

CUET · FINE ARTS · CLASS XII · CODE 312

The Deccani Schools of Painting

CUET unit: The Rajasthani and Pahari Schools / Mughal and Deccan Schools of Miniature Painting (Indian Art history – Medieval India)

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Snapshot

- Deccani painting ran from the late 16th century until the 1680s (Mughal conquest of the Deccan), with afterlives in the 19th century and under the Asafiya/Nizam-ruled Hyderabad.
- The Deccan school was a distinct full-fledged school — long misclassified as Indo-Persian — sustained by independent Sultanates with their own political-cultural vision.
- The three principal centres are **Ahmadnagar, Bijapur and Golconda**, each with characteristic patrons, themes and stylistic markers.
- Key illustrated works (Tarif-i-Hussain Shahi, Nujum al-Ulum, Diwan of Hafiz, Ragamala set, Yogini, Composite Horse) and royal portraits feature throughout.
- This is critical for CUET, which tests cross-school comparisons (Mughal vs Deccan vs Persian) and identification of specific paintings with patrons.
- The Deccan school is the seventeenth-century "third wing" of Indian court painting, operating independently of, and parallel to, the Mughal and Rajasthani schools.

Detailed Notes

2.1 Core concepts

The history of Deccani painting runs from the late sixteenth century until the 1680s — the moment when the Mughals conquered the Deccan and absorbed its independent Sultanates. The tradition then continues, in transformed shape, into nineteenth-century art and under the Asafiya dynasty / Nizam-ruled Hyderabad (NCERT §Intro, p. 55). For a long time the Deccani style was misclassified as Indo-Persian and treated as a derivative branch of Middle Eastern, Safavid, Persian, Turkish or Mughal art. NCERT corrects this historiographical error: the Deccan must be recognised as a full-fledged independent school sustained by rulers with a peculiar political and cultural vision of their own (NCERT §Intro, p. 55).

NCERT also makes an important comparative point. Highly documentary portraiture of historical and religious figures — a feature usually associated with Mughal art and broader Asian Islamic art — is also present in the Deccan. Mughal portraiture, in other words, was not wholly unique; the Deccan developed its own portrait genre in parallel. The kingdoms of Bijapur, Golconda and Ahmadnagar, located in the plateau region of

southern India beyond the Vindhyas, developed a sophisticated court painting marked by unique sensuality, intense colours, dense composition and an aura of romance (NCERT §Intro, pp. 55–56).

The Ahmadnagar School is the chronological starting point. The earliest examples of Deccani painting are found in a volume of poems titled **Tarif-i-Hussain Shahi**, celebrating the reign of Hussain Nizam Shah I of Ahmadnagar (1553–1565). The manuscript contains twelve miniatures depicting battle scenes (of no particular artistic interest, NCERT notes drily) and depictions of the queen and her marriage (NCERT §Ahmadnagar, p. 56). The Ahmadnagar women wear a modified northern costume — a **choli** or bodice and long braided pigtails ending in a tassel — with a long scarf passing round the body below the hips in the southern fashion seen in the Lepakshi frescoes. The palette is richer and more brilliant than in northern manuscripts. The high circular horizon and the gold sky are markers of Persian influence, indicating the debt of all the Deccani kingdoms to Persia for their landscape idiom.

Ragamala paintings of the sixteenth century are the most striking sub-genre of Ahmadnagar-Bijapur production. Women have their hair rolled into a bun on the nape — again a Lepakshi convention — and the horizon disappears, replaced by a neutral ground patterned with stylised plants or symmetrical architectural domes. The male jama with pointed tails seen in early Akbari miniatures probably originated between Delhi and Ahmedabad; the small pagri is close to the earliest Akbari form. NCERT notes that the **Gulistan** manuscript of 1567 contains paintings attributed to Bukhara artists who may also have worked in the Deccan, indicating significant lateral cross-court mobility of artists. A manuscript at the Bankipore Library in Patna, signed by the scribe Yusuf, is dedicated to Ibrahim Qutb Shah of Golconda (1569, who ruled 1550–1580); it contains seven miniatures executed entirely in the Bukhara idiom (NCERT §Ahmadnagar, p. 57).

