

# IMAGES OF MADONNA IN IMPERIAL MUGHAL PAINTINGS: OCCIDENTAL ORIENTATIONS

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*Abstract: Western explorers of 15<sup>th</sup>-16<sup>th</sup> century, all throughout the world, ventured with two primary motives. Firstly, their adventurous mind wanted to expand their knowledge about the 'other'/ non-European world and secondly, to propagate Christianity. The early missionaries in Mughal India, had mistaken Akbar's interest in Christianity to be his weakness and thought of getting a hold of the empire through the conversion of the Emperor himself. Akbar wanted to educate himself and his followers in the spiritual and intellectual aspects of Christianity but never wished to convert. Akbar was fascinated with the new imagery from the Christian world and he instructed his court painters to copy them. This attempt somehow created a new pictorial vocabulary which was a unique expression of cultural interaction. This process of image borrowing juxtaposed many sacred entities with the profane, thus in the process, the idea of divinity is often curbed at the hand of the artist. The pictorial process of subjugation starts with the process of acceptance. If a culture or a state outwardly rejects the 'other', then probably the supremacy of both cultures becomes evident. Once a culture accepts another without refuting, it tends to play the role of a greater patron. The acceptance of the 'Christian' imageries could be seen as a method of tolerance as well as a subtle assault on the western world and the Christian religion. The images of Madonna were of prime importance as it continued to impress Akbar and his successor Jahangir. There was a steady demand for such images within the Mughal court. Gradually images of Madonna were absorbed as a cultural motif and showed many signs of 'otherness'. This paper tries to re-examine the images from a framework of Occidentalism. It attempts to critically analyze the process of iconographic assimilation in context of image production. It also attempts to throw some light on the position of the European 'other' class and the inherent process of acculturation between two major cultural/religious forces.*

## Introduction

Any religion at any given point in history has thrived through propagation. It always attempts to reject existing conventions, in order to communicate new ideas to gain acceptability amongst the public. The inception of a new creed naturally poses threat to existing religious systems which ensues in a conflict of interests. The impact of such conflict finds varied expression in a culture. In imperial Mughal India, the socio-politico-religious situation had left an indelible mark on the painterly activities at the court, where the influence could neither be transcended nor ignored by the artist. The painting

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compositions often became an amalgamated expression of patron's desire and artist's vision, further governed by the socio-cultural norms.<sup>1</sup> The representation of the European or 'Others'<sup>2</sup> varied in expression and were largely influenced by the socio-cultural experience. Christianity was perceived as a foreign doctrine. Image of the west gradually emerged through the direct encounters with its ambassadors. It is needless to say the shock of a new culture was predominant. Before one gets pre-judgmental about the representational categories, it is important to mention that the ateliers functioned as manufacturing units and this paper will be discussing about select images, exploring the idea of cross-cultural encounters in Imperial Mughal miniatures. The intension of this paper is to map the idea of 'Mughal Occidentalism' as reflected in the miniatures depicting the Madonna. Babur, the founder of the Mughal Empire patronized painterly activities probably for a very brief time. It was first Kamran and then Humayun, who managed to create a working atelier, albeit small during the first decade of their respective reign.<sup>3</sup> Humayun during his own reign did introduce formally the art of the book in his court but was too busy in settling the political scores and regaining his throne.<sup>4</sup> The earliest paintings record the influence of Persian styles but in Akbar's atelier the painters contributed to a new stylistic idiom reflective of the cosmopolitan courtly ambiance. They absorbed elements from Persian, Rajput and European sources.

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<sup>1</sup> John Seyller although contests the idea of imperial oversight of every courtly activity and defines it as "panegyric exaggeration". Many other scholars do not second his view. Seyller, John. "Pearls of the Parrot of India: The Walters Art Museum "Khamasa" of Amir Khusraw of Delhi." *The Journal of the Walters Art Museum* 58 (2000): 5-176. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/20168592>. Also see Verma, Som Prakash. "Mughal Painting, Patrons and Painters." *Proceedings of the Indian History Congress* 61 (2000): 510-26.

<sup>2</sup> By the term 'Other' the researcher intends to refer to the people from the European Christian world who arrived in Mughal India.

<sup>3</sup> In contrast to the popular belief that Babur could not establish a working atelier; Laura Parodi has cited Chahryar Adle's work to counter the notion. See Parodi, Laura E., and Bruce Wannell. 2011. "The Earliest Datable Mughal Painting: An Allegory of the Celebrations for Akbar's Circumcision at the Sacred Spring of Khwaja Seh Yaran near Kabul (1546 AD) [Staatsbibliothek Zu Berlin - Preussischer Kulturbesitz, Libr. Pict. A117, Fol. 15a]." *Asian Art News*, November 18, 2011.

<sup>4</sup> Humayun during his stay in Persia in the court of Shah Tahmasp I, around 1542 A. D., got introduced to the Saffavid style of painting. The patronization of painterly activities at Saffavid court was on a decline, and artists were willing to find a new patron. So, they readily agreed to join the entourage of Humayun. Later in 1546, through the Persian ambassador Valad Beg Takkalu, Humayun invited Saffavid painters Khwaja Abd al-Samad of Shiraz, Mir Sayyid Ali of Tabriz and Dust Muhammad to his court in Kabul. They reached Kabul in 1549 A. D. and in 1554 A. D. accompanied Humayun on his successful return to India. Ahmad, Aziz. 1964. *Studies in Islamic culture in the Indian environment*. Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1964. pp. 26. Chakraverty, Anjan. 2005. *Indian Miniature Painting*. Roli Books Private Limited. pp. 23 & 26. Pal, Pratapaditya. 1993. *Indian Painting: A Catalogue of the Los Angeles County Museum of Art Collection*. Vol.I. Los Angeles County Museum of Art. pp.174. Welch, Stuart Cary. 1985. *India: Art and Culture, 1300-1900*. New York: Metropolitan Museum of Art. pp. 143-144.

