

Introduction to Indian Art – An Appreciation
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Module - 03
Narrative Art in Miniature Painting: Mughal and Rajput
Lecture: W3 - L3

Welcome viewers, and welcome to MOOCs online course on Introduction to Indian Artistry and Appreciation. This is the third module of the third week and as you know in this third week, we are looking at the stylistic variations in Indian art by picking up very specific examples whereas, in the first module we looked at Ajanta followed by the second module where we looked at Mamallapuram and Ellora in this module that is the third module we will be looking at two major developments in Indian painting, that is Mughal and Rajput, where narrative was addressed in the most innovative way.

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A distinctive style of painting evolved during the Mughal period at the royal courts of great Mughal emperors from mid-16th century. The extremely refined style of the painting required very talented artists with great technical skill. The best painters of the time were selected by the emperors to join the royal studio as the court-painter. However, the Mughal style was not confined to Mughal and their culture of origin only. It freely absorbed pictorial elements from Persian, pre-Mughal and even European traditions.



To begin with it should be known that a very distinctive style of painting evolved during the Mughal period at the royal courts of great Mughal emperors from mid 16 century onwards. So, Mughals were great patrons of art including architecture, painting, weaving and various other cultural activities, but they particularly all the Mughal emperors and mainly Akbar, Jahangir, and Shahjahan, they were particularly interested in the art of

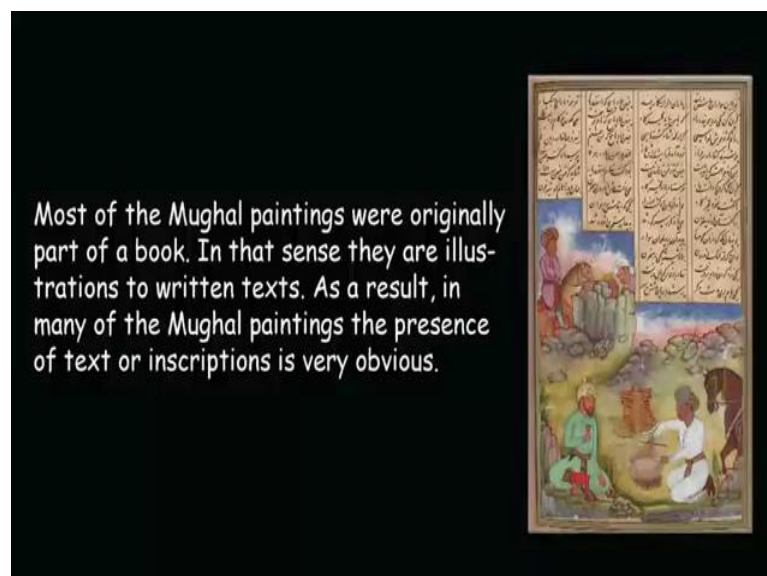
painting and as result they recruited the best painters of their time to their court and made them their court painters.

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Now, this is also true that we do find slightly different stylistic features, though they belong to the same school, they belong to more or less the same convention, yet they do show certain differences between themselves that is the Akbari period from the Jahangiri period. Hence Akbari period and Jahangiri period are considered to be two most important phases in the history of Mughal painting.

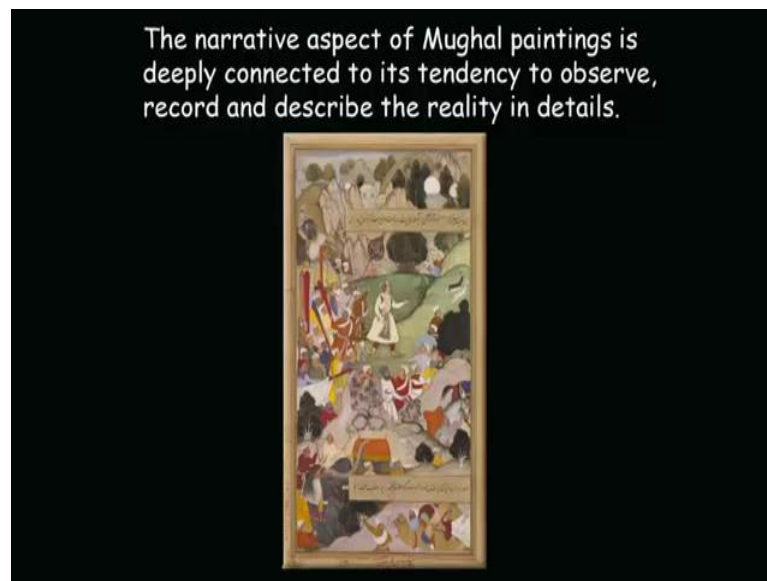
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Now the idea of narrative or the whole idea the concept of narrative painting becomes exceptionally important in the context of Mughal painting, not only because most of their paintings most of the Mughal paintings try to depict narratives of a some kind or the other, but also because most of the Mughal paintings, whether painted independently or is a part of the book or is a part of the album there happened to be very narrative in nature and this is what we need to understand very carefully.

