

UNIT A

MEDIEVAL INDIAN PAINTING

CHAPTER I

DECCAN ART

HISTORICAL BACKGROUND

During the 14th century, the rise of two empire states in Southern India is significant in the history of the development of Indian Art. They are the Vijaynagar Empire and Bahmani Sultanate established in 1336 A.D. and 1347 A.D. respectively. Despite frequent conflicts between the two, both contributed immensely to various forms of art. The rulers of both these empire states patronised and promoted art.

The Vijaynagar Empire based in the Deccan Plateau region in South India was established by two brothers named Harihar and Bukka. It rose to prominence as a prosperous entity extending from Krishna to Kaveri and Bay of Bengal to the Arabian Sea. This kingdom witnessed abundant development of Hindu or the *Sanatana* culture, art and literature. Raja Krishna Dev was possibly the most able ruler of this kingdom. The paintings of Vijaynagar Empire seem as evolved as that of Ajanta though there are characteristics of *Apbhransa* style too. The brilliant examples of Vijayanagar paintings can be seen on the walls of Veerbhadra Temple of Lepakshi. The various incarnations of Shiva, the Divine Being, Lord Vishnu, saints, musicians etc. have been beautifully depicted here.

Parallel to the Vijaynagar Empire the Bahmanid Dynasty, named after Sultan Alla-Ud-Din Bahman Shah was founded. One of its rulers Firoze Shah Bahmani was a scholar and patron of arts. Besides fascinating different languages, he was deeply interested in mathematics and science. This Sultanate served as a cultural link between the north and the south. The art of painting that flourished during this empire carried distinct Persian influence and the art that developed here is better known as the Deccan style. When Ahmed Shah Wali Bahmani changed his capital to Bidar, he constructed a large number of buildings like forts, palaces, mosques and tombs including the *Rangin Mahal* (Painted Palace), so called because of its elaborate decoration with motifs and inlay work.

The Bahmani kings were zealots, because of which they ignored the flourishing and advanced *Sanatana* art of their neighbour Vijayanagar Kingdom and could not adopt it. The greed of power due to internal divisions and mutual rivalries resulted in the collapse of the Bahmani Sultanate and it broke up into five states: Ahmadnagar, Bijapur, Golconda (Hyderabad), Berar and Bidar. In 1565, they united briefly and destroyed the great Hindu Empire of Vijaynagar but the alliance at once dissolved and they returned to their old ways. Subsequently Ahmadnagar acquired Berar and Bijapur annexed Berar.

Historically, the art of these principalities is very important. The Bahmanis paved way for the distinct style that was influenced by Persian style but is different from the Mughal art. According to Art Historian Hermann Goetz, Deccan Art was impacted by South-Iranian and Arabian art and Mughal paintings saw a combined influence of North-Iranian and Turkish art.

AHMADNAGAR

Sultan Hussain Nizam Shahi of Ahmadnagar played a vital role in the confederacy of the war against Vijaynagar. After his death, his minor son Murtaza ascended the throne. During his minority, his mother ruled as a regent for several years. Later on his younger brother Burhan captured the throne with the aid of Akbar.

During the period of Murtaza's reign (with his mother's regency), the manuscript entitled *Tarif-i-Hussain Shahi* in praise of Hussain Nizamshahi was written and illustrated. The paintings in this manuscript show some influence of the Malwa *Nimat Namah*. The figures are idealised where stately women are clad in colourful saris (Plate 1). A beautiful example of *Ragamala* painting here is *Hindola Raga*. High domed horizon is a characteristic of this style. The later Mughal influence sees the palette turn brighter with gold skies and ornate depiction of nature.



Plate 1

A SCENE FROM TARIF-I-HUSSAINSHAH



Plate 2

HANDBIBI PLAYING POLO

BIJAPUR

Bijapur was the kingdom of Adil Shahi Sultans. Sultan Ismail Adil Shah was himself an expert painter. The famous scholar Chand Sultana, the wife of Sultan Ali Adil Shah I was a dexterous painter. It was under Ali Adil Shah I; the manuscript entitled *Najum-ul-ulum* (Stars of The Sciences) was illustrated. Majority of the Bijapur Sultans cultivated a tradition of the arts and served as patrons to them. The art here was broadly influenced by Jahangir era art. Woman in Dense Forest, Chand Bibi Playing Polo, Elephant Fight etc. are few of famous paintings of this era (Plate 2)

Bright faces, simple background with dense foliage are certain characteristic features of paintings here. The art here lost its originality by the second half of 16th century.

GOLCONDA

After the gradual weakening and downfall of the Bahmani Sultanate, Golconda came under the dominion of the Qutb-Shahi Dynasty. Ibrahim Qutb Shah took over the reins became of the kingdom in 1550. Hyderabad later on the capital of this principality. This dynasty primarily had Persian origin, which was the reason for cordial relations with the Persian rule. Advanced trade made this principality rich. The Golconda Sultans were even more prolific patrons of art and were generous with expenditures for its development. Golconda was also known for its diamonds.

The paintings of Golconda are replete with the representation of women. “Lady with the Myna Bird” is a fine example from the Chester Beatty Collection. The court scenes of Muhammad Qutb Shah and the individualisation of the portraits have rare delicacy and charm. Both Hyderabad and Golconda saw mature cultivation of the art of painting and exquisite paintings of governors, courtiers and *raga-raginis* were depicted in miniatures here. Tuzuk-I-Asfi is an important illustrated manuscript of this era. Rendering of female forms gained a new dimension in Golconda style.

Gradually this style lost its originality due to growing influence of ornate Maratha style.



PLATE 3
LADY WITH THE MYNA BIRD

Important points

1. The Hindu *Sanatana* art flourished in the Vijayanagar Empire of the south.
2. The art that developed under the patronage of Bahmani Sultanate is known as Deccan Art.
3. Bahmani Sultanate was named after Alla-Ud-Din Bahman Shah.
4. Ahmadnagar, Bijapur and Golconda were the main seats of Deccan art.
5. The famous scholar Chand Sultana was related to Bijapur.
6. Deccan Style was deeply influenced by Persian and Arabian art.
7. Gradually the Deccan style lost its uniqueness to the growing Mughal influence.
8. The Lady with the Myna Bird and Chand Bibi playing Polo are important works of Deccan Style.

EXERCISE QUESTIONS

Very short answer questions:

1. Which two brothers laid the foundation of Vijayanagar Empire?
2. Into how many parts was the Bahmani Sultanate divided?
3. Name any one title of the paintings of Bijapur?
4. Deccan Art was influenced by which style?

Short answer questions:

1. The painting “Chand Bibi playing Polo” belongs to which style?
2. “Lady with the Myna Bird” belongs to which style of painting?
3. Where was the illustrated manuscript *Tarif-I-Hussain Shahi* painted?

Essay-type questions:

1. Describe the subject matter and characteristics of Deccan Art.
2. Write an essay on the chronological development of Deccan Art.