The Mughal Empire (1526–1757)

The Mughal court and state
The Mughal empire was one of the three great empires of the sixteenth century, along with those of Charles V of Spain and the Chinese Son of Heaven. The Mughals brought about qualitative changes in Indian society that were global in scope, anticipating a secular, pluralistic outlook that we tend to associate with our age. The landed classes had been in decline in a number of societies, giving rise to the rule of absolute monarchs, whose power base was an efficient, loyal bureaucracy. The impersonal state, whose urbanism, individualism, and ‘objective’ approach to nature laid the foundations of ‘modernity’, is more commonly associated with Renaissance Florence (c. 1400–1600), but the same phenomena could be discerned during the Edo period in Japan (c. 1600–1868) and in Mughal India (1526–1757). Yet it is not easy to understand why this burgeoning ‘modernity’ in Mughal India failed to take firm roots. Mughal ‘urban’ culture remained the personal achievement of the monarchs and the court. Lacking the social infrastructure that a large professional class, for instance, would have provided, these developments could not be sustained. Noble households dominated the urban economy in a patron–client relationship between the sovereign and the aristocracy, especially in the later period. The artisans attached to workshops essentially served these dominant groups. Other impediments to ‘modernity’ included the Hindu caste system, which discouraged social mobility, and the Mughal law of inheritance, whereby an official’s personal property reverted back to the emperor after his death. Although this was a disincentive to wealth accumulation and encouraged conspicuous consumption, the ‘urban’ outlook itself had a powerful impact on Mughal patronage.

Contemporary literature bears witness to a new curiosity about everyday life that was a product of heightened individualism. Mughal autobiographies and diaries, written not only by monarchs but also by the ladies of the harem, were comparable in their lively detail and immediacy to Lady Murasaki’s Tales of Genji and Boccaccio’s Decameron. Babur (emperor 1526–30), the founder of the Mughal dynasty, reveals his enthusiasms, admits his mistakes with disarming candour, and offers penetrating observations about life around him. For much of
present-day India, the refined urbanity and elegant lifestyle of the Mughal court, its standards of haute cuisine and its codification of Indian classical music remain the essential benchmark. Mughal blood sports were taken up by the British Raj, as was the game of polo. Mughal emperors took their sartorial elegance as seriously as their collections of curios, jewellery, and precious objects of jade and hardstone.³

Mughal curiosity about science and technology was a sixteenth-century phenomenon. Mughal artillery proved decisive in battles, even though firearms had been introduced in the Deccan a century earlier through contacts with Iran and Syria. The age witnessed a rapid development in global communication, in part the result of European expansion. European travellers, some of them Jesuits, made their way to the Chinese and Mughal empires, which resulted in the exchange of objects and modes of thinking between the cultures. In India, however, curiosity about Western things and ideas was confined to the Mughal emperor and his courtiers and did not filter down to other groups.

During the Mughal period the incipient ‘urbanism’ affected the subject matter of art, hitherto the preserve of the three great religions, Buddhism, Hinduism, and Islam. Mughal painting expressed a lively engagement with the external world, which may be loosely termed ‘realism’. Renaissance mimesis is universally familiar as the cornerstone of Western art history, yet a similar concern was expressed in Mughal history painting and portraiture. The art of the book had transformed patronage during the Sultanate, a process that reached a climax during the Mughal era. Art became an autonomous activity, fostering a close relationship between the patron and the artist; it ceased to be a communal concern. The Mughal emperors were fervent patrons of the arts, their multifaceted personalities informing their patronage—Akbar, the brilliant creator of a vast efficient empire; Jahangir, the endearing hedonist; and Shah Jahan, the royal architect and avid collector of precious objects—each was unique in his personal style of patronage. Yet, in at least one instance, patronage was not confined to royalty but included a grandee of the realm (see below).

The reign of Akbar

Two cultural streams flowed in the veins of Akbar’s grandfather, Babur, the founder of the Mughal empire: the Turk–Mongol tradition of his ancestors, Chinggis Khan and Timurlang, Marlowe’s ‘scourge of God’, and the Persian culture which had deeply impressed the Mongols. A ruthless soldier, 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 expression of this mixed heritage of violence and refinement, a characteristic shared in varying degrees by all three early emperors.³

Akbar’s empire

Akbar, the greatest Mughal emperor (1556–1605), was a brilliant intellectual with a prodigious memory. Formally educated, he compensated this drawback by having courtiers read to him regularly. His doctrine of religious tolerance (sult–shuhd) wrought a political revolution by removing discrimination against the Hindus and basing his rule on the ‘two pillars’ of Indian society, Hindus and Muslims. He created a centralized bureaucracy by organizing officials into military ranks (mamlukhs), promoting on merit and owing loyalty solely to the emperor, which largely replaced the quasi-feudal land-holding system (jagirdari) of the Delhi Sultanate. Akbar made the land tax more efficient and improved communications by expanding the arterial Grand Trunk Road, founded by Sher Shah. The pilgrimage route from Agra to Ajmer was lined with stations for imperial use and miniature towers for milestones. Mumina Khan’s bridge in Janamab (1562) was an engineering feat. Akbar awakened the Islamic view of the ruler as God’s deputy on earth, in favour of a doctrine of divine kingship. This enabled him to dispense impersonal justice to all by decree, thereby stripping Islamic judges of their traditional authority.

Early Mughal architecture

Mughal architecture made clear political statements through a complex, syncretic imagery of varied pedigree. The different, and at first sight conflicting, 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 viceroyes, came to stand for imperial authority. Being descended from the nomads, the Mughals always retained a soft spot for tents, which they furnished with colourful carpets and costly fabrics.³ However, it has been argued that Mughal experiments in urban design were inspired by the symmetrical, four-square gardens (chahar bagh), whose spaces were divided into modules—the particular Persian interpretation of the Koranic paradise garden.³ The empire’s founder, Babur, barely had time to lay out gardens for planting the Iranian fruits he missed in India. His son Humayun, destined to spend the best part of his life in exile, only realized a few of his architectural ideas. It was left to Akbar to commission the first major building from two architects from Bukhara in order to fulfill his filial duty by building a mausoleum to his father, Humayun. This centrally planned sepulchre in the centre of a four-square garden with running pools, streams, and open pavilions is the first of the Mughal paradise gardens [70a, b].³

Urban planning

A brilliant general, whose empire rivalled Asoka’s, Akbar built a network of fortress palaces between 1565 and 1571 aimed at imposing iron control over his considerable territory.³ The first to be completed was the fort at Agra, which superseded Delhi as the main capital. With its fine masonry work and its elegant Delhi Gate made of sandstone inlaid with white marble, the fort came to serve a ceremonial rather
Kashmir, and finally the Allahabad Fort, which guarded the eastern flank of the empire.

