EUROPEAN ELEMENTS IN MUGHAL MINIATURE
DURING AKBAR'S REIGN

Percy Brown has written a very interesting book on a very interesting phase of Indian painting. The Mughal school appeals easily to European connisseurs of art and the fact that too sumptuously produced
on the same subject have came out of the Oxford press in the course out of the three years focussed much attention on the part of English critics, although the materials and opportunity for the study have been abundant both in the private and public collection in England.

As early as 1777 Sir Joshua Reynolds himself recorded his appreciation of the beauties of Mughal paintings but his tribute was an isolated one, for inspite of the admiration of the great English artist, the important collection of Mughal paintings in England continued to be ignored and until recently, the products of this school held no place in English connoisseurship.

In the case of Indian paintings at least the Mughal School, something like cartloads of pictures have rested in the archives of the English collections for nearly a century before it can be said to have drawn any attention of English connoisseurship in art.

Before Akbar sat on the Mughal throne there was a living school of Indian paintings, both in the realm of book illustration and portfolio pictures and there were more than one guilds or shrenis of the practicers of the craft of painting whom Akbar brought together and consolidated. It is not as though, Akbar by the magic wand of patronage brought to existence an art that did not exist but that his patronage and active interest changed the direction and motive of the native school which was surviving in various parts of the country. 'Wholly misses the significance of this tribute, and fails to draw the obvious and legitimate conclusion as to the state and temper of the surviving indigenous school, on which Akbar based his foundation'.

1. Rupam. All illustrated quarterly Journal of Oriental Art, 1921, vol. 5
The Mugal development was a brilliant pose and an episode in the history of Indian paintings. In the Hamza paintings we actually see Mughal paintings in the making. Their true significances, available from a study of their internal evidence, in many details, have been somewhat overshadowed by the belief that they were all the works of imported kalmuck artists. Abu'l Fazl's rather loose statement has been taken as an authoritative evidence and has thrown students off their scents. There is much in the Hamza paintings which speak of the brushes of Hindu painters. It is well known that the Mugal artists freely borrowed many means of expression from European painting, the most important debts being the use of shadows, night effect and aerial perspective. In later Mughal paintings these are very evident. The flat and sometimes decorative cloud effects of the earlier miniatures gave way to solid realistic treatment of landscape, with a sense of depth.

The Mugal style was further influenced by the European paintings which came in the Mughal court in about 1580 and absorbed some of the western techniques like shading and perspective. A large number of illustrated manuscripts, court scenes, hunting series and portrait were executed during the period of Akbar.

'Another aspect of European art of interest to the Mughal was its christian identity knowledge of christianity was entrenched in the Mughal myth and symbolism long before the arrival of European work of art example are Mughal style work.' 'Such excellent artists have assembled here that a fine match has been created to the world renowned unique art of Bihad and the magic making of the Europeans'.

I. O.P.Sharma, Indian Miniature Painting, exhibition compiled from the collection of the National Museum, New Delhi, 5-26th October 1974.
Percy Brown, Indian painting under the Mughal, A.D. 1550 to A.D. 1750.
The great importance for the formation of the Mughal style of the painting was the contact of Akbar’s court painters with European art from European painting. Hindu painters learned about perspective and modelling. They introduced three dimensional landscape and new colour schemes unknown to Persian painters. Some of the miniatures illustrating episodes from Persian poem the Mughal introduced Portuguese figures and even Christian saints. The formation of the Mughal style was the creation of the Mughal style was the creation of all the artists working for Akbar. Few of the painters of the Akbar School show an individual style, among the best known ones is Basawan, a pupil of Abdus Samad whose style is often free from Persian conventions and colour schemes. His miniatures often show a palette of pastel colours, softness of delineation and shading which reflect the European influence. On the north-west frontier were the Mughals under Babur, whose progress and whose influences on the art of the country have been already dealt with in the preceding chapter. On the south-west seaboard the Portuguese navigator Vasco-Da-Gama, has landed, and with his arrival India’s direct intercourse with Europe began. The effects that such contact had on the arts of India, and specifically on the paintings of the Mughals is a necessary portion of the present study.

