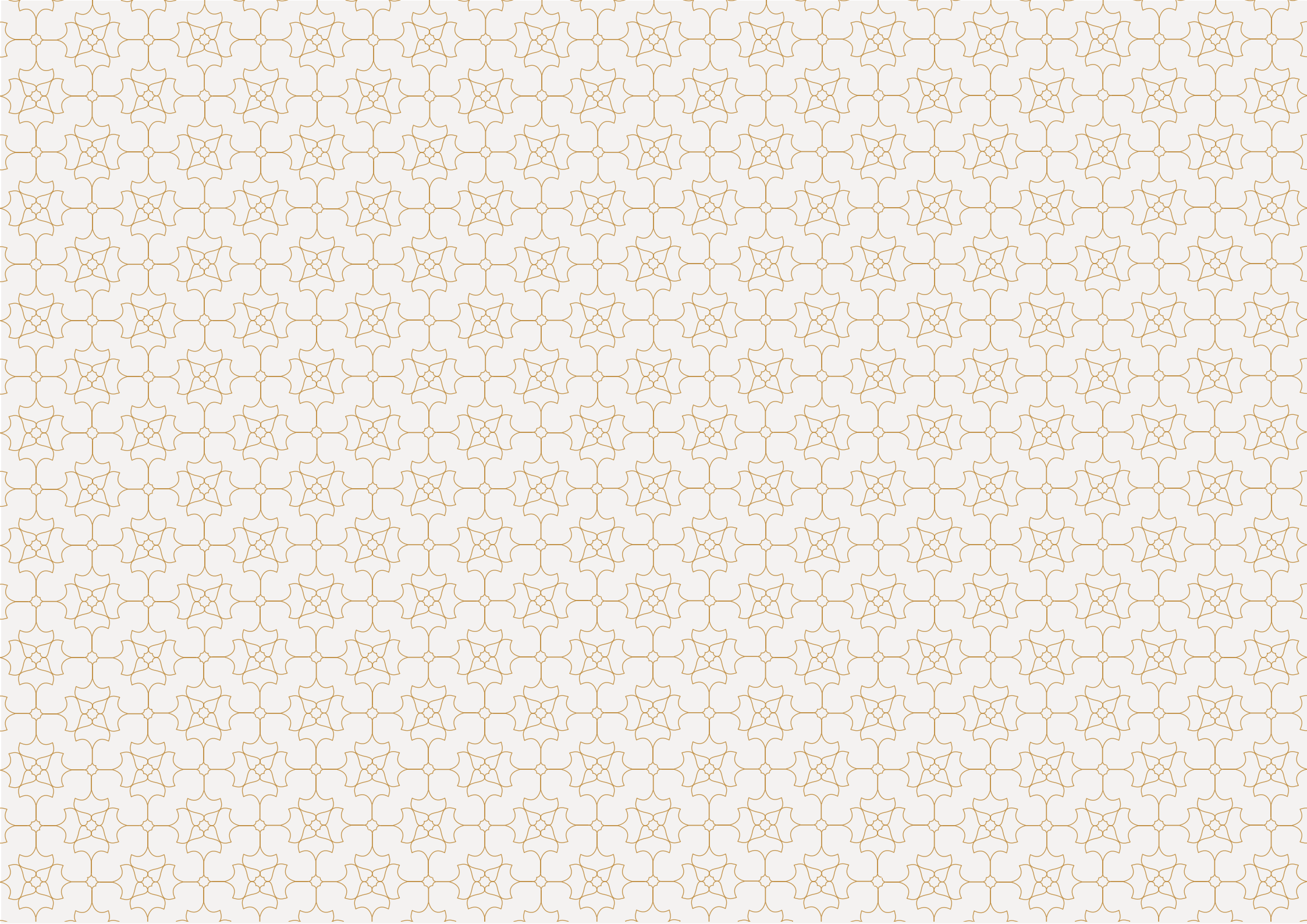




AN UNDERSTANDING OF INDIAN HISTORY:
MUGHAL INDIA



Project III
**An Understanding
of Indian History:
*Mughal India***



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DECLARATION

I declare that this written submission represents my ideas in my own words and where others' ideas or words have been included, I have adequately cited and referenced the original sources. I also declare that I have not misrepresented or fabricated or falsified any idea/date/fact/source in my submission. I understand that any violation of the above will cause a disciplinary action by the Institute and also can evoke penal action from the sources which have not been properly cited or from whom proper permission has not been taken when needed.

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APPROVAL SHEET

The project titled 'An Understanding of Indian History: Mughal India' by Ameya Narvankar, is approved for partial fulfillment of the requirement for the degree of 'Master of Design' in Visual Communication.

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ABSTRACT

History is a vast subject and is often dreaded by both students and adults alike. The aim of this project is to generate a healthy curiosity towards Indian History and make learning a richer and memorable experience.

The project began as an exercise in creating visual aids to facilitate understanding for middle schoolchildren. However, after assessing the subject I realised that my own understanding of history was inadequate and thus began the process of re-learning. In addition to exploring the various reading materials and media resources available on *Mughal History*, I also undertook various activities which made my own learning experience enjoyable and fun.

'The Mughal History Project' - story kit is the outcome of this effort. The resulting story kit is a bundle of my own experiences that aims to make history less intimidating for casual readers through the medium of storytelling and activity.

It explores the A to Z of Mughal Social Life, right from the *Atelier* to the *Zenana*; sharing nuggets of information on the larger-than-life personalities of the Emperor and his wives, their grand and opulent lifestyles, the court politics and not to forget the indelible mark they left on Indian art & architecture, which is reflected in the Miniature Painting style approach of the design.

The following report describes my approach towards re-learning and understanding of Mughal History; and arriving at a design solution that captures my own experiences and present it with the best of my abilities as a visual communicator in a meaningful way to the same.

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Introduction

What is History? An exploration of our past or rather a mere memorization of dates. The school textbooks on Indian history, one could say, focus on the latter rather than on a genuine understanding of India's glorious and eventful past. Long masses of text consisting of facts, names, dates have made learning a tedious, forced task.

Attempts have been made to make the content palatable to the millennial generation but alas it still remains a dull affair. Audio-visual aids have been used in schools and they have definitely helped break the monotony of the routine textbooks. But are there other alternatives out there which can do a better job?

This project aims to explore dynamic and fun learning methods, **using visuals and storytelling, to create a healthy curiosity towards Indian History**, and in turn lead to a greater understanding.

"If history were taught in the form of stories, it would never be forgotten."
- Rudyard Kipling

1. History Education

The fault in our textbooks?

- 1.1. Why do we study history?
- 1.2. School curriculum and its objectives
- 1.3. Textbook-centric learning: Advantages & disadvantages
- 1.4. Review of Class VII History Textbook - SSC & NCERT
- 1.5. A Visit to Kendriya Vidyalaya, IIT Powai

Why do we study history?

Why bother with history? is a question high school students are often riddled with. There is already enough to learn in the world today, so why add to their burden by looking at the past.

The simple answer would be that history is inescapable. It is all around us. It is not just about political events but people, cultures, civilizations, ideas, everything have a history. It is the basis of all Social Sciences in school curriculum. But students tend to see it as another compulsory subject they need to study, so that they can pass the test. This has led to a general lack of interest in the subject.

As I began my work on the subject, I realised that I had a very limited understanding of history. Sure, I would know a few facts and figures but little did I try to find the why and how of it. I would know of the actions of great men and women, but be ignorant about what prompted these actions.

This is much the same situation in schools, where students blitz through the vast syllabus with little to no genuine understanding.

Why does this happen? Is it the fault of the textbooks? or the way it is presented? or does the blame lie on the instructor? To answer these questions, I decided to look at the very purpose of history and what are its objectives.

What is history?

History is the study of man, in space and time. How man evolved from wild life to civilisation is the general theme of history. It traces the evolution, growth and development of man and society as a whole, over different periods.

History education

A knowledge of history is essential for an adult understanding of the world, it is an indispensable subject in the complete education of man. Much of the knowledge is carefully curated for both academic and political reasons, to achieve the following:

- **To promote self-understanding**
It satisfies our need for an identity by telling us who we are and where we stand in respect to society. It is our collective shared memory and helps us connect to our roots.

- **To understand change**
History is a means to understand how our society has evolved over space and time. It covers the numerous happenings which have shaped our present-day society.
- **To inculcate a sense of national pride**
Post-independence, history textbooks have been viewed as nation building tools to develop a patriotic attitude and an appreciation for our rich heritage.
- **To inspire the future generations**
Indian history talks of great men and their achievements in a bid to inspire us.
- **To develop an understanding of the world**
Indian society did not live in isolation. History equips us with the knowledge to communicate with the world better.
- **To promote tolerance**
History can help us develop tolerance and open-mindedness towards those with different faiths, different cultures, different ideas and ideals.

School Curriculum & its objectives

The scope of history learning is enormous; facts and dates about our past are far too numerous for anyone to comprehend them all. Taking this into consideration, the curriculum has been designed in such a way that the quantum of knowledge is bare minimal for the understanding of the subject. The maturity levels and skills of the student at different stages of schooling are also considered.

The division of history has been done according to these three stages of schooling:

- **Primary level (I to V)**
Evolution of Man
- **Middle school (VI to VIII)**
National history
- **High school (IX to X)**
World History

In primary level, History is included within Social Studies and the subject is taught independently from Grade VI. It is at this stage, I believe students start losing interest in the subject with its sudden barrage of names, dates and places.

For my project, I decided to focus on the part of the curriculum which is concerned with our

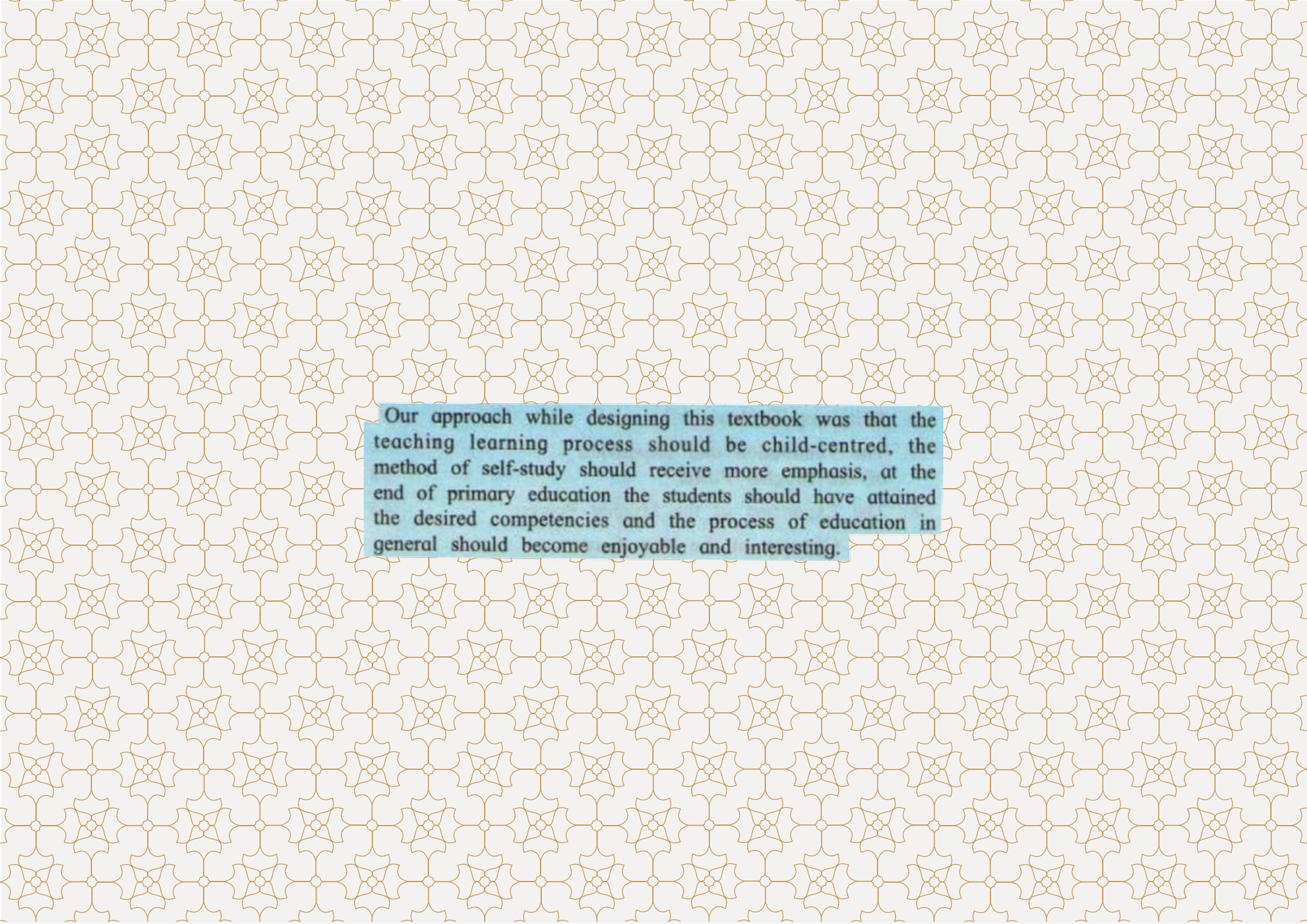
national history. The syllabus covered during these three schooling years is pretty much the same in both state and central board. Each board follows a separate textbook. However, their objectives remain similar.