When we use this term that Mughal paintings are very narrative in nature we generally mean that their paintings, most of their paintings they try to be very descriptive to say the least and when this paintings have a tremendous narrative content they are not merely descriptive, but they also become very narrative. The painters try to device ways try to figure out methods to make their paintings very narrative along with them being very descriptive and also they try to make their paintings very successful in terms of a story telling device.

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So, the narrative aspect of Mughal painting is deeply connected to its tendency to observe record and describe the reality in details. So, this is another very interesting aspect. On the one hand Mughal paintings are narrative and they are extraordinarily powerful and successful in terms of the narration, not only because they follow this urge this very requirement, this very need to tell the stories through their paintings.

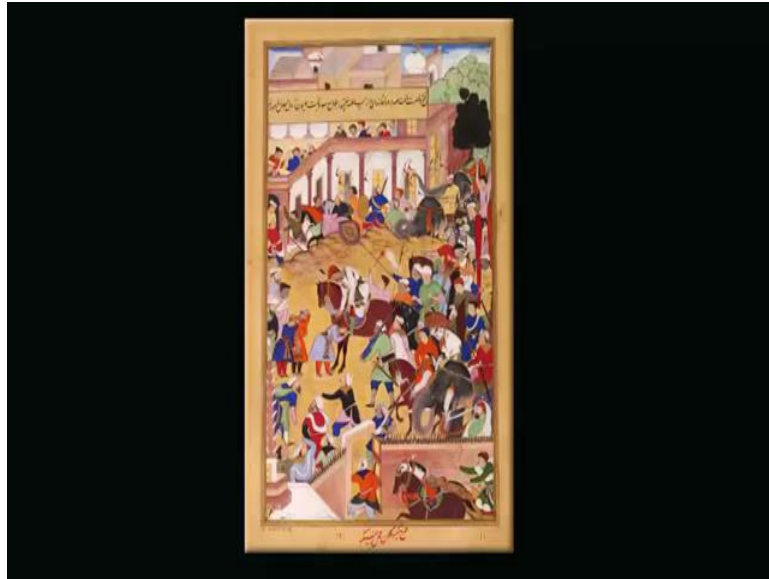
But also because being a very pragmatic very practical minded people Mughals were very particular in terms of their observation in terms of they are recording what they were observing and also in terms of their description of what they had observed and recorded. So, observation and then recording or putting it down in writing or in visual terms what you are observing and finally, describing them in great detail happened to be a part of Mughal culture and that left a great influence on the style or in the language of Mughal painting also.

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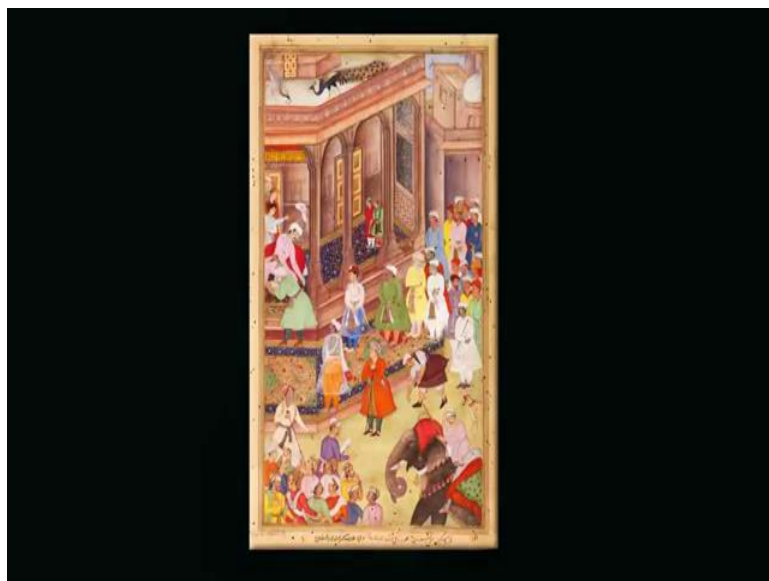


Look at any Mughal painting at random, you will be convinced that Mughal paintings are by and large very powerful in terms of the description and very effective in terms of the narration and it is also true that Mughal paintings are not just narrating or describing some stories, they are also narrative and describing real life events.