'The first monarch to display an interest in the handiwork of the European craftsman was the Mughal emperor Akbar'. Comparatively early in his reign in 1572, he had spent a year in the conquest of Gujarat, in close proximity to some of the western seaports, where he made the acquaintance of the Portuguese officer in his service, Europeans were not, however, unknown in the cities of Mughals, for there was a fair sprinkling of wandering Poles and Muscovites. Greeks and Levantines, in the bazars of Agra and Delhi even at this time. In the south of India but outside the

1. Ibid
sphere of Mughal influence, many more were beginning to arrive, as not only trade but the Christian religion brought by the Jesuit priests was making steady progress. With the extension of these missions appear the first known examples of western art in India. In 1570 one of the priests at Goa was brother of Aranha of Lisbon, a skilled artist and versatile craftsman, who designed and built many of the original Christian churches in the locality, decorating them with religious pictures painted by his own hands. Akbar seems to have obtained certain vague information, which speedily grew into a desire for more definite knowledge. In 1578, therefore, he specially deputed an agent of his court by the name of Haji Habibullah to proceed to Goa for the express purpose of making investigations.

When the company arrived back at the court after their expedition, the emperor was much gratified with the manner in which the Haji had carried out his mission. He had actually engaged a number of Europeans to come and carry on their trades at the court of the great Mughals. Unfortunately, the details that have survived of the results of Akbar's enterprise are meagre, although it is recorded that one article which received the special admiration of the church organ "like a great box the size of a man, played by a European sitting inside. One of the court artists Madho Khanazad, subsequently introduced the instrument into a picture he painted of a musician (Plato) charming a large concourse of wild beasts who lie helpless around him".

Mughal emperor's desire for the productions of the west and he soon began to cast about for other methods of securing what he coveted, whether Akbar in professing an interest in Christianity, was in earnest or merely using religion as a means to an end, will never be known, but that he favoured it at one time in order to get into closer touch with the European in India, and learn from them as much as possible about western culture, is quite clear. The experience of the three priests who made up the party at
the Mughal capital, where they remined for some three years, is as fascinating narrative, most of which lies outside the subject of painting. It was, however, through their presence that Akbar made his first acquaintance with European pictures.

In one of the apartments of the 'House of Mariam' in Akbar's now deserted capital, there used to be the much faded remains of a large wall painting, the subject of which was said to be the announcement. The support of the Mughal emperor was to bring with them many examples of European pictorial art. They came prepared, therefore, with a considerable number of paintings of saints and religious subjects, which seem to have been very well received, these also eventually led to much discussion between the members of the mission, Akbar and his priests. Akbar accepted the gift with evident signs of pleasure and placed it in his imperial library, where it remained for fifteen years. It was then handed back to a later Jesuit mission which came to the court of Mughal. There is little doubt that during the period that it was in the emperor's keeping the artists studied the illustrations in this book just as carefully as they did those of the Persian schools and the result of their study is plainly observable in some of their miniatures. "Among its engravings were some pictorial maps displaying galleys and other medieval ships sailing through sea in which aquatic monsters disport themselves".

Akbar was ingtrigued by the exotic merchant adventurers from the west. He first encountered them at Caubay in 1572. A year later during the siege of Surat a large party of Christian came for an audience with him and was asked to guarantee the safety from pirates of Muslim pilgrims to Arabia. In 1576 Akbar met two Jesuit priests in Bengal with whom he discussed

1. Ibid
religion one of his favourite topics.

Daswanth was a painter of Akbar's court who learnt the art under the guidance of Khwaja Abdus Samad. He is described as a rival of Baswan and is known for his paintings in the Razmnama, Tariikh-i-Khandan-i-Taimuria and in the Ardeshir collection (Bombay). The present miniature is a rare and may belong to the last phase of his career. "A noticeable feature of the miniature is a spaciousness in which the viewer can identify animation, which is contrary to the trend of crowded animation, a trait of the sixteenth century Mughal manuscript paintings which is observed in the same painter's other works. The deep shaded outlines, the suggestive shading striving for a three dimensional effect, mounds of earth and simpler contours of the hills. "A trend towards Indianisation of the early Mughal paintings, rhythmic heavy folds in the costumes and a hazy distant landscape borrowed from European technique of painting" all these declare a materer development of Daswanth's art. The realistic depiction of the saints gives us an important documentation of the sixteenth century ascetics life. As such this piece may be studied along with other illustration containing the depiction of the ascetics, seen in the Tariikh-i-Khandan-i-Taimuria, Baburnama and Akbarnama.

The Hamzanama illustration on cloth originally consisted of 1400 leaves bound in seventeen volumes. Each leaf measured about 27 x 20 inches. The Mughal style was further influenced by the European painting which came in the Mughal court in about 1580 and absorbed some of the western techniques like shading and perspective. A large number of illustrated manuscripts, court scenes, hunting scenes and portraits were executed during the period of Akbar. According to the Mughal practice a number of painters were commissioned to illustrate a single manuscript, "following the example of the Mughal Emperor the courtiers and the provincial officers also patronized painting. They engaged artists trained the Mughal
technique of paintings, but the artists available to them were of inferior merit, those who could not seek employment in the imperial atelier which required only first rate artists. The work of such painter are styled as popular Mughal or provincial Mughal painting.

