



## Deccani Manuscripts in the Medieval and Early Modern Period in India

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**Abstract:** *The manuscript painting was an important art and received remarkable patronage in the Deccan during the late fifteenth to the seventeenth century. Particularly in these important Islamic dynasties: Nizam Shahis, Adil Shahis, Qutb Sahis.*

*Deccani artists produced many paintings for albums and books of nobles and wealthy patrons in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries; the miniature painting of Persia greatly influenced the works of these painters.*

*Some of these manuscripts have survived in different copies in museums, libraries, private collections, and other centres. Deccani manuscripts have adapted Persian landscape conventions to the normal Indian horizontal perspective. This article aims at introducing some important manuscripts which were produced in the late fifteenth to seventeenth centuries in Persian, Urdu, Dakkani and Dakkani Urdu Languages. And explores some of the Decani manuscripts like Tarif-i Husain Shahi, Anwar-i Suhayli, Nujum al-Ulum, Shahnama, Muhammad Quli's Diwan, Kitab-I Nauras, Pem Nem. These manuscripts and their various miniature paintings interpreted the social, cultural and artistic situation of the medieval and early modern period in Ahmadnagar, Bijapur, Golconda and then Hyderabad.*

**Keywords:** *Deccan, Manuscript, Miniature Painting, Nizam Shahis, Adil Shahis, Qutb Sahis, Persia.*

### Introduction:

Indian art not only shows an inventive and creative struggle of Indians in the course of history but also reflects the culture and civilization of this mysterious land. Fortunately, the greater part of Indian art has survived in museums, collections, and libraries; these artworks were topics of many studies on their theme, context, meaning, technique, and style.

There is a body of sources that refer to schools of painting in medieval Deccan and early modern period as these paintings display a new artistic construction of society at that time.

The manuscript painting was an important art and received remarkable patronage in the Deccan during the late fifteenth to the seventeenth century. Particularly in these important Islamic dynasties:

- Nizam Shahis (1490-1636) in Ahmadnagar.
- Adil Shahis (1489-1686) in Bijapur.
- Qutb Shahis (1512-1687) in Golconda and Hyderabad

Mark Zebrowski, a pioneer of Deccani Painting's scholar, believes that realizing the difference between Mughal and Deccani civilizations is essential for an understanding of Deccani painting which is the precise portrait of men, animals and plants, and their achievements.<sup>1</sup>

Deccani artists produced many paintings for albums and books of nobles and wealthy patrons in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries; the

miniature painting of Persia greatly influenced the works of these painters.

Deccani monarchs from Ahmadnagar, Bijapur and Golconda were very interested in painting in the middle of the sixteenth century. The paintings of this period were very similar to Persian and Turkish Styles.

Deccani dynasties have been looking for a unique artistic style that would integrate Indian motifs with Indo-Persian art. Persian culture proved to be a source of inspiration for Deccan artists as several great artists from the Safavid Empire immigrated to India at that time.

The school of Deccani painting can be traced to the three Deccani dynasties of Adil Shahi in Bijapur, Nizam Shahi in Ahmadnagar, and Qutb Shahi in Golconda and Hyderabad. Bijapur and Golconda were followers of the Shia sect of Islam and had intimate political and cultural relations with the Safavid rulers of Persia. Many officers, nobles and artisans had migrated to these Muslim kingdoms of the Deccan. After the decline and disintegration of the Vijayanagar Empire, the artists from that kingdom came over to the courts of the Sultanates. They tried to synthesis the Persian, Turkish and indigenous styles of painting and developed a new style known as the Deccani style of painting.<sup>2</sup> Unfortunately, only a few of the surviving Deccani paintings have the painter's signature, date, or any inscription.

Deccan produced many manuscripts over these two centuries; some of these manuscripts have survived

in different copies in museums, libraries, private collections, and other centres. Deccani manuscripts have adapted Persian landscape conventions to the normal Indian horizontal perspective. This article aims at introducing some important manuscripts which were produced in the late fifteenth to seventeenth centuries in Persian, Urdu, Dakkani and Dakkani Urdu Languages.

