



Depiction of a Ramayana scene, Mughal Miniature Painting, Ink and Gouache, circa. (1780-90), Lahore, Pakistan.

This beautifully illustrated manuscript folios show the late Mughal miniature style that flourished in the post-Mughal courts of North India (Lahore- in present-day Pakistan), in the late 18th century (1780-90). Executed on paper in ink and gouache, it includes delicate double-ruled borders and Persian text in elegant nasta'liq script, reflecting the fusion of Persian literary refinement with Indian mythological themes. The inclusion of Hindu epic imagery within a Persian manuscript format suggests that it comes from a Persian translation of the Ramayana, as with the manuscripts of the Razmnāma commissioned under the patronage of Emperor Akbar. The art is balanced between text and image, a hallmark of Persian manuscript design, but the bright flat colour fields, stylised foliage, and patterned garments point toward those characteristics more commonly associated with Rajput and Mughal miniature painting style conventions. Figures, with their elongated eyes, sharp profiles, and decorative stylisation, are thoroughly Indian in aesthetic tone but are integrated into a sophisticated formal structure typical of Persian art.

The central miniature represents a scene from the Bāla Kāṇḍa, the first book of the Ramayana, which narrates the birth and youth of Rama. The two anthropomorphic monkey figures, Vanaras such as Hanuman and Sugriva-are shown in animated conversation within a lush garden; their tails and expressive gestures emphasise divine vitality and devotion. The garden setting evokes the Vanara kingdom of Kishkindha, a symbolic realm of virtue and loyalty in the epic. Dressed in courtly attire resembling Mughal costume, these figures reveal the cross-cultural adaptation of Hindu mythology for a Persianate audience. Such visual reinterpretations of sacred Hindu narratives within Persian manuscripts exemplify the syncretic spirit of Mughal art, where artists and scholars of diverse faiths collaborated to blend Sanskrit epics with Islamic

aesthetics. Through its compositional harmony, vivid palette, and intercultural iconography, this folio becomes more than an illustration-it stands as a testament to the hybrid visual and

intellectual culture of early modern India, where art served as a bridge between religious traditions and royal patronage.

The influence of Emperor Akbar's religious tolerance and patronage of the arts on the development of Mughal miniature painting is widely recognised. The translation of the Hindu epics, the Mahabharata and the Ramayana, during Akbar's reign gave rise to Mughal miniature painting. This excellent, refined school amalgamated Indian themes with the rich tradition of Persian miniature painting.

Mughal emperors ruled India for more than three centuries (1526-1857). As a Muslim dynasty that governed in a land with a majority of non-Muslim population, the Mughals have been admired by the majority of Hindus for their peaceful policy of acceptance and tolerance. An overview of the history of India shows that Mughal rulers relied mainly on a peaceful co-existence approach, with the exception of some periods of difficult interaction with their subjects. Koch states that Mughal leaders were presenting pictures of philosopher-kings or "ultimate leaders" to show their authority and leadership towards their subjects.

The Mughal court of India was not only a centre of political or governmental authority, but also a crossroads of different cultures and faiths and therefore of artistic experiences. Such a tendency was so important during the reign of Akbar (1556-1605). During his long reign, Akbar welcomed people of various faiths and cults and played a key role as a bridge between them. In an exhibition of religious tolerance and cultural inclusivity, both Akbar and Jahangir warmly welcomed the Jesuit Fathers into their personal circles. Not only did they actively support the construction of churches across major Mughal cities, but they also incorporated Christian iconography into the very fabric of their reign. This was seen through the adornment of their palaces, gardens, and tombs, and even in everyday items such as jewellery and royal albums. These featured images of Christ, the Virgin Mary, and a diverse array of Catholic saints reveal a profound respect for and fascination with Christian religious traditions.

Akbar's attempt to promote the translation of Hindu sacred texts into Persian was consistent with his syncretism, which culminated in the establishment of his new religious concept of Din-I Ilahi.

