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\*Corresponding Author: [ramin@fskik.upsi.edu.my](mailto:ramin@fskik.upsi.edu.my)

## MUGHAL MINIATURE PAINTING: AN ANALYTICAL STUDY OF THE AKBAR'S RAMAYANA

Ramin Hajianfard<sup>1</sup>, Zekrgoo Amir H<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup>Department of Art and Design, Faculty of Art, Sustainability and Creative Industries,  
Universiti Pendidikan Sultan Idris, 35900 Tanjong Malim, Perak, Malaysia

<sup>2</sup>School of Historical and Philosophical Studies, University of Melbourne, Melbourne,  
Australia

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### ABSTRACT

While the influence of Emperor Akbar's religious tolerance and patronage of the arts on the development of Mughal miniature painting is widely recognized, this research provides a detailed analysis of the artistic elements in Akbar's Ramayana. Mughal patronage produced fine illustrated manuscripts, outstanding artistic achievements within a sophisticated cultural context. The translation of Hindu epic scriptures, the Mahabharata and the Ramayana, during Akbar's reign gave rise to Mughal miniature painting an excellent, refined school which amalgamated Indian themes with the rich tradition of Persian miniature painting. This study primarily focuses on the artistic aspects of Akbar's Ramayana and will provide a nuanced understanding of the blend of Persian and Indian art forms. A brief introduction about its translation to Persian and the social sensitivities provide a historical context leading up to this remarkable act. The central focus is on the pictorial elements, exploring the stylistic treatment of lines, colours, figures, natural elements, architectural features, composition, and layout. A short passage discusses 'artists and the production process. Seven illustrations from Akbar's Ramayana were selected to provide visual references to enhance discussions. This research aims to elucidate how Akbar's Ramayana instigated a significant cultural shift in Indian society through unique aesthetics.

**Keywords:** Ramayana, Akbar, Mughal Painting, Hinduism, Persian manuscripts, miniature painting

### INTRODUCTION

Mughal emperors ruled India for more than three centuries (1526-1857). As a Muslim dynasty that governed in a land with the majority of the non-Muslim population, Mughals have been admired by the majority of Hindus for their peaceful policy of acceptance and tolerance. An overview of the history of India shows that Mughal rulers relied mainly on a peaceful co-existence approach, with the exception of some periods of difficult interaction with their subjects. Koch states that Mughal leaders were presenting pictures of philosopher-kings or "ultimate leaders" to show their authority and leadership towards their subjects (Koch, 1987). "For the first time in the Islamic world, painting has been used systematically and effectively to spread the sovereign's political aims" (Rogers, 1993, p.53). The Mughal court of India was not only a centre of political or governmental authority, but also a crossroads of different cultures and faiths and therefore of artistic experiences. Such a tendency was so important during the reign of Akbar (1556-1605). During his long reign, Akbar welcomed people of various faiths and cults and played a key role as a bridge between them. In an exhibition of religious tolerance and cultural inclusivity, both Akbar and Jahangir warmly welcomed the Jesuit Fathers into their personal circles. Not only did they actively support the construction of churches across major Mughal cities, but

they also incorporated Christian iconography into the very fabric of their reign. This was seen through the adornment of their palaces, gardens, and tombs, and even in everyday items such as jewellery and royal albums. These featured images of Christ, the Virgin Mary, and a diverse array of Catholic saints, revealing a profound respect for and fascination with Christian religious traditions (Bailey, Gauvin Alexander, 2021).

This eclectic approach is found in the architectural elements of his time, in places such as Fatehpur Sikri. His inclusive approach could be seen as a reflection of his psychological tendency and inclination to link people from various sects and cults (Isan, 1981). Abu al-Fazl, Akbar's wise and learned minister, saw the religious hostility among of people a result of their lack of knowledge. He mentioned "having observed the fanatical hatred prevailing between Hindus and Musalmans and convinced that it arose only from their mutual ignorance, the enlightened monarch (Akbar) wished to dispel the same by rendering the books of the former accessible to the latter" (Das, 1983, p.147). Evoking the cultural situations of the Mughal Empire, Hodgkin (1997, p.41) offers imported Islamicized epics like Shahnama or Hamzanama and suggests educational, sensational, and cathartic results for producing those translated texts. The translation of the Mahabharata and the Ramayana can also be seen in this context. Unlike Babur, the founder of the Mughal dynasty, who was rather dissatisfied with India, his grandson Akbar showed an active interest in India and its culture (*Ibid.*, p. 19). In view of this, the translation and illustration of these sacred Hindu texts may be in keeping with Akbar's inner enthusiasm for learning about other religions and cultures, which can be seen as part of his broader policy of tolerance towards other religions. It is worth mentioning here that despite much opposition and objections from some conservative scholars and religious bodies in India, Akbar did not give up and continued and promoted his policy of tolerance which, except for some limited periods during the Mughal rule, became a landmark of the Mughal Empire.