### Persian Manuscripts in Deccani Painting Schools

The major school of manuscript illumination flourished in Iran, India, Ottoman Empire, and Central Asia during the twelfth to nineteenth centuries in which depictions of ruler's portraits, the major events of their time and scenes from the stories was an inseparable part. These manuscripts, with their calligraphy and painted iconographic details, became primarily objects of veneration.<sup>3</sup> Although attempts have been made to link certain of more Persianate Sultanate manuscripts of the fifteenth century to the Deccan, the first indisputable evidence of such manuscript production belongs to mid- sixteenth century, when Golconda established a manuscript studio producing work based on various Persian styles, which were derived from Herat, Shiraz, Bukhara, and Tabriz schools. Ahmadnagar and Bijapur also patronized such studios while focusing on a much more indigenous style.<sup>4</sup>

#### *Tarif-i Husain Shahi*

As a historical manuscript, *Tarif-i Husain Shahi* (1565), commissioned by the Husain Nizam Shah (r.1553-1565), chronicles the victory of Husain Shah of Ahmadnagar, along with the other Deccan Sultans, over the Hindu empire of Vijayanagar in 1565 at Talikota. Ahmadnagar painting provides a crucial basis for understanding the evolution of style and taste in the Deccan era. Although extremely fragmentary, the evidence demonstrates two broad styles. An early simplified Indic idiom of around 1565 is seen in the painting of the *Tarif-i Husain Shahi* (Chronicle of Husain Shah).<sup>5</sup> (Fig. 1)

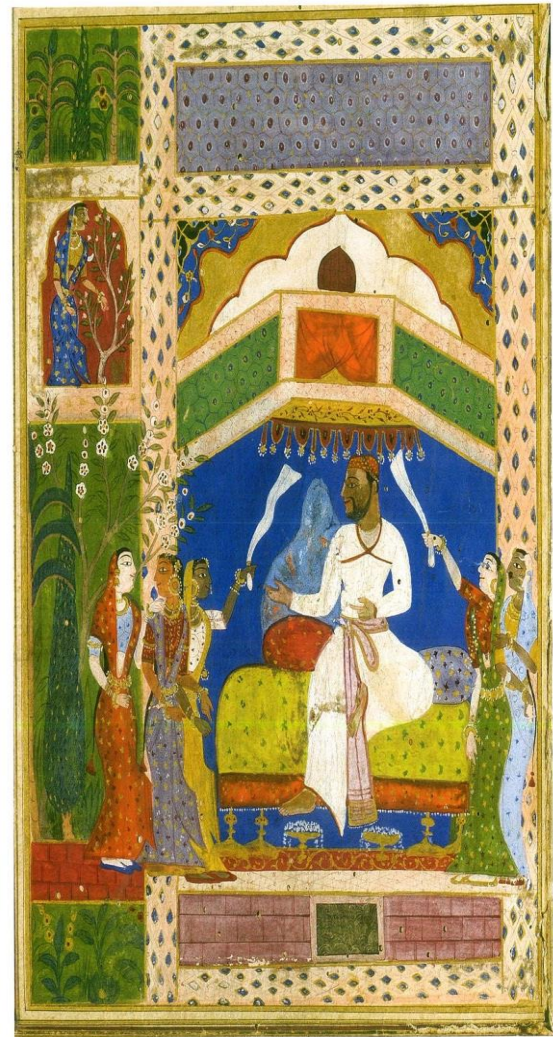


Fig.1. Manuscript of the *Tarif-i Husain shahi*, Ahmadnagar, ca 1565-69, Ink, opaque watercolour, and gold on paper, (15.6x12.7 cm), Bharat Itihas Sanshodhak, Mandal, Pune.

The *Tarif-i Husain Shahi*, written by the royal poet Aftabi in Persian the court language of Ahmadnagar, is the earliest and one of the greatest Deccani illustrated manuscripts; the text is a long epic poem (*masnavi*) in praise of the sultan. It chronicles his principal activities, particularly his great victory over Vijayanagara at the Battle of Talikota in 1565 and his marriage to Khanzah Humayun, his primary queen, whom Husain idolized.<sup>6</sup>

About 85 percent of Aftabi's original text has survived, and some pages of the manuscript are missing. The text is written in the *Nastaliq* script. The margins are sprinkled with gold. There are fifty-three remaining folios, the last three are empty, although being margined. According to a note on the first page of the manuscript, there were



fourteen paintings in *Tarif-i Husain Shahi* and the book contained some illuminations.

#### **Anvar-i Suhayli**

As the earliest miniature painting from the reign of Ibrahim Qutb Shah, the manuscript of the *Anvar-i Suhayli* is available in the Victoria and Albert Museum, London. (Fig 2). It has 126 miniatures. It bears Qutb Shahi seals but no colophon. The vegetation is exuberantly lush, and the architecture depicted has Golconda traits. Related illustrated manuscripts are the *Sindbad Namah* in the India Office Library, London, and the *Khusrau and Shirin* in the Khudabakh Library, Patna, though neither has a proper colophon mentioning a Golconda patron.<sup>7</sup>

