

An emperors path to aesthetic unison history essay

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PRASHANT KHATRYHI 399-001PROF. JHALAFinal Paper Rough Draft' Azeem-o-Shaan Shahenshah' Akbar: An Emperor's Path to Aesthetic UnisonIn 1582, King Philip II of Spain received a letter from the Mughal Emperor Akbar of India. Akbar wrote: " As most men are fettered by bonds of tradition, and by imitating ways followed by their fathers... everyone continues, without investigating their arguments and reasons, to follow the religion in which he was born and educated, thus excluding himself from the possibility of ascertaining the truth, which is the noblest aim of the human intellect. Therefore we associate at convenient seasons with learned men of all religions, thus deriving profit from their exquisite discourses and exalted aspirations." [Johnson, 208]The conquest of the Mughals in the early 16th century began a period of profound change in the culture and politics of India. Not only did it mark the beginning of a more centralized, established Muslim rule, but it also ushered in a cultural renaissance of the arts, most particularly in painting. Combining Persian, indigenous Rajput and European elements, the Mughal art style virtually dominated India for about the next 200 years and produced a change in aesthetic values, a new painting style, and an innovative way of perceiving and understanding the world. One of the most influential and perceptive rulers of the Mughal Empire was Akbar. Akbar was curious and thoughtful, wanting to know the world and its people. Unlike his forefathers, he was born in India and was interested in and concerned with the different groups of people that composed the country. If he was to rule all of the land, he believed he needed to be more aware and sensitive to the needs of all of the people. Akbar was curious and thoughtful, wanting to know the world and its people. Unlike his forefathers, he was born

in India and was interested in and concerned with the different groups of people that composed the country. If he was to rule all of the land, he believed he needed to be more aware and sensitive to the needs of all of the people. Solidifying Mughal control in Northern India by the conclusion of the 16th century, he was then able to focus on the creation of a new culture and a new way of thinking about art and the world. As the patron of the arts, Akbar established an unprecedented imperial atelier that was engaged in the production of sumptuous manuscript illuminations that illustrated court life, hunting and battle scenes, flora and fauna, portraits, history painting, and religious and cultural works. His evolution as both a ruler and a person was crucial to the development of Mughal painting. It was his charismatic, curious nature that brought about more tolerance and exchange between Hindus and Muslims, opened India to more profound European aesthetics, set the foundations for a modern India, and established the values and vocabulary, with the help of his courtiers and painters, of the new Mughal aesthetic style. The art produced by Akbar's atelier became ways in which Akbar could communicate in a new visual language his radical political, social, and religious synthesis and his power as divine ruler. Akbar's fascination for the amalgamation of cultures traces back to his nurture and marital life. From his Persian mother, he inherited his princely manners, his love of literature and the arts, and a characteristically Persian delight in philosophical discussion and from his Turkish father, he inherited his fierce energy, his love of war and his ability to command. Although Akbar was born into a Sunni Muslim family, he received an education by two Persian scholars on religious matters, which likely had an impact on his tolerant vision for Mughal society.

Akbar displayed remarkable respect for his Hindu subjects and their faith. Akbar married the Hindu princess of the Rajput raja of Amber. Her family was then inducted into the Mughal hierarchy as nobles (amirs), who retained their ancestral lands and their Hindu practices on the promise of allegiance and military support to the emperor. Such agreements were then rewarded with high-ranking court positions and riches. Akbar thus established marriage and imperial promotion as ways of uniting and controlling Hindu and Muslim courts. In total, Akbar had 36 wives of various ethnic and religious backgrounds. After reviewing the major literature on Mughal painting, one can compare the Mughal style to its sometimes more indigenous counterpart Rajput painting, a distinction which tends to ignore the many connections and interrelationship of the two. The two traditions are clear, simple opposites. In reality, the interaction between the two kingdoms was more fluid and complex. Mughal painting is generally characterized by its fine draftsmanship, meticulous application of colors and details, realistic figuration and scenes, and a secular and/or historical approach. Like its Persian relative, it typically employs a sense of space and depth through overlapping zones delineated by architectural motifs. Scenes are usually of battles, portraiture, or court settings. Decorative designs proliferate in borders, in landscape and interiors, and in clothing. Typically, the composition is lively, dynamic, and of a single moment. To contrast this general image of the Mughal style, more indigenous Indian painting is seen as more "medieval" or "primitive". Looking to a Rajasthani example, one can see the obvious differences in the Rajput style. The Rajasthani Rajput style was "firmly rooted in the Hindu religion and the timeless world of Indian