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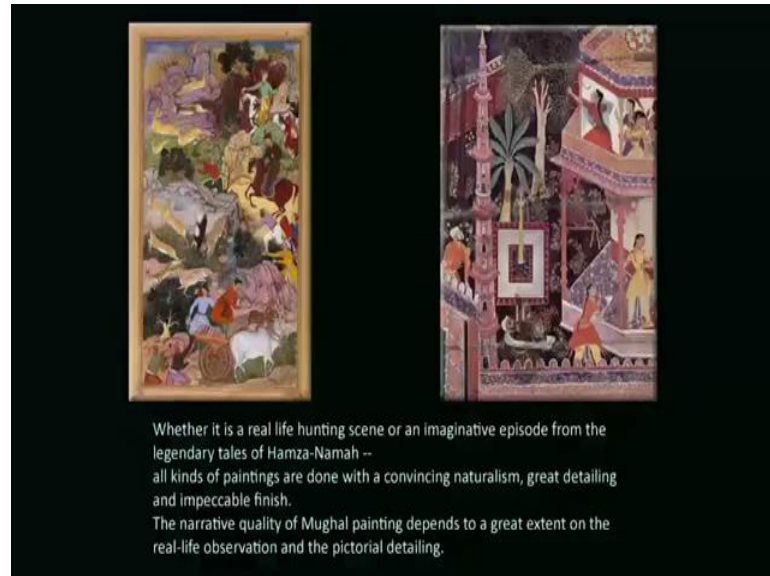


So, the dealing with the two ends of a common spectrum; so on the one hand they devised ways they devised certain methods of composition, certain methods of figuration, certain methods of coloring and also they devised and they practiced and they developed a particular technique of bringing in all the necessary details of figures of trees of costumes of architectural details even the textile details everything.

So, that the painting as a whole as a total experience becomes very convincing, very realistic, very practical, I mean there is no chance of imagination everything is told

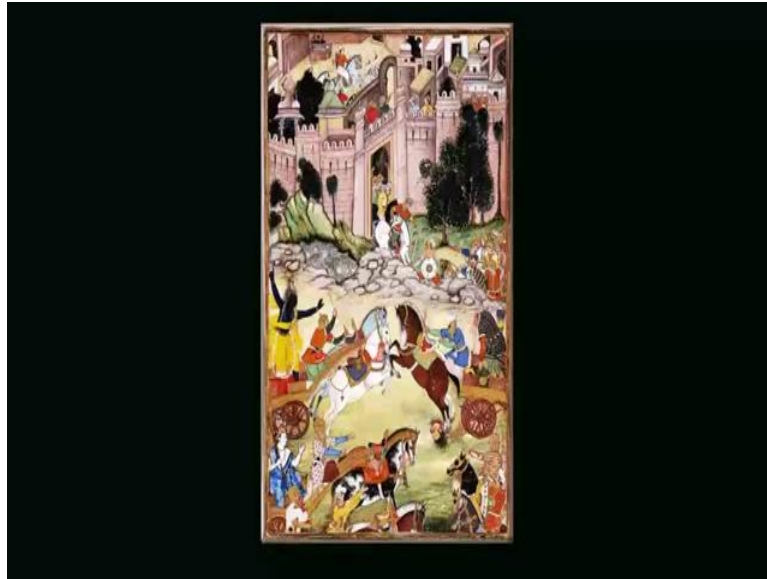
everything is shown everything is depicted in a Mughal. Yet this is true that not all Mughal paintings are based on real life events or happenings some of them are.

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For example in this slide if you look at the left hand image, you will see it is a pictorial depiction of a real life hunting scene carried on by prince Akbar. Whereas, the painting on the right hand is a visual depiction of an episode from a legendry tale called Hamzanama, we really do not know whether the Hamzanama events really took place at one point of time in history or not, but we certainly know that Akbar used to go for hunting and he use to take his painters along with him to observe the hunting. So, that when they come back to studio they can draw or paint on the basis of their experiences outside.

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So, the narrative quality of Mughal painting actual depends to a great extent on the real life observation and the pictorial detailing, irrespective of the fact whether the painting is imaginary or a real life incident. They all get mixed up for that matter look at this image, where you can see a blue scanned figure on the left hand side of our painting with a yellow dress and this is obviously Krishna. Now how come Krishna appears on a Mughal painting? This is what you might be asking yourself.

First of all Akbar got lot of Hindu texts translated into Persian and they got those texts very profusely painted beautifully painted Harivamsa that is a life of Krishna life of Hari was one of those texts. So, this is one painting from Harivamsa Series where you can see Krishna, but look where Krishna has been relocated, he is relocated in a very typical Mughal ambience with Mughal horses Mughal soldiers Mughal architecture. So realistic details, details from the real life of that time around got merged with the idea and the story of lord Krishna in one single painting and this is what Mughal painters have been doing, so successfully, so beautifully over many a periods or many centuries.

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Now, because of that tendency to record the observed reality with a great convincing method, so Mughals in Mughals a painting done by the Mughal painters you can actually rely on the depiction and figure out, what kind of architectures? What kind of interiors this Mughal emperors lift in? What kind of costumes they wore? What kind of jewelries they used? What kind of objects they used in their daily life, even if you do not have them as evidence as real object, but you do have them in their paintings.

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In other words what I am trying to say is that beside the fact that these paintings are wonderful narratives of their time. Wonderful narrative visual narratives of the tales and the legends they were trying to retell to the Mughal courtiers and the Mughal nobles irrespective of all these things these paintings are also for ask the historians and for anybody for that matter are very reliable evidences of that period. You look at the carpeted any Mughal painting this one for example, and you can stay convinced.

