

Depiction Of Birds In The Miniature Paintings Of Jahangir's Era: Thematic Approach

Samina Mukhtiar¹, Dr. Imrana Seemi²

Abstract

The reign of Emperor Jahangir (1605-1627) marked a turning point in Mughal art, particularly in the complex world of miniature painting. Bird depictions, with extraordinary detail and realism, were central to this artistic flowering. These avian representations not only demonstrate Jahangir's keen interest in natural history, but also demonstrate the various cultural and creative influences that influenced the Mughal court. This study focuses into the artistic techniques used by expert painters of Jahangir's court, such as Abul Hasan, Mansoor, Bichitra, Govardhan, and Bisandas, whose works stand out as exceptional triumphs in the genre.

The analysis begins with an indepth investigation of the technical features, focusing on the precise brushwork, bright colour palettes¹, and compositional methods that distinguished that era's bird paintings. It then explores into the symbolic associations buried in these paintings, exploring how birds were more than just natural subjects, but also carriers of deeper cultural and spiritual importance.

Finally, the research looks into the impact of European artistic influences on Mughal miniature painting, specifically the use of perspective and naturalistic realism. The study uses a thematic analysis to provide light on the multidimensional nature of Jahangir-era bird paintings, establishing them as a significant component of the larger cultural and creative advances that constituted one of Indian art's golden periods.

Keywords: *Mughal Paintings, Persian, Indian style, paintings, symbolism, Mughal emperors, Akbarnama, Indian portraiture, Western traditions, portrait, landscapes, masterpiece, historical illustrations, transformed, Mughal masterpiece, characteristic, , figural mass, thematic.*

Introduction

After starting in Persia, the Mughal growth of miniature and painting continued for around three centuries in India. The art of creating miniatures was inherited and modified by generations that followed. Art and architecture were projected by Babur, the first Mughal emperor, who had strong aesthetic sensibilities. His affiliation with gardens and his interest in them are remarkable, but he also contributed significantly to the establishment of a small foundation. In addition to encouraging miniature painting, his son Humayun invited some Persian painters to India. Two notable figures who began to depict the vibrant and dynamic Persian culture while including

¹Ph.D. Scholar, Art And Design Department, College Of Home Economics, University Of Peshawar. Email: Saminamukhtiar@Uop.Edu.Pk

²Chairperson, Department Of Art And Design, University Of Peshawar. Email: I.Seemi2012@Gmail.Com And Imranaseemi@Uop.Edu.Pk

elements of Indian appeal were Abdus Samad and Mir Sayyid Ali. Akbar, the son of Humayun, discovered how to draw from these creators.

Even Akbar was keen to incorporate elements of his native culture with the blending of Islamic and Persian styles. He is regarded as one of the most important Mughal emperors due to his enthusiasm and appreciation for all forms of art. Several artists were supported by him when he was in power, and he showed his appreciation for their work by giving them expensive presents and rewards. Following his father Akbar, Jahangir built the foundations for the Mughal empire. Emperor Jahangir is renowned for his creative achievements, especially in the realm of miniature painting. There is enough evidence of Jahangir's passion with nature, and his support of the arts produced a collection of work notable for its meticulous and accurate portrayals of nature, particularly birds. In order to better understand the depictions of birds in Jahangir's miniature paintings, this study looks at the artistic techniques, symbolic interpretations, and European influences that influenced these pieces(Koch,1999).

Artistic Techniques

The Jahangir era miniature paintings are notable for their realistic portrayals of birds that exhibit great attention to detail. In order to depict the complex feather patterns and the play of light on plumage, artists used exquisite brushwork, generating a lifelike image that was seldom seen in Mughal art (Beach, 1981: 44).The use of vivid colours and meticulous representations of various species demonstrate the artist's talent as well as the impact of European reality, which brought new methods like perspective and shading (Welch, 1976: 102).One painting that demonstrates the artists' ability to render their themes with a great degree of naturalism is "Jahangir Receives Prince Khurram," which features birds that are depicted in exquisite detail (Goswamy & Fischer,2011:124).The painters' deft use of precise lines and deliberate brushstrokes to capture the feathers of the birds shows an extensive knowledge of avian anatomy and behaviour.

