

CUET · FINE ARTS · CLASS XII · CODE 312

The Mughal School of Miniature Painting

CUET unit: The Mughal School of Miniature Painting (Medieval Indian Painting Traditions)

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Snapshot

- Mughal miniature painting was a 16th–mid-19th century courtly style that synthesised Persian, indigenous Indian and (later) European visual idioms.
- It evolved emperor-by-emperor: Babur (Persian/Timurid roots), Humayun (Safavid-trained Mir Sayyid Ali & Abd us Samad), Akbar (mass projects, Hindu epics), Jahangir (naturalism, single-master Muraqqas), Shah Jahan (idealisation, jewel-like finish), Aurangzeb (decline), Bahadur Shah Zafar (last flicker).
- Named masterworks — **Princes of the House of Timur, Hamza Nama, Madonna and Child, Jahangir's Dream, Padshahnama, Dara Shikoh with Sages** — are each tied to a specific reign, year and artist.
- The technical process: **tarh, chiharanama, rangamizi**, pigments (cinnabar, lapis lazuli, orpiment), squirrel/kitten-hair brushes and agate burnishing.
- High CUET yield: factual recall of dates, artists, manuscripts and stylistic features dominates.
- Acts as the principal counterweight to the Rajasthani chapter (lefa102), and supplies the visual vocabulary that the Pahari (lefa105) and Deccani (lefa104) schools selectively borrow.

Detailed Notes

2.1 Core concepts

NCERT opens by characterising Mughal painting as a distinctive style of miniature painting that developed in northern India in the sixteenth century and continued until the mid-nineteenth century, known both for sophisticated techniques and for the diverse range of its subjects (NCERT §Intro, p. 35). The peak of Mughal painting presented a highly sophisticated blend of Islamic, Hindu and European visual culture and aesthetics — a synthesis of foreign influences with indigenous flavour. The Mughal atelier was a workshop staffed by calligraphers, painters, gilders and binders; the paintings were intended to be viewed only by royals and were typically bound into manuscripts and personal albums.

NCERT carefully distinguishes the indigenous Indian style from the Mughal style. The indigenous style emphasised flat perspective, a strong use of contour lines, a vivid colour palette and bold modelling, while the Mughal style offered subtlety, finesse, near three-dimensional figures and an optical sense of reality — features inherited from

Safavid Persia and amplified by direct contact with European prints (NCERT §Influences, p. 36).

The style developed emperor by emperor. Babur (r. 1526), descendant of Timur and a Chaghtai Turk by lineage, brought with him Persian and Central Asian visual sensibilities; his autobiography **Baburnama** records his patronage of painting and specifically mentions admiration for the Persian masters Bihzad (of Herat) and Shah Muzaffar (NCERT §Early Mughal Painting, pp. 37–38). Humayun, who succeeded Babur in 1530, was exiled to the Safavid court of Shah Tahmasp; on his return he established his court at Kabul in 1545 and invited two Persian artists — Mir Sayyid Ali and Abd us Samad — to come to India. He founded the **Nigaaar Khana** (painting workshop) as a part of his royal library, and initiated the great **Hamza Nama** project that would be completed under Akbar. The painting **Princes of the House of Timur** (1545–50), most probably by the Safavid artist Abd us Samad, was executed in opaque watercolour on cotton; portraits of Akbar, Jahangir and Shah Jahan were painted over the original during later reigns, making it a palimpsest of Mughal dynastic memory (NCERT §Early Mughal Painting, p. 39).

Akbar (r. 1556–1605) is described as the great institutional builder of the Mughal atelier. According to the court historian Abul Fazl, Akbar employed more than a hundred artists. Akbar himself, believed to have suffered from dyslexia, laid great emphasis on illustrated manuscripts as a means of cultural communication and political integration. His major projects include the **Hamza Nama** (1567–82) — supervised by Mir Sayyid Ali and Abd us Samad, consisting of fourteen volumes with fourteen hundred illustrations, completed in about fifteen years; the format is large, the surface is cloth with paper-backed narrative, and the technique is gouache (NCERT §Akbar, pp. 39–40). The **Razm Nama** of 1589 — the Persian translation of the **Mahabharata** — was completed under the master artist Daswant and contained 169 paintings; the **Ramayana** and the **Akbar Nama** (the latter with celebrated artists like Govardhan and Miskin) followed. **Madonna and Child** (1580) by Basawan reflects European Renaissance and Byzantine influence absorbed into the Mughal atelier, with Indian details such as fans and jewellery integrated into the composition (NCERT §Akbar, pp. 41–42).

