PAINTING AT BIJAPUR

by

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A certain amount of evidence, accepted by all students of the subject, has accumulated in recent years for painting in the Islamic kingdoms of the Deccan during the 16th and first quarter of the 17th centuries A.D. Ahmadnagar, Golconda and Bijapur have been established as the three main schools or, perhaps one should say, as the three main centres of activity. For Ahmadnagar the evidence is small but sound. No-one doubts that the *Tarif-i Husayn-Shah*, in the Bharata Ithasa Samshodhaka Mandala, Poonam, was painted at Ahmadnagar. Most students, correctly in my view, would date it about A.D. 1505 to 1565: a minority would wish to bring it up to the last decade of the 16th century A.D. The magnificent painting in the Bibliothèque Nationale is now generally accepted as a contemporary portrait of Burhan Nizam Shah II of Ahmadnagar, who ruled from A.D. 1591 to 1595. For Golconda two documents have survived from the reign of Ibrahim Qutb Shah (A.D. 1520-80): the Medical Encyclopaedia in the Chester Beatty Collection, written at the capital by Fazl Bahu Mirk of Herat in A.D. 1572 (A.H. 960), which contains a fine illuminated double frontispiece; and a *Shahin wa-Khosrow* of Hafiz in the Bankipore Library, written for Ibrahim in A.D. 1569 (A.H. 976) and containing a good *wastawi* and seven full-page miniatures. Both however are in Persian styles and merely indicate the choice of models available for the development of a truly local style. The only sure example of the latter is the portrait of Muhammad Qutb Shah (A.D. 1621-26) in the British Museum. I have recently suggested that five miniatures inserted in a *Diuain* of Hafiz in the British Museum also belong to the Golconda style of about A.D. 1586 to 1590. This attribution seems to have received fairly general acceptance. For Bijapur there is only one document which has never been disputed, the Bikaner portrait of Ibrahim 'Adil Shah II (A.D. 1580-1627). This may be dated about A.D. 1595, when the monarch was twenty-four years of age. Question that this portrait was painted at Bijapur and it will be difficult to proceed. But accept the picture as an authentic portrait of Ibrahim II and it is open to doubt whether the famous British Museum "portrait" represents the same personage. Painted at Bijapur the British Museum "portrait" may prove to be, but the identity of the subject may not perhaps be used as evidence for that conclusion. The various copies, good and indifferent, of contemporary portraits of Ibrahim II, together with the coldly observed portrait by Hishim, taken either from life or a contemporary Deccan painting, do seem to establish the physiognomy of the monarch and some may find it hard to believe that a large, curved nose can be painted as a short straight one. Again the two illustrations in the Hyderabad *Nimat-nama* cannot be accepted as evidence for Bijapur painting on the basis of the portraits, since on both the features are effaced. They may however be accepted on other grounds—Yazdani has in fact given sufficient reason for doing so—whence it may be argued that the seated central figure of the two paintings was probably the young Ibrahim II. The generally accepted date for the Hyderabad *Nimat-nama* is about A.D. 1590 to 1600.

There is in the British Museum an unpublished manuscript of great importance which can be attributed to the Bijapur School with as near certainty as one can hope to achieve in this field. The subject of the manuscript (Add. 16880) is the romance of Ratan Sen, Raja of Chitor, and the princess of Ceylon. It contains the bookplate dated September, 1805, of William Yule, whose sons presented it to the British Museum. The manuscript consists of 230 folios, measuring 9½ by 6½ inches. The poem, of 199 chapters and 999 dohas, is written, the *chopais* in red ink and the *dohas* in black, in Arabic characters within ruled and gilt borders. It is composed in an archaic form of Deccani Urdu, with a large admixture of Arabic and Persian words. The author was Hasan Masjih Khaliq, who assumed the poetical name of Hans. The plot is presumably borrowed from Malik Muhammad Jayasi's *Padmavati* composed in A.D. 1520, but I have been unable to find any mention of Hans' poem in the standard histories of Hindi and Urdu literature, and know of no other copy of this work.

