Chapter V

Painting Technique — used by the artist
PAINTINGS TECHNIQUE—USED BY THE ARTIST

Abdur Rahman Chughtai was a highly skilled artist of his time. This was the time when India was not divided and in Bengal school of art, artists there used to paint in water colour wash techniques. Chughtai also painted in water colour wash technique but that was a technique which was unique of his own.

Talking of water colours the name of Chughtai would be the first one that would come to forth and perhaps the only one. His paintings are so close to reality with natural colours that one is simple spell bound and lost into the beautiful colours and brush strokes. Chughtai was born in 1897 and educated at the famous Mayo school of Art, Lahore studied under Abhanindranath Tagore, Bengal and Printmaking in London. He was also head— instructor in chromo-Lithography at the Mayo School of Art, Lahore,\(^1\) Chughtai is known today because of his technique and understanding of prevalent life style
of a particular period which he wants to show in his creation. The unique speciality, which is not found in any other artist's work that makes Chughtai's work special, different from others is in his use of fine lines which are typical in execution, to enhance the beauty of the painting. Another technique that differentiates him from others is his choice of colours and their proper application. He uses soft hues, besides bright colours. Sometimes he uses very contrasting colours in his paintings.

Chughtai choose the water colour media for his work and utilized the infinite capacity of the flowing line work with graded wash-colouring technique. It was for no ordinary reason that the public gave him the title of the "Artist of the East". He used to do in Mughal and Persianised style of painting in water-colour wash technique.
**Artist's Pencil Drawings:**

The impulse for drawing is man's creative right, and drawing has existed in all periods of history. But for drawing as we actually understand it today, it requires support of two important elements:

(i) The use of "Paper" and the other

(ii) The use of "Black Stone".

The use of this "Black stone" resulted in the manufacture of what is known as "Lead pencils," which only date back to the nineteenth century.³

The drawings of M.A. Rahman Chughtai were different from the other famous painters of his time. The famous Indian art critic Venkatachalam said that his line was superior to any other artist in India. The famous London Magazine "Apollo" noted the fine sword-like point of the drawing of M.A. Rahman Chughtai, and suggested in an editorial review that the Western art student could learn much from a study of the line work of this artist.
The pencil excelled in the hands of M.A. Rahman Chughtai. The green and also yellow "Venus" pencils and the blue black "Staedtlers" were used with their wood shorn by the artist's pocket knife.⁴

The artist's hands held that pencil like a sword in a very unusual manner, and he could complete a very long stretch of line, without breaking it. The art was to have his hand in a measurable way related to the page. And his line moved with silkey glideness like a meandering revulet of water. Where a straight line was required, his draftsmanship came in abundance for geometrical patterns and architectural renderings. Often no rubber erasure was required. The line would be perfect in the first instance.

"Motherhood."⁵ (see Pl 31) it is made in the year 1919 and Old Masters like Rembrandt could be akin to him, as well as Modern ones like Picasso. There are probably 4000 pencil drawings he did, and Chughtai Museum of Lahore has most of them. That
collection clearly shows him as a prolific Master of the pencil.

Chughtai, is considered as supreme Master of Pencil drawing of the country. In brief, we can say that Chughtai's pencil-work has its special uniqueness. His style has a living value. It has a continuous movement. His undying creative urge made his paintings a valuable contribution to art world.⁶

**Innocence Par Excellence:**

In assessing the value of Chughtai's art the physical accuracy in his paintings the rules of anatomy and proportion, the laws of perspective, modelling, light and shade and the cast shadows are irrelevant. The Greco-Roman views of art have now long been brushed aside in full recognition of the oriental methods and aims of art. And modern art-criticism universally admits.

Artistic expression need not necessarily take place through a scientifically
complete representation of natural appearance.\textsuperscript{7}

What other’s have said about Chuhtai. Jacob-Baal-Teshuva, a critic of United Nations, has rightly remarked:

Chuhtai combines in his work the traditions of the Muslim masters and the contemporary view of art as having beauty in its own right rather than a mirror of reality. While his work is thoroughly representational, he has nevertheless bestowed upon his subjects modern techniques of abstraction and stylization. In his colours also he has combined the Eastern Love of the bright and radiant with the Western romantic tradition.\textsuperscript{8}

