

*Original article*

**SYMBOLISM OF THE MANDALA IN THE PAINTINGS OF INDIAN MUGHAL MANUSCRIPTS IN THE 10<sup>TH</sup>-11<sup>TH</sup> H/ 16<sup>TH</sup>-17<sup>TH</sup> G. CENTURIES**

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**Abstract:**

*The present research paper aims to study the art structure of illustrations in the opening of the manuscripts of the Indian Mughal school in the 10th–11th H./16th–17th G. centuries that had several concentric circles, including circular and golden lobed shapes decorated with floral decorations and bird paintings, especially the central gilded circle, in which the painter used to add the name of the Mughal emperor, the Mughal emperor stamp, or a half-length painting of the Mughal emperor. Most researchers of Islamic paintings used the term shamsa because the symbol of the enlightened sun, derived from ancient civilizations, was prevalent in a form that resembled the circular and lobed structure in the Mandala. This paper discusses the ritual, universal, and political symbolism and effect of the Mandala in ancient Indian cultures on painting. It also discusses the shamsa used for this artistic structure, which was generally used in Islamic arts, and its compatibility with the Indian mandala decorations as an art structure with no religious symbolism, like the Indian art. The study highlights the importance of the concept and symbolism of the mandala and its relation to the Indian Mughal painting. Additionally, Indian Mughal artists employed it as a continuous local ritual effect with the same previous symbolism integrated with the Mughal concept about the ruler, as well as his legal rule and spiritual status among the people. The study highlighted the doctrinal, spiritual, and political importance of the mandala and discussed its symbolism in each aspect. It illustrated the Mughal thought about the emperor and his position as a solar ruler.*

**1. Introduction**

The mandala was prevalent in several ancient civilizations, each with a different interpretation and representation. Therefore, there is no unique interpretation of this phenomenon. Most studies agree that the concept mandala emerged in Hinduism in India as a religious symbol with spiritual and ritual significance. Most mandalas are formed by a central circle, which is believed to be the source of power emitted outside and surrounded by several concentric circles. In some mandalas, the central circle is surrounded by a square. This religious symbol appears in many temples and artworks in India and Southeast Asia. In addition to its religious symbolism, a mandala is thought to have universal and political symbolism. It was used as a political regime in Southeast Asia, where political regimes are defined based on the management centers instead of the geographical boundary, which agrees with the concept of the center as the most powerful part of the mandala. Mandala took several forms, such as a circle of gods or an eight-pointed sun ray, like the Surya Majapahit [1]. This decorative composition used to appear in the opening of some Iranian manuscripts, especially in the Timurid period, which continued in the openings of Indian Mughal manuscripts, taking the form of golden con-

centric circles, some of which were colored in gold, yellow, and blue with real or modified floral or animal ornaments. The Indian Mughal manuscripts uniquely focused on the center with a half-length painting of the Mughal emperor. In other cases, the emperor's stamp or the Mughal lineage appeared in the center of the circle. This paper is the first study to link mandala symbolism—traditionally associated with Hinduism and Buddhism—with Mughal Islamic manuscript art by linking art history, religious studies, and cultural interaction.

**2. Examples**

**2.1. The first painting**

A mandala in the opening of an album; Manuscript: Mughal album [2], fig. (1). \*) **Date:** circa 1750-1770. \*) **Location:** Royal Collection Trust in London. \*) **Preservation number:** RCIN 1005069.c. \*) **Size:** 32.7×22.2 cm \*) **Description** “*Visual structure*” it depicts an album opening “frontispiece”<sup>(a)</sup> Recto: decorated with a mandala of concentric circles; the first is circular, followed by an 8-lobed circle, then a blue 8-lobed circle, followed by an 8-pointed star with flames or sun rays. \*) **Portrait description:** In the center is a side half-

length painting of Jahangir holding a globe inscribed with "Jahangir Padshah," whose head is surrounded by a circular halo of a luminous sun. \*) **Historical context:** The painting of Jahangir is in a lobbed figure containing his lineage "a genealogical seal of Jahangir dated 1025 AH (1616-17 AD) and regnal year 11" of 8 parts, each in a cartouche written in Nastaliq, starting from the right with 1- Ibn bādshāh Akbar, 2- Ibn Bādshāh Hmāywn, 3- Ibn Bādshāh Bābr, 4- Ibn Mīrzā ‘Umar Shaykh, 5- Ibn Sulṭān Abū Sa‘īd, 6- Ibn Mīrzā Sulṭān Muḥammad, 7- Ibn Mīrān Shāh, 8- Ibn Amīr Taymūr Shāhib Qirrān. "Ibn Akbar Padshah, Ibn Humayun Padshah, Ibn Babur Padshah, Ibn Omar Sheikh, Ibn Sultan Abu Saeed, Ibn Sultan Muhammad Mir, Ibn Miran Shah, and Ibn Amir Timur, ruler of Qiran, ending with prince Timur". Finally, it is surrounded by a blue 8-lobed shape.



