreciate the significance of this tendency better and more adequately. The word for a Muslim has a compelling power of creation: his spirit must fly to eternity on the wings of words. Not only that, these are the only wings which can take him there. Hence, every sensuous experience which inspires a painter to express himself in colour and line, in order to be integrated in his personality, must be capable of verbal

expression. The rise and fall of sensuousness must be capable of being regulated by words.⁵

Muslim painting, especially in its early phases, was not an autonomous medium of expression. It was subsidiary to literature. The earliest Muslim paintings were the results of the efforts of painters to illustrate some of the classical books. They derived their content from these books and their form from their need to decorate and make beautiful. The passion to illustrate the written word is not something peculiarly Muslim, it has inspired painters like Delacroix to illustrate Goethe's *Faust* and artists like Michelangelo to paint Christian myths and legends on the interior walls of cathedrals and churches. It is significant that the grand old man of painting in Pakistan, 'Abd al-Rahman Chughta'i, won his reputation as a great artist by his illustration of *Diwan-i Ghalib*. When painters, whether of the East or of the West, seek grand visions and cosmic views to colour their artistic endeavours, they illustrate great books. Perhaps the need for these visions is perennial.

Let us now substantiate these points by have a brief a glance at the history of Muslim painting.

C. Historical Background

Muslim painting started its career under the Umayyads, who as rulers and conquerors were mainly without any puritanical disdain for luxury. The palaces they built were expressions of the theme of splendour and richness, which gradually came to dominate all aspects of their lives. One finds the walls of these palaces made beautiful and attractive with paintings inspired by various colourful motifs. About 94/712, the Umayyad Caliph, Walid I, built a desert lodge at Qusair 'Amrah. This romantic palace was decorated by wall paintings representing allegories and various kinds of animals and plants.

The 'Abbasids went further. In their pagan pursuit of imaginative luxury they made the human figure loom large in their paintings. In their paintings girls dance, musicians sing and play on instruments, animals stroll, and birds fly and twitter. These figures are enclosed in circular disks. One finds a resplendent example of this tendency in the palace at Samarra built in the third/ninth century. Side by side with these painting one sees the opposite motif. On wooden boards are painted plants in white, red, yellow, and blue. In these paintings human and animal motifs are absent.

But the early 'Abbasids made their artistic influence felt more in Iran than perhaps anywhere else. Here one sees several palaces decorated with frescoes in diverse styles and various modes of execution. Some of them are only in black and white, while in others all colours are employed to create the desired effect. The black and white paintings portray human movements, while the multi-coloured paintings depict human and diabolical figures, male and female, with and without haloes, heads, busts and dresses. The plaster niches found at Nishapur are made of different designs, but all have the vase or goblet motif; these vases seem to radiate palmettes against a blue background and have a triangular shape reposing on top. Sometimes two magical eyes diffuse a spell over the entire niche. In Egypt, beautiful frescoes were made under the patronage of the Fatimid Caliphs in the fourth/tenth century. They had several themes – geometrical patterns, birds, palmettes moving out of central figures, human

beings holding drinking cups in their hands. One also sees the dawn of miniature painting in this period.

D. Book Illustrations

In the seventh/13th century, the 'Abbasids began to patronize illustrations of classical works of science and mysticism. The impetus probably came from some of the illustrations made by painters in the second/eighth and third/ninth centuries under the influence of Mani, the great Iranian painter. The 'Abbasids probably employed the Nestorian or Jacobite Christians to illustrate the books they regarded as classics. The main difference in content between the Manichaean illustrations and Muslim illustrations was that the former were mainly representations of religious themes and the latter devoted by and large to making the sciences of the body and the soul sensuously attractive to the human eye. For instance, the Arabic translation of Dioscorides' *Materia Medica* was illustrated profusely by 'Abd Allah ibn al-Fadl. Similarly, other books dealing with animals and plants in a scientific manner had their themes illustrated by skillful painters of the time.

The distinctive feature of these illustrations was that they treated of operational themes. They dealt with subjects such as doctors preparing medicines or surgeons doing operations. These illustrations have a very simple style. Rich and powerful colours make the theme throb and pulsate with energy and vivacity, rosettes and palmettes cover and decorate the apparel and garments, but the background is only just indicated, generally with a few conventionalized trees.