Symbolism and Cultural Context

Mughal miniature paintings frequently featured birds with deep symbolic implications. Certain creatures, like the falcon, are connected to nobility and power; they represent the emperor's strength and dominion (Koch, 2001: 85).The Mughal idea of the emperor as a ruler endowed with divine characteristics was in line with the peacock, which is frequently seen in these paintings and symbolises beauty, immortality, and paradise (Jahangir, 1999: 256).

Jahangir was fascinated by birds and their symbolic significance, as evidenced by his own writings in the *Jahangirnama*. He emphasizes the significance of birds as symbols of his reign and as objects of art by describing his observations and cataloguing of numerous bird species on multiple occasions (Jahangir, 1999: 312).When birds are portrayed in lush gardens or paradisiacal settings, for example, their symbolic connotations are further strengthened, emphasising their connection to the divine and the everlasting.

Influence of European Naturalism

The intricate and accurate depictions of birds in Mughal paintings during Jahangir's reign demonstrate the impact of European art on Mughal painting. Jesuit missionaries and diplomats brought European prints and paintings to the Mughal court, where they presented new artistic techniques that the Mughal painters quickly embraced (Welch, 1976: 79).Using perspective, chiaroscuro (the manipulation of light and shade), and a more realistic portrayal of the natural world were some of these techniques. The artwork "Jahangir Preferring a Sufi Shaikh to Kings," which features birds rendered with a degree of realism and detail that strongly resembles the European style of the era, is among the most

remarkable instances of this influence (Beach, 1981: 97). The fusion of these European methods with Mughal aesthetic tradition resulted in a unique style that became a trademark of Jahangir-era miniatures.

Literature Review

The fourth emperor of the Mughal dynasty, which was established in 1526 A.D. by his great grandfather Babur (1483-1530), was Jahangir (1605-1627). Throughout almost two centuries, the dynasty unified and ruled the Indian subcontinent. It was the first time in Indian history that Babur and his heirs elevated their court from its nomadic Central Asian roots to a sophisticated creative culture (Brend, 1991). The Mughals were known to be supporters of art, especially miniature painting, and were greatly influenced by the wealthy and powerful Persian culture as well as Indian riches (Ikram, 1961; Hassan, 1996). The foundation for the Mughal studio, where the art of the Mughal court started, was laid by Babur's son Humayun r. 1530–40, 1555–56. It flourished more under the support of his successor, Akbar, who ruled from 1556 to 1605, and it peaked under Jahangir's expertise. Following his father's *tasvirkhana* (painting studio) and his huge and stable business, Jahangir invested the time and resources required to significantly elevate the calibre of artistic output. Jahangir favoured single-page paintings that could be seen in their own context and framework once they were bound in a *muraqqa*, in contrast to his father, whose *tasvirkhana* created important decorated books. 8

In addition, Jahangir picked themes for his paintings from everyday life rather than Akbar's favourite historical or mythological subjects. According to Kumar, paintings have been commissioned for political purposes, historical event documentation, grandiose displays, gifts, or just to add to *muraqqa*. Encased in books barely bigger than a medium-sized notepad, these paintings were formal, informal, spiritual, worldly, ostentatious, and historical. According to Goetz (1957), Jahangir is regarded as one of the most devoted buyers of Mughal miniature paintings, and his time is celebrated as the "Golden Age" of Mughal art in India (Marika, 2000). In his autobiography, *Jahangirnama*, Jahangir makes the following claim about his expertise as a connoisseur of art: "I enjoy painting so much and am so skilled at judging it that, even if the name of the artist is not mentioned, no work by any master, past or present, can be shown to me and I not immediately know who created it." I'm capable to identify which master created each face, even in an instance with multiple figures. If the eyebrows and eyes were created by several artists in a single artwork, I can ascertain who created the eyebrows and eyes, as well as the face (Thackson, 1999). (Beach) The emperor's personal hobbies as well as the prevailing cultural and spiritual ideas of the time are reflected in the birds that have a deep symbolic meaning in Mughal miniature paintings from the Jahangir reign. These portrayals reflect a vast tapestry of meanings that resonate with the intellectual and spiritual currents of the Mughal court, surpassing simple artistic representations of natural themes.