The Bijapur School is the richest section. A richly illustrated encyclopaedia, **Nujum al-Ulum** (1570), contains 876 miniatures depicting weapons, utensils and constellations; the women are shown in the tall, slender south Indian dress also found in the Ragamala paintings. Bijapur was patronised by Ali Adil Shah I (1558–1580) and his successor Ibrahim Adil Shah II (1580–1627) — both patrons of art and literature. Ibrahim II was an expert in Indian music and the author of the **Nauras-nama**; he owned the **Nujum al-Ulum** manuscript and may have commissioned the Ragamala series in the 1590s. Bijapur had close connections with Turkey, and the astronomical illustrations in the **Nujum al-Ulum** may derive from Ottoman Turkish manuscripts. The Ragamala set echoes the Lepakshi style of southern wall painting (NCERT §Bijapur, p. 57).

The single most celebrated Bijapur folio in this chapter is **The Throne of Prosperity** (1570) — a symbolic diagram of an auspicious throne of seven stages, supported by elephants, tigers, palm trees, peacocks and primitive tribes. The basic structures recall the wood-carved doorways and façades of Gujarati homes or Deccan temples; the arabesques on the top of the throne are in the Islamic Persian tradition. A second key Bijapur folio is the **Yogini** (17th century, Chester Beatty Library): a vertical composition

with a long-standing figure complemented by a group of white architectural structures as a tapering visual note. The Yogini is in conversation with a myna bird; she is adorned with elaborate jewellery, has an elongated hair bun and long swirling scarves (NCERT §Bijapur, pp. 57–58).

The Golconda School is the third strand. Golconda became an independent state in 1512 and, by the end of the sixteenth century, was the wealthiest Deccan kingdom — sustained by brisk trade from the east coast ports, iron and cotton exports to Southeast Asia, and trade with Persia. Early in the seventeenth century the discovery of diamonds dramatically expanded its revenues. Golconda art became popular in Europe as Dutch merchants carried Sultans' portraits to European markets in the late seventeenth century. Early Golconda paintings of 1635–1650 were sometimes as large as eight feet high and served as wall hangings rather than album miniatures (NCERT §Golconda, pp. 58–59).

The earliest five Golconda miniatures are bound into the **Diwan of Hafiz**, dated 1463. The court scenes show a young ruler enthroned, holding a typically long straight Deccani sword and wearing a white coat with embroidered vertical bands. The pages are lavishly enriched with gold and deep azure sky; the architecture is symmetrical and unfunctional; the palette includes distinctive purple hues; sometimes animals are coloured blue (e.g., blue foxes). The painting suggests no Mughal influence at this stage. A portrait of Muhammad Qutb Shah (1611–1626) on a divan shows him wearing the typical Golconda dress and an elegant tight-fitting cap; the composition has gained sophistication, the symmetry of the 1590 pages is retained, and there is a marked plastic rendering in the drapes (NCERT §Golconda, pp. 59–60).

A Sufi poem manuscript with paraphrased prose is illustrated with more than twenty Golconda miniatures; its peculiar feature is the sky shown in gold and blue in separate bands; trees are of the Deccani type, richly coloured with tinted edges; plants are silhouetted against dark foliage; costumes indicate fashion under Ibrahim II of Bijapur. The **Composite Horse** (Golconda, early 17th century) is one of the most distinctive Golconda paintings: human figures are intertwined to form a galloping horse on a decorated background of flying cranes, lions, Chinese clouds and large-leaved plants. The surreal element is unmistakable; rocky formulations at the bottom anchor the painting; and the palette is restricted to brown and blue (NCERT §Composite Horse, p. 61).

A series of named picture studies follow. **Sultan Ibrahim Adil Shah II Hawking** is dominated by brilliant red on the horse's limbs and tail and on the flowing garment of the Sultan; the forest foliage is dark and dense (olive and emerald) with cobalt blue; cranes appear in the background; a white hawk sits at the centre. The horse and rocks show Persian influence; the foreground is native Indian. The painting is at the Institute of the Peoples of Asia, Academy of Sciences, Leningrad (NCERT p. 62). **Ragini Pathamsika of Raga Hindola** (c. 1590–95, National Museum, New Delhi) is believed by scholars to be from Bijapur: arabesque on two domes, Devanagari script letters above,

central female playing veena, vibrant red complemented by green, and a dark elephant with raised trunk in the left corner as a sign of welcome (NCERT p. 63).

The Sultan Abdullah Qutb Shah portrait at the National Museum carries a Persian inscription on top; he is enthroned and holds a sword — the symbol of political sovereignty — and a halo surrounds his head, signifying divinity (NCERT p. 64). The provincial painting Hazrat Nizamuddin Auliya and Amir Khusrau is from Hyderabad, Deccan, and depicts the thirteenth-century Sufi saint listening to music played by his disciple Amir Khusrau; the style is naive and basic, but charming and narrative of a popular Indian theme (NCERT p. 65). Finally, Chand Bibi Playing Polo depicts Chand Bibi, the Queen of Bijapur who resisted the Mughal political attempts of Emperor Akbar; she is shown playing **chaugan** — the Indian name for equestrian polo. The work is a provincial painting in the National Museum (NCERT p. 66).