One book which was distinguished for its remarkable illustrations was Hariri's *Maqamat*. Its illustrations were done by a powerful painter of the time, Yahya ibn Mahmud of Wasit, conveniently known as al-Wasiti. This painter copied and illustrated the most important copy of the *Maqamat* in 635/1237. These magnificent paintings deal with everyday life. They show ordinary Muslims travelling in the desert, praying in the mosque, drinking in the tavern, and reading in the library. Their realism is enchanting, their conception is bold, their strokes are sure and vital, and the line they imprint is fine and delicate.

In this period, *Kalilah wa-Dimmah*, a Hindu book of stories, which was translated into Arabic by ibn Muqaffa', was quite a popular fount of inspiration for the painters who aspired to make their mark as illustrators. One of the manuscripts prepared in 628/1230 show minute observation of details and an excellent realization of the animal motif, but here, as elsewhere, the third dimension is only barely and abstractly indicated. In northern Mesopotamia under the Saljuq Atabegs painting seems to have acquired considerable popularity. Nur al-Din Mahmud, the Urtuq Sultan of Diyar-Bakr, asked al-Jazari, the great inventor, to write a treatise on the work he had done. Several illustrated copies of this book called "Automata" can be seen in the various museums of the world.

In Iran, during this period of history, only wall paintings and ceramics portraying figures and legends in comparatively subdued colours were being made. Turquoise, blue, or white serving as background would shoot forth gold, silver, green, violet, etc.

E. The Mongo School

The Mongols brought with them a deep fondness for the Chinese art. The painters of Mesopotamia, as we have seen, themselves possessed a great sense of realism. This sense was made more acute and sharp by their contact with the Chinese culture and Fine Arts. The Chinese artists had achieved considerable excellence and maturity in painting landscapes. The Muslim artists assimilated in their idiom not only on themes selected by the Chinese painters but also their method of impressionistic painting in black and white. Ibn Bakhtishu's *Manafi'i al-Hayawan* is the earliest Iranian manuscript of the Mongol times. Several copies of this book were made in different styles, sometimes adopting mild tones and at other times venturing forth in bolder colours.

The most important influence that Mongol painting received in this period was that of a master mind. Rashid al-Din, the man who wrote, among other books, *Jami' al-Tawarikh*, a history of the Mongols, was, above all, a devotee of learning and arts in the pursuit of which he founded a colony of people whose main business was the enrichment of life with knowledge. Several artists, provided with accommodation and amenities of life in that colony, were asked to copy and illustrate books, mainly his own. The miniature painting in all these books – especially those in *Jami' al-Tawarikh* – show a peculiarly sober but fascinating blend of the Iranian and Chinese features of artistic expression. Some of the copies of this book can be assigned to a later period because they suggest developments which occurred only in the beginning of the eighth/14th century.

Quite a few of the painters of this period copied and illustrated *Shah Namehi* of Firdausi. Again, there are several variations of the composite influences of the Chinese and Iranian styles of painting. The realism of these paintings is particularly marked, the expressions are distinctly individualized, and the details are painstakingly portrayed.

F. The Timurid School

Then came Timur. He was the man who left a trail of blood behind whenever he ransacked a country. Nonetheless, he was a great lover of arts. When he conquered a country he would take special care not to kill the artists. He would then take them to Baghdad, where under his patronage they copied and illustrated manuscripts. But true artistic greatness was achieved only under the inspiring benevolence of Shah Rukh (Timur's son) who made Herat his home. Shah Rukh was interested in books and he inspired many artists to calligraphy and decorate the famous and important books of the time.

Khalil, a great painter, who was regarded second only to Mani, was the leading figure in art at Shah Rukh's Court. Shah Rukh's son, Baisunqur Mirza, founded an academy of book arts with a large staff. Among the important painters were Amir Shahi and Ghiyath al-Din. *Shah Nameh* was still the fount of themes for the Court painters, but they also addressed themselves to mystical and romantic subjects – such as those found in Nizami's *Khamseh* and Sa'di's *Gulistan* and *Bustan*. The vivid and lyrical imagery

of those paintings suggest that the painters modified and changed their style to suit the novel subjects they had discovered. At Shiraz, where an independent school flourished at this time, colours were milder and cooler, and the style, though not vastly different, was definitely less skilful than that of the school at Herat.