Birds as Symbols in Jahangir-Era Miniatures

1. Imperial Dominion and Royal Authority: Some birds, such as the eagle and the falcon, are frequently connected to imperial dominion and power. Owing to his intense interest in falconry, Jahangir often had paintings of these birds commissioned, signifying his command over his kingdom and his position as a king bestowed with heavenly favor (Vaughan, 1999). Specifically, the falcon was a representation of the king's immense power, grace, and agility.
2. Spirituality and Mysticism: In Mughal art, birds such as the parrot, peacock, and the fabled huma bird have spiritual connotations. A symbol of beauty, longevity, and the soul's journey towards divinity, the peacock is frequently observed with its brilliant plumage.

3. **Knowledge and Wisdom:** The parrot, which appears frequently in Mughal miniatures, is a symbol of knowledge and eloquence.
4. **Love and Faithfulness:** In Mughal art, birds such as the dove and the bulbul (nightingale) are often linked to love, faithfulness, and yearning. These birds were not only beautiful themes in Jahangir's court, but also representations of the courtly love culture that grew throughout his rule.

Influences from Across Cultures and Cultural Synthesis: Paintings from the Jahangir era's symbolic depictions of birds also show the blending of European, Persian, and Indian creative traditions. The incorporation of birds such as the European canary or the hoopoe signifies the impact of European natural history and art, signifying the Mughal court's global outlook and receptiveness to outside influences.

Methodology

This study examines how birds are portrayed in Jahangir's miniature paintings using a qualitative method, focusing on thematic analysis of miniature artworks to find avian-related themes and patterns. The present research study is based on the fundamental approach of thematic analysis, which is renowned for its adaptability and significance in qualitative research (Braun & Clarke, 2012). The previously mentioned instrument facilitates the methodical investigation of themes and patterns within data, thus making it particularly suitable for the analysis of artistic and symbolic elements found in Mughal miniature paintings. The three primary phases of the process are the visual analysis, contextual analysis, and artwork selection. By adopting these stages, one can have an extensive understanding of the artistic methods, symbolic interpretations, and cross-cultural influences that exist in these works

1. Selection of Artworks

The meticulous selection of Jahangir era miniature paintings is the first stage in this research project. The paintings are selected according to their **Historical Relevancy, Subject Matter and Availability of source Documentation**

Primary sources include museum at Lahore and libraries including Peshawar. In addition, reproductions in scholarly publications, such as Stuart Cary Welch's *Mughal Painting: A Study in Naturalism*, are considered.

2. Visual Analysis:

The research makes use of a number of art historical techniques, such as iconographic analysis—which deciphers the symbolic meanings of the birds—and formal analysis, which assesses the paintings' stylistic and visual features.

3. Contextual Analysis

Contextual analysis places the paintings in the larger cultural, historical, and intellectual context of Jahangir's court, giving further depth to the visual interpretation.

4. Coding: Initial codes are created for birds in the paintings that view out, such as specific bird kind, patterns, Scenes, hues, and themes. Later on, these codes were systematically implemented across all collected paintings to ensure reliability.

5.Theme development: The codes generated are then grouped into potential themes that gain important aspects of the paintings, such as " birds pecie," " colours harmony" , "figures" patterns," and "ancient context." These themes were critically studied to ensure they precisely represent the data and are different from one another.