Figure (1) a mandala in a Mughal album

## 2.2. The second painting

A mandala in the opening of an album [3], fig. (2). Manuscript: Shah Jahan album. \*) **Date:** 1640-1650. \*) **Location:** Cleveland Museum of Art<sup>(b)</sup>. \*) **Painter:** Bichitr 1615- 1650. \*) **Size:** 40×27.7cm. **Description “Visual structure”**, it depicts an art structure called "shamsa" of several concentric circles. \*) **Portrait description:** Its center is decorated with a side half-length painting of the Emperor Shah Jahan (written below as Padshah Shah Jahan), depicting the Shah as a young man with a black beard and mustache, wearing a red medallion with gilded lines and a turban in the same color with a feather and holding a rosary, with his head in a circular, gilded halo. The painting is on a golden background. The painting of the emperor is encompassed in several circles: Three circles followed by an 8-lobed circle with a frame of blue braided plant branches and decorations in white, red, and green. The lobed circle encircles a large 3-lobed leaf in each lobe in the same colors and decorations as the frame of the lobed circle, which may indicate a lotus. It is followed by another 8-lobed circle with a larger diameter. Inside the lobes are floral ornaments of flowers and roses in red and blue on a gilded background, with a decorative structure in the middle of a large 5-lobed circle encompassing golden modified floral ornaments on a blue background. Another decorative structure decorates the separating space between the lobes of the 8<sup>th</sup> multi-lobed circle with modified floral decorations on a green and blue background. The entire structure is surrounded by a larger circle filled with fine blue floral ornaments against a yellow background. The rest of the page around the circles includes

bird decorations, containing four simurghs. The two paintings show the emperor in the center of the mandala with a gilded circular halo surrounding the head. Thus, it is important to interpret having a personal painting of the emperor in the center of the circle, discuss the shamsa and its relation to the gilded circular halo, and interpret the symbolic relation between the shamsa and the Indian mandala. \*) **Historical context:** According to the website of the museum, it is the painting of Emperor Aurangzeb, Shah Jahan's son, as he placed his painting instead of his father's seal, Shah Jahan, as soon as he took over and began painting his picture in the middle above his father's name. \*) **Symbolic interpretation:** This behavior illustrated the importance of the central point as the divine ruler in the golden center (symbolized by the golden sun), from which emits the floral ornaments and geometric patterns, especially the 8-lobbed circle like an 8-petal flower in each level (the sacred lotus among the Buddhists) in all directions of the center. It is worth noting that the golden halo decorating the head of the emperor and symbolizing the sun was important for the Mughal emperors, as illustrated below.

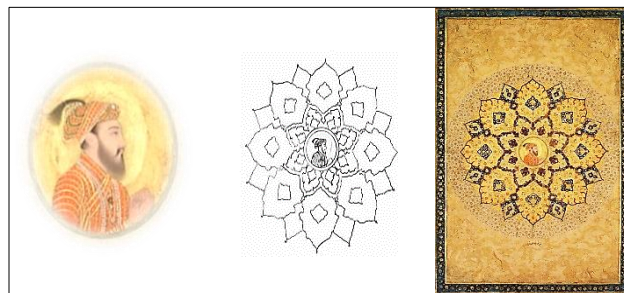


Figure (2) a mandala in the opening of a Shah Jahan album

## 2.3. Highlighted some models of this art structure

It is important to highlight some models that made this art structure, as follows: \*) Some examples included the lineage stamp of Jahangir, the center of the circle in the opening of the Shahnameh 1612AD/1012 AH in Victoria and Albert Museum, fig. (3), a prayer reads (bi-Rasm khzānt-al-Sulṭān al’ẓm-Nūr al-Dīn Muḥammad Jhānjyr-Bādshāh Ghāzī khld-Allāh mlkh) "By the decree of the great Sultan Nouruldeen Muhammad Ibn Jahangir- Padshah Ghazi- May his rule last long) on a golden background" [4].

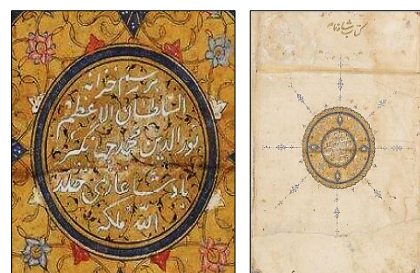


Figure (3) Mandala in Shahnameh 1612AD/1012

\*) In another example included the lineage stamp of Jahangir in the Metropolitan Museum of Art [5]. Accession number: 13.228.47, fig. (4), **Date:** ca.1615-20, is encompassed in

several circles, a middle circle containing the name of Padshah Ghazi Abu Almuzafar Nourdeeen Jahangir surrounded by eight circles (1- Ibn bādshāh Akbar, 2- Ibn Bādshāh Hmāywn, 3- Ibn Bādshāh Bābr, 4- Ibn Mīrzā ‘Umar Shaykh, 5- Ibn Sultān Abū Sa‘īd, 6- Ibn Mīrzā Sultān Muḥammad, 7- Ibn Mīrān Shāh, 8- Ibn Amīr Taymūr Šāhib Qīrrān). 1- on the right Akbar Padshah, 2- Ibn Humayun Padshah, 3- Ibn Babur Padshah, 4- Ibn Omar Sheikh Merza, 5- Ibn Sultan Abu Saeed, 6- Ibn Sultan Muhammad Merza, 7- Ibn Miran Shah, and 8- Ibn Amir Timur, ruler of Qiran.