Objectives

- **Knowledge & Awareness**
The student should acquire knowledge on the people and society in different time periods of Indian history. They should be able to recall and recollect information and facts on the topics they have studied.
- **Understanding ideas**
The personalities that feature in our history textbooks did great things and at times, not so good things. Their actions were shaped by their ideas and beliefs and the political environment during that time. The students should be taught in such a way that they grasp these ideas.
- **Develop Critical Thinking**
The subject should be able to develop critical thinking within the child. They should be able to identify and analyze the events that happened over time. They should be

able to question generally accepted truths and seek evidence on the same.

- **Practical Skills**
The subject should enable the students to gain practical skills in the study and understanding of historical facts. They should be able to read, identify and draw maps, timelines, charts, etc.
- **Social Attitude**
They should be able to develop a healthy social attitude amongst the children based on co-operation, tolerance and mutual respect.
- **Enjoy & appreciate History**
Also importantly, they should be able to capture the attention of the students and create an appreciation for our rich past.



Our approach while designing this textbook was that the teaching learning process should be child-centred, the method of self-study should receive more emphasis, at the end of primary education the students should have attained the desired competencies and the process of education in general should become enjoyable and interesting.

Textbook-centric Learning

Most schools in India rely heavily on the textbooks. A history lesson in class would traditionally involve reciting from the textbook and then writing down answers from the same. Not much has changed. Rote-learning trumps over understanding of history. **However, despite the monotonous presentation of the content, one cannot simply let go of the textbook method.** It has its fair share of advantages and disadvantages.

Advantages

- **Organisation**
The information is designed and presented chronologically providing structure and organisation to a student's learning.
- **A guide for teachers**
The educators too benefit from the structured content. The exercises at the end of every chapter helps teachers plan their lessons.
- **A handy reference**
Textbooks are available for reference and review for both parties, are generally well researched and presented as authoritative and reliable sources of information.

Disadvantages

- **Single perspective**
The textbook is designed as a sole source of information. This rings especially true in case of the Maharashtra State Board textbook. Comparatively, the ICSE & NCERT textbooks push the students towards further self-study by providing links and quoting the original sources.
- **Outdated information**
History is constantly changing. The syllabus has remained stagnant over the last 10 years. Attempts have not been made to update it with newer evidence or to make it relevant to modern narratives.
- **Fact-based exercises**
Every lesson in the textbook is followed by exercises which are predominantly based upon facts. Students fall under the wrong assumption that history is all about facts and figures. There have been attempts to add questions based upon problem solving and creative thinking.

No textbook is perfect or complete. It is up to the instructor or to the parent to encourage

children to do external reading on a particular subject. Supplementary reading enriches the learning experience. Students, particularly, would not be so keen on reading another book, as it would be adding to their burden. Instead, efforts can be made to find other alternatives, perhaps in the form of visual aids like films or games to pique their interest.

Keeping in mind that the goal of my project was to not replace the textbooks but find a way to complement the existing sources of information, I proceeded ahead.

Reviewing the textbooks

The primary step was to read and identify the issues with the textbooks prescribed in school. I narrowed down my focus to study Class VII History which chronicles the Medieval period in Indian. This primarily includes the Delhi Sultanate, The Mughals in the first half, while the latter half focuses on The Marathas and their conflict with the Mughals.

My main goal was to identify issues with the representation and design of the content, not the content itself.

I first looked at the **Maharashtra State Board Std VII textbook** and made a few observations.

- **Presentation & Structure**
Each chapter is packed tightly with content and facts. A single page would have a plethora of names, dates & places. How can a student be expected to remember them? was a question that continued to run through my mind.
- **Lack of context**
Events just happen one after another. There is no back-story at times. I do realise that by

adding that information, we would perhaps be increasing the volume of the content.

- **Language**
Compared to the NCERT and ICSE counterparts the language in the SSC textbook is simple and easy to understand. Although at times, it has been framed in a cryptic manner.
- **Lack of storytelling**
Some events which happen in the book can be enriched and made dramatic by sharing more details.
- **Visual representation**
The use of visuals is sparse. Illustrations of personalities are done well but they do not add much to the understanding of the text. The quality of photographs used have been compromised but that is a production cost issue. Maps, too, are inundated with a lot of information. Visual representation, where necessary, does not exist.

Balban : Balban was an important Sultan on the throne of Delhi in the period after Sultana Razia. He subdued the rebellious *Sardars* in Sindh, Bengal and Ayodhya. He secured the north-west frontier of India by containing the Mongol invaders. He strengthened the Sultanate of Delhi. Balban died in AD 1286. Amir Khusrau, the famous poet and philosopher, was at his royal court.

Alauddin Khalji : Alauddin Khalji became the Sultan of Delhi in AD 1296. It was his ambition to convert his kingdom into a vast empire. He protected his kingdom against the Mongol invaders. He brought Gujarat and Malwa under his rule.

He captured the forts of Ranthumbhor and Chittod. Most of the kings in Rajasthan accepted the dominance of Alauddin Khalji. Alauddin defeated the powers in the South and made them accept his overlordship. Thus, he expanded his rule in the south.

Alauddin had a firm hold over his administration. He improved the land revenue system. The revenue was fixed by measuring the land actually under cultivation. To ensure the supply of essential commodities to his army at fair prices, Alauddin fixed the prices of those commodities. He exercised a strict control over weights and measures. Alauddin died in AD 1316.

Muhammad Tughlaq : Muhammad Tughlaq became the Sultan in AD 1325. His empire covered the regions from Peshawar in the north to Madurai in the south and from Sindh in the west to Assam in the east. Muhammad made attempts at improving the administration of his vast empire.



Fort of Vasal



Paintings : The Mughal court had many Indian and Persian painters. Indian painters were highly skilled in portrait painting. The Persian painters were adept at landscape paintings. Jahangir got many paintings of birds, animals and flowers done. Landscape painting assumed importance during Jahangir's time.

LOOK OUT FOR THESE

Definitions

Source

Additional
Information

Elsewhere

KEYWORDS

SOME IMPORTANT
DATES

Imagine

Let's recall

Let's discuss

Let's do

Who were the Mughals?

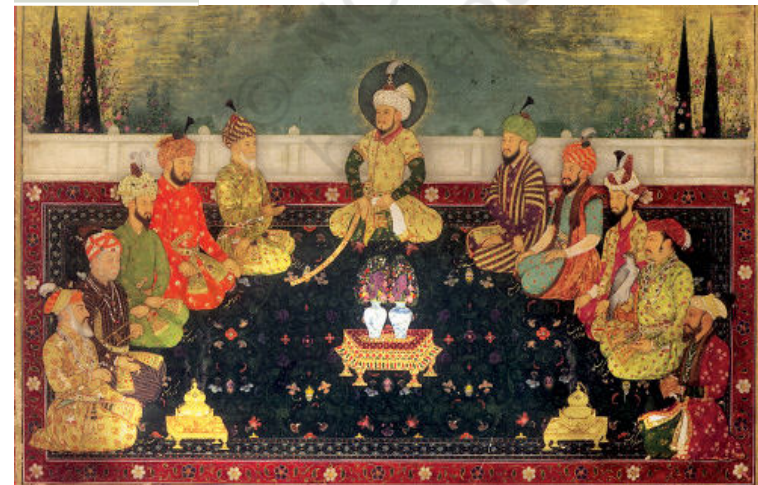
The Mughals were descendants of two great lineages of rulers. From their mother's side they were descendants of Genghis Khan (died 1227), ruler of the Mongol tribes, China and Central Asia. From their father's side they were the successors of Timur (died 1404), the ruler of Iran, Iraq and modern-day Turkey. However, the Mughals did not like to be called Mughal or Mongol. This was because Genghis Khan's memory was associated with the massacre of innumerable people. It was also linked with the Uzbeks, their Mongol competitors. On the other hand, the Mughals were



Do you think this painting suggests that the Mughals claimed kingship as a birthright?

Fig. 2

A miniature painting (dated 1702-1712) of Timur, his descendants and the Mughal emperors. Timur is in the centre and on his right is his son Miran Shah (the first Mughal emperor Babur's great-great-grandfather) and then Abu Said (Babur's grandfather). To the left of Timur are Sultan Muhammad Mirza (Babur's great-grandfather) and Umar Shaikh (Babur's father). The Mughal emperors Babur, Akbar and Shah Jahan are the third, fourth and fifth individuals on Timur's right and on his left, in the same order, are Humayun, Jahangir and Aurangzeb.



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Next, I compared the State board textbook with its NCERT counterpart and found that it was better designed in every possible way.

The **NCERT history textbook for Class VII** also covers similar events minus the local history. They have continually worked upon the curriculum to update it to today's standard, and it has reflected well in the design of the textbooks.

- **Extra information is provided.**

There is a back-story and context provided for the events that have happened. The Indian civilizations did not flourish in isolation. NCERT also gives tid-bits of information regarding events happening all over the world during that time period. These events may or may not have directly influenced those in India, but I feel it gives the students a sense of space & time.

- **Relevant visuals**

The visuals are rich and includes illustrations and photographic representation. Paintings and other forms of art from that era complement the descriptive texts.

- **Use of tables & timelines**

Information is given in a concise, tabular format so it can be compared easily. Important dates are highlighted on a timeline in a chapter, making it simpler to recall and reconstruct events.

- **Summary**

Every chapter features a summary towards the end which neatly summarises the learnings from that lesson.

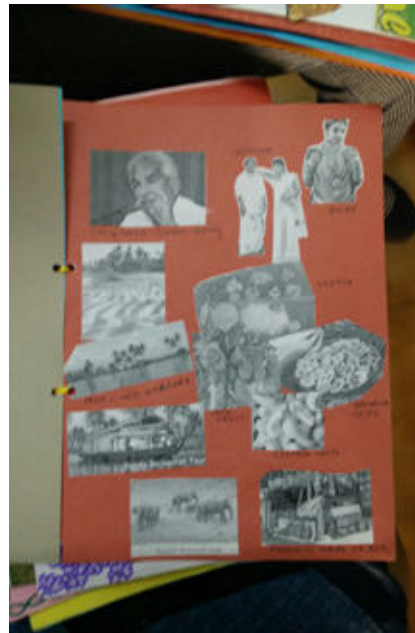
- **Creative thinking questions & activities**

Analytical and application based questions are provided after the exercises.

- **Further reading**

Sources of interpretations are mentioned so students can seek the truth themselves.

But, are the extras making any difference in learning? Are they able to better capture the student's attention?



Scrapbooks & picture collages:

The teachers at KV mentioned that students take a keen interest in working on their homework books which involve collecting and sticking pictures on the topics of their interest which are relevant to the chapter they have studied in class.

