



PAINTINGS DURING THE RULE OF IBRAHIM ADIL SHAH II

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ABSTRACT :

The great name earned by the Bijapur Paintings is mainly due to the patronage and personality of Ibrahim Adil Shah II (150-1627). This was the period when the best Dakhni works were produced at all three Sultanates, Ahmadnagar, Bijapur and Golkonda. Literary evidence clearly shows that Ibrahim Adil Shah II was a person of extremely cultured and artistic tastes, a musician and a poet and probably a painter and, that he always took interest to secure the best possible talents to his courts. A number of portraits of Ibrahim Adil Shah II and his contemporaries are attributed to his painters, but unfortunately none of them is either dated or bears any inscription that they were executed at Bijapur.¹

KEYWORDS : *patronage and personality of Ibrahim , poet and probably.*

INTRODUCTION :

The finest of the Ibrahim Adil Shah's portraits is the one in Lalgah Palace at Bikaner (VI a). A note on the reverse says that it came from the treasury of Adoni. It is clear from this note that this was a part of the loot of Raja Karan Singh of Bikaner shortly after the fall of Bijapur into Mughal arms. This shows him as a young prince with retinue. It contains all the richness and mellowed grandeur that are found in this small group of paintings associated with the Deccan at the close of the 16th and beginning of 17th centuries. This is incidentally the period when Indo-Muslim painting was at its peak. These pictures achieve a grandeur by the beautiful placing of the figure of Ibrahim Adil Shah II in the composition. The sensitive portraiture of and superb proportion of Ibrahim and seven courtiers who follow him, are executed with utmost care and devotion. The luxurious costume of Ibrahim Adil Shah II and the very gorgeous coloring of this paintings have hardly ever been repeated or excelled in the whole range of Indian miniature painting. The feeling of diagonal thrust of the central figure in this painting is accentuated by the banked-up figures behind him. The figure of Ibrahim is pushed forward by the imaginative placing of the figures in such a way that the ruler almost lurches forwards into the empty space lying in his front. We are aware that Ibrahim was eleven in 1582, and since in this painting he is shown about twenty-five years of age it would be reasonable to say that this painting was executed around 1586.²

Another portrait of Ibrahim is in the British Museum. This shows him holding castanets. The figure has been set in the midst of a mysterious dark green landscape with billowing, cloud-like leaves and light color fringes, against which some light and springy plants are silhouetted. This is a deccani feature of the late 16th and early 17th centuries, more particularly of Bijapur School. Exotic foliage and water lilies at the feet of Ibrahim are perhaps in the southern culture. A gorgeous gold-woven scarf is worn across the shoulders and held in by



the arms. In the background there is a palace with lot of modelling. This feature is probably due to western models acquired directly from Goa which adjoined Bijapur territory. It must be noted that Goa was under Portuguese possession. Although some scholars believe that this European influence came to Bijapur via Mughal School, there is hardly any basis for this, and the influence of European technique or vision which appealed to the Bijapur artists, might have come in all likelihood direct from Goa rather than at second-hand from the Mughals. The breezy quality of the whole atmosphere in this painting, especially the flowing transparent *jama* and scarf, the exquisite finish and the suggestion of movement, coupled with a highly balanced composition, secure this portrait a high position in the whole range of Indian portrait painting.³

Some other portraits of Ibrahim are also worthy to mention. Of these one in the Naprstck Museum, Prague, a folio from Jahangir's album, depicts him playing a musical instrument, probably a guitar, while three courtiers are keeping time by clapping. An inscription on the inner margins says "Allahu Akbar. Portrait of Ibrahim Adil khan Dakhni Subedar of Bijapur who considers himself superior to masters of that art of the Dakhni music. The work of Farrukh Beg in the regnal years 5 corresponding to 1019. This humble servant Muhammad Husain Jahangir Shahi transcribed it." Apparently, the date 1019/1610-11 is the date when the inscription was written, or possibly this painting itself was copied in 1610-11 from an earlier version. In this case since Ibrahim's age in this painting is about the same or little less than in the portrait in the Lalgah Palace Bikaner collection, this painting of Naprstck Museum should be a work of about 1595. It is a charming painting with all the best traits of the early Bijapur School.⁴