The Mughals, whose roots were in Central Asia and who borrowed heavily from Persian culture, embraced Indian culture while being highly accepting of other cultures, and they set a mark of a hybrid, tolerant and magnificent dynasty in Indian history that achieved amazing feats in various artistic fields, from craftsmanship to architecture, literature and painting. Akbar was aware of the importance of the sacred texts of Hinduism for the majority of his subjects who adhered to this faith (Das, 1983, p.147). In a country where the majority of Hindus were ruled by a Muslim minority, this tolerant approach could be seen as a way to treat and administer the state in a peaceful manner. Akbar took a drastic intellectual step by commissioning the interpretation and illustration of the most important Hindu scriptures into Persian - the official language of the Mughal court. Soon after the first Persian edition of the Ramayana was produced for the emperor himself, two more Persian editions were made, one for his mother Hamida Banu Begum and the other for the Mughal vizier Abd al-Rahim Khan-i-Khanan.

Akbar's attempt to promote the translation of Hindu sacred texts into Persian was consistent with his syncretism, which culminated in the establishment of his new religious concept of Din-I Ilahi (Staff, 2010). Moreover, his policy of "universal peace" or Sulh-i Kull is further evidence of his interest in other religions, a push towards the so-called translation project. Akbar not only married a young Hindu, but was also in contact with Debi, a Hindu priest with whom he held dialogues on Hinduism and who was tasked with making contributions to the translation project (Yourk Leach, 1998). He also encouraged his family and their courtiers to learn about Hinduism. For example, he asked his son Murad to research the Mahabharata and his other son Daniyal to write poetry in Hindi. (Leach, 1998). Before coming to power, Akbar received painting lessons under the supervision of the famous Iranian masters Abd al-Samad and Mir Sayyid Ali on the instructions of his father Humayun (Beach, 1987). His generous patronage of the arts, especially book arts, led to the production of magnificent, illustrated manuscripts. According to Abu al-Fazl, the splendour of artistic activities at Akbar's court was directly based on the greatness of the patron or the king himself (Beach, 1987, p.87). At the time of Akbar's death, his library numbered 24,000 volumes with a total value of 6,500,000 rupees, and it is said that this was three times more than what he spent on the construction of Fatehpur Sikri, which underlines his great and unique predilection for the art of the book (Seyller, 2010, p.13). Indeed, Akbar's patronage was of great importance to the emergence and development of Mughal miniature painting (Pinder-Wilson 1985). Akbar's superiors kept him informed of the latest improvements in his workshop projects. Some of his artists attained high social prestige with special titles such as "Nadir al-Zaman" (Wonder of Time) or "Nadir al-Asr" (Wonder of Era).

## Production of The Ramayana

Akbar's tolerant attitude led to Hindu artists, musicians and other officials being attracted and actively represented in the court studio (Brand 1986, p.19). However, his flexible policies were not appreciated by many Muslims. Bada'uni, who is considered the main translator of the Ramayana and the Mahabharata, considered these works a deviation from the true teachings of Islam and referred to them as black texts (Faruqi 1940).

Abu al-Fazl states in *Ain i-Akbari* that three persons - Naqib Khan, Bada'uni and Sultan Thanisari - were involved in the translation of the Ramayana. However, since it is customary to attribute the credit for this kind of work to a single person, Bada'uni was credited with this task (Truschke 2012). It is said that a Hindu Brahmin named Debi Missar helped Naqib Khan translate the slokas (Beach 1981). It is also mentioned that there may have been two versions of the Ramayana produced in Akbar's workshop, one in prose translated by Naqib Khan and Sultan Thanisari, and a second in poetry translated by Bada'uni (Truschke 2012). Although she claims that if this theory were true, Abu al-Fazl mixed the two versions for unknown reasons and extracted only one, the present version, or at least the version of the poem was lost (Ibid.). In any case, one cannot deny that the translation of Hindu sacred books through Akbar's patronage represented a new phase of development in the field of Indo-Persian cultural interaction. Abu al-Fazl, Akbar's court historian and prime minister, explains the role of this cultural enterprise in consolidating the power of the central Mughal court, as he points out (Ibid.).

