

CHAPTER 2

MUGHAL PAINTING

By the beginning of 15th century, significant changes started appearing in Indian paintings. The Jain *Apbhramsa Style* saw distinct modifications and the paintings of Malwa metamorphosed with new artistic characteristic indicated in the forms, subjects and style, the examples of which can be clearly seen in the *Nimat Namah*, *Aranyak parva*, *Laur- Chanda*, *Mahapurana*, *Chaurpanchasika* (Palam) etc. The beginning of 16th century witnessed a revival of arts and at the same time the mutual conflicts between states proffered favourable grounds for foreign invaders to attack and consolidate themselves here. Babur founded the Mughal rule in India in 1526 A.D. with the victory in the battle of Panipat. He was a descendent of Timur on his father's side (5th generation), of Changez Khan on his mother's side (14th generation) and so the term Mughal came into being. The Mughal emperors were art lovers and continuity and progressive development in the Mughal style can be traced from the reign of Babur to that of Shahjahan. The earlier Mughal art was predominantly Persian, presented in Indian context. It developed as a blending of Persian and Indian ideas. In the court of Akbar, this style emerged because of synthesis of *Rajasthani*, *Apabhransha* and Deccan style and steadily gained recognition as a distinctive style of painting with a rich tradition to fall back upon. Therefore, it is said that Persian and Rajasthani style gave birth to Mughal Style. Under Jahangir, this style was completely Indianised whereas during the reign of Shahjahan it imbibed European influence. According to Rai Krishnadas, the Mughal Style originated with the advent of Babur and continued evolving until the reign of Shahjahan, reaching climax under Jahangir. Auragzeb, a fanatical monarch who ignored arts, succeeded Shahjahan. The artists sought refuge in other kingdoms in order to save their lives and this lead to the downfall of the Mughal arts. Being court art, this art took different dimensions in accordance with the interests and tastes of the patrons so it will be justified to understand Mughal Style with respect to individual; Mughal ruler.

BABUR

Babur is credited for the establishment of the Mughal dynasty (1526A.D.) in India. But he ruled for a very short period and died soon after in 1530 A.D. No miniatures survived from the reign of the founder but he was interested in fine arts because he had seen and analyzed the paintings of Persian painter Bihzad and Shah Muzaffar. He has also mentioned these artists in his autobiography *Tuzuk-I-Baburi*.

HUMAYUN

His eldest son, Humayun (1530-1556 A.D.) as the second Mughal emperor, succeeded Babur. Humayun was mostly engaged in containing his rivals and was driven out by Sher Shah. He sought refuge in the court of Shah Tehmasp of Persia where he acquired love for the art of painting.

Upon his return to India, the Persian master artists Mir Syed Ali and Khwaja Abdus Samad Shirazi accompanied him. Young Akbar also learnt painting from them. The miniatures prepared during this period

were in Persian Style. The illustration of *Dastan-I-Amir Hamza* or *Hamza Nama* began under Humayun but was completed during Akbar's reign.



PLATE 1
HAMZA NAMA



PLATE 2
ANWAR-I- SUHAILI

AKBAR

In 1556, Humayun died as a result of tumbling down the steps of the library and his fourteen year old son Akbar came to throne. The political upheavals and instability forbade Babur and Humayun the pleasures of life dominated by fine arts but Akbar not only expanded and consolidated his empire but also earned the reputation of being a strong syncretise emperor. The Persian master artists who had already come to India, Mir Syed Ali and Khwaja Abdus Samad Shirazi were in charge of the imperial atelier and in conformity with the interests and policies of Akbar infused the elements of integration and solidarity in the art field too.

These artists painted the Persian figures in Indian colours to realize the concepts of Akbar and proficient artists like Daswant and Basawan brought the Mughal style to life that resulted in the replacement of Persian severity with Indian grace. Apart from the qualities of a scholar and administrator, Akbar was a connoisseur of art. Therefore, he patronised, honoured and promoted numerous artists. Mughal historian Abul Fazal in his *Ain-i-Akbari* says that Akbar from his earliest youth, had shown a great predilection for this art, and gave it every encouragement. The name of these artists promulgated in Persia and Europe as well. Viewing Indian painting in a broader perspective, the Mughal paintings under Akbar were a fusion of Persian style and Indian traditions. He encouraged the painters to minutely observe the local Indian art, traditions, culture, and paint accordingly. He commissioned the illustrated manuscripts like *Dastan-I-Amir Hamza*, *Shah-Namah*, *Tarikh-e-Khandan-e-Timuria*, *Razm-Namah*, *Wakyat-Babri*, *Akbar-Namah*, *Anwar-i-Suhaili*, *Darah-Namah* and the masterly painting and translation of the *Ramayana*, *Mahabharat*, *Yoga Vashishtha*, *Nal-Damyanti*, *Shakuntala*, *Kathasaritsagara*, *Krishna-Charita*. **(Plate 2)**