The wide access to Hindu texts had touched the Mughal court on a personal level. It is said that Hamida Banu, Akbar's mother, saw herself as an embodiment of Sita in her loyalty to her husband Humayun; she never left Humayun's side during his exile in Iran. Akbar himself may have seen himself as Rama, the symbol of an ideal ruler. In this sense, the translation of the Ramayana was, in Abu al-Fazl's view, more of an advisor to the king than a purely religious text. The production of Hindu sacred texts at the Mughal court was a new challenge for the painters, who had previously dealt mainly with Persian literature and animal fables; the

problem was solved by hiring Hindu artists who were familiar with the concept. The copies of the Razmnama and the Ramayana produced at the Mughal court in the 1580s and 1590s were new and unconventional, incorporating imagery not seen before. The production of

manuscripts in the Mughal studios was largely a team effort, with several artists working on a single piece. Some were masters at drawing faces, others at drawing other parts of the scene, and still others were responsible for colouring. This tendency clearly makes it difficult to identify the artists' hands in unsigned works.

Among the qualities that distinguish Mughal painting from its Persian roots is the gradual departure from the somewhat cluttered and highly ornamented scenes seen in Persian miniature painting. This different approach to pictorial space becomes clear when comparing the illustrations of the two versions of the Ramayana produced during Akbar's time - the manuscripts of Akbar and Abd al-Rahim. Akbar's Ramayana features crowded and ornamented compositions that are very similar to Persian paintings, while Abd al-Rahim's copy shows rather empty spaces and less ornamented compositions that are very similar to Indian conventions. An overall formalistic assessment of the illustrations of Akbar's Ramayana shows the dominance of Persian conventions of idealised and abstract scenes with echoes of Indian realist standards. Among the subjects chosen for illustration, battle scenes are prominent, and this approach contrasts with the native copies, on which authentic religious scenes are more common.¹

Indian art and thought have been overwhelmingly influenced by the Ramayana; its impact can be felt in the whole of South East Asia. Ramayana is still very popular and has been translated into all the major Indian languages. Before the advent of printing technology, it was handwritten. Various media (paper, cloth, bark, palm leaf) were also illustrated. The illustrated copies of Ramayana have become a prized possession of collectors. A substantial number of these are in the libraries and museums abroad. The paintings in these manuscripts throw light on the development of various schools in India. Although the art of miniature painting is centuries old, the art reached new heights during the Mughal period, and after the disintegration of the Mughal empire, it got patronage under small rulers in Himachal, Rajasthan, Bundelkhand, Malwa, Ahmednagar, Golkonda, Tanjore, Orissa, etc. Under the influence of new geographic locations and rulers, it began to develop an idiom of its own, and a respective school of miniature paintings began to develop.²

¹ Mughal Miniature Painting: An Analytical Study of the Akbar's Ramayana, October 2023, Kupas Seni 11(2):53-66, Ramin Hajianfard, City University Malaysia.
https://www.researchgate.net/publication/374467105_Mughal_Minature_Painting_An_Analytical_Study_of_the_Akbar's_Ramayana

² ILLUSTRATED RAMAYANA MANUSCRIPTS (Published in Vihangama 2003 Vol. I (January - February), By Dr. Virendra Bangroo,
https://ignca.gov.in/PDF_data/Illustrated_Ramayana_Manuscripts.pdf

Translation from Persian to English -

Page 1 - folio 1

نوشتم و چند, نام من بود بر تسب چو کردم پوند,

بر می ایز رامالین را از زبان هندی بری زبان فارسی ترجمه ما یز

اگرچه قصه در مرسه را ما با قسام الفاظ و کلام نگاشته بر ازکان انام و سهره خاص و عام

او لیکن چون این را ماین درایام **رام** با انجام رسیده

کوش و **لو** پسران خدا وند بعد انصرام جک این را تمام سرائیده اند و خود شنیده و پسندیده