The wide access to Hindu texts had touched the Mughal court on a personal level. It is said that Hamida Banu, Akbar's mother, saw herself as an embodiment of Sita in her loyalty to her husband Humayun; she never left Humayun's side during his exile in Iran (York Leach, 1998). Akbar himself may have seen himself as Rama, the symbol of an ideal ruler (Gandhi, 2009). In this sense, the translation of the Ramayana was, in Abu al-Fazl's view, more of an advisor to the king than a purely religious text (ibid.). The production of Hindu sacred texts at the Mughal court was a new challenge for the painters, who had previously dealt mainly with Persian literature and animal fables; the problem was solved by hiring Hindu artists who were familiar with the concept (Das 1983). The copies of the *Razmnama* and the Ramayana produced at the Mughal court in the 1580s and 1590s were new and unconventional, incorporating imagery not seen before (Das 1994). The production of manuscripts in the Mughal studios was largely a team effort, with several artists working on a single piece. Some were masters at drawing faces, others at drawing other parts of the scene, and still others were responsible for colouring. This tendency clearly makes it difficult to identify the artists' hands in unsigned works.

## Akbar's Ramayana

The Persian Ramayana manuscript translated and illustrated under Akbar was completed on the 28th Dhu al-Hijah, 997 A.H (6 November 1589) (Das 1994). Based on Bada'uni's statement in the *Muntakhab al-Tawarikh*, Beach believes that the translation of the Ramayana began in Akbar's court in 1584 (Beach 1981, p.132), while Truschke sometimes gives this starting point in the late 1580s (Truschke 2012, p.279). This assumes that the illustration process was completed only six months after Bada'uni submitted the translation and concludes that the process of illustration took place in parallel with the translation (ibid.). Another study estimates that the painting process took place one to two years after the aforementioned date (Seyller 1990).

The Akbar Ramayana is one of the less accessible Persian manuscripts of the Ramayana. The manuscript is in the Maharaja Sawai Man Singh II Museum in Jaipur, India. It lacks the cover page, perhaps due to the Hindu ban on the use of leather that applied to museum items (Das, 1994). Attempts by scholars such as Ashok Kumar Das and Amina Okada to gain access to the manuscript failed due to the strict ban on conducting direct research on the manuscript. Akbar's Ramayana consists of 365 folios of glossy cream coloured glossy *Daulatabadi* paper measuring 41.2 mm x 27.7 mm (Das 1983). The text is written in an exquisite Nasta'liq style, but there is no indication of the scribe's name. The text blocks are not titled, and the episodes are narrated following the previous texts. The texts on the blocks are all written in black ink. The style of the paintings shows a fusion of Persian miniature painting with the local Indian form, a style known as Indo-Iranian or Indo-Persian (Zekrgoo 2000). Ray points to two expressions in common use in Mughal workshops - '*Dihli qalam*' (Delhi style) and '*Irani qalam*' (Iranian style) - which illustrate the clear distinction between Persian and Indian styles of painting in

the early stages of the development of Mughal miniature painting, while noting the tendency of Mughal miniatures towards Iranian sources (Niharranjan Ray 1975, p.23-28).

Among the qualities that distinguish Mughal painting from its Persian roots is the gradual departure from the somewhat cluttered and highly ornamented scenes seen in Persian miniature painting. This different approach to pictorial space becomes clear when comparing the illustrations of the two versions of the Ramayana produced during Akbar's time - the manuscripts of Akbar and Abd al-Rahim (Hajianfard, Ramin, 2017). Akbar's Ramayana features crowded and ornamented compositions that are very similar to Persian paintings, while Abd al-Rahim's copy shows rather empty spaces and less ornamented compositions that are very similar to Indian conventions. An overall formalistic assessment of the illustrations of Akbar's Ramayana shows the dominance of Persian conventions of idealised and abstract scenes with echoes of Indian realist standards. Among the subjects chosen for illustration, battle scenes are prominent, and this approach contrasts with the native copies, on which authentic religious scenes are more common.

### **A Visual Survey of Selected Illustrations**

Despite genre label 'miniature' now being viewed by many South Asian art historians as Eurocentric, it nonetheless reflects the minute detail and precision typical of these artworks. Using opaque watercolor and powdered gold, the artists crafted vibrant, intricate compositions demonstrating the exquisite attention to detail characteristic of the Mughal artistic tradition (Chakraborty, 2022). Before embarking on an analytical study of Akbar's Ramayana, a visual introduction to selected paintings is useful or even necessary. This is because by looking at the paintings, one can get a first-hand aesthetic impression of the works. Moreover, one can see the carefully executed details that lead to a better appreciation of the amount of expert artistic work that has gone into these works of art. In addition, the importance of Persian literature in the form of framed texts within the paintings catches the viewer's eye; the texts are part of the main text of the Ramayana, but the passages have been carefully chosen to complement the image - something like the modern notion of a descriptive caption. Another common feature of the paintings (with the exception of Figure 2) is the strong geometric division of space and the flat treatment of perspective - another element borrowed from Persian miniature painting.