Akbar's illustrated historical manuscripts are many. The most vivid in Islamic art and his Akbarnama of which "17 folios" certainly the most compelling among them, although it is uneven in quality.1 An artist such as Basawan however possessed such a creative imagination that he could envision episodes such as this making every gesture and expression convincing. There he had painted elephants seldom equalled in Indian art, a great achievement considering that elephants were a speciality of Indian artist.

"Although this manuscript of the Akbarnama probably completed in about 1590. It is likely that the projet began at least five years earlier probably as Abu'l Fazl completed writing his accounts of the episodes".2 Akbar assigned the subjects to the artists best qualified to depict them. In this picture, Basawan's boatman with his expressive distortions of Cannon marks back stylistically to the Hazmanama.

The work of several German and Flemish engravers was known to them, Durer and H. S. Beham, Maerten van Heemskerck and Sadeler, Wiericx and Peter Vander Heyden are represented by originals or by close copies in the Mughal imperial albums. The earliest signed and dated copy is by Kesu, after an engraving by Heemskerck of St. Matthew, dated 1587. Two other copies of Christian subjects by this artist signing Kesava Das are known. J. Sadeler's plate of St. Jerome engraved in 1576, was copied by a lady, Nadira

2. O.P.Sharma, Indian Miniature Painting, exhibition compiled from the collection of the National Museum, New Delhi, 5-26th October 1974.
Banu at an unknown date but in the correct colouring, while the figure of St. John from Durer’s engraving of the crucifixion of 1511 was copied with great skill by the young artist Abu'l Hasan in his thirteenth year in 1600 by Durer’s Virgin and child engraved in 1513 was copied by an anonymous hand in the Mughal court about the same date. This is now in the Royal Library at Windsor. All but the St. John which is only slightly tinted, are fully coloured in western taste thus proving that the artists had access to western paintings or to advice from Europeans.

Akbar’s interest in western art is also undeniable but we do not have such detailed information about it. In 1581 he was fascinated by a European organ, we learn from Bada'oni and an organ is represented in one of the margin pictures of Jehangir’s album leaves. In 1582 Akbar had European curtains hung in his palace and these were probably tapestries. At Fatehpur Sikri, in 1582 also copies of pictures of our Lord and the Virgin Mary in the Jesuits oratory were made by Mughal painters and in 1602 at Agra they copied a replica of the Madonna del Topolo, which Akbar caused to be carried into the palace for the purpose.

The third Jesuit mission conducted by father Jerome Xavier a nephew of St. Francis Xavier reached the court at Lahore in 1595, and he stayed on for twenty two years.

Mughal painting of these twenty years from 1595 to 1615, we can find many instances of a thorough assimilation of Western Pictorial Science.

In the reign of Akbar, Daswanth was one of the nine painters, all Hindus, who contributed oblong miniatures to this manuscript aligned with the spine of the book, a shape which obviously, derives from the palm leaf and early paper manuscripts of western India which developed from it. In other pages, six of them, he seems to show Deccani influence. One of
these, which fills a double page opening of the manuscript, show an army in formation the ranks arranged like a maze, as indeed is required by the text. The only comparable miniature is in the Bijapur manuscript of Najum-al-Uloom of 1570 which is reproduced and discussed below. It is possible that this convention was more widespread in pre Mughal India than we can now know.

Daswanth illustrates the salvation of type of all living things from the great universal flood in a boat constructed by the Prophet Manu who is represented in the act of securing it to the peak of the northern mountain, while it is supported below by a great fish which is an incarnation of Vishnu. The extension of the flood to the four corners of the picture is characteristic of the composition in this manuscript, linking them with the later Hamzanama pages. Next to Daswanth in this achievement in the Jaipur Razmnama comes Basawan another of the Hindus of unknown origin who became the leading court painter. Abu’l Fazl account of the Imperial library in about 1595 this style at that time is known from his picture of the Mulla rebuking the Darvesh for pride in his patched dress in the Baharistan of Jami in the Bodleian library dated 1595, he shows his interest in European figure and drapery drawing and his mastery of Chiaroscuro. That he was one of the first to show a knowledge of western technique of picture making is seen in several pages of the Darabnana manuscript in the British museum. A lavishly illustrated manuscript from the Imperial library. Although undated this must surely be almost contemporary with the Jaipur Razmnama, but it contains no work by Daswanth, while Basawan in the latter manuscript is less advance and more purely Indian even when he is the sole author of a manuscript. This illustration of the death of Balarama, showing the huge cobra proceeding from his mouth as he lies under a tree, does indeed reveal obviously westernized drapery folds, but the landscape is little changed from the early Mughal form of the 1570, Anwar-i-Suhaili manuscript. In this only miniature in the Darabnana illustrating princess and the shade, the background, here
architecture is much more ambitious in attempting a complete perspective view of a city with the help of a panel of text. Basawan has avoided the difficult transition from the foreground pavilion built on piles over water to the domes and towers of the background.

