

## Deciphering Visual Languages: Lahore and Kashmir Book Art of 19<sup>th</sup> century

Nausheen Abbas<sup>1</sup>  
Rukhsana Said<sup>2</sup>

### Abstract

*A plethora of book art specimens from the 19<sup>th</sup> century reveal that a constant interchange of ideas and styles existed between Lahore and Kashmir. The colophons of some hand written books give the textual evidence of presence of Kashmiri artists in Lahore. Other primary sources of the time also confirm that a number of artists were travelling to Lahore during and after Sikh rule. Some made Lahore their permanent home while the other artists kept coming in winter seasons to get means of income by writing and decorating books. Many are also seen going to Kashmir from the plains to work on book production under the dignitaries there. This interchange resulted in the amalgamation of a number of Kashmiri features of illustrations and illuminations of the books in Punjab plains. This study examines the stylistic characteristics of Lahore and Kashmir book art to find out their mutual similarities and points of divergence. It also attempts to critically judge certain specimens of book art that has been mistakenly identified as “North-Indian”, “Kashmirian” or “Afghan- Kashmirian” and to place them in rightly designated provenance i.e. either belonging to Lahore or Kashmir.*

Just like any spoken language, visual language too, is governed by phonology, vocabulary and grammar, in the form of visual elements peculiar to each. The visual narrative tradition, in the illustrated manuscripts from the Persianate world (15<sup>th</sup> to 19<sup>th</sup> centuries), constitute a visual language. It has its dialects as well, in the form of its cross-cultural manifestations. Archives around the globe boast of their collection of illustrated manuscripts. In most of the cases however, they face challenges to assign a time period and provenance to these illustrated manuscripts in the absence of the colophons. This problem to a great extent can be solved by using tools of provenance research.

<sup>1</sup> Taxila Institute of Asian Civilizations, Quaid-i- Azam University, Islamabad

<sup>2</sup> Assistant Professor, University of Azad Jammu and Kashmir

Provenance research is a relatively modern discipline that endeavors to trace the origin of an art object. Alongside other determinants, it tends to decipher visual clues found in visual art, so that a time period and the place of origin of an art piece may be determined. This kind of research is specially relevant with regards to Persian miniatures found in the books.

Persian remained lingua franca for centuries not only in Persia but also in many parts of Asia and south-Asia. Dehli Sulṭāns and the Mughals were greatly instrumental in establishing Persian as the literary language. In Kashmir, it was promoted under the rule of Zain-ul Aābidīn in fourteen century and then under the Mughals, Kashmir, being the part of their domain. After the rule of the Great Mughals, smaller regional establishments continued to produce Persian manuscripts under the court rulers. Kashmir and Lahore were no exception. Being physically proximate to each other, both regions were continuously sharing Persianate book traditions in the form of illustrations and illuminations. For the big part of 19<sup>th</sup> century both regions came under the unified rule of Sikh (last of the Persianate courts in India). The second half of 19<sup>th</sup> century witnessed colonial rule in Lahore and a treaty with Gulāb Singh in Kashmir by the Britishers.

A huge amount of hand written books adorned with book art of illustrations and illuminations from Lahore and Kashmir are testimonies of deep interconnections between them. Some of these books contain categorical facts about their provenance in the form of colophons. However, a lots of them are without any clear evidence as to which area they may be designated. In the absence of the colophons an intrinsic analysis of their stylistic characteristics is required. It requires a visual corpus to be formed for both the regions to ascertain the time and space they belong to. The paper in this way intends to clarify the confusions faced by a lot of catalogers around the globe who have mistakenly designated Lahore manuscripts to Kashmir and vice a versa.