Thematic Analysis

Figure-1: Two Peafowl



Figure-1: Depiction of Two Peafowl in miniature painting of Jahangir's era (Guy 2011: Pl.33)

Bird	Codes	Theme
	Scientific name is Pavo cristatus originated from Native to the Indian subcontinent. In the landscape peafowl is moving with brown, dark green, royal blue, brown, black, olive green, purple, red colours. Botanical Patterns are used in composition	Royal Harmony

Table-1: Assigning codes and themes to Two Peafowl

The scientific name for the two peafowl depicted in the miniature artwork (Pl. No. 1) above is Pavo cristatus. Most of the time, it is located in the Indian subcontinent's native territory. Although the two birds' faces are similar on one side, Mansur painted them facing the other way. The birds in this scene are wandering about in an attempt to find food since they are hungry. A peahen is visible in the scene close to the lower left corner. The peahen advances, but her head is still turned in the direction of her male partner. The peahen looks on in jealousy as the peacock, with a tasty worm in its beak, descends toward the right side of the image. The image makes the hungry appear aggressive toward one another. The depiction evokes a sense of aggression between the hungry birds (Welch, 1985). Notably, the peahen's harsh claws mar its attractiveness and add an unpleasant element. With both birds moving, the artist deftly releases the energetic movement, providing a kinetics study. The artist made corrections to his drawing at each stage, and the areas where the underdrawing was improved are now covered in a dark grey color. These birds' forms are taken straight from life, which is a difficult undertaking. Just enough details are retained in the backdrop to counterbalance the birds. These birds have vivid, pleasurable, and lifelike colors. The peacock's tail was painted with lapis lazuli and gold to set the artwork apart from conventional styles. The peacock also uses lapis lazuli in circles on its tail and around its neck.

Its tail and lower body are black with touches of vermillion to intensify the color. The pattern on the peahen's neck and tail is made of light green color. Its foot, the end of its tail, and the area beneath its wings are all painted a dark grey color. The peahen's remaining body is nearly entirely white and devoid of the glossy, green lines that adorn the peacock's body. Two birds are depicted in motion by drawing the composition diagonally in order to provide precision to the painting. Mansur has put a lot of effort into the delicate brushwork on these birds' bodies, which depicts their structure, feather orientation, colors, outline, and textures.

Figure-2: Turkey Cock



Figure-2: Depiction of Turkey Cock in miniature painting of Jahangir's era (Clarke 1983: Pl.15)

Bird	Codes	Themes
Turkey cock	Scientific name of turkey cock is <i>Meleagris gallopavo</i> . In landscape the bird is sitting in Red, Black, Brown, Blue, Greyish-White Hues. The whole composition is sketched in Flora and Calligraphic Patterns.	Beauty and elegance

Table-2: Assigning codes and themes to Turkey Cock

Jehangir, who was drawn to the strange and odd, sent one of his courtiers to Goa with instructions to bring in strange new things. One among the treasures returned was a turkey, a species Babar had previously written about in his memoirs. Even though Babar only gave a description of these animals and did not order any paintings of them, Jehangir, enthralled with their peculiarities, instructed his painters to paint them immortal in his *Jehangirnama*, adding to the sense of wonder associated with these animals. The scientific name for the bird seen in the above miniature artwork (Pl. No. 2) is *Meleagris gallopavo*. It is covered in thin calligraphic bands with beautiful motifs that adorn the top and bottom edges. Here, the background is kept straightforward, with the figure resting on a thin strip of blooming plants (Clarke, 1983).

The distinctive characteristics of the turkey are highly appreciated: a short beak, an oval eye with a large black dot encircled by blue, and a red head and neck with a pointed shape extending over the beak. The body is painted in shades of greyish-white, brown, and black. The intricate details, including the fan-like tail feathers and the lighter-colored fluff on the

sides, are brilliantly rendered, including the feathers, wings, and tail. The turkey's feet have greyish-toned nails and resemble those of a chicken. The painting's texture, which includes the wings' smoothness, the feathers' roughness, and the feet's wrinkled skin, all demonstrate Mansur's artistic ability. Jahangir's creative description, which compares the turkey's jowls to red coral, is poetic.

