

Indian Art - Seminar 3

Mughal Art

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WAHG

Lecture Notes N°3

MUGHAL ART

(Please refer to AM LO10 Indian miniatures)

Mughal Art was basically - a secular Art motivated to foster the political power and gratification of a developed aesthetic taste of the Mughal emperors and members of their elite

The **Delhi Sultanate** was one of many Muslim states that ruled in India from 1206 to 1526. Ibrahim Lodi was the last ruler of Delhi Sultanate. He belonged to the Afghan tribe, Ghilzai of Pashtuns. He ruled over a wide area of Northern India from 1517 to 1526. He was defeated and killed on April 21, 1526. by the Mughal leader Babur (*who had been invited to India by some members of Lodi's court*) at the battle of Panipat. Babur then established a new Mughal dynasty that ruled over large parts of India; a dynasty that lasted for three centuries. Thus the Mughal period starts in the 16thCE with the second major wave by Muslim invaders - Mughals with a Timuridⁱ dynastic background and culture who were fond of painting and aesthetics. Its Art was motivated by the Mughal court but was frequently adapted and developed by Hindu artists. The art tapers off by mid 18thCE.

Two cultural streams flowed in the veins of Babur, the founder of the Mughal Empire: the Turko-Mongol tradition of his ancestors, Chinghis Khan and Timurlang, Timurlang had a weakness for beautiful things, collecting artisans from all over Asia in order to turn his capital, Samarqand, into a cultural wonder. Babur's temperament, as is evident from his remarkable autobiography, is an

ⁱ A Central Asian Sunni Muslim people of Persian origins

expression of this mixed heritage of violence and refinement. This mixed heritage of violence and refinement was a characteristic shared in varying degrees by all three early emperors. This is reflected in the architecture and art produced during their reigns

The art was subject to several influences; Rajput art being one of the most influential. When Akabar became Emperor in 1556 he consolidated his inheritance and absorbed what had been the "Delhi sultanate"ⁱⁱ into his wide empire. A main factor in this success was indubitably his co-option of native Rajput chiefs into his empire building project. The Rajput chiefs collaborated with the alliance and cemented it by marriage; with numerous Rajput noblewomen being wed to Mughal grandees. This extended Rajput influence across the Indian sub-continent. Both Akabar's son Jehangir and grandson Shan Jehan who became successive Mughal emperors were born to Rajput mothers. Thus his reign countenanced, for the first time, the involvement of Hindus in the affairs of a Moslem Empire.

Mughal architecture

Mughal architecture made clear political statements through a complex, syncretic imagery of varied pedigrees. The different influences from Timurid Central Asia, Iran, India, and the West were moulded into an organic unity through a powerful theory of kingship. Mughal architecture, disseminated throughout the empire by the viceroys, came to stand for imperial authority. Whilst Babur, barely had time to layout gardens for planting the Iranian fruits that he missed in India it was his son Akabar who laid down the architectural tone of Mughal power but which was sensitive to the

ⁱⁱ In 1192 CE, the Muslim general Muhammed Ghor captured Delhi and started a dynasty of rulers which, together with some later dynasties, is called the ***Delhi Sultanate***. They ruled varying parts of India from Delhi from that time to 1526.

majority Hindu sensibilities. Nevertheless it has been argued that Mughal experiments in urban design were inspired by the symmetrical, four square gardens whose spaces were divided into modules reflecting the particular Persian interpretation of the Koranic paradise garden.

Akbar had an impassioned interest in architecture. He not only realised that forts enhanced and secured his position but that he could use architecture to integrate culturally his diverse nation through deliberately blending Islamic and Hindu elements.