Cambridge Shahnama Project is a digital repository of *Shahnāma* manuscripts illustrations from around the globe. Some of its description about the provenance of certain manuscripts contain erroneous designations to either ‘Kashmir’, or simply “north Indian” or just “Indian”, the illustrations however, contain clear vocabulary of Lahore school. A manuscript of *Gulistān-i S’adi* in State Library Victoria, Australia from 1258 A.H/ 1835 C.E. is given Kashmir provenance, though it displays

clear Lahore's iconography in illumination as well as in illustrations. In an article "Fruits of Paradise" published in daily Dawn newspaper (Dawn, March 20<sup>th</sup>, 2017), all illustrations are credited to Kashmir School of illustration. The manuscript is without colophon, but the visual denominators from illustrations present in at least the later half of the book all point to a Lahore origin. These are some of the misunderstandings that might result in the absence of a developed "visual corpus" of a visual language hailing from some specific part of the world.

The reasons to mix together Kashmir and Lahore style of illustration and illumination are not very difficult to fathom. In Kashmir, the tradition of Persian book art narrative has its roots in the rule of Sultān Zain-al 'Aābidīn. History records that during and after his rule, the calligraphers, the artists and the manuscripts-all, kept coming from Persia specially Shiraz, to Kashmir (Goetz, 1962 in Goswamy, 1998, p. 19). Later, during Mughal times this tradition was further strengthened. Many artists of great repute were present in Akbar's royal atelier who were the natives of Kashmir (Ab-al Faḍl in Brown, 1981, p. 197). Lahore, had been a home of book production and book art specially during and after Akbar, who made it the capital for 14 years from 1585- 1598 C.E. Therefore Lahore and Kashmir both, were the carriers of Persian book art. This tradition kept well alive till 19<sup>th</sup> century. Sikh rule was maintained in Punjab plains and Punjab Hills as well, including large areas of Kashmir valley. There remained a constant interflow of artisans.

During the rule of Sikhs, in the first half of the century and also during the later half, we know of many names of artists who came from Kashmir and took residence in Lahore as it was the seat of Sikh government. A father and son, Pandit Rām Kaul and Daya Rām Kaul Ṭuṭa are two renowned artists who came from Kashmir and took permanent residence in Lahore. In addition to the famous manuscripts of *Gulgashta-i Punjāb* and *Zafarnāma* Ranjīt Singh, various manuscripts can be found in archives around the globe transcribed, illustrated and illuminated by them<sup>1</sup>. Another artist of a manuscript of *Gulistān-i Sa'di*, in Lahore Museum archive, informs the reader in the last pages, that he has come from

<sup>1</sup>"Ikhtasār-i *Shāhjahānnāmāh*" in National Museum Karachi, N.M. 1962-184, have the name of Rājā Rām Kaul Ṭuṭa, as the scribe of the manuscript. Three manuscripts from Raza Library Rampur, (M.K 782, 790 and 791) contains signatures of Daya Rām Kaul Ṭuṭa, who transcribed the manuscripts from 1869 C.E to 1873 C.E (Schmitz & Desai 2006).

Kashmir and is temporarily residing in Lahore. Yet another factual evidence is from a manuscript in Khuda Bakhsh Library Patna, that has an informative colophon about the book being transcribed in Kashmir. The narrative paintings within the manuscript are however done half way in Kashmir's idiom and the later half in Lahore's iconography, indicating a definitive interchange of book or artists. Imām Wairdi is known as the father of Lahore's Calligraphic art (Rahi, 1982; Bhutta, 22007, p 167). Tracking his way in Northern India, he came from Kabul-went to Kashmir-and finally settled in Lahore with Nawāb of Kashmir, Nawāb Shaikh Imām Dīn. (Bhutta, 2007, p. 167). The Punjabi University of Patiala has considerable number of manuscripts of Janam Sakhi, done in standard Kashmir's style while in Lahore (Goswamy, B.N. 1999, p. 109). A manuscript of Shahnāma in the Raza Library, Rampur bears the name of Muḥammad Bakhsh who copied it from Miān Muḥammad Bakhsh Ṣaḥḥāf in Lahore. Barbara Schmitz, notes that there appears three artists who made the illustrations, one of them betrays Kashmir connections as his lines are "thin black and the faces are lack of shading...who attempts to blend his style with one prevailing in Lahore", (Schmitz & Desai, 2006, p. 142). The same phenomena can be seen the manuscript of Bahār-i Dānish, in National Museum of Pakistan, Karachi. Although it's illustrations are designated to Kashmir by the writer of the article, mentioned earlier, at least one –third of its illustrations towards the end of the book are in clear Lahore style.