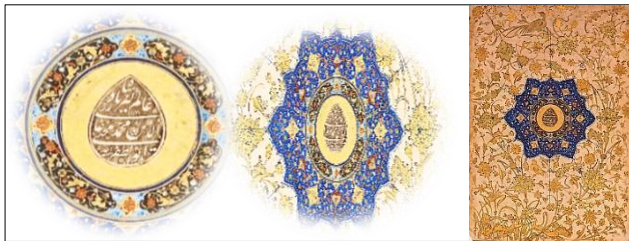
**Figure (4)** A mandala included the lineage stamp of Jahangir.

\*) An example of the opening of Diwani of Anwari (1616), fig (5). Jahangir has a black two-line stamp in the center that reads (Akbar Shah- Jahangir Shah) Akbar Shāh Jhānjy Shāh on a golden background in the international collection of Getty images [6].



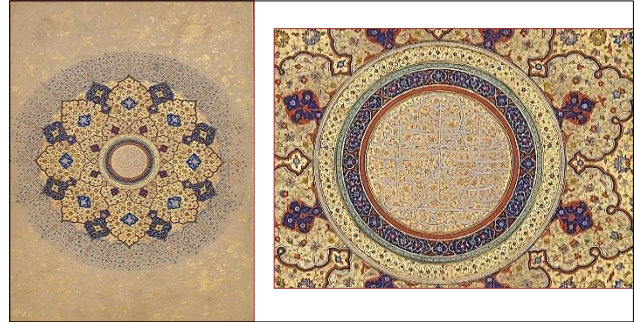
**Figure (5)** a mandala in the opening of Diwani Anwari

\*) In the opening "frontispiece" of the manuscript of the Keir Collection of Islamic Art on loan to the Dallas Museum of Art [7]. fig. (6), the seal of Emperor Awarangzeb, the central circle reads (Abū Alẓfr Muḥyī al-Dīn Muḥammad ‘Ālam kīr bādshāh Ghāzī aḥad sanat) "Abu'l-Zafar Muhyi al-Din Muhammad 'Alamgir Padishah Ghazi", with the date 1070 A.H./1660 C.E. and the first year (of his rule).



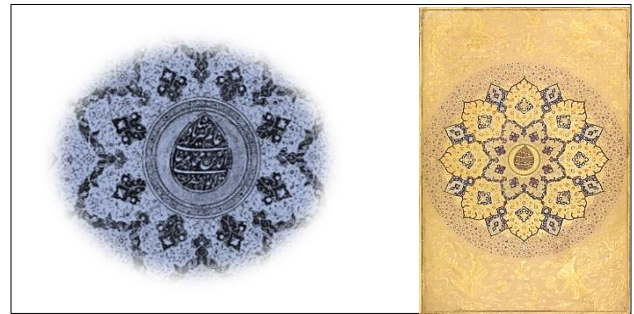
**Figure (6)** a mandala in a manuscript in Keir Co.

\*) The opening of a manuscript in the Metropolitan Museum of Art, fig. (7) "Rosette Bearing the names and titles of Shah Jahan", Folio from the Shah Jahan Album, ca. 1630-40. The inscription in the center of the "tughra" (handsign) style reads (Hdrt Shihāb aldīn Muḥammad Shāh Jahān Pādshāh Ghāzī Khalad Allāh mlkh wa sultānah) "His Majesty Shihabuddin Muhammad Shahjahan, the King, Warrior of the Faith, may God perpetuate his kingdom and sovereignty [8].



**Figure (7)** opening of a manuscript in the Metropolitan Museum

\*) Rosette Bearing the Name and Title of Emperor Aurangzeb (Recto), fig. (8), from the Shah Jahan Album [9]. The rosette (shamsa) bears the name and titles of Emperor Aurangzeb (r. 1658-1707), in the center of the page (Abū Alẓfr Muḥyī al-Dīn Muḥammad ‘Ālam Kīr Pādshāh Ghāzī aḥad sanat) Ab'uz-Zafar ad-din Muhammad Muhyi Ghazi 'Alamgir Padishah.



**Figure (8)** a mandal of Emperor Aurangzeb

### 3. Mandala or Shamsa

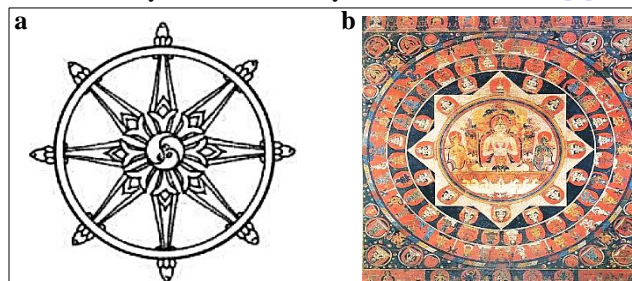
In all previous examples, there is a clear interest in the center of the circle, which is almost illuminated with gold, symbolizing sunlight, containing the painting, name, or stamp of the Mughal emperor. Thus, it is essential to seek an interpretation of the importance of the golden center of the circle for the Mughal emperors and the concept and relation of the mandala to the Indian Mughal painting.