The image of the Madonna was introduced to the Mughal court by the Portuguese Jesuit Missionaries. In 1579 A.D., Akbar sent his first envoy to Goa <sup>5</sup> and by 1580 reached the first Portuguese mission in Fatehpur Sikri. The first mission introduced Akbar to Christianity and to the Christian world. Akbar was not only curious about the doctrine but also wanted to enlighten himself in the spiritual light of Christianity. He gave ample opportunity to the Portuguese Jesuits to propagate. They were granted space for a chapel and were allowed to preach and convert and even permitted for elaborate funerary processions with crucifix during Akbar's reign. <sup>6</sup> The Jesuits even engaged in street theatre narrating the stories of bible. (Bailey 1997: 31-34) The growing demand for the images of Virgin Mary started from the very first visit of the Jesuits to the Mughal court. Akbar adored and revered the image of Madonna and urged for more images of such kind. However, it is striking that when Akbar first encountered the painting of the Virgin in the Jesuit chapel at Fatehpur, in 1580, his immediate reaction was to bring not only his leading courtiers, but his chief painters and other painters to look at them. <sup>7</sup> Father Francis Henriquez of the first Jesuit mission recorded that they were all wonderstruck and said that there could be 'no better painting, nor better artists' than those who had painted those pictures. (Correia 1980) Not only Akbar, but his son Jahangir was also a great admirer of the Madonna. Though Jahangir himself did not believe neither in the orthodoxy of Islam nor Christianity, but the image of the Madonna continued to fascinate him. Several scholars have pointed out, that such affinity towards the image of the Virgin, was

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<sup>5</sup> Akbar first met the Portuguese in 1573 A.D. during his expedition to Surat. In 1575 he sent his courtier Haji Habibullah to procure European goods and to train his own craftsmen, who stayed in Goa for about a year. In 1576 A. D. he came to know about two Jesuits named Antonio Vaz and Pedro Diaz located in Bengal. Later in 1578 A. D. he received a Portuguese delegation sent by Viceroy to King of Portugal in Goa headed by Antonio Cabral. Du Jarric, Pierre. 1926. "The First Mission to Mogor" In *Akbar and the Jesuits: An Account of The Jesuit Missions to the Court of Akbar*. Trans. by C. H. Payne. 14-23 London: Harper & Brothers. Veliath, Cyril. 2005. "Jesuit Missionaries in an Islamic Court." *Bulletin of the Faculty of Foreign Studies* 40: 172-91. Silva, Nuno Vassallo e. 2004. "Precious Stones, Jewels and Cameos: Jacques De Coutre's Journey to Goa and Agra." In *Goa and the Great Mughal*, edited by Jorge Flores and Nuno Vassallo e Silva, 116-33. Lisbon: Calouste Gulbenkian Museum.

<sup>6</sup> Maclagan, Edward Douglas. 1932. *The Jesuits and Great Mogul*. London: Burns, Oates and Washbroune. pp.28-35 Bailey, Gauvin Alexander. 1998. "The Indian Conquest of Catholic Art: The Mughals, the Jesuits, and Imperial Mural Painting." *Art Journal* 57 (1): 24-30. <https://doi.org/10.2307/777989>.

<sup>7</sup> The image of the Madonna which was placed in the Church of Agra in 1602 A. D. was probably a picture of Virgin Mary (Madonna del Popolo) of Church of S. Maria Del Popolo. Many believed that this icon had special ability to convert the infidels and gentiles. Another early image gifted at the court was from the church of Santa Maria Maggiore in Rome known as Salus Populi Romani. Verma, Som Prakash. 2011. "Biblical Themes in Indian Experience" In *Crossing Cultural Frontiers: Biblical Themes in Mughal Painting*. 43-66. New Delhi: Aryan Books International. Refer to p. 43. Devapriam, Emma. 1972. "The Influence of Western Art on Mughal Painting." Case Western Reserve University. Natif, Mika. 2018. "Mughal Tolerance and Encounters with Europe". In *Mughal Occidentalism*. 56-67. Leiden: Brill.

probably the result of a cultural parallel to be seen in the Mongol character of Alanquwa.<sup>8</sup> In his letter of 20 August 1595 A.D., Father Jerome Xavier wrote to his provincial how Salim became seriously angry with the Muslim guide who went to Goa for not bringing him any image of Mother of God and bade another to make extensive purchases and not to fail to bring with him a fine picture of the lord. (Guerreiro and Payne 1930: 66-67) By the mid-16<sup>th</sup> century, Goa became a major production centre of Christian art. The Goan workshops of religious image production catered to the local need as well as to the need of the other Indian markets. They produced woodcuts,<sup>9</sup> icons of Christ, Madonna and other saints along with several other artifacts for veneration.<sup>10</sup> By 1595 A.D., three Jesuit missions<sup>11</sup> had arrived in the Mughal capital and by the second decade of 17<sup>th</sup> century many ambassadors and travelers had arrived.<sup>12</sup> The predominant classes of westerner were traders, travelers, missionaries and clerics. This direct contact with the Europeans facilitated the exchange of images and the understanding of Christianity.