Figure-3 Male Mallard

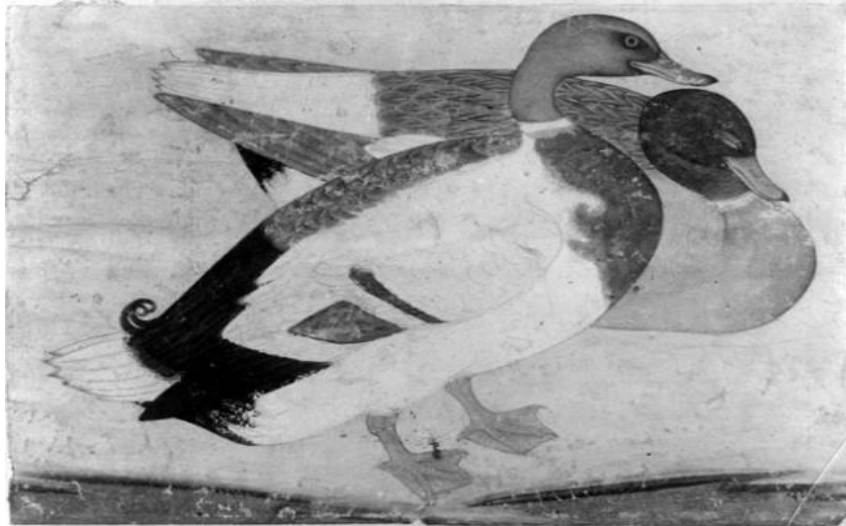


Figure-3: Depiction of Male Mallard in miniature painting of Jahangir’s era (Ananda 1981: Pl.52)

Bird	Codes	Themes
Male Mallard	Scientifically is called <i>Anas platyrhynchos</i> . The mallard is native to the temperate and subtropical regions of the Northern Hemisphere .Found in grey, black and dark green colours.The painting is completed with Botanicals Patterns.	The Mallard's Grace in Northern Wetlands

Table-3: Assigning codes and themes to Male Mallard

The Northern Hemisphere's cold and subtropical regions are home to the mallard. In addition to being common in North America, Europe, and Asia, it has also been introduced to several other regions of the world, such as Australia and New Zealand. Various ecosystems, such as marshes, lakes, rivers, ponds, and even urban areas, are residence to mallard ducks.

The exquisite attention to detail in Jahangiri paintings is well known, especially in their scientifically accurate depictions of the figures' physical attributes. These paintings exhibit a great deal of detail and hue in the anatomy, showing a careful effort to capturing the natural world .Colours ranged from grey, black and dark green. It's interesting to observe that Jahangiri paintings reflect the influence of European botanical depictions and engravings of flora and animals, suggesting a cross-cultural flow of artistic ideas (Ananda, 1981). Along with to being accurate in terms of appearance, a lot of these paintings

additionally portray the attitude and state of mind of the birds and animals, giving their representation a unique look. For instance, the bent tail indicates that the duck (Pl.No.3), with the theme "Quiet in Autumn's Veil," is male in the Sir Cowasji Jehangir Collection.

Figure-4: Siberian Crane



Figure-4: Depiction of Siberian Crane in miniature painting of Jahangir’s era (Das 1967: Pl.96)

Bird	Codes	Theme
Siberian Crane	Its scientific name is <i>Leucogeranus leucogeranus</i> . This species is native to the Arctic region of Siberia . Found in black, white and vibrant red colours.The composition is in Animal Motifs.	The Siberian Crane in Arctic Majesty

Table-4: Assigning codes and themes to Siberian Crane

Among Ustad Mansur's paintings, one of the most significant in terms of zoological representation is that of the Siberian crane (Pl.No.4), scientifically called as *Leucogeranus leucogeranus*. Interestingly, Mansur depicted the Siberian crane long before it was formally described and given a binomial name by Peter Simon Pallas in 1773.

