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Title - Visual Representation of the Royal Mughal Women in Miniature Paintings (1556 - 1707 AD)

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Mughal miniature paintings are an invaluable source for understanding the roles and identities of royal women during the Mughal Empire. These paintings, created during the empire's peak, provide rich insights into the lives, status, and cultural roles of women in the courtly and social spheres. However, the depiction of women in Mughal art was complex, often shaped by social, cultural, and artistic norms, as well as the male perspective of the artists who created them.

One of the key findings of this research is the portrayal of women in a passive and ornamental light. Mughal art frequently depicted royal women as symbols of grace and beauty, often emphasizing their delicate features, elaborate attire, and passive roles. The "Ek Chashmi Do Chashmi" style, where women were shown with one eye visible and the other obscured, was commonly used to depict women. This convention reinforced the idea of women as secondary to men, who were typically shown with both eyes visible, suggesting their dominant and active roles. This stylized portrayal reflected the gender dynamics of the time, where women were often relegated to subordinate positions, even within the royal household.

The representation of women in Mughal art also reflected the influence of Persian artistic traditions. Persian aesthetics, emphasizing delicate features, flowing hair, and elaborate clothing, shaped the way Mughal women were depicted. Additionally, the introduction of European techniques, such as perspective and shading, during the Mughal period further enriched the visual language of Mughal art, adding depth and realism to the portrayal of women.

Despite these restrictions, Mughal miniature paintings also revealed significant aspects of women's roles in courtly life. Royal women, including queens and princesses, were depicted engaging in cultural and social activities, such as poetry recitations, music, and dance. These representations suggest that women, though confined to certain spaces, played vital roles in the cultural and intellectual life of the court. The paintings also highlighted the fashion, jewels, and daily activities of royal women, offering insights into their status and influence within the Mughal social hierarchy.

While the purdah system restricted direct access to the Zenana (women's quarters), artists still produced portraits of royal women, indicating that some may have had access to these spaces. There is evidence suggesting that a few women artists were involved in the creation of more

realistic and individualized depictions of royal women, breaking from the traditional, idealized portrayals.

Mughal art was also shaped by the patronage system, with emperors commissioning paintings that reflected their own cultural values. The training of artists in the imperial "Kitab Khana" (House of Books) further ensured that specific conventions, such as idealized depictions of royal women, were passed down through generations. However, as the Mughal Empire progressed, the representation of women evolved, with later rulers, like Jahangir and Shah Jahan, featuring women more prominently in court scenes, though often still in idealized and stylized forms.

In conclusion, while Mughal miniature paintings offer a window into the lives of royal women, they must be understood within the context of male-dominated artistic traditions and cultural norms. These paintings provide valuable historical documentation, reflecting both the constraints placed on women and their influential roles within Mughal society.