Figure 1 illustrates one such example produced in early 17<sup>th</sup> century Goa. The figure shows bust of Mary with a serene face. The half-closed, downcast eyes evoke the sense of divinity in the figure. The features of this icon help us to identify with the non-Indian

<sup>8</sup> Alanquwa/Alanqua/Alan Gho'a/Alan-Qo'a is the female Mongol progenitor who conceived by consuming the divine light. Ibid. 9. Natif.

<sup>9</sup> The first books include *Conclusiones Philosophica*, St Francis Xavier's *Doutrina Crista* and Garcia de Orta's *Coloquis*. Carvalho, Pedro Moura. 2004. "Rarities from Goa' at the Courts of Humayun, Akbar and Jahangir (1530-1627)." In *Goa and the Great Mughal*, edited by Jorge Flores and Nuno Vassallo e Silva, 98–115. Lisbon: Calouste Gulbenkian Museum.

<sup>10</sup> By early 16<sup>th</sup> century, when the Portuguese made Goa their stronghold, they discovered many riches of India apart from spices which had equal trading possibilities in Europe. Portuguese merchants and traders started commissioning Indian artisans to produce artifacts which could cater to the European market. Among them, the figurines of Christian icons were one of the prime objects. Carvalho, Pedro Moura. 2008. *Luxury for Export: Artistic Exchange between India and Portugal around 1600*. Boston: Gutenberg Periscope Publishing. Refer to pp. 3-6.

<sup>11</sup> Three Jesuit missions in 1580, 1591 and 1595 were sent to the Mughal court. Camps, Arnulf. 2000. *Studies in Asian Mission History: 1956 - 1998*. Leiden: Brill. Refer to p. 60.

<sup>12</sup> At the Mughal court, the Portuguese missionaries were followed by several European travelers, traders and ambassadors apart from common men. Accounts of such people help us to understand Mughal India from a Euro-centric perspective.

features of broad forehead, sharp nose tip, prominent chin, thin lips and lean facial structure. As gifts, numerous artifacts of such kind must have reached the Mughal court and became reference source for the Mughal artists.<sup>13</sup>

### I. The European Gifts and the Changing Iconography

In 1579, when Akbar sent an envoy to the Portuguese authorities in Goa, he did not have an extensive idea about the new culture. From records we do come to know that Babur and Humayun did have contact with the Europeans and received gifts, but the extent of their interaction is not widely documented.<sup>14</sup> It was primarily his curious nature which expressed a desire to explore the culture of the new coastal settlers. For Akbar, it was not only an issue of political significance but also a scope to gain intellectual insights about the Christian world. In 1580 A.D. when the first European mission reached Fatehpur Sikri, the ideas of Christianity arrived with them. It is to be remembered that this team of Portuguese delegates consisted of religious men who were seeking an opportunity of propagation. The first gifts included Abraham Ortelius's atlas of the world (*Theatrum Orbis Terrarum*-1570 A.D.), followed by a set of seven sumptuous folio volumes of Christopher Plantin's *Royal Polyglot Bible*.<sup>15</sup> The work was printed in Antwerp in 1569-73 A.D. for King Philip, and was completed in eight volumes. It contained frontispiece and illustrations by Jan Wierix, Philip Galle, Peter Van der Hayden, Geeraert van Kampen and many other northern renaissance artists. Gradually images of Madonna and Christ were unveiled and introduced to the Emperor. By 1595 the amount of the collected books and souvenirs were plenty. It was recorded by Father Jerome Xavier who headed the third Jesuit Mission to the court, that there was a volume of 20 Christian books available at the royal library.<sup>16</sup> Judging from the maritime trading documents of Mughal India it can be seen that the Europeans were engaged in export of lavish goods and there was a steady demand for European imageries at the Mughal court. Such goods were mostly afforded by noble classes.<sup>17</sup> There is no doubt that such exchanges encouraged

<sup>13</sup> Fig.1. - Head of Mother Mary, Ivory Carving from Goa, early 17<sup>th</sup> c. Ashmolean Museum, Oxford. Bequeathed by Major Thomas Bouch, 1963. Accession No. EA. 1963.180.

[http://jameelcentre.ashmolean.org/media/collection/w800/Collections/Single\\_Objects/EA/EA\\_1963/EA\\_1963\\_0000/EA\\_1963\\_181-a-L.jpg](http://jameelcentre.ashmolean.org/media/collection/w800/Collections/Single_Objects/EA/EA_1963/EA_1963_0000/EA_1963_181-a-L.jpg)

<sup>14</sup> It should be mentioned here that from the accounts of Diogo do Couto, one comes to know that Humayun possessed several European articles including a Book of Hours. It is also surprising to note that the emperor was familiar with several western icons and narratives. See Subrahmanyam, Sanjay. "A ROOMFUL OF MIRRORS: The Artful Embrace of Mughals and Franks, 1550–1700." *Ars Orientalis* 39 (2010): 39-83. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/23075923>

<sup>15</sup> Bailey, Gauvin Alexander. 2001. *Art on the Jesuit Missions in Asia and Latin America, 1542-1773*. Toronto: University of Toronto Press. Refer to p.116. Koch, Ebba. 2019. "Being like Jesus and Mary: The Jesuits, the Polyglot Bible and Other Antwerp Print Works at the Mughal Court." In *Transcultural Imaginations of the Sacred*, edited by Kern, Margit and Klaus Krüger. 197-230. Berlin: Wilhelm Fink Verlag.

<sup>16</sup> Ibid.12, pp. 63

<sup>17</sup> Principle nobles like Mahabat Khan, Asaf Khan, Khan-i-Azam, Muqarrab Khan and Mir Jamal-

and inspired the Mughal artists greatly. The Christian religious motifs and symbolism transformed the language of the artistic production.