The poet opens conventionally with the enumeration of the ninety-nine attributes of God, prayers to God, and praises of the Prophet Muhammad, 'Ali, Fathima and the *Ma'sumah*. He then praises his Marshal Pir, Shih Burhanji, himself a writer of prose and poetry, who died in A.D. 1582 (A.H. 990) and was buried in his father's tomb at Bijapur. The poet continues with a eulogy of Ibrahim 'Adil Shah II, his learning, penmanship and knowledge of music and the nine Rasas (*Nauras*). The King had written a book, in which after much study he had collected great gems of knowledge (Folio 23b). The musician Moti Khan is then lavishely praised for his playing of the *tamburd*, which comprehends and has complete
mastery over the Nauras, thus ravishing the souls of his listeners. This is
doubt the same Moti Khan whose playing of the nirjvida receives
special mention in Ibrahim II’s own work, Kitab-i Nauras. There
follows a long passage devoted to Atish Khan, to whom reference is also made in
Kitab-i Nauras. Scholars have been in doubt as to the identity of this enigmatic
personage. The introduction to the “Ratan Kahan” makes it clear he
was an elephant, the pride of Ibrahim II’s stables. He was an avatar
of Gujaraja, always in must, attracting people by his beauty as a lamp
attracts moths. If all the painters, no matter how gifted, essayed his likeness, they would fail. Much the same sentiment is expressed in the
Kitab-i Nauras, together with the prayer—for this is how the line given by
Gayani must now be translated—that Atish Khan, the elephant who
is always in must, might live for ever. There follows a brief and difficult
reference (folio 31a) to Chanchal, who, it seems, had crossed the salt sea.
Then follows an enthusiastic description of Bidyapur (Bijapur) and its
environs. In the citadel, now generally called the Arq-qi’ah, the drums
were beaten thrice daily. The moat, now dry, was as deep as the ocean
and full of alligators, the latter statement probably not merely a poetic
conceit. Special praise is lavished on the Anand Mahal, which is said to
have been built by Ibrahim II in A.D. 1589, and to which he rode in state
in A.D. 1591 after his victory over Ismaili Nizam Shah of Ahmadnagar.
The poet goes on to describe the gardens of Bijapur, its roads, shops and
markets. Every house, he claims, had a mosque, for the people were as
religious as the King himself. Of course special mention is made of the
Jami’ Masjid, begun by Ali Adil Shah I after the victory of Talikota over
the empire of Vijayanagar in A.D. 1565. Reference is also made to three
famous suburbs outside the walls of Bijapur: Ibrahimpur, about a mile
from the Falah Gate to the south-east, Allahapura to the east and Nauraspur
to the west. After modest protestation of his lack of virtue and general
unsuitability for the task the poet says he composed his “Ratan Kahan”
at the instigation of his friends in A.H. 990 (A.D. 1590-1591). The long
introduction now ends and the poem proper begins. The manuscript
contains no colophon.

Before discussing the illustrations to the manuscript a few words may
be said of its relevance to the problem of the composition of Ibrahim II’s
Kitab-i Nauras. In the introduction to the “Ratan Kahan” the word
nauras frequently occurs in references to the King’s musicianship and to
that of Moti Khan. Obviously Ibrahim II, though only nineteen years of