Many of the Kashmir originated manuscripts were in possession of people living in plains for example Tulsi Rāmāyāna, that was owned by Barkat Rām a resident of Gujranwala District (Goswamy, K. 1998, p. 81). A group of itinerant artists are also recorded who used to come to Punjab plains in winter months to seek employment roaming in the streets, announcing their arrival by "*kātib wa muṣṣawir*" (scribe and painter) (Goswamy, K. 1999, p. 54, 55). The areas close to Kashmir specially Gujrat and Sialkot played an important role in these interconnections. These areas were important centers lying on route to Kashmir from Lahore. Many of the families from Kashmir are recorded to have settled in these cities. Two manuscripts from Punjab University Library Lahore (Ac. Nos. 419/746, O-57/7282), one from Milli Library Tehran (Ac. No. 17787-5) and another from Cambridge University Library, Or. 1354 (15) has been noted by the author to have originated from these cities. All of these combine Kashmir style with that of Lahore in their illuminations and illustrations.

In existence of such interconnection, it really becomes very difficult to discern Lahore manuscripts from that of Kashmir. But still, closer observations of a significant number of illustrations from both sides yield some parameters upon which provenance can be assured. Some of them are:

### **The distribution of picture plane**

The distribution of picture planes in both Lahore and Kashmir examples follow the traditions of Persians and in turn Mughals, where no attempt is made by the artist to produce illusion of depth. Rather, the whole scene unfolds in front of us as a pulled up carpet. The background and middle ground is as visible as the foreground. However, in most of Kashmir examples, the demarcating lines between the planes are well defined and harsh without any blending, whereas in Lahore's example the blending is a bit subtle and merged specially between the middle ground groups (see Figures, 1 and 2).

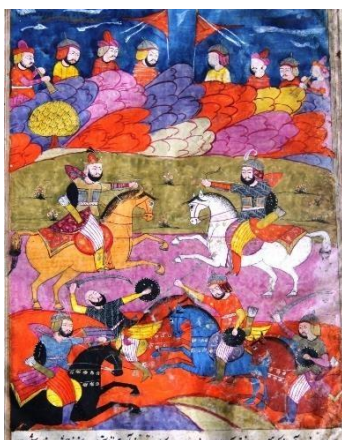


Figure 1. Shāhnāma, Kashmir, 19th century, Ac. No. 1383, 163 mm x 124 mm, Ganj Bakhsh Library, Islamabad. Photo by author.

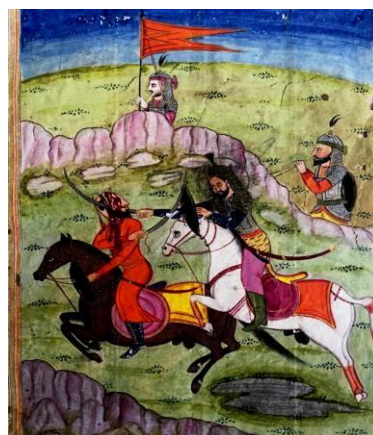


Figure 2. Sh, Ac. No. 168.569. Folio. 384, 153 mm x 115 mm, 19<sup>th</sup> century, National Museum of Pakistan, Karachi. Photo by author