Style-wise, Mansur's drawings are distinguished by their fine detail, with a lone bird usually serving as the composition's main focus. The Siberian crane, with its pure white plumage, black primary feathers, and bright red flesh on its face, is native to the Arctic region. The Siberian crane is a majestic bird that stands tall at up to 2.4 meters (8 feet) in the air. In the background of Mansur's paintings, one may frequently see birds in feeding or standing positions amid vegetation and insects. Mansur's painting of a Siberian crane on paper showcases his exceptional attention to detail, as it captures even the smallest details, such the bird's naked skin wrinkles and a tiny feather affixed to its claw.

Figure-5: Flamingoes in a Pool

Bird	Codes	Themes
Flamingoes in a Pool	Its scientific name is <i>Phoenicopterus roseus</i> . Found in red, pink, pink-maroon, white, dark green, brown, golden colours. The composition is set in Animal and Floral Patterns.	The Flamingo's Elegance in a Garden of Colours

Table-5: Assigning codes and themes to Flamingoes in a Pool**Figure-5:** Depiction of Flamingoe in miniature painting of Jahangir's era (Alvi and Rahman: 1968.PI.77)

The Americas are home to flamingos, as are Africa, Europe, and Asia in the Old World. Due to their diet of algae and crustaceans high in carotenoid colors, they are recognized for their unusual pink or reddish plumage. *Phoenicopterus roseus* is the scientific name for this plant, which grows in red, pink, pink-maroon, white, dark green, brown, and golden hues. It is one of the reason that flamingos are called *Phoenicopterus roseus*, due to delicacy in structure and pinkash tones. (PI.No.5). The flamingos' delicate balance on their small legs and the flowing motion implied by their whirling necks both exhibit a sense of lyricism that permeates this composition. The artwork has a sense of movement and grace because of this vivid portrayal (Sanchez, 2010).

Figure-6: A Falcon



Figure-6: Depiction of Flamingoe in miniature painting of Jahangir’s era (Ananda 1986:Pl.4)

Bird	Codes	Themes
Falcon	Falcon scientific name is peregrinus. Found in Green-Brown, Pink, Light and Dark Brown, Black, White colours.The painting composition is Animal Patterns.	

Table-6: Assigning codes and themes to A Falcon

Falcons, particularly the Peregrine, can be found all over the world. The falcon may be found on every continent except Antarctica. They are renowned for their quickness and hunting ability. Falcon's scientific name is Peregrinus. Found in green-brown, pink, light and dark brown, black, and white. The falcon image in the miniature picture (Pl. No. 6) is documented in Jahangir's diaries from his fourteen-year reign, as cited by Roger (1993:103). The falcon is depicted against a homogeneous backdrop, perched on a stand and grasping its roost firmly with its claws, which have pointed and somewhat unsightly nails. Its claws' skin is darker than its nails. The falcon has extended eyes and a slightly curved upper beak, and it has a rope connected to its leg near the ninth corner, limiting its flight to a certain altitude, as documented by Bussagli (1966) and Verma (1999). The falcon is admired for its swiftness and outstanding vision, and it represents power and sovereignty, which is frequently linked with rulership.

The bird is shown with grandeur and a characteristic attitude on the roost, with a distinctive composition marked by short, rhythmic strokes, which are typical of Mansur's technique. While credited to the painter, Jahangir's memoirs eloquently depict the falcon's splendor, marveling at its distinct black markings on the wings, back, and sides. He ordered Mansur to capture the bird's incredible features, as stated by Gascoigne (1987:133).

Figure-7: A Himalayan Cheer Pheasant



Figure-7: Depiction of Flamingoes in miniature painting of Jahangir’s era(Clarke 1983:Pl.16)

Bird	Codes	Themes
Cheer Pheasant	Scientific name is <i>Catreus wallichii</i> . Colours ranges from light and dark brown, grey, purple, plain yellow-ochre. The composition is set in Animal and Floral Patterns.	The Cheer Pheasant Amidst Blossoms

Table-7: Assigning codes and themes to Cheer Pheasant

The Cheer Pheasant is native to the Himalayan region, especially northern India, Nepal, Bhutan, and Pakistan. It can be found in high, grassy hillsides and open forest areas in such places.