A Visit to KV, IIT Powai

Upon my review of the textbooks, my guide remarked that perhaps a *better designed book* is the answer and that re-designing the State Board textbook on the same lines as the NCERT counterpart would be a universal solution. To see if that held true, I paid a visit to Kendriya Vidyalaya on the IIT Bombay campus. The school follows the CBSE board and uses the NCERT textbooks.

The first thing I observed was that the teacher have strict timelines. They are assigned a particular time frame to complete a particular part of the syllabus and then they move on to the revision part of the curriculum.

During my visit, I met two teachers of the History department of KV Powai - Miss Corobi Mandal and Miss Lata Menon. I spoke to them briefly on the interest of the students, the textbook, the teaching process, learning activities involved as well as the general attitude of the students towards the subject. I also attended one of Miss Lata Menon's classes for the VIII grade. As the portion had been already completed I did not see the teaching part in action but was able to assess how the students were applying the information they

had learned. I have noted down a few key insights which have further shaped the project.

- **The design of the textbook makes little to no difference in enriching the learning experience**

The extra information provided by the NCERT textbooks is glossed over. The teachers do not have enough time between their strict guidelines and short classes of 30 minutes to conduct an activity involving a large group of students. The teachers feel that they only increase the burden. The students too, skip them as they are not part of the required syllabus for the exam.

- **The role of the educator can help make a difference in learning**

I got the opportunity to directly interact with students in Miss Menon's class. They chatted up about history and their interest. Some of them groaned about the need for the subject, while some complained that it could be taught in a better way. Some commented how the teachers are always trying to come up with ways to make it more interesting by the use of charts, maps and pictures. They showed me two books

they kept on the subject, one for classwork and another for homework. They enjoyed working on the homework book which was more like a scrapbook with pictures carefully collected and pasted from the Internet.

Miss Mandal also mentioned how she would at times show the students her vacation pictures of the monuments they had often read about in the books. Such instances often helped pique their interest towards the subject.

- **The personal learning interest of the pupil**

This was perhaps the most interesting bit of feedback I received from KV. Some of the students I spoke to were quite keen on learning and discussed how they would watch NatGeo or read extra books on the subject. I realised that I cannot force information be it via visual aids on something they have no affinity towards.

Keeping these in mind, along with the feedback I received from the faculty (discussed in next section), I decided to reconsider my objectives of the project.

2. An Alternative Study

Identifying the potential solution

- 2.1. Visual aids & alternate methods
- 2.2. The role of design & the designer
- 2.3. Thinking outside the textbook
- 2.4. Subject of interest: Mughal History
- 2.5. A visit to the museum: CSMVS
- 2.6. An end to the rift: Content vs Presentation

Visual aids and alternate methods

The school visit confirmed that history is a dreaded subject not just for the students, but for the teacher as well. The teacher often faces the challenge of making the notoriously dull and boring subject, fun and interesting. Visual aids, with their various devices, techniques and resources come to the rescue.

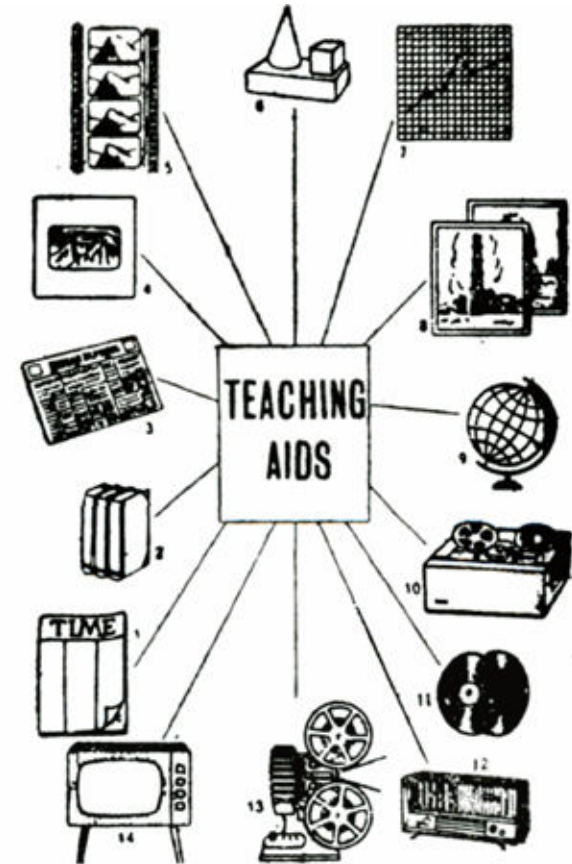
- **Supplement verbal descriptions in the textbook:** The audio-visual experience provided by films or videos help in better understanding of the text.
- **Direct experience:** History is concerned with our dead past. With visual aids, our minds are transported to the days gone by. These help us reconstruct the past for direct and effective learning.
- **Break from the routine:** They provide an opportunity for a change in the monotonous atmosphere that generally prevails in a classroom

- **Easy recollection:** When the facts are associated with visuals, they are easier to remember and recall
- **Increased Interest:** History learning becomes fun and dynamic. Class participation also sees a positive change.

Use of maps and charts, alongside presentations on tv screens are common in well equipped schools. But are they enough to appeal to the current generation who have an even shorter attention span. It seems apt to also look at some non-traditional visual aids that evolve the student from mere observers and listeners to participants with a greater understanding of history.

Early Proposition

Designing visual aids to make history learning memorable and fun, for middle school children.



Role of design & the designer

The next task was to figure out how I can contribute as a designer to the making of effective visual aids. What makes an effective visual aid? What would I be doing differently from the existing available resources?

As a designer, is my role limited to only the presentation or can it evolve beyond that to handle and reinterpret the content?

A satisfying role I felt would be to put forth an unbiased perspective with my representation in such a way that it pushes the child to think critically and reach their own conclusion. But this was easier said than done.

Faculty feedback

During one of the feedback sessions, Prof. Raja Mohanty brought up a very good point that unless you know history yourself well enough, you could not teach it to someone else. In addition I was not yet clear what area of history I wanted to tackle and **choosing to design visual aids for a chapter from the books seemed a bit trivial.**

A later discussion with Prof. Mohanty, made me see that history is ultimately about seeking the truth. It is about forming your own perspective. The process one opts in this truth-seeking mission is the core essence of studying history. We spoke about how conflicts arise and how one distinguishes between what is right and wrong. Some of it arises from our human innateness and part of it is shaped by our understanding and interpretation of the world around us. He felt that a direction for the project could be my own understanding and interpretation of history as I examined various sources and make a social commentary on present-day situation. This would make the project a richer experience.

The discussion lent some clarity to my thought process and pushed me to look beyond the textbook as sources. On the other hand, my guide Prof. Mandar Rane felt a more practical approach was the way to proceed. He believed that given the timeframe of the project and the fact that I did not possess the same expertise as that of a historian, it would not be a good idea to fiddle with the content interpretation. He gave an analogy of how history is like a

blackhole, you keep going from one source to another, one piece of information to another, everything is connected. If one had compiled all this information and presented it in a clear concise format, it would save one's time from this unending search.

For the next phase of the project, this dilemma between content vs presentation continued, and was solved as certain events happened around the country and the pieces fit in place.

Thinking outside the Textbook

During the early stages of the project, I stressed on thinking outside the textbook but was not making any effort to do so myself. The interactions with the faculty pushed me to do more secondary research on looking at alternate methods of learning.

Books & Comics

There are several book series on history that have attempted to make the content engaging and fun. But the one which stood out from the rest was the **Horrible Histories** series by Terry Deary. Compared to the formality of lessons taught in schools, the books talk about the unpleasantness and violence part of history in a tongue-in-cheek manner. Over 20 years old, it is quite popular with children and adults alike. The series has grown into a franchise consisting of not just books but magazines, videos, plays, toys, and so on.

One particular play I felt was relevant to my topic is 'Horrible Histories: The Mad Millennium'. The musical play is about the last 1000 years of British History and revolves around a group of young people discovering themselves through history. The

plot evolves to comment on the education system in schools that history is in the end about both the facts and figures, yet also the interpretations and enjoyment.

Back in India, publishing houses like Eklavya and CBT have been actively involved in releasing storybooks with historical narratives. The pair of **Akbar-Birbal** has been a favourite of many. Based on folklore than on historical accuracy, these stories on the wit and wisdom of Birbal have spawn several cartoons and television shows.

Television & films

Historical events are immensely popular when it comes to adapting them for television and film. Channels like History Channel & Epic have aired specialised content on almost every topic possible. Mahabharata and Ramayana have ruled the silver screen, and period films like Mughal-e-Azam and Jodha-Akbar have been immortalised in Indian cinema.

Web Series

Newer technology has changed the way we access information. It has also opened up

a forum wherein different perspectives of history can be shared. Youtube channels like **Crash Course: World History** by John Green and **Epified**, an Indian Youtube channel about Hindu mythology simplify historical events using narration and animation to engage the audience. They have a wide reach and allow viewers to discuss further in the comment section.

Other sources of information could be more direct like attending a seminar on a subject, or a visit to the city museum or a field trip to a monument. I recollected earlier trips to these places and how everyone would be intently listening to the guide or speaker as he weaved an interesting tale.

Storytelling seemed to be the common element that emerged from these success stories.

Another aspect of history I realised is that it can be a fascinating subject for adults too, given the way it is presented.

Subject of Interest: Mughal History

Another hurdle which stopped me from proceeding with the project was my indecisiveness in settling down on a topic in Indian history.

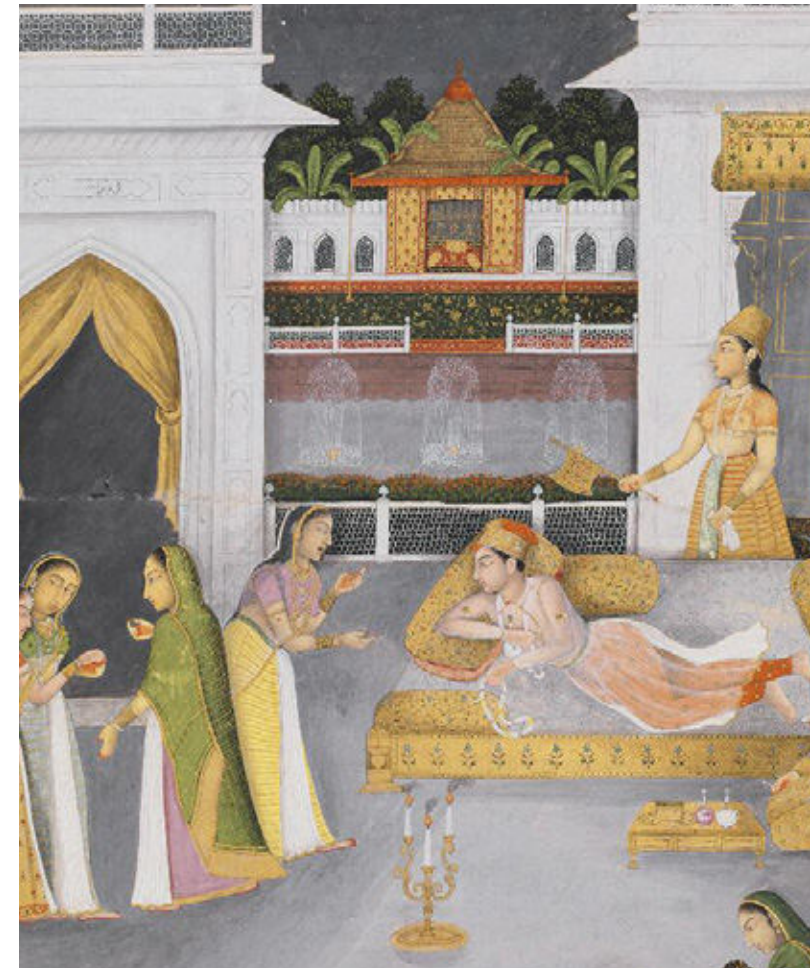
During my initial study of the textbooks, I had narrowed down to the Medieval period of Indian History as that fascinated me to some extent. I also had an affinity towards the Mughal Period, perhaps emerging from my Internship at Good Earth India.

