Chapter VI

A Critical Assessment Of Chuughtai's Work
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Before assessing art values in chughtai's work let us see what some well known critics said about his work. For example, Sir Lawrence Binyon, "the late Keeper of Oriental Antiquities at the British Museum, wrote in a letter:

"I admire the rare gift of poetic feeling which is revealed in the painting and especially the lovely line". The Late Dr. Rabindra Nath Tagore expressed his appreciation in a letter: "your perfect command over lines and the delicate colouring of your picture have a great appeal." and to quote chughtai himself: "as regards my art, I am not influenced by any artist of East and West. The themes, composition, figures and characters are all my own creations. Although to some extent undying classical designs have influenced me but not like my contemporaries who are mad about various "isms" where my paintings were first exhibited it was quite a strange style, which although greatly appreciated, gave good material to critics, half
encouraged and half discouraged. I carried on my effort and endeavours for the fulfillment of my high aspirations. Enthusiasm gave new trend to inspirations; drawing became bolder, more fluent and above all the magic of colour grew richer and harmonious — all original and individual, — my own.”¹

And a name began to be established in the history of art: “Chughtai Art”.

Imitation of natural forms and anatomy are no longer the chief criterion. All that we are concerned from the point of aesthetic approach is the pictorial design, and the use of the structure and pattern, whether conceived fancifully or in terms of accurately rendered natural forms. The nature and effect of line, mass, form and colour in a painting are more important elements. Selection and arrangement of the other elements of the painting (i.e. sacrificing some elements and emphasising some other) are the essence of art of painting.
Hence inaccuracies of anatomy in the paintings of Chughtai are irrelevant so long as the treatment is artistic. But he has his own peculiar system; his own specific impressive style of human anatomy. "He treats the human body architecturally."² and it is this type in his figure subjects which tends his works.

**Chughtai-ness** his style of human anatomy is also echoed in his treatment of trees and bushes which have the same fantasy of shape. The landscapes, backgrounds, architectural settings and atmosphere all have a peculiar character of Chughtai-Ness in all its aspects and phases. Thus his facial types and the gestures and attitudes of his figures, although apparently awkward, they constitutes his unique individualism. Every figure of the artist has a particular message to convey. His study of human figure is matchless. "Rama Chandra Rao in his Modern Indian Painting. Where in he treats Chughtai under New Horizons observes: where in the indelible stamp of chugaism consists of deliberate deviation of anatomy, in form
by a certain typical graceful naïveté and charm. The fantasies of forms and shapes are rendered in plastic lines at once more spontaneous and fluid".  

Inspite of the anecdotal and illustrative character, Chuughtai's paintings can be enjoyed as pure art. So significant are the aesthetic qualities of line, colour and form in the visual concepts and images that form the point of view of the pictorial expression in his pictures can well be appreciated absolutely without knowing their themes or subjects. He retains the distinctive mood and posture of the Persian tradition but gives his pictures a special quality of his own in lovely colour combination, in delicate lines that seem to be less lines of painting than of some inaudible poetry made visible, infolds of drapery that are never mere coverings to or discovering of the human body, but best women in the liturgy of beauty, in decorative back grounds based on
saracenic tyranny of the actual into free citizenship of the realm of romance.⁴

Chughtai was fascinated by Ajanta paintings so, Abdullah, his brother and himself made a trip to the south and visited Hyderabad and after that they went to see the Ajanta frescoes⁵. There, they spent a few days watching closely the gracious figures of Ajanta and admiring Sub lime beauty in the form of colour and line.⁵

This visit to Ajanta caves left an undying impact on the style of chughtai. He studied every fresco piece minutely and tried to incorporate that unique style in his paintings. Ajanta, like Mughal or Persian also inspired him much.

Chughtai's art has traversed over the vast span of Hindu art. He was very much impressed by the figures in the paintings of Ajanta and Alora. In this respect some impressions can be noticed in his paintings in Muragga-e-Chughtai, again in

⁴ Fresco- Wall Painting
Amal-e-Chughtai there is a painting in which chughtai has shown a woman sitting in front of a temple. In the dark atmosphere under the Hindu style of an arch, the woman with a lit earthen lamp on her head, her body contours and seminaked bosom is a challenge to the priests and suggests that the temple should be a place to worship this woman and not the deity. The painting is an example of beauty well depicted. 

This shows so much he was inspired by the Ajanta and Alora. The examples of standard beauty in chughtai's paintings are oriental. This oriental emphasis is more aesthetic and attractive in chughtai's paintings than in Iqbal's poetry. It is more feminine than masculine in nature and character which have been shown in many ways, eyes, hands and lips are important in chughtai's paintings. Eyes like almond muscara eyes are all attractive for chughtai. The thick bulky lips having sex appeal, their thin corners, all show
the aesthetic taste of the artist. All these reflect the turbulent inner feeling of the artist which were kept suppressed due to the religious atmosphere of his house.⁷

Chughtai gave his figures for the sake of sex appeal, well drawn and specially to set up to appear triangular in form. To balance the head and body he has generally negotiated and recognises the human figures in geometrical forms. Through figure we can understand the nature and background of its message. He tries to remove the difference between the size of the head and the body outwardly and thus this difference is minimised just with the help of dress and other outer forms. All such short coming have been tried to be removed with the help of drawing lines after lines, showing the curves of the creases of the dress and by the way of sitting or standing postures. To achieve the balance, chughtai has also taken help from the background setting. Forms
used in the background have some definite relation from certain angle with that of the main force drawn in the foreground of the painting. Sometimes the foreground and the background of the scene have been achieved just by the proper use of the colour. Again sometimes the balance is achieved through the main forms sitting postures lines balance with certain forms of the background. Chughtai loves balancing ratio proportion and perspective as well. He knows how to present a picture with its various aspects.

