Complex histories, Hybrid cultures

Material visual cultures of the Mughal Empire, seen in fashion, art, & architecture.

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Readings:

- **Visions of paradise: The luxury of Mughal art**, in Indian art, by Vidya Dahejia.

Bose & Jalal trace the birth of Islam in the 7th century in Mecca, and the first migration of Islam to northern India in the early eighth century. It became established in various parts of the Indian subcontinent between the 8th and 11th century.

**According to Bose & Jalal,**

Islamic culture in South Asia is not monolithic. Rather, it reflects multiple cultural influences such as Persian (Iran), Turkish, Mongolian, and Arabian that mixed with the beliefs of the native inhabitants of what is now Afghanistan, Pakistan and India (Sindhi, Pashtun, Pathan, Afghan etc).

Conversions of the local populace to Islam happened by various means, including: military occupation (& forced conversions), escape from the hierarchical caste system of Hinduism, and natural assimilation into locally dominant Muslim areas.

Post 11th century, northern India developed a distinct Indo-Islamic culture. This was driven by the economic and political dominance of Islamic rulers in what was called the Delhi Sultanate.
According to Bose & Jalal,

This Indo-Islamic culture had 3 broad social strata or classes: the nobility, the artisans and the peasants. The nobility were drawn from the invading immigrants, the artisans and peasants were from the local converts to Islam. The peasants, particularly were lower-caste Hindus who had converted, or been converted to Islam.

The Bhakti and Sufi movements are examples of the blending and mixing of Hindu and Islamic ideas and art forms into unique religious and art forms. These reflected a confluence of Indo-Persian, Turkish, Arab mysticism.

An example of this is Sufi poetry; whereas in Arab and Turkish poetry, the love for the divine is written in male reference only, in Indo-Islamic Sufi poetry, “the imagery is altered into a love of the divine in the form of a woman devotee. Drawing upon Hindu traditions, the soul is described as that of a loving woman seeking union with God, the ultimate beloved.” (p 25).
According to Bose & Jalal,

The Bhakti and Sufi movements did much to unite Islam and Hindu traditions to create and promote a more equal, less hierarchical society. The leaders of these movements identified as both Hindu and Muslim. They were Gurus (teachers) and leaders. They spoke many languages and combined Indian languages with Persian and Arabic to create unique poems. Both men and women were recognized as Sufi and Bhakti Gurus and artists in India, as opposed to the segregation of women into the veil in the originally regions of Islam.

Whereas in the Middle East, dance and poetry and calligraphy were predominant art forms, in the Indo-Islamic world painting was an added art form to represent the stories and lessons of this evolving hybrid culture.

These events describe the groundwork and histories that led up to and evolved in the Mughal empire. The Mughals were an Indo-Islamic dynastic empire of Turkish-Mongol descent. They ruled most of the Indian subcontinent from 1500s to 1800s, when they were wiped out by the British.
RIDER ON AN EPIGRAPHIC HORSE, INDIA, PERHAPS BIJAPUR, LATE SIXTEENTH CENTURY.

(FROM ANTHONY WELCH, CALLIGRAPHY IN THE ARTS OF THE MUSLIM WORLD (1979), PLATE 77.)
“In contemporary times, religion and religious identity is being used as cover for political agenda. Be it terrorist violence or sectarian nationalism in various parts of the world, religion is used to mask underlying politics.” - http://www.dawn.com/news/1179527

THE SUFI AND BHAKTI TRADITION IN PAKISTAN, AFGHANISTAN, BANGLADESH AND INDIA ARE TWO TRENDS FROM WITHIN ISLAM AND HINDUISM RESPECTIVELY, THAT ARE FOCUSED MORE ON THE UNITY OF HUMANITY AS A WHOLE, OVERCOMING SECTARIAN DIVIDES.
Examples of Indo-Islamic art in contemporary times

In your light,
I learn how to love
In your beauty,
how to make forms.

You dance inside my chest where no one sees you, but sometimes
I do, and that sight
becomes this art.

“Rumi”
Readings:


**According to Dahejia,**

The Mughals were a dynastic empire of Turkish-Mongol descent. They were great patrons of the arts and “cultivated an eye for the beautiful” (p 299).