Another portrait of Ibrahim is in the Goenka collections, Calcutta. In this painting also he is shown as a musician, this time playing an Ektara. He is seated on a brocade carpet against a gold background with two flowering trees. He wears a long transparent white *jama* on pink *churidar pajama* while a plain brocade scarf covers his shoulders. He holds the 'Ektara' in his left hand while in the right he holds a book. There is an inscription contained in two rectangles cutting across the trees. In its style this painting is very close to the paintings in the Hans Shah's "Ratan Kahan" manuscript in the British Museum Or. 16880 (V a). Douglas Barrett informed the present writer that it is dated 1592 and was composed for Ibrahim Adil Shah. As in this portrait Ibrahim's age would be about 19 years, it should have been painted about 1590, since Ibrahim was 9 years of age when he ascended the throne in 1580. In the Goenka collection there is another portrait of Ibrahim showing him as a musician. These portraits, apart from their aesthetic importance, sufficiently prove Ibrahim's love for music and the fact that he was a musician himself. One peculiarity of Ibrahim's dress is noticeable from these and his other portraits is that he used long white *jama* with outside coat-ties at each side of the armpit, besides the conical turban with two wide encircling bands. This costume was not used by contemporary rulers either of Ahmadnagar or Golkonda.⁵

Like the contemporary Mughal portrait, there is a lot of naturalistic modelling in Bijapur portraits produced from about 1615 to 1627. Although both these schools imbibed this naturalism due to European influence, yet there was a difference: Mughal portraiture is more dazzling in technique while in Bijapur naturalism remains subservient due to imaginative composition and poetic content.⁶

There are several other individual paintings in different collections which could be ascribed to Ibrahim's reign. (V b). Of these some are portraits of courtiers (V I b) which show a more intense life than the reporting of the average Mughal court portraiture. There is so much similarity and unity of style that we can safely say that Bijapur had a distinctly individual style of portrait painting in the early 17th century.⁷

The number of great paintings, of different themes, known from Ibrahim's time, is not very large. But their style is so distinctive and their quality so fine that we can certainly say that there were very competent painters working under this enlightened patron. Here only some of the most important of these would be named. We have the study of an Elephant in the Sitaram Sahu collection, Varanasi. This charming study may well be of Ibrahim's much prized elephant named *Chanchal* which was presented to Akbar in 1604 through Akbar's envoy Asad Beg. Then there is the portrait of saints in a landscape, c. 1601-04, in the Hermitage, Leningrad; 'A Yogini' c. 1605 Chester Beatty collection, Dublin; A Yogini seated beside a river', c. 1605, in the present author's collection (unpublished); 'A Yogini seated in a jungle' c. 1620; 'Elephant Fight' c. 1610 in the Bharat Itihasa Sanshodaka Mandala Poona (both unpublished) and 'Lovers', c. 1600 in the Top Kapu Serayi

Muzesi Istanbul (unpublished). All the above mentioned paintings have a distinct quality of their own in the very unconventional composition, rich landscape; mysterious atmosphere, gem-like colouring, lavish use of gold, exquisite finish, profusion of large plants, flowering shrubs and typical Dakhni castles in the background, and above all, the sweeping baroque rhythm that their Bijapur origin and their being from Ibrahim's period is immediately clear.⁸

There are two bird studies in the *Musée Guimet*, Paris, which should also be cited as important examples of the early seventeenth century Bijapur painting. One of these depicts 'Two Cranes at a water edge' and the other painting shows 'Falcon on a tree' (c. 1650). In addition, there is a fragment in the State Museum, Hyderabad showing 'Two Sparrows perched on the branch of flowering mango tree' (c. 1625). These paintings prove that, like the contemporary ruler Jahangir, Ibrahim was fond of bird studies. But the agitated rhythms, the luminous colours, the flamboyant postures and the mysterious romanticism achieved by the Bijapur painters is more exciting than the Mughal work of the same subject. The Mughal birds are but dignified creatures and make only excellent naturalistic and penetrating studies, while if we study the paintings of Ibrahim's period, we notice that one of their secondary motifs is birds which, with their symbolic presence, add a romantic and mysterious agitatedness in the composition.⁹

There are several later copies of early seventeenth century Bijapur paintings. Their importance lies in the fact that the number of the early Bijapur paintings being small these copies help us in the study of the Bijapur style. We would name here three paintings which are of great importance in this regard and which have very often been discussed by writers of Indian painting. Most important of these is 'The Siesta' in the State Museum, East Berlin "Ibrahim Adil Shah II in a garden with courtiers", attributed to the mid-eighteenth century. Lucknow artist Mir Kallan Khan, Earl of Harrowby collection, the third is "Ibrahim Adil Shah in later years", copied by the Mughal artist Hashmi around 1620, Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York.¹⁰