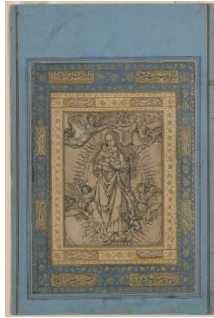


Figure 2 illustrates a Mughal copy of “Apotheosis of Virgin” after a European original by Martin Schongauer.<sup>18</sup> The artists at the court were fascinated by the realism of western image sources.<sup>19</sup> They tried to imitate the three-dimensional character of the figures, without caring much for the changes in iconographic meaning. (Goetz 1957) In this figure, “The Apotheosis of Virgin” was painted after the engraving by Martin Schongauer. One can easily notice that the artist had no prior knowledge of such mediums of execution, such as wood cut, wood engraving, engraving and etching. The linear qualities of the images were transferred in the painting process. The images were either executed as a grisaille work or were directly painted over the original. The figure in discussion shows the Madonna and child standing in the center. Four European angelic figures are seen surrounding the central figure. One can also see that the Mughal artist does not fail to imitate the heavy drapery folds from the European prints. Scholarship on Mughal history records the tolerant religious policies during Akbar’s regime. Thus the new court ambiance was more receptive of non- Mughal cultures. The Emperor indulged himself in

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ud-din Inju ordered for western images as the records of the Jesuit and English factors reveal. During Jahangir’s time the demand for battle scenes, comic scenes and nude studies steadily grew. Pelsaert, Francisco 1972. *Jahangir’s India : the Remonstrantie*, trans. by W.H. Moreland & P.Geyl. Delhi: Idarah-i Adabiyāt-i Delli. Refer to pp.26-27. Malekandathil, Pius. 2013. “Akbar, the Portuguese and the Politics of Religious Dialogue.” In *The Mughals, the Portuguese and the Indian Ocean: Changing Imageries of Maritime India*, 13–38. New Delhi: Primus Books.

<sup>18</sup> Fig. 2. - Apotheosis of Virgin after Martin Schongauer, Ink, Opaque Watercolour and Gold on Paper, 12.9 cm x 9.4 cm, 1600 A.D. Freer Gallery of Art and Arthur M. Sackler Gallery. Accession Number S1990.57.

<http://www.asia.si.edu/collections/zoomObject.cfm?ObjectId=23931>

<sup>19</sup> Artists like Govardhan, Dasawanth, Manohar, Kesu Das and Abul Hasan among others were highly fascinated by the European idiom. This fascination paved way to an ‘aesthetic hybridity’ in Mughal art. Recently Valerie Gonzales has critically challenged the notion of hybridity in Mughal art from a broader perspective. Gonzalez, Valerie & Jones, Professor Ann Rosalind & Singh, Professor Jyotsna & Suzuki, Mihoko 2016. *Aesthetic Hybridity in Mughal Painting, 1526-1658*. 65-119. London: Routledge

matrimonial alliances with Hindu kingdoms and employed more Hindu noblemen than ever before. Naturally the atelier itself experienced a major intake of Hindu artists. Later Akbar appointed Jerome Xavier- the Portuguese priest painter who headed the third mission. There was also a Portuguese painter who worked in his atelier for a short span. (*Ibid.* 7) Speaking about the painters, their job was primarily to address the courtly affairs as directed by the patron. In such cases of factual events the intervention or interpretation gets reduced to the nominal. The copies made in the Mughal atelier can be read/examined from diverse perspectives. The copies were made not at the wish of the artist rather at the wish of the patron. Older scholarship opines that every work produced at the atelier had the approval of the patron. However contemporary scholars like Natif reject the idea of weekly monitoring.<sup>20</sup> The early images were copied from the European sources at the court and later the same sources along with the copies became a reference point for future drawings by court artists. At times, the act of painting over the European imageries helped Mughal artists to understand the volume and distance. (Losty 2012: 119) Akbar having converted to Din-i-Ilahi became much tolerant to other faiths. Badauni and Abul Fazl mentioned – that there was a certain preference for the Jesuits in Akbar’s court. Abul Fazl further emphasized that Akbar liked the “Nazarene Sages”. (Beveridge 1907: 68) Jahangir on the other hand also played the role of a curious patron all through his life. His religious policies were not hostile towards Christianity. Alike Akbar, Jahangir too was respectful towards the missionaries and the “*Firangis*”.<sup>21</sup> The tolerant policies of Jahangir had different dynamics. Jahangir, being a proud monarch, probably did not wish to bring down his own status before any religious power more than that matter. Such confirmation comes from Sir Thomas Roe’s account of Jahangir who himself was privileged to witness courtly happenings from a close quarter. Sir Thomas Roe came in 1615 as the first official ambassador to India from the English court of James I. Roe wrote – “*His religione is of his own invention; for hee envyes Mahommeth, and wisely sees noe reason why hee should not bee as great a prophett as hee, and therefore proffesseth him selfe soe. hee hath found many disciples that flatter or follow him.*” Roe further added- “*all sorts of religions are welcome and free, for the King is of none*”..... (Foster 1926)

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<sup>20</sup> Court historians record that each week the superintendents and clerks use to submit and showcase the works done by each artist. This weekly affair determined the honors and increase in monthly allowances. *Ibid.* 5. Pal. pp. 176. Abū al-Faḍl ibn Muḥarrak & Eighteenth Century Collections (ECCO) (1800). Ayeen Akbery; or, the institutes of the Emperour Akber: Translated from the original Persian by Francis Gladwin. printed by G. Auld, for J. Sewell; Vernor and Hood; J. Cuthell; J. Walker; Otridge and Son [and 4 others in London], London