\textbf{Decorative Effect:}

Decorative effect is a key-note of Chuhtai’s art. His beautiful decorative details and his oriental decorative motifs are simply alluring. In the true tradition of his ancestors, he has created many abstract patterns, geometric and floral. "The patterns are above all, decorative embroidering the
essential framework with floral or geometrical design". He has invented for himself a personal symbolism, a system of formal and chromatic equivalent to the intensity of his emotions. His paintings are neither exuberant nor abrupt; the imagined perceptions are distilled into restrained statements of tender outlines and reposeful colour harmonies. "Alongside elaborate details, Chughtai reveals remarkable simplicity, suggestive power and economy. This will be seen, for instance, in the treatment of the draparies which suggest voluminous bodies under them in a few strokes. "An additional element of restraint in his personal emotional symbolism, a delicate suggestiveness in place of direct statement" 9

**Chughtai's Imagination:**

Chughtai is a great painter of figure subjects, especially the solitary figures and duets. And there is a great variation within his own vision
and idiom of figural themes and their conception. He is a man of high feeling and deep insight. His fanciful figures coming from his mental world of the dream of past and steeped in oriental feeling, moods, costumes and manners, romantic and mystified, reveal immense variety. He is verily an imaginative artist who sees with the eye of mind — a vision which is an indispensable quality of any creative art. Mere dexterity and cunning of hand, however great they may be, can not create art unless guided by an inspired mind. That is why mere technical excellence and refinement are not a criterion of art unless there is a beauty of design of pattern and a nobility of conception. And Chughtai combines both virtues of conception with beauties of execution.

Jalaluddin Ahmad, has rightly observed in "Crescent and Green": Indeed Chughtai revels, in concentration in the sense that the moment depicted in the picture seems to epitomise the past and the future also. There is apparently no action in his
pictures; all the figures are shown in repose, but there is a tenseness and a significant air about it which suggests that either something has happened. The essentials of Chughtai's art, to sum up, are: his distinctive individualism of figure types belong to the Persian and Urdu Ghazal; their characteristic postural and gestural mannerism with reposeful and contemplative moods; his mediaval poetic vision of an idealistic dreamland saturated in mystery and romance; his fluid, smooth and facile lines; and his vibrations of colour sequences of both soft harmonies and loud notes. One of his critics has remarked: "To appreciate Chughtai in any high degree one must appreciate pure form, rythmical proportions, the relations of parts, and extreme refinements in these relations. He hates the vague and the uncertain, loving to see with his mind's eye as clearly as with the eye of sense. His paintings are in truth the geometry of beauty. He knows that art begins at the point when the thousand of an inch makes all the difference". "The parrots, nightingales,
the gazalls and wine jars have become purely decorative and form an integral part of the pictorial pattern.

**Mood and Method:**

Chughtai possesses a unique mood and God gifted talent to unfold his creative and artistic potentialities. He is an artist of excellence and high vision. The London art magazine 'Studio' had this to say about him:

"Chughtai's work is not only influenced by Persian paintings of the past. It is an avowed re-birth of that art, with some recognition of modern progress, and the stamp of individual genius - there is an exquisite refinement of mood and method, a typical fervour in every line. Effects are economically achieved through concentration on the main theme of the picture"... Everything he touches is a superb piece of craftsmanship. He has almost swaggering command of the brush so common to the Japanese and the Chinese masters; his handling is more akin to the neat and precise style of Persian and Mughal painters. He uses the pencil with
the delicacy of silver point in style. The European student can learn much from his remarkable economy of means and material."

Water colour is a transparent medium as compared to the opaque characteristics of oil which Chuhtai rejected outrightly and never opted for. Flat colouring is the tradition of the pictorial art of the East which Chuhtai picked up in his early education from his uncle Karim Miran Baksh and later on from the Persian paintings. His works look closer to Persians and reflect Mughal, Kangra and Bengal schools of Paintings. Chuhtai specially selected water colour medium not because it was the popular medium of the day but because oriental artists have always preferred to use water colours.¹² Luthra, P..... wrote in this regard, "He chose the water–colour media for his projections and utilised the infinite capacity of the flowing line work with graded wash colour technique.