Akbar’s most ambitious project was the citadel at Fatehpur Sikri, his new capital, where he introduced Indian concepts of royalty to assert his independence of the Islamic clergy. It was founded around the shrine of Salim Chishti at Sikri as a thanksgiving to the saint, and in 1579 Akbar read the khusba here—ostensibly a legitimizing act on the part of an Islamic sovereign, the khusba actually consolidated Akbar’s own authority. Akbar assumed personal control of the shrine, encouraging Salim Chishti’s descendants to join the imperial service. Different aspects of the city give architectural expression to the twin elements in Akbar’s ideology: his personal rule and the Indianization of the empire.12

Fatehpur Sikri, which in its heyday held about a quarter of a million people, is irregularly laid out on an east–west axis, its over eight miles of walls broken only by a natural lake.13 However, what is not evident today is that the citadel was once surrounded below by a large settlement built of less permanent material. The layout of Sikri and many of its features reflect the Gujarati-Rajasthan building tradition, not least the influence of Man Singh’s palace at Gwalior on Akbar’s living quarters [71]. The precise function of many of the Sikri buildings remains conjectural, though some can be clearly identified as fulfilling the needs of a Muslim state: a Friday mosque, an administrative centre, residential palaces, baths, caravanserais, gardens, centres of learning, bazaars, and workshops. Some of the buildings may have been inspired by the Mughal tent culture, but above all the buildings and the spacious terraces and courtyards that separate them constitute the geometrical realization of a theory of kingship. Indeed, this was acknowledged by the historian Abu’l Fazl.14

Sikri’s Friday mosque, the largest of the period and the focal point of the citadel, stood at the summit of a windswept ridge. Its open courtyard harked back to Sultanate architecture, the prayer hall consisting of an iwan (domed hall) whose facade was dominated by a central pishtaq (portal) which, though large and high, was lightened by a series of chhatri kiosks. It is interesting that the iwan, designed as a detached building, has been compared to a Hindu temple sanctum.15

Fatehpur Sikri was a city of contrasts. The counterpart to the stark Buland Darwaza (triumphal gateway) [72]—whose scale and position overwhelm us—is provided by the open pavilion palaces. The delicate white marble tomb of Salim Chishti, decorated with perforated stone work, also offers a contrast to the sombre red Sikri sandstone. (Of course, we should remember that the dark red sandstone interiors were transformed by rich carpets and silk fabrics.)16

The brackets deriving from Gujarati architecture in the zanana (commonly identified as the Rajput princess Jodha Bai’s palace but this
is now challenged) are seen as an expression of Akbar's respect for the faith of his Hindu consorts. One of the unusual structures is the Panch Mahall, its five superimposed pavilions topped by a large single kiosk. This pleasure palace, which allows cool breezes to flow through its rooms in the summer, suggests an imaginative method of ventilating buildings in a dry, hot desert climate.

The Buddhist idea of the universal ruler ( sakravartin ) and Akbar's interest in solar symbolism probably influenced the beehive-shaped 'Gujarati' capital resting on a slender Hindu pillar in the midst of the dwara i-khas. This giant 'mushroom' is strongly suggestive of the ancient concept of axis mundi. The circular platform on its capital is reached by walkways at each corner. Sitting on this central platform, Akbar gave audience, his courtiers humbly approaching him from all four directions, while his attendants stood below. Finally, built as a striking evidence of his intellectual openness was the House of Worship, where leaders of the major faiths met to hold free and vigorous debates. Whether Akbar's syncretic Din i-lahi (Divine Faith) was a new religion, as claimed by some, or not, it helped to strengthen the emperor's personal rule at the expense of the Muslim divines. Akbar's urban experiment came to an end when Fatehpur Sikri was abandoned after 15 years; he was obliged to move to Lahore to secure the border threatened by the Safavid empire in Iran.
The Mughal painting workshop

Akbar laid the foundations of Mughal painting, a unique confluence of Persian, Indian, and European art. The emperor rejected the orthodox view that artists transgressed by seeking to rival God's creation and insisted that they fell all the more humble before God's omnipotence because they could not infuse painted figures with life. The Mughal emperors, who received instruction in painting as part of their education, cultivated the art of the book with a rare passion. Their exquisite volumes were placed on stands, each individual page scrutinized for its elegant lines and delicate brushwork, which needed to be enlarged to be fully appreciated (the glass lens was already in use at this time). During his flight from Agra, the emperor Humayun never lost sight of his book collection; his first thoughts on returning to Agra were of his library, and it was from its steps that he fell to his death.

We owe much valuable information on the production and consumption of art in India to the Mughal period. While in exile in Iran and Afghanistan, Humayun invited the Persian artists Abd us-Samad and Mir Sayyid Ali to set up a royal workshop (karkhana) in Agra. Abu'l Fazl gives us details of this workshop, which was inherited by Akbar and turned by him into one of the largest artistic establishments of the time. Islamic karkhanas were collaborative enterprises comprising paper makers, calligraphers, illuminators, gilders, illustrators, and binders, all supervised by a master [73]. However, Akbar's karkhana was more hierarchical than the Persian ones, the master being in charge of the composition, while the execution was left to junior artists.7

Paper, initially imported from Iran, began to be manufactured in the Punjab from the sixteenth century. Paints were made from animal, vegetable, and mineral substances, brushes from animal hair. The production of artist's materials was controlled for quality during Akbar's reign.8 Many layers of paper were glued on top of one another to form a "hardboard" painting surface. This was primed, burnished with agate, and then a freehand drawing was made or a stencil traced onto it. The preliminary brush drawing was done in red or black paint, the burning repeated after each stage of painting, giving a dazzling finish. Safavid painting, introduced by the two Persian masters, continued to be the model, while regularly imported stencils indicated the colours to be used. The work was divided among different artists specializing in foundation drawing, background, figure work, and portraiture, only master painters being allowed to do the outline drawing.9

Painters at Akbar's court

From the attention lavished on miniature paintings in the Mughal period one might imagine that wall paintings had gone out of favour. This is, however, disproved by ample literary evidence, their depiction
in miniatures, and from surviving fragments on walls. But undoubtedly the ablest artists and most ambitious works were connected with the art of the book. The artist continued to be a craftsman who had no independent status. As late as the time of Shah Jahan, painters born in the imperial household were called *khanacad* (second-generation servants). Artists, their children, and their apprentices were part of the imperial household, which met all their needs. The Mughal painters Abu'l Hasan, son of Aqa Riza, and Manohar, son of Basawan, were born in the imperial household during Akbar's reign. Given training from an early age, they graduated from pattern books to the human figure, and practice in the drawing of flowers was meant to arouse their aesthetic feeling.

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. Out of over a hundred painters, including the woman artist Nadira Banu, about a dozen rose to prominence as masters with distinctive skills and personalities. They were rewarded with high positions and honours. Abu'l Fazl's *Ain-i-Akbari* ranks artists in order of merit. However, before the reign of Akbar's son Jahangir it is less common to find individual artists signing specific paintings. This raises the question: in these collaborative works, to what extent can we ascribe an artistic style to the patron's taste or to artistic personality?

