



## MUGHAL RULERS : THE PATRONS OF PAINTINGS

**Dr. T. Samraj,**

*Department of History, Bishop Heber College, India.*

### **Abstract**

*Paintings played a vital role on exposing human ideas and portrayed the life of the people. Religions also played a prominent role in promoting paintings in India. The Mughals introduced Persian method of painting in India. The contributions of Akbar and Jahangir for the growth of paintings in India was marvelous. Mughal paintings reached the pinnacle of glory during the time of Jahangir.*

**Key Words :** *Ajanta, Akbar, Ellora, Jahangir, Mughals, Rajaput Style.*

Painting is the most understandable way of art, because it gives a full and vivid impression. As paintings were found on the walls of caves, it is evident that painting was the first way of art that man used to depicted his ideas and feelings. In pictographic way of communication, pictures were used as symbols of communication. So it is clear that paintings played a vital role in exposing the human minds as well as ideas from the very ancient time ie. since the evolution of communication. India holds several peculiar features in the field of painting. A number of schools emerged in India which attracted people from far and wide through its artistic beauty. The paintings in Ajanta and Ellora caves are typical examples of Indian paintings. The salient feature of Indian painting is that India had its own form of paintings, yet it accommodated the foreign styles too, as a result, new form of paintings emerged in India with the blending of Indian and foreign ideas. It is apt to say that many paintings reflects foreign style with Indian art. Religions also played a prominent role in promoting paintings in India. Buddhism and Hinduism had a prime role in promoting painting in India. The nature of Hindu artists is “living mentally and bodily in another and more abstract environment and working for Hindu patrons, pictured scenes from the Indian classics, domestic subjects and illustrations of the life and thought of their motherland and creed.” The Indian rulers too acted as the patrons of painters and many painters delivered their masterpiece with the help of the rulers. Mughals in India also contributed a lot for promoting paintings and they became patrons of many painters. Even separate department was started by the Mughal rulers to promote paintings in India. The enormous contributions made by the Mughal rulers introduced a new form of painting in India, in course of time. According to Prof. S.R. Sharma, “though the Mughal art started its career as an exoitic plant, very soon it became acclimatized to the Indian soil and assimilated many typical Indian features”.



The Mughals introduced Persian method of painting in India, which is different from Indian style. Persian model of painting was confined itself to portraying the materialistic life of the court with its satisfactions, processions, hunting expeditions and all the picturesque. The Persian style of painting introduced by the Mughals was assimilated by the Hindu craftsmen of India, paved the way for the emergence of new form of painting in India. The blending of Hindu ideas and Mughal ideas developed Indo – Persian or Indo – Mughal style, which in turn in course of time created the two popular schools of painting, known as *Mughal style and Rajput style*. Babur, the founder of Mughal rule in India didn't made much contributions for paintings in India. But it should be noticed that he is a great lover of art and nature. No traces of painting belonging to his period is available. But the Alwar manuscripts of the Persian version of Babur's Memoirs reveals information about the works produced by the court painters employed by Babur. It attributes that Babur found great pleasure in painting flowers, springs and streams. Lane Poole writes " he delights in the discovery of a spikenard which he had not found before and he is never weary of expatiating on the loveliness of the flowers in his favourite gardens." Similarly he brought a number of paintings from the library of his ancestors to India. It shows his deep interest on painting. Humayun sowed the seed and it was grown as tree during the reign of his son Akbar. The interesting fact is that eventhough he spent his life in exile for many years, he did contributions for painting with the available time. He developed the taste for painting when he was in exile in Persia. His taste and patronage towards painting was evident from the invitation of two reputed painters namely Mir Sayyid Ali and Khwaja Abdus Samad in 1550, who were asked to prepare a copy of Dastur – i- Hamzah. It formed the nucleus of the Mughal School of Painting which came into existence during Akbar's reign. So Humayun was considered as the original founder of Mughal School of Painting. Eventhough his exile and early death restricted him from publishing paintings in massive scale, his efforts and taste towards painting reflected through the works of his son Akbar.

Akbar the great was a great patron of painters. He himself was also a good painter. He himself attributes that "It appears to me(Akbar), as if a painter had quite peculiar means of recognizing God, for a painter in sketching anything that has life and in devising the limbs one after another, must come to feel that he cannot bestow personality on his works and is thus forced to think of God, the giver of life and then increase knowledge." He transformed painting from being an aid to idolatry to a means to teach the existence of God. Besides, he removed the stigma of sacrilege attached to painting. The paintings belonged to his period portrayed incidents related to all walks of life and left no progression untouched. In addition, the fresco painting on the model of Ajanta painting is a salient feature of Mughal painting. The mural paintings portrayed in the walls of Fatehpur Sikri exposes the uniqueness