<sup>21</sup> *Firangi* term which refers to people of European (*farang*) origin at large, especially of the Caucasian race. They were also used for people from non-European Christian nations as well as for Jews and even Muslims migrants serving Christian masters. The term was also used to demarcate natives from non-natives. Harris, Jonathan Gill. 2015. *The First Firangis: Remarkable Stories of Heroes, Healers, Charlatans, Courtesans & other Foreigners who became Indian*. New Delhi: Aleph Book Company. Refer to pp. 18

William Hawkins, another English ambassador also left views about Jahangir's tolerant religious policies. (Fischer 2007) One chronicle also records the disgust expressed by Jahangir towards his own faith for not permitting him to eat pork and drink wine. (Manucci & Irvine 1907: 158) Jahangir much like his father allowed the Jesuits to convert and preach within his territory. The painterly activities under his patronization assimilated more and more European elements than ever before.<sup>22</sup> It is recorded that Jahangir's interest in European imagery started much before he took the throne. It was a matter of pride to possess much European gifts and pictures in his collection. He constantly borrowed copied European imagery from Akbar's atelier. During Shahjahan's reign the foreign and religious policies changed to a great extent, which changed the political dialogues at the court. (Saxena 1958: 293-294) We come across a new pictorial idiom where portrayals of Madonna do not enjoy the former attention. Shahjahan's political relationship with Catholic Portuguese is also to be taken into consideration which played a crucial role in his commissions.<sup>23</sup>

## II. Locating the Transformed – Changes in Iconography

In imperial Mughal court, the image of Virgin Mary received more attention than the crucified image of Jesus. (Weis 2008: 109-18) The holy Quran speaks of Jesus and his disciples but does not mention their names instead it refers to them as 'helpers to the work of God'. Islamic exegesis and Quranic commentary however names them and include Matthew amongst the disciples. Islamic exegesis identifies the disciples as Peter, Andrew, Matthew, Thomas, Philip, John, James, Bartholomew and Simon. It also informs us that Matthew and Andrew were the two disciples who went to Ethiopia to preach the message of God. (Noegel and Wheeler 2002) Mary as mother of Jesus also finds her mention in Quran. The narration of several events pertaining to Jesus/Mary alters in texts like Holy Bible and Holy Quran. The version of these stories has to be reviewed in order to examine the artistic production and the religious influences of the artist within the Mughal atelier. The iconographic schema for portraying Mary changes at times. Often images portray Mary in Mughal interiors or landscapes, where a certain degree or attempt of Mughalization occurs.

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<sup>22</sup> See Hopper, Clair. 2019. "Jahangir, Collector: Seizing the World." *Rice Historical Review* IV (Spring): 41–56. <https://doi.org/10.25611/7aq2-sj73>. Flores, Jorge. 2015. *The Mughal Padshah: A Jesuit Treatise on Emperor Jahangir's Court and Household*. Edited by Jeroen Duindam. Leiden: Brill.

<sup>23</sup> Shahjahan had a personal grudge against the Portuguese. Before his ascension to throne, he was serving at Bengal for a short span where he was refused help by the Portuguese to plot against his father. Gascoigne, Bamber. 1987. *The Great Moghuls*. London: Jonathan Cape pp. 200. Manrique, Sebastião & Luard, Charles Eckford .1927. *Travels of Fray Sebastian Manrique, 1629-1643* : a translation of the Itinerario de las misiones orientales. London: Hakluyt Society. Refer to pp.323-33





Figure No. 3 illustrates a non-biblical theme.<sup>24</sup> Here the central figure of Mother and child can be identified as Virgin Mary and infant Christ. They are seen standing against a Mughal landscape along with a Jesuit priest and a Mughal attendant. The only association of Virgin Mary is her distinct attire. Drawing inspiration from other visuals, the Virgin is painted with a much lighter palette. Her skin tone reminds the viewers of her foreign origin. The priest here is also seen in his traditional blue robe, wearing a Portuguese hat and holding the holy book. These are the few basic iconographic traits which the Mughal artists employed repeatedly to highlight the ‘otherness’. The third figure in the frame is that of a lady attendant, painted with a darker palette. By the posture of the figure, one can assume that probably the figure is not painted from a European image source rather influences of Indian manuscript painting is quite visible. The figure resembles the early Mughal miniature figures where artists struggled to represent human figures in profile.

Again in the process of copying European imageries, often Christian symbols were absorbed directly from material sources without any particular intension. The idea was to come up with a reproduction of the source image where artists often changed the original composition by introducing images from other sources that caught their fancy. Thus, often zoomorphic symbols of Madonna were included in the images. Christian iconography suggests the symbol of cat as “*gatta della Madonna*” which often appears in Mughal Madonna images. (Ferguson 1959: 14) There is a mention of a cat which gave birth to a litter of kittens in the same stable where Christ was born. Thus, in several scenes related to the event of nativity, we can locate Mary in her symbolic form.

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<sup>24</sup> Fig. 3. - Virgin Mary and Child with Christian Priest and Attendant, 1610 A.D., Opaque Watercolour on Paper, British Museum. Museum No: 1961, 1215,0.1.