The frenzied movement, feverish activity, clashing colours, and high drama which characterize the paintings of Akbar's early period have been attributed to his taste, much as Jahangir's introverted personality is seen to be mirrored in the intimate works of his reign. But it is equally interesting that the two leading artists at Akbar's court, Daswanth and Basawan, seem to have left a clear stamp of their temperaments on their art. The brief, tragic life of Daswanth is the stuff of romance, reflecting the topos of genius better known in the West than in India. Considered by Abu'l Fazl to be the finest Mughal painter, a view fully shared by Akbar, Basawan became a legendary figure in his lifetime. The son of a humble palanquin bearer, his compulsive habit of drawing on walls brought him to Akbar's notice, who arranged for Abu Us-Samad to train him. Daswanth 'became matchless in his time ... but the darkness of insanity enshrouded the brilliance of his mind, and he died a suicide', writes Abu'l Fazl. It is interesting to note that this is the only recorded case of self-conscious artistic neurosis in pre-modern India.

Daswanth has been identified with particularly dramatic, expressionist works, and it is significant that after his death in 1574, Mughal painting moved away from a Dionysian frenzy towards an Apollonian lyricism associated with the other master, Basawan. According to Abu'l Fazl, our invaluable guide in these matters, in 'designing, painting faces, colouring, portrait painting, and other aspects of this art, Basawan has come to be uniquely excellent. Many perspicacious connoisseurs give him preference over Daswanth'.

Akbar's workshop under Mir Sayyid Ali and Abu Us-Samad recruited Indian painters in large numbers, whose formative works are preserved in the *Yuti Nama* (*The Tales of a Parrot*, a popular Indian folk tale, compiled in the mid-sixteenth century). Even though Safavid and Timurid artists continued to serve in Akbar's workshop, it was the immediacy of feeling in western Indian art that enabled Mughal painting to cut its Persian umbilical cord, namely the Safavid subordination of detail to an overall formal arrangement. The *Yuti Nama* is valuable also for showing us how young Gujarati artists such as Daswanth and Basawan were in the process of absorbing Persian art. Work began on the first landmark in Mughal art, *Hameza Nama*, in around 1562, its overall unity imposed by the workshop. The mythical adventures of the Prophet's uncle, Amir Hamza, interspersed with moral lessons, were illustrated with paintings on a larger format than the average Safavid works (14 x 10 inches) and painted on cotton rather than paper. Rediscovered in the nineteenth century, some 200 out of 1,400 works have survived (mainly in the Österreichisches Museum für Angewandte Kunst, Vienna and the Victoria and Albert Museum, London). While the visual impact of objects, such as brightly coloured polychrome tiles and richly patterned carpets, together with the luminous colours of Safavid painting liberated Indian artists from their hitherto limited palette, they themselves brought a freshness to details such as the leaves of trees or women drawing water from a well. But, above all, the dramatic and violent movement depicted in the *Hameza Nama* is alien to the remote, ordered sensibility of the Safavid artist.

As part of his objective of gaining Hindu confidence, Akbar turned to the Sanskrit epics *Mahabharata* and *Ramayana* soon after the arrival of learned Brahmins at the House of Worship in Sikri in 1580. These were translated, and provincial governors were instructed to make copies of them in an effort to disseminate Hindu classics throughout the empire. The second major painting series, for the *Razm Nama*, the Persian translation of the *Mahabharata*, was commenced in 1582 under the supervision of Daswanth, the emperor's favourite.

**History painting**

The powerful artistic style developed in these two early projects with their depiction of psychologically related figures laid the foundations of Akbar's history painting. A revolutionary development in Indian art, Akbar's historical narratives perfectly express his theory of
Kurchidov's The Boy in the Mirror, Mughal, c. 1570. In this episode, the princess chooses a man to save her prince. The scene is set off by lush trees, carpets, and other details. The immediacy of the scene is heightened by the 'crowning' of the foreground. Some 100 craftsmen, including 50 painters, worked on the epic. The combination of aerial perspective for distance and eye-level perspective for the foreground suited the inclusion of panoramic treatment of the subject matter.

Kingship: in every painting the sovereign assumes his role as the chief actor in the historical spectacle taking place before us. An archival office headed by Abu'l Fazl and manned by 14 clerks made faithful records of daily events, while court officials were encouraged to write their memoirs. Although this obsession with detail earned the dynasty the sobriquet 'paper government', it is thanks to Abu'l Fazl's Akbar Nama (History of Akbar) and Ain i-Akbari (Laws of Akbar) that we get an unrivalled insight into the age and into the mind of the great emperor. And if Abu'l Fazl was too close to the throne to be objective, the corrective was supplied by Badani, the orthodox historian who disapproved of Akbar's liberalism.  

Akbar was in need of a narrative style that could do justice to his eventful reign, which revolved around the court, the hunt, and the battlefield. The earliest example of an illustrated text used as an exercise in political legitimation, Timur Nama (History of Timurlang) traces Akbar's genealogy back to the illustrious Mongol warrior. It is significant that the paintings in this text constantly juxtapose Akbar with Timurlang. For instance, scenes of Akbar hunting are modelled on those of Timurlang. The central text of Akbar's reign, however, was the Akbar Nama, the illustration of which was entrusted to Basawan, who rose to prominence after Dastur's suicide.[76].  

Akbar's search for a convincing pictorial 'reporting' style was aided
by his discovery of European art, traces of which can be discerned in works as early as the 
Hamza Nama. However, his meeting with the Portuguese came at a significant moment. In 1572, on his visit to Cambay, on the Gujarat coast, the emperor gave an audience to the Portuguese officials who were keen to extend their economic hold in India. Six years later, the Jesuits arrived at Fatehpur Sikri to participate in religious debates, bearing gifts that included an illustrated Royal Polyglot Bible, published in Antwerp by Christopher Plantin in 1568–73. Akbar, his courtiers, and his artists must have pored eagerly over these 'wonderful works of the European painters who have attained worldwide fame.'

Akbar built up a collection of European religious paintings (his favourite subject), as well as secular ones, together with engravings, tapestries, and a musical organ. The actual absorption of European conventions by Mughal artists cannot be dated precisely, although it is known that European prints began flooding the empire in the late sixteenth century. The first stage of wonder and experimentation probably gave way to selective appropriation. Among early responses, there exists a precious copy of St John from Dürer's Crucifixion by the 15-year-old Abu'l Hasan. At the end of Akbar's reign, the impact of Mannerism begins to be palpable, as for instance in the night scene from Jami's Baburistan, painted by Miskina, who uses subtle atmospheric light and deep dramatic colours. Although history painting dominates Akbar's period, there was no shortage of intimate works like these, which were meant for private delight.

The reign of Jahangir
Akbar's eldest son, Salim, by his Rajput queen, Jodha Bai, succeeded him, assuming the name Jahangir (Seizer of the World). Having lived in the shadow of his father, Jahangir's response was to withdraw into a private world of pleasure. A man of refined sensibility, his overindulgence in the good things of life ultimately led to alcoholism and physical decline but he took Mughal painting to great heights, creating a symbiotic relationship between the patron and the artist. Jahangir's sharply observed journal, Tuzuk-i-Jahangiri, offers us a mirror as much to his personality as to the age itself.