But this fascination towards the subject was more on a surface level. How much did I really know?

What was it about the Mughal Era that fascinated me? The larger-than-life personalities of the Emperors and their wives? The court politics which would put Game of Thrones to shame? Their grand and opulent lifestyles? The mark they left on Indian art and architecture? What had so strongly drawn me towards the Mughals despite the little knowledge I had on them.

In a brainstorming session with the faculty and my peers, someone suggested I take a trip to Delhi and explore the Mughal architecture that stands tall even today. A field trip did sound appealing but given the timeframe of the project, it did not seem feasible. Prof. Mohanty proposed I visit the Mumbai city museum as a start. I had been to the museum a couple of times before but had never astutely observed the exhibits. The Mumbai museum, known as Chhatrapati Shivaji Maharaj Vastu Sangrahalaya (CSMVS) housed a gallery on miniature paintings during the Mughal Period and I stood to learn a thing or two from revisiting the museum.

In addition, the Mughal Era spanned over 300 years. I again needed to further narrow down to focus on a certain aspect of Mughal history.





Zenana (women's apartment):

The harem or zenana is the part of the Mughal imperial household where the women resided. No men apart from the Emperor and the Princes were allowed to enter the quarters. The museum has a life-size display which showcases the habits and pasttimes of the royals in the form of objects placed on the floor.

Atelier (painting studio):

A miniature diorama display of the imperial painting studio of the Mughals. The display is paired with information panels that explain the entire process of miniature painting from materials to the people involved.

A visit to the museum: CSMVS

I dedicated an entire day to visiting the museum and its numerous galleries. I recalled visiting the place before and much had changed since.

Each collection has its own dedicated gallery from paintings to sculpture, from textiles to coins and so on. Interactive kiosks and activity booths at each gallery were an added surprise. Screenings of documentaries on forgotten time-periods is also a new attraction.

Miniature Painting Gallery

My agenda was to visit the Miniature Painting Gallery and learn more about the period. The Mughals were excellent record-keepers and had religiously documented the reign of every emperor in the form of illustrated manuscripts. These small paintings are a window to the past and contain valuable information about the life of the Mughals known to us today.

A good half of the gallery was dedicated to the Mughal school of painting, while the other half chronicled the other Indian schools of miniature painting.

The Mughal miniatures were sub-divided and chronologically showed the evolution of the

Persian style with the Indian aesthetics during each Emperor's reign. They also portrayed significant events in the life of these individuals, from wars to birthday celebrations to religious pilgrimages, etc.

Informative Dioramas

To showcase how the miniature paintings were created in the imperial workshop, the museum has installed a 3d mini diorama that show artists at work in a Mughal setting that was recreated using miniature paintings for inspiration. Adjoining the diorama, the entire process is presented in detail.

A life size display of a *Zenana* (ladies apartments) is placed in the opposite section of the gallery. It acts as a window to the much secluded private life of the Emperor, and sheds light on how the royals spent their time.

Activity Booth

There are several activities that take place in this gallery at specific times of the day. Some require manned booths while rest can be accessed all throughout the day. Once a day, for an hour, visitors can touch and handle an actual miniature painting.

The museum has also kept themselves relevant to current trends and set up a stall to click selfies wearing a Mughal turban.

The museum has also installed pen tablets connected to a screen that allow the visitors to draw and showcase their artistic skills. Children were flocking to these and drawing all sorts of objects within their sight.

Interactive Kiosks

Every gallery has a touch screen kiosk which consolidates all the information from the displays in that gallery. It not only gives one a better understanding of that era but with the use of animation, 360° views and puzzle games makes it an effective learning experience.

Parallels in disseminating information

After observing the presentation of information in one gallery, I was able to draw parallels with that of the textbooks. The museum is the history textbook. Observing an gallery is akin to reading a textbook chapter. The activities conducted are comparable to the exercises in perhaps the NCERT textbooks. And the interactive kiosks are a way of revising the knowledge acquired.

The structure is similar, and is more effective despite the absence of a facilitator(teacher). The major difference is the method in which the information is presented. The objects and articles of history indirectly tell a story of the era gone by. They act as a reminder, allowing us to immerse ourselves in the past while passing on nuggets of information that would stay with us longer than reading from a textbook would.

Museum Library

After an exhaustive tour of the galleries of the museum I retired to the library. The library is cordoned off from the taxidermy gallery and one is likely to miss it if they have no knowledge of it beforehand. This is the reason I had never heard of its existence until this visit. I signed in

the register and was not surprised to see that there had been only two visitors that day.

I found that the library has an excellent collection on research books and journals on the Mughal era and on miniature paintings, especially during the reign of Akbar. 'Mughal Miniatures' by J.M. Rogers and 'Court Life & Arts under Mughal Rule' by Robert Skelton are well researched accounts of the Mughal Emperors and their patronage of the arts.

These two books formed the base for my study of understanding how the imperial workshop functioned and how the practice of everyday record-keeping was so pivotal to the dynasty.

Museum Shop

I concluded my trip by visiting the souvenir shop inside the museum as well as the larger museum store that was near the entrance. The souvenir store had a miniature painting kit that caught my attention. On inspection of the contents, I was rather disappointed. It consisted of replicas of miniature paintings along with blank outlined pages of the same. A small Camlin watercolour set was provided. It was a glorified colouring book.

The museum shop on the other hand was well stocked with all sorts of interesting albeit expensive toys and books. A majority of the items were targeted towards the foreign tourists. The children's section had some nifty products to get them interested in a subject.

A company named 'BrownBox Toys' has designed travel guide kits for children and families to explore different countries and their culture. After looking the company up on the web, I discovered it was started by an enthusiastic mother who had adopted similar means to engage her children with their surroundings during family holidays.

Prof. Mohanty's advice about the project reflecting one's personal journey of learning came to my mind then. It dawned upon me that the trip to the museum had taught me a lot more about the Mughals and about the process of learning itself. The visit became my base for laying the foundation for my outcome.

An end to the rift: Content vs Presentation

Post the museum visit, I decided to tackle the content vs presentation dilemma once again.

In a bid to achieve both, I proposed a two-part outcome : One, a game or museum activity that focuses on the historical context, and two, a series of zines that document my own understanding of the history and its relevance to the events around me today.

A direct relevance to the project was presented in the form of a trending topic on Twitter - **#RemoveMughalsFromTheBooks**. The extreme Right parties in their mission to saffronise education now wished to erase the Mughals from the textbooks completely. Some voiced their support while a majority felt one cannot erase a significant part of our nation's history. My sentiment echoed with those who though it was ridiculous stand. I felt the zines could portray my reflections on the politics of it all and add substance to the project.

With this new direction, however, I later realised there was a link lost between the two-parts. They were becoming a project onto themselves. I also made peace with the

fact that History is indeed about different perspectives. There is no single universal way of interpreting it. With the zine, I would be pushing for my own perspective which may or may not be the same way someone else felt. I owed my audience the liberty of interpreting my content and forming their own opinions.

My ideal solution would primarily focus on the presenting the content with no bias, alongside some redefined objectives:

- enriching my own understanding of the Mughal period
- designing interactive activities or games on Mughal history making learning a richer experience
- and would be integrated with the CSMVS museum environment

Building a narrative for an activity or game that focused on a certain aspect of the Mughal era was the next part of the process. And before I began to do so it was necessary to take a look at the content already available and also familiarize myself with a thorough history of the Mughals .

3. Storytelling in Mughal History

A review of available content

- 3.1. Books & other media
- 3.2. Immersing oneself in the Mughal Era

Books & other media

Mughal History is perhaps the most well documented period in medieval Indian history and a vast volume of books have been written on the subject. School textbooks only offer the dry bones of history in the form of facts and dates. The flesh, blood and colour is contained in the intricate details which helps us truly understand the social and political conditions of that era.

I began my journey by first perusing the non-fictional books on Mughal History written by both Indian and Western authors.

- **The Mughal Empire, from Babur to Aurangzeb (1936)¹**

A detailed account of the Dynasty under the rule of its six glorious emperors written in the pre-independence time. The author believed that the writings under the Colonial rule had tried to antagonise the Mughals as invaders to increase the Hindu-Muslim tensions for their own benefit. To an extent, they prevailed as modern-day politicians further perpetuated the disdain towards them. The writing is well-researched and

puts forth all the good as well as the not so good done by the Mughal rulers. Several school textbooks in India and Pakistan have also cited this work.

- **Royal Mughal Ladies and Their Contributions (2001)²**

An aspect of Mughal History I was personally drawn towards was the life and contributions of the royal Mughal ladies. Despite the fact that women in medieval India were oppressed, these women somehow managed to wield enormous influence and power, and in some cases were de-facto rulers of Hindustan.

- **The Mughal World (2007)³**

A comprehensive dissection of India under Mughal rule, the book examines the life of the common subjects and contrasts it against the opulent lifestyle of the Emperor and his court. Topics such as the arts, clothing, trade, commerce, role of women, religion, etc. are discussed. The book uses relatively easier language and reads more like a fictional novel.

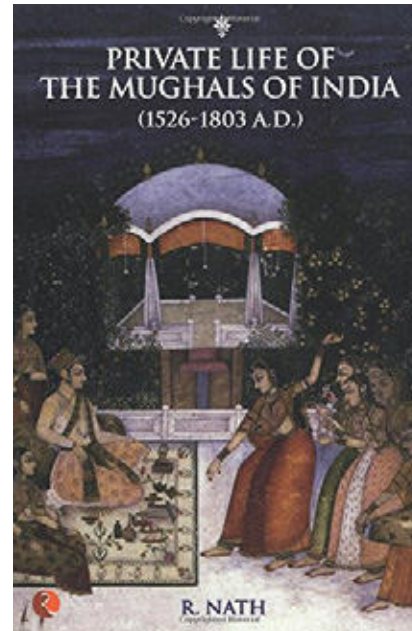
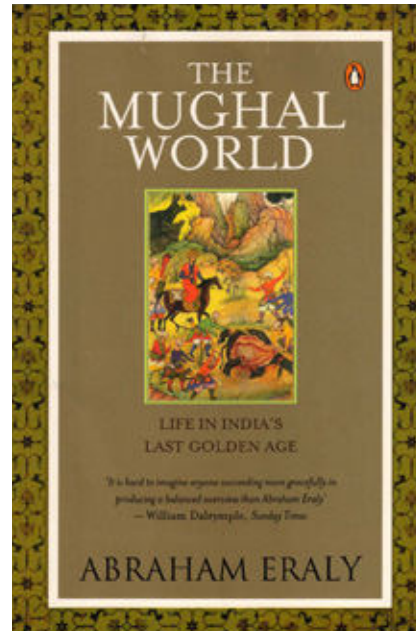
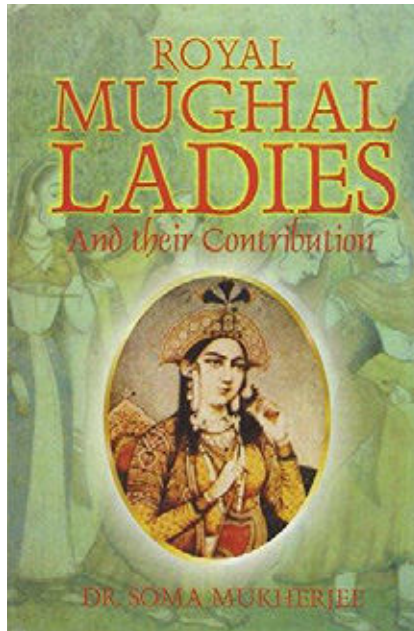
- **An abridged translated account of Abul Fazl's 'A'in-i-Akbari'⁴**

A'in-i-Akbari is an in-depth record of the Mughal administration written by Emperor Akbar's court historian Abul Fazl. It is originally written in Persian and offers vivid details of the Mughal life and imperial household. There are several translations available on the web, with a sharp critique of Fazl's embellishment and undue praise.