**Figure 1** Bharadvaja entertains Bharata. Preliminary design / Sketch: Lala, Artist: Jagajivana, Copyright (2011) by Diane Selliers. Reprinted with permission

The chaotic and dense collection of people in the lower part contrasts pleasantly with the well-organised composition of the upper part - the centre of the painting. The area is brighter and easier to recognise. The details of the scene, such as the architectural elements and vegetation, are vividly rendered. The architectural elements, the interior decoration and the people are embedded in a geometrically structured frame. The text box is also placed in this area. The artist has taken great pains to depict the emotional interaction of those present in the scene. To understand this better, it is good to look at the positions of the people and the way they look at each other. As far as the composition is concerned, a circular approach can be seen in the positioning of the people.

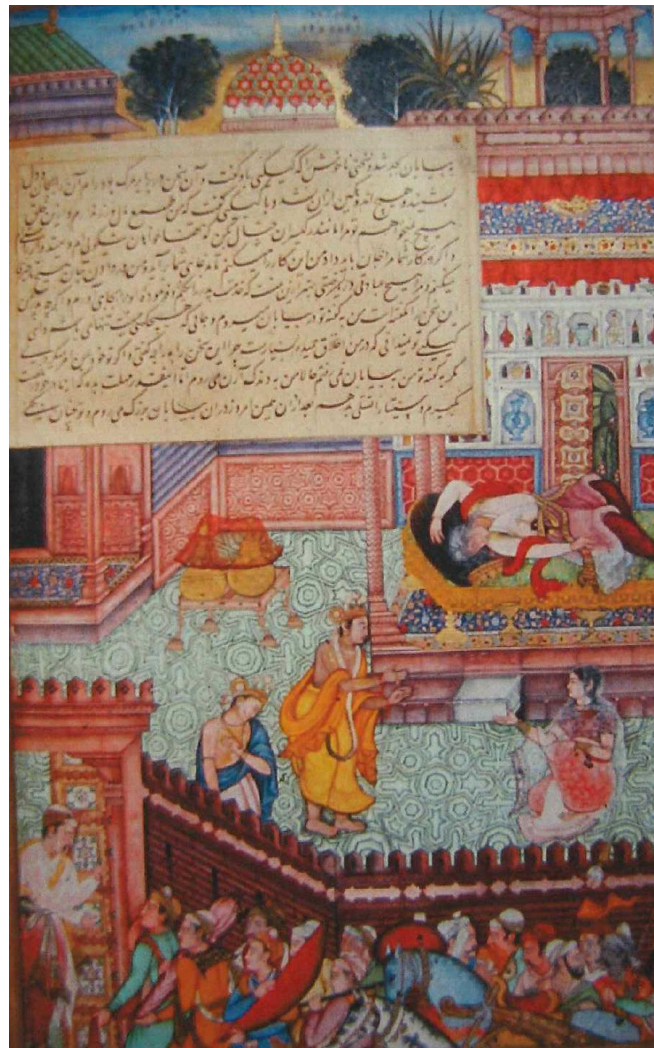


**Figure 2** Menaka, the beautiful apsara, comes to seduce Vishvamitra from his austerities. Artist, Miskin. Copyright (2011) by Diane Selliers. Reprinted with permission

Indra sent Menaka, the most beautiful of the Asparas, to seduce Vishvamitra. The female body is depicted much smaller and more delicate than the male body. The text field is large and fills a considerable part of the picture area. The treatment of the rocks and the animals is reminiscent of Persian miniature painting, while the depiction of space is more realistic in terms of depth of field - a clear departure from Persian models. Realism is evident in the domed structure on the right and in the recessed city with buildings on the upper left - showing the influence of European painting. A South Indian wax bush is placed in the lower centre, showing the delicacy and romantic atmosphere of the stage while symbolising eternal love. Storks and deer play a decorative role in this painting and implicitly contribute to the romantic and seductive atmosphere of this scene. Sage Vishvamitra makes meaningful gestures with his hands. His left hand is in the Tarjani Mudra position, a sign of warning or caution to Menaka. The right hand is in Bhumisparsha Mudra to witness to the earth that the Apsara has failed to interrupt his meditation - a similar situation that the Buddha faced when Mara tried to interrupt