As heir apparent, he had caused the ageing emperor a great deal of sadness by his rebellion and the murder of Akbar's close companion, Abu'l Fazl. However, Jahangir made his architectural debut with the pious act of building his father's mausoleum at Sikandra, renamed Paradise Town in honour of the great emperor. As had become the practice, the sepulchre was set in the midst of a four-square garden of paradise, with lofty minarets at four corners of the entrance gateway, the first of the multiple-minaret designs that became a common feature of the later Mughal style. Its square ground plan, which
Nur Jahan and female patronage

A more opulent tomb, built much later, was dedicated to the father of the charismatic Nur Jahan (‘Light of the World’), the pivot of Jahangir’s life. Although legends tell of young Jahangir’s love for Nur Jahan, he probably met her after becoming emperor. Once she was married to the emperor, a junta centring on her family assumed enormous power, taking advantage of Jahangir’s progressive alcoholism. Nur Jahan was accorded the rare honour of having coins struck in her name. One of the major women patrons in India, she may have inspired more Persianate ornaments and popularized the use of more realistic figures, hitherto discouraged as an un-Islamic, Hindu predilection. But her greatest contribution lay in architecture and gardens. Nur Jahan’s informed taste in architecture is demonstrated in her most important commission, Itimad ud-Daula, the tomb for her father, a two-storeyed white marble sepulchre with decorative inlays set in the midst of the prescribed four-square garden. A rich texture is provided by delicate *pietra dura* work (marble inlaid with precious and semi-precious stones). The decorative motifs include representations of wine decanters and fruits of Safavid inspiration that promise the delights of paradise.

Royal gardens

Jahangir emulated his Timurid ancestors in building hunting lodges whose shooting towers were dotted with animal heads as trophies, but clearly gardens were a particular favourite of his, and his enthusiasm in this area was shared by Nur Jahan. The garden increasingly rivalled the citadel as an emblem of royal power and as the site where the divine king received his adoration. Seventeenth-century Mughal gardens, which fused Rajput, Iranian, and Timurid traditions and put a new gloss on the Islamic paradise garden, were integrated into the layout of cities. In his autobiography, the emperor enthuses about the gardens of Agra with their water reservoirs, channels, and plants. Their designer, Khwaja Jahan, was rewarded with the high rank of a *Manasabdar*. Jahangir waxes eloquent about the clear waters and flowering trees of Kashmir, where he made his summer residence. The harnessing of nature by connecting waterfalls, canals, and terraces to the natural streams and springs of Kashmir equally reflects the taste of his milieu, in which women of the *zanana* were active patrons. In fact, it is only now that scholars recognize Nur Jahan’s share in the gardens of Jahangir’s period.

Jahangir and painting

By all accounts, Jahangir’s patronage of painting remains the outstanding achievement of his reign. A man of discriminating taste, Jahangir’s collection included European, Persian, and Deccani paintings as well. In his time, illustrated manuscripts gave way to self-contained, decorated albums (*murqquats*) of miniature paintings. In these *murqquats*, two calligraphic pages facing each other are often followed by two related paintings, thus giving the albums a greater unity. When Jahangir set up his rebel court at Allahabad, one of his first acts was to give the émigré Iranian painter Aqa Riza charge of his painting workshop. Jahangir took particular pleasure in the company of artists, whom he honoured in different ways, conferring a very high title on Abu’l Hasan and sending Bishandas as part of a diplomatic delegation to the Safavid court of Iran. Jahangir was particularly proud of his discerning eye:

My liking for painting and ... judging it have arrived at such a point that when any work is brought before me ... I say on the spur of the moment that it is the work of such and such a man. And if there be a picture containing many portraits and each be the face of a different master, I can discover which face is the work of each of them.

The weekly inspection of an artist’s work in progress, initiated by Akbar, was taken even more seriously by Jahangir. The prestige acquired by painters at the Mughal court led to a growing demand for masterpieces, which makes the task of telling an original from a copy rather difficult.

The development of naturalism

Seventeenth-century Mughal painting is dominated by two tendencies: the formal Persian arrangement of lines and colours and the new requirements of naturalism. Jahangir’s attachment to mimesis was noted by the British envoy, Sir Thomas Roe, who, on giving an English miniature to the emperor, was immediately presented with a plethora of copies by court artists. When asked by Jahangir to identify the original, Roe was momentarily at a loss, which pleased Jahangir no end. The origins of the Jahangiri style lie in the series produced in 1601 at Allahabad in Aqa Riza’s Persian idiom. Yet the growing importance of naturalism is tellingly illustrated by the fact that Aqa Riza’s own son, Abu’l Hasan, became its leading exponent.

From these early exercises, Jahangir’s workshop went on to develop naturalistic colour compositions, as lyrical understatement with a concern for tonal values became fashionable in the paintings of his reign. Naturalism, in part inspired by European prints, enabled painters to invest faces and figures with solidity, to set up psychological...
relationships, and generally to tell a story more convincingly. Single figures were now placed against plain backgrounds or distant landscapes, which often quoted details of European pictures. Above all, the Renaissance concept of 'consistent lighting' was explored, creating tensions between naturalism and the formal arrangement of lines and colours.

Alongside such stylistic changes, artistic individualism under Jahangir became more pronounced. The younger generation in the royal workshop—including Basawan’s son Manohar and Aga Kiza’s son Abu’l Hasan, as well as Balchand, Daulat, Govardhan, Bishadas, Mansur, Bichitri, and Padarath—all signed their individual works. Daulat sketched four of his colleagues and himself, and Abu’l Hasan depicted himself presenting his work to Jahangir. These self-representations were clear indications of the artists’ assertion of their worth. Among these versatile masters, let us consider two very different personalities, Abu’l Hasan and Govardhan. Each of them had a personal style that gave expression to naturalism in remarkably different ways.

Abu’l Hasan, a colourist by preference, was given the title Nadir uz-Zaman (‘Light of the Age’) by the sovereign, who considered his work to be perfect [78]. His portraits, with their soft outlines and subtle shading, deftly capture individual faces, as in the painting that celebrates the occasion when Jahangir conferred the title Shah Jahan (‘King of the World’) on the 25-year-old prince, Khurram [79].

Very little is known about Govardhan, whose career also spanned Shah Jahan’s reign. Although he was one of the most accomplished portraitists of the time, he was fascinated by the nude as depicted in western art, modelling individual figures softly and observing the details of bony fingers and toes with sensitivity. The naked yogis he was so fond of painting, with their erotic overtones, gave him scope to display his virtuosity with light and shade [80].

78 Abu’l Hasan
Detail from Squams in a Chinar Tree, Mughal, c.1630.
The artist’s adolescent copy of Dürer’s print expressed the excitement of discovering European chiaroscuro. While Mansur was Jahangir’s favourite animal painter, Abu’l Hasan has left us this animal study, masterful in its warmth of understanding of the minute of nature. Much is revealed in this detail, which is only a minute part of the miniature landscape. It shows the great skill of Mughal painters with fine details such as the fur on the small squirrel or its expression. (See facing p. 107.)
Portraiture

As artistic personalities flourished, so too did a wide range of styles and genres which developed during Jahangir’s reign: portraits, dynastic subjects, and animal, flower, and literary paintings replaced the epic narratives of Akbar’s reign. Although Akbar had compiled a large album of portraits of his courtiers and himself, not until Jahangir’s time do we encounter psychological portraits of variety and depth. The formal court scenes, with ensembles of courtiers, based on workshop stencils of their likenesses, depicted individuals accurately enough to be recognizable, thus serving as official records, a practice begun by Akbar [81].

