

Date: 19-09-2025

1. Describe the land revenue administration of Akbar's reign. How did the Zabti (Bandobast) system, Dahsala, and Mansabdari system contribute to the economic stability of the Mughal Empire?

Akbar (r. 1556–1605), the third Mughal emperor, is credited with laying a strong administrative foundation for the Mughal Empire. A key aspect of his governance was an efficient land revenue system and the Mansabdari system, which helped stabilize the empire's economy and strengthen central authority. His finance minister, Raja Todar Mal, played a crucial role in institutionalizing these systems.

Zabti or Bandobast System

- Also known as the Ain-i-Dahsala, this system was implemented under the guidance of Raja Todar Mal.
- It was based on survey and measurement of agricultural land.
- The land was divided into three categories: Polaj (cultivated every year), Parauti (left fallow), and Chachar (uncultivated for 3–4 years).
- The productivity of the land was assessed, and the average produce and prices of the last ten years were calculated.
- Based on this, the state fixed a share—usually one-third of the average produce, payable in cash.
- This system was prevalent mainly in northern India, including Delhi, Lahore, Allahabad, Agra, and surrounding regions.

Dahsala System

- Introduced in 1580, the Dahsala system was a refined form of Zabti.
- It averaged the produce and price over ten years to determine a standard revenue demand.
- It brought uniformity and predictability, relieving peasants from annual fluctuations. Revenue was paid in cash, encouraging monetization of the economy and reducing the burden of in-kind payments.
- Officers known as Karoris were appointed in each district to ensure efficient revenue collection.

Mansabdari System

- The Mansabdari system, a military-cum-civil administrative structure, was introduced by Akbar to organize his nobility and bureaucracy.
- A Mansabdar was assigned a numerical rank (Mansab), which determined:
 - Zat: The personal rank and salary of the officer.
 - Sawar: Number of cavalrymen to be maintained by the officer.
- The revenue assignments (Jagirs) were given to Mansabdars in lieu of salary, which they used to collect revenue and maintain troops.
- This system ensured that the Mughal nobility remained loyal and the army was regularly maintained without direct financial burden on the treasury.

Contribution to Economic Stability

- The Zabti and Dahsala systems created a stable agrarian economy, improved revenue efficiency, and enhanced the state's capacity to plan expenditure.
- The cash-based revenue system increased market activity, leading to expansion of trade and urbanization.
- The Mansabdari system integrated the ruling elite into the empire's administrative structure, reducing rebellion and strengthening political unity.
- By decentralizing revenue collection but centralizing policy control, Akbar ensured financial accountability and imperial cohesion.

Conclusion

Akbar's land revenue administration and the Mansabdari system were crucial to the Mughal Empire's longevity and economic prosperity. These systems reflect Akbar's visionary approach, balancing centralized policy-making with local implementation, which allowed the empire to sustain its vast territorial and administrative reach effectively.

2. Compare and contrast Mural and Miniature paintings in Indian art history. Highlight their significance with examples from Ajanta, Vijayanagara, Mughal, and Rajput schools.

Indian painting has a long and diverse tradition, prominently featuring murals and miniatures. While mural paintings are large-scale artworks created on walls, miniature paintings are small, detailed works typically found in manuscripts and albums. Both forms flourished in different time periods and represent India's rich cultural, religious, and political history.

Mural Paintings: Features and Examples

- Murals are large-sized wall paintings, often depicting religious and mythological themes.
- They were executed using the fresco or tempera technique on temple walls, caves, and palaces.

Key Examples:

- 1. Ajanta Murals (2nd century BCE – 6th century CE):**
 - Buddhist themes from Jataka tales.
 - Fluid lines, expressive faces, and vibrant natural colours.
 - Fresco technique on cave walls.
- 2. Vijayanagara Murals (14th–16th centuries CE):**
 - Found in Lepakshi temple (Andhra Pradesh).
 - Depict episodes from the Ramayana and Mahabharata.
 - Use of bright colours and stylized figures.
- 3. Chola Murals (Tamil Nadu):**
 - Found in Brihadeshwara Temple, portraying Shaivite themes.
 - Use of natural pigments and narrative panels.

Miniature Paintings: Features and Examples

- Miniatures are small-format paintings used to illustrate manuscripts or as standalone works.
- They are intricate, with fine detailing, vivid colours, and use of gold and lapis lazuli.

Key Schools:

1. Mughal Miniature (16th–18th centuries):

- Introduced under Akbar’s patronage.
- Blend of Persian realism and Indian themes.
- Artists like Basawan and Abd al-Samad.
- Depicted court scenes, battles, nature, and portraits.
- *e.g.* Akbarnama, Baburnama.

2. Rajput Miniature (17th–19th centuries):

- Indigenous style with spiritual and romantic themes.
- Sub-schools: Mewar, Marwar, Bundi, Kota, Pahari.
- Inspired by Ramayana, Krishna Leela, etc.
- *e.g.* Gita Govinda paintings from Kangra school.

Comparison and Contrast

Feature	Mural paintings	Miniature paintings
Medium	Walls (Temples, Caves, palaces)	Paper, cloth, palm leaves
Size	Large scale	Small, hand held
Themes	Religious, mythological	Religious, court life, romantic, nature
Patronge	Temples and kings (e.g., cholas, Vijayanagara)	Mughal emperors, Rajput kings
Accessibility	Public, site-specific	Private, manuscript- based

Significance

- Murals reflect collective religious consciousness and temple-centric culture.
- Miniatures reflect royal tastes, documentation of political history, and personal devotion.
- Both contributed to the evolution of Indian aesthetics and regional artistic diversity.

Conclusion

Mural and miniature paintings are two distinct yet equally important traditions in Indian art. While murals symbolize grandeur and devotion in public religious spaces, miniatures capture royal elegance and cultural nuances. Together, they enrich the visual heritage of India and provide valuable insights into its historical and cultural evolution.