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This is how a Mughal carpet actually looked like, this is how a Mughal architecture looked like, this is how a Mughal emperor like Akbar would ride on his horse and hunt and chase the wild animals to hunt them to kill them I mean all these details are because of their (Refer Time: 11:42) for details because of their love for details, Mughal painters looked at carefully not only the dress and costumes and figures, but also animal beings and that is why in Mughal paintings you find representations of animals like Tigers, Lions, Deer, Antelopes.

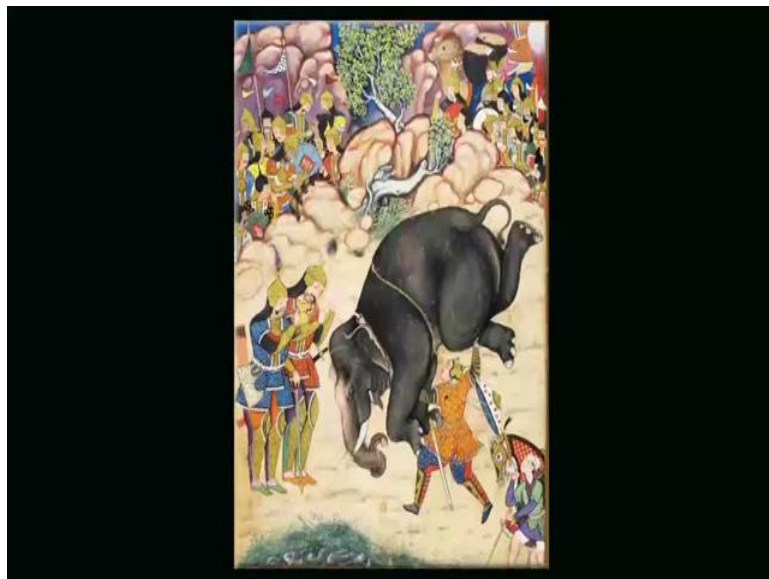
And all kinds of animals in such a realistic way that you might wonder that where did they learn to represent living animals with a great deal of realism because after all they did not go to any art collage to learn that did not study anatomy in the way a western artist would study yet they were able to do this kind of representations very successfully.

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Now, it is difficult to believe usually that this painting would be an episode, a episode from the narration of Hamzanama. If you had not noticed that there is a demon a figure of a demon at the below of the painting at that makes a story a little frictional, but otherwise rest of the objects including the tents, the trees and, the figures everything is as real as they might have seen in their real life.

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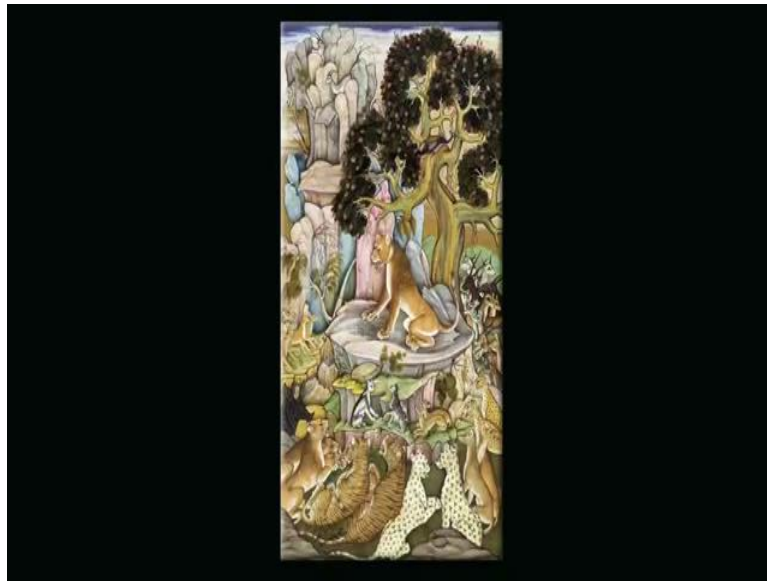


And the daily life and these paintings and last one that we saw and the one we are looking at right now, these paintings are from Hamzanama. And Hamzanama is not a

historical tell it is semi historical, it is fantasy, it is a kind of legend, it is a kind of fable, it is a kind of story, that is very much a product of the imagination of human beings.

At least even if the story was true this story did not happen did not take place during the Mughal time. Yet the way the Mughal painters deal with this stories they make it look very contemporary. They use and they not only use they relocate any story within the Mughal culture that is the beauty of most of their Mughal paintings.

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Even when somebody is doing a painting like this, where there is no human figure it is entirely full of animal figures. You can see that how each of this animals they are all wild animals, they are having a kind of gathering were the lion seems to be the king and probably this is a symbolic image of authority of power, of imperial power, where the lion represents the emperor the king and rest of the animals are like his subjects.