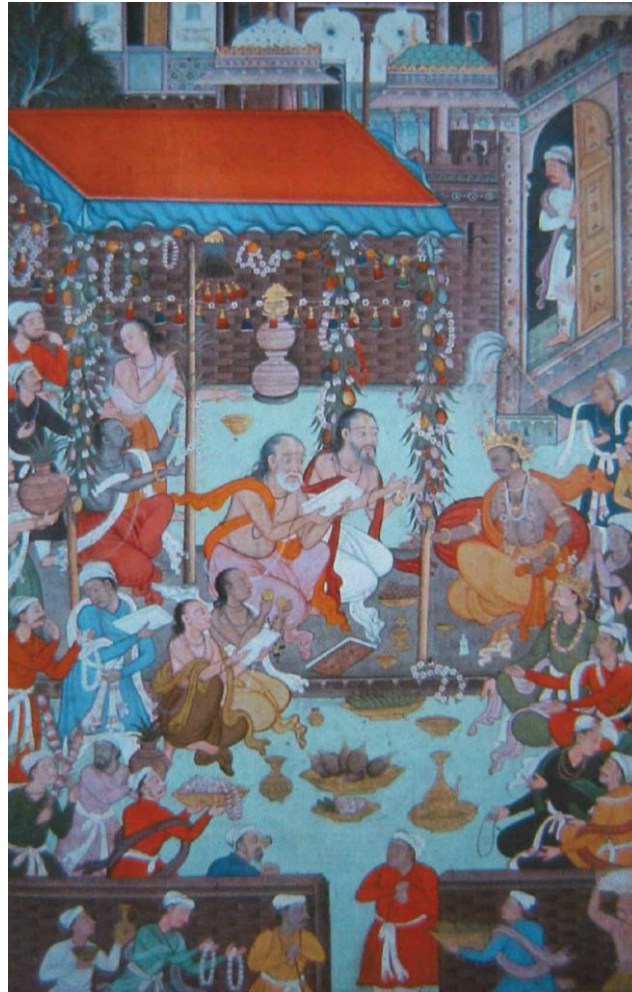


his meditation. (Zekrgoo, 2017). It is one of these works in this manuscript where a considerable part of the scene is taken up by the text block.



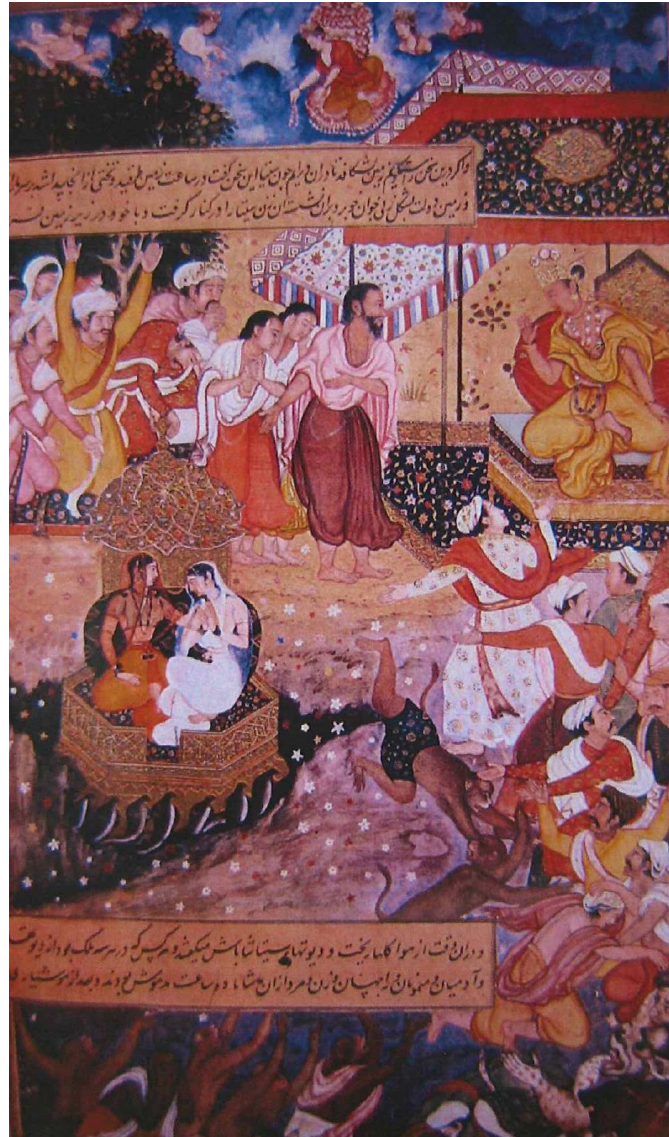
**Figure 3** Dashrata Swoons Again, Preliminary design / Sketch: Kesava, Artist: Bhora.  
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The composition of this painting was carefully sketched to express the prevailing mood. The area inside the palace, which occupies about three quarters of the picture's surface, is cheerful and bright. The detailed design of the architectural elements does not disturb the calm atmosphere. The health of Dashrata, the beloved king of Ayodhya, is failing badly. In front of the palace in the lower and darker area of the painting, an anxious crowd is gathered - an interesting and meaningful contrast to the rest of the painting. Most of the people and all of the animals are depicted in profile, as was common in Indian painting. The composition is strictly defined vertically from top to bottom by different layers. A tendency towards three-dimensional perspective can be observed through the use of some rough angles in architectural elements. An interesting indication of the realistic representation in this painting and the representation of dimension is the texture of the top of a large scarf hanging around Kaikeyi's neck and arms. If you look closely, you can see the geometric patterns of the ground on this delicate and opaque texture. The birds are depicted in flocks in the air.