[http://www.britishmuseum.org/research/collection\\_online/collection\\_object\\_details/collection\\_image\\_gallery.aspx?assetId=262698&objectId=231480&partId=1](http://www.britishmuseum.org/research/collection_online/collection_object_details/collection_image_gallery.aspx?assetId=262698&objectId=231480&partId=1)

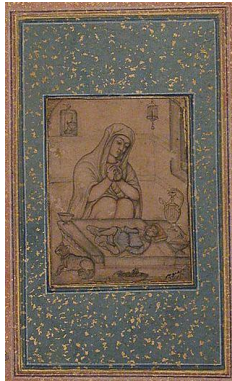


Figure No. 4 shows a grisaille work of Madonna and child by Manohar.<sup>25</sup> Here the artist assimilated few motifs from the European sources. Again, the Madonna can be seen represented in her typical attire, her hands clasped in adoration and in admiration of infant Christ lying on the floor. The cat is probably copied from a different source but it gives the impression of a domestic interior. However, the zoomorphic ewer or the hanging candle lantern were not copied from any source, rather they were improvisations done by the artist.<sup>26</sup>



<sup>25</sup> Fig 4. - Madonna and Child in Domestic Interior, painted by Manohar, Black and colored ink and gold on paper, early 17<sup>th</sup> c., Metropolitan Museum of Art, Rogers Fund 1970. Accession No: 1970.217.

<http://www.metmuseum.org/collection/the-collection-online/search/452104>

<sup>26</sup> See curators comment at the MET website.

<https://www.metmuseum.org/art/collection/search/452104>

Figure no 5 shows “Mother and Child with White Cat”, probably painted either by Manohar or Basawan after a European original.<sup>27</sup> Although the artist copied the images of Madonna and Child, he had incorporated Mughal elements like the Persian rug, ewer and a figure of a goat in the distance. Here the architecture depicted is of European order, but to culturally appropriate the image, the artist includes all such Mughal props. Here again the motif of the cat was copied, probably to give a feel of a domestic interior.

The initial act of copying European images can be read a playful exercise as most of the painters were unaware of the religious iconographic significance. Later the act of copying or painting became a conscious activity as by then artists were acquainted with the prominent iconographic features.<sup>28</sup> Akbar and Jahangir in particular were curious about the iconography and wanted their painters to copy in exactness. They also use to ask ambassadors and priests to explain the content. Jahangir in particular selected engravings from the albums of the Jesuits in order to commission his painters for color reproductions, enlarged wall paintings etc. (Carvalho and Thackston 2012: 52) He even went one step ahead of Akbar and had sent his painters to Jesuit chapels to consult the fathers and to strictly adhere to the prescribed colors and iconography.<sup>29</sup> The activities within the city premises such as Jesuit theatres also played a vital role in communicating the ideas of Christianity and even helped artists to great extent. (*Ibid.* 8) The portrait of Virgin Mary being copied in any Islamic tradition was not entirely a new phenomenon. We come across instances from 16<sup>th</sup> century Middle Eastern Islamic courts where the Quranic versions of Jesus and Mary’s life had been depicted.<sup>30</sup> Within Persian tradition we find ample evidence where Persian poets such as Nizami, Jalal al din Rumi and Sadi included biblical stories about Jesus and Mary. (Ukāshah 1981: 65) The Jesuits as well as European ambassadors at the Mughal court became an important source of knowledge and information for Akbar and later Jahangir. There were Christian books within “*Kitab Khana*” or royal library and Father Jerome Xavier engaged in translating major Christian works into Persian within the Mughal court. His principle translation works include- “*Mir-atu l quds ya ni dastan I hazrat –I isa*” (The mirror of the holiness: Life of the Lord Jesus), “*Aina-yi-haqq-numa*” (The Truth showing Mirror), “*Dastan- i- ahwal –i-*

<sup>27</sup> Fig 5. - Mother and Child with White Cat, Folio from Jahangir Album, attributed to Manohar or Basawan, Opaque Watercolour and Gold on Paper, c. 1598 A.D. San Diego Museum of Art, Edwin Binny 3<sup>rd</sup> Collection. Accession No: 1990.293.

<http://www.sdmart.org/collections/Asia/item/1990.293>

<sup>28</sup> Milo C. Beach has opined that in many cases Mughal painters misinterpreted the subject matter as they were unable to read the text. They were fascinated only by the formal elements. Beach, Milo Cleveland. 1965. “Gulshan Album/Its European Album Sources.” *Bulletin (Museum of Fine Arts, Boston)* 63 (332): 63–91.

<sup>29</sup> *Ibid.* 12. pp. 65 (letter of 24<sup>th</sup> September, 1608 A.D.)

<sup>30</sup> In *Zubdat-al-Tawarikh* (Cream of Histories) by Seyyid Lokman Ashuri, produced in 16<sup>th</sup> c Turkey and dedicated to Sultan Murad III in 1583, we find illustrations of several events from the old testament, commonly shared by both Islamic and Christian narratives. One of the major illustrations show ascension of Christ apart from images of Joseph, Abraham, the seven sleepers and other characters. Lewis, Bernard. 2001. *The Muslim Discovery of Europe*. London: WW Norton & Company. Refer to pp. 243

*hawariyan –i-isa wa zikr –i- manaqib –i- Ishan*” (History of the Vicissitudes of the Apostles of the Lord Jesus and Commemoration of their Virtues), “*Zabar*” (The Psalms of David), “*Bayan-i- Iman-i- Isawiyān*” (Explanation of the Faith of the Christians) and the Gospels. Here in ‘*Dastan-i-ahwal....-i-Ishan*’ the motive was shown that how peacefully Christianity was spread by the apostles and their followers. “*Bayan-i-Iman-i-Isawiyān*” however gives a comprehensive explanation about the creed. Father Jerome Xavier also wrote ample volumes of original text including books on philosophy and literature.<sup>31</sup> These books also provided useful information about Christianity and European culture.