AKBAR'S LOVE FOR THE ART OF PAINTING- Akbar was himself an accomplished artist because his father Humayun organised lessons in painting for him from the famous Persian painters as part of character building. There was some political stability and peace during Akbar's reign. Whatever leisure time Akbar had at hand, he would go and spend it in the royal atelier. His court had both Hindu and Muslim painters- Khwaja Abdus Samad Shirazi, Mir Syed Ali, Sukhlal, Daswant, Mukund, Jagannath Madhav, Mahesh, Tarachand, Sanwal, Khemkaran, Harvansh, Ram, Basawan etc. Abul Fazal wrote that the Indian painters were more dexterous, nimble and impassioned as compared to their Persian counterparts. There were but a few in the world equivalent to them. Life sang in their artworks. The great musician Tansen graced his court. With painting, Akbar encouraged and patronised other arts too. Based on their ability, Akbar used to confer various titles to the painters *Nadir-Ul-Mulk*, *Humayun Nasari* etc. The *Navratnas* of his court were skilled and proficient in their respective streams. Rai Krishna Das has divided Akbar era paintings as follows-

Paintings based on non-Indian stories- *Hamzanama*, *Khamasa Nizami* etc.

Paintings based on Indian stories- *Ramayana*, *Razmanama* (Mahabharata), *Nala-Daman* (Nala-Damyanti), *Anwar-I-Suhaili* etc.

Historical books- *Shah-Namah* (history of the Persian rulers), *Timur-Namah* (history of Timur), *Babur-Namah*, *Akbar-Namah* etc.

Portraits (*Shabih*) and social paintings.

According to Rai Krishna Das, about twenty thousand paintings were made during Akbar's reign, which are displayed in various museums around the world.

CHARACTERISTICS OF PAINTING STYLE UNDER AKBAR- Akbar understood the Indian life very closely. It was his interest that generated influence on the then prevailing arts. The fusion of Rajput, Persian and European elements gave a distinctive identity to this style. In order to promote religious harmony between Hindu-Muslims, Akbar infused an integrated idea into the painting style. There is an abundance of paintings glorifying magnificence of courts, splendour and the courage and exploits of the Mughal ruler. Due to the Persian effect, Mughal painters used brilliant colours like saffron, yellow, blue, red, pink and green colour in plenitude. Lines became important feature in the paintings under Akbar. There was a general trend of painting profile faces or painting one side of the face. The Mughal attires, jewellery, flora and fauna were aptly depicted. The painters in his atelier were experts at *Shabih* or portrait painting. The portrait of King Prithu is worth mentioning and is in the collection at Bharat Kala Bhawan, Banaras. Most of the artists have followed the precepts and principles in the portraits. The creases and folds of costumes have been depicted quite naturally. Many artists worked together on a single miniature. The portraits of important personalities were exhibited after completion. The prime subject was painted predominantly in a crowd for compositional excellence. *Ain-I-Akbari* gives adequate account of the paintings done under Akbar. The painter's brush was termed as '*Kalam*' and the painter as '*Kalam-Kartar*'. The brushes were made using animal hair. Different types of papers used for painting are mentioned in *Ain-I-Akbari*. A Mughal factory for paper was established in Sialkot (Punjab) and the paper produced here was famous as *Sialkoti* paper or *Mughalia* paper.

CHIEF PAINTERS UNDER AKBAR-

There were a great number of artists working at Akbar's atelier. The artists belonged to both Hindu and Muslim religion.

1) MIR SYED ALI- This Persian artist accompanied Humayun to India. He was a painter of Safavid style of Persia. His father's name was Mansoor who was himself a painter. Mir Syed Ali assumed the alias "*Judai*". His paintings carry a pleasant and beautiful feel. The *Hamzanama* was painted under his direction. He was fond of painting subjects related to the everyday life. *Laila- Majnu*, *The Birth of Majnu*, and *Portrait of Father* are some of his important works.



PLATE 3 VARIOUS BIRDS AND TURKEY FALCON
contribution of Daswant.

2) KHWAJA ABDUS SAMAD SHIRAZI- He came to India with Humayun. He belonged to Shiraz in Persia. His expertise in painting earned him the title '*Shiri kalam*'. He gave lessons in art to Humayun and Akbar. He was the head of Akbar's atelier and his favourite also. His apprentices turned out to be experts too.