village and folk painting" and " was created by artists for whom the eternal order underlying human existence was ultimately more important than its fleeting, particularized manifestations." Akbar also commissioned a large number of manuscripts, illustrated in the Persian style, for his Imperial Library. The earliest known manuscript illustrated in this fashion during Akbar's regime is the Duwal-Rani-Khizar-Khani. Written by the renowned poet Amir Khusro, the illustrations are attributed to Mir Sayyed Ali, the master-painter, who undertook the work in 1568. The paintings of the Hamzanama which represented the most ambitious project undertaken during the golden era of Akbar were executed on large canvas made of cotton cloth. Initially, the work was started by about 30 artists, but their number grew to more than a hundred at the time of its completion. The work on these illustrations served as an excellent training ground for the painters of the royal atelier. The style of Mughal paintings is distinguished by the dramatic action and bold brush work. Apart from the Hamzanama, many other manuscripts such as the Razmanama, the Baburnama, the Akbarnama etc., were also illustrated in similar vein. European prints and enamels also influenced Mughal painting and metalwork. It was in the last quarter of the 16th century that European influence began to affect the Mughal School. Hence, a number of Christian themes were also painted by the Mughal artists. The Mughal art came across European paintings, prints, engravings and other decorative arts in early 1570s. One of the member of first Jesuit mission to the Mughal court (1580-1583), Anthony Mon-serrate noted the presence of European art on the wall of royal din-ing-hall at their arrival in Fatehpur Sikri. It is believed that the first European paintings that reached

Akbar's court were large oil paintings of Mary, the mother of Jesus. Mary was a known figure in Akbar's court. She is the only woman mentioned by name in the Qur'an, and Akbar's mother was named Maryam, the Arabic form of the name Mary. This mission had presented a copy of Jesuits' Bible to Akbar that was Plantyn's Royal Polyglot Bible with illustration done by some Flemish painter of the school of Quintin Matsys (1466-1530) and P. Huys. It is reported that when Akbar received this Bible, he held them in his hands and publicly kissed them, and placed them on his head. A Jesuit priest observed Akbar's behaviour in following words: " Removing his cap or turban, kneeling on the ground with great devotion, he prayed before the picture of Christ and of the Virgin, venerating thrice, once in our manner, the other in that of the Muslims and the third in the Hindu fashion, that is to say, prostrate, saying that God should be adored with every form of adoration." [MacLagan, 227]The court of Akbar fostered a lively literary culture and encouraged translations of all kinds. Massive numbers of classics were rendered into Sanskrit and Hindi. Also, religious literature was translated into Persian from other languages like Chaghatai Turkish, Sanskrit and Arabic. Akbar's school of translation made a valuable contribution to the Indianization of the Mughal ruling class. Akbar's vigorous personal influence over the life of his court was paralleled in his patronage of painting. During Akbar's reign, early Safavid style, which had been introduced into India by Humayun, began to merge and blend with indigenous Indian elements, and a genuinely original Mughal style evolved. The new style brought a change of emphasis in subject matter. Traditional Persian painting had been concerned mainly with the illustration of literary classics such as the shahnameh, Nizami's Khamseh and