Manuscript Illustrations of Ibrahim's period

Only two illustrated Bijapur manuscripts, of Ibrahim's time are known. Of these the Ratan Kalia in the British Museum, or.16880, is the finest examples among the illustrated manuscripts from the Deccan. It has 36 exquisite miniatures of 1592. This manuscript has such a great variety of the subject matter that when published it would provide a very useful key for the study of the style of painting and the social life of Bijapur.¹¹

The other illustrated manuscript attributed to the Bijapur School of the period of Ibrahim 'Adil Shah II is the cookery book entitled *Ni' mat Nama*, in the State Museum, Hyderabad (now in the National Museum, New Delhi). Of its two illustrations one is incomplete and has not been published, while the other has been reproduced in colour by Ghulam Yazdanl. Although it does not bear any colophon connecting it with Bijapur, this seems to be most likely a work of the Bijapur School. There are some indications in one of its miniatures to suggest that the person shown is young Ibrahim 'Adil Shah II. The treatment of the landscape in the background, the presence of the musical instruments (drums) in front of the ruler and the similarity of the costumes with those used by Ibrahim and his courtier's support this belief. As Ibrahim is shown in this painting as being about sixteen years of age and since he was only nine years in 1580 it would be reasonable to say that the *Ni' mat Nama* manuscript was illustrated round about 1587. The name of only one artist Farrukh Husain is mentioned by the court poet of Ibrahim in his *Sih Nathr*. Robert Skelton has tried to prove that this artist was no other than Akbar's important painter Farrukh Beg who worked from 1601 to 1609 at Bijapur and returned in 1609 to work under Jahangir.¹²

Bijapur Wall-Paintings

There are some buildings in Bijapur which were originally decorated with wall paintings. Thus, we have a few fragments in the water-pavilion at Kumatgi and Sat Manzil Palace built during the reign of Ibrahim Adil Shah II. Besides these Athar Mahal and Mubarak Khan's Pavilion, built during the reign of Muhammad 'Adil Shah (1627-1656) also have fragments of mural. The fragment on the north wall of the first floor in the Sat-Manzil Palace depict two figures. Kumatgi was perhaps once decorated profusely with

murals. The existing murals show a vivid scene of polo-players, a hunting scene, portraits of some Europeans, a musician playing up on a guitar while a queen and her maid sit listening, a wrestling match, two seated figures clad in tiger skin garments, and a king, perhaps Ibrahim II, talking to a saint.¹³

The Kumatgi paintings have a strange mixture of the Safawi Persian, European and Deccani elements. Here the figures are set sometimes in the midst of Safawi flowering trees or other decoration and large human and animal figures, and have a considerable amount of modelling. The human figures are shown with faces in three-quarter profile and the animals are drawn with attempts at foreshortening. Both these features were apparently the result of western influence via Goa.

In Athar Mahal two rooms to the south have traces of paintings. Although very few photographs are available, and much has already decayed. Henry Cousens says "from what can be seen, they savour very strongly of western handicraft, and, indeed, in one instance regular European wine glass are represented. These paintings may have been executed by European artists."¹⁴

CONCLUSION: -

Art, dance forms, paintings, literature and culture are the things that give the society its integrity and the Medieval Era does not fail to astonish us with its vast and beautiful diversity of paintings, sculptures, literature, or dance forms. The versatile painters and craftsmen of that period had done such remarkable work that even a layman cannot resist to praise those art forms. The Adil Shahi Kingdom of Bijapur was one among the other kingdoms during which the art forms flourished and left their impact throughout the history and even on our modern lifestyle and modern clothing. The great name earned by the Bijapur Paintings is mainly due to the patronage and personality of Ibrahim Adil Shah II (150-1627). Ibrahim Adil Shah II was a person of extremely cultured and artistic tastes. His interest for painting, and other art forms was immense because he himself was a musician, a poet and a painter so it is obvious.

He always admired the work of his fellow courtiers and his countrymen. Any person with rightful skills and talent was always welcomed and appreciated in his court. Among all the seven rulers of Adil Shahi dynasty, Ibrahim's reign seeks to find its place in history for its resourceful and diligent art forms. Ibrahim was very much fond of new styled clothing with embroider designs. Gold was often used to decorate his coats, scarfs and jama. The luxurious costume of Ibrahim Adil Shah II and the very gorgeous coloring of this paintings have hardly ever been repeated.

During his reign the art forms in medieval period found new peaks which was never seen before. Because of his supportive and affectionate nature towards cultural activities, they are still a part of the modern society and never cease to amaze us with its vast glory.

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