### III. Examining the Christian world in Mughal India

The compositional changes of the Christian imagery in imperial Mughal India should also be studied in terms of religious conflict. But again such assumption seems problematic because Mughal painting was not at all a homogeneous, linear activity. There is no doubt that Islam acknowledges Christianity without its prophet. Both share narratives of the Abrahamic religion. The memory of the crusade must have been alive in both the minds. If we only examine Mughal paintings from the Islamic point of view then our argument will be biased as Mughal atelier was comprised mostly of Hindu artists. The Hindu-Christian conflict does secure its place in history but the connection in the present context is pretty distant.<sup>32</sup> The early conquests of Afonso de Albuquerque (Pearson 2008: 71) in Cochin, Goa and other coastal areas and subsequent tyranny do not really tally with the Mughal situation. In order to argue further we can again delve into the sectarian divisions of Christianity in Mughal India. English, Dutch, French & Danish people soon arrived on Indian shores following the Portuguese. Although the Portuguese were primarily Catholics, but the other European settlers were mostly believers of Protestantism. For Protestants, the icon of the prophet was not important for veneration, so they themselves took part in iconoclasm. (Viladesau 2008)

The Portuguese Catholics were influential at the Mughal court, at least during Akbar’s reign. But soon their own political activities as well as the arrival of English power waned out their political ties with the Mughals. The English ambassadors and merchants at the court constantly attempted to malign the image of the Portuguese in order to secure their place at the court. During Jahangir’s reign, the capture of Maryam-Uz-Zamani’s<sup>33</sup> ship *Rahimi* in 1613 A.D. created much tension in Mughal-Portuguese

<sup>31</sup> Ibid. 15. pp. 35-45

<sup>32</sup> See Axelrod, Paul, and Michelle A. Fuerch. 1996. “Flight of the Deities: Hindu Resistance in Portuguese Goa.” *Modern Asian Studies* 30 (2): 387–421. <https://doi.org/10.1017/s0026749x00016516>. Xavier, Ângela Barreto. 2007. “Disquiet on the island: Conversion, Conflicts and Conformity in Sixteenth-Century Goa.” *The Indian Economic & Social History Review* 44(3): 269-295. <https://doi.org/10.1177%2F001946460704400301>.

<sup>33</sup> Maryam Uz Zamani or Maryam of Eternity was a title conferred to Jahangir’s mother. She was the daughter of Raja Bihari Mall Kacchwaha of Amber, whom Akbar married in 1562 A. D. to

relationship.<sup>34</sup> The English slowly gained favors at the Mughal court by supplying specific gifts demanded by the courtiers and nobles. (Hashmi 2001) It is to be mentioned here that the very nature of the gift changed as the English primarily brought images produced from their own territory. The constant act of referring to European prints absorbed the European pictorial elements but failed to completely assimilate the devotional ideas. The categorization of events and themes brings forth several intensions of patron and the artist. The initial references of Mughal artists were largely produced in Northern Europe which by mid 16<sup>th</sup> century became the primary seat of the Protestants. The influence of such imageries is to be scrutinized in context of Mughal Madonnas. The very nature of religious imagery had changed within Europe by this time, (Nash 2008: 11-38 & 71-86) and somehow the promoters of western art in Mughal India were quite informed about the religious role of these objects in their own society.

#### IV. Madonna as a representation of Woman: Questions of Legitimacy

The portrayal of Madonna at times can be viewed as an extension of the popular image of white women. The portrait of Madonna at many junctures identifies her as a white woman. Portraits of European women or portrayal of white women in Mughal India draws much attention. The social status of Indian women was much more confined within the harems. The condition of Muslim women did not differ much from the Hindu counterparts in terms of social disapproval of female autonomy. Muslim women in Mughal harems enjoyed an economically stable life.<sup>35</sup> The “*purdah*”<sup>36</sup> and its social restrictions, however, presented Muslim women with additional challenge of overcoming subordination within family, community and society. The presence of royal women in public life is much overshadowed in history. Although we come across accounts of Salima Sultan Begum, Ruqaiya Sultan Begum, Nur Jahan, Mumtaz Mahal, Chand Bibi, Jahanara, Raushanara, Zeb-un-nissa and many other who played an important part in the courtly affair.<sup>37</sup> Within the Muslim community at least ‘*purdah*’ played a very important role. It was to maintain the privacy as well as respectability among the women class. But such idea of respectability was not always applicable to the non-elite mass. (Mishra 1967: 77) However the representation of women is quite frequent in Mughal painting but when

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create political alliance. Tod, James and William Crooke. 1914. *Annals and Antiquities of Rajasthan or The Central and Western Rajput States of India* Vol.2. London: Oxford University Press. pp. 27

<sup>34</sup> The Portuguese church at Agra was closed down and all allowances to Portuguese priests were stopped. Mughals also seized the port of Daman. Findly, Ellison Banks. 1998. “The Capture of Maryam-Uz-Zamani’s Ship: Mughal Women and European Traders.” *Journal of American Oriental Society* 108 (2): 227-38 <https://doi.org/10.2307/603650>

<sup>35</sup> Chopra, Pran nath. 1975. *Life and Letters under The Mughals*. New Delhi: Ashajanak Publications. pp.119-120. Sharma, Karuna. 2009. “A Visit to the Mughal Harem: Lives of Royal Women.” *South Asia: Journal of South Asian Studies*. 32(2): 155-169. <https://doi.org/10.1080/00856400903049457>.

