

---

# CHITROLEKHA

## JOURNAL ON ART AND DESIGN

---

### **Akbarnama: A study of the different facets of the emperor's personality**

#### INTERACTIVE ARTICLE COVER

##### About the Journal

---

<b>Journal DOI</b>	<a href="https://doi.org/10.21659/cjad">https://doi.org/10.21659/cjad</a> ↗
<b>Journal Home</b>	<a href="http://www.chitrolekha.com">www.chitrolekha.com</a> ↗
<b>Included in</b>	ProQuest, Art Full-text (H.W. Wilson), EBSCO, Google Scholar

---

##### About the Issue

---

<b>Issue</b>	<b>Volume 7, Number 1, 2023</b>
<b>Editor</b>	Reynaldo Thompson
<b>Issue DOI</b>	<a href="https://doi.org/10.21659/cjad.71">https://doi.org/10.21659/cjad.71</a> ↗
<b>TOC</b>	<a href="https://chitrolekha.com/nsv7n1">https://chitrolekha.com/nsv7n1</a> ↗

---

##### About the Article

---

<b>Title</b>	<b><i>Akbarnama: A Study of the Different Facets of the Emperor's Personality</i></b>	
<b>Author/s</b>	<b>Tanjima Kar Sekh</b>	
<b>Affiliation</b>	Ph.D candidate and JRF at the Department of History and Culture at Jamia Millia Islamia	
<b>Author ID</b>	<a href="https://orcid.org/0000-0001-7640-7219">0000-0001-7640-7219</a>	
<b>Funding</b>	<b>No funding was received. Published free of any charge.</b>	
<b>Article DOI</b>	<a href="https://doi.org/10.21659/cjad.71.v7n100">https://doi.org/10.21659/cjad.71.v7n100</a> ↗	<b>Pages:</b> 1-14
<b>Full-text HTML</b>	<a href="https://chitrolekha.com/v7n100">https://chitrolekha.com/v7n100</a> ↗	
<b>Full-text PDF</b>	<a href="https://chitrolekha.com/ns/v7n1/v7n100.pdf">https://chitrolekha.com/ns/v7n1/v7n100.pdf</a> ↗	
<b>Article History</b>	<b>First Published: April 27, 2023</b>	
<b>Copyright</b>	<a href="#">Aesthetics Media Services</a> ↗	
<b>Licensing</b>	<a href="#">Creative Commons Attribution Non-Commercial 4.0</a> ↗	

---

---

This Open Access article is published under a Creative Commons Attribution Non-Commercial 4.0 International License (<http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc/4.0/>), which permits non-commercial re-use, distribution, and reproduction in any medium, provided the original work is properly cited. For citation use the DOI. For commercial re-use, please contact [editor@rupkatha.com](mailto:editor@rupkatha.com).

# ***Akbarnama*: A Study of the Different Facets of the Emperor's Personality**

Tanjima Kar Sekh

Ph.D candidate and JRF at the Department of History and Culture at Jamia Millia Islamia.

ORCHID: 0000-0001-7640-7219. Email: tanjimakarsekh@yahoo.com

---

## **Abstract**

*Akbarnama* is a major primary source in the study of Mughal history. It is criticized by various historians, as a flattery of a senior courtier for the emperor of Hindustan, Akbar. However, we cannot deny its importance and the rich information that it provides about the contemporary times of Akbar's rule. This paper would explore *Akbarnama* as a political tool that legitimized Akbar's rule and established him as a balanced ruler. It would explore the various tenets of Akbar's character that has been highlighted through some events throughout his period of reign via text and paintings.

**Keywords:** *Akbarnama*, Mughals, Mughal art, Mughal History, Akbar, Mughal Empire.

## **Introduction**

Jalal-ud-din Mohammad Akbar ascended the throne in 1556 at a very young age when his father Humayun, the second Mughal Padshah died accidentally. The perfect way to describe Mughals as Stuart C Welch says would be "although Turkish and Persian in the background, the Mughals were not Muslim rulers of India, but Indian rulers who happened to be Muslims." (Welch, 1963, p. 11) Mughal rulers were romantics at heart. From Akbar's patronage of *Hamzanama*, to his idea of an ideal Hindustan perfect for all his subjects irrespective of religion, the actions of the emperor exuded his fantasy.