- **Private Life of the Mughals of India (2004)⁵**

The opulent and sometimes scandalous private life of the Mughals is brought to life in this well-written book. It speaks about the various aspects of their lifestyle such as their food, clothes and ornaments; addictions and other pastimes; marriage and harem life.

The information provided in these books was exhaustive and most of the titles were meant for advanced reading. Only a researcher or one with a keen interest in the subject would appreciate the writing. A child or a casual reader would be rather overwhelmed.



1. The Mughal Empire, from Babur to Aurangzeb: S. M. Jaffar(author), S.Muhammad Sadiq Khan
2. Royal Mughal Ladies and Their Contributions: Soma Mukherjee(author), Gyan Publishing House
3. The Mughal World: Abraham Eraly(author), Penguin Books India
4. A'in-i-Akbari: Abul Fazl(author); Zachary David Jones(translation), Columbia College
5. Private Life of the Mughals of India: R. Nath(author), Rupa Publications

The next step was to look at resources aimed at the casual reader. The historical fiction category has a plethora of available books that feature the Mughal rulers as protagonists. While reading these books, my first instinct was to look for historical accuracy in the writing.

- **The Mughal High Noon: The Ascent of Aurangzeb**⁶

The fictional narrative explores the bitter power struggle between Shah Jahan's four sons which led to Aurangzeb's succession to the throne. All the history textbooks speak about Aurangzeb imprisoning his father and executing his brothers, but little does it mention how he did it. The book provides an insight into the power-play, espionage and politics of the Mughal court which led to this historic event.

- **Twentieth Wife**⁷

Indu Sundaresan has written a trilogy of books on Mehrunissa (Nur Jahan), one of the most intriguing women of history. She has skillfully blended the textures of history with the rich imaginings of a love story. The first book in the trilogy - Twentieth Wife,

features Mehrunissa's meteoric rise to power to become Empress Nur Jahan; from her ill-fated marriage through motherhood into a dangerous maze of power and politics; all woven into one rich Mughal tapestry.

- **Escape from the Mughal Harem**⁸

A Mughal Saga of romance, revenge and retribution, the story is centered around Zeenat and her time in the imperial harem, set against the backdrop of Jahangir and Shah Jahan's reigns. An interesting point to note here is that the protagonist is entirely fictional, and the author has managed to design her character and her relationships with the historical personalities quite effortlessly to build a believable narrative.

- **The Story of Babur, from Good Earth**⁹

Good Earth, the home & lifestyle brand recently entered into the publishing market with their children's book on the Story of Babur, the first Mughal king of India. It uses the medium of storytelling interspersed with watercolour illustrations to show how the Mughal empire was established in India.

- **Film & Television**

Compared to the books, I observed that the television and film adaptations were rather historically inaccurate. They had taken more liberty in twisting the facts to fit their storyline. In the **TV series 'Jodha-Akbar'**¹⁰, Akbar's chief wife - Ruqaiya Sultan Begum is portrayed as a Hindi soap vamp and Jodha's nemesis trying to destroy Prince Salim's life when historical evidence shows that she doted on him and had played a major role in his succession to the throne.

Similar inaccuracies were seen in the **Bollywood film 'Jodhaa Akbar'**¹¹, the glaring one being the use of the misnomer 'Jodha'. Akbar's chief Rajput wife was never known as Jodha but went by the name of Harkabai or *Mariam uz Zamani* (Mary of her Age). *Jodha bai* was instead the name of Jahangir's chief wife - *Jagat Gosini*.

Despite the historical inaccuracy in some cases, the authors had managed to weave a cohesive fictional narrative that would engage the readers while sub consciously informing them of the Mughal culture and way of life.

6. **The Mughal High Noon:** Srinivas Rao Adige(author), Rupa Publications

7. **Twentieth Wife:** Indu Sundaresan(author), Harper Collins

8. **Escape from Mughal Harem:** Tanushree Podder(author), Roli Books

9. **The Story of Babur:** Parvati Sharma(author); Urmimala Nag(illustrator), Good Earth, Puffin Books

10. **Jodha Akbar(TV series):** an Indian historical drama that aired on Zee TV, produced by Balaji Telefilms

11. **Jodhaa Akbar:** a 2008 Indian epic historical drama film, directed and produced by Ashutosh Gowariker

Immersing oneself in the Mughal Era

In addition to reading literature, I continued to cultivate my interest in Mughal history by involving it in all walks of life. While it would have been ridiculous to dress in a qaba daily or go on a diet of strictly biryani, I found other ways to make sure that I keep thinking and talking about the project constantly.

Discussions with peers & friends

Every time I would meet a friend, I would go on about how intriguing the Mughal period was. I would get a divided group of reactions. One party saw them as only Muslim invaders who drained our wealth. Another party had read about them only in school, for them, Akbar was the good guy and Aurangzeb was the bad guy. The art appreciators applauded their monuments and paintings. Each one had their own opinion on the Mughals. Then we would debate over how they may have come as foreigners but over the years they assimilated within the fabric of our country. These discussions were fruitful in some way and helped me understand why some parties may have issues with the glorification of the Mughals.

Social Media

The year 2016 also saw the appropriation of miniature imagery in a tremendous way on the social platforms. From Buzzfeed to Mad Mughal Memes, the miniature paintings were used in a humorous manner to portray contemporary struggles and problems.

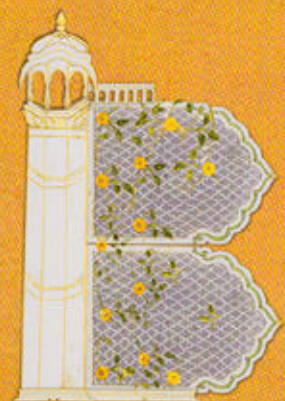
36DaysOfType

36days is a yearly open Instagram event inviting designers, illustrators and visual artists to share their view on the letters and numbers from the Roman alphabet. Beginning 29th March, 2016, designers the world all over began to share their artworks on the platform dedicated to the letter for that day.

As a side project, I decided to participate in the instagram event and based my theme on Mughal miniatures. I created the letter of the day using a collage of motifs, flora, fauna and people from the Mughal miniature paintings. Each letter was accompanied with a little fact about the person or place associated with the letter. For example, N for Empress Nur Jahan or T for Tula Daan, the Hindu weighing practice adopted by Emperor Akbar.

The compositions were not just meant to be aesthetically pleasing but also encouraged people to learn more about the period. I figured that I could further include these in my main project as a glossary in some form.

Such avenues of expression nurtured my own interest in the topic and pushed me to share my learnings with others in the form of 'The Mughal History Project'.



4. Historical Fiction

Approach of the project

- 4.1. Design solutions
- 4.2. Integration with the museum environment

Design solutions

At the beginning of the project, my knowledge and understanding of Mughal History was insufficient. However, after learning so much using a variety of methods including the museum visit, conventional reading and actively participating in related projects, I felt I was now in a better position to share my thoughts on the Mughals.

The Mughal History Project

The topic which began as 'An Understanding of Indian History' had now evolved to focus on solely the three centuries of Mughal History. It dubbed it 'The Mughal History Project' as a whole, which was set to include the potential products or activities I was to design.

Next design decision was to take an aspect of the Mughals and use it as a prototype for a series of similar products on other themes.

I did not want to focus on a specific event or personality, instead present the much fascinating **social life of the Mughals to the public in a contemporary medium.**

Apart from the storytelling aspect, it was the great attention to detail

that recreated the Mughal setting which had grabbed my attention. The topic had been there all this while, playing the invisible character in the background of bringing it all to life.

The social life of the Mughals remained a constant through all the books I read and was perhaps what had drawn me in. A significant amount of practices were started during Emperor Akbar's regime and were followed by later emperors.

The social life of the Mughals during Emperor Akbar's reign is the first title in the series.

Much of it was focused on rather the royals and the nobles, and quite rarely spoke about that of the common subjects. How would their life had been during the reign of perhaps, Emperor Akbar who was known to be benevolent to his subjects? What did they eat? What jobs did they hold? And so on...

A fictional approach

The common subjects were nameless in the books unlike the larger-than-life personalities of the Emperors. Rags-to-riches stories of commoners who won favour with the Emperor are a common theme in Indian folk tales. Perhaps a cliché but they are effective and reliable in their approach.

Potential settings

For the narrative, I narrowed down to a few potential ideas I had come across in my study.

- ***Ishq-bazi* (love play)**
Ishq-bazi is the Mughal sport of pigeon flying popular during Akbar's regime.
- **Imperial Atelier (painting studio)**
The *tasveer khana* or the imperial atelier is the workshop where the illustrated manuscripts were made.
- ***Mina Bazaar* (ladies market)**
During the Mughal era, the Emperor would announce *Khushroz* (days of joy) every month and in celebration, a 5-9 day fair called *Mina Bazaar* was held. They were exclusively held for women and the emperor and princes were the only males who were allowed to attend.

Solution 1



Ishq-bazi

Plot

Pigeon trainers would be competing to appease the emperor to become his '*khaas*'. Different varieties of pigeons can be used to complete specific tasks - from entertaining the court to sending spy letters.

Outcome

A boardgame or activity, multiplayer

Solution 2



Akbar's Atelier

Plot

The story would be set in the painting studio of the miniature painters who are working on the Akbarnama. With each completed painting, a part of history is revealed.

Outcome

A co-operation based board game; a colouring book or painting kit

Solution 3



Mystical Mina Bazaar

Plot

Fantasy meets history, in this time-traveling narrative set in the Mina Bazaar. The protagonist interacts with visitors from different Mughal time periods and gathers pieces of history to complete the story.

Outcome

Mobile game; playing card game

Integration with the museum environment

With three different directions, I needed to also consider the implementation aspect. I was initially keen on designing an activity or game which could be integrated with the museum surroundings.

Out of the three settings, the atelier one fit in best with the museum exhibit. The CSMVS has dedicated spaces that explain the purpose of an imperial atelier (painters workshop) as well as a reconstructed zenana, so it would be a good fit with the information established at the museum. I also weighed the pros and cons of the three ideas, and decided to go ahead with setting my story in the imperial workshop.

A to Z : Atelier to Zenana

While designing the letters in the 36Days challenge, a thought occurred to me that my story could begin in the workshop and take my protagonist on a mission to the much secluded imperial quarters of the Emperor and his women - zenana. That would bring the much needed excitement and drama to the dry narrative of just the art studio.

The protagonist's journey from A to Z would encompass the various aspects of both common subject and imperial lifestyle in the form of people, traditions and surroundings.

Storybook vs Boardgame

With the narrative building ongoing, I was faced with another dilemma. My guide advised that perhaps a book would be more effective given the time frame and my design strengths. I was initially reluctant but realised that it made sense. With the game, there would be a requirement that they know about the topic beforehand to engage them. In addition, I would have two things to consider - the historical narrative + the gameplay. If either fails, the whole thing falls apart. With the fictional story, I can focus only on the narrative and mask the information in subtle details of the surroundings. So I concluded that my outcome will be a storybook plus a few activities that draws from the story.

Story Kit

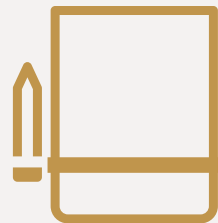
The activity too like the storybooks needed to be connected to museum gallery. I recalled seeing the miniature painting kit sold in the souvenir shop and being disappointed by its contents. It was too much like a typical colouring book and did not offer enough avenues for creative expression. A blank journal was the answer to my problem. The storybook would be accompanied by a blank journal which children can use to record their daily activities and special events much like the Mughal emperors. They can personalise it and name it after themselves, for example, my personal volume would be called Ameyanama.

Storytelling and activity would be combined and packaged together as a kit that can be sold at the museum shop.

The story kit will consist of three parts - the storybook, a journal and a set of flash cards. So the storybook is the lesson, journaling is the exercise and flash cards is a revision of sorts.



