SURFACE DECORATION ON ISLAMIC ARCHITECTURE IN SUB-CONTINENT WITH SPECIAL REFERENCE TO HAYAT MOSQUE HYDERABAD SINDH

By
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The surface decoration plays central role in the Islamic Art. It is the unifying factor, that for centuries has linked buildings and various objects from all over the Islamic world, covering an enormous geographic span stretched from Spain to China and from Egypt to the Indonesia.

Islamic Art is an art not such of a form[1] as of decorative themes that occur both in architecture and in the applied arts.[2] In Islamic architecture the surface decoration has a physical reality as well as a visual impact, and an independence[3] of their own which gives them importance equal to their architectural forms.

The development of artistic techniques throughout the Islamic world is always geared to creatingly intricate surface decoration by the use of reflecting and shining materials and glazes. The repetition of design, the deliberate contrasting of texture, and the manipulation of the plans, increase the effects of decorative richness and intricacy. There is always an ultimate sense of a distinct form sobriety in Islamic Art.

Islamic decoration in architecture covers buildings like mosque, palace, fort and living places. The elements of decoration are mostly calligraphy, geometry and arabesque. Their manipulation results in a rich and sumptuous effect. The walls are usually divided into number of panels, each with its own distinctive pattern. The use of glazed tiles create an effect of richness complexity lightened by the use of tile inlays, which introduce the dimension of colour. The reflecting quality of the glazed tiles permits the play of light on the surface of the building giving it a glossy effect changing subtly as the sun moves, despite the fact that the building surface is flat. Its decoration is through contrast of colours and complexity of design.

The first phase of tile decoration comprises the early centuries of Islam, when under the Umayyaid dynasty in the 7th to 8th centuries, the

techniques and the motifs were inspired by, and followed logically from, the inheritance of the late classical world. Monuments such as Dome of the Rock in Jerusalem[4] and the great mosque in Damascus[5] show that Islamic art was close to civilizations preceding it. In Syrian Umayyaid empire much of the work continued to be carried out by craftsmen working in the Syrio-Byzantine and Sasanian Imperial traditions.[6] Umayyaid covering the surface decoration with mosaics, their subject matter and technique are almost indistinguishable from those found in earlier Christian buildings.

The second phase in the development of Islamic decoration derives from the non-Hellenized elements of the art of Persia and even further East. The layers of surface decoration in architecture increase the complexity of visual effects enriched by the carpets, which reflect the same decorative schemes as those found on walls and ceilings. The decoration on floor and ceilings contributed to the fluidity of space by the nature of their decoration, since they were often patterned in the same manner as the walls. Sometimes, in the case of floors, the decoration actually reproduced as carpets, for example the Tomb of Itumad-ad-Dawala[7] in Agra, has an inlaid marble floor that exactly reproduces the designs of Mughal carpets.

Islamic art is an art of repose, intellectual rather than emotional, where tensions are resolved. It is conceptional art where questions and answers are balanced.[8] Absence of tension is achieved mainly through the subtlety of surface decoration in which patterns are the classical heritage. The principles of decoration in architecture are repetition and the continuity of motifs and designs. The decoration continually reflects and multiplies patterns to provide a cool refuge for the eye and mind creating an art which is dynamic and yet unchanging. A curve implies dynamism in decoration the concept of change or expansion. It extends the meaning of form that is drawn or built by suggesting a change into the dimension as pattern within geometric patterns in surface decoration. The muslim decorator has found himself restricted to the use of calligraphy, geometrical patterns, and floral devices, relief, lattices, Inlay, Mosaic, enamelled tiles painted wall, Frescos.

Calligraphy And Calligraphic Decoration

In Islamic world, calligraphy is considered the most important of the arts because of its role in recording the word of God in the Quran. The role of calligraphy in architecture is of the element of decoration that has at all times done most to unify different types of buildings throughout the Islamic world. Calligraphy, like all Islamic decoration, is closely linked to geometry. In Arabic it is referred[9] to as the geometry of line, implying that the proportions of the letters including the curved strokes are all governed by mathematical proportions. The different calligraphic types as KUFI, which is angular, sober and monumental script, NASKHI, THULOTH, cursive styles all go by this principle. These basic types are superimposed with different material or colours. The Arabic alphabets in their various forms, as used for writing both the Arabic and Persian languages, is so well adopted for decorative purposes that almost every significant Islamic building is freely adorned with texts from the Quran, arranged decoratively to form part of the architectural design, and often signed as the work of famous calligraphists.