#### 3.1. Concept and symbolism of the mandala

The mandala is a Sanskrit word which means "circle"<sup>(c)</sup> [10]. "wheel" or "that which turns about a center". It also means the holy circle [11]. However, the study shows that the meaning of the mandala is not more than the simple circular shape. The mandala appeared in all ancient cultures with various interpretations [12]. It is thought to have an accurate cosmological view of the universe [13]. a religious symbol in ancient Eastern religions, such as Buddhism, Hinduism,

and Jainism, with political symbolic interpretations in Hindu and Buddhist thought [14]. Vedic literature depicts the mandala as the center of the universe<sup>(d)</sup> [15], or cosmic wheel, where it starts and returns. It uses mandala as a synonym for Chakravala, meaning a cosmic disc or wheel, fig. (9-a). In Sanskrit, chakra means the solar disc that symbolizes the time scale since ancient times. Vedic mythology uses the sun as a celestial wheel [16], and is known as the life or religious wheel (Dharma-chakra), symbolizing the sun disc with its rays and orbit, as if it denotes the sun's orbit in the sky [17]. The oldest Buddhist evidence of mandala dates back to the first century BC, with pieces of evidence that suggest the existence of mandalas until the fourth century, which can be found in China, Tibet, and Japan. Later, these art forms spread in many religions, such as Hinduism [18]. The lotus flower sometimes forms the hub of the wheel "chakra," or its petals the spokes. The wheel and the lotus are closely associated, both solar symbols fig. (9). Additionally, the lotus flower symbolizes the sun. Its opening at sunrise and closing at sunset also linked it to the sun, which is itself a divine source of life. In India, too, the lotus was linked to a sun-god. The Vedic deity, SURYA, who personifies the sun, typically holds a lotus in each hand. In Indian culture, particularly Hinduism, the lotus was associated with the sun god and various religious ideas. Moreover, the lotus flower was closely associated with gods and goddesses, many of whom were depicted sitting or standing on a lotus flower [17]. In Mughal miniatures, the lotus was used as a decorative motif and symbol of royalty and divinity, deeply influenced by Hindu symbolism [19]. Despite being circle-based, there are various mandalas [20]. The correlation between the shape of the circle and the mandala resulted in multiple interpretations of its symbolism in ancient cultures [21]. For instance, the circle appeared on the sculptures of ancient Mesopotamia that symbolized their deities, and the decorations of seals made of soapstone of the Indus Valley civilization, which were thought to correspond to the cylinder seals of Mesopotamia [22]. Additionally, native Americans in the northern and southern regions used mandalas, whether as direct representations of their deity or the universe, as a symbol of a spiritual journey or state of mind, or for warding off evil spirits as well, as with the circular hoop design known as a dream catcher. The mandala appeared in Greek works and designs, particularly those depicting the "evil eye." The ancient Celts (Indo-European peoples who lived in parts of Europe and Anatolia) used a circle within a circle decorated with various designs that resembled the mandala structure. Furthermore, the mandala appeared on the covers of the Old Testament and the paintings of Christian saints with a halo around their heads. Some considered the shapes of the concentric circles on the covers of manuscripts and the ceilings of mosques to be a type of mandala [1]. In Buddhism, the mandala is used to practice meditation and guide the spiritual aspirant to the center of the mandala to attain enlightenment and integration with the divine entity [23]. fig. (9-b). In the center of the Buddhist mandala, the holy location of Buddha is represented seating in the large 8-petal lotus [24], believing that the center of the mandala represents Buddha, who is

"Chakravartin," the "universal ruler" who orbits the universal wheel and rules over the universe, expressed in a human form. In Buddhism, it is used for Buddha, who took the title of "Cakravartin" [25]. As long as the center is the most important part of the mandala, they think that Chakravartin radiates outside in the form of a king rich in divine abilities, noting that the ability of the ruler to employ the "universal power" in the center of the mandala relies on the good behavior and creativity. The Hindu and Buddhist traditions of kingship believe that a good king links the kingdom to the universe, having in person and position a relationship with the unseen world that makes his body and actions sacred. In their beliefs, the representation of the king in the mandala disseminates goodness and power around the mandala or the meditator [26]. Hinduism and Buddhism use the mandala as a means of expressing the teachings of Buddha. In addition, the mandala is one of the eight auspicious or lucky symbols in Chinese Buddhism [27]. It is believed that the painting of Buddha in the center symbolizes it as the main deity, i.e., the actual center of the universe, surrounded by concentric circles, each with a symbolic meaning. The first circle has a fire ring (represented in gold) and denotes the sun. The second circle is a diamond, indicating hardness, strength, and difficulty of destruction. The third circle is eight shapes of lotus leaves, representing a new religious birth. The circle symbolizes the aspects of human awareness that connect the people in the rebirth cycle. Besides the Buddha mandala, Buddhism has a creation of mandala to represent a deity or a group of deities. Even if there is a small number or thousands of deities, the main deity is surrounded by others in the center [1].