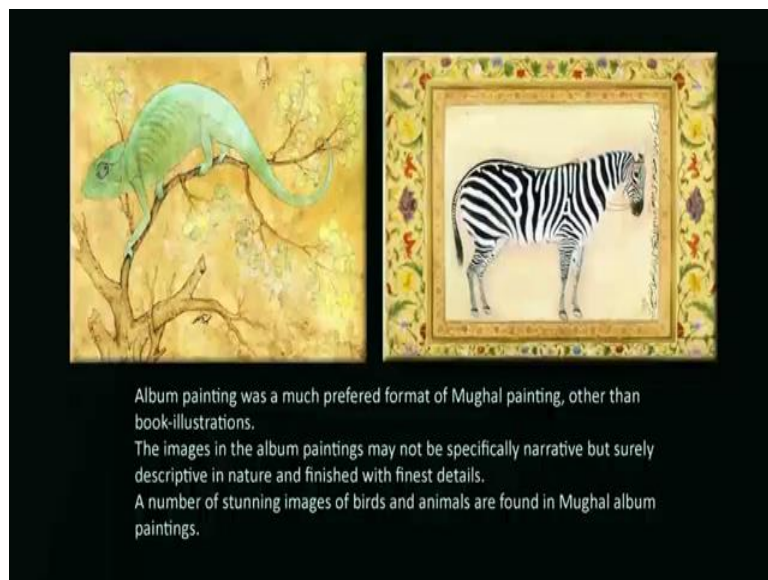
Yet even if it is symbolic each and every animal has been painted with great amount of realism, with great amount of naturalism, with detailing such a kind of detailing that it convinces us that the painters must have observed these animals very closely otherwise it is impossible to depict these animals with so much of convincing details.

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So, in Mughal painting you come across, images of singular birds, singular animals, which is not narrative pursue, I mean the bird does not have any story to offer to us for that matter.

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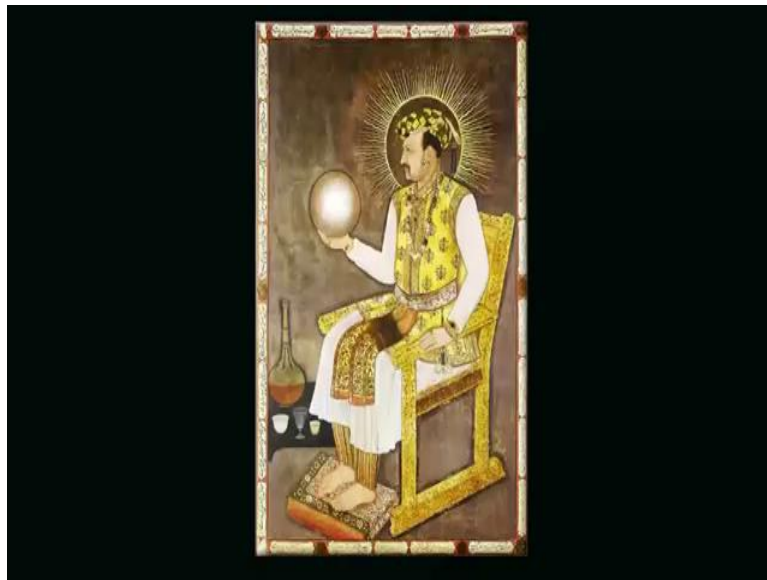
Album painting was a much preferred format of Mughal painting, other than book-illustrations.
The images in the album paintings may not be specifically narrative but surely descriptive in nature and finished with finest details.
A number of stunning images of birds and animals are found in Mughal album paintings.

If you look at this images of zebra and a chameleon these paintings are part of album painting they do not have any particular story to offer and, but they are stories themselves. After all if you read about Jahangir's life, Jahangir's felt very happy and very proud and he felt very satisfactory to have received these animals as gifts from

various people, because he maintained a personal zoo full of exotic animals. Zebra for him an exotic animal; so was chameleon. So was this Turkey. So he got his painters paint them, record them. So, in a sense though not narrative, but these images are visual records of what Jahangir possessed in his private zoo.

So, narrative in Mughal painting takes on different a kind of dimensions, sometimes the narrative painting becomes straight away a device to tell stories, sometimes narrative device is used to retell a story a nonfiction in a very convincing way, sometimes the narrative device in Mughal painting is used to record and describe the real life events and happenings taking place at the royal court or in the life of the emperors, sometimes the same narrative device is also used in this particular way in order to record the very exotic and special animals and birds with great details.

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So, narrative in Mughal painting is not necessarily associated with story, it is associated with ones great ability and impeccable ability to do the detailing. It is connected to the painters talent to observe any object, any figure, any animal with great detail, record them faithfully and describe them visually again with that much amount of detail. So, narrative for the Mughal painters became not only a story telling device, but a device to capture and depict the reality with a great convincing manner.