Jami's Yusuf va Zulaykha. Mughal painters, many of whom were Hindus, shifted their focus from illustrating the great classics of Persian literature to new subjects such as the life of Akbar and his court, as well as the representation of nature, landscape and portraiture. The most distinctive work in Akbar's ateliers was the series of illustrations commissioned for Abdul Fazl's Akbarnama. This series demonstrates the unique and superb qualities of the nascent Mughal School and set it far apart from its Safavid or Timurid precursors. In this series, crowded and bustling scenes of men and animals are full of vigor and movement; the use of color is uninhibited; and detail is finely observed. The languid is rejected. As a patron of the art Akbar personally visited the artists, including his most famous painters, Basawan, Lal, and Daswanth. Under Akbar, Persian artists directed an academy of local painters. The drawings, costumes, and ornamentation of illuminated manuscripts by the end of the 16th century illustrate the influence of Indian tastes and manners in the bright coloring and detailed landscape backgrounds. Modeling and perspective also began to be adapted from Western pictures. Akbar's amalgamated aesthetic vision can also be witnessed in the architecture. The Mughal architecture during the reign of Akbar and his immediate successors was an amalgam of Islamic, Persian, Turkish and Indian architecture. The architecture displayed a very good blend of Indian style with the Iranian style. Unlike Babur or Humayun, Akbar had both the time and the resources to build on a monumental scale. In architecture the first great Mughal monument was the mausoleum to Humayun, erected during the reign of Akbar. The tomb, which was built in the 1560s, was designed by a Persian architect Mirak Mirza Ghiyas. Set in a

garden at Delhi, it has an intricate ground plan with central octagonal chambers, joined by an archway with an elegant facade and surmounted by cupolas, kiosks, and pinnacles. At the same time Akbar was building his fortress-palace in his capital, Agra. Native red sandstone was inlaid with white marble, and all the surfaces were ornately carved on the outside and sumptuously painted inside. Akbar went on to build the entire city of Fatehpur Sikri (City of Victory) in which extensive use was made of the low arches and bulbous domes that characterize the Mughal style. Akbar aimed the unification of Hindus and Muslims for the stability of the empire, and applied this system to architecture. As a result, the buildings grew into some of the most unique palaces in the world, partly because it is entirely single material: red sandstone. The palace buildings at Fatehpur Sikri reflect a synthesis of Timurid traditions of Iran and Central Asia with indigenous traditions of Hindu and Muslim India. There was an equal give and take relation between the Mughals and the Rajputs. While the Mughal architecture was profoundly influenced by the Rajput Hindu architecture; the Rajput although resenting the Mughals adopted various Mughal architectural styles as well such as the 'Zenana', an Islamic concept of Persian heritage. Akbar's aesthetic vision has been wonderfully exhibited on the screen in K Asif's Mughal-e-Azam (1960), regarded as one of the greatest masterpieces of all times in Indian Cinema and the epic drama directed by Academy Award nominee Ashutosh Gowariker, Jodhaa Akbar (2008). While Mughal-e-Azam, which was released on Aug 5, 1960, chronicles the love story of Prince Salim, who went on to become Mughal emperor Jehangir, and Anarkali, a court dancer, Jodhaa Akbar is a sixteenth century love story about a marriage of

