

Mughal Art and Architecture: Features; Architectural Development; Mughal Paintings

Under the patronage of Mughals, the architecture became more grandiose while retaining its elegance. The Mughal architecture is a distinctive Indo-Islamic architectural style which combines the characteristics of the Persian, Turkish, and the Indian style. The marvelous cities like Fatehpur Sikri and Shahjahanabad were established during their reign along with several majestic forts, mosques, and mausoleums throughout their kingdom.

Important Features of Mughal Architecture:

1. Blend of Indian, Persian, and Turkish architectural style.
2. Different types of buildings, such as majestic gates (entrances), forts, mausoleums, palaces, mosques, sarais, etc.
3. Building material: Mostly, red sandstone and white marble were used.
4. Specific features such as the Charbagh style (garden layout) of the mausoleums, pronounced bulbous domes, slender turrets at the corners, broad gateways, beautiful calligraphy, arabesque, and geometric patterns on pillars and walls, and palace halls supported on pillars.

Architectural Development under various Mughal Rulers:

Babur: Due to his short reign (1526-1530), most of which was spent in wars, Babur could not leave any significant construction except the mosque of Kabuli Bagh at Panipat and Jama Masjid at Sambhal near Delhi. He also built Ram Bagh, the first Mughal Garden in India (1528) in Charbagh Style located in Agra.

Humayun: He succeeded Babur, but throughout his reign, he was constantly embroiled in a struggle with Sher Shah Suri. He laid the foundation of the city named Dinpanah but could not finish it. Humayun's Tomb, also known as the precursor of the Taj Mahal was the first imposing structure of the Mughals which was built by his widow Hamida Begum and designed by Persian architect Mirak Mirza Ghiyas. The mausoleum built upon a raised platform is a mix of Indian and Persian artistry using red sandstone and white marble. It has a Persian Charbagh style. The tomb was declared as a UNESCO World Heritage Site in 1993. The Taj Mahal is the climax and therefore perhaps the most famous monument built under the Charbagh layout.



Image: Humayun's Tomb- Charbagh Style

Note: Charbagh Style- It is a Persian style garden layout in which the main building is placed at the center of a quadrilateral garden with shallow water channels neatly dividing the area into smaller parks.

Sher Shah Suri (Sur Dynasty): He built the Quila-e-Quanah mosque of Old Fort in Delhi, Rohtas Fort in Pakistan, Sher Shah Suri Masjid in Patna in Afghan-style and the famous Grand Trunk Road. His period saw the transition from Lodhi style to the Mughal style of architecture.

Akbar: The reign of Akbar (1556-1605) witnessed immense developments in Mughal art and architecture. He built the city of Fatehpur Sikri which was the first planned city of the Mughals and served as his capital from 1571 to 1585. Buland Darwaza (1576, built to commemorate Akbar's victory over Gujarat kings), Jama Masjid, Diwan-i-aam, Diwan-i-khaas, Birbal's house, Tomb of Saint Salim Chisti are some of the important monuments in Fatehpur Sikri.

He also built the Temple of Govind Dev in Vrindavan.



Image: Buland Darwaza- Fatehpur Sikri

Important developments during Akbar's reign:

1. The architecture at Fatehpur Sikri is an excellent blending of Persian, Central Asian, and various Indian (Bengal and Gujarat) styles.
2. Extensive use of red sandstone.
3. Indian elements such as deep eaves, balconies, and kiosks of the Bengal and Gujrat styles blended with Central Asian component of glazed tiles.

Jahangir (1605-1627):

- The prince had a special appreciation for the paintings over architecture. He built the tomb of Itimad-ud-Daula (father of his wife Nur Jahan) displaying the world's finest Pietra-dura works and completed Akbar's tomb at Sikandra.
- He also built the famous Shalimar Bagh in Srinagar, Moti Masjid at Lahore.

Note: Pietra Dura- also called as Parchin Kari is an inlay technique of pictorial mosaic work using cut and fitted, highly polished semi-precious stones as decorative art.



