

Darbar Interior in Royal Mughal Miniature Paintings under Akbar

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Abstract

This study will explore the style of interior design of the Mughals, focusing on the Akbar period. Miniature paintings are one of the unique artistic features of Mughal art and also work as historical documents as any other historical record or data. Art piece of any area, dynasty or country depicts the events, culture, materials, techniques and other aspects including fashion, architecture, landscape, dresses of that particular area. The focus of this study is only on those painting that depicts court scenes that were painted by court artists. The Mughal miniatures were directly supervised by the Mughal emperors. Though the histories directly supervised by the emperors shows some affiliations and biasness but in this case, the depiction of events may be fascinated or paint as per desire of the emperor but the other field including interiors, minor arts, textile, dresses, furniture landscape portrays that period. The documentation of the Mughal art and architecture is very popular and well known but the details of interiors and its aspects is missing. So, this study will help in exploring the

development and progress of Mughal Interiors including styles of furniture, thrones, carpets, wall treatments, doors, ceiling treatments.

Keywords: Darbar, miniature painting, interior design, architecture

Miniature paintings are one of the unique features of Mughal arts. Mughal miniature painting depicts multi perspectives of whole story or scene in small scale, using carefully tiny brush strokes playing with colors according to taste of their rulers. Paintings are good source of history; they portray the taste, available material, fashion, landscape and different aspects of that time. Paintings acts as connection of present to past. Mughal miniature paintings reveal the details of minor arts and interior designing. “Among the world’s most aesthetically minded rulers” (Welch, S., 1963, 11) perhaps define the Mughals best as a connoisseur of art. Mughals were famous for their arts and architecture besides typical rulers of the sub-continent.

Mughal art is also known as court art as all the work created by the master artists were supervised directly under Mughal emperors. The interest and constant supervision of the emperor is one of the main reasons behind the creation of such masterpieces. Emperor Akbar himself supervise the paintings and commission different artwork. Emperor Humayun, second ruler of the Subcontinent, despite the political instability which lead the exile of Humayun to Persia, the credit of introducing Mughal style of painting goes to Humayun. His interest in painting in natural history, just like his father Babur, was evident as mentioned in the memoire of his attendant in which he narrated the scene of capturing and paint a bird about emperor Humayun (Beach, M.C., 1981, 13-15).

Therefore, it was his interest in painting that he brought the two Persian artist Mir Sayid Ali and Abdus Samad and the foundation of Mughal royal atelier was laid under their supervision. This also played the principal role in introducing the Persian style in Mughal painting. Emperor Humayun was the first to commission the *Hamzanama* of 1400 paintings on cloth under the supervision of these two Persian masters, but died before its completion. This

masterpiece completed under Akbar and many Hindu artist were trained during the completion of this manuscript (*Urdu Daira Maarif-e Islamia*, 2007, 658-660).

The Mughal art whether in form of miniature paintings of excellent quality, portraits, stone pottery, textiles, or embellished weapons or adorned manuscripts excels in all fields during the reign of Emperor Akbar, which comprised of almost 50 years (Schimmel, A. ,2005 17 -18). The art of painting flourished under Akbar whose foundation was laid by his father Humayun. The establishment of the atelier of court painters *Kitab-khana*, his personal supervision on choosing of subject to be painted or illustrated, and giving incentives based on quality of work all these points clearly indicate his interest in painting and become the basis of the major factor that art of books and paintings excelled in his reign. All genres of the art including architecture, illustrations, portraits, art of the book etc. are good source of history besides written contents. Interior design and minor arts are well depicted in Mughal miniature paintings.

To develop the sketch of the court interior design and its development under the reign of Mughals miniature paintings are one of the good source. The reign of Akbar who ruled about fifty years saw most developments and changes in all forms of art including interior design and its aspects such as space management, floor and ceiling treatments, furniture, carpets, thrones, illuminations and occasionally necessities. The illustrated *Akbarnama* record of the emperor life by Abul Fazal was one of the most important manuscript of Akbar's reign depicting many historical events from his reign including hunting scenes, scenes from the court life, scenes from different journeys, battlements, marriages etc. The most important scenes from the court life contains the details of the interior and its components. One of the scene of the arrival of ambassador of Badakshan at Akbar's court which depicts the detail of the *darbar's* interior

occupied the two folios of Akbarnama depicting the minute detail of the event. The terminologies of that particular period is also discussed.