Jahangir (r. 1605–1627) was a connoisseur of refined taste. He employed the Iranian painter Aqa Riza and his son Abul Hasan, and preferred fewer but finer works to Akbar's mass production. Jahangir popularised the **Muraqqa** — the practice of mounting individual paintings in albums for private contemplation rather than narrative manuscript illustration (NCERT §Jahangir, pp. 42–43). His memoir, the **Tuzuk-i-Jahangiri**, records detailed observations on artists and individual paintings. Key Jahangir-period works include **Jahangir in Darbar** (1620, jointly by Abul Hasan and Manohar), **Jahangir's Dream** (1618–22, in which Jahangir embraces the Persian Safavid emperor Shah Abbas, by Abul Hasan, who was given the title **Nadir al Zaman** — "Wonder of the Age"), and **Jahangir enthroned on an Hourglass** (1625, by Bichitra). Jahangir was also a passionate naturalist: he commissioned the great animal and flower painter Ustad Mansur — also titled **Nadir ul Asr** — to record exotic specimens like the **Falcon on a**

Bird Rest (1615) and the Zebra (1621), the latter a gift from Ethiopia presented at Nowruz.

Shah Jahan (r. 1628–1658) preferred idealisation and great stylisation over naturalism; his court paintings show jewel-like colours, perfect rendering and fine lines. The **Padshahnama** (Chronicles of the King) is his major manuscript project (NCERT §Shah Jahan, p. 45). NCERT records a fascinating transnational footnote: Rembrandt was inspired by Mughal court painting and made studies of Indian drawings — an early documentation of the European appetite for Mughal art (NCERT p. 46). The painting **Dara Shikoh with Sages in a Garden** (early 17th c.) by Bichitra captures the liberal, Sufi- and Vedanta-inclined prince Dara Shikoh, who was eventually defeated by Aurangzeb in the war of succession.

Aurangzeb expanded the empire territorially but did not actively elevate the atelier; NCERT explicitly corrects the popular belief that the royal atelier was shut down immediately — in fact it continued in reduced form, though many highly skilled artists migrated to provincial Mughal courts at this time. This migration is the principal mechanism by which Mughal naturalism seeded the Rajasthani, Deccani and Pahari schools (NCERT §Aurangzeb, p. 47).

The Later Mughal section traces the slow attrition of the style. The last Mughal ruler Bahadur Shah Zafar — represented in an 1838 painting now in the Fogg Museum, Cambridge — was exiled to Burma after the 1857 Revolt, marking the political end of the dynasty. The style itself merged into the Provincial Mughal traditions of Awadh, Murshidabad and Patna, and into the new Company School that catered to European East India Company patrons (NCERT §Later Mughal Painting, pp. 47–48).

NCERT devotes a separate section to the technical process of Mughal painting. The three stages of making a Mughal painting are **tarh** (composition), **chiharinama** (portraits) and **rangamizi** (colouring), executed on handmade paper (NCERT §Process, p. 48). The colour and technique section lists the principal pigments and their natural sources: vermilion came from cinnabar; ultramarine from lapis lazuli; bright yellow from orpiment; white from ground shells; lampblack from charcoal. Brushes were made of squirrel or kitten hair; the finished painting was burnished with an agate gemstone to produce a characteristic sheen (NCERT §Colours and Technique, pp. 48–49).

Several highlighted miniatures are often turned into image-MCQs: **Noah's Ark** (1590, Miskin, from the **Divan-i Hafiz**); **Krishna Lifts Mount Govardhan** (1585–90, Miskin, from the **Harivamsa Purana** translated by Badauni); **Falcon on a Bird Rest** (1615, Ustad Mansur); **Zebra** (1621, Ustad Mansur, from Ethiopia); **Marriage Procession of Dara Shikoh** (Haji Madni, Shah Jahan period); and **Bahadur Shah Zafar** (1838, Fogg Museum) (NCERT pp. 50–54).

