

**Ques-The Sultanate period is a dark age of painting in Indian history. Do you agree with the statement?**

**Answer:** The Sultanate period has been presented as a dark age of the painting but an article published in the *Journal of the Indian Society of Oriental Art* by Hermann Goetz has highlighted the fact that during the Sultanate period, painting, especially the production of murals, was not only known but it was also widely used in the royal courts. Further, the research was done by Muhammad Abdullah Chagatai, Simon Digby, Karl Khandelavala and Moti Chand at different times confirmed the above fact.

**The earliest mention of painting is in the book 'History of Ghaznavids' (Tarikh i Bayhaqi) written by Abu'l-Fadl Bayhaqi.** In this book, the buildings and monuments of Herat, the capital of Sultan Mahmud, and Lashkari Bazar are mentioned. Archaeologists have unearthed the walls of Lashkari Bazaar on which the remains of murals depicting the royal slaves dressed in royal attire were found. **The court poet Farooqui of Sultan Mahmud also testified to the presence of the Nigarnama (painting gallery) in the magnificent garden built by Mahmud in Lahore.**

According to contemporary writer **Tajuddin Raza**, Ilutmish patronized artistic activities and decorative paintings were prevalent during his reign. The 14th-century<sup>th</sup> century writer Isami ('**Futuh-us-Salatin**') corroborates Raza in the context of painting. **Isami believes that during the reign of Ilutmish, Chinese painters were brought for decoration of the court.**

In contemporary Persian and Hindavi texts, mural paintings, manuscript paintings as well as cloth paintings are mentioned. **Aamir Khusro's** famous book **Aashiq** mentioned the use of perforated pouches for designer paintings. In Khusro's other book '**Nuh Sipih**', beautifully painted garments are mentioned.

The most important details on painting during the Sultanate period are obtained from **Afif's 'Tarikh-e-Firozshahi'**. The treatise describes that Firoz Shah Tughlaq had rejected the practice of decorating the rest houses with sculptural paintings as un-Islamic. Firoz ordered that the paintings of animate objects should not be put in the galleries. Firoz gave more importance to painting flowers and trees than the depiction of humans.

In the Sultanate period, there is evidence of the tradition of painting outside the royal court. A 15<sup>th</sup> century manuscript of the poem Chandayan (**written by Maulana Dawood**) depicts the heroin Chanda's bedroom, showing scenes from the Ramayana painted on its walls. Likewise, in a 16th-century<sup>th</sup> century romantic poem '**Mrigavati**', written by Qutban, a room is depicted with scenes from the Ramayana.

Before Delhi Sultanate, miniature painting was made on palm leaves, wooden strips, etc. Further, Western India became the center of miniatures, where it was given generous patronage. This style developed into a powerful movement in the 14<sup>th</sup> and 15<sup>th</sup> centuries. Subsequently, this art spread to central, northern, and even eastern India. **In the Sultanate period, more influence of the provincial state like Mandu, Jaunpar, Bengal, and Gujarat can be seen on the miniature style than that of the Delhi Sultanate.**

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Overall, many indirect pieces of literary evidence of painting are found in the Sultanate period. However, these paintings could not be collected because the process of painting and destroying was fast; after all, it was a period of political unrest and war. During the entire Sultanate period, a ruler could not sit on the throne for such a long peaceful period that he could build a good secular architecture which could be turned into an artistic workplace. All the extant buildings of the Sultanate period are mainly mosques, mausoleums, etc. in which it was inappropriate to place painting.