In 1589, when Akbar's reign was secure, Akbar commissioned *Akbarnama*, a chronicle of his reign. He gave the responsibility to write all details of his day-to-day life, policies, laws, achievements, both cultural and military and other important and significant aspect of his reign, to his friend Abul Faz'l, who was one of the nine Navaratnas at Akbar's court. It took seven years to produce this magnum opus. The texts were accompanied by illustrated folios and these paintings were the showcase of the emperor's glory. The emperor took special interest in reviewing the chronicle and selected events to be painted in the atelier. (Stronge, 2002, pp. 36-50) Two copies of the *Akbarnama* were illustrated, one in 1590 and the other in 1604. The first one seemed to be propaganda to prove Akbar's invincible power and intimidate his enemies. (Okada, 1992, p. 22)

As a great diplomat, Akbar knew that he would have to be tactful along with building a strong military power in order to rule successfully over a land where the majority of people followed a different faith than his own. Like, every ruler, he tried to legitimize his rule by various

means. One among them was reflecting himself as a perfectly balanced person through the text of *Akbarnama*. 'Abul Faz'l's *Akbarnama* overshadowed medieval history for centuries with sombre weight of his learning and conviction to the detriment of all other histories and sources of memory. At the same time, the tone of *Akbarnama* was derided for being sycophantic to Akbar, and the Padshah himself was belatedly scolded by Western historians for tolerating such excessive flattery. But to see *Akbarnama* as simply an exercise in obsequiousness by an overenthusiastic courtier would be short sighted, for what Abul Faz'l intended was far more ambitious, even incendiary.' (Mukhoty, 2020, p. 346) While introducing the Padshah in the text, Abul Faz'l tries to connect the emperor to the divine forces, through various examples which he claims to have collected from reliable sources. Atagha Khan, the husband of Jigi Anaga (one of the wet nurses of Akbar) and a high official later at Akbar's court had a vision before Akbar's birth. At 22, he dreamt that a moon entered his embrace. The dream was interpreted to be a sign of great fortune. (Faz'l, 2015, p. 47) Faz'l mentions about another incident, of when Hamida Banu Begum was pregnant with Akbar, a glow was seen on her forehead between her brows. His brother Khwaja Muazzam also witnessed this glow and he was taken aback by the mirror-like reflection. It seemed as if the queen wore glass sequins on her forehead but she said to have worn none. (Faz'l, 2015, p. 18) After the prince was born, one evening Jigi Anaga was nursing him. She was upset on being accused of performing sorcery on the blessed prince by Maham Anaga and others. They believed it was only because of her incantations that the prince only received milk from her. On seeing her alone and no one around to witness, Akbar spoke as a baby.

"Be good of cheer", he said, "for the celestial light of the khilafat shall abide in thy bosom and shall bestow on the night of thy sorrow the effulgence of joy. But see that thou reveal this our secret to no one, ...." (Faz'l, The *Akbarnama* of Abul Faz'l Vol 1, 1907, p. 385)

These visions and miraculous acts by Akbar that Abul Faz'l writes about in the text added to the aura of an emperor. However, we must not forget that the *Akbarnama* was written when Akbar already established a stronghold on India and the Mughal empire was already at its glory. Apart from being a historical chronicle, it was also a powerful political tool that worked in favour of the emperor. The fact that kings were considered to be representatives of God on earth had been in practice through centuries at different dynasties, countries and cultures. While, no such mention has been done directly by Faz'l but he does a fairly similar declaration by writing about the miraculous occurrences during Akbar's birth and childhood. The famous ritual of *darshan* also became a regular affair that radiated Mughal command over the people of this land. Every day after the morning prayers, Akbar used to appear at the balcony which was called *jharokha darshan* by the common people. The subjects used to gather outside the palace to get a glimpse of the emperor before starting their day. (Mukhoty, 2020, p. 287) *Akbarnama* is studied here as a record of various facets of Akbar's personality.

## **Akbar and Religion**

While talking about Akbar's rule, his religious policies, which forms a significant part of his reign and personality trait, cannot be ignored. Akbar's principle of religious tolerance and beliefs in Sulh-i-kul (absolute peace) are considered by many historians to be a primary factor in establishing a strong rule over Hindustan. (Khan, 2000, p. 79) Jahangir in his memoir writes about

his father's interest in theology of different faiths. "My father always associated with the learned of every creed and religion, especially with pandits and the learned of India, and although he was illiterate, so much became clear to him through constant intercourse with the learned and wise, in his conversations with them, that no one knew him to be illiterate, and he was so acquainted with the niceties of verse and prose compositions that his deficiency was not thought of." (Jahangir, 1909, p. 3) The medieval historical records contemporary to Akbar's times, especially of kings who were followers of Islam were mostly started with the praise of Allah and then proceeded to other the Prophets, and then to various caliphs and kings. However, Abul Faz'l started with the praise of Allah and then started with Adam, the first man and the first prophet of Islam. Abul Faz'l's intention was to link Akbar to the entire mankind, not as a ruler of just the Muslims. (Mukhoty, 2020, pp. 346-47) The emperor's marriage to a Hindu princess was a loud message to the people of India about his beliefs in co-existence with different cultures. This was a diplomatic move from either party, the Kachwahas, who wanted to have imperial protection from the Mughals and elevate their status in the Mughal court, and the Mughals, who by welcoming a Hindu princess in the harem, despite opposition from the Muslim Ulema set forward an example of Akbar's tolerant religious policies. "When the Rajput brides entered the Mughal harem, they brought with them their holy fires and their sparkling language, their busy gods, and their swaying clothes. For Akbar did not require these women to convert to Islam and they were allowed to fully participate in their Hindu rituals as they had in their own homes" (Mukhoty, 2020, p. 29) Akbar allowed his Hindu wives to have an uninterrupted religious life and access to Brahmins inside the *zenana*. *Havans* and *homs* were performed in the palace and he also wore the sacred thread around his wrist without any hesitation. (Badauni, 1884, p. 269) However, these habits, which he acquired from Hindu customs and culture was deeply frowned upon by Badauni.