They blended Turkish, Mongolian, Persian, & Indian (Hindu) cultural influences into magnificent examples of art, architecture and handicrafts.

They were great patrons on art & culture

They deeply influenced contemporary visual culture of South Asia in terms of handicraft, fashion and language.
WHO WERE THE MUGHALS?

**KEY MONARCHS**
- **Babar**: Founder of the Mughal dynasty; First Islamic invader to settle & integrate in the region.
- **Humayun**: Strong advocate for multiculturalism & recognized himself as "Indian" rather than a conquering migrant.
- **Akbar**: Recognized himself as "Indian" rather than a conquering migrant.
- **Jehangir**: Built the Taj Mahal.
- **Shah Jehan**: Built the Taj Mahal.
- **Aurangzeb**: Built the Taj Mahal.

Portrait of Jehangir & his wife. Mughal miniature painting style.
PATRONS OF ART, ARCHITECTURE, HANDICRAFT

- Hybrid styles of architecture emerged, as seen in elements of Humayun’s Tomb, & the Taj Mahal (known as Indo-Sarcenic)
- Hybrid and new forms of craft such as Chikankari and Zardozi (embroidery styles), and Meenakari (ornamentation of surfaces as seen in jewelry, and painting)
- Hybrid forms of language such as Urdu (Sanskrit + Persian)
- Hybrid forms of classical music within Hindustani music, and dance forms like Kathak
Rich embroidery & clothing styles reflected in contemporary fashion.

Top left: detail of Mughal inspired haute couture embroidery; Bottom left: Mughal era Bracelet in Gold and Diamonds; Right: Detail of Zardozi (gold thread embroidery) on shoe.

Other hybrid art forms emerging from Mughal era.
Top left: Chikan embroidery work; Bottom Left: Dagger & Sheath; Right: Portrait of Jehangir with the Madonna

Chikan hand embroidery

Meenakari work

Miniature painting styles brought recognition to individual artists

Other hybrid art forms emerging from Mughal era
Examples of Chikan embroidery, which comprises over 40 types of intricate stitches. It is still a thriving cottage industry in Avadh region in Northern India.

This example of Chikan embroidery on organza fabric features 8 different types of stitches.
Examples of Zardozi embroidery, which involves stitching with gold thread. It is a strong example of the luxurious materiality of Mughal artistry.
Examples of Meenakari jewelry, which involves mosaic work with precious and semi-precious jewelry embedded in gold, silver, and metal.
Example of Meenakari jewelry from the Mughal era (18th century)
Other hybrid art forms emerging from Mughal era

Left: Turkish influence on Kathak: Ughur dancer. Middle: Kathak dancer influenced by Islamic court style. Right: Kathak dancer influenced by Hindu temple dancers.

Click here to see an example of Ughyur dance: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=5JuAiAPUGs

Click here to see an example of a Kathak performance with more Islamic influence: Lucknow: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=CMsuioOmoHo

Click here to see an example of a Kathak performance with more Hindu influence: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=bWOf8DM18&index=3&list=PLR08z5liZJEimXynfma5O3bLg0_5thjd
BLENDING OF STYLES

- Muslim artists focus on art with ornate geometric patterns, or patterns of flowers & leaves (arabesque) + Hindu artists focus on naturalistic and extravagant artwork.

Above: Details from Sword & Dagger hilts, Mughal era

Highlights from Dahejia reading:
Architecture saw the blending of materials like Marble and Sandstone, and detailed inlay work using gems and precious stones, with stone sculpture and carvings. Also, a combination of (Hindu) onion-shaped domes with (Islamic arches and minarets).
Paintings were mostly products of royal courts. Mughal period paintings saw the blending of Persian characteristics like flat aerial perspective, with Indian naturalism, & inclusion of details of the world around them.

Textiles included geometric patterns found in Persian designs, but Mughal weavers also included landscapes, animal hunts, floral latticework and central flowing patterns that reflected indigenous folk arts motifs.
Daras Bari: This monument is illustrative of Timurid style architecture, Babar's reign
Humayun’s tomb, Delhi.
16th Century.