Some of the painters whose names are written below the miniatures of the Darabnana are of Lahore, which became the principal imperial seat after the abandonment of Fatehpur Sikri in 1585. The drawing is vigourous and strong sometimes even coarse, and the colours vivid and even crude far removed from the quiet tones of the Safavi school all except one leaf which bears the unexpected name of Abdus Samad. The more forward looking artists who participated are Muskin, Nanha and Bhurah, Sarwan and Kanha also depict Deccani costumes, thus revealing a wider horizon. These are a minority of the illustration and these artists are mostly represented by only one miniature a piece. Muskin and Basawan were to become two of the leading painters in the last years of Akbar's reign and Kanha and Sarwan also flourished until the end of that period. The Darabnana is thus most significant for its promise for the future and its evidence of the vigour of the school at this time. The bulk of the miniatures are dominated by the harsh red and greens which seem to characterize the palette of Lahore.

Here too as in miniature from European prototypes placed within an essentially Mughal landscape we have a distant view of building perched against the hills, seen through and arch gate of Mughal style. A hexagonal tank with a fountain in the centre and an ewer in the foreground sprigged with flowering plants are shown. Ornamentation of the head gear and the style of the hair of the ladies in the present example is identical with those in

Lal's work (miniature no. 3A), the European examples from which these figures are derived are probably the same. It is the only example of Mukund's work which has European figures. During Akbar's time (after 1582) began imitation of European pictures, European figures, landscape and motifs being to form the part of the composition. This trend continued in the Mughal school of painting till the late seventeenth century.

It was in 1580 that the first Christian mission arrived at the court of Akbar. This was not the emperor's first direct contact with Europeans, for in 1573 and again in 1578 a Portuguese embassy led by Antonio Cabral had been sent to the emperor by the Viceroy of India, the first to Surat and the second to Fatehpur Sikri, Akbar's new capital, "on the first occasion the emperor was campaigning and the visit was short but in 1578 there would have been opportunity for the emperor and his court to learn something of western painting. In the same year a Portuguese merchant named Tavares came to the court from the Bengal Port of Satigam, and a secular priest, Guiliara Perera was also received by the emperor. It was in the same year i.e. 1578 that Akbar experienced a conversion through an ecstasy of some kind which he suffered in the course of a hunting expedition.

Any influence detected in the work of the Mughal painters during the 1580 must have come through the first mission. Internal evidence reveals that two kinds of European pictorial art must have been available to them, engraving and illuminated manuscripts were find that elements of European painting have effected the indigenous artistic expression of this country. In order to understand that this influence has been and how it has been brought about, one has to study the conditions out of which they have grown.

The direct intercourse between India and England began in the latter part of the 16th century when the Jesuit fathers visited the court of Akbar. Whatever may have been the pretence or motive of the Mughal emperor
regarding the acrimonious debates on different religious beliefs, we find that the visit of the missionaries directly led to the introduction of European paintings in the Mughal courts. We are told that when the fathers presented the emperor with a copy of the Bible, he received it with great reverence and "also commanded his artists to copy picture of Christ and the Virgin which the father has with them, and directed a gold reliquary to be made" here we have the earliest evidence of Indian artists being led to copy European paintings. It is quite clear that his order was given not because the painting were worthy of imitation, but because it would demonstrate the respect which the emperor had or pretended or entertain for pictures. Records of such paintings prove that the copying of or adaption from European paintings did not influence the early Mughal artists to any visible extent at least they do not seem to have lost sight of their own traditions while engaged in copying or imitating works of European art. On the other hand their works relating to Biblical or other European subjects plainly show that they worked under instructions rather to satisfy their patron's fancy than to acquire anything new. This is very clearly demonstrated by the fact that very few of the paintings of the period of Akbar and Jehangir, when most of the copies of or adoption from European paintings were made, show the influence of European painting.