**Figure 4** Lava and Kusa, the twin sons of Rama, recite the Ramayana in front of their father. Artist: Unknown. Copyright (2011) by Diane Selliers. Reprinted with permission

This is a joyous yet formal occasion. Rama, unaware of the existence of his own two sons, meets them for the first time when they melodiously recite a section of the Ramayana before a court audience. The composition is clearly defined in a balanced and symmetrical manner. The register below is separated by the edge of a short wall with an open entrance in the middle. There is a clear contrast between warm and cold colours in this painting. This contrast between blue, red and orange plays an important role in directing the viewer's gaze. In the centre of the painting, two old holy men (Brahmins) with light skin are depicted, taller than all the others - even Rama himself. Rama is depicted with dark skin and a crown, sitting on the throne in the centre right of the picture. Rama belongs to a warrior caste and is therefore depicted slightly smaller than the priests. Below the two Brahmins are Kusa and Lava; they are smaller, one in dark skin and the other in light skin.



**Figure 5** Sita's Virtue is Affirmed as She is Welcomed and Taken into the Earth by Madhavi. Artist: Unknown. Copyright (2011) by Diane Selliers. Reprinted with permission

The composition is divided by two stripes of script into three sections/levels representing the three realms of the world Heaven (realm of the gods), middle stage (realm of the lower divine beings who mediate between Heaven and Earth) and Earth. The middle section of the painting shows the main event - Sita being received by Madhavi. The area above the upper strip of writing is the realm of the deities, the divine entities. The area below the lower strip is the realm of earthly events. The throne adorned with precious stones rises from the ground on the heads of the nagas (serpent kings) carrying Madhavi (Mother Earth) and Sita. The divine bodies, including Brahma and Indra, congratulate the auspicious occasion by throwing flowers from the blue sky realistically depicted above, while Mother Earth seats Sita beside her on her throne. This episode takes place in the presence of Rama, who is seated on the throne at the top right. The people are deeply disturbed by witnessing the disappearance of Sita in the womb of Mother Earth; this is reflected in their body language and chaotic gestures.





**Figure 6** Enthronement of Vibhishana, Preliminary design / Sketch: Lal, Artist, Surji Gujarati.  
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After the battle between the armies of Rama and Ravana, Rama enthroned Vibhishana, the younger brother of Ravana, who possessed good virtues. While the application of Persian conventions is vividly depicted through figures and ornamental motifs, the overwhelming presence of demonic creatures and certain architectural features speak of local Indian and Hindu elements. The text box attached to the wall in the foreground looks like a notice board. The last sentence of the text is left unfinished, and it seems that the supplementary part is placed on the neck of the donkey in the lower left part. At the bottom left, a donkey protrudes from the border. The scene is full of demons with horns and unkempt hair. The dotted skin of some of them is reminiscent of Persian miniatures.

### **Pictorial Elements in Akbar's Ramayana**

The pictorial elements discussed here include form/movement of lines, colours, human figures and their clothing, animals, mythical creatures, plants, buildings, sky, and overall composition.

### **Lines and Colours**

Two distinct categories of lines can be distinguished in the illustrations straight and curvilinear. Straight lines – horizontal as well as vertical – appear in two capacities, a) architectural elements and b) writings that often play a remarkable role within the paintings' compositional structure. (See figures 1, 2, 3, 4, 5

and 6). Bright and lively colours constitute the treatment of most of the pictorial elements. Paints are applied flat, though in some elements like the sky this approach is a matter of minor change. This approach is used in ascendant and descendant hillocks. In the scenes that have a depth of space, intensity of colours diminishes in the background. Hence figures are shown in “monochromatic appearances wrapped in atmospheric mist,” the origins of whom can be traced “to their origin in European prints, which were highly prized in the Mughal court” (Seyller 1990, p.47). (See figures 2, 3 and 5). Indeed, European paintings, imported to the Mughal court as illustrated manuscripts, significantly shaped the aesthetic preferences and techniques of court painters. The prime example of this influence can be noticed in the response to an engraved Bible manuscript brought to the Mughal court. The painters were fascinated by the unfamiliarity of marine subjects within the biblical scenes, propelling them to use these as models when illustrating naval vessels. This presented a novel, intriguing theme for them to integrate into their own work, ultimately contributing to the enriching diversity of Mughal miniature painting (Krüger, Klaus, & Koch, Ebba, 2019).