Geometrical Patterns As An Element Of Decoration

The forms of geometric shapes are found throughout Islamic architecture in bewildering variety of combinations at all periods. Islamic Art inherited the geometric patterns common to the later classical world, but developed these to a degree of complexity and sophistication previously unknown, transforming decorative geometry into major art form. These patterns clearly demonstrate the fascination of Islamic artists with the visual principles of repetition[10], symmetry and continuations generation of pattern. Clearly the art of geometry is related to the study of mathematics and the other sciences, which were keenly pursued by the scientists and philosophers of Islam. Hence the superb, masterful integration of geometry with optical effects, as the balancing of positive and negative areas, interlacing with fluid overlapping and underpassing strapwork, skilful use of colour and tone values. Geometric form patterns also form the basis for organizing the other decorative elements. The generating source of such design is the circle, with the radius functioning as a basic linear unit, and divisions of the circumference

determining the system of proportion. The basic unit of a circle may be developed into a square, a triangle or polygon; squares; pentagons, hexagons, and "octagons[11] star" shapes are often formed in circles.

Floral Patterns: The artists of the Islamic world observed nature faithfully and reproduced it with a great deal of accuracy. Flowers and trees depicted in manuscripts are also motifs for the decoration of textiles, buildings and other objects. In Mughal building a type of floral design emerged out of a combination of European botanical drawings, late Renaissance floral, scrolls and acanthus leaves and local and Persian traditional flora. These designs were applied with supreme taste.

Inlay: Board bands of white marble were inserted to break the monotony of a wide wall surface, as employed in the fourteenth century on the tomb of Tughalak Shah. Ala-Udin's gateway was commonly used by the Muslims of Central Asia, Syria and Egypt. A great innovation was effected by the introduction of the form of Inlay, known technically by the Italian name of "Pietra Dura", which is composed of precious or semiprecious stones, such as ONYX, Sasper, Carnelin. These stones are cut into thin slices and neatly bedded in sockets prepared in the marble. In Mughal architecture,[12] pietra-dura was applied to the buildings on an enormous scale. In Islamic Mughal architecture the motifs are borrowed from Persian art and assimilating and transforming powers from the Indian craftsman. These examples are well designed and finely executed chiefly in Marble at Agra and Delhi.

Inlay with mother of pearls occurs at Salim Chishit's tomb at Fatehpur Sikri.[13]

Lattices: Pierced stone or Lattices used as windows were not unknown to Indian architects. These were specially favoured in the highly decorative temples in Mysore, Deccan or Chalukyan style. The muslim architects, who were restricted in their liberty of decoration, developed the art of designing and executing stone Lattices to the degree of perfection. In Islamic architecture the artist used Lattices not only for windows but also for the panels of doors and for screens or railings around tombs with excellent effect.

The most beautiful traceries are the semi-circular windows of Sidi Sayyad's mosque at Ahmadabad built about 1500. In fact this is the most artistic stone Lattice work found anywhere in the world.

Mosaics: Another appealing surface decoration in the Islamic

architecture of the Sub-continent is Mosaic work. The bold floral mosaics made of marble or red sand stone which appear on the south gateway of Akbar's tomb, are fine examples of it. Mughals loved flowers and that is why these are amicably treated in all art forms. Glass mosaics are found in Sheish Mahals or glass chambers of reserved places, like Udaipur, Amber, Agra, Lahore. The ceiling of the Sheish Mahal Lahore is particularly well-organised and finely done.

Tiles: Surface decoration with coloured enamelled bricks or tiles is of very ancient date in Persia, which was derived ultimately from Babylonia. The lion and archer Friezes from Susa now in Lovre Paris are best examples of the art as practised in Achaemenian times. The Indo-Muslim enamelled or glazed tiles were copied from much later development of the art in Persia, where the ancient technique was never wholly forgotten. The later Persian work shows traces of Chinese influence. M.Migeon believes that the Islamic use of enamelled tile can be seen in numerous Persian buildings of the 14th and 15th centuries. These coloured tiles were known in India much before that in 13th and 14th centuries. The Timurid tradition of Mughals made them more fashionable. The tomb of 'Baha-ul-Hakk at Multan' built between 1264 A.D and 1286 A.D is well preserved. Cunningham, in archaeological survey of Indian report wrote, "some fairly preserved specimens in glazed tiles which may not be contemptuous with the building in its original form. The tomb was extensively rebuilt in 17th century. Sir John Marshall is of the opinion that most of the tile work belongs to that age. The tomb of Baha-ul-Hakk's grandson Rukn-Uddin (A.D 1320), is a well designed octagonal domed building of brick, in Multan, The other most beautiful example of Kashi tile work on a large scale is in Wazir Khan Mosque Lahore. Built in 1634, this building is a well designed domed structure with four handsome minarets, decorated with Kashi tile work of great brilliancy. The oldest Sindh tiles on the Dabgir mosque[14] and Mirza Jani Beg's mosque at Thatta, exhibit only two colours, a deep rich Blue and a Pale Turquoise blue, on a white ground, and resemble the early Multan tiles.

