Persian Paradisal Theme on the Wall of Mughal Tombs
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Abstract: This paper is a comprehensive study of the mural decoration and its design elements used in the famous tombs of the Mughal era, the tomb of Shaikh Salim Chisti (Fathepur-Sikri) and the tomb of Itimid-ud-Dulla (Agra). The monuments are world famous due to its grand architecture. Different types of decorative arts and beautiful symbolic and decorative motifs were used in the buildings as a part of the interior as well as exterior wall decorations. The motifs are in geometrical, arabesques, vegetation, abstract, animated and religious forms. This paper attempts to find aesthetic, cultural and regional logic for placement of different motifs for wall decoration in different squares and rectangular portion in the interior of the tomb. This paper also explores the theme, which has been applied in geometrical portions with different beautiful flowers, fruits and other motifs. This is an explorative study based on literature, survey and interviews. The study concludes that the mural decoration was an excellent experiment in combining the Hindu and Islamic art forms to provide serenity to the place and symbol of the paradise to the person lying in grave and visitors.

Keywords: Mural, Flowers, geometric shaped garden, paradise

I. Introduction
The Mughal monuments in India are world famous for its beautiful and unique architecture. Which could be attributed to the amalgamation of the diverse set of population, belonging to different cultures, faith and racial groups, which have immigrated to India since time immemorial. Basically Mughals have emigrated from Central Asia, and brought with them their aesthetic values, cultural beliefs and many more things that were quite unique to India. Besides, they have also experimented with the native (predominantly Hindu) and Islamic art forms which made their monuments the unique pieces of arts and architecture. Mughal applied different type of wall decoration such as inlay (pietra-dura), glazed tile, glass mosaic, stucco, incised, painting and frescos murals. This paper covers mural decorations used in, the tomb of Sheikh Salim Chisti and the tomb of Itimid-ud-Dulla and gives the answer of these questions as what types of mural techniques and motifs have been used on the wall of tombs? What is the reason for applying particular motifs? Did they follow any theme or was it based on ruler’s interest?

II. Architecture of Tombs
A. The tomb of Shaikh Salim Chisti
The tomb of Shaikh Salim Chisti is located at Fathepur Sikri, just 23 miles west from Agra build by the great Mughal emperor Akbar (Havell, 2006).“The tomb is a world famous monument with many beautiful features. It is raised on about a meter high platform. There are five steps to reach its entrance porch. The tomb is placed in the center of the main hall under a hemispherical dome. The main tomb building has marble (sang-I-murmur) screen on all sides. The marble wall is beautifully carved and has a pearl-like appearance. It was originally built of red sandstone like the other buildings of Sikri, but either during the time period of Jahangir or at the beginning of the reign of Shahjahan, the same was changed completely into a marble structure. There is conflict between who replaced it, “Its present appearance is due to a later development, possibly that which prevailed at the end of Jahangir’s reign or the beginning of that of Shajahan” (Brown, 1983). The tomb has been replaced in marble by the brother of Jahangir. “In the beginning, the tomb was partly in marble both inside and outside. The dome and verandah were of red sand stone. It was Qutubddin Khan Koka, foster brother of Jahangir, who added the outer marble screens and paved with marble. It was done around 1606 (Chandra 2000). According to native persons, the building was replaced with marble in the period of Jahangir, but in the interior, the marble has been replaced only at the lower part of the side walls (dado height). The upper part (drum portion) is in the same condition having white washed with lime. This portion has been painted in different colorful flowers on marble as well as on white washed portion. It clears that the paintings are related to the later period of Jahangir. “The tomb is made of white marble stone and the interior wall of the tomb, just over a meter high, is decorated with painted stylized flowers at a later age” (Michael, 2006). Other monuments of Jahangir’s period were decorated with the same floral mural decoration as the tomb of Akbar, Sikandara and the tomb of Itimid-ud-dulla. The other common thing is the form of grapes and flower vases which are also drawn in the tomb of Itimid-ud-dulla and in the tomb of Salim Chisti. Grapes, vine-vessels, flower vases and pomegranates are the symbol of Jahangir’s...
wariness. These points help to clarify the time-period of the mural painting in the tomb of Salim. The door to the main chamber is intricately carved with arabesque patterns and bears inscriptions from the Quran: To belong the east and the west; Whithersoever you turn, there is the face of God (Michael, 2006)

Brown marble borders the interior bays, while the relief panels—with the Quranic verses—have a blue background. The carved and painted tomb chamber has a white marble floor, which is inlaid with multicolored stones. The tomb of Salim is famous for two reasons: one is for its unique architecture; and the second is that it is a secular place for all religions.