Akbar commissioned the first major building from two architects from Bukhara, Uzbekistan in order to fulfil his filial duty by building a mausoleum to his father, Humayun. This centrally planned sepulchre with at its centre a four-square garden with running pools, streams, and open pavilions is the first of the Mughal paradise gardens. The tomb design is attributed to Sayyid Muhammad and his father, Mirak Sayyid Ghiyath (Mirak Mirza Ghiyas), Persian architects and poets active at Akabar's court

Akbar was a brilliant general, whose empire rivalled Asoka's. He built a network of fortress palaces between 1565 and 1571 aimed at imposing iron control over his considerable territory. The first to be completed was the fort at Agra, which superseded Delhi as the main capital.. Ever since Babur defeated and killed Ibrahim Lodi Panipat in 1526, Agra became an important centre of Mughal Empire. Akbar chose this city on the bank of River Yamuna as his capital and proceeded to build a strong citadel on an old castle site for the purpose. Started in 1565, it took eight years to complete its construction. Qasim Khan Mir Barr u-Bahr supervised the construction of this building. It contained the largest state treasury and mint. With its fine masonry work and its elegant Delhi Gate made of sandstone inlaid with white marble, the fort later came to

serve a ceremonial rather than a strategic purpose for the Mughal courts. Within the complex there are some fine palaces including the *Jahangiri Mahals* built by Akbar as the women's quarters. This double storied palace interestingly reflects a strong Hindu influence with its courtyard halls styled in the broader Gujarat-Malwa-Rajasthan tradition as it had been passed onto the Mughals by the early 16th century by the architecture of Raja Man Singh of Gwalior. Later the emperor Shah Jehan, between 1631-40 had built Khas Mahal a pavilion of imperial apartments. Built entirely of marble it demonstrates distinctive Islamic Persian features. It provides the most successful example of paintings on a white marble surface. **Agra Fort** is now a UNESCO World Heritage Centre

Inspired by the fulfilled prophecy of a Muslim saint who had predicted the birth of his son and heir Salim, the future emperor Jahangir, Akbar undertook the construction of a completely new city - Fatehpur Sikri - on the remote site of the holy-man's retreat, 26 miles west of Agra. For a period of about fifteen years, starting in 1571 a ceremonial capital, including elaborate palaces, formal courtyards, reflecting pools, harems, 162 tombs, and a great mosque, were erected. Over an area two miles long and a mile wide the city rose to completion out of the feverish activity of an army of masons and stone-carvers. They had hardly completed their labours when, due to royal distractions and a lack of an adequate water-supply, the pristine stone palaces were abandoned.

The soaring gateway of the Buland Darwaza is one of the grandest of Mughal monuments. This triumphal arch was built by the Emperor Akbar, when he defeated the king Khandesh of Gujarat in 1573. The name **Buland Darwaza** means 'High Door' and this victory arch rises to a height of 40 meters or 175 feet.

Akabar's successors continued to take a great interest in architecture. One of the result was the renowned building the Taj Mahal. The Emperor Shah Jahan had it built in memory of his favourite wife, Muntaz Mahal. One can only agree with a contemporary Mughal reaction that the Taj Mahal defies an '*ocean of descriptions*'.

The Mughal miniatures

The emphasis of Mughal painting was on miniatures embodied in books that recounted legends or recorded the activities of the Mughal Emperors. In these works, the first influence of Persian art is visible. Thus, the Persian, Central Asian and Indian elements mingled together and out of this synthesis, a new style, known as '*Mughal Style*' was born

The miniatures were collaborative efforts produced in Muslim *karkhana* (art workshops) comprising paper makers, gilders calligraphers, illuminators, illustrators, and binders all supervised by a Master. Out of well over hundred artists employed at Court about a dozen masters rose to prominence including **NADIR BANU**, a woman artist but the outstanding artists were **DASWANTH & BASAWAN** of Akbar's court who left their stamp upon Indian art. Work began on the first landmark in Mughal art, *Hamza Nama*, in around 1562, its overall unity imposed by the workshop recounting the mythical adventures of the Prophet's uncle, Amir Hamza, interspersed with moral lessons. It is illustrated with paintings on a larger format than the average works (14 x 10 inches) and painted on cotton rather than paper. It was rediscovered in the nineteenth century; some 200 out of 1,400 works have survived.

The highly competitive atmosphere at the court spurred artists to surpass themselves. The emperors conducted weekly inspections of paintings attended by courtiers, who offered criticisms.

The **Akbarnama** is a work commissioned by Akabar, and written by Abul Fazl, one of the *Nine Jewels* of Akbar's royal court. It is an official biographical account of Akbar, written in Persian. It includes vivid and detailed descriptions of his life and times. It contains several hunt scenes. It is stated that the book took seven years to be completed and the original manuscripts contained a number of paintings supporting the texts. All the early miniatures representing the early Mughal school of painting is the work of masters of the imperial workshop, including **Basawan**, whose use of portraiture in its illustrations was an innovation in Indian Art...