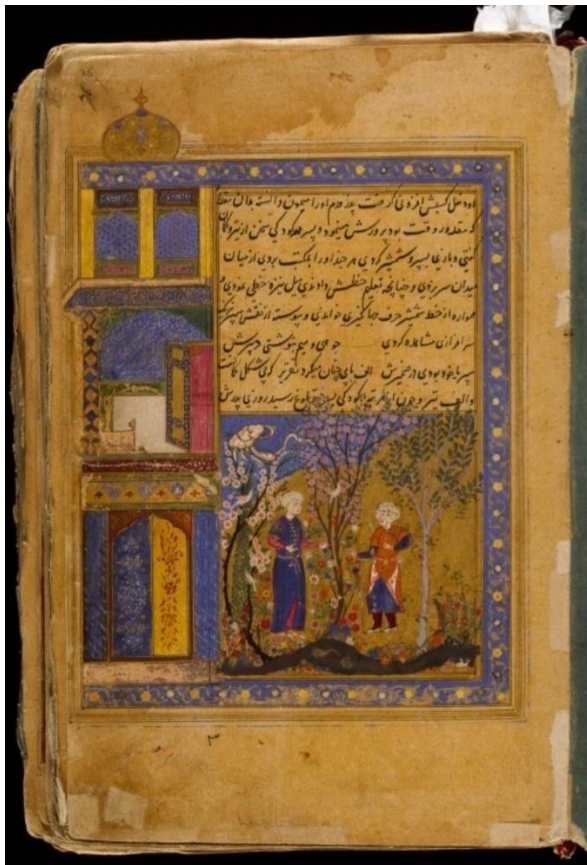


Fig.2. *Anvar-i Suhayli*, (p. 59) Golconda, late sixteenth century, Ink and gold on paper, South and South East Asia Collection, Victoria and Albert Museum, London.

*Anvar-i suhayli*, a collection of fables by the Timurid prose-stylist Husain Va`iz al-Kashifi, was written under the patronage of Sultan Husain Bayqara. The work consists of fourteen chapters. This book has been translated several times into other languages particularly Urdu and English.

The *Anvar-i Suhayli*, often called *The Lights of Canopus* in English, is a Persian version of fables originally composed in India and, at some point, written down in Sanskrit. These had travelled westwards and had been re-written in the languages of the countries through which they moved, some of the stories being incorporated into *Aesop's Fables*. The author takes its name from an allusive, punning reference to the author's patron, Shaykh Ahmad al-Suhayli. In this form, the fables returned to India where they enjoyed wide popularity. For many years, the Victoria and Albert Museum's manuscript was thought to be from a provincial Iranian school.<sup>8</sup>

#### **Nujum al-Ulum (Stars of the Sciences)**

The patron of the *Nujum al-Ulum* was Ali Adil Shah I (r.1557-79) who employed many calligraphers, illuminators, designers, and others to produce books for his court library because of being interested in Indian culture and art.

He, who was something of a mystic and whose credulous personality seems to correspond with the combination of Hindu and Muslim beliefs in the *Nujum al-Ulum*, delighted in having philosophical discussions with saints and holy personages, including Muslim, Hindu as well as Catholic missionaries, whom he invited to his court. He liked to call himself Adil Shah Sufi. His grants to places of worship and the learned were made without distinction of caste and creed.<sup>9</sup>

Explaining the features of the sixteenth century Bijapur, Stella Kramrisch mentions that *Nujum-al-Ulum* illumination of the year 1570 is a local adaptation of Timurid, early Safavid and Turkish modes of painting. Focusing on the thirty-sixth chapter of this book which is on the subjugation of fairies and supernatural things according to the Indian and Khorasani method, Kramrisch states that "Various schools are yoked in these paintings by one more consistent tradition."<sup>10</sup>

The Chester Beatty Library, Dublin collection has some works from the Deccani period; for example, there is a manuscript from Bijapur entitled the *Nujum-al Ulum*, which is dated back to 1570-1. This book consists of various subjects on Indian astrology and magic. (Fig. 3)