Another book, *Diwan-i Jami*, was also a popular source of inspiration for the painters of that period. ‘Abd al-Karim of Khwarizm calligraphed and illustrated Maulana Jami’s *Diwan* at the end of the ninth/15th century. In Samarqand a book on astronomy was also illustrated for the library of Ulugh Beg.

G. The Great Behzad

The Iranian historian Khwandamir wrote thus about Behzad in the middle of the tenth/16th century, “He sets before us marvellous forms and rarities of his art, his draughtsmanship, which is like the brush of Mani, has caused the memorials of all the painters of the world to be obliterated, and his fingers endowed with miraculous qualities have wiped out the pictures of all the artists among the sons of Adam. A hair of his brush, through its mastery, has given life to the lifeless form.”

This great painter began his career with Sultan Hussain Mirza at Herat at the end of the ninth/15th century. Later, he came to Tabriz in the early tenth/16th century to work under Shah Isma‘il. It has been said that when a battle was raging against the Turks, Behzad and Shah Mahmud al-Nishapuri were hidden by Shah Nasir in a cave. In 929/1522, Behzad was appointed Director of the Royal Library. The two well-known manuscripts that Behzad illustrated were *Khamseh* and *Bustan*. One sees in these paintings a keen perception of form, a highly sensitive and subtle sense for colour, experimentation with colours to evolve new *Gestalten*, and novel patterns of feeling and awareness. These paintings show that Behzad had an astonishingly strong consciousness of the opposites: of dramatic action and immobility, of blending peace and unrest, of combining generality with individuality. *Zafar Nameh*, a biography of Timur, was also illustrated by Behzad. Besides, he illustrated Maulana Jami’s *Diwan*, and his illustrations show his experimental genius at its best.

The most outstanding student of Behzad was Qasim ‘Ali, who carried on the style and artistic tradition, set by his inimitable master. Qasim ‘Ali, who acquired the experimental spirit of Behzad, became well known as a painter of faces.

One thing that strikes the modern connoisseur of painting is that Behzad, who unfortunately did not outgrow the narrow confines of miniature painting, had an intense awareness of the *mandala*. One has only to look at his masterpiece, “The Dancing Dervishes,” which, apart from its ravishing curves and powerful lines suggesting movement and rhythm, is a beautiful *mandala* figure. The dervishes make a moving and dancing circle which seems to revolve around a centre. The centre is again not bereft of content. It is filled with four dervishes dancing hand in hand.

This painting gives a lie to all those Western critics of Muslim painting who have repeatedly charged

Muslim art, almost *ad nauseam*, with being almost entirely decorative. This painting is one of the illustrations in *Diwan-i Jami*, a Book of poems with a markedly mystical content. Here is a painter who not only illustrates but also absorbs the mystical content in his artistic forms. *Mandala* represents spiritual wholeness. It seems that Behzad was painting his powerful pictures not to produce decorative effects but to answer a spiritual need. It was a response to his spiritual longing, a colourful realm discovered by his spiritual quest, as answer to the prayers of his soul. When one looks at “The Dancing Dervishes,” one finds that compared with it the most renowned *mandala* paintings by the mystics of other creeds pale into insignificance. The spell that Behzad’s paintings cast on the beholder can radiate only from a whole soul. It is not the work of a mere decorator.

H. The Safawid School

Herat continued to throb with art even when Behzad shifted from there to Tabriz. Behzad’s influence was not passing or transitory, it stayed because it continued to move and stir the Muslim soul. Amir Khusrau Dihlawi’s *Khamsea* was copied at Balkh and was illustrated by one of Behzad’s students. It contained some very significant miniature paintings. The great calligrapher ‘Ali al-Hussaini copied and illustrated ‘Arif’s *Go-i Chaugan* in 930/1523. Similarly, *Diwan-i Hafiz* was illustrated by Shaikhzadeh, a student of Behzad, and Sultan Muhammad who had an individual style. Sultan Muhammad also copied Nizami’s *Khameseh* and produced some very outstanding and superb paintings. In his paintings he introduced new colour schemes and new ways of perception.

Sultan Muhammad was a Court painter *par excellence*. He was not only an intimate and close friend of Shah Tehmasp, but also taught him how to paint. He illustrated Nizami’s *Khamseh* and Firdausi’s *Shah Nameh*. Along with his teacher Mirak, he created a new style of painting. His fingers are more sophisticated and his background is richer in detail and ornament.