Image: Pietra Dura in Taj Mahal

Shah Jahan (1628-1658): He immortalized himself as he built the Taj Mahal in the memory of his late wife, Mumtaz Mahal. He is rightly called 'the prince of builders' as the Mughal architecture reached its zenith under his reign. He built Shahjahanabad, the 7th city of Delhi, today is known as Old Delhi. He made extensive use of white marble as opposed to red sandstone which was preferred by his predecessors. He also built the Jama Masjid in Delhi, Moti Masjid in the Agra Fort, and the Sheesh Mahal in the Lahore Fort brilliantly using pietra dura and complex mirror work.

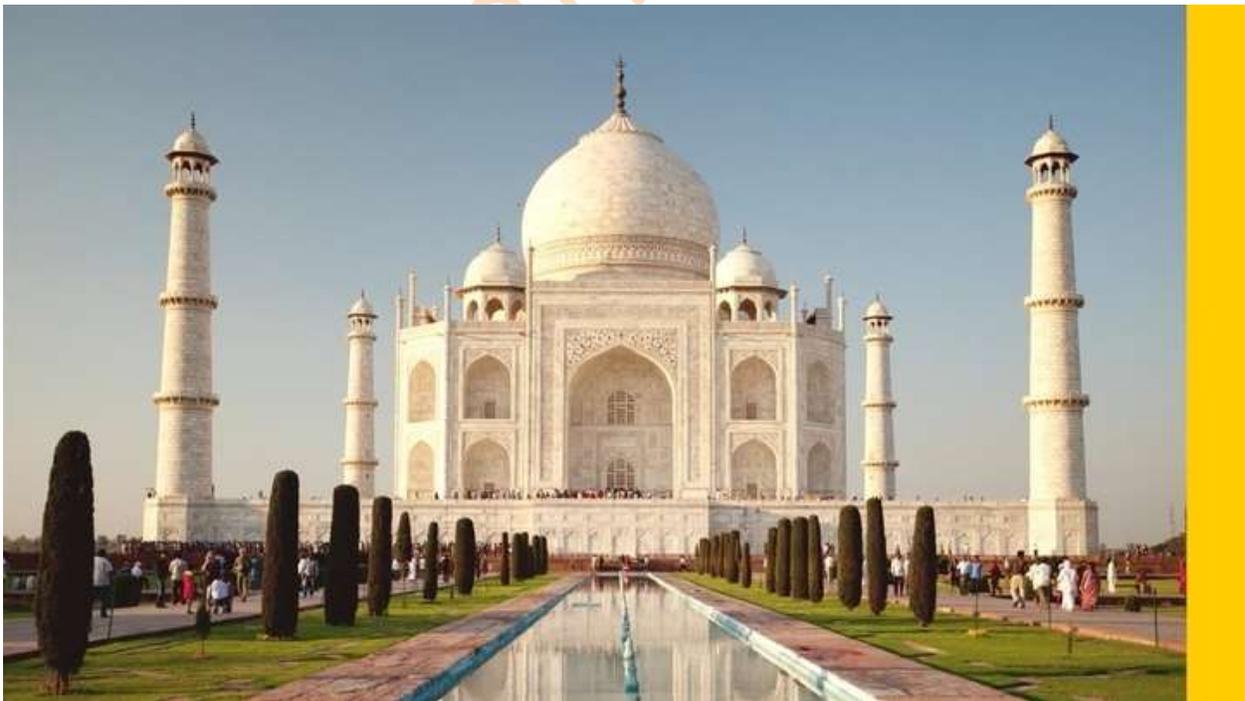


Image: Taj Mahal- Epitome of Mughal Architecture

Aurangzeb (1658-1707): He preferred simplicity over the grandeur. He repaired more mosques than he built. Aurangzeb is also said to have destroyed numerous Hindu temples as well. A beautiful pearl mosque in the Red Fort, Delhi, and the Bibi kaMaqbara in Aurangabad for his wife Rabbia-ud-dauraare only a few notable mentions in his long reign. Thus, overall the Mughal architecture saw a decline in the Aurangzeb's reign.



Image: Chhatri



Image: Arches



Image: Various Domes Style

Other major styles during the Mughal period were:

Sikh Style: Influenced by the Mughal architecture, the style developed in the Punjab region. The arches and chhatris were prominent. The domes became an important feature in the Sikh architecture. Golden Temple completed by Arjan Dev in 1604 is an epitome of Sikh architecture.



Image: Golden Temple

Rajput Style: It blends local and Islamic styles. They built majestic forts and palaces. The hanging balcony, cornices, and arches were used extensively in the Rajput style of architecture.

