

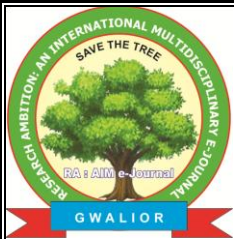
HINDU SAINTS IN MUGHAL PAINTINGS

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The miniature paintings, which are unique among survivals of Indian art for its inscribed portraits of Saints (*Yogis* and *Sannyasis*) who can be identified as historical, legendary or symbolic figures associated with the un-orthodox, electric movements of medieval Hinduism, expressions of popular religious beliefs and practices of the Indian masses - which thrived in the Mughal India during 16th and 17th centuries.

Pictorial art, though important, and sometimes indispensable in constructing history of past yet remains to be examined. Pictorial representation, especially those bearing the stamp of realism, deserves utmost attention of historians. They acquire greater importance from the fact that in them one has visual information of what we may not ordinarily get in chronicles. In many instances the descriptions are very details and frank. The Mughal painter was not primarily concerned with portrayal of the common peoples: Numerous Mughal painting exhibit outdoor scene (such as the remote landscape for background) that evinces a scope large enough to cover the various aspects of commoner's life. The depiction of ascetics was a major theme of the Mughal painting. They appear in their natural surroundings in an unidealized setting. The Dervishes, hermits are truthfully depicted wandering or in groups. We find that picturization of their ways and means of living; sartorial habits etc. are in conformity with the contemporary textual evidence concerning them¹.

Mughal artists painted, Hindu *Sadhus*, *Jogis*, *Sannyassi* etc. conspicuously. Most of these are unidentified. But there can be little doubt that the figures are those of Hindus. Some wearing loose garments with coloured patches², some wearing yellow-ochre garments with begging bowls and sacks in their hands³, yet others wearing only small loin cloths with their bodies smeared with ashes, their unkempt hair falling in long strands over their shoulders, their ears pierced with large round rings,



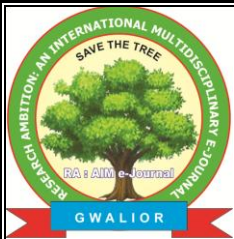
sitting under trees or marching with their disciples carrying horns and bunches of peacock feathers (morchal)⁴, all bear distinctive marks of Hinduism.

In this group of *Jogis*, we can also occasionally catch a glimpse of a Hindu *jogini* here and there, dressed in yellow-ochre *Saree*, wearing her hair loose, with round rings in her ears and a rosary in her hand⁵. Sometimes she can be seen sitting under a tree accompanied by a disciple or two.

The influence of popular *bhakti* (Vaishnava) movement in north India manifested itself in the representation of Krishna's dance with the *Gopies-e.Ras Lila* which was one of the most favorite subjects of the Mughal and Rajasthani painters (in Rajasthani painting). It also revealed itself through the portraits of Hindu spiritual teachers and reformers of all the religious teachers and reformers; Kabir was most popular with the Mughal artist⁶. He seems to have been portrayed with great enthusiasm and zest and his pictures in which he is generally represented as sitting at his loom in his cottage can be easily identified in any collection. Kabir was a disciple of Ramanand⁷. But he is also said to have met Sufi teachers like Shaikh Tagi Summardi and Shaikh Bhika Chishti. Thus he imbibed the essentials of both Hinduism and Islam and developed a synthetic philosophy of life which no preaches with the ardent persistence of an inspired reformer. He was, indeed, the first great apostle of Hindu-Muslim unity in the religious sphere. No wonder that his message was used by broad-minded and catholic Mughal Emperors like Akbar to remove discords and disharmonies and cement national unity in the country. Portraits of other exponents of the Bhakti movement are also noticeable in the Mughal art-collections, e.g. Rai Das, Pipa, Nam Dev, Saina, Kamal, Nanak, Pir Muchandar and Pir Panth Swami⁸.

Baba Gorakhnath⁹ who was one of the earliest literati to add to the Hindi literary treasure-gems of Bhakti thought, and Keshava Das¹⁰ (–1617 A.D.) who produced one of the most admired works of his time *Kavi-Priya*, were also immortalized by the Mughal artist's brush. Besides these, other Hindu subjects such as visits to spiritual teachers¹¹, *yogis*, tortoise posture are found in Mughal paintings.

Besides, the miniature were produced by painters, perhaps Hindus, who knew enough about ascetic life to give not only convening portrayals of the yogis, but also to show their few typical

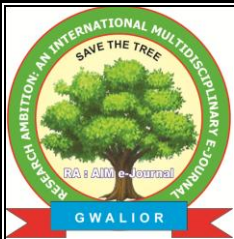


accessories. Each of the quite different *yogis*’ subjects is surrounded by humanizing details, such as pet dogs or cats, staffs meditation crutches, cloth bags and water vessels. The huts, shrines and platforms for meditation are basic, but are distinguished from one another and likewise help to give character to the scenes.