**Figure 1: Akbar at Ibadat Khana. Folio from Akbarnama . Chester Beatty Collection, Dublin.**

In 1575, when the emperor shifted to the newly constructed palace at Fatehpur, he ordered the making of the Ibadat Khana. (Faz'l, The *Akbarnama* of Abul Faz'l Vol 3, 1907, p. 158) Badauni, in his text *Muntakhab-ut-tawārikh* mentions about the considerable amount of time that the emperor spent in his Ibadat Khana, especially on Friday evenings. He invited learned men and scholars, theologians of different religion and listened them talk about true knowledge, sometimes supporting each other and sometimes against. "The learned men used to draw the

sword of the tongue on the battle field of mutual contradiction and opposition, and the antagonism of the sects reached such a pitch that they would call one another fool and heretics." (Badauni, 1884, p. 262) Throughout his life, Akbar had acquired religious wisdom from different faiths and had tried to inculcate them in an ideal way in his life. He believed that theologians, saints and learned people who could guide one to the divine path, can belong to different faiths. (Badauni, 1884, pp. 263-64) Badauni speaks about saints and Brahmins of different sects whose teachings were discussed at the Ibadat Khana. The emperor was always willful to learn about Christianity and ordered Abul Fazl to translate the gospel. (Badauni, 1884, p. 267) The folio from *Akbarnama* shows Akbar in his Ibadat Khana, surrounded by various learned men, of different religions and faith, discussing about the theological aspects in search of the divine truth. The painting shows open books and manuscripts in front of each person. The establishment of a space, solely used for the purpose of theological discussions without hesitant boundaries was a radical accomplishment in the history of India. (Figure. 1)

### **Akbar, a father**

In the 14<sup>th</sup> regnal year, Akbar was twenty-seven years old but without an heir. He had children before but none of them survived. The rumour of ghosts and spirits in the fort of Agra was doing rounds among all the residents and they also claimed that it was because of these spirits the emperor's children suffered death. (Mukhoty, 2020, p. 127) In the year 1569, when Harkha Bai was expecting a child, Akbar shifted her to Fatehpur, and built her a palace near the dwelling place of Sheikh Salim Chisti. He took all kinds of precautions to keep his to-be-born child safe. As per the local tradition, fathers did not visit their new child immediately after birth and Akbar was no exception. The celebrations at Fatehpur and the fort of Agra was extravagant since Akbar was blessed with a long-desired son and an heir to the Mughal throne. Dancers gathered, drums were played, people were distributed generously with alms and all these festivities were meticulously recorded in the *Akbarnama* text as well as painting folios. (Mukhoty, 2020, pp. 127-28) The right side of a double folio from *Akbarnama* that was painted on the occasion of Salim's birth is composed in layers. The uppermost part shows the innermost quarters of the harem in the palace at Fatehpur where Harkha Bai is seen with attendants. Baby Salim is being taken care of by other women in the harem. The middle part shows the alms and gifts being passed on from the palace gates to be distributed among the common mass. The people are playing trumpets and drums on a happy occasion. Gifts and money are being distributed outside the fort gate to common people and is shown in the lowermost section. (Figure. 2 & 3) The left side of the composition shows Akbar in his court at Agra receiving the good news of his son's birth. As mentioned in the text of *Akbarnama*, the dancers and musicians are seen performing at the court on the joyful occasion. The jovial environment is quite beautifully expressed by the court artists. The paintings are done by Kesav the elder, Dharmdas and Chitra.





Figures 2 & 3: Akbar at the court of Agra receiving the news of Salim's birth (left) and the festivities at Fatehpur on the same occasion (right). *Akbarnama* folio, V & A museum collection.