Storybook
Lesson



Activity journal
Exercise



Glossary
Revision

5. Story Development

Weaving the narrative

- 5.1. Plot synopsis
- 5.2. Characterisation: Fictional vs Actual
- 5.3. Story development process

Plot synopsis

After assessing the information I had gathered, I began working on the plot for the storybook. I felt a good approach to go about doing this was to see what message the story would send across in addition to the actual information.

Reflect reality

While the Mughal rulers lived luxurious lives, the condition of the subjects was not so good. Some of them lived in a very impoverished state trying to meet ends. The emperor's happiness was always the main priority for them often putting his need ahead of their own, which led to their further exploitation. With my story, I wished to portray the stark contrast between these two lives.

Location and time

The story would be set in Fatehpur Sikri in the year 1571, right after it was established as the Mughal capital. It is at Fatehpur Sikri that the legends of Akbar and his famed courtiers, the nine jewels or Navaratnas, were born, and they would somehow be involved in the story.

Not so known facts

Akbar had commissioned his aunt Gulbadan Begum around the same time to chronicle the story of his father Humayun. Humayun nama is

the only surviving writing penned by a woman of Mughal royalty in the 16th century. Very few copies of the memoirs exist, and it appears to be incomplete, with the last chapters missing. It also gives us a glimpse of life in the Mughal harem from an insider's point of view. Being royalty, she would have had several ladies-in-waiting attend to her wants and needs. She would go on to play an important role in my story.

Imagining the interactions between historical figures

A challenging aspect would be building the real characters and see how they would interact with each other and also with the fictional characters. Akbar was fond of his aunt Gulbadan Begum, and held her in high regard and would perhaps do anything to assist her.

Role & status of women

No man except the Emperor and the princes were allowed entry in the ladies apartment. However, numerous women have been the subject of portraits. How the painters got access to them in the harem is still a mystery. This became the direct plot point in my story which will revolve around a female painter.

Plot

Little Mehfi leads a dual life. She dons the disguise of a boy to work with her father in the imperial art studio. But what happens when Emperor Akbar discovers her real identity?

- A poor painter living in Fathepur Sikri is trying to make ends meet, a family of four and wife to support.
- His daughter, a 10 year old Mehfi is a very talented and skilled painter, disguises her as a boy allowing her to work in the imperial painting studio.
- Mother does not support this, says it is against will of Allah but relents.
- The young prodigal 'son' gets fame and wealth for the family
- Emperor's attention, followed by a visit to Atelier - Suspicious but cannot read something that could give away Mehfi's identity(Akbar was illiterate)
- Back home, elder sister's wedding is called off. The mother blames Mehfi and her father for invoking Allah's wrath. They promise to discontinue the charade.

- Mehfi does not accompany her father to work anymore. He says his 'son' ran away from home. Akbar who was impressed by Mehfi offers a reward for 'his' return.
- The father decides to be careful lest Akbar finds out. Mehfi is even more confined to home & purdah.
- Khushroz approaches and Meena Bazaar is held. Mehfi and her mother sell their wares. Akbar visits their stall. Her identity is discovered. Confession. Akbar leaves, mother tense.
- Summons arrive from emperor later that night. The harem eunuch arrives. Mehfi is taken in a palanquin.
- The place she is taken to is the zenana. Introduction to Gulbadan Begum who is penning the Humayun Nama, Mehfi will be her helper.
- Her new life - eternal service to the harem. Paint portraits of the ladies of the harem. Mehfi becomes Mehfi Mahal. Her family will get the wealth she earns and her work will be recognised but punishment of staying away from them. Such is the Emperor's justice.
- Mehfi laments her life, mehfooz (concealed) all her life.

The ending would be bittersweet and is open for interpretation. The next story kit would perhaps exclusively focus on life in harem and the politics that led to Jahangir's ascension.

The journal could also have a section dedicated for the readers to maybe draw what happens to Mehfi next in the imperial harem. Her interactions with Gulbadan Begum too could be left open for interpretation.

Characterisation: Fictional vs Actual

Fictional Characters

The protagonist of my story alongside her family are fictional.

Mehfi/Mehfuz,

The protagonist. Her name means concealed, a nod to her life in secrecy.

Salamat Khan, her painter father who dotes on her.

Nasiha,

her mother whom she shares a rocky relationship with.

Phul Malik,

The eunuch who escorts Mehfi to the imperial harem.



The behaviour and traits of each of the fictional characters is dictated by the social and cultural conditions of that era. The protagonist Mehfi aspires to be a great and renowned artist, a respected profession during the times. Her mother Nasiha does not approve as she is a woman and cannot appear before the men without the purdah.

Mehfi's father is perhaps the only exceptional character who is ahead of his times. He is portrayed as someone who is okay with bending the rules. It could also be interpreted as a desperate father and husband who builds this charade to feed his family.

Historical Personalities

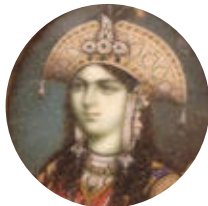
Akbar's regime saw a number of dynamic personalities. In my story, they appear as secondary characters to progress the plot.



Emperor Akbar, the reigning Mughal emperor who has shifted his capital to the newly built Fatehpur Sikri



Gulbadan Begum, Akbar's aunt who was commissioned to pen the Humayun nama



Ruqaiya Sultana Begum, the Empress, Akbar's principal wife and Gulbadan's niece

Mir Sayyid Ali, the Persian Master of the Imperial Workshop

Navratnas, the nine jewels of Akbar's court who would make small appearances in the story

As the story is set in a specific year, I was required to make sure I capture the age of the historical personalities, and their status and position accurately.

For example, Akbar had turned almost 30 years old at the time he moved his capital along with his harem to Fatehpur Sikri. They camped there for almost 15 years between the years 1571 to 1585. Gulbadan had spent some amount of her time at Fatehpur Sikri, the exact years are unknown. I have taken the liberty of choosing the year to fit my story.

Story development process

Plot structure

The Proppian theory which I had studied in a previous elective dictated my approach towards sequencing the story. Vladimir Propp had studied folktales and put forth that every story can be broken down into certain sections or plot points. A combination and reordering of these sections can be used to build a new story. There are 31 plot points proposed by Propp which include classic ideas like victory, journey, struggle, recognition, rescue, pursuit and so on.

Secrecy

The protagonist Mehfi is harboring a deep secret, if revealed could mean ill for her family. This injects tension within the story and engages the reader.

Misfortune

Mehfi's secret is almost uncovered by the Emperor. It continues to build the tension but also acts as a plot point for Nasiha to use it as a warning to confine Mehfi to the home.

Exposure

Her identity is revealed at the Mina Bazaar. The readers can anticipate Mehfi's fate.

Departure & guidance

Mehfi leaves her home environment and begins a new adventure. Ruqaiya acts as the mentor or guiding agent in Mehfi's journey.

Dilemma

Mehfi is forced to make a difficult choice between her confinement to the harem and her father's life.

Reward & Transfiguration

In Mehfi's case, the reward is somewhat bittersweet. Her father's life is spared but she cannot meet him now. Her new life at the harem makes her Mehfi Mahal, the concealed of the palace.

A third person narrative

The story is told from the POV of several characters and follows a third person narrative. From the aspirational Mehfi to the worrisome Nasiha, the story explores the thoughts and views of the Mughal era from various perspectives.

Another advantage of choosing a third person narrative was that it is traditionally used in stories told from childhood, making it an easier

read. Secondly, it would relieve the reader from the monotony of only seeing things from Mehfi's viewpoint.

Chunking for writing

The plot was divided into chunks, each one revealing a bit of information and also the progression of the story. As it is a short storybook and not a novel, I had to be careful with conveying only the needful and not go on writing descriptive passages of text.

The story has roughly 20-21 chunks each one occupying a spread. Each chunk consists of an illustration, a portion of the story, and historical facts and social life insights.

Language

The language is reminiscent of fairytales and folktales which speak about kings and their kingdoms. It is relatively simple and is descriptive where the visuals are not enough to transport the reader to the Mughal period.

There are instances when foreign words like 'qaba' and 'atelier' are used. These are pivotal to the story and are later visualised and explained in the glossary section of the kit.

An excerpt from the story:

The following excerpt gives an insight about the life of the common people. Their fears and anxieties at the thought of displeasing the Emperor are conveyed.

Salamat and Mehfuz walked in silence on their way back home.

Salamat bore a worried expression on his face. What if the Emperor discovered the truth about Mehfuz. He and his family would lose everything they had gained so far. The new-found wealth and respect. The new house. And what about his eldest daughter Saliha. The new fortunes had helped him find a groom from a respectable family for her. Would the Mir Bakawal's son still marry her if they lost everything?

Suddenly, the aroma of fresh jalebis wafted through the local bazaar as they walked down the narrow street of Fatehpur Sikri. Salamat was so occupied with his thoughts, he did not realise Mehfuz was not by his side.

'Abu! Abu!' shouted Mehfuz. 'I am here!'

Salamat turned back to see Mehfuz calling him, eagerly pointing at the glistening orange sweets the vendor was frying. The jalebis were still dripping with ghee when Salamat paid him a gold mohur for it. For a minute all his worries had disappeared.

Once upon a time he was struggling to make enough money to feed his wife and four children. And now thanks to his prodigal son, they were able to afford such small luxuries. Allah had been kind. Mehfuz was being heralded as the next master painter. Mir Sayyid Ali himself was showering the child with the highest praise, and had even rewarded them generously with a sack of gold mohurs for the last completed painting.

But sooner or later the truth would be out and all would be in vain.

'Don't worry, Abu, the Emperor will never find out. I shall be extra careful tomorrow!' uttered Mehfuz, almost reading Salamat's expression.

'I am sorry, beta, I should not have made you do this...'

The child wrapped Salamat in a warm embrace. 'Don't worry, we won't get caught. Come on, let's hurry home. Otherwise, the jalebis will get cold'.

6. Visualisation

Illustrating the story

- 6.1. Mock booklet
- 6.2. Illustration Style
- 6.3. Page layout and fonts
- 6.4. Journal and glossary

Storyboard | Mock Booklet

The chunking of the story writing in portions allowed the same to be conducted for determining the number of pages and illustrations. I created a mock booklet which helped me to place the necessary textual information and relevant visuals for each spread of the story.

The dimensions of the book

The story features Mughal imagery and references to miniature paintings throughout. The book too can reference from the same, and mirrors a portrait layout in a size observed in the paintings.

I also considered the production method and paper sizes which gave me the size 6.5 in x 9.5 in. A single spread can be fit onto a 12 in x 18 in print size.

A numbers game

The mock booklet gave me a fair idea of the number of required illustrations and what it should convey. The total number arrived at 21 illustrated spreads, this included, full page, half page, half spread, and small or no illustrations on certain pages and spreads.

The pages of the book added up to a 52 (48+4) after counting all the illustrated spreads, the title page, cover & back, end paper, etc. The inside 48 pages of the book can be divided into three sections each

Layout and text

Placing the text alongside the imagery helped me control and shape the flow of the entire story more easily.

It was the month of ^{Sept} 1572, when the prophecy was fulfilled.
 Birth of third heir -
~~Alauddin~~ Daniyal
 Prince
 Blessed with not one but three sons. It was here in this very city of Fatehpur Sikri. The Sufi mystic Shah Salim Chisti had promised Akbar 3 sons. Built the city in his honour, and named his first-born Salim after him.

joy?
 singing &
 dancing

decor needed - red sun disks on walls,
 + lots (artificial)
 Celebrations in full swing -
 laywords - festoons, bunting, flowers

Introduction to Fatehpur Sikri,
 1571
 Akbar
 (Text)



Illustration Style

Mughal Paintings

The Mughal miniature paintings themselves are so rich in visual cues that shed light on the social life of the period. They became the reference point for the stylistic approach and colour palette for the illustrations.

The approach was to depict each illustration as a part of a miniature painting, or the painting itself in case of full page illustrations.