So, here is the image of Jahangir who is holding a globe, but it looks that Jahangir is giving is giving a pose like a model with certain kind of a symbolic meaning with

whatever he is doing, he is seated on a throne. There is also a hollow right behind his head now the hollow is definitely a pictorial addition maybe it was not there in the real life. So, there are elements there could be elements in within the painting, which are not necessarily coming directly from the real life, but coming from the intension of the patron. This is happening mostly in the Jahangir's time during Akbar's period the pictorial elements were more or less drawn from the real life and less from imagination.

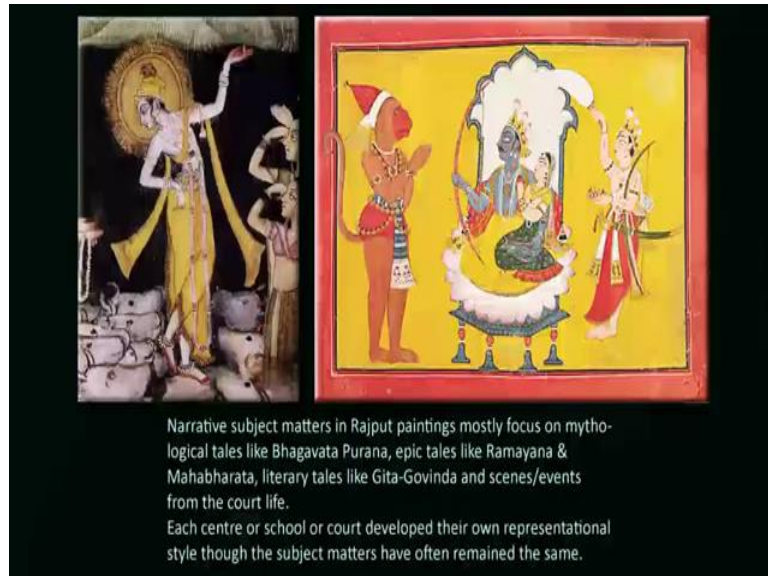
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Now, from Mughal painting we move on to another world of miniature paintings full of narratives and that world is generally in the context of Indian art is known as the world of Rajput painting. The two major places of Rajput miniature paintings are Pahari and Rajasthani. Rajasthani is of course, the present Rajasthan and Pahari is the place which coincides with the present Himachal Pradesh and the present Jammu of today.

Where these two places are lot of small course ruled by kings very powerful kings though their kingdoms were not very big, but a not only that the kings were very powerful, but they were culturally very ambitious and they were great patrons of art literature and music. So, though we say Phari and Rajasthani Rajput miniature painting, but each of these places again has lot of sub division schools and smaller course and each of these courses in Rajasthan and Pahari region each of them patronized a painting tradition at the respective course.

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Now, narrative subject matters in Rajput paintings mostly focused on mythological tales, like Bhagavata Purana epic tales like Ramayana and Mahabharata literary tales like Gitagovinda and of course, scenes and events from the court life we also find similar kind of a narrative literatures being used to paint, narrative paintings in Mughal period, but the subject matters are slightly different sometimes they are all so many subject matters.

For example when we were looking at the Mughal painting we saw quite a few examples of paintings showing a Mughal emperor in chasing may be an animal Mughal emperor in the context of a hunting scene. You will find hunting scenes, but painted in a slightly different way also in Rajput paintings.

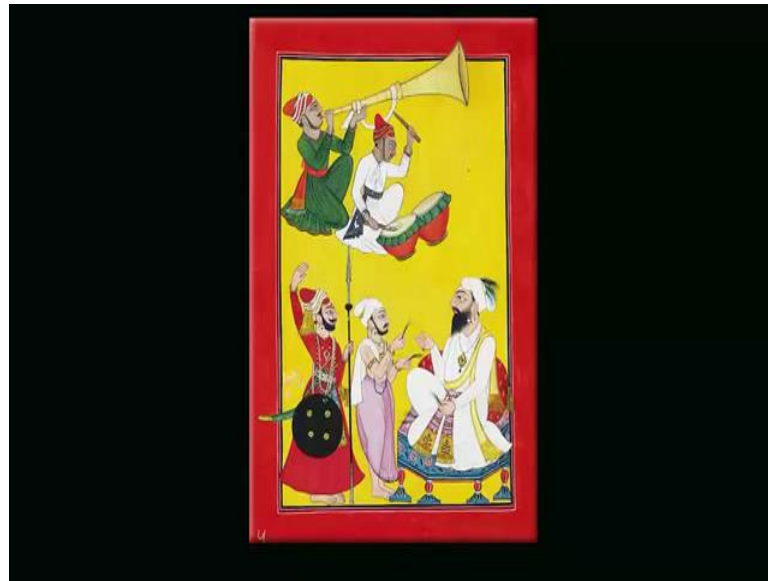
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Now, for example, in Rajput paintings one of the main dominant narratives would be the life of Krishna partly because Bhakti tradition was the dominant culture and the religious philosophy for most of the Rajput kings. They were great devotees of lord Krishna hence they patronized paintings in various styles, paintings about life of Krishna or paintings where images are derived from Vaishnava literary pieces like Gita Govinda and other literary texts, which dealt with the life of Krishna.