**Figure (9)** **a.** Chakravala, a cosmic disc or wheel, **b.** Mandala Chandra-Nepal Buddhist art- 1400-1499- Private Collection- Himalayan Art Resources . <https://www.himalayanart.org/items/89042>.

### 3.2. Mandala and magic

The mandala has a magical, symbolic meaning. It is used to describe any magic circle. When the king stands in the center, he identifies himself with the powerful personality that rules the universe and collects its magical power within himself, where the mandala is described as a sacred area that protects against the disintegration of powers while symbolizing the evolving universe, which revolves around a central point [28]. The magical power of the mandala can change the social and religious status of people in the present and future. Additionally, what happens within the mandala may be radically transformative, as it can not only change the karma destiny of a person but also attract various worldly blessings (often related to kingship) [29]. A person in the center of the mandala can rule the entire universe, proving divine satisfaction;

thus, the Mughal emperor painted himself to fulfill the same purpose.

### 3.3. Cosmic significance of the mandala

As previously highlighted about its importance in ancient Indian beliefs, the mandala represents a map of the universe in some cultures, expressing the circle of the continents around a central axis- Mount Meru, the axis of the world on which the sky rests. All ancient Eastern religious beliefs on the evolution of the universe assume having a center from which all aspects of the universe emanate, calling it Bindu (i.e., point), meaning that it is the point from which the universe is created (start of creation). The Bindu is believed to be a central point around which the mandala is created, symbolizing the universe [16]. In the mandala regime, the king or lord was seen as the deputy regent of the divinity or gods from which his rule authority was derived. (The same idea as the Mughal *farr-i izadi*, where the king is always at the center of the mandala). Did the Mughal Emperor intend, by placing his painting in the center of the mandala, to benefit from its universal symbolism?

### 3.4. Political significance of the mandala<sup>(e)</sup>

It represents the circle of close and far neighbors of the king [30,31]. The political meaning of the mandala also highlights the importance of having the king at the center of the mandala, denoting the legitimate central rule of the Indian king, strengthened by the central gravitational force inherent in creating a government system based on the principle of the mandala. An integral part of the mandala is that power emanates from a central god. In the mandala regime, the king or lord was seen as the deputy regent of the divinity or gods from which his rule authority was derived. A king was described as a brilliant ruler to receive this divine grant [32]; thus, it matches the Mughal concept of the ruler and divine light. Consequently, the mandala has become a symbol of self-reflection and reflections on the universe to a practical legacy, taking the form of a leadership system, where "a divine king" is one center surrounded and protected by a friendly relation with a "circle of kings" that is dedicated and loyal to the "powerful brilliant king". This form emerged in Hindu India and manifested in Buddhist Southeast Asia [33].

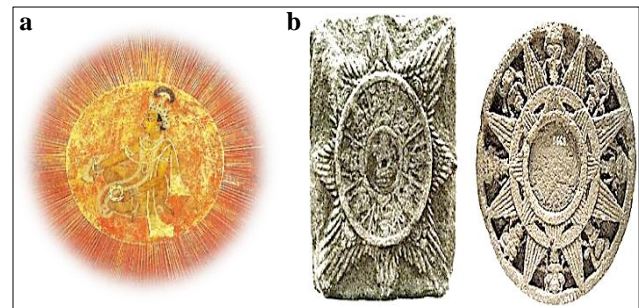
### 3.5. Shamsa and relationship with mandala structure

The study revealed that most of the Islamic art literature uses shamsa to structure concentric circles after the Arabic word *shams* (i.e., sun), believing that it resembles the circular sun and is almost found colored in golden sun rays. In ancient Persian times, the sun symbol was used to bring the radiance of divinity to the earth. In contrast, shamsa was used in Islamic art for a circular medallion decorated with floral arabesque and writing inscriptions, as well as decorations of living organisms. This decoration is employed in various forms, such as decorating the first page of the Holy Qur'an, metal, pottery, and carpet [34]. Usually, the circular medallion or lobed rosette was used to decorate the façade of Timurid manuscripts created to be presented to the royal person, where the name of the king or prince was written in the center. It is worth noting that the rosette, circular medallion, or lobed circle has decorated the *mushaf* (Qur'an manuscript) as sep-

arators of verses, titles of the surahs, or title pages. It is known as shamsa because of its gilded circular shape. In Persian, it is known as "Sar Turang". Additionally, this decoration frequently appears on carpets [35], metal works, decorations of the domes of mosques and mausoleums, and other decorative arts in Islamic art [36]. Accordingly, shamsa was used for a decorative structure, which Islamic art derived from Indian mandala decorations, as an art structure with no religious symbolism, like Indian art. It was utilized to decorate all Islamic art forms, especially in Persia. Additionally, Indian Mughal artists employed it as continuous local ritual effects with the same previous symbolism integrated with the Mughal concept about the ruler, as well as his legal rule and spiritual status among the people.