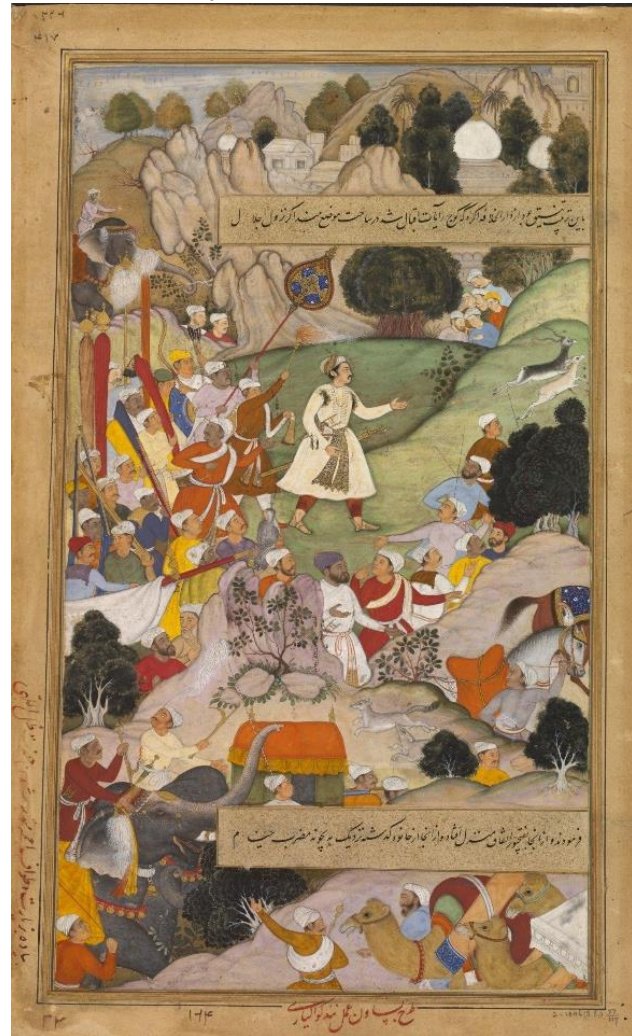
### Piety of a great ruler

On losing his children multiple times, Akbar sought divine intervention through the help of Salim Chisti, a Sufi saint. He also took a vow to travel to Ajmer to the holy house of Moinuddin Chisti, if he is blessed with a healthy child. On the birth of his son, he named him Salim, after the saint Salim Chisti and also kept his promise to travel to Ajmer on foot. On Friday January 20<sup>th</sup> 1570, Akbar started his journey from Agra and this event has also been recorded visually in the *Akbarnama* folios (Figure. 4). (Faz'l, History of Akbar Vol 4, 2015, p. 452) Throughout the *Akbarnama*, multiple visits to the Ajmer dargah have been written about which reflects the emperor's devotion towards the Chisti Sufi saints. He respected them and also patronized them, and so did his successors thus highlighting his pious side despite being such a powerful ruler.

### Akbar's equity

In the sixth regnal year 1562, Akbar decided to call back Adham Khan from Malwa back to the capital and appointed Mohammad Shirwani as an officer there to handle all royal matters. Maham

Anaga was united with his son and the injustice caused by Adham Khan over the subjects of Malwa was finally over. The emperor gave his foster brother enough opportunities to refrain from any illegal or unjust acts. (Faz'l, History of Akbar Vol 4, 2015, p. 467) Abul Faz'l writes about the death of Adham Khan in detail in the *Akbarnama* as an incident reflected the emperor's sense of justice. Faz'l also explains how Adham Khan, who was the foster brother of Akbar and the younger son of Maham Anaga, was not of a very good conduct and was always envious and resentful towards Atagha Khan. On 16<sup>th</sup> May 1562, while Atagha Khan was busy with official matters with other courtiers at the hall of audience, Adham Khan entered with his bodyguard and other men. When everyone rose to greet Adham Khan, Atagha Khan was half up. Khusham Uzbeg, the body guard of Adham Khan, charged Atagha Khan with a dagger and was killed, or rather as Abul Faz'l mentions, martyred in the *sahn* (courtyard) of the hall of audience. After killing one of the most valuable courtiers of the empire, 'the doomed one'<sup>i</sup> marched angrily towards the harem. The emperor was asleep in his palace when Adham Khan was trying to force enter through the entrance. Niamat, the harem eunuch, bolted the door. The emperor was awakened by the commotion. On knowing the reason for the same, he was so furious that he ordered the execution of Adham Khan immediately. Adham Khan was thrown from the attached terrace of the palace headlong twice. (Faz'l, The *Akbarnama* of Abul Faz'l Vol 2, 1907, p. 270) Despite Maham Anaga's position in court, as a foster mother of Akbar and his advisor, Akbar didn't hesitate to punish his own foster brother. This incident is also depicted in a painting folio of *Akbarnama*. The painting is painted by Miskin and Shankar during 1590-95. It has several layers which depicts the event in a narrative style. The lower left corner shows Atagha Khan, the prime minister of Akbar lying murdered. The commotion caused due to the murder in the palace and harem is clear from the men in the foreground. The man thrown from the terrace upside down is Adham Khan who has been punished. Akbar is seen on the top left corner, in his white Muslin dress but with a bare chest covered in a white chadar. This depicts he was relaxing in the palace harem and had to tackle the attack abruptly. He probably didn't have time to dress up. His fury is clear in his wide eyes and is also depicted by the flutter of his chadar behind him. The stair which is painted in the folio, is