of the paintings of Akbar's period. Prof. Sherwani says "there is a marked improvement on the miniatures as most of the one looks, while a large majority of the figures in miniatures only show their profile. Some of the murals depict plenty of movements, both in human beings and in birds and animals. Fatehpur Sikri subjects scared to Buddhism and Christianity side by side with the delineation of social aspects of contemporary life". The establishment of a separate department of painting was a far reaching effort on promoting paintings. In course of time, it developed as National Indian School of Painting. He patronized both Hindus and Muslim painters. He employed not less than 17 painters in his court and among them 13 were Hindus. According to Abdul Fazl "Hindu painters were supremely expert in their art and a few indeed in the whole world are found equal to them". Number of prominent painters were employed by Akbar. Khawaja Abdus Samad served as the head of the department of painting. Other prominent painters during his period were Mir Sayyid Ali, Faruk Beg, Daswant, Basawan, Sanwal Dass, Tarachand and Jagan Nath. He even employed foreigners as painters in his court. Abdus Samad, native of Persia was vested with the title "*Shirin – Kalam or Sweet Pen*". During his time, the famous works like Ramayana, Ayardanish, Zafarnamah, Chingiznamah, Naldaman, Razanamah, Kaliadaman were illustrated. Abdul Fazl's Ain – i- Akbari states that "he gives every encouragement, as he looks upon it as means both of study and amusement. Hence the art flourishes and many painters have obtained great reputation. The works of all painters are weekly laid before His Majesty by the Darogas and often confer rewards according to the excellence of workmanship." An immense album was prepared under the patronage of Akbar and it is said that Akbar personally contributed a lot for the album. The beautiful drawing of Umar Shaikh, the father of Babur on a hunting expedition, preserved in British museum belongs to the period of Akbar. The manuscripts of Razim – Nama at Jaipur worth 40000 pounds, the Babur Namah preserved in British museum were the masterpiece of Akbar's period.

During the reign of Jahangir, the Mughal paintings reached the pinnacle of glory. Jahangir himself possessed qualities of great painter and he himself mentioned in his memoirs that "Regards myself, my liking for painting and my practice in judging have arrived at such a point that when any work is brought to me, either of deceased artists or those of the present day, without the names being told 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 my portrait and each face be the work of a different master, I can discover which face is the work of each of them. If any other person has put in the eyes and eyebrows of a face I can perceive whose work is the original face and who has pointed the eyes and eye brows. Iswari Prasad attributed that the artistic personality of the monarch and the settled condition of the country made painting to flourish during the period of Jahangir. The paintings of Jahangir possessed certain



uniqueness. He gave importance for realism. The portrayals of nature are extremely realistic. Major theme of the drawings were laid on natural objects like hills, clouds, sceneries and other objects like flowers, birds, beasts and human features. Sir Thomas Roe observes that he presented a painting to Jahangir, that was specially ordered from England for the emperor. At one night, the emperor showed six paintings and asked him to pick out his painting. But Thomas Roe was unable to distinguish his picture. The art of painting became Indian at the time of Jahangir. “Akbar laid the foundation of the Mughal miniature painting, but it was his son Jahangir guided the new school of Indian Art to maturity and taught it by the influence of his own rare judgment to achieve success”. He possessed an artistic vision and so long as he lived, he was the ‘soul and spirit of the Mughal art.’ He even struck coins engraved with his own portrait, sometimes even holding a wine cup in his hand. In addition, he employed a number of painters in his court. Aza Riza, Abul – I- Hassan, Farrukh Beg, Ustad Mansur, Bishandas, Manohar were the prominent painters. The contribution of the emperors ideals with the craftsman skills resulted in the Mughal school of painting reaching the highest pitch of excellence. Three beautiful paintings of his period have been found in Jaipur, one is believed to be a portrait of the Sufi saint Salim Chisti.

During the period of Shajahan, importance was given to architecture than painting. Yet he employed painters and nobles too patronized painting. The home of Azaf Khan was beautified with best pieces of paintings. The painters of his time preferred to depict the scenes of Darbar, rather than outdoor scenes. Dr. Tarachand opines that “the reign of shah Jahan saw the culmination of the art, the rules of perspective and foreshortening, of modeling and shading were introduced, the finest blues and the most costly colours were used. Prince Dara was also a good patron of painting. During the time of Aurangzeb, paintings began to decline. The ardent nature of the emperor blow a death knell to paintings. Percy Brown states that “The Mughal School of Paintings in India coincides with the period of Mughal dynasty. Coming into patronage during the reign of Akbar during the reign of Akbar in the late half of the 16<sup>th</sup> century, it attained its apogee under the imperial dilettante Jahangir. The reign of his successor Shajahan marks the first step of its decline, while under the unsympathetic rule of Aurangzeb, its death knell was rung. It lingered on a decadent art under the Nawabs of Oudh until the end of eighteenth century and practically ceased with the advent of British rule. As a school of painting, its duration was short extending even two and a half century and it has been aptly referred as not exactly a school but more of a brilliant episode in the history of Indian art”.



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