3) DASWANT- Daswant was the best Hindu painter and initially an employee at Akbar's atelier. He learned painting from Abdus Samad. He painted beautifully in *Razmanama*. He also painted nondescript figures. He painted the mythological scenes based on the daily life. The Indian element in Mughal style is the

4) BASAWAN- He was a leading Hindu painter in the court of Akbar. He painted around hundred paintings. Abul Fazal has praised him in his memoirs. Basawan's paintings are very close to reality. He was an expert at preparing backgrounds, portraying facial features, preparing colours etc. He worked on the illustrated manuscripts *Darbaranama* and *Akbarnama*.

MUGHALART UNDER JAHANGIR-

Jahangir took over the reins of Mughal Empire in 1605. He was a scholar, kind-hearted, art-loving administrator. Under him the art continued with tradition of Mughal style promoted by Akbar but later on, with ample chiaroscuro (lights and shades), this style faced a transition with incorporation of new elements. Persian painter Aqa Reza was the head of Jahangir's atelier. Aqa Reza's style was replete with Indian style of painting. His son Abul Hasan was the favourite of Jahangir. The birds painted by Ustad Mansoor are very attractive and his "Turkey Cock" and "Falcon" are world famous. **(Plate 3)**

Various expressions and moods were painted during Jahangir's time. His face was usually painted with a halo behind. Jahangir also sent his painters abroad for learning and study. Bishandas took training in Persia. He also painted for the Shah of Persia for many years where he painted the world famous "Sheikh Phool Sufi Saint". His marriage to Noorjahan evinced a deeper interest in painting. Manohar, Ustad Mansoor, Aqa Reza, Hasan, Bishandas, Goverdhan etc were some painters of this era. For his love of nature, Jahangir ordered the erection of an open tomb for self. This period is known as the finest of Mughal Art.

SUBJECTS OF PAINTINGS DURING JAHANGIR ERA-

Nature and human expressions were integrated in paintings during Jahangir's time. On the other hand, the importance of manuscripts diminished. Paintings on social, religious and political themes have been painted with dexterity. The Court themes have been painted with sophistication and luxury. Scenes of recreation, hunting, seraglio and celebration have been depicted realistically. In order for the painting to be aesthetically pleasing, all elements of composition have been fused. The European works influenced the painters of Jahangir's court. Delicacy and finish attained great sensitivity. Along with the portrayal of the splendours of royal life, historical events, Christianity, Europeans and other subjects were the favourable themes for paintings.

CHARACTERISTICS OF PAINTING STYLE UNDER JAHANGIR-

The natural scenes in the paintings of Jahangir period are consummate with Indian elements. There is realism in the paintings. Very fine rendering and the depiction of creases and folds is remarkable. The repetition of fine lines used for shading or '*Pardaz*' is known as '*Khatpardaz*'. Using small dots to show light and shades was known as '*Dana-Pardaz*'. Delicate toning and modelling created a three dimensional effect in the paintings. There is more naturalism in the handling of nature and animals in paintings. The influence of Ajanta is apparent in the depiction of elephants. The lines are rhythmic and efficacious. The colour palette is very pleasant to the eyes with diluted soft blues, greys and greens, pink and whites, gold and silver. Faces painted in *ek chashma* or profiles are expressive. Women were also painted during this period. Art developed under the Emperor's patronage, who became increasingly obsessed with the unity of all life and was a keen naturalist. The male costume comprises of a robe, girdle, a turban, and the female costume of *odhni* primarily. Hence, due to various distinctive features, the paintings during Jahangir's period were detached from the Persian influence and fused with Indian elements. Formalist style and realism have been their distinctive features.

MUGHALART UNDER SHAHJAHAN-

After Jahangir Shahjahan succeeded the Mughal throne. Shahjahan was more conservative as compared to his predecessors. He liked and patronized paintings and painters but he was more inclined towards architecture. Taj Mahal is the finest example of the same. His marriage to Mumtaz Mahal made him more obsessed with this passion. The art of this period got a totally new makeover. The paintings under Shahjahan are restrained and bound to court establishment but still retain their technical virtuosity. Composition got emphasis over expression. The European influence was gaining credence during this period. There was an excessive use of tones and shades and the artists were developing a fondness for third dimensionality. *Shahnama* is the finest manuscript of the Shahjahan period. Scenes depicting the grandeur and splendour of Mughal court have been prominently painted. The lines became inconsequential. Objects were painted with finesse. The technique was superior and perspective was used. There is clarity and naturalness of expressions. Women depiction can also be seen. Hindu themes were not painted as much anymore. Scenes of courts and meetings with saints were frequently painted. There were paintings on Christianity. Some paintings of black brushwork (*Syah Kalam*) are also available which have been done in black lines without using any colour. These painting have been coated with albumen of the egg for preservation. Soft colours were applied on lips etc but the drawing was ultra-fine. Vichitra, Chitraman, Honhar, Lalchand were few of the court painters of this period.