2.2 Definitions to memorise

Term	Definition	Page
Tarif-i-Hussain Shahi	Volume of poems celebrating Hussain Nizam Shah I; 12 miniatures — earliest Deccani painting	56
Choli	Bodice worn by women in Ahmadnagar paintings	56
Ragamala	Family of paintings of ragas and raginis	56
Nujum al-Ulum	1570 Bijapur encyclopaedia with 876 miniatures	57
Nauras-nama	Book on Indian music by Ibrahim II of Bijapur	57
Jama	Male costume with pointed tails	57
Pagri	Small head-turban (early Akbari form)	57
Yogini	Bijapur 17th-c. vertical composition with myna	58
Diwan of Hafiz	1463 manuscript with earliest five Golconda miniatures	59
Composite Horse	Golconda painting of intertwined figures forming a horse	61
Chaugan	The Indian name for equestrian polo	66
Dargah	Shrine (Nizamuddin Auliya context)	65
Lepakshi-style hair bun	Hair rolled into bun on the nape (Bijapur Ragamala convention)	56
Halo (Deccani portrait)	Divinity around ruler's head	64
Long straight Deccani sword	Diagnostic Golconda court attribute	59
Gold sky	Persian influence on Deccani landscape	56
High circular horizon	Persian influence on Deccani landscape	56
Plastic rendering	Sculptural-fold quality of drapes in mature Golconda	59

Term	Definition	Page
Provincial painting	Later Hyderabad Deccani work	65
Hussain Nizam Shah I	Ahmadnagar Sultan (1553–65)	56
Ibrahim Qutb Shah	Golconda ruler (1550–80)	57
Ali Adil Shah I	Bijapur Sultan (1558–80)	57
Ibrahim Adil Shah II	Bijapur Sultan (1580–1627), music patron	57
Muhammad Qutb Shah	Golconda ruler (1611–26)	59
Sultan Abdullah Qutb Shah	Golconda ruler whose halo portrait survives	64

2.3 Diagrams / processes to remember

Plates students should recognise visually for image-MCQs: **Sultan Adil Shah II playing Tambura** by Farrukh Beg (Bijapur, 1595–1600, National Museum, Prague, p. 55 chapter opener); **Tarif-i-Hussain Shahi: King sitting on the Throne** (Ahmadnagar, 1565–69, Bharata Itihasa Samshodaka Mandala, Poona, p. 56); **Nujum al-Ulum: The Throne of Prosperity** (Bijapur, 1570, Chester Beatty Library, Dublin, p. 57); **Yogini** (Bijapur, 17th century, Chester Beatty Library, p. 58); **Dancing before Muhammad Quli Qutb Shah** (Golconda, 1590, British Museum, London, p. 59); **Poet in a Garden** by Muhammad Ali (Golconda, 1605–1615, Museum of Fine Arts, Boston, p. 60); **Composite Horse** (Golconda, early 17th c., p. 61); **Sultan Ibrahim Adil Shah II Hawking** (Leningrad, p. 62); **Ragini Pathamsika of Raga Hindola** (c. 1590–95, National Museum, New Delhi, p. 63); **Sultan Abdullah Qutb Shah portrait** (National Museum, p. 64); **Hazrat Nizamuddin Auliya and Amir Khusrau** (Hyderabad provincial, National Museum, p. 65); **Chand Bibi Playing Polo** (National Museum, p. 66).

Memorise three stylistic feature sets: AHMADNAGAR — choli + braided pigtail with tassel + southern scarf + high circular horizon + gold sky; BIJAPUR — Lepakshi hair bun + neutral patterned ground + tall slender south Indian dress + arabesque + brilliant palette; GOLCONDA — gold-blue banded sky + Deccani trees with tinted edges + plastic-fold drapes + long straight sword + occasional blue animals + halo-and-sword portrait formula.

2.4 Common confusions / NTA trap points

- Students confuse the three centres: Ahmadnagar (Hussain Nizam Shah, Tarif-i-Hussain Shahi), Bijapur (Adil Shahs, Nujum al-Ulum, Yogini, Ragamala), Golconda (Qutb Shahs, Diwan of Hafiz, Composite Horse).
- Ibrahim II of Bijapur (1580–1627) is the music expert and author of Nauras-nama — NOT Ibrahim Qutb Shah of Golconda (1550–1580).
- The Deccani style was LONG CLASSIFIED as Indo-Persian but is actually a full-fledged independent school — a favourite NTA trap.