But what we are interested in is also the style of painting that we see in Rajput paintings are very valued very rich in terms of his variation and in most cases we find very strong colors are being used very rich color pallet with very contrasting hues like yellow red green white are being used not only to create contrast in terms of color.

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But also to create contrast in space in Rajput paintings we also find that though the painters have been repeatedly painting episodes from Bagavatpura. Here as you can see a very common subject matter where the demon of (Refer Time: 22:49) Trinavarta being subjugated by the child Krishna.

Now, how you show this particular episode, this is entirely up to the painter nobody knows how the Trinavarta demon looks like you need to visualize you need to imagine that demon and Rajput painters because they did not much depend on the realistic

observation because they relied more on their imaginative power. Hence, you get to see as you can see in this painting there is outstanding imagination to depict which helped the painter to resolve this whole challenge this problem of how to depict the demon Trinavarta, which is a world win demon and look how he has been depicted by this unknown painter here of Bhagavata Purana or for that matter Aghasura.

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Bhagavatpurana has details, detailed description this is how Aghasura looks like and all that, but when a Rajput painter has to actually paint this and how does he go what is the scale and the length of the Aghasura how will he manage the composition these are the things that the Puranic stories do not tell you these are the solutions, these are the resolutions that the painter has to come up with using his experience talent and his part of imagination.

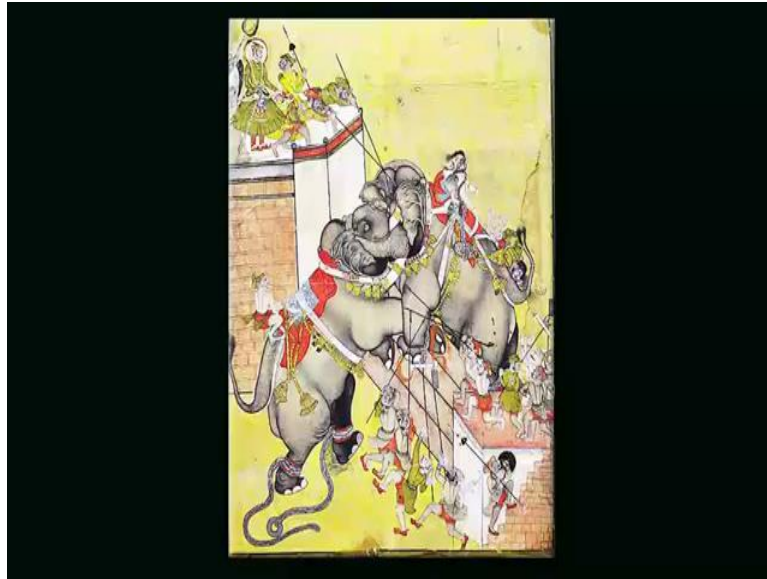
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But at the same time beside the puranic and mythological stories, Rajput painters were very good also at depicting various interesting moments from the real life. For example you can see that an elephant is being chased by another elephant, probably it is a detail from a tremendous chaotic scene or in episode, but I am looking at the and I also want to draw your attention to the character of their different and the whole body anatomy of the elephant tells you a lot about the power, the speed, the dimension, the movement and what is going on in the scene.

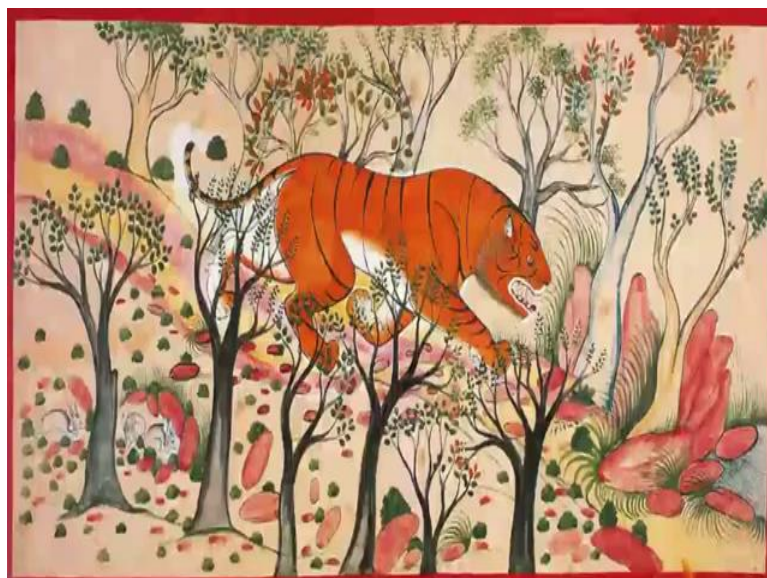
So, the narrative qualities in a painting like this will be found not only in the overall composition, but also in the details not only in the realistic details like in the Rajput paintings, but also in the slight distortion of the realistic details. You can always challenge that in reality and elephant does not look like this as you seen in Rajput paintings. The elephants do look a little distorted.