B. The tomb of Itimad-ud-Dulla

The tomb of Itimad-ud-Dulla is known as the baby Taj-Mahal built by the Mughal emperor Jahangir the son of Akbar. It contains cenotaphs of Mirza Ghias and Asmat Begum. Mirza Ghias Beg (Itimad-ud-dulla) was father of Nur Jahan, queen of Jahangir. He had a great position in Mughal court. In January 1622 Itimad-ud-dulla died. After his death Nur Jahan put in hand the construction in white marble of his exquisite tomb at Agra. which was finished six year later in 1628. It is situated near Yamuna in the old city of Agra near about one and half kilometer from Taj-Mahal. This building is made of white marble. Marble was used for the first time in this building. According to some scholar it is more plentiful then Taj-Mahal. “It is like a brilliant casket, bejeweled with various styles of inlay” (Gascoigne1971)

III. Internalization of Mural in Mughal Era Architecture

It is a well-known fact that Mughals were fond of art. “Akbar was very fond of paintings (Blochmann, 2010) miniature and portraiture, as well as architectural (Smith, 1909).” Babur was the grandfather of Akbar and came to Hindustan in the 16th century. There was a battle between Ibrahim Lodhi, the last of the Afghan kings of Delhi, and Babur (Havell, 2006). Babur had brought two Persian artists with him who continued their art work even after the death of Babur. After the death of Babur Humayun, his son Akbar took the power in his hand. The tradition of employing artists from abroad continued. These artists were doing fine work influenced by local culture, climate, tradition, material and technology. They respected the other artists and wanted to adopt their style. The Mughals were inspired by Persian art and applied this art in many Mughal monuments in India in the form of geometrical shapes. However, in many monuments, they used murals, the art of India. In the words of Nath (1970), “unlike glazed tiling and mosaic work, which were no doubt introduced into India by the Islamic artist, stucco and painting were the ancient art of the Hindus. Though no examples of the art exist, we have overwhelming literary evidence which indicates that it was a well-advanced art in India in the pre-Christian period”. Mural decoration is usually done on the surface of the wall of a building. In ancient times, it was done on rocks and caves. In the Indian sub-continent, we find frescos. It is also believed that the art of frescos in India is older than the Ajanta caves. The ancient Hindu painters also equally excelled in wall painting. With the rise of Buddhism, painting received a new impetus; it was used as the medium for the spread of religion and religious subjects became its main theme (Brown, 1983). Ajanta frescos style and technique later spread towards the east and the west. n. In the west and in Europe, there are many ancient frescos built in palaces and temples of the ancient Greek and Roman civilizations. One of the most famous fresco painting found in Europe at the time of the renaissance is ‘The Last Supper’ by Leonardo, painted on the wall of a church in Milan. Persia was influenced by the European style, and from there this style was adopted by the Mughals. In 1506, Babur paid a visit to Herat, the residence of his uncle Husayn Byqara. Babur was fascinated by Herat, and his descriptions of the city still make interesting reading. There was a pavilion with mural depicting the heroic deeds of the Timurid Abu sa’id Mirza. Later during the Mughal reign in India, murals were prominent features of castles and places (Annimarie, 2004). He (Akbar) supplied the idea and the motive force; the Islamic artist, chiefly Iranian, suggested the pattern—geometrical, floral inscriptional, conventional floresque and others as against the traditional animate figures of the Hindus. “The new motifs revolutionized the whole art. Iranian influence gave a new interpretation to the ancient art of Indian painting (Nath, 1970).It is true that even Mughal mural decoration is an amalgamation of different arts. Yet, it has new features, and so this art is famous in the world. “It is obviously of a comparatively earlier period and might be original” (Nath, 1970, p. 63).

IV. Different mural technique

In Mughal era different type of mural style has been used. They are very attractive and have an important place in the society. The most popular mural styles are inlay, tile, stucco and mosaic. Inlay is one most popular of them. This was known as Pietra Dura (Pietra = Stone, Dura = Hard). This art was related to Persia and adopted by the Mughals. The very first example was found in the Ashraf Mahal and Tower of victory at Mandu, due to this some scholar said that this art is the ancient art of India but according to Nath before Mughal in Gujarat some Persian artist came to India and they lived here by changed their names. They work as an artist and add some mural decoration in their painting through this inlay was found in some places. In Mughal era this art has been used in Humayun old fort in Delhi (Nath 2004)in the period of Akbar it can be seen in Buland Darwaza, Fatehpur Sikri and in Delhi Gate Jahangiri Mahal Agra Fort. In the time of Jahangir this art reach its Zenith. The most popular example of this art is The Tomb of Itimad –Ud –Daulla near Jamuna in Agra, and the world famous monuments is TajMahal by ShanJahan  Fig. 1 & 2.
Mughals art makes use of stucco as a decorative means in mosques and palaces. Indian knows stucco as a material for sculpture in an architectural context. It is rare in the countryside. History of tile (glazed brick), manufacture and decoration in Iran, goes back to the prehistoric period. It has an important position among the various decorative arts in Iranian architecture. Mughal brought this art in India. “The new motifs revolutionized the whole art. Iranian influence gave a new interpretation to the ancient art of Indian painting.” (Nath, 1970).