CHARACTERISTICS AND THEME OF THE PAINTINGS UNDER SHAHJAHAN-

The paintings under Shahjahan are distinctive with fine drawing, inlaid work (*Pachchikari*) and orderliness. Shahjahan had a liking for the European oil paintings, which promoted lights and shades and realism in paintings during this period. There was a trend of painting Christian themes. The painting style of this period remained confined to the court. The male attire constituted of long trousers or *pyjamas*, long ornated scarves and the female costumes comprised of transparent material and narrow trousers. Such ornate motifs gave a new dimension to the paintings. The Hindu culture diminished in painting. There was a change in the depiction of elephants and they were depicted broader than before. There were more paintings of court culture, grandeur, etiquettes, ambassadors, respected and revered personalities and meetings. There were paintings of folk singers too. Gold plate has been used. There were broader borders and emphasize was given on decoration. The covers of books popularly known as '*Bayaz*' were attractively made.

DOWNFALL OF THE MUGHAL STYLE-

After Shahjahan, the succession of Aurangzeb led to a great blow to the arts. Aurangzeb was a fanatic.

He murdered his brothers to capture the throne of Delhi. He also imprisoned his father Shahjahan. He detested art and considered it anti-religion. He got the murals white washed which were painted under his own ancestors. He forced the artists to give up painting. It resulted in the artists fleeing his oppression and emigrating to provincial states or adopting other means of livelihood. Painting came to a complete standstill. The sun of Mughal art set forever to never rise again. His successors were profligates who were incapable of heeding art. As a result, oblivious to its glorious past, the Mughal art disappeared.

IMPORTANT PAINTINGS-

Many paintings were painted during the Mughal period and some are especially famous-

REJOICING UPON THE BIRTH OF PRINCE SALIM- 'Rejoicing upon the Birth of Prince Salim' is one of the most important paintings from Akbar era. It is known for its composition (space division) and grand scene. The complete event has been depicted in sections. Giving alms outside the court and inside the *zananamahal*, dancing women have been depicted. One part illustrates bathing of the newly born prince and the other shows the delivery room. A peacock on the terrace and a high horizon with surrounding nature has been beautifully illustrated. A very attractive colour scheme has been followed in the painting. Kesu painted this work of art. **(Plate 4)**

KABIR AND REDAS- Illustrating all the characteristics of Jahangir Era style of paintings, this painting was created in 1640 A.D. by Ustad Fakirullah. Rural life has been depicted in gray, earthy colours. Kabir is weaving cloth outside the cottage and Redas is sitting on a mat beside him. Both are lost in their devotion oblivious to the material world around them. Both devotees have been depicted as gaunt figures. The earthy brown colours have lent perspective to the subject. The border has been painted in blue. This is the finest example of Shahjahan era paintings. **(PLATE 5)**



PLATE 4
BIRTH OF SALIM



PLATE 5
KABIR AND REDAS

THE PROCESSION OF DARAH SHIKOH- This painting is known for its composition of Mughal era paintings. There is an attractive depiction of clothes and jewellery, horses and royal procession. Dara dressed as groom is seated on horseback with Shahjahan following him on a horse behind him. The women of the royal family seated on elephants and the band players have been composed and illustrated beautifully. The representation of men and women standing with folded hands to welcome the ceremonial procession further sheds light on the narrative. The fireworks in the background and decoration introduce the vivid imagination of the painter. The figures are depicted in profile of *ek chashma*. Haji Madani made this painting. **(PLATE 6)**

THE DREAM OF JAHANGIR- The favourite painter of Jahangir, Abu Hasan, made this painting. It illustrates Jahangir embracing the Persian Shah Abbas where reality was that both rulers never met each other. It belongs to the period when Jahangir was not on cordial terms with the Persian Safavid Sultan. The painter Abu Hasan has cleverly depicted Jahangir as supreme with the expression of the world conqueror. In the painting, on a globe, Jahangir and Abbas have been illustrated on a lion and a sheep respectively. The costume and jewellery and the aura created around Jahangir is an attempt to show him as superior. The world map on the globe is considered as the most accurate of the then contemporary context. The golden halo depicted in the painting mirrors the title Noor-Al-Din (the light of faith) of Jahangir. Tempera medium is used in the painting with prominent use of gold and silver. Jahangir bestowed the title of Nadir-Al-Jama (icon of the era) on Abu Hasan. **(PLATE 7)**