Sultan Muhammad also painted some portraits of charming young men and lovely ladies. Some of his portraits are those of Shah Tehmasp himself.

The second half of the tenth/16th century saw the rise to eminence of another painter, Ustad Muhammadi, son and student of Sultan Muhammad. The miniatures painted by this great artist reveal an enchanting style and a sense of composition unprecedented in the history of Muslim painting. He took his subjects from everyday life and imparted an inimitable rhythm to all the details of his figures. Trees, wild and tamed animals, men and women enter his paintings and become immortally and irrepressibly alive.

I. The Bukhara School

In the early tenth/16th century, Bukhara became the centre of hectic creative activity. Mahmud Madhahhib, a student of the famous calligrapher Mir ‘Ali, excelled in painting love scenes. He also illustrated Nazami’s *Makhzan al-Asrar*. Several other painters painted miniatures in this century and

their work shows the influence of Behzad and his school. But they did not blindly imitate Behzad; they accepted his influence and developed a new style. They experimented with colours and afforded local touch to the figures they made. One painter illustrated Sa'di's *Bustan* and another Muhyi Lari's *Futuh al-Haramain*. One finds these paintings beautiful and decorative, but lacking in the spiritual fire which was characteristic of Behzad's work.

They were bereft of the ardent longings which animate paintings of the Herat school. They are expressions of artistic decay which set in at about this time in Iran and other Muslim countries. The principal reason of this decline seems to be the desire of clinging to the same old form of miniature painting and a refusal to experiment with other media of expression. That is why in Isfahan, under the patronage of Shah 'Abbas, illustrations were made but only of works of much lower calibre than *Shah Nameh* or *Diwan-i Hafiz*. Paintings were made to portray scenes from books like *Chihal Sutun* and *'Ala Kapi*. At this time Rida'-i 'Abbasi were regarded as the most outstanding painter of Iran.

His tinted drawings throb with life and vigour. One finds in them undulating curves flowing with facility into the patterns they weave and mild strokes emphasizing the ends. This was indeed a breath of fresh air. Life itself, rather than books, became the fount of inspiration. This was a great change, but it could not be felt as such because great changes need great artists to sustain them. Unfortunately, neither Rida'-i 'Abbasi nor anyone else had the powerful vision of a Behzad or a Sultan Muhammad. Consequently, the 11th/17th and 12th/18th centuries, people imitated and admired Rida'-i 'Abbasi, but no new movement came into being.

J. The Turkish Painting

The origin and development of Turkish painting is still wrapped in mystery. However, this much we know that in 855/1480 Sultan Muhammad II invited Gentile Bellini to his Court and commissioned him to paint his portrait. In the tenth/16th century Shah Quli and Wali Jan, the Iranian painters, came to Constantinople and became Court painters. These artists selected the houris of paradise as their subject-matter. Shah Quli achieved excellence as a painter of curved leaves and Wali Jan became distinguished for the elegance of his lines. Some Iranian painters illustrated "History of the Ottoman Sultans" and *Sulaiman Nameh*, a book of stories by Firdausi of Brusa. The main distinction of these painters was that they did a good deal of experimental work in colours.

K. The Mughul Painting

Babur, the first Mughul Emperor of India (933 – 937/1526 – 1530) was a philosopher and great lover of nature. It seems that he patronized Fine Arts and brought with the traditions of Behzad and the Bukhara school. Babur's son, Humayun, invited Khuwaja 'Abd al-Samad of Shiraz and Mir Sayyid 'Ali to his Court at Kabul and asked them to illustrate *Amir Hamzah*. The paintings they made of this fantastic story were 1400 in number. Akbar, Humayun's son, was a unique patron of arts. He built a city, Fatehpur Sikri,

where he decorated his palaces with mural paintings and founded an academy of Arts.

This was an institution for the creation and promotion of a native school of painting. Painters of this school were influenced by Behzad and the early Timurid paintings. Nizami's *Haft Paikar* was copied and illustrated by the painters at Akbar's Court in a style which had a peculiar blend of two traditions: Behzad School and the early Timurid School. They show a local touch in so far as the content is concerned, but in the selection of colours and design they were markedly Iranian.