### **Color distribution on picture plane**

Color palette in both the schools prefer same hues. Crimsons, yellows and purples are favoured by both. Lahore tradition although exhibit a range of styles yet, but in most cases vibrant colors are applied in illustrations just like Kashmiri illustrations and illuminations. However, there is a difference of distribution of color on picture plane. Kashmir artist never

hesitates in using bright reds, and yellows in any feature of the painting no matter they are rocks, ground or canopies and dresses or accessories in court scenes (see figures, 1 and 3). Lahore artist on the contrary has restricted the use of bright tones in court accessories and dresses while keeping the background almost neutral in color (Figures 2 and 4). The same tendency can be noticed in illuminations. Both of the traditions use same color palettes and a preference for floral motifs, but, where Lahore artist surround brighter tone by neutral shades, Kashmiri artist uses the colors all over the area allocated for it. Same is true to the use of motifs. Floral patterns is the supreme choice of Kashmiri artists who uses it un sparingly in the main area, in the borders outside the borders till the edge of paper. However, Lahore's artist keep florals in the main areas and surrounds it mostly by geometric borders or neutral surrounding patterns (see figures, 5 and 6).

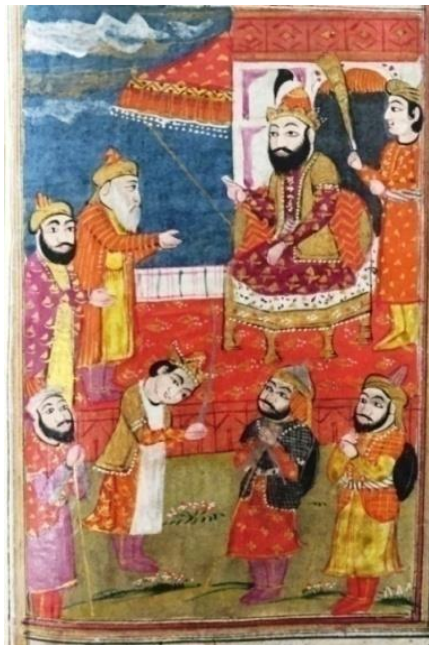


Figure 3. Khusraw wa Shūrīn, Ac. No. 1970/A, Khusraw's court, 100 mm x 66 mm. National Museum of Pakistan. Karachi. Photo by author



Figure 4 Mathnawi Sahr al- Bayān, Ac. No. 13842, 1847 C.E. Lahore. folio, 20. 115 x 90 mm. Ganj Bakhsh Library, Photo by author.

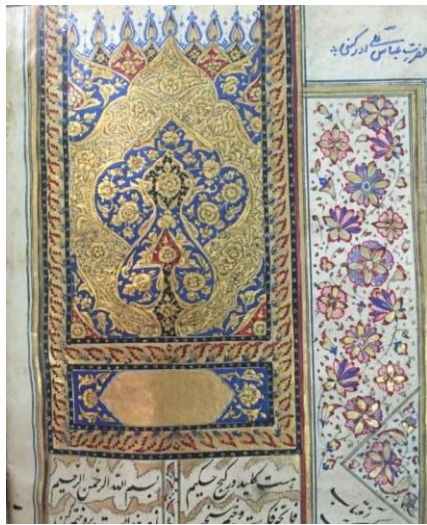


Figure 5. Khamsa-i Niami, N.M. 1970.19 frontispiece, Kashmir, 19th century. Photo by author.

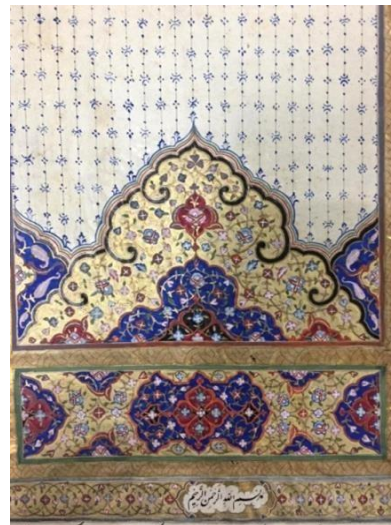


Figure 6 Detail of Headpiece, Ā'in-i Akbari, Fol. 1 450 mm x 270 mm, 1848 C.E Lahore, Punjab University Library. (Photo by author)