In 1946, a year before the partition, he gave a demonstration of his style for the students of Fine Arts College, Hyderabad. According to Fremi Brehmenshah:
First of all, Chughtai dipped white paper in the water and stretched it on the board. He pressed the paper fully to push the air out to avoid bubbles and let it dry for sometime. Then he took imported colour mixed with a lot of water and applied it with brush on the paper in one direction and put second wash on it on the other direction and waited till it got dry. Then with the help of pencil, he outlined a figure and filled the surface with flat colours and allowed to dry completely before the next wash of diluted solution of colours over the painting to be used because of the limited time, he used one wash but told that multiple washes can be applied to get certain tonal effects. In the end, he outlined, the whole figure carefully with brush and finished it...  

M.D. Taseer, whom Chughtai found one of his very close friends, watched him working and recollects the method of his painting in 1920s:

Chughtai has transformed the oriental water colour into tempura and thus brought greater weight and impact to the medium. The creative conception remains
spontaneous. There is no going back, no improvisation as in oils. The nuclear plan of modelling and composition, as well as the whole course of linear design is preordained, the picture is completely planned ahead and does not grow under the brush. But the carefully prepared white gesso ground subdues the semi outline and makes pliable variations possible, and as the China glazes are applied one above the other lines begin to achieve depth. Colour seems to come from inside and has an unusual quality of resonance. The frequent washes, a peculiar technique of Chuhtai, bring out granular areas of pigment which lend body to plastic modelling. And yet the flow and case of linear movement, the dexterity of gradations and the accents of lines do not lose their intensity. The unique combination of power and flexibility is particularly visible in Chuhtai's portraits...

Since this technique was prevalent in first quarter of the 20th century in almost all over India, Chuhtai too could not disentangle himself from
this wave and was carried away in this stream. Chughtai himself wrote:

"There are people who think that the fineness, glow and uniqueness of my colours is due to some special process which I have worked out. They think I make my own colours. In fact, I use imported colours and imported paper, but my technique changes their complexion. I assert that if you were to dip my paintings in water and let them there for a long time even then, when you take them out, you will find the colours as brilliant and lasting as ever".¹⁶

Chughtai had sets of fine brushes which he imported from England and always used imported colours (Windsor and Newton) and also used imported paper. It is to be noted that the surface of the paper also contributes to this translucent quality by allowing the brush to be drawn across it in such a manner as to achieve the sparkle of scattered lights. He was most particular regarding the tools or articles of art.
No doubt, Chuhtai cultivated an unrivalled technique and maintained his separate identity throughout his career of painting, still his technique was not much dissimilar to what the Bengal school artists were working on. One can say that Chuhtai has very swimmingly ripened this Bengal school technique- in his own way but Chuhtai disapproved of any influence of Bengal school technique in his paintings.¹⁷

In this regard he himself remarked: “My technique, colour mixing,— composition and drawing are very much my own. I have spent a life time perfecting them”.

Chuhtai has favourably synthesised, the wash technique and the technique of tempra, (a technique which employs pigments suspended in an effect). M.D. Taseer stated that Chuhtai has transformed the oriental water-colour into tempra and thus brought greater weight and impact to the medium”¹⁸
Malik Shams has described Chughtai's technique in the following manner:

"To avoid murky, dim effects, he has reinforced wash technique by combining or enjoining tempra on to it, through which he gains well defined clearness and luminosity of colours in that they could obtain the brilliancy and depth of colours through their tempra so much so that it yielded them effects of glass mosaics or glazed tiles. And Chughtai while using wash technique adds subsequent tempra coating to get the best of both."

The faint colour washes around delicate but distinct out-lines are operated one after another till the desired quality of lightness is acquired. The super imposition of flat washes used repeatedly and each wash was conceded to dry completely before its next application. The painting with thin colours were applied to give an appearance of being the part of paper itself. The details were worked out with brush on the preplanned compositions. The use of wash and repeated washes, painting . over the
washes and proximity of wet colours of various lines are processed with perfect harmony.\textsuperscript{20}

\textbf{Novelty Of Lines And Colours, In Chughtai Paintings:}

Herman Goetz, a well-known German scholar wrote:

"This is also the characteristic of the copious work of his success M.A. Chughtai, which, however developed a beautiful rhythm, (reminiscent of Burne-Jones, Carne, Morris) and a pellucid colour."\textsuperscript{21}

Chughtai's choice of colour was no doubt determined by the unique sensibility of the painter. The selection of the colours is personal but the harmonisation of the preferred colours, their application in specific areas within the stipulated space of the paper, their modulated tones, all these manifest Chughtai's achievement over the skill of mixing of colours and the manipulation of brush. For a good artist the
knowledge of colour harmony and its proper use are very essential aspects.