Hindu painters, working under the Mughul influence, illustrated manuscripts dealing with the lives and exploits of Timur, Babur, and Akbar. Their paintings reveal a remarkable mixture of the Hindu, Iranian, and European influences. For the first time in Muslim art one notices the presence of perspective and a clear visualization of the third dimension.

Jahangir (1014 – 1038/1605 – 1628) carried on the tradition of his great ancestors, and he carried it much further. He liked art to be representative of life as it is lived in the present and not a mere illustration of the wisdom of books. Thus, in his time realistic painting of plants and animals were produced in abundance. On his travels he would take his Court painter with him and urge to portray significant historical events in their paintings. Mansur, Murad, and Manohar were distinguished painters of his time. These artists painted rare birds, animals, and flowers in an exquisitely realistic style.

Jahangir and his nobles were also fond of getting their portraits made. The famous portrait painters of this time were Bishandas, Manohar, Muhammad Nadir, and Abu al-Hassan. Abu al-Hassan was Jahangir's favourite: he painted some beautiful miniatures and some very fine portraits of Jahangir. Mughul painters also painted pictures representing nobles and princes conversing with Hindu ascetics and hermits. Shah Jahan, Jahangir's son, was a devotee of portrait painting. Some of his own portraits, made by artists at his Court, show acute observation, elegance and subtlety in execution, and a deep sense of colourfulness. Muhammad Fakhr Allah Khan and Mir Hashim were two of the important painters of his time. Dara Shikoh, Shah Jahan's son, who never ruled, was a great admirer and patron of arts – but after him, that is, in the 12th/18th and 13th/19th centuries, Mughul art suffered a complete decline.

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1. “Prayer, then, whether individual or associative, is an expression of man’s inner yearning for a response in the awful silence of the universe. It is a unique process of discovery whereby the searching ego affirms itself in the very moment of self-negation, and thus discovers its own worth and justification as a dynamic factor in the life of the universe.” Sir Muhammad Ashraf, Lahore, 1958 p. 92,

2. Thus, Bachofen writing about the characteristics of matriarchal societies regards preference for darkness as an important attribute of such pagan cultures. Bachofen says, “By no means less significant is a second expression of the same fundamental law, that of pre-dominance of night over day born of her maternal womb. In antiquity... preference of night over the day (was) associated with ... a dominant maternal influence. In this instance two hoary customs and usages, councils and court assemblies, that is, the preference for darkness for the exercise of social functions, show that we are not dealing with a philosophic theory of later origin, but an actual mode of life. Added to these observations comes the preference of the sinister aspect of life and death over its bright aspect of creation, the pre-dominance of the dead over the living and of sorrow over joy.”

3. ‘Images of the goal,’ says Jung, “are mostly concerned with ideas of the mandala type, that is, the circle and the quaternity. They are the plainest and most characteristic representations of the goal. Such images unite the opposites under the sign of the quaternio, i.e. by combining them in the form of cross, or else they express the idea of wholeness through the circle or sphere.”

4. Louis Massignon, “Time in Islamic Thought,” *Eranos Yearbook*, Rhein-Verlang, Zurich, 1951.

5. In a footnote in his paper on Christianity and Islam, Dr. Cantwell Smith writes, “It is the word (Kalam) of God, it is not He nor is it other than He.” He further quotes from Al-Nasafi, “We do not say that the verbal expressions (alfaz) and letters are eternal... The (uncreated) Qur’an, the Speech of Allah, does not reside in the hearts, nor in the tongues, nor in the ears, but it is an Eternal idea subsisting in the essence of Allah.”

The last line in al-Nasafi’s quotations, however, suggests that the Eternal Idea could be grasped without the Word. But this is a mistaken view of Muslim consciousness. In Muslim consciousness the Word is an integral part of the total meaning of God. That is why a Muslim, however rationalistically oriented he might be, will always admire – covertly or overtly – the heroic fight that Imam Ahmad bin Hanbal put up against the doctrine of al-Qur’an khalq1–Allah, that is, the Qur’an is the creation of God.

One may agree with Dr. Smith when he writes, “By this act (i.e., memorizing) the Moslem is, as it were, taking the gift of God up off the book and paper in which it is enshrined and incorporating it within himself, so that it becomes for him alive and inalienably personal.” It is quite true that the spoken word which is incorporated in the personality of the memorizer (hafiz). After all, the Qur’an descended as the spoken word of God.

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