alliance that gave birth to true love between a great Mughal emperor, Akbar, and a Rajput princess, Jodha. Both films play a prominent role as a useful record of Mughal aesthetics such as the clothing, interiors, architecture and paintings. Shot in Rajput palaces of the era, Jodhaa Akbar tries to recreate the clothing and interiors of the Mughal court. The director made best efforts to recreate the scenes as allied as possible with the source material present for that period. Certain scenes in the film, such as the moment when Akbar throws Adham Khan, his wet nurse's son from the palace terrace is actually based on paintings from the Akbarnama. The makers of Mughal-e-Azam, a "benchmark" and "milestone" in the history of Indian cinema, left no stone unturned while recreating the grandeur of Mughal era and portraying the characters. The film's production design was very large scale and expensive. Certain sets were reported to have taken six weeks to erect. The song "Pyar Kiya To Darna Kya" ("I have loved, so what is there to fear?") was filmed in a set built as a replica of the Sheesh Mahal in the Lahore Fort, in the Mohan Studios. The particular set was noted for its size, measuring 150 feet in length, 80 feet in breadth and 35 feet in height. A heavily-discussed aspect of the set was the presence of numerous small mirrors made of Belgian glass, which were crafted and designed by workers from Firozabad. This set took two years to build, and cost more than 15 lakhs, a price higher than the budget of an entire film at that time. Skilled artisans from across India were recruited for crafting the paraphernalia. The Mughal costumes were made by tailors from Delhi who The costume design was done by dress designers Makhanlal and Company, tailors skilled at zardozi embroidery from Delhi stitched the Mughal costume. In addition, the footwear was ordered from

Agra, the jewelry made by goldsmiths in Hyderabad, the crowns designed in Kolhapur, and blacksmiths from Rajasthan manufactured the armoury. A statue of Lord Krishna, to which Jodhabai prayed, was made of pure gold. In the scenes involving an imprisoned Anarkali, the chains Madhubala wore were authentic. The battle sequence between Akbar and Salim featured 2,000 camels, 400 horses and 8,000 troops. A significant portion of the soldiers were taken from the Indian Army's Jaipur cavalry, 56 Regiment. Dilip Kumar, who played the character of Prince Salim, visited London to test the wig he would wear in the film. This is a testament to the passion that went into making the film. Display of Mughal courtly aesthetics in Indian popular culture, particularly Bollywood Cinema has played a huge influence on the promotion of tourism to these heritage sites of the Mughal and Rajput era. In fact, Fatehpur Sikri is a world heritage site. Through the exploration of the various discourses that shaped and revealed Akbar's understanding of the world, one begins to see a clearer picture of the context of his particular painting style. What is revealed is a multitude of concerns hinging on Akbar's rule and involved in his own creation of an image of power, intellect, and synthesis. Through his ascent and consolidation of power to his religious and political reforms, Akbar ultimately was searching for a better understanding not only of his position in the world but of his relationship with the Divine. The paintings he commissioned are thus less historical documents of a particular age and more the complex expressions of both painter and patron concerning their pursuit in understanding and communicating the inner ideas of power, unification, and God. Akbar is quoted by Abu'l Fazl as asserting, "There are many that hate painting; but such men I dislike. It appears to me

as if a painter had quite peculiar means of recognizing God; for a painter in sketching anything that has life, and in devising its limbs, one after the other, must come to feel that he cannot bestow individuality upon his work, and is thus forced to think of God, the giver of life, and will thus increase in knowledge." [Abu'l Fazl] Akbar wanted to partake in a communion, creating an empire and fashioning a history that supported his position as its material and spiritual leader. Because of his ideal of cultural synthesis and religious diversity, Akbar reserved a unique place for himself in Indian history. Perhaps most of all, Akbar the Great showed the rulers of all nations everywhere that tolerance is not weakness, and open-mindedness is not the same thing as indecisiveness. Akbar the Great's life shows us that when tolerance reigns, societies flourish, and when tolerance ceases to exist, so do empires. Akbar's legacy of religious toleration, firm but fair central control and liberal tax policies that gave commoners a chance to prosper established a precedent in India that can be traced forward in the thinking of later figures such as Mohandas Gandhi. As a result, he is honored more than four centuries after his death as one of the greatest rulers in human history. In other words we could say that Akbar was the founder of the new aesthetic style in Mughal India that brought together the Mughal, Persian, Rajput and even the European aesthetic styles. As Anand K. Commaraswamy stated, "The Mughal aesthetics under Akbar showed that it was still possible to found a new art on the basis of the old traditions: foreign influences were, not perhaps easily, but at last effectually, assimilated, and the result was a new and great art, which is truly original."