2 Ibid., p. 151.

age in A.D. 1590, was already an enraptured student of this aspect of Hindu
music and aesthetics. Also the building of the new suburb at Nauraspur,
though perhaps never completed, had evidently begun. There is moreover,
in the “Ratan Kahan” clear and explicit mention of a book into
which the King had collected great gems of knowledge. B. G. Gayani,
after a study of the surviving manuscripts, has said that the Kitab-i
Nauras is a collection of stray songs composed by the King from time to
time, and that the songs were meant to be sung in different tunes or
Ragas of Indian music. There is nothing like a continuous narrative on
any particular subject.” Gayani held the Sir Salar Jung copy of the
Kitab-i Nauras to be the earliest. It is said to bear the date A.H. 990
below the name of the scribe ‘Abd al-Rashid, and contains less songs than
other manuscripts, thus suggesting the continuance of the King’s poetic
activity, the new songs being incorporated in later copies. Nasir al-Din
Hishami has also placed the compilation of the book between A.H. 990
(A.D. 1582) and A.H. 1015 (A.D. 1606). The date in the Sir Salar Jung copy
is puzzling. It would mean that the King had composed most of his songs
by A.D. 1582, when he was eleven years old. Such Mozaritan precocity
may be doubted, but it is clear from the introduction to the “Ratan
Kahan” that he was at nineteen already an accomplished musician, at
least in the eyes of his courtiers, and had written a book. Internal
evidence for the date of the Kitab-i Nauras is unfortunately small. Moti
Khan and Atish Khan, and here the introduction to the “Ratan Kahan”
is helpful, were already well-known personalities in A.D. 1590 to 1591.
A reference to Chaud Bibi, Ibrahim II’s famous aunt, wishing her long life,
obviously antedates her tragic death at Ahmadnagar in A.D. 1606, and
could possibly be earlier than A.D. 1588 when she left Bijapur to accompany
Khadija, Ibrahim II’s sister, to the latter’s short-lived and unhappy
marriage with Husayn, the son of Murtagh I of Ahmadnagar. Zuhfi’s
famous prose preface to the Kitab-i Nauras is, one supposes, not earlier
than A.D. 1595. Zuhfi had dedicated his Safi nama to Burhan Nizam
Shah II of Ahmadnagar, whom and whose court it eulogises, and is not
likely to have left Ahmadnagar for Bijapur until after the death of his
patron in A.D. 1595. Presumably one at least of the versions of the
Kitab-i Nauras is later than this date. Nevertheless the introduction to
the “Ratan Kahan” makes it clear that the young king had already
begun to write by A.D. 1590. No doubt a great deal more useful
information could be gleaned from the manuscript by a scholar experienced
in Deccani Urdu.
The manuscript of the "Ratan Kahan" contains a good illuminated 'unwān' and thirty-four miniatures, which with three exceptions (folios 177b, 178b and 184a) occupy the whole page. The whole page miniatures measure about 6 3/8 inches by 3 1/8 inches. One however (folio 80a) is larger and broader, measuring 7 1/8 inches by 5 1/8 inches, and another (folio 197b) is exceptionally tall and narrow, measuring 8 1/8 inches by 3 1/8 inches. Two main hands or manners may clearly be distinguished in the manuscript, and probably a third. Hand A is responsible for eighteen of the miniatures (folios 46a, 47a, 49b, 69a, 75b, 80a, 82b, 89b, 119a, 138a, 181b, 183a, 197b, 210a, 213b, 215a, 219a, and 232a). (Figs. 97–99.) Seven of these miniatures are composed to fill the whole of the allotted field, but in eleven of them a horizontal band of decoration is introduced at the top of the picture, as if the tall, narrow format were an embarrassment to the artist. This band is filled with gold "Chinese" cloud-scrolls on a solid blue ground. Occasionally flights of white cranes are painted among the cloud-scrolls. On a few miniatures, e.g. folios 181b and 210a, two bands of decoration are employed at the top: the gold "Chinese" cloud-scrolls on blue and below, a band of red "Chinese" cloud-scrolls on gold, or of
regular scrolling, also red on gold. Below this again sometimes hangs a textile torana. This use of bands of decoration employing two forms of cloud and sky convention, is of course found on the British Museum portrait of Muhammad Qutb Shāh of Golconda. On the picture proper the sky is usually solid gold, sometimes with long, ragged red clouds. Occasionally dark and light blue with white are used to produce a stormy sky; an effect found in the Hyderabadi Nīmat-nāma and in the Bikaner portrait of Barālnām Kālīl Shāh II. Gold is very lavishly used throughout for jewellery, designs on costume, costume itself, and sometimes for the entire ground of the scene. The general impression of the miniatures is consequently of a richness and brilliance rare even in Deccan painting, which delighted in such effects. In general the foliage of trees and bushes is depicted as a dark mass edged with flickering touches of pale green, yellow, purple and red. Such foliage is also used to provide a background to the strangely out of scale iris-like plants frequently found in Deccan painting. The trees, like the sky, are usually full of white cranes, as on the miniature in the Hyderabadi Nīmat-nāma. Certain trees, like the banyan, are individually portrayed. The ground itself, when not gold, is a warm
brown, or a dark green lit with light green grass or small red and white
glimmering flowers. White palaces and pavilions embovvered in trees or
perched on "Persian" crags are a frequent feature of the high sky line.
The human face is already modelled with skill, and the artist has, with the
princess of Ceylon in particular, achieved a delicate charm of expression in
his women. The men wear the typical costume of Bijapur, the folds of
shawl, coat or girdle often being treated with considerable plasticity. The
coats have the long prominent straps on either side, often in a contrasting
colour: a fashion peculiar to the two southern kingdoms of Bijapur and
Golconda. The finery of the women is as splendid as the men's. The saris
are very long, drawn across the bosom and over the back of the head, like
an ombâni, to hang down in a long, narrow fold, which either caught at the
girdle or elegantly held by the hand or over the lower arm, is allowed to
splay outwards. Everywhere is found those daring colour clashes of dark
green and pale purple, gold and black and chocolate and blue, to which
Deccan painting owes so much of its distinctive quality.
Hand B is responsible for fourteen miniatures (folios 90b, 135a, 147a, 166a, 168a, 171a, 172a, 176a, 177b, 178b, 184a, 202a, 206a, and 224b). (Figs. 100, 101.) Though he commands most of the stylistic vocabulary of Hand A, this artist is altogether a smaller talent. He attempts little or no modelling of the face, and his efforts to realise the volumes of the human form or the plasticity of drapery folds are usually clumsy and unconvincing. He has a particular fondness for purple grounds, on which large gold flowers and scrolls are heraldically placed with no concern for scale or "naturalism". At his most pedestrian his line is coarse and colours harshly juxtaposed. But he often communicates a real, if naive charm, as two of his more successful pages (folios 147a and 224b) illustrate.