1. Fresco Paintings as Wall Decoration. Fresco[15] Painting is called Munabbat Kari by native artistes. It is executed on the base of lime plaster, prepared carefully after racking out the joints of masonry ground, the surface of the treatment of Fresco painting is first cleaned

racked with hand brush to remove the dust and to roughen the surface, otherwise the thick layer of lime plaster may stick to it. Usually a layer of coarse lime mortar in the ratio of 3:2 (five course) strengthened with slacked lime in the ratio of 10:1, is laid on the wall. The thickness of the layer is normally from half to one inch. The thick layer is normally from half to one inch. The thick layer is then allowed to remain on the wall for a day. If on the next day the layer is too dry to be treated further it is moistened with water and then tapped with edge of a small piece of wood of triangular shape. The whole process normally gives it a rough surface. The plaster is then curved for fifteen days so that its initial setting is complete. Then a thin layer of Khankar lime is applied over it. The technical term, in the local language, for it is Dugha. Over their Dugha is then given another layer of fine white lime cream. This layer is of about 1/16 of an inch in thickness. If the actually the ground, is carefully smoothed with a small flat iron trovel. The smooth surface is now ready to sketch the design.

2. The Painting. [16] The finished ground prepared according to the specifications is then sketched with the help of perforated drawing. The drawing is fixed over the wall surface and pounced with a small bag of fine linen filled with some fine coloured dust. Through this action the design is transferred on the surface. The drawing is then removed and outline is redrawn in red or black. A sketch drawing is thus prepared. The outline of the design is then filled with the desired colours. The painting is rubbed carefully. Throughout the process the surface is to be kept damp so that the texture of the painting is absorbed into the plaster layer. The final touches give the picture a more or less permanent sheen which can withstand the washing by water and the change of weather.

3. Pigment: The Mughal artists normally used pure mineral colour for painting. The required mineral was ground with rice or linseed with little course molasses (GUR). The thick compound thus prepared was then mixed with water and used for painting.

Surface Decoration Of Hayat Mosque Hyderabad Sindh:

This small mosque with its unique appearance is situated in Hyderabad (Sindh) in the thickly populated part of the city. It is the only mosque which is without a dome. The main entrance has an inscription

on the marble slab, on which the name of the mosque is written as "Masjid-e-Hayat" (constructed in Hijri 1312). It is narrated by its caretaker that a man named Khameso willed that a part of his residential house be turned into a mosque after his death. This mosque was entrusted to one of his neighbours, Ali Bux Bhatti. Since then this mosque is under the care of this family. His great grandson Ghulam Mustafa Bhatti is now the Mutwalli (the caretaker) of this mosque. Hayat Mosque is constructed with local material, i.e wood and mud bricks. Its beautiful painted Mehrab is 15 ft high, 16 ft. wide, 10 ft. long and the thickness of its mud wall is 3 1/2 ft. This mosque is badly damaged with the passage of time. Its outer painted wall is in bad condition and mostly washed out. A part of the ceiling was also damaged recently which is now repaired with plaster and Kashi decorative tiles. The walls of the main prayer hall are painted with a variety of bright colours as orange, blue, green, magenta, black and gold. These wall paintings still have the brilliancy of colours.

Surface Decoration Of The Ceiling Of Hayat Mosque

Ceiling of the Mosque is divided into small square panels. In each square floral arrangement is repeated, giving overall an ornamental look. This ceiling resembles the decorative work done in the Mosque at Uchh Sharif.[17] All the four walls are decorated with geometrical and floral design, dividing these walls with interwoven geometrical patterns. One can find different panels beautifully arranged with "Guldasta" (Floral Boques) vases. Two panels have "Guldasta" with fruit arrangements. In this Gulkari different types of flowers are treated separately. Guldasta and flower arrangements and other geometrical forms are lightly shaded. Tughra in Arabic script are painted on the wall, with interesting designs. Colours like orange, green, blue, black and magenta are used lavishly. Gold colour is also added in its decorations. Floor of the mosque was originally in Kashi Tile work. Original doors are changed, except for the door at the main gateway which is also in bad condition. The quality of work is not of high standard, the overall design is not in perfect harmony. But despite this flaw its wall frescos need to be preserved for their artistic merits.

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