V. Color Application

In ancient times, artists used ‘earthen colors’ in buildings. This technique is called panel paintings from the 13th to the 15th century. But later in about 1239, oil painting was practiced in England as trade (Touch, 1911) and oil colors were used for the first time by Hubert and Jan Van Eyke. When paints with oil base were introduced, tempera painting gradually lost its prominence as the preferred medium for major works of art. This style became popular in other countries too. Mughal artists were also influenced by this technique. “The mural painting in the tomb of Salim is really exquisite work. The entrance to the interior room has been elaborately painted in floral and inscriptive pattern chiefly in gold, pink and green. “The painting in the interior is bold and broad and has been done on a plaster layer 1/10 thick (Nath, 1970).” They applied a thick paint layer on the wall surfaces. Colors were prepared by the artists themselves. They used earthen colors, chemical color sand plant colors. Red color was made from Laakh, sindoor and hingul (Anand, 2005); white from lime; blue (neel) from the plant, black from kajal and mustard oil; and yellow was made from the plant, dhak. Colors were derived from natural materials. Even eggs, gold powder and silver foil were sometimes used.

VI. Subjects

The interior walls of the tomb are fully decorated with painted mural decoration. No part of the wall is free, and almost all the paintings are different from each other. Subject of these murals is mostly flowers: lotus (kanwali), Lily, Rose (Gul-i-surkh), Pansy, Daffodils, Hibiscus, Juhi, Sunflower, Jasmine and Keshar. Besides these, there are many flowers, plants and creepers which grew in the Mughal garden, like Chameli, Champa, Chandni, Datura, Gudhal, Gandraj, Harsingar, Jawa-ri-rani, Sunflower, Mehandi Mogra and, etc. Mughals used these flowers for oil, perfumes and as cosmetics. Mughals had a variety of flowers. They had great knowledge of the names and quality of various flowers. Different flowers were used as beauty products too. Sweet-smelling flowers were used in large quantities. Oil was also extracted from flowers and used for the skin and hair (Blochmann 1997). In Figure 8, the arrow shows the lotus flower motif at the entrance of the tomb. It has also a symbolic meaning. This lotus is shown in full blossom and the meaning of the full blossom is that the empire was at the full peak or the prime stage in Akbar’s period. Another meaning is to show the welcoming effect.