Hand C, responsible for two miniatures (folios 70b and 87a) (fig. 102) should also perhaps be isolated. The general style of this artist is close to that of Hand A, but a little less finished. His two pictures have a quite distinctive tonality, in which pale and dark blue predominate. His best miniature (folio 87a) shows Ratan Sen, the image of his beloved in his bosom as in every appearance of the hero, listening to two musicians. The agony of separation causes the lover to emit flames of longing, a conceit applied to Atish Khan in the Kitāb-i Nauras.

The evidence of the introduction to the "Ratan Kahan" is sufficient
the date of composition of the poem is curiously emphasised. The date, given as a chronogram in black ink in the poem (folio 38b), is repeated below in abjad numerals in red ink. If the British Museum "Ratan Kahan" can plausibly be dated about A.D. 1590 to 1591 it will be the earliest, as it is certainly the finest, illustrated manuscript which can be attributed with near certainty to Bijapur. It will have been written and illustrated at the moment when Ibrahim II had reached the age to take over control of government, himself to begin poetic composition, and to exercise effective patronage of the arts.

The British Museum manuscript also underlines the early appearance in Deccan painting of shading of the face and plastic modelling of body and drapery. This "naturalistic" intention is clear in the Hyderabad Ni'mat-nama and the Bikaner portrait of Ibrahim II, and also in the portrait of Burhan II of Ahmadnagar to be dated A.D. 1591 to 1595. It does not appear in the five miniatures which I have attributed to Golconda of about A.D. 1586 to 1590 which follow rather the Persian conception of picture making as a two-dimensional emotive pattern of line and colour, a conception which survives, though much modified, in the British Museum portrait of Muhammad Qutb Shah of about A.D. 1612. The Bijapur style of Hand A however looks forward, perhaps with some influence from Mughal painting of the Jahangir period, to the small but exceptionally fine group of highly finished portraits of about A.D. 1615 in the British Museum, the Victoria and Albert Museum and the India Office Library, of which the "Ibrahim II" in the British Museum is the best known. The style of Hand A also suggests that another important Deccan picture of the early 17th century A.D., the Chester Beatty "Yogini" should be attributed to Bijapur, as earlier claimed by Basil Gray, Dr. Moti Chandra and other scholars, rather than to Golconda, as I had proposed.

