



Illuminated manuscripts of India – with special reference to Moghul manuscripts

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Abstract

During the 5th c AD manuscripts began to feature small images and colourful decoration that would illustrate the text. A text with miniature paintings along with illustrations that framed the text in a box is known as an illuminated manuscript. This tradition came to India by 800 AD. Jain, Hindu, Islamic and Buddhist traditions of illuminated manuscripts exist in various parts of India. However it became the dominant style of creating manuscripts during the Mughal period. Akbar the great was by far the biggest patron of illuminated manuscripts in India. He had studied painting himself in his youth and had inherited his father's library. After he moved his capital to Fatehpur Sikri he set up a school dedicated to miniature painting under the tutelage of Persian master artists. This style soon spread to the surrounding Hindu courts and the Hindu epics of the [Ramayana](#), Mahabharata, smaller fables and fairy tales began to find themselves in this format in all languages and scripts. Illuminated manuscripts have to be preserved for posterity as they represent the legacy of India. But unlike other manuscripts these illuminated manuscripts need special care & conservation techniques.

key words: illuminated manuscripts, special care ,challenges of conserving

Introduction: Akbar was also the first great Mughal patron of the arts. Of his various building projects, the most ambitious was the new capital city of Fatehpur Sikri, near Agra. Built mostly between 1571 and 1585, when Akbar adopted Lahore as his principal residence, the palace buildings at Fatehpur Sikri reflect a synthesis of Iran and Central Asia with indigenous traditions of Hindu and Muslim India. (Welch. S.C. The emperor's Album – images from Mogul India 2010). Although he is said to have been illiterate, Akbar assembled a royal atelier, first at Fatehpur Sikri, then at Lahore, from

which he commissioned numerous illustrated manuscripts that incorporate Persian, Indian, and even European elements. In fact, the artists who worked for Akbar, the first great Mughal patron of the arts of the book, included Persians as well as Indian Muslims and Hindus. (Welch. S.C. The emperor's Album – images from Mogul India 2010). This collaborative process helped to foster the development of a specifically Mughal style, which was initiated under Akbar and is demonstrated by pages from diverse late-sixteenth-century manuscripts.(Welch. S.C. The emperor's Album –



images from Mogul India 2010). This style of painting was further developed and refined during the reigns of Jahangir & Shah Jahan during the seventeenth century. (Sandra Hyndman – Manuscript illumination in the modern age Evanston 2001).

An illuminated manuscript- An illuminated manuscript means handwritten manuscript that has been decorated with gold or silver, brilliant colors, or elaborated designs or miniature pictures. In India the Muslim period saw several such illuminated manuscripts. (Welch. S.C. The emperor’s Album – images from Mogul India 2010). The term “illumination” originally denoted the embellishment of the text of handwritten books with gold or, more rarely, silver, giving the impression that the page had been literally illuminated. (Welch. S.C. The emperor’s Album – images from Mogul India 2010). Art was at its height, specialization within scriptoria or workshops called for differentiation between those who “historiated” (i.e., illustrated texts by relevant paintings) and those who “illuminated” supplied the decorative work that embellished initial capital letters and often spilled into margins and borders and that almost invariably introduced gold in either leaf or powdered form. (Welch. S.C. The emperor’s Album – images from Mogul India Newyork 2010).

The two functions sometimes overlapped, particularly when drolleries and other irrelevancies

began to populate initials and borders, and even in medieval times the distinction was often blurred. In modern times the term denotes the illustration and decoration of early manuscripts in general, whether or not with gold. (Welch. S.C. The emperor’s Album – images from Mogul India 2010)

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The following are the important illuminated manuscripts of Mogul times

1. Daastan e amir humza
2. Tutinamah
3. Anvar-i- suhail
4. Iyar I Danish
5. Noah’s ark

there are literary manuscripts of Moghul period

1. Gulistan – e –sadi
2. Diwan anwari
3. Diwan i hafiz



4. Jami baharistan
5. Khamsa amir khusru
6. Dehlavi

Emperor Akbar wanted to get the translations of Ramayana & Mahabharata into Persian hence several illuminated manuscripts were prepared using naturalistic colors one such manuscript was Ramayana which was translated into Persian language. The treatment of this manuscript reflects.

key features of illuminated manuscripts

1. Naturalistic scenery
2. Persian influence
3. Landscape
4. Natural colors
5. Unusual match of ethnic dress
6. Royal backdrop
7. Imperial dressing sense
8. Panoramic beautification
9. Imposing majestic
10. Grand outlook
11. Grandiose display
12. Beautiful presentation

These illuminated manuscripts of Moghul period depict heavy Persian influence. The royal people were enjoying a rich & luxurious life style. The royal throne, attendants, servant class, royal insignia, etc were depicted with great delicacy & vulnerability. The depiction of battles, court scenes, receptions, legendary stories, hunting scenes, wildlife, portraits, flora & fauna etc

are considered the best in the Indian context.

Reflection on Hindu Muslim unity

The illuminated manuscripts reflect on the free thinking & liberal ideas of emperor Akbar, his love for art, his conviction in aesthetic principles, his reconciliation of different sects. He succeeded in uniting Hindus and Muslims in the service of a multi-ethnic, multi-religious state, promoting Hindus in his civil service, marrying Hindu princesses and entrusting his army to the Rajput ruler of Jaipur. He ended the religious tax paid by non-Muslims under sharia law, commissioned translations of the great Indian classics from Sanskrit into Persian and filled his court with artists and intellectuals of all faiths and ethnicities. Indeed, Akbar personally took on many Hindu practices and even became a vegetarian. These illuminated manuscripts are a part of the many examples of the Mughals' interest in the Hindu faith, through beautifully illustrated translations of the Mahabharat and the Upanishads,

Conclusion – Thus illuminated manuscripts of Moghul period are exquisitely honored & preserved for their elitism & exclusiveness. Being representative of the royal grandeur they are reflective of artistic delicacy & exuberance. The illuminated manuscripts reflect on the free thinking & liberal ideas of emperor Akbar, his love for art, his



conviction in aesthetic principles , his reconciliation of different sects.

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