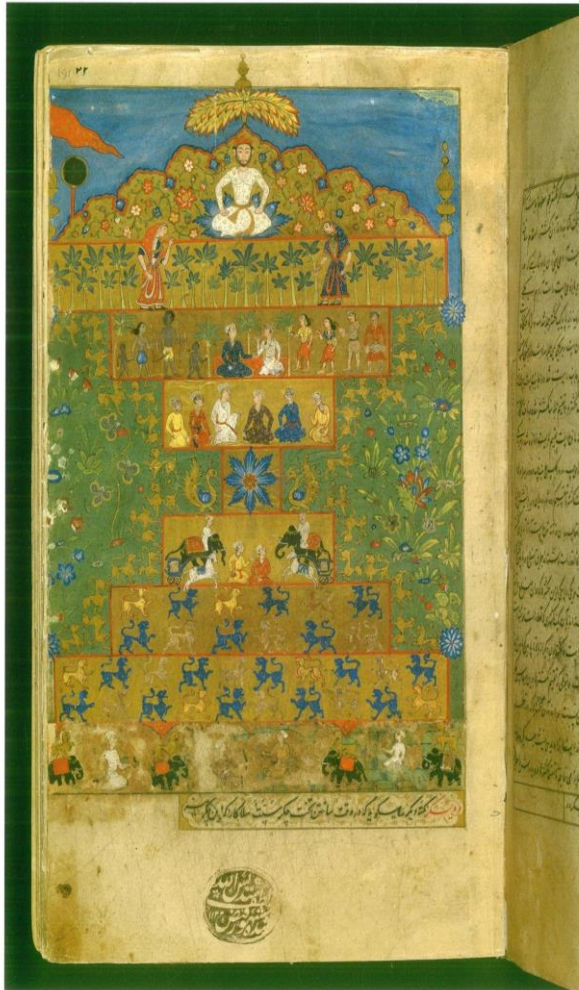


Fig. 3. Manuscript of the *Nujum al- Ulum* (Stars of the Sciences), *The Ruler on His Seven-Storyed Throne*, Folio 191r from the *Nujum al- Ulum*, Bijapur, 1570, Opaque watercolour, ink, and gold on paper, (25.8x16 cm), Chester Beatty Library, Dublin.

The Persian element entered largely in the painting of the Bijapur school. Persian bookmaking style can be seen in the creation and production of *Nujum al- Ulum* as it is in part the local adaptations of the early Safavid tradition and mode of painting.

The paintings indicate a similar assumption about the Bijapur court and its taste in that the variety of styles reveal a mingling of aesthetic cultures. It has been suggested that the book was produced by artists, working alongside those trained in classical Persian bookmaking, who arrived from the recently defeated kingdom of Vijayanagara to the south.<sup>11</sup>

Linda York states that “Some very good artists cooperated in creating the illustrations for the volume. In addition, the extensive use of gold and the ornate background patterns, as well as the

elegant abstract designs, signal the expense and quality of the *Nujum al-Ulum*.”<sup>12</sup>

#### Manuscript of the *Shahnama* in Bijapur

Ibrahim Adil Shah II, (reigned 1580-1627), the sixth ruler of the Adil Shahi dynasty, being a great book lover and excellent patron for artists and authors in Bijapur, was interested in poetry, music, painting and illustration of manuscripts.

*Shahnama* (Book of King), compiled by Abul Qasim Firdausi (ca. 940-1020) consisting of 50,000 rhyming couplets, is one of the most important and valuable epics of the world literature. This historical and legendary tale is about the ancient kings of Iran. The illustration of the *Shahnama of Shah Tahmasp* (ringed 1524-76) is known as the most elegance and luxury copy of *Shahnama* ever produced in the history of Persian art. Navina Najat Haidar and Marika Sardar believe that the text eventually came to be represented more than any other narrative in illustrated manuscripts across the Persianate world.<sup>13</sup>