Arrival of Badakshan's Ambassador at Akbar Court, Akbarnama (1603-5):



Pl.1 Two folios of miniature painting depicting the scene of arrival of Badakshan's ambassador at Akbar court.

Source Chester Beatty Museum Dublin

The miniature paintings depicting the scenes of receiving the ambassadors from Badakshan (pl.1) from Akbarnama (1603-5) were painted by Sur Das in 1561 using pigment and gold on paper. The scene was painted after 42 years. The folio (pl.2) executed in paper with ink, pigments and gold. The Persian *nastaliq* calligraphy occupied the lower part of the painting.



Pl 2. Left folio details from *Arrival of Badakshan's ambassador at Akbar court*. Source: *Chester Beatty Museum*

The darbar scene including the different activities which were taking place at that time were painted carefully showing the the actions of different courtiers performing their particular tasks, besides receiving the ambassador. As it was a tradition in Mughal court that the ambassador was received in *Diwan i Amm* (Hall of the public audience; ceremonial place for general assembling and receptions (Schimmel, A., 2005, 324)) and after that differenet gifts were presented to the empror by the ambassador (Schimmel, A., 2005, 74).

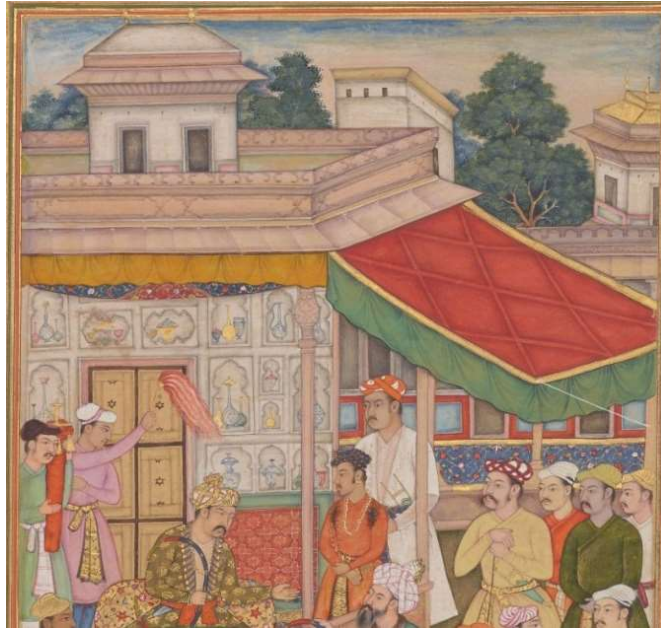
Dividing the miniature painting l{{eft folio, for further elaboration, the most upper part of the miniature painting (pl.3) showing the enclosed square shapped superstructure in light gold, having tent shapped formation on roof atop with two golden pinnacles. Below this a extended chajja is suported with extended corbels instead of brackets, the typical mughal architectural element, this upper portion of balcony is separated with colored band all in yellowish pink color. Below this greysih white paint was done on super-structure having dado in plan pink color with borders in green band form. Two opening without doors, also has black band boarders and white think line. The short heighted parapet wall is adorned with tinted pink repeated tri-petal motifs, below this eight fold star pattern reparts with the long elongated band with star shapped at both ends.

The right side of the painting is occupied with half seen squarish shaped part of the building simialr to the super-structure above *chubin rawati* (pl.3), with a diference that the roof of the later structure is golden and flat atop with two golden pinnacle. (pl.4)



*Pl 3. Detail from Arrival of Badakshan's ambassador
miniature painting, super structure over the darbar*

Above the emperor the the ceiling adorned with velvet cloth in similar pattern like of the carpet with mustard silk fringe can be seen, the ceiling of this outdoor extended *darbar* or *Bargah* is covered with luxurious fabric like velvet or braocade in blue color with floral motifs and vine scrolls, the middle part of this *saybaan* has red central floral motif (Schimmel, A. ,2005, 54) As mentioned by Annmarie Schemmil that the Mughal were used to lavish their darbars with silk and brocad tents (Schimmel, A. , 2005, 171-172). The extended part of this *saybaan* can be seen approaching outwards towards right side of the painting tied with white strings with unseen support, whereas in *Ain i Akbari* it was mentioned that these were tied with silk tape with walls, which would be tassels to hold these saybaan. The outer part of this extended saybaan has large diamond shaped pattern with goldebn plain border and green fringe.