## 4. Symbolism of the Sun in the Indian Mughal Era

**Golden backgrounds:** The sun is significant in the artistic structure understudy "mandala", as it is the in the most important part, i.e., center circle. The Mughal emperors paid special attention to the sun symbolism. Thus, Mughal manuscripts were among the most important artworks utilizing sun symbolism. It decorated the golden center of the mandala in the opening of manuscripts or sometimes the final page. Additionally, some studies used the shamsa term due to the golden circular center that resembled the golden shape of the sun, figs. (1, 2, 6 & 8). The symbolism of the sun had an important sacred position among Mughal emperors, who believed that the ruler was looked at as the illuminating sun, which was a tradition among Indians. The Indian subcontinent had a long history of sun worship, starting from the Vedic period (1500-500 BC), if not earlier. Furthermore, the sun has drawn due attention as a source of life and creation *Visva Karman* [16], which deeply affected several aspects that helped develop solar symbols among the Mughals in India, such as: *Surya* (sun deity), fig. (10-a) was a major deity in Vedic Hinduism, *Surya Majapahit*, fig. (10-b). It took various forms on the roofs of temples, including Candi Penataran, where the sun appeared as a mandala-like cosmic structure. It also took another form of *Surya Majapahit*, namely the eight rays of the sun with *Surya* in the center riding a horse or chariot in the central ceiling decorations of the inner sanctuary of Bangkal temple [1].



**Figure (10)** **a.** common carving of Surya Majapahit taken from Majapahit temple ruins- National Museum Jakarta, Rizki Lestari, *Bomantara: Reinterpreting Batik Fabric Relief Surya Majapahit*, (EAJMR), Vol. 1, No. 10. 2022. **b.** Surya (sun deity) painted in the Punjab Hills by Guler or Basohli in 1740-1750. <https://www.christies.com/en/lot/lot-6195346>

In the Vedic period, the king was believed to be like a deity. Some Hindu deities, such as Ram, were related to the sun. Furthermore, there were references in the writings of that period, such as Manusmṛiti, which reads "... A king ... surpasses all living beings ... like the Sun ... and no one on earth is able even to look at him. ... he is the Sun and the Moon, and he is (Yama) the King of Justice. This text is important because the concept of the king shining divine light is observed in other Mughal cultural backgrounds [37]. The people of the Central Asian regions demonstrated similar reverence for the sun in the 6<sup>th</sup> century. This interesting overlap between the belief systems of the Indian subcontinent and Central Asia was derived from the myths of Karna and Alanquwa. In the Indian epic Mahabharata, Karna was a demigod from the son of the sun god Surya and princess Kunti, which resembled the Mughal epic on the origin of the Mughals from Princess Alanquwa, who was a Mughal Princess that transferred divine light through her children Genghis Khan and Timur, as well as their successors to Babur and his descendants. The Mughals used it to build the identity of the Indian Mughal emperor as an emanation of the god's light and as a superior being chosen specifically by god to rule [38]. According to Akbarnama by Abu Fazl, ... "Even though kings are the shadow of God on earth, he [Emperor Akbar] is the overflow of God's light". He legitimized the Mughal rule, considering the inherited values of his subordinated people, the Hindus. Some of its parts resembled the Mughal epic of Alanquwa, as the inheritor of the divine solar light. However, Abu Fazl made several modifications to the Alanquwa epic, whose role was limited to transferring divine light [39]. and who had been legitimate holders of it since birth [40]. It is worth noting that the belief in divine light or glory of the ruler among Mughal emperors was an ancient Persian concept<sup>(6)</sup> [41]. Avesta Khvarenah was later known as farre or farr-e-izadi. It referred to the symbol of the divine authorization given to the king. It was included by Mughals and Persians in the Islamic context with the (divine light) concept of the ruler, who was believed to be god's shadow on earth, which was stressed by Abu Fazl in Ain-i-Akbari that [... Royalty is a light emanating from God and a ray from the sun, the illuminator of the Universe. It is the proof of the book of perfection, the container of all virtues that God transmits to kings without anyone's intermediary...]. It was believed that divine light was visible and resembled a halo emanating from "the blessed face of the king". Farr-i izadi was visually represented in the official royal pictures like a halo surrounding the head of the Mughal ruler [42]. Abu Fazl described the solar halo around the head of the emperor as "a divine light that God directly moves to kings". He referred to the gilded circular halo around the head of the emperor, stressing the appearance of solar symbols from the reign of Akbar and the symbolism of the sun and the gift of divine light gifted to kings [37]. The Mughal emperor was a political ruler, teacher, and spiritual guide (pir), denoting the sacred status of the Mughal emperor who enjoyed God's shadow and care [43]. It is worth noting that the term "God's shadow on earth" was reported in Hadith books as doubtful: (Alsulṭānu ḡillu Allāhi fī al'rḍi, f' dhā