The usage of colour (in a symbolic way) by Chuqhtai is more or less prescribed by his innerself.

The reflection of his personality is voiced through his colours. Though in some of his paintings these are established in the sense of symbols. The meaning of colour and its usage change with the environment so much so the approach towards the selection of colours.\(^2\)

Primary colours remained dearest to his colour palette though the early works of first phase of Chuqhtai’s work which is considered from 1916 to 1920 represent a mixture of various hues and Chuqhtai used relatively narrow range, low toned colours which included browns and greys. Later Reds, Yellows, Blues and Greens were employed in their brilliant as well as on subdued forms on the surface of paper. He knew the secrets and behaviour
of the colour and his colours reflect the multifarious moods of environment. He could extract from colour its sound and its essence.

Red being the favourite of his palette, is handled with, a great sense of perfection. Sharfun Nisa (Plate 30) is bathing with red tone. Red is an exciting colour and is a symbol of passion and love. The emotional value is aggravated by the use of bright red for the dress of a young woman. This is a land mark in Chuhtai's career and is a rare achievement in conception composition.²³

It is really a great contribution to art. He is a master of colours and a great draftsman. He brought about a revolutionary change of outlook in the art of east. He gave a new direction to art human essence. In this regard Iqbal makes God declare:

"One who does not possess creative power, to use is naught but an infidel and a heretic".²⁴
The true function of all artistic effort is not merely to provide amusement or to give delight but to awaken high sympathies in man. Just as God has created Nature, man creates art, and it is for us to decide whether man's artistic creations are not superior in design and grace to the world created by God. Pointing out the fact that the results of his creative activity show marks of superior craftsmanship.\textsuperscript{25}

Without a miracle nations can not rise—what is art without the striking power of the Moses staff?\textsuperscript{26}

If art does not contribute to the fuelness and exuberance of life and fails to provide guidance for humanity in the various problems that baffle it, that art is meaningless. It is no doubt, a pseudo art. Chughtai is a creative artist and has perfect sense of using the different colour schemes and its tradition of course, he is master in the sense that he knows the secret of all the colours he uses in
his paintings. The treatment of his colouring is totally his own. He has explored some new tones which give his painting extraordinary exclusive freshness.

Kashmira Singh observed that as far as he can judge, yellow is Chughtai’s favourite colour and in his preference, he is Indian rather than Persian or Mughal. 27

There is no doubt in saying that he was influenced much by Persian and Mughal artists. As Kashmira Singh said “he is the master of colours and loves yellow colour immensely. Here his likeness resembles with modern Dutch artist Van Gogh”.

But it is also fact that, he loves neither red nor blue nor yellow. He treats all colours with the sense and strength of a master, for he has an extraordinary knowledge of colour scheme and its tradition. 28
Moreover Chughtai line work has its own value and uniqueness. This is one of the most important features of his artistic creativity. In this regard Razia Sirajuddin said:

"The most distinctive feature of chughtais art is his line work. It is this which gives his pictures their exquisite fineness, Their maturity and a perpetual look of elegance...... they are never forced and abrupt but give one the feeling of continuity and expansion."

The artist’s mastery over lines and his full control to draw lines in depicting a painting subject can better be judged in his painting work besides pencil sketches. Accordingly M.D. Taseer has rightly opines:

"Chughtai sensuous lines have the quality, the flow and flexibility of a soft badger hair brush and the coppery medium does not retard the liquidity of line for which chughtai is rightly famous... the lines flow torrently, as it a stream has left the meadows and entered a ravine. Which
ever medium he uses, he remains what he is, an oriental painter".\textsuperscript{30}

Chughtai has shown his brilliance in metal working method and in pen, ink and brush drawing. In some of his compositions, the main emphasis is on line apart from the colour used here and there in selected areas to give more illustrative approach.
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5. Ibid.


7. The exhibition entitled, "The unknown chughtai", op-cit, p.4


9. Ibid.,

10. Ibid., pp.7-8.
11. Ibid.,
12. Lathra., Promilla., op-cit., p-171
14. Luthra promilla, op-cit., p.172
15. Ibid.,
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