و برکریزه است بار برآن طبع مهم آن کرایده **رُباعی** امید که مطبوع جهان کرد

داین کساف دفایق کحصان کرد داین تاریخ قدیم است. ذفصل نیروان

سر دفتر تاریخ شهان کرد دان

چون پرمشیان بلاغت و ثار و دیوانیان فصاحت اشعار

عبارت بسه اطوار اشتهار دارد مرخرد مقفی و عاری

درین کتاب ترجمه بلط با لفظ بکار میرفت

نوشتن مقفی مرخصورت نمی گرفت نیایران عبارت عاری اتفاق افتاد

مگر بعضی جا که محل ادای مگی لفظ سنسکرت نمیشد تسوید و وقسم اول رو یداد

باعث یالف نظم درجنین دور بر دغا و فریب. کادمیت شده نمبردم عیب

راستی دور شد از اهل جهان. نیست غیراذ دغالبه بهان

سیر مرد ما

Folio 1: Persian Text Transliteration

1. Neveshtam o chand, nâm-e man bud bar tasb cho kardam pavand
2. Bar mi-eiz Râmâyân râ az zabân-e Hindi bar zabân-e Fârsi tarjume mâ yaz
3. Agarche qesse dar marsa râ mâ bâ qesâm-e alfâz o kalâm negâshte bar azkân-e anâm o sahre khâs o 'âm
4. O lekin chon in râ mâyin dar ayam Râm bâ najâm reside
5. Kosh o lav pesarân-e khodâvand ba'd ensarâm jak in râ tamâm sarâide and o khod shenide va pasandid
6. Va bar kerize ast bâr yerân tab'e mohem ân keraide robâ'i omid ke matbu' jahan kard dâin kasaf defâyeq ke jahân kard
7. dâyin kasâf dafâyeq kehsân kard dâyin târikhe qadîm ast zafasl-e nirvân.
8. Sard-eftar-e târikh-e shahan kard d-ân
9. Chon per mentshian balâghat va sâr va divâniyân fasâhat ash'âr
10. Ebârat be seh atvâr eshtehâr dârad mar-khord maqafi va 'âri
11. Dar in ketâb tarjume balafz ba lafz bekâr mireft
12. Neveshtan-e maqafi mar-khor surat nemigereft nayâiran ebârat-e 'âri etefâq oftad
13. Magar ba'zi jâ ke mahel-e edâ-y maghi lafz Sanskrit nemishod tasvid va vaqsem aval roydâd

14. Bâ'es-e yalf-e nazm dar jennin dour bar daghâ va farib. kâdamiyat shode nambordam 'eib
15. Râsti dour shod az ahl-e jahan. nist ghayer az daghâlbe bahân
16. Sir-e mard-e mâ

Folio 1: Accurate English Translation

1. I wrote, and at times my name appeared in the title as I finished.
2. We translated the Ramayana from Hindi into Persian.
3. Although we expressed the story in various words and phrases, we addressed both the elite and the common people.
4. Yet, as this Ramayana has reached completion these days,
5. The Lord's sons have fully sung its verses, heard them themselves, and approved of them.
6. It has become well-known, and its essential character is established; this quatrain (rubayi) is created with the hope that its form will please the world and that its virtues will last.
7. This work has established purity and virtues. This is ancient history. It comes from the chapter of Nirvan. (Fasl e Nirvan - Rama's return)
8. The cold preface of the history of kings was completed this way.
9. The eloquent, insightful, and poetic Persians, along with skilled court poets, made this their symbol.
10. The expressions appear in three forms; some are in rhyme, while others are in prose without rhyme.
11. In this book, we primarily conducted translation word by word.
12. Writing in rhyme could not always be achieved; plain prose was used except for a few instances—
13. Where we could not convey the meaning of Sanskrit terms otherwise, those occasions were marked in the first section.
14. Composing poetry in such a deceitful and treacherous time rarely happened; I did not list faults.
15. Truthfulness has left the people of the world; nothing remains but deception and common excuses.
16. Such is the nature of our men.

NOTE from the translator - The given folio is the preface of a manuscript, evidently Ramayana, in an illustrious style in Mughal miniature style, with the Indo-Persian style of Nasta'liq script.

The use of the Farsi language is poetic like prose. Although the page starts with the line I wrote, but doesn't mention any name or the name of the kings.