**Figure 4: Akbar on his journey to Ajmer. Akbarnama folio, V& A Museum collection.**

The lower left corner shows Atagha Khan, the prime minister of Akbar lying murdered. The commotion caused due to the murder in the palace and harem is clear from the men in the foreground. The man thrown from the terrace upside down is Adham Khan who has been punished. Akbar is seen on the top left corner, in his white Muslin dress but with a bare chest covered in a white chadar. This depicts he was relaxing in the palace harem and had to tackle the attack abruptly. He probably didn't have time to dress up. His fury is clear in his wide eyes and is also depicted by the flutter of his chadar behind him. The stair which is painted in the folio, is



symbolic of ascendance as well as rapid descent of a person, which is Adham Khan in this context. (Figure. 5)

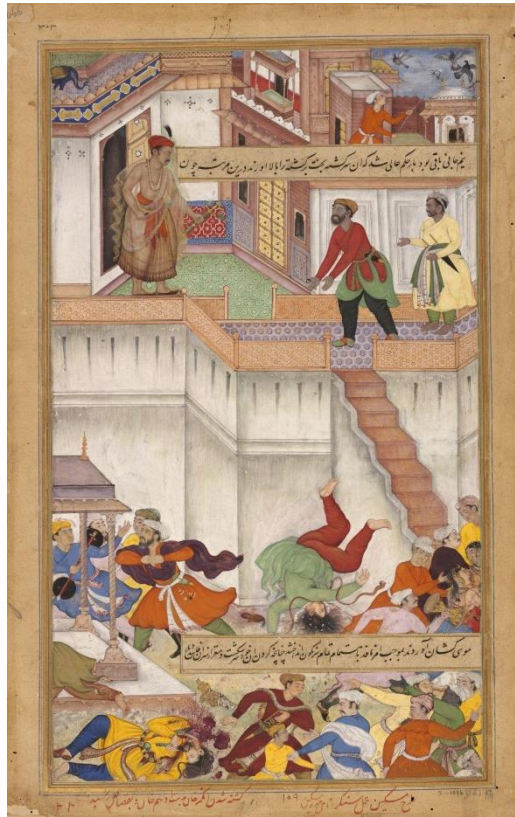


Figure 5: The killing of Adham Khan. *Akbarnama* folio, V& A Museum collection.

### Resilience of His Majesty

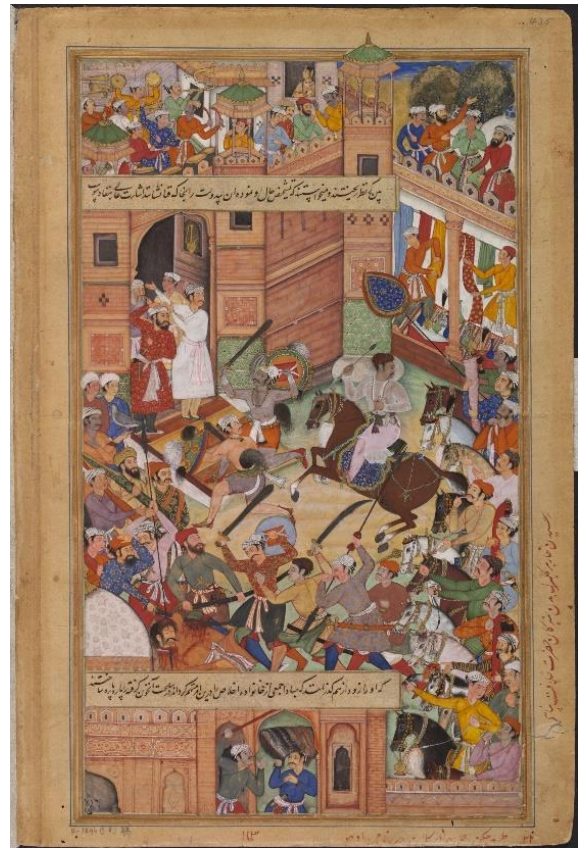
When Akbar visited Delhi in 1564, the entire city was rejoicing on the presence of his majesty in the city and crowded the streets to get a glimpse of him. While he was returning to his dwelling after paying a visit to the shrine of Nizamuddin Auliya, he was attacked near the Khairul Mosque with an arrow which penetrated the emperor's right shoulder. Abul Faz'l wrote Akbar's reaction in *Akbarnama* in a very poised tone. He stated that instead of showing anger and wrath, Akbar first thought the arrow to be a stone. When people around him were hustling and screaming in pain for the emperor, he kept his calm and asked people to pull out the arrow. He also rode his own horse to reach the palace. When people caught hold of the one who performed this unblessed act, the emperor ordered the immediate execution of him because he didn't want any loyal subject to be accused of the same act later on. With the treatments of shahi hakim Khizr Khwaja Khan and Hakim Ain al malk, and with the blessings of the saints, the emperor's health restored. (Faz'l, The *Akbarnama* of Abul Faz'l Vol 2, 1907, pp. 312-14) The incident is particularly important as it shows how composed Akbar stayed in crisis, a trait especially desired in a ruler. It also showed his mental and physical resilience which reinstated his power as a Shahenshah.