Pl 4 detail from *Arrival of Badakshan's ambassador miniature painting*,
 main part of *Miniature painting showing main interior*

The wall behind the emperor Akbar is fully adorned with *naqashi* (Fresco painting, UNESCO-Getty Foundation, 2009, 283) having different sizes of alcoved niches (pls.3 &4). All these niches embellished with different styles of *surahi*, *qulqul*, *payala* (types of pottery, Verma, S.P., 1976, 563-569) attened and as well as plain in blue, gold, green and pinkish red color. A wooden yellow door, perhaps for the entrance of the emepror, is present on this wall with rectangular panels with dark brown lines bearing small star motifs. The dado of this wall has ten folden star shapped patterns in reddish orange color, a mirror of the same pattern is also seen inside each pattern, with green border around. The dado of the rare wall is divided into plain squarish boxes in sky blue color with red oxide color borders in thick band shapped.



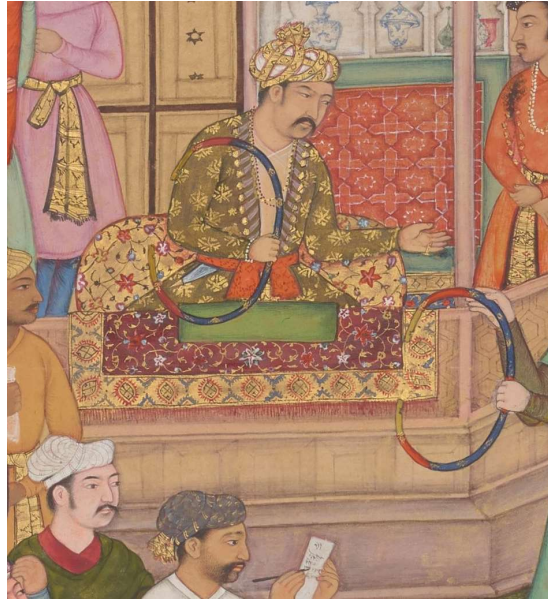
Pl 5 Detail of naqashi on the wall from *Arrival of Badakshan's ambassador miniature painting*.

The emperor Akbar inspection the unstrung bow, (Allama, A.F., 2004, 14) sitting on hidden *awrang* (throne, Allama, A.F., 2004, pl vii, 12) behind the wooden screen separating the *bargah* from the rest of the area, adorned with octagonal patterns, the *kursi* (raised platform, UNESCO-Getty foundation, 2009, 282) of which is divided into two parts square boxes below the octagonal designs and the lower one is left plain. (pl.6) Infront of the emperor carpet is placed on wooden separation screen. It is a carpet with all over floral pattern surrounded by gold border with geometrical pattern, further above this another piece of small green plain carpet is also placed. The carpet that is running behind the floor towards left side of emperor covered the entire corridor, as mentioned by Annmarie Schimmel that attendants were used to walk bare foot, showing on high quality carpets (Schimmel. A., 2005, 72). The entire corridor including the *bargah* transmits the upon the wooden pillar mentioned in *Ain i Akbari* as *Chaubin Rawati* (Allama, A.F., 1873, 46). Four wooden columns clearly seen in painting, among these only one decorative infront of emperor having decorated capital is seen fully. The elongated oval shaped capital have forming melon shaped element above which a stylised lotus

bud pattern was carved (pl.7) The lower portion of these columns have triangular formation can be seen in rare wall.

The emperor Akbar reclining on the colorful floral vine scrolls pattern *awrang* in gold color placed behind it. All the floral patterns on carpets, *awrang*, ceiling of the saybaan are of same (pls ,4,5,6). The darban behind the emperor holding yak-tail (Topsfield, A., 2008, 78) used to fan him, made up of thread like bunch with metal holder, locally known as *chauri* (Verma, S.P., 1976, 563-569) (pl.5).