<sup>36</sup> *Purdah* is the Urdu word for veil used by Muslim womenfolk.

<sup>37</sup> For detailed discussion refer to Mukhooty, Ira. 2018. *Daughters of the Sun: Empresses, Queens and Begums of Mughal Empire*. New Delhi: Aleph Book Company

it came to the European body then it became a vehicle for communicating many other ideas. The image of Madonna essentially lured the imagination of patron and artist alike because it was an image of a common mother and child. The emperors often wanted to compare their mothers with Madonna. (Madhok 2010: 67-78) Even on the contrary, history records that when Portuguese people confronted an image of Hindu Goddess Durga, they had mistaken it to be an image of Madonna. (Irwin 1955: 386-390) Portrayal of nude native woman is quite rare in the early Mughal genre. Although we do come across portrayal of nudes in contemporary paintings from Safavid Iran from which the Mughal painters borrowed a great deal. (Babaie 2009: 105–36) The representation of nude woman in early Mughal painting traces its source to European imagery in circulation. In such cases we do not see an attempt on the artist's part, to portray it as a Mughal figure. The courtly scenes or harem scenes do show Mughal women in conversation or engaged in mundane activities assuming the roles of mother, lover, attendant or woman of historic importance- but hardly have we come across such semi-nude representation of them. With the arrival of European prints and images- the image of the female nude was circulated in abundance. The European and Mughal conceptions surrounding nude representation were different. The former often champions it as a natural state of being depicting beauty of the human form.<sup>38</sup> Female nudity is often associated with the idea of purity and feminine while in other cultural context it is commonly associated with notion of shame and amorality. Probably it was easier for the Mughal artist to portray Madonna breastfeeding child Christ, as for them the very identity of the Virgin was associated and credited to foreign sources.<sup>39</sup>



Figure no 6 shows another image of Madonna and Child by celebrated Mughal artist Manohar, who himself was extremely fascinated with European prints and especially with

<sup>38</sup> Several states of nudity are symbolized in Christian art. Such as *Nuditas Naturalis*, *Nuditas Temporalis* and *Nuditas Criminalis*. Ibid. 36.pp .49

<sup>39</sup> Although the Mughal artists borrowed this scheme from the European prints but sixteen century Islamic manuscripts of *Qisas al-Anbia (Stories of Prophets)* and *Falnama (Book of Omens)* do represent figures of Mary nursing his infant. See. Ibid.9. Natif, M. pp-20

that of Madonna and Child.<sup>40</sup>) Here again similar to Figure No 5, the Madonna is represented as a bare breasted white woman feeding the infant Christ. In this image she sits on a European Savonarola chair<sup>41</sup>: the infant Christ being held by her left arm whereas she holds a hand fan in the other. The figure adorns Indian jewelry. In this interesting image, although the identity of the figures represented could be traced back to European image sources at the same time, the formal aspects of the image point out that the artistic intension was to legitimize the nude representation in the Mughal context. It somehow represents the idea of “Fantasy Excursion” (Creighton 1995) were the subject in question gets prone to exploitation of an artist’s fancy.

### Conclusion

Madonna in imperial Mughal court paintings appears mostly as symbolic marker of the European’s faith and in most cases the painter had tried to establish the foreign origin of the character. Christianity as a religious doctrine never received total acceptance from the Mughal court. Mughal artists identified the common chords between Christianity and Islam, but the icon of Madonna always remained as a symbol of the “other” faith. The image of the Madonna essentially represented the projected imagination of a white woman. The images served dual purpose. They became objects of veneration as well as instruments to subvert the authority of Christianity in the Mughal world. The process of acceptance of the ‘other’s’ doctrine multiplied the chances of politically subjugating the religion as it started functioning in a legitimized private domain. It can be argued that by doing so, Islam played the role of a superior patron. Christianity in Mughal India represented Europe and Europeans were seen as torch bearers of Christianity. Thus any image of such religious nature directly or indirectly pointed out the presence of the “white” race. The non familiar imagery became prone to exploitation thus functioned as an easy tool to pictorially legitimize certain restricted behavior. The bare breasted representations of Madonna probably gave the patrons some liberty to gaze at a legitimized image, where issues of Islamic morality were not prominent. There were also constant attempts to appropriate the image of Mary, by representing her in Mughal domestic milieu. This process of internalization helped the Madonna image as well as Christianity to leave an indelible mark on the Mughal society. The image of the Madonna established itself as a universal symbol of motherly compassion. The painters altered and experimented with the icon of Madonna in several ways, often negating its religious

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<sup>40</sup> Fig. 6. - Madonna and Child, Attributable to Manohar, India, Mughal, Circa 1580. Ink and opaque watercolor on paper, 38 x 24cm, Sotheby’s Auction House. The Stuart Cary Welch Collection: Art of the Islamic World. 6 April 2011. Lot no. 89.

<http://www.sothebys.com/it/auctions/ecatalogue/2011/c-welch-part-ii-111227/lot.89.html>

<sup>41</sup> The Savonarola chair is an X-shaped armchair which originated in medieval Italy. Later the design became popular in other parts of Renaissance Europe. Cimino, Rosa Mario. 1987. “The “Savonarola” Chair in Mughal Miniatures.” In *A Mirror of Princes: The Mughals and the Medici*, Vol.39. edited by Dalu Jones. 97-106. Bombay: Marg. Also refer to <https://www.metmuseum.org/art/collection/search/471206>

significance. It can be argued that the portrayal of Madonna in imperial Mughal paintings does record tendencies of Occidentalism at play.

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