### **Human figures**

Human figures are accurately drawn with elegant outlines. The common idealized and curved approach to making bodies in Persian paintings is clearly applied here too. This approach is somewhat rigid but sufficiently fluid to make it dramatic. The heads are mainly profile or in three-quarters, and seldom from front or back. Current contemporary dress codes from the Mughal period are used to show scenes from this ancient epic. In this line, the abundant use of jewellery and ornaments is a common tendency. The garments and ornaments used in Akbar's Ramayana were also found in earlier mid-15th-century illustrations of the Ramayana, such as Bilvamaṣgala's Balagopalastuti (Brockington, John).

### **Animals and Mythical Creatures**

In addition to apes and bears, that are key characters in the story, other animals such as horses, elephants, donkeys and birds have also been depicted. Most birds occur in groups of two or more, especially in the background. Many of these animals are ornamentals like peacocks which can be seen here and there. The angle of representation of the animals is primarily profiled. In terms of rendering, the smooth and curved form is dominant. The illustrations in many cases include numerous mythical creatures, deities and demons. When it comes to deities such as Indra or Brahma, the artist has done his best to show the specific religious characteristic of the deities as we can see in figure 5. Some demons are rendered as the predominant style in contemporary Persian manuscripts, with spotted skins, long, twisted horns wearing detestable and sometimes funny faces, and naked torsos.

### **Plants**

The kind of plants and flowers depicted in the paintings are mainly indigenous to India. Plants serve two purposes the first decorative and the second filling the negative spaces. When it comes to representing specific plants in the foreground, the artists depicted various parts of the plant – leaves and petals – meticulously. The plants in the background are mainly composed of trees, sometimes with light leaves and sometimes in a fuzzy texture. General plants in the middle and foreground, are often presented in the form of scattered bushes.

### **Sky and Clouds**

A sort of aerial perspective in the air with the use of white colour strokes and shades of blue can be seen in the painting. The common Chinese scroll clouds used in Persian paintings are also lively here. There are two approaches to the depiction of sky and clouds. In the first approach, the cirrus dispersed in the context of blue or grey. (Figure 3) On the second approach, the cumulonimbus clouds are composed of Chinese-shaped clouds which fill the sky. (Figure 7)



**Figure 7** Indra Strikes Down Hanuman with a Thunderbolt. Artists: Lala, Jagajivana.  
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This interesting painting is successful in creating a composition that is almost entirely Hindu' with the exception of Mughal outfits. The sun is shining bright with its carefully drawn rays from the upper right corner. All the players on the stage are mythological creatures. Indra, the king of Gods, is depicted on his heavenly elephant mount Airavata, entering the space battle from left. Hanuman's smaller dark body is hardly recognizable against the bright whirling clouds on the right side of the picture, lower than the victorious Indra. Hanuman is wounded by Vajra (thunderbolt), Indra's magical weapon. The space is filled with deities and demons and the event is happening in the sky. Even the demon riding a mule on the lower left-hand corner appears floating in space. Since the characteristic of Indra is closely associated with clouds and rainmaking (Deodhar, Chinmayi H., 2021), the imposing presence of clouds around him, derived from the tradition of depicting clouds in Iranian painting, which itself goes back to Chinese pictorial traditions, is very suggestive and appropriate.

### **Buildings and Architectural Elements**

In terms of rendering architecture, interior and exterior conceptions, elements of common contemporary approaches in Mughal buildings are implemented. In fact, architectural presentations are among distinct features that give paintings of Akbar's Ramayana a remarkable Mughal outlook. Detailed representation of architectural elements, interior as well as exterior – gardens, stained-glass windows, and carpets that often appear both in the interior and exterior – mark another aspect of the illustrated pages. Architectural elements are drawn with great precision, with a definite tendency to show three-dimensionality. Onion domes and chhatris are all around the paintings especially in the middle and backgrounds, all suggesting authentic Indian architecture.