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But I would like to argue and make a counter argument by saying or by asking whether this counter distortion disturb the whole painting what do you think do not you think that this. So, called distortion actually helps a painter to express the power of the elephant that the kind of movement action they are engaged in. So, this is what we need to look at and beware careful about that is the intension of the painter, but the focus of that painting what exactly it is trying to say or convey, accordingly we should be analyzing the figures the forms and the space.

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For example; this one a Tiger in a forest, we can always use this term stylization to describe how this particular Tiger has been shown, but do not you think looking at the tiger you also get that fearsome quality of the tiger we can almost we are able to we can also listen to his roar, how is shouting, how is roaring. Though it may look that he had the trees the tiger and everything has been slightly stylized, but at the same time the real experience of the tiger the real experience of the space has not be denied, has not been denied or together.

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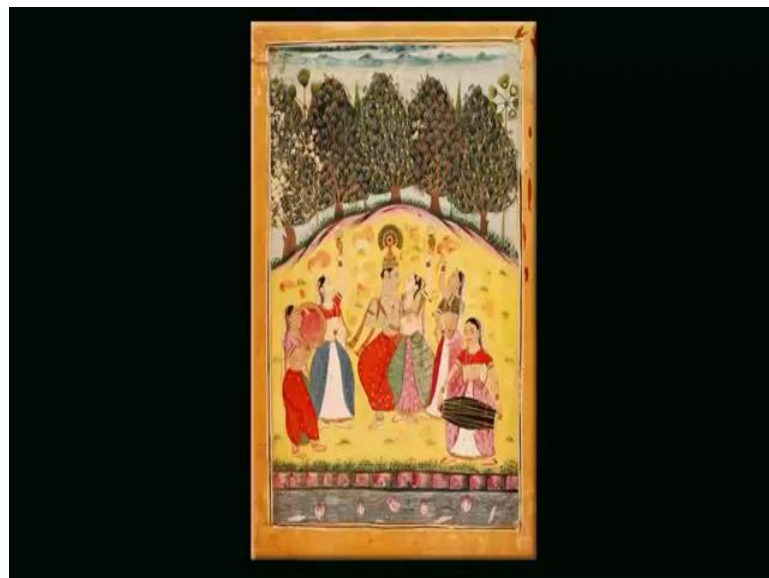
So, in Rajput paintings you find a wonderful combination of pictorial stylistic elements, which was slightly, divide from the reality and the real life elements you look at each of this paintings keeping in mind its core subject matter keeping in mind its content then you will be able to figure out how this combination is working. So, well in most of the Rajput paintings.

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Now, in the context of Rajput painting, it will be a great injustice to not to mention that Ragamala painting is one of the greatest inventions of Rajput painting. It is because in the first time in the history of world art you get to see that music or sound and classical Indian Ragas and Raginis to be more specific it is musical modes pertaining to specific moods moments and emotions are been given pictorial forms in this paintings first time ever we come across something like this.

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Now, do not you think this is also a kind of narrative for example, this one this is Vasant Ragini, where this whole mood, ambience, joy and celebration of Vasant. That is the spring time is being pictorially depicted basically trying to evoke that particular raga Indian classical raga which also celebrates the same mood.

So, the bond between the raga and this pictorial depiction of that raga is the mood and mood is something very abstract and most of the Rajput paintings are successful, absolutely successful in their ability to touch and express mood which is something very abstract through a certain poetic quality which they achieved through their paintings. So, abstraction happens to be in some way or the other an important component of Rajput painting.

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For example; this painting is a very beautiful example and an evidence of how abstraction played an important role in the way Rajput painters were devising their paintings. It is all about fire Pandavas and their places being put on fire where you can see certain traces of their dwellings may be at the back of the painting.

You can see a star started sky suggesting that its night, but how do you paint fire not exactly following the realistic flame, but devising their own formation of fire. The is this possible because there is an element of abstraction, not always grounded in realistic observation, but often taking a recourse imagination and abstraction.

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This is a contribution of Rajput painters. That is why they are able to paint something like this. Where you can see Sudhama he is greatly touched he got emotionally carried away. When he noticed the golden castle of Krishna in the far end almost at the horizon of an undulated land and this is a real land because its painted in Kangra (Refer Time: 31:00) that is Phari region you can be rest a sure, this is the land of the place where these painters lived and worked. I mean this land will not be found in the painting done by a painter in Rajasthan.

So, geography definitely plays a very important role the natural environment, but geography at the same time the natural environment at the same time also provokes the painter to imagine in a very poetic manner. Whereas, detailed naturalistic description became the hallmark of Mughal painting, the poetic quality and abstraction became the hallmark of Rajput painting.

Thank you.