dkhla aḥḍukum baldan lysa bhi sulṭān unflā yqm̄n bih.) "The Sultan is God's shadow on the earth. Once you enter a country with no sultan, do not stay there" [44]. Hence, the Mughals believed that farr-i izadī (divine light) emanated by the great sun star on the Mughal ruler from the sky, whom God chose, and a divine light emanated to express a divine selection. The loss of the royal status and rule also expressed God's dissatisfaction because of the bad works. Thus, God deprived him of divine light. This belief was to legitimize the power given to the ruler. However, this idea was influenced by ancient pagan Hindu influences on the ruler, giving him the deity's status. It integrated the various Eastern traditions, especially Iranian and Indian. Thus, the belief in the divine light of earthly rulers in Indian art was a tradition known mainly in ancient Indian manuscripts. From the time of Akbar, Jahangir, and Shah Jahan, the Mughal emperors made the concept of farr-i izadī an important addition to legitimize their rule. They sought, by all means, to prove and demonstrate their legitimate right to rule. The court painters recruited by Jahangir and Shah Jahan transferred inherited doctrinal influences into pictorial form, not limited to the image of the shamsa halo, but included all artistic forms representing the greatness of the empire [45]. For example, Bichitr showed the idea of sacred divine grace combined with his Hindu beliefs about the idea and status of the ruler in the center of the mandala, stressing the official propaganda of the greatness of the Mughals, their personal light, and solar affiliation. He showed solar symbols in all court scenes; hence, the radiant face of the Mughal ruler was recognized with a sun halo [42]. The sun is the symbol of light, a source of natural resources, and the center of the universe in Indian sacred manuscripts, such as the Mahabharata. Additionally, the main component of the mandala is one concentric circle or more, symbolizing the center of the universe and the sun [46]. Thus, Mughals integrated the symbolism of the sun and mandala, as shown in the manuscripts understudy where the name, stamp, or images of the emperor on gilded background in the center of the mandala and the sun, denoting the center of the universe. This supports the argument of the study that the purpose of the mandala paintings in the openings of Mughal manuscripts illustrates the status of the emperor as spiritual symbolism, "divine light", and universal symbolism that Mughal emperors in India are the center of the universe. For instance, at the inauguration of the Mughal throne, Emperor Humayun appears in a hall decorated with zodiac signs like the sky for the solar emperor. Humayun was passionate about cosmic symbolism, magic, and astrology. Additionally, the layout of Humayun's famous "Mystic House" appears as a building with an octagonal room with a jeweled imperial throne in the middle. The shape of this throne room denotes the concept of the octagonal alignment of cosmic space, which was known to the ancestors of the Turk Mughals. This concept highlights the four corners of the earth and the four intermediate directions. Thus, the emperor was put in the center at the intersection of these eight cosmic directions, like Chakravartin, the world leader [39]. It resembles the scheme and symbolism of the mandala and the position of the king in the mandala.

## 5. Results

It could be concluded that \*) the mandala appeared in the depictions of Indian manuscripts of Jahangir, Shahjahan, and Aurangzeb in particular. At that time, it was important to demonstrate the legitimacy of the rule, with a focus on the greatness of the Mughal ruler. Additionally, painting was important for the Mughals to demonstrate this thought. \*) The study highlighted the doctrinal, spiritual, and political importance of the mandala and discussed its symbolism in each aspect. \*) It illustrated the structure of the mandala of concentric circles, focusing on the number of lobes of each circle that was mostly fixed, i.e., eight, denoting the number of Emperor Jahangir's lineage from Timur to Jahangir. He was the emperor who began using this artistic structure in Indian Mughal manuscripts. He knew the universal value of the number eight, as his throne room was eight-sided, like the sun disk in Surya Majapahit with eight rays. In Buddhism, the cosmic wheel has eight paths and forms an eight-petal lotus. \*) The golden circle in the center of the mandala, with the importance of the center, is due to the belief that it is the center of the universe and symbolizes the golden sun. Additionally, the king in the depiction gives it its symbolism. \*) The study demonstrated that depicting the Mughal Emperor in the center of the golden mandala, symbolizing the sun as the center of the universe, was due to the ancient pagan belief that the Mughals belonged to the sun according to the legend of the Angu, the solar ruler with the solar halo around the face symbolizing the light that God granted him as a result of his solar origin and good deeds. \*) The study concluded that the mandala was an artistic and symbolic means of *farr-i izzadī* for the Mughal emperors, and This supports the argument of the study that the purpose of the mandala paintings in the openings of Mughal manuscripts illustrates the status of the emperor as spiritual symbolism, "divine light", and universal symbolism that Mughal emperors in India are the center of the universe.

## 6. Discussion

The author discussed that the artistic structure adopted by the Mughals of India to decorate the opening of their manuscripts relied on an artistic tradition inherited from Hinduism and Buddhism, like other forms that contradicted the teachings of Islam. Most of the mandala depictions in Indian Mughal manuscripts were made by non-Muslim Indian artists, such as *Bichitr*. It clearly explains what the Mughal emperors did when they put their paintings in the mandala's center, influenced by its symbolism among the Hindus, which satisfied their love of greatness. They were the new rulers of India with a Hindu majority. Thus, having the painting of the emperor in the center of the mandala reminded them of their previous belief about the sacred, powerful king who would spread good and rule the universe with magical power. Furthermore, the emperor's presence in the center of the mandala, the sacred area, protected him from any destructive forces, benefiting from the magical powers of the mandala, which transported those in its center to a better future life and received divine grants. This finding was supported by the