2.2 Definitions to memorise

Term	Definition	Page
Nigaar Khana	Painting workshop founded by Humayun, part of his library	39
Muraqqa	Individual paintings mounted in albums; popular under Jahangir	42–43
Tarh	Stage of making the composition	48
Chiharanama	Stage of doing portraits	48
Rangamizi	Final stage of colouring	48
Gouache	Water-based opaque colour technique used in Hamza Nama	40
Nadir ul Asr	"Wonder of the Age" — title given to Ustad Mansur	52
Nadir al Zaman	"Wonder of the Age" — title given to Abul Hasan	44
Ghab-ghab	Double chin — Bihzad's tendency to lengthen	38
Razm Nama	Persian translation of Mahabharata, 1589, under Daswant	41
Tuzuk-i-Jahangiri	Memoirs of Jahangir	42
Padshahnama	Chronicles of the King — Shah Jahan's project	45
Akbar Nama	Akbar's official chronicle (Abul Fazl)	41
Hamza Nama	14-volume Akbar manuscript, 1400 illustrations	40
Baburnama	Babur's memoirs	38
Cinnabar	Mineral source of vermilion red	49
Lapis Lazuli	Mineral source of ultramarine blue	49
Orpiment	Mineral source of bright yellow	49
Agate burnisher	Tool for polishing finished painting surface	49
Squirrel / kitten-hair brush	Mughal painting brush	49
Provincial Mughal	Style after Aurangzeb — Awadh, Murshidabad, Patna	47
Company School	Indo-European hybrid painting under EIC patronage	47
Mir Sayyid Ali	Safavid painter brought by Humayun	38
Abd us Samad	Safavid painter brought by Humayun; Princes of the House of Timur	38–39
Bihzad	Herat master praised in Baburnama	38

2.3 Diagrams / processes to remember

The Mughal painting workflow in three named stages should be memorised in strict order: (1) **tarh** — composition / underdrawing; (2) **chiharanama** — portrait modelling, especially of faces; (3) **rangamizi** — colouring with mineral pigments. The handmade

paper is then burnished with an agate stone, and the painting is mounted with a calligraphic border into a **Muraqqa** album (Jahangir-period practice).

Key images and where to find them in the NCERT plates: **Princes of the House of Timur** (Abd us Samad, 1545–50, British Museum, p. 37); **Tutinama: The Girl and the Parrot** (1580–85, Chester Beatty Library, Dublin, p. 38); **Babur inspecting the fort of Gwalior** by Bhure, from **Baburnama** (1598, National Museum, New Delhi, p. 39); **Spies of Hamza attack the City of Kaymar** (1567–82, Museum of Applied Arts, Vienna, p. 40); **Madonna and Child** by Basawan (1590, San Diego Museum of Art, p. 42); **A Prince and a Hermit** from **Diwan of Amir Shahi** (1595, Aga Khan Museum, Canada, p. 43); **Jahangir in Darbar** by Abul Hasan and Manohar (1620, Museum of Fine Arts, Boston, p. 44); **Jahangir's Dream** by Abul Hasan (1618–22, Smithsonian, Washington D.C., p. 45); **Jahangir enthroned on an Hourglass** by Bichitra (1625, Smithsonian, p. 45); **Dara Shikoh with Sages in a Garden** by Bichitra (early 17th c., Chester Beatty Library, p. 46); **Bahadur Shah Zafar** (1838, Fogg Museum, Cambridge, p. 47). Each plate is a potential image-MCQ source.