Portraits served also as instruments of diplomacy. Bishandas was sent to the court of Shah Abbas of Iran; Manohar’s likeness of Jahangir was presented to Sir Thomas Roe, James I’s envoy to the Great Mughal. The latter survives only as a print in the seventeenth-century English travel compendium Purshas His Pilgrimes. A rare portrait, purported to be that of Nur Jahan, epitomizes the empress’s unconventionality, for royal ladies, who seldom appeared before artists, were usually portrayed in stereotypical forms. The hunting gun she holds suggests that she was a good shot, a prowess admired by the monarch himself. Royal women, including the daughters of Jahangir, Shah Jahan, and his successor Aurangzeb, were patrons as well as amateur painters. On the other side of the coin, women artists were attached to Jahangir’s zanana. Among them, we know of Nadira Banu, a pupil of Aqa Riza, and a princess, Sahiba Banu [82]. Few portraits are more intriguing than the late allegorical ones of Jahangir. Their complex iconography, partially revealed in poems inscribed on the paintings,
The courtier Abd ur-Rahim, Khan I Khanan, a detail of Jahangir Receiving Prince Panjic, Mughal, 1610.
This study of an experienced and wary courtier is one of the most penetrating in Mughal art. Abd ur-Rahim, commander-in-chief of the Mughal army, employed 20 artists in his Azakhana who illustrated the Ramayana and the Mughal Nastis as well as ragamala paintings. His life gives us a nice glimpse of patronage by a Mughal high official.

often conceals political messages. Jahangir's imaginary encounter with contemporary monarchs underlines the political message of a 'Pax Mongolica' reinforced by motifs such as the nimbus (halo), a solar symbol, the world map, and the juxtaposition of the lion and the lamb [83].

Mughal animal paintings reflect Jahangir's curiosity about the natural world [84]. At Jahangir's insistence, numerous paintings of animals, birds, flowers, and plants served as objective records of the flora and fauna of the realm. Jahangir's curiosity had a morbid side as well, which inspired The Dying Inayat Khan, a drawing of tragic intensity [85]. It is also rare that a drawing should survive from the period, since drawings were not collected but only used by artists as the basis for paintings.

One cannot leave Jahangir's reign without mentioning the magnificent display of wealth at the court. One typical ceremony held on special days was the weighing of the sovereign and the princes against gold, silver, and other precious materials. These were later distributed among the poor, a practice that had roots in ancient India. The emperor's collection of objets d'art included Chinese figures and vases, gem-studded weapons, articles of personal attire such as jewelled turban pins, and objects of domestic use, such as jade wine cups, enamelled hookah bases, magnificent carpets, and precious stones.

The reign of Shah Jahan
In 1628 Jahangir's third son, Khurram, better known as Shah Jahan ('King of the World') (1628–38), seized the throne by putting his rivals to death. Mughal treasures acquired a legendary reputation in his time, but the pomp and circumstance of Shah Jahan's reign had an underlying political message. A heterogeneous ruling class created by Akbar had supplanted the hereditary aristocracy, but it had become entirely
dependent on the sovereign's personal charisma, which was sustained by the imperial myth. Shah Jahan codified Mughal personal rule through court rituals, architecture, and painting, formalizing the existing social pyramid with the emperor at its apex. His art and his treasures lent a grandeur to his reign that impressed his subjects no less than it did foreign visitors. The monarch spent part of each day examining gems and inspecting the work of painters, carvers, engravers, goldsmiths, enamellers, and architects [86].

Yet all was not well in the state of the Grand Mughal. A long reign of peace and the glittering life at court camouflaged the inner decay of the realm, a decline hastened by Shah Jahan's inordinate love of precious objects. Life at court had become artificial, governed by strict rules of etiquette that glorified the increasingly intolerant emperor at the expense of the nobles. Shah Jahan's policy of territorial expansion was a costly failure, while the oppression of peasants reached an intolerable level.

Later Mughal architecture
Shah Jahan's first love was architecture, which was a synthesis of his aesthetic and political ideas. It was a love shared by the courtiers and even by the ladies of the royal family, who continued to play their part in commissioning buildings. Literary sources inform us that a critical appreciation of architecture was taken for granted at the court, the emperor providing aesthetic leadership through his department of architecture. The leading architects enjoyed a high reputation, notably Abd al-Karim and Makramat Khan, who were associated with the building of the Taj Mahal.

Abandoning Akbar's architectural ideology, which sought to reconcile Hindus and Muslims, Shah Jahan consciously returned to the
Sultanate roots. The most singular aspect of his architectural style was its formal harmony, which was enhanced by the magical quality of the soft white marble he used. Buildings were governed by hierarchical stresses, seeking bilateral symmetry through the emphasis on both wings of the central axis, in contrast to previous centrally planned structures. Architectural uniformity was achieved by the repetition of a few significant forms and motifs embodying a complex symbolic message that reinforced the doctrine of divine kingship. The motifs themselves had a mixed Iranian, Hindu/Buddhist, and European pedigree: columns with multifaceted capitals (mugarnas); cusp-arch bases; deeply curved naturalistic acanthus plants with cypress bodies; baluster columns; semicircular arches; cornucopia motifs (parna ghata); finally, so-called bangala curved roofs and cornices. The most prominent decoration, however, was the pietra dura work that had been a feature of Mughal architecture since the time of Jahangir."

Although Shah Jahan's first architectural commission was his father's tomb at Labore, the lack of warmth for this virtually mandatory enterprise is noticeable. The tomb's unusual layout was dictated by Jahangir's wish to be buried under an open sky. The impressive quality of this first major example of pietra dura work stems from the four lofty minarets at its four corners.

Royal tomb design attained perfection in the building that commemorates Shah Jahan's beloved queen, Mumtaz Mahal (1593–1631).
The emperor, grief-stricken by her death in childbirth, chose leading architects to design a flawless memorial to her [87]. Yet, as we shall see, the Taj Mahal was also the first monument to translate Shah Jahan’s concept of absolute authority into architecture. Situated by the river Yamna, the Taj Mahal was the ultimate Islamic paradise garden, as confirmed by the inscription at its entrance. The sepulchre, set at the end of a four-square garden, is divided by four wide waterways, which are further subdivided into four narrow ones, which flow into a central marble pool. The central axis of the tomb, which rests on a raised platform, is balanced by symmetrical structures on either side, a simple yet effective design marked by four slender minarets. The Taj also contains a mosque, an assembly hall, and dwellings of tomb attendants, as well as bazaars and caravanserais whose income supported the tomb. The inclusion of domestic buildings is a reminder that the Taj is the earthly replica of a heavenly mansion and an example of the interchangeability of Mughal secular and funereal architecture. The most celebrated decorations of the building consist of flowers in *pietra dura*—rose, narcissus, and tulip—beloved of the Mughals. Compared with the rich texture of Itimad ud-Daula, the decoration here is remarkably restrained. In the interior, an inlaid marble cenotaph received the favourite queen’s remains and, later, those of Shah Jahan.