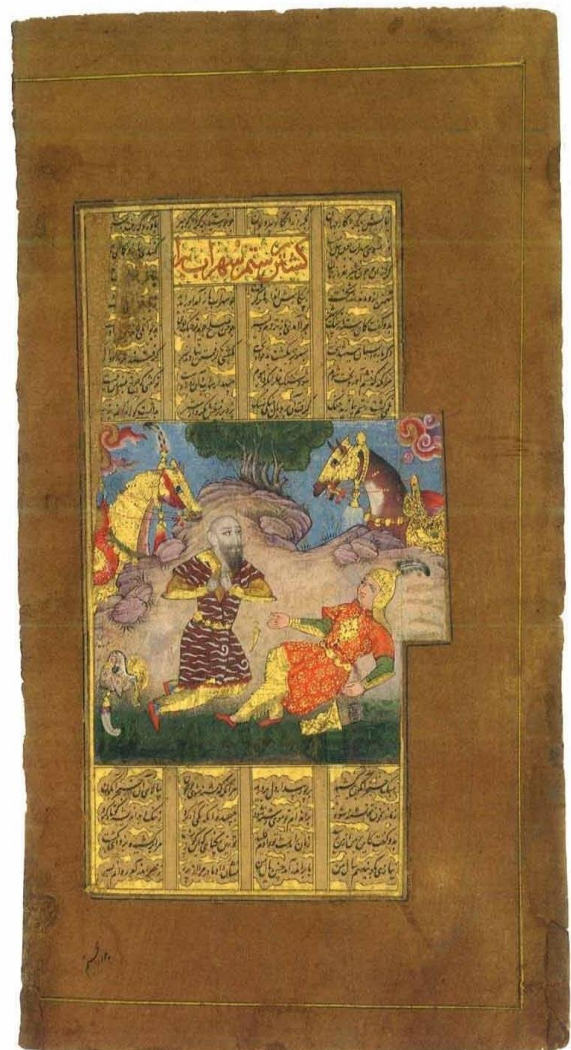




Fig.4. *Suhrab Slain by Rustam*, Folio from a *Shahnama*, Bijapur, ca. 1610, Ink, opaque watercolour, and gold on paper, image: (6.7x8 cm), folio: (20.3x12.2 cm), The Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York, Gift of The Kronos Collection, 1985

The illuminations and images of Bijapur's *Shahnama*. are related in style to those usually found in Persianate manuscripts during the sixteenth century. For example, Fig.4, which is the tragic illustration of "*Suhrab Slain by Rustam*", shows Rustam, his face pale and big eyes open wide, as he rips apart his tiger-skin garment in agony, having discovered that he has slain his son. *Suhrab* lies bleeding on the ground next to him. The colour palette emphasizing pink, orange, and green and the candy-coloured swirling clouds in the upper right and left corners are features that are derived from the Deccani tradition of painting.<sup>14</sup>

**Urdu Manuscripts in Deccani Painting Schools**  
***Diwan Muhammad Quli Qutb Shah (Kulliyat of Sultan Muhammad Quli Qub Shah)***

This *Diwan* was produced at the turn of the seventeenth century, and it is the earliest illustrated Urdu *Diwan*. It has 138 folios inscribed poems with eight elegant paintings. Michell, George Michell, and Mark Zebrowski have mentioned that nearly all are contained in a sumptuous manuscript of the sultan's Urdu verse, the *Kulliyat*, in the Salar Jung Museum, Hyderabad, so lavishly illuminated and illustrated that it must be Muhammad Quli's copy. The quality of his poetry established him as India's first great Urdu poet.<sup>15</sup>

Of the eight manuscripts of Muhammad Quli's *Diwan* or poetic collection that survive today, only the Salar Jung copy includes paintings. Currently encased in a nineteenth-century binding, this binding holds two texts, both in Dakani: The *Diwan* of Muhammad Quli (r.1580-1611) and that of later Qutb Shahi ruler, Abdullah Qutb Shah (r.1626-72). Within the pages of Muhammad Quli's *Diwan* one finds eight paintings, a double-page illuminated frontispiece, a double-page *Sarlawh* at the opening of the text three less elaborate *Unwan* (headings). Five of the eight paintings also have opulently decorated margins.<sup>16</sup> This is title of *Diwan (Sarlawh)*, (سرلوح) (Fig. 5).

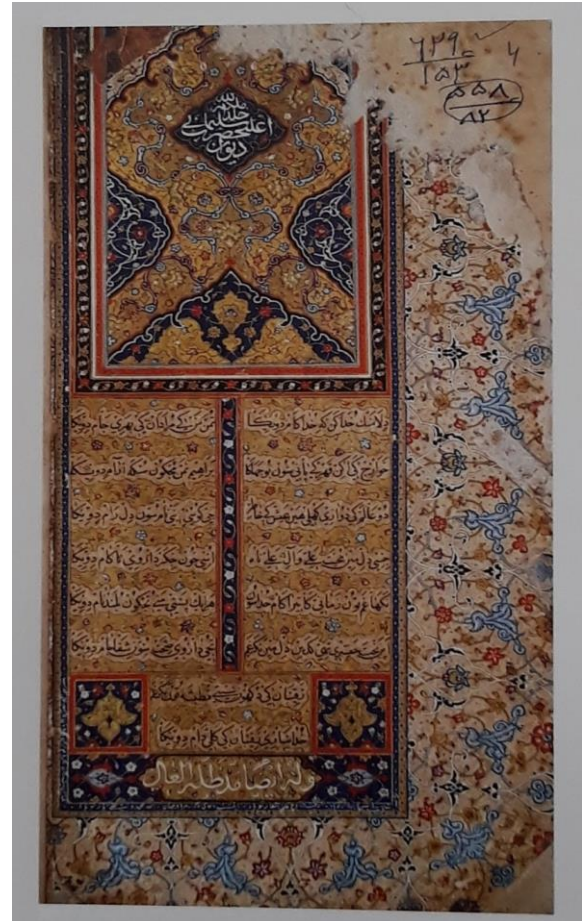


Fig.5. *Diwan* of Muhammad Quli Qutb Shah, Golconda, 1590-1605, folio 3v. Watercolour, gold and ink on paper, Salar Jung Museum, Hyderabad

*Diwans* have been popular text for illustration in courts; therefore, Muhammad Quli Qutb Shah determined to compile a *Diwan* like Persian kings as Persian immigrants were influential and Persian was the language of his court.