Percy Brown remarks that since Sir Jeshua Reynolds recorded his admiration for some of the Mughal miniature in the British museum albums, with occasional interludes of neglect, Indian miniatures have received their need of estimation from neglect, Indian miniatures have received their need of estimation from artists, connoisseurs, and students of oriental learning while at the present time the prospect of their attaining a fairly high pace in the sphere of pictoral are seems assured. While there seems to be some

grounds for the last observation, few will be able to endorse Mr. Brown's remark that with occasional neglect, Indian miniatures have received its tribute of praise from English critics.

Mr. Havell began to sing their praises, the Mughal miniatures neglected on the assumption that they represented a decadent branch of Persian painting had not received any serious attention on the part of the English critics. Mr. Brown is apparently inclined to slur over this piece of neglect, although as enthusiastic connoisseur and an educated critic of Mughal paintings he must have left that the neglect was indefensible. In some sense Mr. Brown's attitude is right, for rather than reproach his fellow critics, in the aggressive fashion of Mr. Havell, he has preferred to allow his own enthusiasm and the excellent illustrative material which he has collected in his book, to cast their contagious charm over his friends that home. It is not possible to gauge to what extent Mr. Brown's book is winning admiration for Mughal paintings in England. The review published in the Times was certainly a little lukewarm in its appreciation. The publication of the Indian Society, edited by M/s. Binyon and Arnold, with many sumptuously produced collo-type and coloured illustrations, was designed to evoke the serious attention of the English public. But unfortunately in all matters relating to Indian that recalcitrant public is very slow to respond and Mr. Brown must have himself felt that in the form that Mr. Binyon's book was presented sufficient justice was not done to the claims of Mughal paintings.

Dr. Coomaraswamy, the students of his school are, indeed, heavily indebted in many respects but to Mr. Brown must be given the credit for an attempt to write a monograph on the subject with ample materials. The fact that he comes with greater claims invites a more critical examination. It is a pioneer work and for the first time initiates a proper survey of the subject, and for that consideration alone he deserves generous indulgence for the imperfections of his works. We should like, therefore, to emphasize the
positive contributions of his works, rather than its imperfections. Although he has not been able to lay under contribution all the available collections, the materials that he has actually put forward are of considerable value. It is curious that Mr. Brown draws more on the collections outside England than on the materials near his hand. He is likely to give very pleasant surprises in the illustration that he cites from the collections of Rothschild, Demotte, Cartier, and Vever. For though the collection of the latter is known to a few Mr. Brown's selection from the other collections, for the first time, brings forth new materials but the most important of his discoveries is the selection from the valuable materials hitherto unknown, from the Rampur State library. The most valuable of these materials is offered by a page in the Mongolian style from a History of Mongols. Apart from being a picture of exceptional quality, it is an important document for the history and development of Persian painting, a short, but brilliant sketch of which Mr. Brown has introduced in chapter I of his historical survey. This was a very relevant introduction for it is impossible to realise the exact position and the contribution of Mughal paintings without an accurate appreciation of its relation to the Persian schools. For in spite of its many debts to the schools of Central Asia, particularly through the examples of the Taimurid school, which the Mughals sought to transplant in India, the Mughal school stands on its own indigenous qualities.

Mr. Brown wholly misses the significance of this tribute, and fails to draw the obvious and legitimate conclusions as to the state and temper of the surviving indigenous school on which Akbar based his foundation. Mr. Brown confuses the issue by his somewhat vague and innocuous remarks, "Undoubtedly the natural genius of these Indian painters, the result of centuries of experience only required Akbar's patronage and the Persian's guidance to bring it again to a high state of efficiency. Another face which Mr. Brown very unhappily misses is that the indigenous pictorial tradition in its Rajput phase existed side by side one flourishing round the throne at
Delhi and the other living in the inspiration of the folk psychology and the culture of the Hindu population far away from the pomp glory of the Mughal court. Dr. Goetz has been able to show on a very careful examination of the fashion of the models, costumes and dresses that figure in many Rajput painting, that a large number of very characteristic pictures of the Rajput school were actually contemporaneous with the Mughal schools, though diametrically opposite and fundamentally different in their technique, subject matter and temper. It must have been on the basis of these contemporary Rajput pictures that Abu'l Fazl made his remark quoted as above. As Mr. Brown himself remarks (p 48), "When the Mughals began to turn their attention to the revival of painting in India, there still survived a strong living tradition among the people of the country on which the movement that they had in contemplation might be most surely founded".