- Chaugan is the other name for POLO, not a type of dance or sword.
- Halo in Sultan Abdullah Qutb Shah's portrait symbolises DIVINITY; sword symbolises POLITICAL SOVEREIGNTY.
- The high circular horizon and gold sky reflect PERSIAN influence — not Mughal.
- Sultan Adil Shah II playing Tambura is by Farrukh Beg, in PRAGUE, not London.
- The Composite Horse uses BROWN and BLUE only — not the full Bijapur red.
- The Nujum al-Ulum has 876 miniatures (NOT 169 — which is Razm Nama).
- Chand Bibi is the Queen of BIJAPUR who resisted AKBAR — not of Ahmadnagar or Golconda.
- Hazrat Nizamuddin Auliya & Amir Khusrau is HYDERABAD provincial — not Bijapur or Golconda.
- The Diwan of Hafiz is dated 1463, but the Golconda miniatures inside were added later.

2.5 Key artworks / artists

Artwork or Artist	Period	Significance	NCERT page
Tarif-i-Hussain Shahi	1565–69, Ahmadnagar	Earliest Deccani painting; 12 miniatures	56
Hussain Nizam Shah I	1553–65, Ahmadnagar	Patron of earliest Deccani manuscript	56
Ahmadnagar Ragamala set	16th c.	Lepakshi-bun women, neutral ground	56
Ibrahim Qutb Shah	1550–80, Golconda	Bankipore Yusuf manuscript dedicated to him	57
Nujum al-Ulum	1570, Bijapur	876-miniature encyclopaedia	57
The Throne of Prosperity, Bijapur	1570	Seven-stage symbolic throne	57
Ali Adil Shah I	1558–80, Bijapur	Early patron	57
Ibrahim Adil Shah II	1580–1627, Bijapur	Author of Nauras-nama; music patron	57
Nauras-nama	c. 1600	Ibrahim II's music treatise	57
Sultan Adil Shah II playing Tambura, by Farrukh Beg	1595–1600, Bijapur	National Museum Prague	55
Yogini, Bijapur	17th c.	Vertical composition, myna conversation	58
Diwan of Hafiz	1463, Golconda	Earliest five Golconda miniatures bound here	59

Artwork or Artist	Period	Significance	NCERT page
Dancing before Muhammad Quli Qutb Shah	1590, Golconda	British Museum	59
Muhammad Qutb Shah portrait	1611–26, Golconda	Sophistication and plastic drapes	59
Poet in a Garden, by Muhammad Ali	1605–1615, Golconda	Museum of Fine Arts, Boston	60
Composite Horse, Golconda	Early 17th c.	Intertwined figures forming a horse	61
Sultan Ibrahim Adil Shah II Hawking	17th c., Bijapur	Leningrad; brilliant red and dark foliage	62
Ragini Pathamsika of Raga Hindola	c. 1590–95, Bijapur	National Museum, New Delhi	63
Sultan Abdullah Qutb Shah portrait	17th c., Golconda	National Museum; halo and sword	64
Hazrat Nizamuddin Auliya & Amir Khusrau	Hyderabad provincial	National Museum, naive style	65
Chand Bibi Playing Polo	Provincial Bijapur	Chand Bibi resisting Akbar	66
Bankipore Yusuf manuscript	1569	Bukhara-idiom Deccani folios	57
Gulistan of 1567	Bukhara artists	Lateral artist mobility	57
Farrukh Beg (artist)	Late 16th c., Bijapur	Painted Sultan Adil Shah II playing Tambura	55
Muhammad Ali (artist)	Early 17th c., Golconda	Poet in a Garden	60

Practice MCQs

PYQ Alignment

The Deccan Schools is a consistently tested chapter in CUET Fine Arts — usually 1–2 direct identification questions per year on patrons (Ibrahim II, Hussain Nizam Shah, Qutb Shahs), manuscript names (Tarif-i-Hussain Shahi, Nujum al-Ulum, Diwan of Hafiz) and painting–centre matching. Expect statement-based and matching-type MCQs that contrast Deccani features (gold sky, Persian horizon, Lepakshi-style hair buns, brilliant palette) with Mughal/Rajasthani conventions, plus one symbolism question (halo, sword,



chaugan). CUET 2024 carried a Throne of Prosperity attribution question; CUET 2025 set a Composite Horse identification.



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