The main themes of *Diwan*'s paintings are hunting parties, dervishes dancing, and prince playing polo. Most of the paintings do not illustrate the text they accompany as the poems do not contain continuous episodes which could be illustrated sequentially. As a result, the artist depicts generic scenes from well-known stories.<sup>17</sup>

**Dakkani Manuscripts in Deccani Painting Schools**

***Kitab-i Nauras***

The *Kitab-i Nauras*, was compiled by Ibrahim Adil Shah II in 1617; it includes fifty-nine poems and seventeen couplets. This manuscript was illuminated and written by Khalillullah, a Persian calligrapher who worked at the Safavid court

before joining the Adil Shahi court. Ibrahim had given him the title of *Padshah-i qalam* (king of the pen). *Kitab-i Nauras* is written in the Dakkani language.

Ibrahim Adil Shah II is credited with composing a book of songs, the *Kitab-i Nauras* (Book of Nine Essences) which is a key to several artistic high points of the period and the aesthetic concept of *nauras* as a symbol within state affairs. Filled with romantic metaphors, the text sheds light on Ibrahim's hybrid religiosity and devotion to *Saraswati*, the Hindu goddess of music and learning; it also includes references to Muslim divines, and provides information on Sultan's inner circle. Surviving pages from an imperial copy are among ten or so contemporary versions of the text written during his reign.<sup>18</sup>

The text surviving in the highest number is the *Kitab-i Nauras*, and the most well-known manuscripts include a copy by Abd al-Rashid dated 990 (1582-83),<sup>19</sup> one by Abd al-Latif Mustafa with a terminus ante quem of 5 *Muharram* 1022 (February 24, 1613),<sup>20</sup> and the luxury example by Khalilullah,<sup>21</sup> transcribed after 1617.<sup>22</sup>

Nazir Ahmad, the principal investigator of this material, has derived the total number of songs (fifty-nine). Ahmad's survey has also given us the names of contemporary copyists of the manuscript; namely, Ismatullah, Abdul Latif Mustafa, and Abdul Halim, among others.<sup>23</sup>

The earliest copy is in the Salar Jung Museum, this spare copy written out by Abdul Rashid is executed in fine *Naskh* calligraphy, with headings enclosed in gold-ruled compartments, similar to that of other manuscripts produced at the court in the period. Reportedly Ibrahim's preference for the *Kitab-i Nauras* was in *Naskh* style calligraphy, with each page containing seven lines of text.<sup>24</sup>

In addition to these known copies, intriguing references have been made to another unusual and lavishly illuminated copy of the *Kitab-i Nauras*, written out in *Nastaliq* style calligraphy by the Bijapur royal calligrapher khalilullah *But-shikan* (idol-destroyer). It was presented to Sultan Ibrahim in A.H. 1027 (A.D.1617), almost twenty years after its composition, who reportedly gave the calligrapher the title of *Padshah-i Qalam* (king of the pen) as a sign of his pleasure.<sup>25</sup> The colophon of the book mentions the name of Khalilullah in Persian and Arabic languages; hence this copy can be easily distinguished from other works. (Fig. 6)

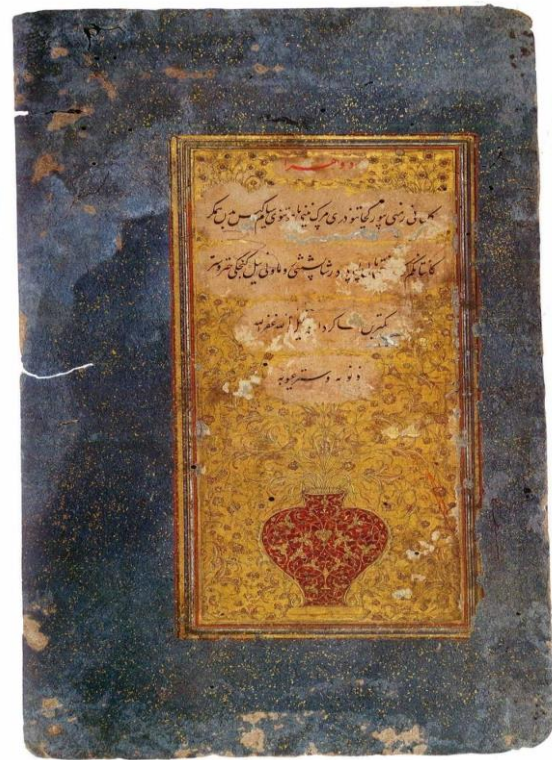


Fig.6. A Folio from Manuscript of *Kitab-i Nauras* (Book of Nine Essences)