fact that the painter of Jahanshah's album was the Hindu *Bichitr*. It illustrated the interest of the Mughals in the mandala in the openings of manuscripts and having the paintings or stamps of the emperor in the most important part of the mandala "center circle", symbolizing the location of the deity or divine king for Buddhists and Hindus, who believed the king to represent the deity. Our conclusion was packed by the Mughal thought about the emperor and his position as a solar ruler, as mentioned by several historians, including the Mughal court historian Abu Fazl, agreeing with the Buddhist and Hindu belief about the universal king and his divine location within the mandala, i.e., the center of the universe. The important symbolism of the sun for the Mughal emperors appeared in the depictions of manuscripts in various forms, especially the golden halo around the heads of the emperors, symbolizing the sunlight that radiates from the face of the emperor according to their inherited beliefs. It could be seen in the center of the mandala, around the emperor's head, and the golden background that increases the lighting around the emperor's head. My belief was backed by the fact that Humayun's court in the 1530s was interested in the idea of the universe, as the emperor and courtiers had placed on the court carpet a model of the universe with concentric circles and distinct colors. In this model, Humayun identified himself as the sun and occupied the corresponding central circle, which was colored golden [37]. That example affirmed the belief of the Mughal emperors in the symbolism and importance of the mandala. It also confirmed that the Mughal emperors borrowed the symbolism of the mandala to verify the legitimacy of their rule. In sum, this artistic structure with several concentric circles, which art scholars used to call "shamsa," is an inherited artistic tradition among Mughal emperors for its symbolism, which served their belief in the legitimacy of their rule and consolidated the emperor's status as a divine ruler who enjoyed divine care, regardless of the background of this artistic structure "mandala" with pagan donations.

## 7. Conclusion

*The present research paper studies the mandala forms depicted in the opening of Indian Mughal manuscripts. It explains the symbolism of this artistic composition, its relationship to ancient Indian beliefs, and its influence on the concepts of the Mughal rulers. It tries to modify the name of the term used for the form of the artistic structure consisting of interlocking circle shapes, proving that this shape and symbolism among the Mughals of India were ancient inherited influences of the Buddhist mandala symbol to implement the Mughal beliefs about the absolute greatness of the Mughal Emperor, the interest of the Mughals in the mandala in the openings of manuscripts and having the paintings or stamps of the emperor in the most important part of the mandala "centre circle", agreeing with the Buddhist and Hindu belief about the universal king and his divine location within the mandala, i.e., the centre of the universe. The belief in divine light or glory of the ruler among Mughal emperors had emanated by the great sun star on the Mughal ruler from the sky, appeared in the depictions of manuscripts in various forms, especially the golden halo around the heads of the emperors, symbolizing the sunlight that radiates from the face of the emperor according to their inherited beliefs. It could be seen in the center of the mandala around the emperor's head. The paper recommends investigating the cultural and religious backgrounds of ancient people when*

studying any special artistic structure of the Indian Mughal arts, and not to adopt artistic terms without a comprehensive, accurate study of the ancient doctrinal aspects.

## Endnote

- (a) Verso<sub>2</sub> The first side of a double-page illuminated *sarlowh* (frontispiece) together with RCIN 1005069.d. The center panel contains a bust portrait of Emperor Shah-Jahan in old age, facing left. A Persian inscription in the gold cartouche above the portrait reads 'Emperor Shah Jahan, the second Lord of the Conjunction. see [1].
- (b) In December 2013, the Cleveland Museum of Art purchased a collection of Islamic paintings of the Mughal Empire, depicting the Deccan school in India. This collection was initiated by a lawyer in Beverly Hills, Ralph Benkeim in 1961, and continued over the next 51 years in collaboration with Benkeim's wife and art historian Katherine Gill, who assembled an important collection of Indian painting worldwide, with each work selected to represent genres, manuscripts, and albums on the full story of court painting in India from the sixteenth to the eighteenth centuries. see [1].
- (c) The symbolism of the circle has been known since old age. It symbolizes the universe and heaven. Having no beginning or end of the circle has made it a symbol of eternity, symbolizing unity and perfection. see [35].
- (d) The history of the Veda books dates back to the early oral history in the mid-second half BC, writing down the beginnings of knowing the universe in the Indian thought attributed to Hinduism. see [20].
- (e) The mandala has had other politics-related definitions. Many ancient Indian writings on the rule system used the mandala to indicate the geopolitical relations between political regimes, the oldest of which was Arthaśāstra in the fourth century BC, attributed to the politician and philosopher Kautilya, who served as the advisor and counselor of the ruler of the ancient Mauryan Empire. Kautilya offered his political theory, Arthaśāstra, on foreign policy, using the mandala to mean "the circle of kingdoms" to define the geopolitical position of his ideal king. The ideal king is surrounded by other kingdoms, representing natural enemies with their shared borders. Additionally, there is another circle of kingdoms that are not neighboring. In this circle, kings share borders with the enemies of the ideal king, who are natural enemies and allies against the shared enemy. Other circles of kingdoms extend outside and adopt the same pattern with the friend of the enemy. In terms of form, the sacred mandala made of several circles is concentric. see [35].
- (f) Avestan *khvarenaha* Zoroastrian concept (lit. glory) refers to the belief in a divine power or empowerment that helps the ruler to fulfill his duties. It is given only to the legitimate ruler (the concept of the divine right of the ruler). See [46].

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