The illustrated folio in *Akbarnama* visually depicts the incident. Artists Jagan, Bhawani Kalan and Madhav worked together in this folio. Akbar is seen in the centre on a horse clutching an arrow. The red sandstone buildings probably depict the Khairul Masjid. The disorder created by the sudden attack on the emperor has been well portrayed in the image by the hustle of the people surrounding the emperor. The front legs of Akbar's horse are been shown lifted up as if reacting to the attack. The people are seen to have killed a person in the left corner of the painting, which can either be a suspect or the actual person who was caught and executed at Akbar's command. (Figure. 6)

### The Compassionate Sovereign

Akbar was a teenager when he ascended the throne. Thus Bayram Khan, the commander-in-chief of the Mughal army became his guardian and mentor. After Humayun's sudden death, Akbar's position as king and the Mughal authority over India was in a vulnerable position. Bayram Khan's regency helped Akbar establish the Mughal stronghold. However soon they started disagreeing on administrative decisions. As Akbar grew up, he wanted freedom to rule his own kingdom on his own terms. Ambition and power as regent led Bayram Khan to rebel against the throne and it couldn't be tolerated. In 1560, Akbar tactfully left Agra and moved the seat of power to Delhi and declared that Bayram Khan was released from his duties as Khan-i-Khanan. He was advised by Akbar to leave for Mecca and live the rest of his life in service of the faith. (Stronge, 2002, p. 60) However, on his way to Mecca, he was murdered near Gujarat. His son and wife were brought back to the Mughal court. Akbar married his wife and gave her shelter in his harem and also brought up his son as his own. He grew up to hold the position of Khan-i-Khanan later, and also held a prestigious position in Akbar's court as one of his Navratnas. A painting folio in *Akbarnama* shows Akbar receiving four-years-old Abdur Rahim at the court. The emperor is seen at the centre of the composition on a high throne and under a pavilion which marks his authority. His face is younger as compared to the illustrations of events that happened later in his life. Mostly all paintings show the emperor wearing a white muslin *jama* which was likely what he preferred wearing. The person introducing the child to Akbar is probably Atagha Khan. An attendant is seen fanning the emperor with a whisk and another is seen holding the royal *aftabgir*. (Figure. 7)



**Figure 6: The attack on Akbar. Akbarnama folio, V& A Museum collection.**

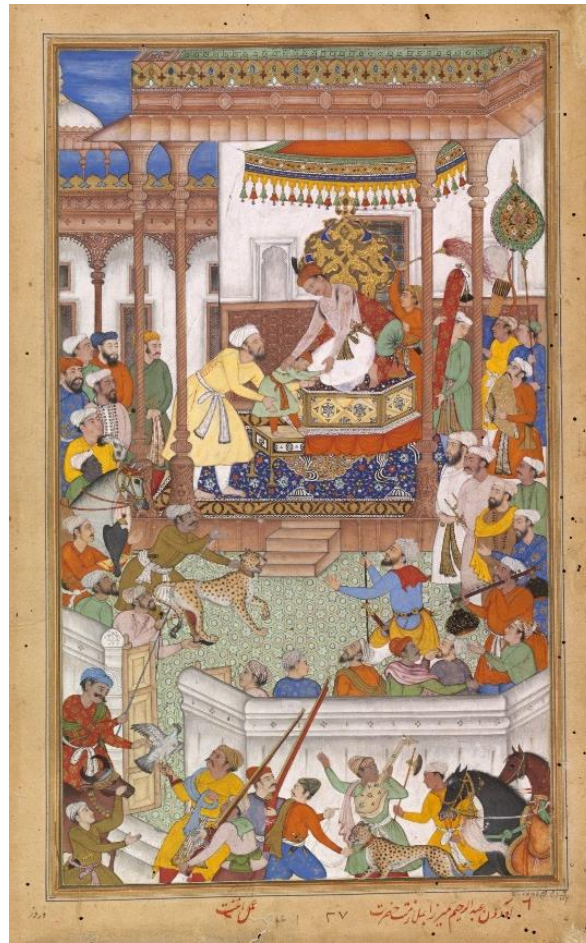


Figure 7: Akbar receiving young Abdur Rahim at court, V& A Museum collection.