A mixed collage

I had mentioned earlier that I had participated in the **36 days of type**, Instagram event and had created letter forms on a Mughal theme, and would use the alphabet as a glossary in the project. These letter forms were created by collaging deconstructed pieces and elements of a miniature painting.

Addition of vectors

The miniature elements on their own are so intricate and detailed. The figures I had drawn were getting lost. They were required to be simple and stand out from the miniature collage tapestry. I achieved this using vector figures which were painted using flat colours. I chose to lose details of clothes and jewelry

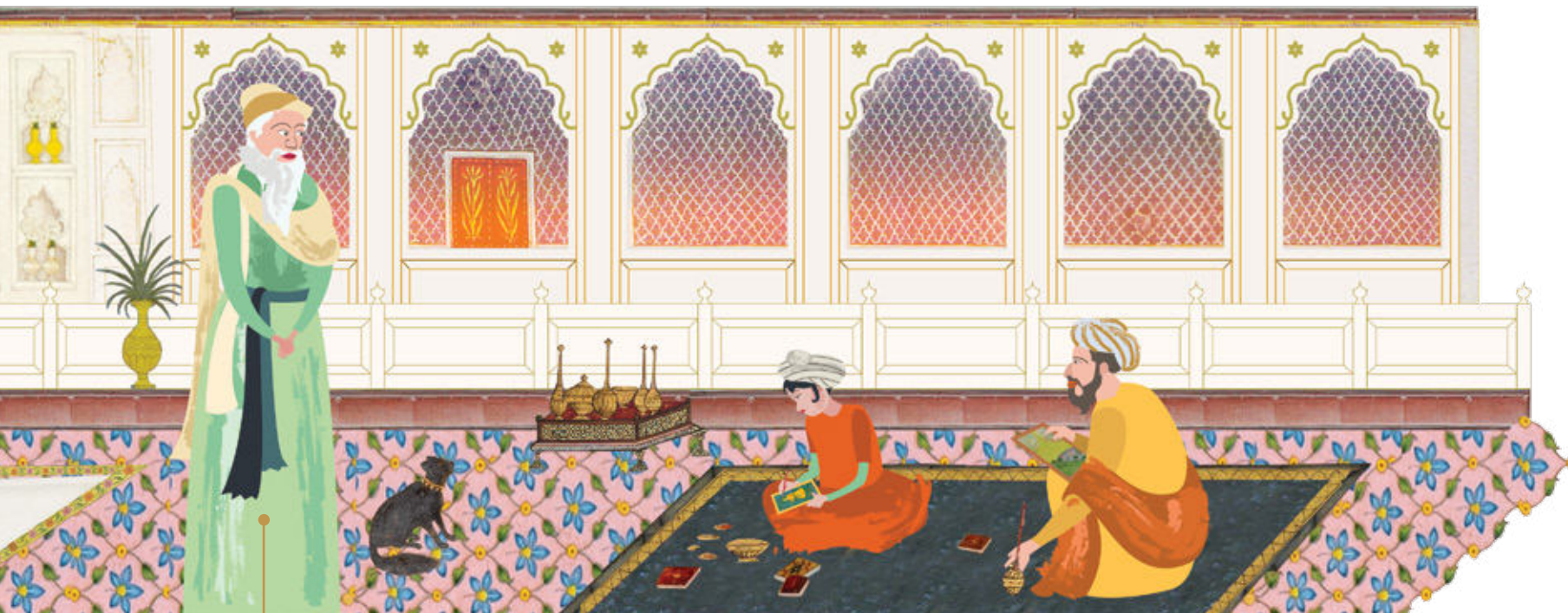
and used vector brush strokes to give the figures some dimension and depth.

Colour palette

The Mughal school of painting developed and improved under each ruler. Each period was characterised by their own motifs and colours. Under each Emperor, the painting styles also varied. In case of Akbar, who was the Emperor in question in my story, the Atelier was headed by the Persian painters who had Hindu and Muslim painters working under them. They worked in collaboration, creating a distinct Mughal miniature style.

Every illustration will use a painting as a colour reference and borrow its aesthetic to create an intricate collage to depict the life in the court and beyond.





Certain elements like paints and water bowls are sourced from the actual paintings. If a curious reader would like to know more, the museum exhibit has larger replicas and explain their functions in detail.

Use of vectors for the main elements help them stand out in the mixed illustrated collage

Page layout | Fonts

Every chunk/spread mimics a miniature painting each having its own colour scheme. For the layouts as well, I decided to experiment and position the visuals differently on each page and spread. The book shall be an amalgamation of colours and graphics drawing a parallel with the cultural diversity the Mughals exhibited.

The imagery would be complemented by a serif font which has a classic appeal, invokes a sense of nostalgia and whimsy, but at the same time be legible and appropriate for print and production. I opted to use a system default - Adobe Garamond which ticked all the requirements I had in mind.

❧ MEHFI ❧

Salamat and Mehfuз walked in silence on their way back home. Fatehpur Sikri was bustling with activity as the vendors in the local bazaar prepared their last sale for the day.

Salamat bore a worried expression on his face. What would happen if the Emperor discovered the truth about Mehfuз? He and his family would stand to lose everything they had gained so far. The new-found wealth and respect. The new house. And what about his eldest daughter Saliha. The new fortunes had helped him find a groom from a respectable family for her. Would the *Mir Bakawal's* son still marry her if they lost everything?

Suddenly, the aroma of fresh *jalebis* wafted through the bazaar as they walked down the narrow streets. Salamat was so occupied with his thoughts, he did not realise Mehfuз was not by his side.

'Abul Abul' shouted Mehfuз. 'I am here!'

Salamat turned back to see Mehfuз calling him, eagerly pointing at the glistening orange sweets the vendor was frying. The *jalebis* were still dripping with *ghee* when Salamat paid him a gold *mohur* for it. The vendor handed the *jalebis* to little Mehfuз who continued to smile broadly. For a minute all of Salamat's worries seemed to disappear.

Once upon a time he was struggling to make enough money to feed his wife and four children. And now thanks to his prodigal son, they were able to afford such small luxuries. *Allah* had been kind. Mehfuз was being heralded as the next master painter. Mir Sayyid Ali himself was showering the child with the highest praise, and had even rewarded them generously with a sack of gold *mohurs* for the last completed painting.

But sooner or later the truth would be out and all would be in vain.

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'I am sorry, *beta*, I should not have made you do this...'

The child wrapped Salamat in a warm embrace. 'Don't worry, we won't get caught. Come on, let's hurry home. Otherwise, the *jalebis* will get cold'.



Other contents of the kit

Journal

The storybook is the hero of the kit. The journal is a secondary element. To allow my readers to pen down their thoughts and draw their surroundings and daily life, the journal would be their go to sidekick.

In comparison to the storybook, the journal would have more number of pages, around 180-200. In order for it to not overshadow the storybook I halved its size to make it pocket-fit friendly 4.5 in x 6 in.

The journal would have a few introductory pages that take off after Mehfi is confined to the harem. It would allow the readers to come up with their own adventures for Mehfi in the harem and also express their thoughts on what Akbar did was right or wrong.

These would be followed by a few sample pages on how the journal can be used. These can be contributed by upcoming artists and illustrators from the city, thus, giving them a platform to exhibit their work.

The rest of the journal would have a variety of Mughal miniature frames with blank space for

one to draw and scribble in. Some pages would be left blank, some would feature small and large frames in various shapes.

In addition, it could be integrated with social media and allow the journal users to share their artwork and thoughts with the rest of the world.

It would be an engaging activity not just for children but for adults as well. A few samples shared by illustrators and artists from Mumbai:

Tasneemnama

~Tasneem Amirrudin

Applenama

I looked to my right and saw my sister staring at an apple ~ Pranita Kocharekar

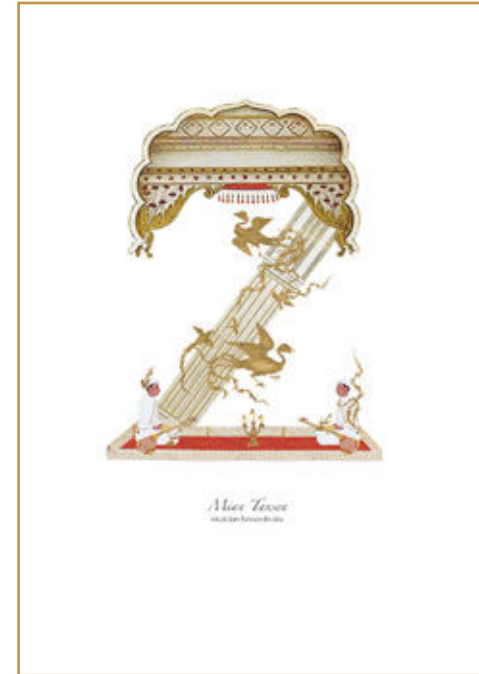


Glossary

Over the course of the project, I made the 26 letters of the Roman alphabet and the numbers 0-9 for the 36 Days of Type, Instagram event revolving around the Mughal theme.

The alphabets from A to Z would be used as a glossary to explain the foreign terms that appear in the story, accompanied by nuggets of information to encourage further reading for the curious history buffs. The numbers excluding 0 can be used to denote the Navratnas or the nine gems, the nine most learned men of Akbar's court.

As the kit is to be sold in the museum shop, the glossary could be in the form of collectible items. I had initially thought of using the alphabets as flash cards with facts but dropped the idea as they would get scattered and not be easy to navigate through when referencing. A foldable poster with the letters denoting the unfamiliar terms visually is the probable outcome. The Navratnas could be a set of nine postcards and be a family of items on its own.



Tansen, musician extraordinaire. The famed Hindustani classical singer was said to have the power to conjure fire with his Deepak Raga that it would light up all the oil lamps in the Imperial Court of Akbar.

7. Production

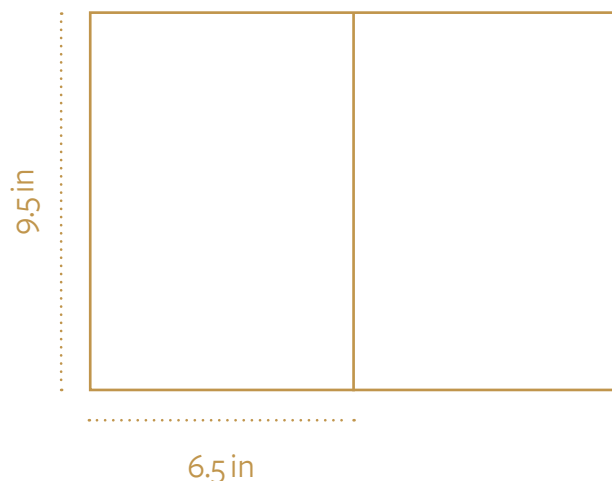
The book & other deliverables

6.1. Production and print

6.2. Packaging

Production: The Book

The dummy booklet helped determine the size and dimensions of the book.



Book-binding

With the total number of pages coming to 48 excluding the cover and back, I divided them into three sections. Each section would consist of four signatures. A signature is a piece of paper folded in half to have four sides. So, a single section would have 16 pages. These three sections(booklets) will be each central bound and then connected to each other.

Title of the book

The whole kit would be marketed as 'The Social Life of Mughals (A to Z): From the atelier to the zenana'. The storybook could also be sold individually and can have 'A to Z' as a sub heading.

The title was required to be intriguing and also tell the buyer that it focuses on the Mughal period by just glancing at it on the shelves.

In case of historical fictional narratives, the titles are often borrowed from facts and history. However as my protagonist is fictional I did not have the liberty to do so. Most of the names I came up with centered around Mehfi. I narrowed down my choices to:

- ***Mehfi Mahal or Mehfuz Mahal***

The title bestowed upon the protagonist at the end of the story.

- ***Mehfinama***

A book about the life of Mehfi much like the biographical accounts of the Emperors.

- ***Mehfi or Mehfuz***

Dropped the title to keep it simple and perhaps expand it to a series about her life.