From the very outset a powerful myth grew up around the Taj Mahal, which has been termed a ‘love poem in stone’. However, its dimensions suggest Shah Jahan’s desire to create concrete symbols of his absolute power. The tomb is 230 feet high, the enclosure is 1000 × 1860 feet, and the whole complex covers 42 acres. It is evident that its allegorical significance goes far beyond its immediate function. As has been argued, in addition to the symbolism of the mausoleum as a paradise garden, the apocalyptic imagery and the passages inscribed on its surface allude to it as the throne of God on the day of resurrection, an idea that is associated with the Islamic concept of the heavenly mansion.

**Urban planning**

In 1639, Shah Jahan embarked on an ambitious urban project, the new capital north of Mughal Delhi, which he named Shahjahanabad. His aim was to restore the former glory of the Sultanate capital, which had been superseded by Agra. The city, originally planned by the masters Hamid and Ahmad, was completed in 1648 by other architects, but the controlling hand remained that of the emperor. Shahjahanabad has been studied as an example of a pre-modern city taking the form of an ‘imperial mansion’, this being essentially an extended royal household. Known today as the Red Fort, this irregular rectangle, two and a quarter miles in circumference, was once surrounded by residences belonging to Shah Jahan’s nobles. The Red Fort symbolizes the political heart of modern independent India, even though the locus of administration remains the New Delhi of Edwin Lutyens and Herbert Baker (see chapter 12).

The Red Fort is served by imposing gateways, the Delhi and Lahore Gates in particular. The Lahore Gate led through a covered arcade to the public audience hall (*divan i-amm khas*), the secular hub of the empire, as the Friday mosque was its spiritual centre. Although Shah Jahan deployed a variety of architectural symbols to underscore his divinity, none is as insistent as this red sandstone audience hall. This was where he was to elaborate further the political ideas he first realized in the Taj Mahal. The architectural sources of the *divan i-amm khas* were mixed: the building itself drew upon the Iranian *Chihil Sutun* (Hall of Forty Pillars), even as the *jharoka*, the ceremonial balcony where the emperor appeared before his subjects, offered a fresh gloss on the age-old Indian custom of *darsan*, the viewing of deities or great personages by the common people.

The architecture was the setting for a choreographed imperial spectacle that reinforced the aura of divine kingship. Here the emperor made his daily appearance in a public renewal of his indivisible authority. The nobles and their retinue were arranged in the hall in a strict hierarchical order, the highest nobles being placed closest to the ceremonial balcony. When everyone had assembled, standing to attention and waiting with bated breath, the emperor made his solemn entrance onto the resplendent balcony. This ceremonial balcony, which emerged as the supreme symbol of Mughal kingship, reaffirming ideas of hierarchy and subordination, was situated in the central bay at the eastern end of the hall. In contrast to the plainness of the hall itself, the marble enclosure was studded with rubies, emeralds, and other precious stones and richly embossed with *pietra dura* work. The
mosques had a special sanctity. His favourite was the exquisite Moti Masjid of white marble in the Agra Fort, crowned with three lotus domes and chhatris. But unquestionably it was the massive jami masjid (Friday mosque) in Delhi that served as the symbol of the faith. This, the largest Friday mosque in India, remarkable for its clarity of design, brought mosque architecture in India to an impressive climax, marking the restoration of Delhi as a capital [89].

Shah Jahan and painting
Shah Jahan’s public support of the Islamic injunction against images earned him the reputation of being indifferent to painting. But this

sovereign, seated here on a marble throne, gave audience and conducted public business from an exalted height. The jharoka, a baluster column held up a deeply curved jangla roof or baldachin, widely used by Shah Jahan as a sign of authority. The baluster column, associated in western iconography with religious and royal personages, was adapted from western prints by Shah Jahan as a symbol of his divine status. In addition, Mughal emperors used Greek and Roman and Judaico-Christian myths to construct their doctrine of royal authority, the most popular being that of the wise king Solomon. Orpheus of Greek mythology, the pacifier of animals, was used to further reinforce the Solomonic myth. The European motifs were not mere exotica but formed an indispensable part of Mughal ideology. In this world of shifting imagery, meaning had no fixed status. However, the underlying symbolism had a clear purpose—the legitimation of Mughal rule [86].

The more intimate private audience hall (diwan-i-khas) was meant for the close associates of the monarch. The simple marble piers on its outside belied its richly ornamented interior in which a silver ceiling was held up by jewel-encrusted marble walls. The focus of this chamber was the fabled Peacock Throne studded with rubies and emeralds. A famous inscription in here assures us that “if there be paradise on earth, it is this, it is this”.

For Shah Jahan, who was more religious than his forebears,
was not the case. As in other spheres, the emperor exercised strict control over painting projects so that they underlined his theory of kingship, but within these constraints his artists produced works of great richness, finish, and refinement, even when dealing with gory subjects such as the beheading of rebels.26 Striking innovations during his reign included the use of form to express hierarchy and a new genre of panoramic landscapes with deeper perspectives and vivid treatments of fortresses and woods. A fashion for equestrian portraits was taken up rapidly by the provincial governors, especially the Rajput princes [90]. Rembrandt had one such portrait. His pen and ink sketches after Mughal paintings, which retain his mastery of line and tone without destroying the essential character of Mughal art, add an unusual chapter to the history of cultural borrowings.27

Historical narrative
History painting, in abeyance since the reign of Akbar, appeared with renewed vigour as a prime vehicle for sustaining the Mughal theory of kingship, much as architecture had been exploited for its own symbolic language. Military campaigns, which once again became necessary as rebellions broke out in various parts of the empire, continued to be painted as in Akbar’s times, with the difference now that the emperor’s agents, rather than himself, were shown engaged in maintaining law and order. Some of the finest examples of history painting are in the official chronicle of Shah Jahan, the Padshah Nama [91]. A number of illustrations to this royal text by Balchand, Bichitr, Bishandas, Daulat, Payag, and other major artists include formal court scenes. A favoured pictorial device here was to place the haloed emperor in the ceremonial balcony, while the courtiers were depicted in profile below him, arranged symmetrically rather than interacting with one another. It is interesting to note that the lower echelons were portrayed in livelier poses.

These court scenes give us useful information about the interiors of buildings, not least about wall paintings, which can be seen in the background, attesting to their continued importance.28 However, more intimate works of the period have their own appeal. Their major exponent, Payag, was fascinated with chiaroscuro and used it to give the Mughal art of storytelling a new intensity. The clever use of a single, centrally placed light source enabled him to delineate the different figures vividly and yet invest them with a sense of mystery.29

Deccani painting
Before we leave the subject of Mughal painting, it is worth considering a parallel tradition that offered an artistic counterpoint to Mughal art. While both Mughal and Deccani painting owed a great deal to the Safavids, they represent two very different historical processes. The

Deccan boasted a painting tradition that remained outside the orbit of Mughal painting until the Deccan sultans lost their independence to the Mughals. Following the demise of the southern Vijayanagar empire in 1664, the rival Bahamani dynasty in the Deccan splintered into the Sultanates of Ahmadnagar, Bijapur, Bidar, Berar, and Golconda. These successor states, which had close links with Safavid Iran through trade and marriage, fell prey to the Mughals on account of their lucrative foreign trade and diamond mines, which until the eighteenth century were the major source of this precious stone. Golconda was renowned internationally for its dyed textiles, and later for the export of chintz, while in the eighteenth century Bidar acquired
a high reputation for its refined inlaid metalwork, the so-called Bidriware. 5)