Hand B in the British Museum manuscript, less competent than Hand A, is also more old fashioned. It has perhaps a bearing on the provenance and date of some of the most controversial groups of 16th century A.D. Deccan paintings, especially of the Chester Beatty Nasim al-'Ulum and of the more "southern" group of Raga paintings and their copies. Though most of the pages of the Nasim al-'Ulum show strong influence from the style of the Vijayanagar Empire, certain elements, the small female figures on the frontispiece and the preference for grounds of

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1 I owe this interesting observation to my friend Muhammad Idris Siddiqi.
solid colour, especially purple, with heraldically placed floral designs in gold, do seem to be related to the style of Hand B of the British Museum manuscript. If the latter is accepted as about A.D. 1590 to 1591, the thrice repeated date of A.D. 1570 in the *Nuzūm al-'Ulam* and its attribution to Bijapur would receive some support. The same stylistic elements in the Rāga paintings, especially the women with their long, looped saris, would also suggest that the "southern" group at least was painted at Bijapur sometime between A.D. 1570 and 1590.

The manuscript of the "Ratan Kahan" has a certain relevance to the identity of the subject of the British Museum "portrait" of Ibrahim II. The miniatures by Hand A of the meeting of the King of Ceylon and Ratan do seem to establish that in Bijapur painting a heavily built man with a beard is not necessarily Ibrahim II. It would have been a doubtful if not dangerous compliment to employ the figure and features of the nineteen-year-old King to depict the middle-aged father of the heroine of the poem. The identity of the subject of the British Museum portrait remains an open question. In this context something may be said of the portrait of Ibrahim II in the Naprstek Museum, Prague. The inscription at the top of the page on which the portrait is mounted, reads: "Allah is greatest. Portrait of Ibrahim Adil Khân Dekkanî, governor of Bijapur, who in the knowledge of the music of the Deccan made himself the master of those who profess the art." The inscription continues at the bottom of the page: "and it is the work of Farrukh Beg in the 3rd regnal year equivalent to the year 1019 (A.D. 1610-11). Written by Muhammed Husayn Zarin Qalam Jahangir-Shâhî." There is of course no suggestion that Ibrahim II, who like the other Deccan rulers, was regarded as a mere vassal by the Mughals and addressed as "Khân", sat for Farrukh Beg. In the Prague portrait the King seems to be about the same age as in the Bilancer portrait, perhaps a little younger. I would suggest that the original Bijapur painting on which the Mughal copy by Farrukh Beg is based was, in the light of the style of Hands A and C of the British Museum manuscript, not much later than A.D. 1595.

In the introduction to the "Ratan Kahan", immediately after the long and grandiloquent eulogy of Atish Khân, Chanchal is briefly mentioned as having gone over the salt sea. This is evidently an elephant, and the Chanchal which Ibrahim II reluctantly handed over to Akbar in A.D. 1604. Chanchal—the name means playful or coquetish—was, one may believe, a female. Perhaps her absence from Bijapur, whither I cannot conceive, caused Atish Khân, in the imagery of the *Kitâb-i Nauras*, to burn with the fire of longing, if she was his favourite. It would be useful if someone experienced in this field could sex the splendid elephant in the famous Deccan or Mughal copy of a Deccan miniature in a private collection in Banaras.7 If the elephant is female, Dr. Moti Chandra's suggestion that it is Chanchal is very plausible. If it is male, as N. C. Mehta assumed, then it may well be a portrait of Atish Khân, the most prized and admired of Ibrahim II's elephants, whose likeness the painters could not successfully capture. The date usually given to the miniature, about A.D. 1600, would suit either alternative.

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7 N. C. Mehta, *Studies in Indian Painting*, Bombay 1926, pl. 47.

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