The miniature picture (Pl.No.46) depicts the Himalayan Cheer Pheasant based on the artist's observations in Kashmir, a location that Emperor Jahangir adored and frequently visited in his later years of reign. The borders embellished with densely organized gold flowering plants on indigo-dyed paper are typical of the artistic style common during Jahangir's reign. A comparable miniature, presumably from the same period as Jahangir or Shah Jahan, depicts the Cheer Pheasant against a plain yellow-ochre backdrop (Clarke, 1983). The vivid hues of the bird's feathers stand out against the background, focusing emphasis on the main subject. While the picture itself is well-executed, the textural effects may not be completely realistic, as seen in the representation of the bird's feet, which lack finer details. However, the composition's diagonal arrangement and balanced use of colors exhibit exceptional artistic ability. This style has parallels to the previously mentioned miniature, including a little lack of weight in the bird's body.

Figure-8: Horn Bill



Figure-8: Depiction of Flamingoes in miniature painting of Jahangir’s era (Okada 1992: Pl.254)

Bird	Codes	Theme
Hornbill	Its scientific name is <i>Buceros bicornis</i> , found in black, white, yellow, brown, grey colours. The composition is painted in Animal and Floral Patterns.	The Great Hornbill in a Floral Sanctuary

Table-8: Assigning codes and themes to Hornbill

Hornbills are distributed throughout Africa and Asia, mainly in tropical and subtropical climates. The Great Hornbill lives in the jungles of India, Bhutan, Nepal, mainland Southeast Asia, and the Indonesian island of Sumatra. It is scientifically known as *Buceros bicornis*. Majestic Echoes among the Floral Canopy. This thoroughly researched study illustrates Mansur's perfected expertise, which gained him the distinguished title "Nadir al-Asr, Wonder of the Age." Such works, based in the best tradition of natural history, were especially commissioned by Jahangir to portray his fascination with the natural environment, which has been thoroughly chronicled in contemporary reports and the emperor's own memoirs, the *Jahangirnama* (Verma, 1999). The artist exhibits a deep interest in animals (Fig: 1a) and portrays the bird with exceptional accuracy.

The bird (Pl.No.47) has a pointed, extended, yellowish beak with texture and color that extends smoothly to its head. The top of its head is covered in delicate white fur-like feathers, with a patch of white feathers directly below. The bottom of its body is mostly white, with a long tail that has a black band toward the end. Its body and wings are predominantly black, with a white lining along the wings. The bird's feet are precisely detailed in a grayish tone, with clear black edges and sharp nails. Its body contours are perfectly sketched, with smooth, flowing lines that precisely capture its form. Its small, spherical eye contains a dark patch inside, surrounded by yellow feathers.

The artist pays close attention to detail, depicting the textures of the bird's body with sensitivity and grace. To generate shading, linear brush strokes are used, with the shapes and directions of the feathers being carefully considered. The overall composition has a rich texture, which is especially noticeable in the meticulous representation of the fuzzy outlines. Mansur's minimally painted landscape features a bird's feet gripping a rock,

emphasizing the main subject's dominance. The bird is diagonally across the painting, facing outward on the left side, capturing attention with its startling presence.

Conclusion

The depiction of birds in the miniature paintings of the Jahangir era represents a fusion of artistic innovation, cultural symbolism, and cross-cultural influences. The meticulous attention to detail and realism in these paintings reflects Jahangir's personal interest in natural history and the broader intellectual and artistic currents of the time. The influence of European naturalism, combined with traditional Mughal aesthetics, created a distinctive style that not only enriched Mughal art but also contributed to its lasting legacy.

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