Served as inspiration for the Taj Mahal’s layout & plan.

It incorporates Timurid elements such as the Hasht Bihisht (8 paradise), with local materials (sandstone).

Hindu elements such as jharokha (window).
A large iwan, a high arch, punctuates the center of each facade, and is set back slightly. Together with the other arches and openings, giving the façade a depth.

- Pink and white stone is used in the construction of the tomb.
- The dome of the tomb is made of white stone, which gives it a beautiful look.

- The architects of the tomb, Sayyed Mohammad and his father were Persian. But they were influenced with the Hindu architecture and other buildings in the Delhi.
- It has hexagonal chattries (domed pavilions) like those found in the Rajput forts.
Along with the Chattri (umbrella shape), the jaali jharokha, (net window) is one of the Hindu architectural elements incorporated to form Mughal architecture.
The *jaali jharokha*, or net window is one of the Hindu architectural elements incorporated to form Mughal architecture with Calligraphy ornamentation.

Conservation artists working on restoring plaster work at one of the smaller sites on Humayun’s tomb.

Highlights from Dahejia reading:
The symbolism of the Elements of the Monument that serve as Symbolic of Paradise:

The Char-bagh or 4 gardens

➢ These chahar bagh are not just gardens but more than that.

➢ The symbolism behind it very strong and relates to the life after death

➢ The Quran(xxv.15) describes paradise as a garden of eternity (Arabic jannat al-khulud) with four rivers: of water, milk, wine and honey.

➢ Gardens had been built as earthly representations of the lush and splendid gardens of paradise described in the holy book.
The symbolism of the Elements of the Monument that serve as Symbolic of Paradise Garden: The Char-bagh or 4 gardens.

Seen here: the Taj Mahal

Gardens often formed an important accompaniment to architecture.

Without these gardens, the splendors, visual impact and symbolism of the building or the tomb would be greatly reduced.

One of the most prominent forms in a Paradise Garden is perhaps its fourfold.

Here paradise lies in the midst of square after square being divided into smaller squares by channels of water.

Water is carried north, south, east and west. Larger paradises give way to smaller paradises.
Symbolically, these were the perfect embodiment of the Islamic ideal, the ultimate paradise garden, with the emperor forever in paradise.

- The **large square enclosure**, divided with geometric precision, was the ordered universe.
- In the centre, the tomb itself rose like the **cosmic mountain** above **four rivers** represented by the **water-channels**.
- **Eternal flowers, herbs, fruit, water and birds** added further character to the tomb garden...

The tomb proper stands in the centre of a square garden, divided into four main parterres by causeways (charbagh), in the centre of which ran shallow water-channels.
Aerial views of the tomb and garden complex, Humayun's tomb

Highlights from Dahejia reading:
Highlights from Dahejia reading:

The Taj Mahal, in Agra India
The Taj Mahal complex can be conveniently divided into 5 sections:
1. The **moonlight garden** to the north of the river Yamuna.
2. The **riverfront terrace**, containing the Mausoleum, Mosque and Jawab.
3. The **Charbagh garden** containing pavilions.
4. The **jilaukhana** for the tomb attendants and two subsidiary tombs.
5. The **Taj Ganj**, originally a bazaar and caravanserai only traces of which are still preserved. The great gate lies between the jilaukhana and the garden.
Levels gradually descend in steps from the Taj Ganji towards the river
The Taj Gateway

- Spread over a width of 150 feet and standing tall at 100 feet, the Taj gateway is entrance to a monument.
- Made of red sandstone, this three storeyed building is topped by cupolas or chattris. Records state that this gateway was completed in 1648.
- Decorated with the most sought after craft in the Mughal times, calligraphy was used to inscribe Holy Koranic verses on the walls of the Gateway.

- Crowning the gateway are twenty two small ornamental chhatris, placed in two lines of eleven above the main portal.

- As grand an entrance as this is, it was never used by Shah Jahan and the royal party, as they always arrived from the Agra Fort by boat.