The lower right side of the painting was occupied by the delegation came with ambassador stand with different gifts including preying birds, horses covered with embellished *kajem*, (A mailed covering for the back of the horse, . Allama, A.F., 2004, pl.xiv,14). swords with gold handles, dishes filled with gifts. Musical instrument can be seen on the lower left side of the painting, a courtier in orange dress was holding *daff* (musical instrument, Verma, S.P., 1976, 563-569) and just besides him another courtier can be seen holding *tambura* (musical instrument Verma, S.P., 1976, 563-569) (pl.2).



Pl 6. Detail of the Kursi and carpet over it from Arrival of Badakshan's ambassador miniature painting



Pl 7. Detail of Pillar from Arrival of Badakshan's ambassador miniature painting

Right Side Folio from Arrival of Badakshan's Ambassador at Akbar Court



Pl 8. Right side folio of Arrival of Badakshan's ambassador at Akbar court. Source: Chesty Beatty Museum

In this painting the gifts were shown brought by the ambassador in different forms, including the covered dishes, boxes, wrapped carpets and animals. Elephants and camels can be seen below on the left corner of the painting, elephants covered plain *kajem* whereas camels with double *kajem* ornamented with floral motifs. Elephants were hacked by *gajbag* or *ankus* (instrument used to guide elephants, Allama, A.F., 1873, pl.xiii, 14) and one of them is covered gold harness. The double hump camels were also covered with gold bells shaped harness. Among the other gifts an elongated covered dish two golden boxes and two wrapped carpets in blue and golden with floral motifs can be seen in the painting. *Jhamdar* was tie to the shirts of the majority of courtiers in standing in the reverential position behind the delegation towards the veranda. (pl.8)



Pl 9. Detail of ornamentation of pillars, doors and parapet wall from the right side folio of
Arrival of Badakshan's ambassador at Akbar court

Five tinted yellow colored wooden doors framed in pinkish yellow border can be seen inside the veranda with dark brown boundary dividing the door into the six panels. Above the three front door inside the veranda alcove shaped blind deep niches can be seen. The veranda supported on the pillar have different capitals from those shown in the left side miniature

painting (pls.2, 7). The thin pillar is topped by melon shaped motif and wedge shaped capital adorned with stylized form of lotus. The parapet wall is adorned with tinted pink stylized lotus motifs below which the eave in purplish color square panels atop with white three petals can be seen (pl.9).

The most above part of the miniature painting is occupied by cluster of the buildings.(pl.10) Above the roof the most right side is occupied by the half seen onion white dome with white floral finial above half seen probably hexagonal building. Beside this, a three tiered hexagonal tower, lower in solid plan, middle pierced with four seen arches and top with one entrance and two adjacent windows atop with the gold dome and white inwards floral motif pinnacle. The middle part of the miniature painting is covered with cluster of structure a *jharoka* occupied the façade with similar golden tent shaped roof atop with two pointed pinnacles as seen in right side miniature painting folio (pls.2,3) and behind this a three arched veranda all topped with dome structure can be seen. The most left side is occupied with solid small structure topped with golden pinnacle is the continuation of the building depicted in left side miniature folio. (pl.4).The arrow slits can also be witnessed on the parapet wall showing this building as the part of the fortified structure. (pl.9)

Conclusion:

These miniature paintings are good sources to form the interior outline of the Mughals as both illustration contains every little detail of the *darbar* interior. They also express the interest of Emperor Akbar in the illustrations as well as the awareness of the interior aspects in his *darbar*. The position of the *masnad* creates emphasis point, the floral patterns in ceiling, carpets and pillows are similar yet responsible for the harmony and unity as applied in different colour combination and on different materials. The back wall fully decorated with *naqshi* looks

balance instead of overcrowded due to its colour combinations and variety of shapes. Space management, the most important element of interior design, is carefully allocated, from the position of emperor, his *darbans*, *wazirs*, attendants and the guest to the space allocated to the animals, nobody is neglected nor is the over-crowdedness witnessed. The colour combinations, royalty, space management, sitting arrangement, lavishness and selection of the materials, all managed according to elements and principles of interior design in true spirit.



*Pl 10. Detail of cluster of buildings from the right side folio of
Arrival of Badakshan's ambassador at Akbar court*

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