Calligraphy by Khalilullah Butshikan, Bijapur, A.H 1027 (A.D 1618)

Ink, gold, and opaque watercolour on paper, (20.6x11 cm)

National Museum, New Delhi

Inscribed: کمترین شاگرد امیر خلیل الله غفر الله ذنوبه و ستر عیوبه

Kamtarin shagird amir Khalilullah ghafarallah dhunubahu wa satar uyubahu (work of humble student amir Khalilullah. May Gog forgive his sins and conceal his failing).

#### Dakkani Urdu Manuscripts in Deccani Schools *Pem Nem* (The Laws of Love)

The *Pem Nem* is one of the greatest examples of manuscript illustration from the court of Sultan Ibrahim Adil Shah II, This Dakkani Urdu manuscript containing thirty-four miniature paintings illustrating the Sufi love story of prince Shah Ji and princess Mah Ji, and 239 folios, was written by Hasan Manjhu Khalji, no other works by the *Pem Nem*'s writer, who adopted the pen name Hans is known. The text contains 199 rhyming couplets and 999 quatrains and praises the 99



names of God. Deborah Hutton has elaborated on the concept and style of the manuscript.

One of the important Sufi romance's manuscripts is the *Gulshan-i Ishq* (Flower Garden of Love); it was composed in Dakkani Urdu in 1675 by Mulla Nusrati at the Bijapur in the Ali Adil Shah II period. Salar Jung Museum has the earliest version of this manuscript dated 1669.

The *Pem Nem*, "The Laws of Love" or "The Rule of Love", is a unique, illustrated Sufi romance created at Adil Shahi court of Bijapur between circa 1591 and 1604. As this Dakhni Urdu manuscript comes with interpretive challenges, it is a crucial piece of evidence for the understanding of Bijapur's artistic development of innovative imagery.<sup>26</sup>

The manuscript has thirty-four full-page illustrations which were done by three artists with different tastes and talents.

That text is penned in elegant, clear calligraphy, with the lines well-spaced on the page and framed with simple gold and blue border. Yet, despite the clarity of the script, the poem is very difficult to read today. Hans composed the *Masnavi* is an obscure, early form of Dakhni Urdu that seems to contain many words from Marathi and other local dialects of the period. The linguist David Matthews, who has extensively analyzed the *Pem Nem*, has concluded that it is unlike other Dakhni writings from the period; apart from a few verses from the *Kitab-i Nauras*, the book of poems is attributed to Ibrahim, Adil Shah II.<sup>27</sup>

Deborah Hutton in her article on *Pem Nem* has considered major points in paintings of this book and mentioned that these paintings are, on the one hand, elements that display a very sophisticated approach to, and understanding of, visual representation, and, on the other hand, aspects, particularly as related to technical execution, that seem less developed and less refined. This mixture is what makes the *Pem Nem* useful for the understanding of not only the stylistic development of Bijapuri painting but also its function within Adil Shahi courtly culture.<sup>28</sup> The most prominent of *Pem Nem*'s visual metaphors is the face of Mah Ji, which appears in every single depiction of Shah Ji on his heart.<sup>29</sup> ( Figs. 7, 8)

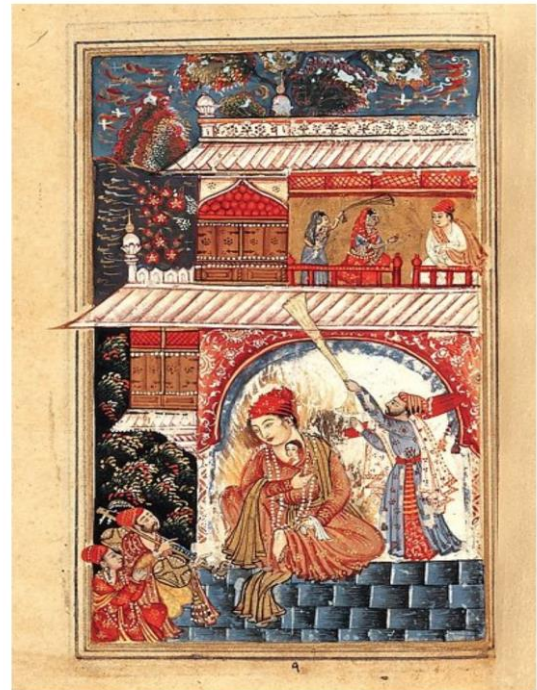


Fig.7. *The hero, Shah Ji, enflamed with passion*, Manuscript of the *Pen Nem*, Bijapur, 1590-1 Ink, opaque watercolour, and gold on paper, (24x16 cm), The British Library