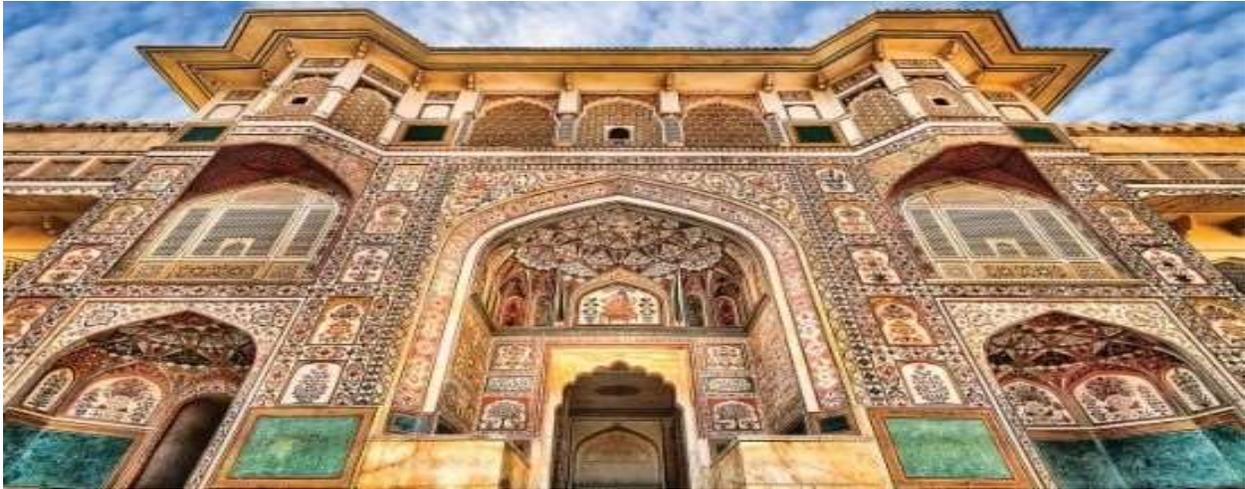


Image: Amer Fort

Mughal Paintings:

Like the architecture, the Mughal paintings reflect a combination of Indian, Persian and Islamic style as well. The distinguished Mughal paintings originated during the rule of Humayun through the Persian artists, Mir Sayyid Ali and Abu us Samad. Their art got influenced by the local styles and gradually gave rise to Mughal paintings of India. The earliest example of Mughal paintings is Tutinama painting (tales of a parrot).