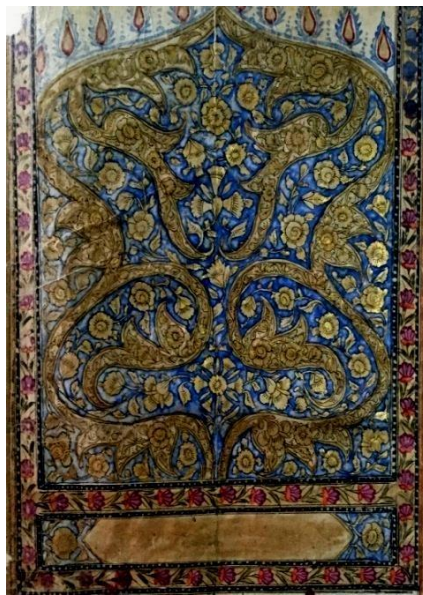


Figure 7, Shahnama, Kashmir, 19th century, National Museum Karachi, N.M. 31. Photo by author



Figure 8, Ikhtiṣār-i Shahjahān nāma, Lahore, 19th century, Rām Kaul Tūta, N.M. 192,184. Photo by author

An interesting case of fusion between Lahore and Kashmir can be seen in the above two examples; figures 7 and 8. Figure 7 is an illumination by a Kashmiri artist whereas figure 8 is painted by Rām Kaul Tūta, the famous Kashmiri-turned Lahori artist. We may notice the same choice of colors in both; the main motif is also the same, which is repeated modified lotus. Rām Kaul has fused his style with that of Kashmir by keeping the design in the centre while keeping negative areas on the top and geometric borders instead of floral.

### Figures and their attire

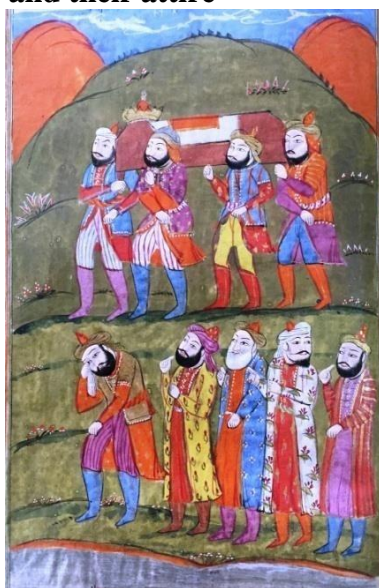


Figure 9 Shahnama, Kashmir, 19th century, National Museum Karachi, N.M. 31. Photo by author

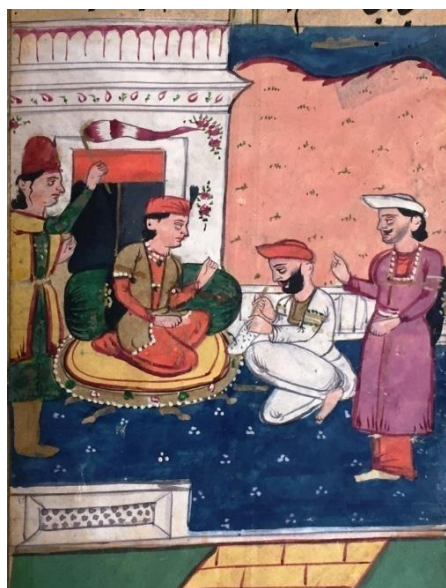


Figure 10. Mathnawi Saḥr al-Bayān, Ac. No. 13842, 1847 C.E. Lahore. folio, 20. 115 x 90 mm. Ganj Bakhsh Library, Photo by author

Above are examples of two illustrations from Kashmir and Lahore (see figures, 9 and 10). If we observe the dresses in these and in many other examples, the attire including gold jackets, long robes are common in both but with regional differences. The head dresses are different according to peculiar styles of both regions. Where Lahore men wear flat hats or rounded thick turbans, Kashmiri figures wear turbans with conical protruding centre. The figures are robust in Kashmiri illustrations while those in Lahore's are thinner. Lahore artist always apply shading on the faces but Kashmiri faces are devoid of it.