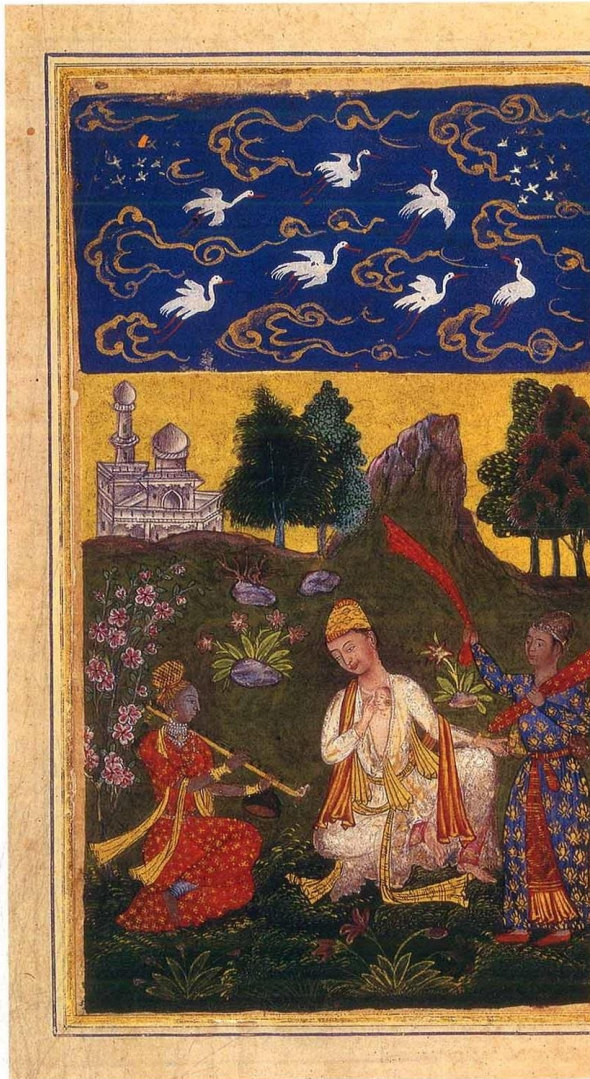


Fig.8. *Mah ji's Face on Shah Ji's Chest*, Manuscript of the *Pen Nem*, Bijapur, 1590-1  
Ink, opaque watercolour, and gold on paper, (24x16 cm), The British Library

Dekkan Urdu manuscript *Pem Nem*, which is available at the British Library in London, is a book of Sufism and a mystical love story based on Deccani painting school.

### Conclusion

Deccani painting flourished in the centres of Ahmadnagar, Bijapur, Golconda and then Hyderabad during the late fifteenth to seventeenth centuries. Controlled designing and artistic harmony of aspects are typical conventions followed by the Deccani masters. Conceived invariably as types, the human figures were rich in the dramatic impact of gestures. Such a concept of stylization, lyrical yet sensuous, was closer to the Safavid mannerism of the sixteenth century as an element of fantasy pervaded even the landscape backgrounds.

Miniature painting, particularly illustrated in the manuscript in this period was so distinct and brilliant. Even quality and variety of paintings had competed with Safavid, Ottoman and Mughal paintings at that time. Persianate cultural and traditional forms and concepts played a significant role in the development of Deccani painting.

These miniature paintings, in various manuscripts, interpreted the social, cultural and artistic situation of the medieval and early modern period in Ahmadnagar, Bijapur, Golconda and then Hyderabad. The artists were involved in Deccani events of the time; thus, the painting contained several conceptual trends and illustrate the various themes of Deccani culture including its contemporary geopolitics and visual contents.

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<sup>12</sup> York Leach. *Mughal and Other Indian Paintings from the Chester Beatty Library*, Volume II, p.820.

<sup>13</sup> Haidar and Sardar. *Sultans of Deccan India 1500-1700, Opulence and Fantasy*, p.108

<sup>14</sup> Ibid, p.108.

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<sup>18</sup> Haidar, and Sardar. *Sultans of Deccan India 1500-1700, Opulence and Fantasy*, p.71.

<sup>19</sup> This copy is available in Salar Jung Museum, Hyderabad.

<sup>20</sup> This copy is available in Central quem Record Office, Hyderabad.

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