Inscriptions start at the bottom and but miraculously look the same size as your eyes travel up the arch.
- Decorated in calligraphy with verses from holy Koran.
- The original door of the gateway was made out of the solid silver.
- Calligrapher, Amanat Khan has used the trompe l'oeil effect.
- Gradual enlarging of the letters and their spacing as they snake around the form of the arch.
- The result is seemingly consistent dimensions as you read the holy lettering from the ground.

- The Taj is hidden by a massive red sandstone gateway within this square before the main entrance.
The dome

- The most remarkable part of the Taj Mahal.
- Enormous white onion shaped dome crowning the tomb.
- Located at the exact centre of the structure, the main dome is flanked by four smaller ones on it four corners.

- The onion shaped dome of the Taj Mahal sits on a massive drum that adds support to the circular top.

- The drum is also intricately designed with superb inlay work.
• The dome is actually double shelled, and the interior false dome was made much smaller to be in proportion to the inner chamber.

• This gave the building perfect visual balance; extraordinary from the outside and comfortable small from the inside.

Similar technique is used at St Paul's Cathedral in London.
Finial of the Dome

- The main finial was originally made of gold but was replaced by a copy made of gilded bronze in the early 19th century.
- The summit of the gold gilded finial perched at almost 220 feet from the ground, gives a finishing look to the Taj Mahal.
- The motif is a Hindu symbol with bent lotus leaves mounted on a "kalash" with a coconut on top.

Decorating the summit of the dome is an open lotus, over which is a gilded finial.

Taj Mahal - Islamic inscription on the gold gilded Finial
Chattris

• The most prominent are the main four chattris, which flank the four corners of the onion dome.
• Having an octagonal base
• with small arches on each of the eight sides
• The top is nicely finished with an inverted lotus with a gold finial rising from its summit.
• Chattris are also present at the tops of the four tall minarets.

Taj Mahal "Chattris" flank the main dome from four sides

Open ornamenting lotus the chattris

Similar Chattris on the top of the minarets
• The tomb is the central focus
• It stands on a square plinth
• It consists of a symmetrical building with an iwan topped by a large dome and finial.
• Its basic elements are Persian in origin

• On each of these sides, a huge pishtaq, or vaulted archway, frames the iwan with two similarly shaped, arched balconies stacked on either side.
• Multi-chambered cube
• Chamfered corners forming an unequal octagon that is approximately 55 meters (180 ft) on each of the four long side.
Hasht bihisht and the central chamber

- The central chamber of the mausoleum is an octagonal room.

- It is flanked on each wall by outer chambers that create a layout used frequently in Mughal architecture.

- This layout, referred to as the 'hasht bihisht', a nine-fold plan, was derived from Persian architectural precedents.
The Rauza(tomb) in the Mausoleum

The main chamber houses the false sarcophagi of Mumtaz Mahal and Shah Jahan.

The actual graves are at a lower level
Jali around the cenotaphs

- A protective octagonal screen made of perforated marble panels, or jalis, with borders of inlaid marble surrounds the two cenotaphs in the central chamber.

Octagonal room

Each of the jalis, including the larger doorway and north face, were carved from single slabs of marble.
Ornamentation and Mouldings

• The Taj Mahal depicts elaborate carvings with around forty three different kinds of gems used.
• The carving at the Taj Mahal is done using a technique called “manabbat kari”, which essentially is a carving that stands out from a flat surface.
• The manabbat kari process involves drawing the flower patterns directly on the marble with henna and then using fine chisels to carve them out.
Ornamentation and Mouldings

INLAY WORK
in semi-precious stones, on marble
Detail of inlay work in an interior wall of the Taj Mahal.
Flooring Pattern

Geometric patterns in stone
Calligraphy in perspective on the walls of the Taj
Materials, Cost and Calligraphy

- The Taj Mahal was constructed using materials from all over India and Asia. The buildings are constructed with walls of brick and rubble inner cores faced with either marble or sandstone locked together with iron dowels and clamps.
- Much of the calligraphy is composed of florid thuluth script, made of jasper or black marble, inlaid in white marble panels.
- Higher panels are written in slightly larger script to reduce the skewing effect when viewed from below.
- Throughout the complex, passages from the Qur'an are used as decorative elements.
Mughal hybridity Part 2: Mughal Miniature Paintings as a form of hybridity