### A mighty conqueror

Akbar had captured a lot of kingdoms during his period of rule and the fiercest of them all was the siege of Chittor. The description in *Akbarnama* as well as the accompanying miniature painting distinctly showcases about his struggle in the attack and how he overcame them to finally capture the fort. It expressed his valour as an emperor of Hindustan. On October 23, 1567 Akbar had set up tents in the vicinity of the Chittor fort. It was heavily raining at that time, but when the storm subsided the fort was clearly visible. The troops were moved to the foothills of the mountain where the fort stood. For a month Akbar was helped by the royal retinue to measure the circumference of the entire fort and the Mughal army were stationed at different locations in groups encircling the fort from all sides. (Faz'l, History of Akbar Vol 4, 2015, pp. 343-49) A lot of direct attacks were done by the brave soldiers against the emperor's advice. He understood that the fierce Rana of Chittor who never agreed to form any sort of alliance with the Mughals had an impregnable fort. Entering the fort of Chittor would need strategy. There were many soldiers who died in the course of this seize. In the blast that was being prepared by the Mughal soldiers to break open the fort walls, an accident occurred and several soldiers lost their lives (Figure. 8). But the emperor was adamant to take over the fort because it would prove Akbar to be indestructible. While supervising the bastions, one day the emperor saw a man wearing a cuirass leading the rival army. Since it was worn only by men of rank, Akbar shot him and later found out he was Jaimal,



the commander in chief of the Rajput army. Soon after fire flames were visible at various places inside the fort and it was understood that the Rajput *zenanas* were preparing for *Jauhar*<sup>ii</sup> since the death of their commander in chief would mean a certain defeat. (Stronge, 2002, p. 71) On February 24, 1568 the fort was finally captured. (Faz'l, History of Akbar Vol 4, 2015, p. 341) The paintings from *Akbarnama* paints the events quite dramatically and vividly. The left side of a double composition shows the accidental explosion by flames blowing up in all directions and men and horses of the Mughal army shot up along with the flames floating in the air. The lower left corner shows the imperial tents that had been set up around the fort. Akbar is seen with an attendant behind fanning him with a whisk. A Men from the Mughal army is informing Akbar about the mishap caused. The waterbody, probably a moat surrounding the fort is painted. The hilly terrain of the fort is perfectly painted by Persian styled stones. (Figure.8) The right side of the double composition shows Mughal cannons on the right firing at the fort. Mughal army is also trying to construct a closed path to enter the fort. The Rajput opponents however are protecting themselves fiercely. The soldiers are painted pointing their guns from atop the fort wall. (Figure. 9)



Figure 8 & 9: Double folio composition showcasing the siege on Chittor. *Akbarnama* folio, V& A Museum collection.

### **Mettle of a monarch**

Akbar had a fascination towards taming wild elephants. He always wondered about the majestic creatures that could show kindness as well as wrath, those that could be calm as well as fierce in the battlefield. Their swiftness and agility despite their huge size amazed the emperor. (Faz'l, *The History of Akbar* Vol 3, 2015, p. 217) Abul Faz'l writes about the emperor's fearlessness while riding upon the mast elephants in *Akbarnama*. He states, 'Riding upon mast, men killing, driver throwing elephants, the sight of whom melted the gall bladder of the iron livered ones of this art were exhibited by this holy personality.' (Meaning his majesty) He also writes how Akbar controlled an unruly elephant as if he is taking a stroll in the garden. Akbar not only rode these beasts but also made them fight with other mast elephants. Sometimes when he saw the driver losing control over the other elephant, he would leap from one elephant to other. 'Then did the pious receive the collyrium of illumination! For it was impossible to approach this animal without God's protection, much less, to ride it, and again to control it with severity, and to engage it in fight with the exoteric and the esoteric became submissive.' (Faz'l, *The Akbarnama* of Abul Faz'l Vol 2, 1907, p. 113) A vivid description of one such elephant fight is vividly described in *Akbarnama*. An ill-tempered elephant Hawai could never be rode upon by professional elephant keepers but Akbar not only rode him but also engaged him into a fight with an equally unruly and enraged elephant Ranbagh. The emperor's bravery however caused great stress among the onlookers. His well-wishers turned to Atagha Khan to stop the emperor. The double illustrated folio in *Akbarnama* shows how Akbar is riding on Hawai bare footed like a brave person and chasing the elephant Ranbagh. They are crossing the river Yamuna in front of the red fort of Agra, on a makeshift bridge made of boats. The chaos caused due to the clash of the beasts is visibly seen in the folios. The waves of the water, the posture of the people and a diagonal alignment of the river adds movement to the composition. The prime minister Atagha Khan is seen praying on the right side. The painting is done by Chetar and Basawan. (Figure. 10 & 11)





**Figure 10 & 11: Double folio composition showing Akbar riding Hawai (left) and Atagha Khan praying for his majesty(right) . Akbarnama folio, V& A Museum collection.**