2.4 Common confusions / NTA trap points

- Mir Sayyid Ali vs Bihzad vs Aqa Riza: Mir Sayyid Ali and Abd us Samad were brought by Humayun; Bihzad (Herat) is only MENTIONED in Babur's memoirs; Aqa Riza was Jahangir's painter (father of Abul Hasan).
- Abul Fazl vs Badauni: Abul Fazl wrote Akbar Nama and recorded the artist count; Badauni (the orthodox theologian) translated the **Harivamsa Purana** into Persian.
- Nadir ul Asr vs Nadir al Zaman: both mean "Wonder of the Age" but the former was given to Ustad Mansur, the latter to Abul Hasan.
- Hamza Nama figures: 14 volumes, 1400 illustrations, ~15 years, 1567–82. Easy to confuse with Razm Nama (169 paintings, 1589).
- Pigment-source pairing: vermilion ← cinnabar; ultramarine ← lapis lazuli; bright yellow ← orpiment; white ← ground shells; lampblack ← charcoal. NTA loves swapping these.
- Princes of the House of Timur is by Abd us Samad (Safavid), NOT Mir Sayyid Ali — and is on cotton, not paper.
- Shah Jahan prefers IDEALISATION over naturalism; Jahangir prefers naturalism over idealisation. NTA inverts this.
- The Muraqqa (album) is a Jahangir-period format, not Akbar-period.
- The atelier did NOT shut down immediately under Aurangzeb — it gradually declined.
- Bahadur Shah Zafar was exiled to BURMA (not Yemen or Hejaz) after 1857.
- Rembrandt is the European master inspired by Mughal painting (NCERT p. 46).
- The three Mughal stages MUST be in order: tarh → chiharanama → rangamizi. NTA scrambles them.

2.5 Key artworks / artists

Artwork or Artist	Period	Significance	NCERT page
Bihzad	15th c., Herat	Persian master praised in Baburnama	38
Shah Muzaffar	15th–16th c.	Persian master praised in Baburnama	38
Mir Sayyid Ali	Mid-16th c., Safavid	Brought by Humayun; supervised Hamza Nama	38
Abd us Samad	Mid-16th c., Safavid	Princes of the House of Timur; co-supervised Hamza Nama	38–39
Princes of the House of Timur	1545–50	Opaque watercolour on cotton; over-painted later	39
Babur inspecting Gwalior, by Bhure	1598, Baburnama	Akbar-era Baburnama illustration	39
Hamza Nama	1567–82	14 vols, 1400 illustrations, 15 years	40
Daswant (artist)	Akbar period	Master of Razm Nama (1589)	41
Razm Nama	1589	Persian Mahabharata, 169 paintings	41
Akbar Nama	Akbar period	Imperial chronicle illustrated	41
Basawan (artist)	Akbar period	Madonna and Child (1580)	42
Madonna and Child	1580, Basawan	European-influenced Mughal folio	42
Govardhan, Miskin (artists)	Akbar period	Akbar Nama painters	41
Noah's Ark, Miskin	1590, Divan-i Hafiz	Mass animal composition	50
Krishna Lifts Mount Govardhan, Miskin	1585–90	From Persian Harivamsa Purana	51
Aqa Riza (artist)	Jahangir period	Iranian painter, father of Abul Hasan	42
Abul Hasan (artist)	Jahangir period	Nadir al Zaman; Jahangir's Dream	44
Manohar (artist)	Jahangir period	Co-painter of Jahangir in Darbar	44
Bichitra (artist)	Jahangir / Shah Jahan	Jahangir on Hourglass; Dara Shikoh with Sages	45–46
Ustad Mansur	Jahangir period	Nadir ul Asr; nature painter	52–53
Falcon on a Bird Rest	1615, Ustad Mansur	Naturalist masterpiece	52

Artwork or Artist	Period	Significance	NCERT page
Zebra	1621, Ustad Mansur	Ethiopian gift, Nowruz	53
Jahangir in Darbar	1620	Abul Hasan + Manohar	44
Jahangir's Dream	1618–22, Abul Hasan	Embrace of Shah Abbas	45
Jahangir enthroned on an Hourglass	1625, Bichitra	Allegorical portrait	45
Dara Shikoh with Sages	Early 17th c., Bichitra	Liberal-prince portrait	46
Padshahnama	Shah Jahan period	Chronicles of the King	45
Marriage Procession of Dara Shikoh	Shah Jahan period, Haji Madni	Court ceremonial	54
Bahadur Shah Zafar	1838, Fogg Museum	Last Mughal portrait	47

Practice MCQs

PYQ Alignment

This chapter is a recurring favourite in CUET Fine Arts papers — past papers typically pull 8–12 questions from it, dominated by factual recall of named paintings with their artist-and-year (Hamza Nama, Padshahnama, Jahangir's Dream), emperor–patron–style pairings, identification of Persian / European stylistic influences, and direct recall of technical terms (tarh, chiharanama, rangamizi, Muraqqa, pigment sources). Assertion-Reason and match-the-following formats are also frequent. CUET 2024 set a pigment-source match-the-following question; CUET 2025 used an Ustad Mansur attribution question on the Zebra.