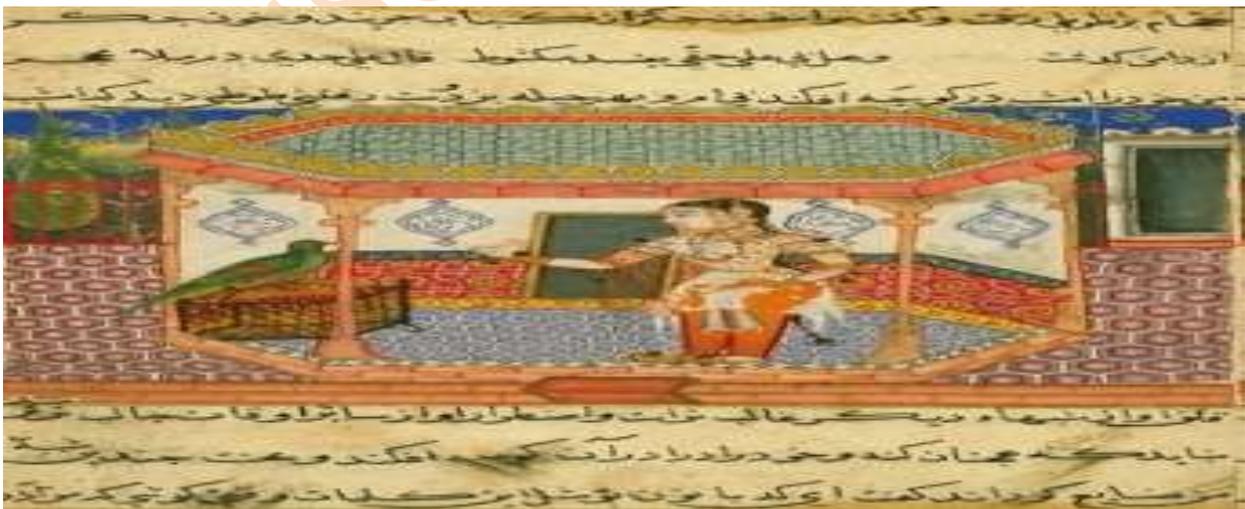


Image: Tutinama Scene

The Mughal paintings revolved around themes of battles, court scenes, hunting scenes, wildlife, portraits, etc. Akbar is known as the pioneer of the Mughal miniature paintings.

Akbar's reign saw huge development in the Mughal style of paintings under the direction of the Persian artists. Paintings based on Mahabharata, Ramayana and Persian epics were encouraged. He commissioned the Hamza-Nama (adventures of Amir Hamza).



Image: Hamza-Nama Scene



Image: Akbar Hunting Scene

Under Jahangir, the period saw more and more refinement in brushwork along with the use of lighter and subdued colors. The main themes revolved around the king's own life pictured in Jahangirnama, durbar scenes, portraits, and portrayal of nature. He encouraged his artists to emulate the European style as well in their pieces of work. Aqa Riza, Abul Hasan, Mansur, Bishan Das, Manohar, Goverdhan, Balchand, Daulat, Mukhlis, Bhim, and Inayat were the famous painters in the court of Jahangir.

Shah Jahan focussed more on the architecture, though the paintings flourished as well. The paintings of this period lost their sensuousness and became cold and opulent.

Aurangzeb did not encourage the paintings' culture, and only a few survive from his court to give an account of the development of the art in his reign.

The Mughal paintings greatly influenced the Rajput miniature painting style. Moreover, as the Mughal empire was on the decline, the court artists spread throughout the kingdom and gave rise to new court cultures in the provinces of Awadh, Rajputana, Sikh, and Deccan.

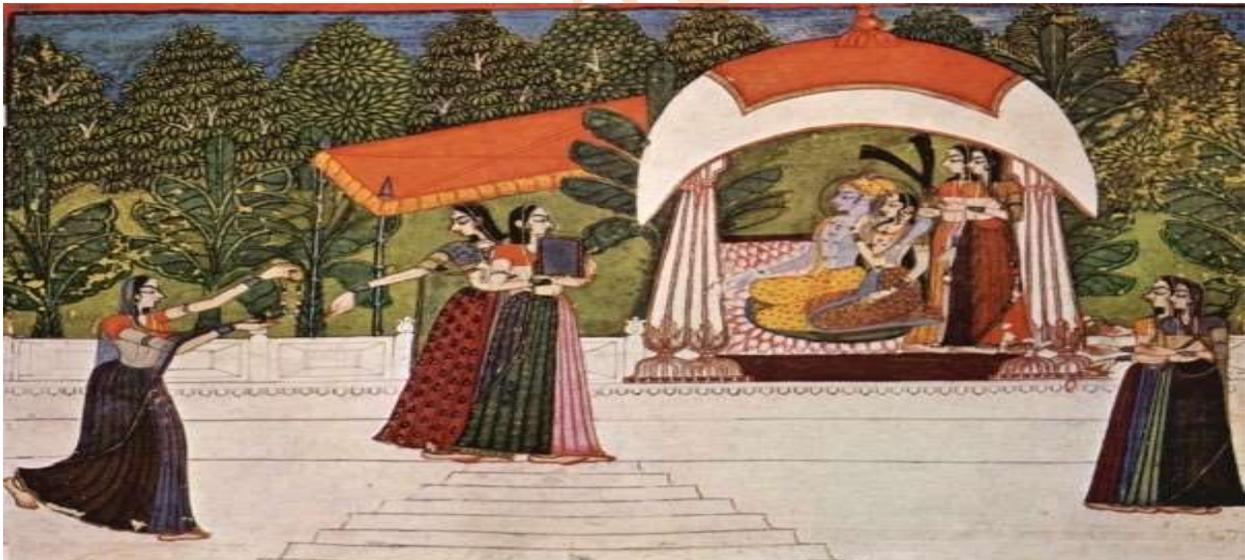


Image: Rajput Miniature Painting