Chughtai is not only an artist but he is a real photographer. The people who know about chughtai's command over the lines and drawing fine lines may think about his paintings to be devoid of natural atmosphere but when we observe chughtai's work keenly only then we can note that the photography is the starting point of the art of chughtai. The difference of foreground and background is not found in Mughal or Iranian painting similarly the
perspective has no place in Mughal or Iranian paintings'. Chughtai added these in his paintings and he knew that unnecessary loading of background mares the all over beauty and atmosphere of the painting. Selection of proper forms and other tools of art plays an important role in making the central idea more prominent and attractive. He also use the background for the sake of balance, selection of proper forms, perspective, balance, and proper use of spaces are the main characteristics of chughtai's paintings. He also follows certain rules of portrait paintings. There are, gesture, pose, different parts of the body to emphasize such as proper setting of hands. He does not believe in the Mughal and Iranian concept of painting the details of each part of the body. No doubt, he got inspiration from these paintings, yet he formed his own style. Like a good photographer he believes in giving an over all good effect to the whole of the painting. The
details in his paintings are all related to the central figure or idea. The idea of distance in a picture taken by a camera is conceived by relatively clear or faint object in the picture. Sometimes the idea of distance in a painting is achieved by means of graded colour application.\footnote{9}

Chughtai invariable painted single figures, sometimes lightly draped, sometimes heavily draped or semi nudes and even nudes. the poses and attitudes are free, fanciful, whimsical, poetical and sometimes realistic. The man and woman of chughtai have peculiar face and anatomy which he assimilated precisely after studying the art of Persia, Ajanta and Kangra. His understanding of art objects was unique.\footnote{10}

Women of chughtai have elongated bodies and variety of faces which he painted according to their need. The forehead rises from the ridge of the nose, sometimes straight. Big heavy lidded eyes, narrow, half closed, fish like and bird like
eyes, almond shaped eyes, arches pencilled eyebrows, straight, sharp edged and aquiline nose, flower-petalled lips, then sometimes round chines, narrow, short, round and long necks, heavy rounded bosoms and big shoulders, the hair waved on each side sometimes on fore head to reduce the height and width of the forehead, the winglet is falling down on either side of the shoulder, head covered with turban or dupatta or hair pulled back tightly to form a bun or plait and above all exaggerated anatomy which occupies chughtai's painting surface freely.\textsuperscript{11}

The rhythmical flow of lines in his etchings and drawings define notable feature of chughtai's art. An etching of a woman \textit{Portrait} reproduced in Chughtai's \textit{Indian Paintings}, has the resemblance of facial expression of Kishangarh miniature painting but chughtai very carefully moulded this in his own style by giving it a liner effect depicted on different media.\textsuperscript{12}
In brief, we can say that Chughtai was one of the most important and influential oriental artists. His creative work, no doubt, is the composition of various schools of art. He was influenced mainly by Persian, Mughal, Ajanta, Alora, Kishangarh and the like schools.

Have a thorough look on his work you will come to know something amazing. In present days there are many industries such as fashion industry, dress designing industry, cosmetic industry, jewellery industry, stylish headgears, foot wears industry producing, for example, female 'juteez' all these industries in design and decoration of the items they are producing, it seems, have an impression of the designs and decorations, as found in chughtai's paintings.

These industries if not exactly copying chughtai's design/decoration style, seem to be well impressed by his imaginative creativity. Visit the modern times shops, malls, haats or any boutiques
shop of the above mentioned industrial production items, the work of artisans, craftsmen and designer's creations whether in costumes or other articles to be worn by women, sometimes reminds us that there is a similarity found in these items to that of the artistic work of chughtai. Yes, chughtai the artist who has a unique style of his own while he decorates women in his paintings. The beautiful bangles or bracelets of Pervezabad (Uttar Pradesh), juteez from Punjab, silver jewellery from Hyderabad (Andhra Pradesh), or silk fabric from Banaras (Uttar Pradesh), the designs and decorations, found in the items being produced at these places, can be traced in the paintings of this Artist that is Mohd. Abdul Rahman chughtai.

As a creative artist he has formed his own style besides Ajanta Alora, Rajasthan, Mughal schools and we can say that his style or technique is the composite fruit of all other art-systems. Through in every line or stroke he has brought a
revolution in the history of modern painting, especially in the field of the miniature paintings. He was most original, creative, impressive and influential artist in the art world.
References

1. Exhibition, "The unknown Chughtai", A brochure sent to me by Mr. Arif Rahman Chughtai, Director chughtai Museum Trust, Lahore, p. 9.

2. "The beauty of lines" by Malik Shams, retired Curator, Central Museum Lahore.

3. Ibid.,


5. Luthra, Promilla, op-cit., p.20

6. Abdullah, Chughtai, op. cit., p.113

7. Ibid., pp.112-113

8. Ibid., p.114

9. Ibid., pp.115-116

10. Luthra, p. op-cit., p.115

11. Ibid., p. 186

12. Ibid.,