## **Composition and Layout**

There are 176 miniatures in the manuscript, 13 of them in double-page format. The headpieces are in blue, violet, green, black, red, orange, yellow, white, and gold. The text areas are framed with fine straight lines. The page borders are decorated with fine vegetable margins with gold tones and other colours (Das 1983). On pages containing miniature paintings, most of the space is occupied by painting, and the text is confined in boxes. A few of these boxes are narrow and allow the rest of the stage to be seen more freely (figures 5, 6 and 7), but in others, there are large text boxes that occupy a considerable amount of pictorial surface, therefore playing a remarkable role in the composition (figures 1, 2 and 3). The general composition of the paintings is dense and empty spaces are very scarce. A considerable attempt in design such as horizontal rows and round compositions can be seen in these paintings.

## **ARTISTS AND THE PROCESS OF PRODUCTION**

Mughal ateliers were called *taswirkhana* (painting house) or *karkhana*, (workshop). Artists and craftsmen from different branches of manuscript production worked there in cooperation. The common tendency within *taswirkhana* was that several artists worked on the same miniature. In this line, there was a precise division of labour for the whole project, from the primary drawing to the drawing of faces and colouring. This tendency makes it difficult to trace the hands of a particular painter on an unsigned work. In the studio, different artists and artisans such as paper makers, bookbinders, illuminators, calligraphers, drawers and those responsible for colouring worked hand in hand.

The poetic manuscripts were treated differently. Often only master artists worked on them – taking the responsibility of designing, drawing, and colouring the illustrations. As such, we come across the names of a handful of master painters on the illustrated pages of manuscripts. (Kumar Das). Instead of palm leaf paintings that have been highlighted in traditional Indian manuscripts, Mughals took advantage of paper. It had, however, started as early as the end of the fourteenth century in pre-Mughal works. Mention should be made here of the exception in the initial phase of Mughal painting, namely the *Ḥamzanama* (*Dastan -i Amir Ḥamza*) which was produced on cotton-based textiles (Zekrgoo, 2000).

The common approach of cooperation in the production of miniature paintings for the manuscripts of the Mughal workshop was based on two groups. The first group were masters who were responsible for the main design (*tarh*) which were called *tarrāh* (drawer). The second group was in charge of colouring (*amal*). In some paintings, one person had responsibility for these two jobs. Thus, for all the works of a script like the *Ramayana*, there was a team of many artists involved which have the names or signatures of many of them written in red ink on the lower margins. Most of these names or signatures are found in the lower margins while in five of them the artists put their names someplace in the paintings. Furthermore, 12 paintings have not been signed (Das, 1983). As for participation, Basawan, Lal, Miskin and Kesav are eminent artists. In her detailed study based on a graph theory, Rice mentions the names of three principal artists involved in this project who respectively are Lal, Kesav Kalan, and Basawan (Rice, Y, 2017).

During the production of this copy of the *Ramayana*, some notable changes took place such as the death of the renowned artist Dashwanth, the relocation of the Fatehpur Sikri court studio to Lahore, resulting in the participation of new and diverse artists, including many local artists such as Kesav, Lal, Miskin, Bhavani, Dhanu, Jagat, Devji Gujarati, Kesav Gujarati, Meghij Guajarati, Paramjeev Guajarati, Surji, and of course the well-known painter Mando (Das, 1994). Some of the names are the same, but with different suffixes like *kalan* (senior) and *khord* (junior), among which Kesav Kalan and Kesav Khord. Sometimes more than one version of the same person exists like Banwari and Banwali, or Nanha and Nana. (Das, 1983).



## CONCLUSION

As can be seen, around the late 16th century, a leading change occurred in the form and subject of miniature painting in the court of Akbar. The changing taste was in fact a significant tendency towards translation and illumination of the Hindu sacred books, namely the Mahabharata and the Ramayana. This was partly based on the tolerance policy of the Mughal court that led to the use illustrated manuscripts to improve artistic productions as well as to better understand Hinduism. Furthermore, it shows the power and dominance of the taste of the court by assigning the conceptual framework. A detailed categorization of the themes in Akbar's Ramayana shows that battle scenes are at top with 78 paintings. Other themes include 28 court scenes, 7 scenes of romantic nature, 11 sense with ritual themes, 14 scenes with remarkable presence of deities and 38 illustrations that could not be assigned to the above categories. As for the formal approach, we can see a significant trace of Persian conventions such as flat treatment of paint and compact composition. The use of gently demarcated decorative elements is widespread in these paintings. After producing this first illustrated manuscript of the Ramayana, two other manuscripts were made during Akbar's reign, one for the mother of Emperor Hamida Banu Begum and the other by Akbar Prime Minister Abul Rahim Khan-e Khanan, that each requires separate research. Later, during the reign of Emperor Farrokhsiyar in the early 1700s, a new manuscript of the Ramayana was produced. This copy with its very different format and a new translated text requires a separate study.

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