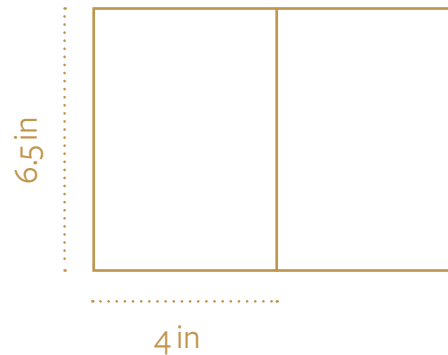
The third title appealed to me greatly and I chose to go ahead with it. Also if I named it after the central character it would have scope for development of more kits in the future each centered around another Emperor's reign. For example, the next part of Mehfi's life would be in the harem where young Prince Salim lived and she can be a witness to his rise and rebellion to become the next Emperor.

The Mughal-ness may not necessary be conveyed by the title but the images and visuals on the cover could do the same instead.

The Journal

I initially wanted to use handmade paper for the journal to complete the whole Mughal painting experience but since some of the pages would contain printed information I decided against it.

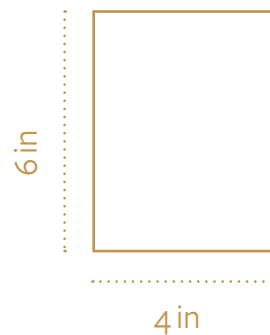
A slightly tinted paper is my next go to option for the inside paper. For the prototype, I figured I can use multiple tinted pages as I shall be binding it myself but in case of mass production I would stick to a single colour.

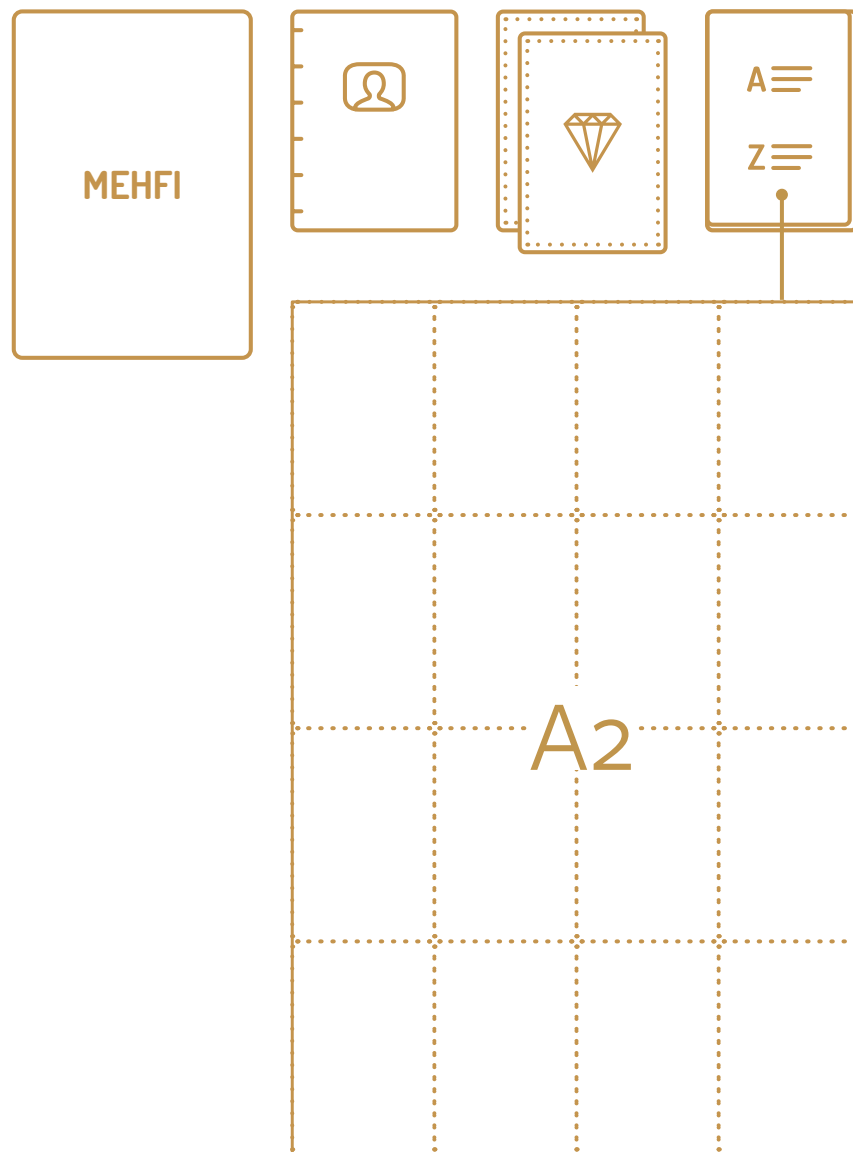


Glossary + Postcards

The alphabetical glossary list of terms is designed on an A2 sized poster which is folded four times to hit the size 4 in x 6 in.

The Navratna postcards too are made in the same size as the folded poster - 4 in x 6 in. They would be printed on to a paper with thicker gsm - roughly 250 gsm.





Final contents of the story kit

- The Story of *Mehfuz*
6.5 in x 9.5 in, 48 pages
- A record journal | sketchbook
4 in x 6.5 in, 90-100 pages
- Navratna Postcards
4 in x 6 in, 9 printed cards
- A to Z, Glossary
A2 poster

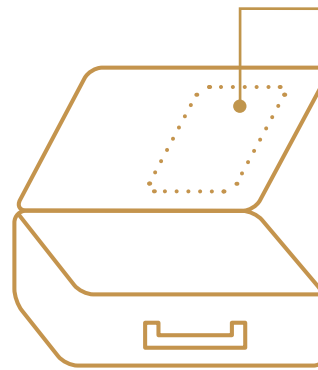
Packaging

With the inner content having rich and detailed imagery, the exterior is better off having a toned down appearance. Also at the same time it is to give a glimpse of the inside content.

Inspiration

I propose a box/chest which takes inspiration from the Mughal palanquins. Whenever the women of the harem were to travel outside, they would sit in these enclosed transport structures wielded by the servants.

The form would be simplified to a rectangular shaped suitcase and would have a jaali screen to preview the inner contents.



A jaali screen previews the inner content. It is also a subtle reference to the protagonist's fate in the story.



Conclusion

The Mughal History Project in its entirety has been a personal journey of relearning historical facts and understanding the context of the events that led to it. The story of Mehfi, the record journal and the glossary collectibles are bundled as a story kit to weave this rich Mughal tapestry to life.

The Story of Mehfi

With equal parts fact and fiction, the story of Mehfi attempts to decode the social conditions of the Mughal period during Emperor Akbar's reign. The book describes the food, clothing, festivals and other past times of the royals - the things one would be curious about. In the process, it also highlights the vast disparity between the life of the common subjects and the royals.

An underlying theme of the story of Mehfi is the role and status of women in Mughal India. On one hand, we witness the struggle of Mehfi, who has donned the garb of a man to pursue painting. On the other hand, we have strong women characters like Ruqaiya Sultana Begum

who pulls strings from within the harem to save Mehfi and her father. Despite the notion that the harem was a gilded prison in itself, it is a noteworthy fact that the women who enjoyed the Emperor's favour wielded enormous influence.

The Record Journal

The accompanying activity which takes off from the story itself allows the readers to embark on their own journey of learning. It is an avenue for them to express and reflect upon what they have read so far.

With a social media tie-in, one could bring incentive to the use of the journal. People can send in their daily artworks and thoughts, and they would be shared on social media.

Distribution Channels

The museum souvenir shop is the most obvious choice for the sale of these kits. Apart from the museum — bookstores, niche art cafes and contemporary design boutiques like Good Earth can also stock the kits.

Scalability

While Mehfi's story focuses on only the reign of Akbar, similar kits can be designed with newer stories and characters. Alternately, Mehfi's life in the harem can be further touched upon in a sequel which could explore the reign of the next Mughal Emperor - Jahangir.

The structure adopted in the story kit can be used for explaining any time-frame within history. History has witnessed a variety of great personalities, each one with a story to tell. By adding in the activity element, we allow the reader to partake in their story. The model has the potential to seduce the reader with storytelling and imagery, and at the same time impart an history lesson, making the whole experience memorable and fun.

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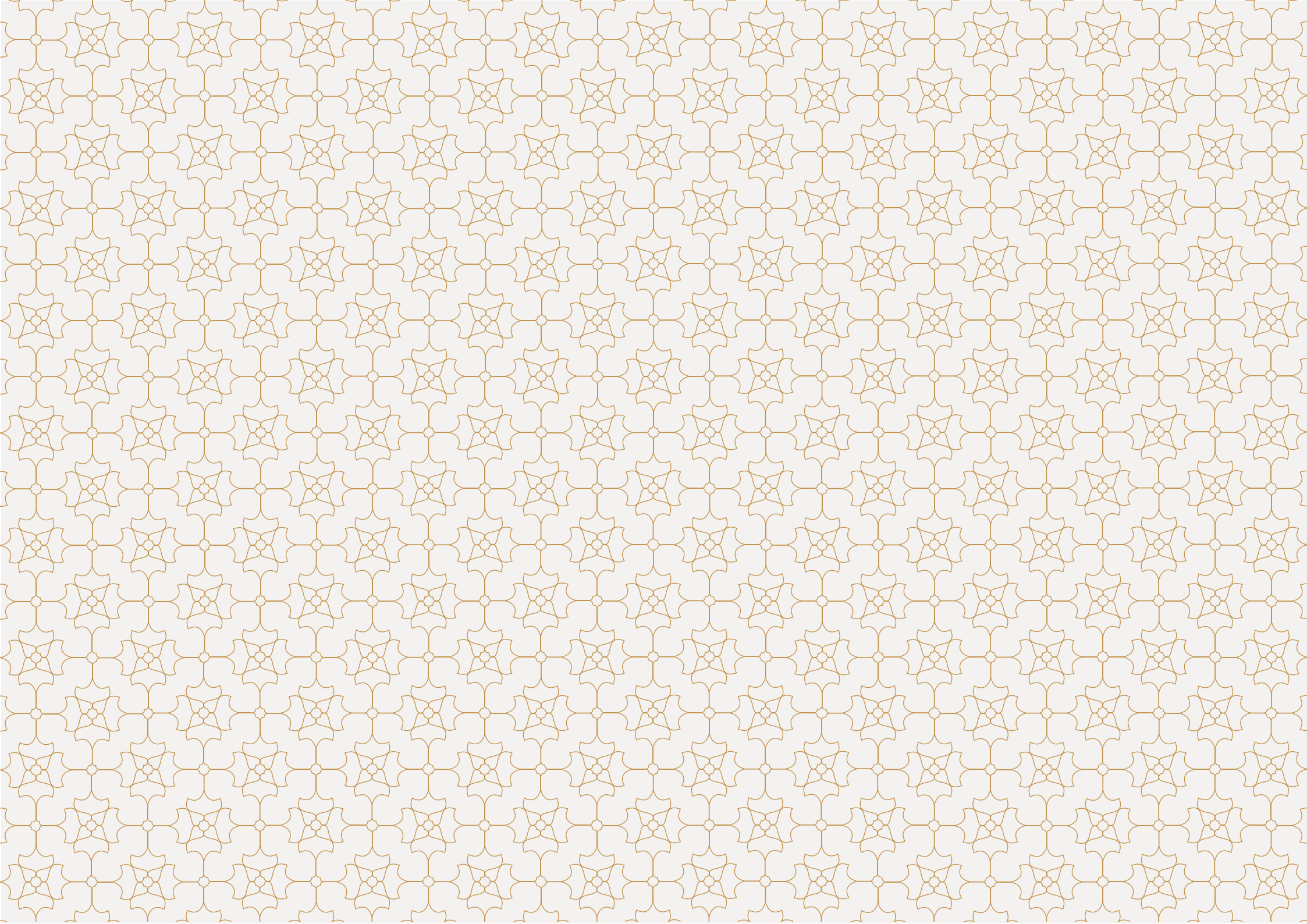
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Project III

**An Understanding
of Indian History:
*Mughal India***

Jan - May 2016

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