While observing the landscape elements specially trees, a common attitude towards stylization and pattern can be noticed in both of the traditions but in Kashmiri illustrations this tendency is more pronounced and consistent (see figures.11 and 12). In Lahore, they range from highly stylized to ones with attempts towards realistic shading observable on both foliage and the trunks of trees (see figures. 13 and 14).

White architectural structure in the background is ever present in court scenes. The low seated, octagonal golden throne is used in both. However, hanging canopy is a typical feature of Kashmir never used in Lahore illustrations. The frontal surrounding wall on the other hand is a feature peculiar to Lahore (see figures 15 and 16).

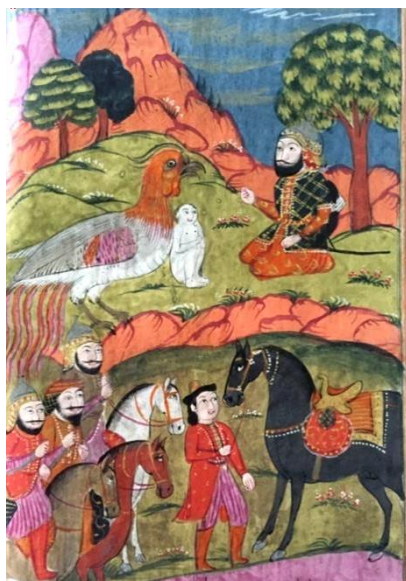


Figure 11 Shahnama, Kashmir, 19th century, N.M. 31. National Museum Karachi, Photo by author



Figure 12 Shahnama, Kashmir, 19th century, Ac. No. 314, Ganj Bakhsh Library, Islamabad. Photo by author



Figure 13 *Mathnawi Sahr al- Bayān*, Ac. No. 13842, 1847 C.E. Lahore, folio, 123. 110 x 90 mm. Ganj Bakhsh Library, Photo by author



Figure 14 *Bāhār-i Dānish*, G.B.L Acc. No. 1056. Lahore, 1842 C.E, folio. 537, 110 mmx 85 mm. . Ganj Bakhsh Library. Photo by author



Figure 15, *Shahnama*, Kashmir, 19th century, Ac. No. 314, Ganj Bakhsh Library, Islamabad. Photo by author

Figure 16 *Tārīkh-i Dilkusha-i Shamsirkhāni*, Ac. No. 9515, un paginated. Ganj Bakhsh Library, Islamabad. Photo by author

### Conclusion

The visual vocabulary of the narratives within the books of 19<sup>th</sup> century Kashmir and Lahore are stylistically intermingled in many ways but systematic compilation of visual corpus of a considerable amount of this visual data, reveal many differences as well. To sum up the similarities:

1. Kashmir and Lahore Book art both take up after the parent schools-the indigenous traditions of Indian book with that of Persian.
2. Thematically both take similar subject matter.
3. Both show a preference for gold, yellows, blue and crimsons.

4. The fashions in costumes and accessories overlap at many points.

The points of differences may be summed up as follows:

5. Where Kashmir artist preference is decoration, Lahore artist keep it restrained.
6. Both use floral motifs but Kashmiri artist use it unsparingly in all the segments of illuminations as borders, in between the rows around the margins, whereas Lahore artist combine it with plainer or geometric bands.
7. The figures display differences in structure and in shading of the face as well.

Both of the schools of Book Art amalgamate to form their distinctive styles. They actively enrich the visual vocabulary of each other's book art---that vocabulary or the Visual Corpus which is vital for an art form to emerge, blossom and prosper.

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