### A patron of architecture

Akbar was a great patron of architecture. He constructed several buildings which are prominent landmarks till date. At the beginning of the 10<sup>th</sup> regnal year the construction of a mighty fort was ordered. The emperor had a pretty good stronghold over Hindustan by then and thus an authoritative seat for sovereign was needed that exuded the same amount of valour as the emperor himself. (Faz'l, History of Akbar Vol 4, 2015, p. 133) The construction of the fort is painted over a spread of two folios. The left folio shows Akbar on the right top corner inspecting the construction of the fort. He is unusually seen in a green *jama*. The details captured from a construction site are the nuances that Akbar's artists were known for. The painting shows material of construction being transported through the river Yamuna; on whose banks the fort is being constructed. These materials are taken in by people on their heads, and also via a slope, temporarily constructed at the site. The man on right in a red *jama* seems to be the taking notes, probably keeping a track of the materials used and amount of work done like a civil contractor or an appointed site supervisor. Women seen at the sight have clothes like that of Banjara women

who are seen at construction sites working on daily wage to support themselves (Figure. 12). The right side of the double paged composition shows construction of a bastion. Men are seen cutting red sandstones. Bullock carts are used to carry materials. The hustle of a construction site, minute details such as the cement spatula, women carriers, men with shovel picking up materials, men carrying them on their head, are beautifully captured by artists Miskina, Tulsi and Sarwan. (Figure. 13)



Figure 12 & 13: Akbar supervising the construction of Agra fort. *Akbarnama* folio, V& A Museum collection.

Akbar's contribution towards the consolidation of Mughal empire is well known. He was not only a great ruler, but also a great diplomat. His actions and lifestyle reflected the same. This paper selectively studies the emperor's personality through the paintings of *Akbarnama*. Akbar was also the one who utilized the resources of his father's atelier and patronized a wide range of folios and manuscripts which eventually contributed to the establishment of the unique Mughal miniatures. The paintings of *Akbarnama* are an excellent source of information that added glory to the Mughal atelier.



## Notes

---

<sup>i</sup> Referring to Adham Khan. Adham Khan was the son of Maham Anaga and the foster brother of Akbar.

<sup>ii</sup> When Rajputs were certain of defeat in a war, the women would either perform this act of self-immolation or killed by their husbands or brothers, or other male members in order to avoid capture or enslavement. Instead of surrendering to the enemies, they preferred to perform Jauhar and keep their pride intact.

## References

- Badauni, A. (1884). *Muntakhab -ut -Tawarikh Vol 2*. (W. H. Lowe, Übers.) Calcutta: Asiatic Society of Bengal.
- Faz'l, A. (1907). *The Akbarnama of Abul Faz'l Vol 1*. (H. Beveridge, Übers.) Calcutta: The Asiatic Society.
- Faz'l, A. (1907). *The Akbarnama of Abul Faz'l Vol 2*. (H. Beveridge, Übers.) Calcutta: The Asiatic Society.
- Faz'l, A. (1907). *The Akbarnama of Abul Faz'l Vol 3*. (H. Beveridge, Übers.) Calcutta: The Asiatic Society.
- Faz'l, A. (2015). *History of Akbar Vol 4*. (W. M. Thackston, Hrsg., & W. M. Thackston, Übers.) Cambridge: Harvard University Press.
- Faz'l, A. (2015). *The History of Akbar*. (W. M. Thackston, Hrsg., & W. M. Thackston, Übers.) Cambridge: Harvard University Press.
- Faz'l, A. (2015). *The History of Akbar Vol 1 (Bd. 1)*. (W. M. Thackston, Hrsg., & W. M. Thackston, Übers.) Cambridge: Harvard University Press.
- Faz'l, A. (2015). *The History of Akbar Vol 3*. (W. M. Thackston, Hrsg., & W. M. Thackston, Übers.) Cambridge: Harvard University Press.
- Jahangir, N.-u.-d. M. (1909). *Tuzuk-i-Jahangiri*. (H. Beveridge, Hrsg., & A. Rogers, Übers.) London: Royal Asiatic Society.
- Khan, I. A. (2000). Akbar's personality traits and world outlook- A Critical Appraisal. In I. Habib, & I. Habib (Hrsg.), *Akbar and His India*. New Delhi: Oxford University Press.
- Mukhoty, I. (2020). *Akbar: The Great Mughal: the Definitive Biography*. New Delhi: Aleph Book Company.
- Okada, A. (1992). *Indian Miniatures of the Mughal Court*. New York: Harry N. Abrams Inc.
- Stronge, S. (2002). *Painting for the Mughal Emperor the Art pf the Book 1560-1660*. London: V & A Publications.
- Welch, S. (1963). *The Art of Mughal India Painting and Precious Objects*. New York City: Asia Gallery Publications.
- Tanjima Kar Sekh is an art, history and culture enthusiast. She holds a Master's degree in History of Art from National Museum Institute, Delhi. She worked as a part time Assistant Professor at College of Art, Delhi. Currently, she is a Ph.D scholar at the Department of History & Culture, Jamia Millia Islamia. She is also a practicing artist inspired by traditional art.