Miniatures of Behr-ul-Hayat, depicts the *yogis* and their hearts, tortoise posture or yogic position. Abul-Fazl gives a basic description of the eighty five positions and the theories of breath control discussed more fully in the *Bahr-ul-Hayat*. He says, “*The writer of these pages, who has witnessed many of these postures, has gazed in astonishment, wondering how any human being could subject his muscles, tendons and bones in this manner to his will*”¹². A painting depicts,¹³ the *kanphatyogi* kneels on a platform in front of a shrine with his left hand on his right knee, his doubled right arm resting on this and his chain supported by his right first. A cat is his companion. Immediately in front of him are the ashes of his fire; beside the *yogi* are bags, a begging bowl, a ewer and a crutch. Another painting depicts, the *yogi* kneels with his crossed hands resting on one thigh and his head turned to the left. A standard has been set up in front of him and a straw hut crowned with vines is behind. He sits between his reed hut and the ashes of his fire¹⁴. These poses are *Kurma* or tortoise. However, by the 19th century they seem to be called *guruda* pose.

The *yogi*, is seen wearing a *kanphat* necklace, kneels with palms on thighs and head turned upward. He is before a rectangular hut with a ewer and a begging bowl near him¹⁵. The *yogi* supports himself on his hands while his legs are wrapped around forearms in a lotus position. He is depicted in front of a small cave with a dog as companion. Ashes of a fire on one side and his possessions, including a *vina*, are on his other side¹⁶. The *khecharimundra* posters; the *yogi* loses consciousness and may die or alternatively gain *Samadhi*.

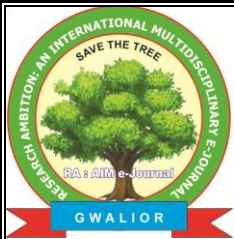
A group of Hindu ascetics are seen seated outside a vine-covered – thatched hut at night the principal figure seated on the grass mat has long matted hair and wears only a pink *dhoti*. Next to him is an old *kanpatayogi* seated in meditation with his knees supported by a *yogapatta*. Facing them on the other side of a fire are two pink-clad monks the older has his left hand raised in a gesture of exposition while the younger tells his rosary.



Besides these, two figures is a peacock feather fly-whisk together with a crutch for meditation and a water-pot. The hut is situated on the bank of river with buildings beyond¹⁷. Another drawing is possible by Goverdhan (c.1620 A.D.), depict a based Hindu ascetic dressed in a loin-cloth it's on the bank of a river outside his cell, in an outcrop of rocks. He supports his left armpit with a crutch, and hands. A water-vessel is standing in the cove¹⁸. The scene represents a hermitage in the woods where a young ascetic stands before a leafy hut below a banyan tree. He holds a large rosary (*mala*) with both hands. A group of deer are in front of the hut, and a stream is indicated in the foreground. Three women on the right are approaching hesitantly or watching him discreetly. The ascetic wore a *mala* in neck and a *tilak* (a mark) on forehead and dhoti only to below to knee and wore mala in wrist¹⁹.

A miniature from *Ramayana* depicts, four *yogis* seen, Sita and Rama in Centre and four *yogis* are seen in four sides. They are nude and had covered only their private part by a little clothes and have mala (*tasbi*), which they wore *mala* in neck²⁰. In other miniature, five ascetics, have covered their private part with little cloth, wore a *mala* on neck and other mala in hand. Long hair and long beard, hair hanging on shoulder. They are in position of professional acrobat-doing *yoga*²¹. In miniature of *Ramayana* (Mughal provincial) depict two ascetics which are in *dhayana-mudra* seated under the same tree²².

The dispute between two groups of *yogis*: The dispute between the *kur* and *puri* sects of *sanyasis* at Thaneshwar in 1567 A.D. This incident is represented in the Mughal painting of *Akbarnama* (Victoria, Albert Museum, London, Khwajah Nijamuddin Ahmad described, "Town of Thanessar, a body of Jogis and sannasis were assembled on the bank of a reservoir, which they call kurukhet, and which is a place of worship of the Brahmans, and to which the people of Hindustan come from all directions, on the days of solar and lunar celipses to bathe : and these are great crowds, and they bestow gold and silver and gems and money and various kind of cloth to brahmans; and They also throw some of these things into the water. The jogis and sannasis also get the share of these alms..... At last the Jogies were defeated and the sannasis were victorious"²³.



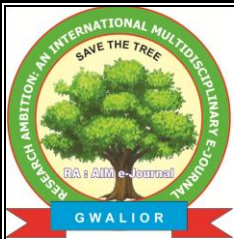
JAIN MONK OR YATI:-

Mughal miniatures represent the Jain Monk. A painting (1589-1595 A.D.) depict²⁴, a Jain ascetic holding a water-bowl in hand and a stick and wore a *lungi* reached to knee wrapped a thin muslin (transparent) cloth round the shoulder, a book in armpit, ring wear in ear, and barefoot. Another painting by Basawan²⁵ (A.D. 1585) depict, a portrait of a Jain ascetic or *yati* or Jain monk. The gossamer treatment of the garment of the monk, who belongs to the order of Shvetambara (clad in white). From 1582 onwards, Hiravijaya, an eminent Jain Guru from Gujarat, and two other Gurus after him, won great influence with the Emperor (Akbar). It was at his instigation that Akbar released prisoners, renounced his beloved hunting, gave their freedom to caged birds, restricted the practice of fishing and prohibited slaughter of animals during periods covering approximately half the year²⁶.

A good number of illustrations depicting *yogis* and *sannyasis* represent them practicing serve austerities. The Mughal Emperors, princes and nobles further showed interest in holy men, whether Muslim or Hindu. It's so appears from the genre pictures depicting Emperors, princes and others visiting ascetics. The miniature "Jahangeer visiting Gosai Jadrup". In another instance, several miniatures show Dara Shikoh visiting ascetics²⁷.

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