The most familiar Deccani paintings are those associated with Ibrahim Adil Shah II (1586–1627) of Bijapur, an enlightened patron of poetry, music, and painting. They are portraits with fully rounded figures, seen through flowing, transparent skirts. Ibrahim also had portraits painted of himself, attired in coloured silk garments and adorned with jewellery; in standing or seated poses against a low-key background. Ibrahim, whose ancestors were Ottoman Turks, represented a synthesis of Hindu and Muslim cultures. His mother tongue was Marathi but he was well-versed in Persian. Hindus, notably his adviser Antu Pandit, enjoyed positions of power within his kingdom. A skilled painter and calligrapher himself, Ibrahim inspired innovations in painting. 6)

However, it is the intriguing case of Ibrahim Adil Shah’s favourite court painter, Farrukh Husain, that has continued to attract scholarly attention [92]. He has been identified as Farrukh Beg, who was born around 1547 and received his training in Khorasan in Persia. He joined Akbar’s bakshna at its initial stages but mysteriously disappeared between the years 1590 and 1605. It is almost certain that during this period this talented painter was working for Ibrahim. Subsequently, he rejoined the Mughal court and was honoured by Jahangir with the title Nadir al-Asr (‘Wonder of the Age’). 7) Around 1627, as the Deccani kingdoms increasingly succumbed to the Mughals, so Deccani painting failed to resist the influx of Mughal art.
Rajasthani and Pahari Kingdoms (c.1700–1900)

Rajasthan, regarded as the homeland of the Ksatriyas (warrior and ruling castes), lies in the western and central regions of North India [see map, p.6]. Rajput courtly culture reflected a complex set of social relations dominated by 'feudal' clans linked by blood. The ruler was the chief among equals, the whole structure held together by traditional notions of chivalry. Unlike the urban, bureaucratic Mughal empire, the Rajput states were dominated by the 'rustic nobility' whose roots were in the soil. Thus folk elements constantly surface in Rajasthani architecture and painting.

The Rajputs, who had resisted Muslim advances for centuries, were finally pacified by the Mughals with matrimonial alliances and high positions within the imperial system. The process was accompanied by the transformation of Rajput taste in art and architecture. Lying north of Rajasthan in the foothills of the Himalayas, the Hill States of Basohli, Guler, Kangra, and Jammu, ruled by Rajputs, came into being during the eighteenth century as the Mughal state went into decline.

The palaces and cities of Rajasthan

The Rajput strongholds, the great desert fortresses of Rajasthan, though much rebuilt over centuries, bear witness to the turbulent history of the area. One of the earliest surviving structures in Rajasthan is an impressive tower of victory built by Rana Kumbha in 1458 to celebrate Rajput recovery from the dominance of the Delhi Sultanate. The tower gives the impression of a series of Hindu temple halls stacked one above the other. The Rajput palaces are among the major examples of secular architecture from pre-colonial India. As Rajput princes joined Mughal imperial service in the sixteenth century, their palaces back in Rajasthan began displaying Mughal taste in both the interior and exterior of buildings. And yet in important ways they differed from Mughal palaces. The exteriors of Rajput palaces, such as those at Udaipur and Jaipur, were in many respects like those of Mughal ones, though lacking the symmetry of the latter [93]. Yet in
essence Rajput structures were fortified palaces rather than Mughal ‘palaces within fortresses’. The former also made extensive use of inner courtyards for social and ceremonial purposes. The antecedent here was Man Singh’s palace at Gwalior.¹

**Interior Design**

Rajput interiors, following the Mughal pattern, comprised three parts: public and private audience halls and the private quarters of the ruler, which introduced the strictly segregated women’s area (zanana). But, as with façades, so with ground plans: Mughal order and symmetry were purposely altered in favour of ‘picturesque irregularity’. It is sometimes difficult to trace a clear architectural plan in the interior, and this cannot be wholly explained by the fact that many of these evolved gradually over a long period. It is clear from details of the buildings that architects understood the principles of formal symmetry but that they playfully subverted them.

Palace interiors were enlivened by wall hangings, screens, velvets, embroideries, and carpets, whose lavish use may have originated in the Sultanate period. The Rajput palaces also adopted Mughal shekhawat—rooms decorated with mirror fragments. In the case of Rajput versions, the mirror discs on the walls were no different from those used in rural women’s skirts in Rajasthan, an indication of the relationship between high and folk art.¹ Likewise, palace wall paintings were more refined versions of those to be found inside and outside of havelis, which were a distinct feature of Rajasthan. These houses of noblemen and affluent merchants were built around a shared central courtyard. Several havelis formed a nabhala belonging to a particular profession, for instance the stone cutters, dyers, and producers of printed cloths, thus ensuring privacy and caste segregation in a town.³

**Jaipur**

Sawai Jai Singh II, the eighteenth-century ruler of Jaipur and a Mughal official, was responsible for striking examples of Rajput architecture: some of the earliest observatories in the world and the centrally planned city of Jaipur, founded in 1727. In both types of architecture, the perfect blend of function and aesthetics makes them unique creations. Jai Singh had studied Greek, Arabic, and Sanskrit astronomical works. He kept himself abreast of the latest research in Europe and was a collector of western scientific instruments. Because of his knowledge of astronomy, the Mughal emperor assigned him to the task of devising an accurate calendar for official purposes. When Jai Singh was planning his observatory, he was convinced that the instruments available were too small to achieve the degree of accuracy that he sought. So, instead of placing astronomical instruments within his observatories, he designed the structures themselves as instruments. Elegant architectural forms were created by combining geometrical shapes—hemispheres, arcs, cylinders, cubes, and isosceles triangles [56].¹

In building Jaipur, which took its name from its ruler, Jai Singh’s search for perfect symmetry might have stemmed from his scholarly interest in astronomy and mathematics. The city is also a rare example of urban planning based on the Hindu symbolic ground plan, the vastu-purusha-mandala, whose application had until now been confined
Plots of the city of Jaipur, eighteenth century.
The straight, stone-paved streets were laid out on a rectangular grid plan, although this had to be somewhat modified to take into account peculiarities of the terrain, such as the hill on each side. The palace of the ruler and the observatory were placed in the centre, according to the concept of the sacred middle (brahmasthana), while the residential quarters of the different castes, shaped in squares and rectangles, conformed to sacred geometry.

Rajasthani painting
Rajasthani and Pahari artists started absorbing Mughal innovations from the seventeenth century, but their art was very different in temperament and outlook. Part of this difference lay in the more lyrical approach of the Rajasthani artists and the pleasure they derived from pure lines and colours. Unlike Mughal artists, Rajput artists (citerna) were anonymous and did not enjoy the high status of their Mughal counterparts. The art historian was thus obliged to fall back on dyanistic or geographical categories in order to explain the evolution of styles, a development that has now been challenged. The shift of emphasis in the history of Rajput art from the ruler's taste to artistic personality undoubtedly marks an advance in the study of this tradition, but styles could well be products of particular workshops rather than hallmarks of individual masters.