Translation from Persian to English

page 2 - folio 2

چه کمراه است

گرچه فسرح بپر جهان شاه است

راه بر سی زرا اندارم تر بند حرف غیر عصبه و خشم

مردمی نیست جر نمبردم خسم سالک جادهای پروانی

خواجه را مکشن عفسانے

کرد تقلیف تا بونیم من

مغی تا لمیک را ما میں

تا تبکیرند اہل جہاں

خصلت یک از طریق

مہاں

راستی و سخا و نیست خوب

کسب اخلاق خصلت مرغوب

زین سیب کلک را رواں کردم

حالت رم را ما میں

کردم

ہر کہ خواند د عا طمع

دارم

از ایک من بنده کز کارم

اگر ترجمہ راماین

با لمیک کاند اول مسمی

بال كاند

جی سزا ست بهکوان را
و پر را رنده عالم را که
او را جنم نیست و تمام عالم

و جودا و است نر کن
است و کن هستم او است
برز کی نسر است سردار
او لا در کپو را و شا و کشنده دل **کواشلا** را که **رام** است و کشنده
وہ سر پسر دشر تھع کے
چشم او مثل نیلو فر است
من کہ را بض و عالم و را نندہ

کفتار است

Folio 2 - Persian Text Transliteration and Translation

1. che kamrāh ast
How misguided it is.
2. garchi fasrah bīr jahān shāh ast
Although outside, there is a king of the world.
3. rāh bar sī zarā andāramad tar hend harf-e gheyr ‘asbah o khashm
The path to that place is barred; every word outside is nothing but factionalism and anger.
4. mardomī nīst jar namabardam khasm sālik-e jādahā-ye parvānī
There is no humanity except I did not mention the enemy, the traveler of the moth’s path (path of devotion).
5. khāje rā makoshan ‘afsāne
Do not destroy the master with tales/fables.
6. kard taklīf tā bonīyam man
He imposed a duty so that I might exist (or be established).
7. maghī tā lamīk rā mā yīn
*Except as long as we (remain in) this world.
8. tā tabkīrand ahl-e jahān
So that people of the world may weep.

9. kheslat yek az tarīq mahān

Virtue is one of the paths of the great.

10. rāstī o sakhā o nīst khūb

Truthfulness, generosity, and not being attached to material possessions are good.

11. kasb-e akhlāq kheslat-e marghūb

Acquiring good character is a desirable attribute.

12. zin sīb-e kalk rā ravān kardam

From this apple (fruit/pen), I set my pen in motion.

13. hālat-e Ram rā mā yin kardam

I described (made known) the state of Ram here.

14. har keh khānad du‘ā tama‘ dāram

From whoever reads, I expect (desire) a prayer.

15. az yek man bandeh ke az kāram

From me, just a servant, from my act/work,

16. aghār tarjome-ye Rāmāyin

Is (this) humble translation of the Ramayana.

17. bā lāmīk kānd awwal mosammā

With Valmiki, who first gave it its name (authored it).

18. bāl kānd

With (his) pen.

19. ji sazāst Bhakwān rā

Worthy of the Lord (God) is praise

20. va har rā randeh ‘ālam rā keh

And everyone who moves through the world (all created beings),

21. ū rā janam nīst o tamām-e ‘ālam

He has no birth, and all the world

22. vojūd āvast narkon

Is created by Him, not by anyone else,

23. ast o kon hastam ū ast

He is being and existence itself.

24. barz kī nasr ast sardār

Among all, Nasr is a (true) commander/chief.

25. ū lā darkahu rā va shā va koshandeh del-e Kawashlā rā keh Rām ast va koshandeh

He is the one who led the hosts and the slayer of the heart of Kaushala, who is Ram and the destroyer.

26. vah sar pesar-e dashr tah' ke

And that chief, son of Dasharatha, whose

27. chashm ū mesl-e nīlūfar ast

Eyes are like lotuses.

28. man keh rā baz o 'ālam o rānandeh

As for me, who writes and sets this forth for the world,

29. kaftar ast

I am but a pigeon (humble, insignificant)