These small Indian Miniature paintings have enchanted art lovers for centuries. Their dazzling colours - rich blues, shell powder whites, vermilions and tropical greens, often accented with gold and silver leaves, beguile the eye. The minute exactness, with which they were painted, sometimes with strokes so fine that a brush of a single squirrel's hair was used, never ceases to invoke wonder and imagination.

One characteristic of the Indian miniature is the outline within which every figure is enclosed. This can be either thick or thin, depending on the area and the period from which the painting originates and on the degree of prominence the artist desired to give the figure. Many of the miniatures, certainly of the Mughal School, were true mirrors of life in those times. They also provide some knowledge about the dress and architecture of that period.

MAHARAJAⁱⁱⁱ

The *Mughal Style* of aesthetics is one of the major influences adopted by the maharajas. In both Asia and Europe the word '*maharaja*', literally 'great king' conjures up a vision of splendour and magnificence. The image of a turbaned, bejewelled ruler, whose authority was absolute and whose wealth was beyond measure, is both pervasive and evocative. Yet this view is also somewhat limited. The important role played by India's kings in the political, social and cultural history of the subcontinent from the early eighteenth century to the mid-twentieth has often been marginalized by more dominant narratives of the Mughal and British empires. More particularly; it has been the Orientalist stereotype created during the period of the British Raj of the maharajas as exotic creatures who both epitomized and justified India's role as the jewel in Britain's imperial crown, which has prevailed. Indian concepts of kingship can be traced through the verse epics of the *Ramayana* and the *Mahabharata*, and to early treatises on statecraft such as the *Arthashastra* written in the fourth century BCE. These poetic and prose sources have undoubtedly helped to shape Indian ideas of royal identity, attributes and responsibilities, but it is important to recognize that such notions were not static but constantly evolving. Even the concept of India itself can be hard to define; whether as a geographical or philosophical entity; it too has changed over time.

The shifting ethnic, religious, linguistic and cultural make-up of the subcontinent has impacted in different ways, in different places and at different times on the nature and meaning of kingship. India's

ⁱⁱⁱ Across the subcontinent a wide range of titles existed: Raja, Rana, Rao, Maharana, Maharawal, Maharao, Nawab, and Nizam.

rulers have adapted to conquerors and colonizers, and to changes in political, economic, religious and social structures, all of which have determined how kingship has been represented and enacted.

Despite differences in form and function, by the early eighteenth century certain elements in the symbolic language of kingship were recognizable across much of the subcontinent. India's rulers were expected to exercise appropriate behaviour, their royal duties or *rajadharma* encompassing the protection of their subjects, the adjudication of disputes and the ministering of justice and punishment. Martial skills were as important as judicial and diplomatic ones; kings were expected to be wise and benevolent.

Before their kingdoms merged into the nation of India in 1947, many of the *maharaja* ruled, albeit from the eighteenth century with the consensus of the British over vast territories. For example Jodhpur-Marwar was the third largest, Indian state, after Kashmir and Hyderabad, with an area of over 36,000 square miles. The kingdom was established in 1459 by Rao Jodha, the head of the Rathore clan of Rajputs (literally, "sons of kings"), who claim their descent from the Kshatriyas, the hereditary Hindu social class (or caste) of warriors and rulers.

The Exhibition *Maharaja: the Splendour of India's Royal Courts* starts with the heyday of the maharajas, which began after the collapse of the Mughal Empire in the early 18th century. The exhibition opens with this period of chaos and adventure and closes at the end of British rule in 1947, when Indian princes acceded their territories into the modern states of India and Pakistan.

The show explores the extraordinary culture of princely India, showcasing rich and varied objects that reflect different aspects of royal life, jewelled objects, metalwork and furniture.

The Mughal Emperors

<i>Ruler</i>	<i>Reigned</i>
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Babur	1526 to 1530
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Humayun	1530 to 1556
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Akbar the Great	
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1556 to 1605	
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Jahangir	1605 to 1627
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Shah Jahan	1628 to 1658
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Aurangzeb	1658 to 1707
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Akbar crossing the Ganges



THE MUGHAL EMPIRE