PLATE 6
THE PROCESSION OF DARAH SHIKOH



PLATE 7
THE DREAM OF JAHANGIR

COMMON CHARACTERISTICS OF THE MUGHAL STYLE- There is a variety in Mughal style of paintings but the verve of Ajanta paintings is missing. The paintings were orderly and done with good taste. There was no painting of familial subject in Mughal style. Social themes were painted. Due to court discipline, the human figures seem to be placed in queues. Paintings on hunting scenes, events of historical importance, nature depiction, birds, flora and fauna, religious paintings, mythological scenes and court

scenes have been impressively illustrated. There were realistic depictions and tableaux of natural scenes that were beautifully expressed. Many species of Indian birds and animals were illustrated. The paintings of court splendour, hunting and war are distinctive of this style. There are striking illustrations of elephant, bulls, cocks, quails and partridge fights. Iranian narratives such as *Amir-Hamza*, *Shah-Namah* etc. and love stories of *Laila-Majnu*, *Shirin-Farhad* were illustrated. Hindu religious epics namely *Ramayana*, *Mahabharata*, *Yoga-Vasistha* etc. were also painted. In the historical paintings, the events of the lives of the Mughal Emperors were dexterously chronicled. Paintings based on *Tarikh-E-Khandan-E-Timuria* were also illustrated.



PLATE 8
JAHANGIR MEETING A SAINT

Shabih Portraits of Emperors, Princes, noblemen, saints and ascetics were portrayed cleverly and masterly. Paintings on meetings with saints and ascetics were also made. **(PLATE 8)**

The fusion of the Indo-Persian style gave birth to a distinctive Mughal style of painting. The palette modulated the background with dull and insipid colours with soft tones. Intricate motifs were applied to costumes, draperies, and other decorative items and were gilded as well. The initial faces painted in Persian style are *dedh chashma* but later on majority were *ek chashma* or profile. Architecture has found prime importance in Mughal paintings. The vaults, arches and columns have been embellished with mosaic work and the painted forts are resplendent with turrets, ramparts and steeple. While the European art was wielding influence in the Mughal court, the Mughal art retained its distinguishing compositional qualities, harmonious colour schemes with delicate tones, curves and contours. A look at the Mughal paintings evidences that it was an art of the Emperors, courts and courtiers devoid of the depiction of daily life. It was confined to the noblemen and administrators and was a manifestation of their interests and life. It could never establish any relationship with the commonplace. The

Mughal art was immersed in the luxuries and splendour of the court life and most of the paintings were too expensive for the commoners to even dream to procure.

IMPORTANT POINTS

1. With the victory in the battle of Panipat, Babur became the ruler of Delhi and with it the Mughals entered India.
2. Initially the Mughal art was greatly influenced by Persian art but gradually with the fusion of Rajasthani *Apabhramsha* and Southern styles it gained its uniqueness.
3. The Mughal art was at its peak during the reign of Jahangir.
4. This art faced its downfall during Aurangzeb's rule.

5. The themes of Mughal paintings were confined to court splendour, portraits of the rulers, hunting scenes, paintings of historical and mythological legends and religious stories.
6. The painted foreground depicts realism.
7. There is rhythm and movement in the lines and contours.
8. Nature painting has found prominence whereas female paintings are almost negligible..
9. The borders have also been painted. At places the borders are more beautiful than the main painting.
10. Lights and shades have been used to paint similitude and realism where the areas of depth and enhanced areas are clearly seen.

QUESTIONS FOR PRACTICE

SHORT ANSWER TYPE QUESTIONS

1. Which two Persian painters initiated the Mughal art?
2. Why is Mughal art known as court art?
3. Who were the main painters during Jahangir's reign?
4. What were the reasons for the downfall of the Mughal art?
5. What was *Shabih*?
6. Which Mughal painter is known for his mastery in paintings birds and animals?

ESSAY TYPE QUESTIONS

1. Describe the subject-matter and characteristics of the Mughal art during Akbar?
2. 'Jahangir era was the finest period of the Mughal art.' Elucidate.
3. Write an essay on the development of the Mughal art.
4. Write a detailed critique on art during Shahjahan's reign.
5. Give an introduction to the main painters of Akbar's court.