We have previously examined the art of the Rajput kingdom of Mewar on the eve of Mughal conquest, the best-known example being the Caurapancasika series. This tradition was continued at Mewar by the influential Muslim painter Sahibdin, who illustrated the epic Ramayana and other Hindu classics. Sahibdin continued the traditional Gujarati figure style, while adopting the rocks and ridges from Mughal art. The employment of Sahibdin and other Muslim artists by this state reminds us that the Mewar-Mughal conflict was political rather than religious and that the Indian artist was prepared to serve any patron regardless of personal belief. The Mughal style was first introduced in the region through the works brought back by Rajput rulers, later augmented by the arrival of Mughal artists at Rajput courts when the empire was in decline in the eighteenth century.

Portraiture
The paintings of Rajput and the Hill States demonstrate the genres favored in these regions as well as the nature of the patronage that gave rise to them. Portraiture was the most popular genre introduced...
The artist uses four dominant colours: dark grey-green for costumes, bright red for bolster and picture border, turmeric yellow for the background, and chestnut-brown for the floor. Delicate and yet incisive drawings of details such as the Raja’s profile and the hookah add a human touch. The artist frequently or intentionally ‘crops’ part of the hookah as it runs over the sword cross-over onto the red border itself.

The forests next to the Kotah fort and along the Chambal river are captured with a wildness that springs from the artist’s personal knowledge of the landscape. The animals are vivid, imparting a sense of realism to the scene. The work has recently been attributed to an anonymous eighteenth-century master, assisted by the known artist Shakhri Taqi, whose works on Hindu themes show the influence of Deccani painting. However, this attribution is not universally accepted.

from the Mughal court. However, subtle changes occurred in the art of portraiture on its journey from Agra to Mewar. Monarchs were no longer depicted as formal individuals but as real human beings holding court, celebrating festivals, or enjoying their favourite blood sport, the hunt [96]. The mood of Rajasthani court paintings differed from the austere elegance of Shah Jahan paintings in their boisterous scenes of merrymaking during festivals such as that of spring (bolt). The Rajasthani and Pahari artists imposed their own experience and sensibility on Mughal naturalism even as they recorded real events. Compared with Mughal portraits, the profile of the sitter became increasingly idealized. Perhaps the perfect specimen of this type of portraiture is to be found not in Rajasthan but in the Hill State of
immediacy that reminds us of Blake’s lines, ‘Tyger! Tyger! burning bright /In the forests of the night’ [88].

The variety and importance of Hindu deities as the subject matter of Rajput painting marked another departure from Mughal art. Furthermore, if Mughal art brings to mind history painting and portraiture, Rajasthani and Pahari artists are remembered today for lyrical paintings extolling romantic love and the perennial Indian concern with feminine beauty. It is interesting that when Mughal art was at its zenith, neither the nude nor the beauty of women fired the artist’s imagination.

At Kishangarh, set in the midst of idyllic mountains and lakes, a new vision of the romance of Radha and Krishna came into being during the reign of Raja Sawant Singh (1748–57). The Mughal artist Bhavanidas, who founded the Kishangarh school, was invited to the state by its first ruler, a Rajput official in the Mughal empire. But Kishangarh’s fame rests on the artist Nihal Chand and his patron Sawant Singh, poet, painter, and a devotee of Krishna. Early art historians, who were moved by the romantic story of the love between the king and a professional singer, Bani Thani, identified her with the heroine of Nihal Chand’s paintings, but as a recent work suggests, the inspiration for the canon might have been more prosaic. There are, for instance, similarities between the eyes of the Nihal Chand heroine and those of the conventionally painted cult image of Srinathji—in fact, the convention pervades all Gujarati-Rajasthani painting [99].

In the eighteenth century, as political turmoil followed the dismemberment of the Mughal empire, the Hill States, nestling deep in the Himalayan valleys, developed into a cloistered fairy-tale world, where men were imagined as perpetually elegant and women eternally enchanting, poised, and aristocratically aloof. As suggested by the conventions used in an illustrated Devi Mahatmya text from Kangra (1532), the *Caurapancasika* style had arrived in the hills by the sixteenth century. From this evolved the recognizable Pahari style in Basohli during the reign of Kirpal Pal (1678–93). Bhainsdrar’s *Rasamanjari*, a fifteenth-century treatise on the typology of lovers, is illustrated in the *Caurapancasika* tradition of depicting open pavilions and figures with ‘staring eyes’, but now the range of colours has become richer and ‘hotter’ [100].

**Pahari painting**

Pahari painting is particularly interesting because it throws light on the nature of patronage in these regions. In the absence of signed works, the art historian Ananda Coomaraswamy and others after him identified each Pahari style with a regional kingdom such as Basohli, Guler, Jamnu, or Kangra. More recently, scholars have sought to establish the authorship of works by examining the relationship between artist and patron, ascribing a greater degree of individualism to the artist than was previously assumed. The family of artists became the basis of different styles in the Pahari kingdoms, thus loosening the hold of geographic and dynastic categories. Pandit Seu (c.1680–1750), a Brahmin from Kashmir, settled in Guler as a court artist (citren). As a painter, his status was equal to that of a lowly carpenter (turkhan). It was the custom for the son to take up the father’s profession and to learn to draw by practising on a wooden board (takhti) covered in clay. The talented ones progressed from community work such as painting temple murals to court patronage. Some of the myths relating to the artists suggest that they often resented being dependent on royal patronage. With Nainsukh (c.1710–47), the most talented son of Pandit Seu, Pahari painting reached a major turning point. Nainsukh is associated with the introduction of Mughal naturalism into the Hill States, although the process may have already begun with his father. Nainsukh’s portraits—the arrangement of his figures, his use of colour, and his naturalistic drawing—all point to a sure grasp of the late Mughal art produced at the court of Muhammad Shah (1727–48). Nainsukh, who entered the service of Balwant Singh of Jazrota in the 1740s, captured his reign with great fidelity. Although his court scenes are impressive, Nainsukh’s finest works are his intimate portraits of the
ruler, a token of the special relationship he enjoyed with him. Balwant Singh’s death in 1763 ended this special relationship. Nainsukh was then forced to seek employment at the court of Amrit Pal of Basohli (1757–76), presumably at the suggestion of his brother Manaku, who was an artist at the court. With Nainsukh’s arrival, the burning colours of Basohli gave way to a graceful, lyrical naturalism [101].

Pahari art produced in Kangra under Sansar Chand (1775–1833) is identified with the last vision of feminine beauty before the colonial era [102]. Although Kangra paintings have suffered from overexposure through reproduction, in their original state these lyrical paintings represent a delicate balance between the stylized and the real. Sansar Chand’s active patronage of art and his substantial painting collection are known from the accounts of visiting Europeans. With his full power in the middle of the nineteenth century, this flourishing tradition came to an end. As colonial rule tightened its grip on the subcontinent, and western taste overtook the indigenous courts, the artists faced competition from oil painting, mechanically reproduced prints, and ultimately photography. The only court that doggedly refused to give way to the new taste was that of Mewar, a state that re-emerged during the nationalist period as a symbol of Indian resistance.