As for the kanwal, there are two kinds. One opens when the sublime sun shines, turning whenever the sun, goes and closing at night it resembles the shaqayisa, but its red is paler. Its petals, which are never less than six in number, enclose yellow stems … the other kind has four white petals open that at night and turn itself according to the moon but does not close (Blochmann 1997). Lotus is popular and can be seen easily in every monument. The floor is also decorated with this flower (Figure 9). It occupies a great place during Shahjahan’s time (Figure 10). The ‘Aftabi’ was also used in this era. This flower is yellow. The Indians called it sunflower’. There is a quality in this flower that it turns to the sun automatically. “The Aftabi is round, broad and large, has a large numbers of petals and turns continually to the sun. Its stem reaches a height of three yards” (Blochman 1997). In the tomb, this flower can be seen on the border of the square. This flower is in its original color and forms the yellow round with green petal (Figure 11). A flower on the border repeated three to four times in creeper style, seen in many Mughal miniatures, is the hand of a great personality. It is pink in color, with dark green colored gul-i-surkh (rose); the seeti resembles the Gul-i-surkh but is smaller. Gul-i-surkh in Persian is a pink fragrant rose that blooms in spring (Blochman 1997). Around this are creepers of many small flowers which may be Juhi, and try to show in its original form because this flower is in the creeper with many other flowers and the
tree and makes itself dance; so the something is in Figure 12. “The Juhi has small leaves; this creeper winds itself round about trees, and flowers in three years” (Blochman 1997). Now the question to be answered is why only flower motifs are seen in the tomb? Why these flowers were in a square portion and not in a circle or any other shape? What was the aim behind depicting flowers on the side wall? What was the reason not to use the repetition of motifs? The answer may be that firstly, the Mughals were influenced by Persians. It was the Mughals who introduced paradise gardens under Persian inspiration (Jose, 1994). In Persian and Mughal painting, gardens were a favorite subject with artists but their representation, though realistic in detail, is idealized at least in the context of layout and settings, because in the Mughal era, India traded with Persia, China, and many European countries, along with Japan, Burma, the Dutch and the Turks. The Gardens were in square shape and floral arrangement. Nature was considered as an integral part of interior decoration. The fondness for nature was in their cultures. Mughals also adopted this thing and made their gardens square in shape, divided into number of squares. In the main square fruit and flower trees were planted. Each square contained one kind of fruit or flower. Sometimes several flower trees were mixed up in one square. Ram Bagh is the first garden in India (Figure 13) (Annimarie, 2004). Akbar made for himself beautiful gardens in Agra fort, Fathepur Sikri and other places. At Sikndara, there was another garden associated with his name. He lies buried there (Jayapalan, 2000). His awesome mausoleum stands in the middle of this beautiful garden. Some of the ladies like Bika Begum, the grandmother of Akbar, and Mariam Makani, the grandmother of Jahangir, were also interested in laying out gardens. Nurjahan’s garden, called Shahdara, was built near Lahore. Shahjahan was equally interested in gardens, and his Anguri Bagh in the Agra fort is a garden around the mausoleum of Mumtaj Mahal in the Taj. The garden was planted with fruit and flower trees. Mughals were lovers of nature. They thought that if a person thinks himself with nature, he can find new strength and art of life. So they made flower motifs in the tomb to look like a garden. “The horticultural factor of the Mughal funerary complex is taken from Iran where the enclosed garden was developed if no one invented, and which for many religions came to be a symbol of paradise (old Persian, pairidaezaenclose park; Greek paradises, Modern Persian, Firdausi). For Islam, paradise is literally a garden watered by streams; burial in a garden is for the Muhammadan a kind of early anticipation of paradisal bliss. Since it is believed that dead live in their tombs (Jayapalan, 2000), the prospects of being buried in a shady, watered and flowery garden may make one even look forward to one’s death” (Jayapalan, 2000). Mughals were fond of flowers and it shows in these lines: “In Goverdhan’s painting, Akbar wears the typical Mughal jama made of fine, somewhat transparent white fabric depicted with a faint regular pattern of flower springs all over in gold” (Condra, 2008) It is also of concern that the tomb of Salim was decorated during the time of Jahangir or at the start of the reign of Shahjahan. He was most fond of splendors. He loved nature even in his daily dresses with delicate embroidery. The border decorations also reminded the painting during the time of Shahjahan, which were decorated by ornaments. The other reason for flower motif is symbolism. There is no doubt that Akbar believed in Hindu mythology and did his work according to the stars. The artists knew this tendency so they made flower motifs. According to the Hindu mythology, flowers represent sacrifice, love, respect and peace.

VII. Paradise Theme

Now the question to be answered is why only flower motifs are seen in the tomb of Sheikh Salim? Why these flowers were in a square portion and not in a circle or any other shape? What was the aim behind depicting flowers on the side wall? What was the reason not to use the repetition of motifs? Why in the tomb of Itimad-ud-dulla vine-vessels dishes, flower vase, perfume bottles, were decorated. The answer may be that firstly, the Mughals were influenced by Persians. It was the Mughals who introduced paradise gardens under Persian inspiration (Jose, 1994) 28. In Persian and Mughal painting, gardens were a favorite subject with artists but their representation, though realistic in detail, is idealized at least in the context of layout and settings, because in the Mughal era, India traded with Persia, China, and many European countries, along with Japan, Burma, the Dutch and the Turks. The Gardens were in square shape and floral arrangement.

Figure 5 Mughal garden in different geometrical shapes

Figure 6 Mural in Itimid-u-Dulla Tomb

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VIII. Conclusion

This paper proves that the presence of different kind of motifs as geometrical fruits motif calligraphy is auspicious in the tomb of Salim. In the order of its use, the geometrical motifs come first, followed by flower and fruit motifs. Beside all ornaments, there are only floral motifs in the wall of the interior. The theme of this is based on the garden of Mughal period inspired by Persian and Indian arts. It is the best example of the amalgamation of Hindu and Muslim techniques in the garden and in the mural technique. This monument is also world famous and remains symbol of unity among different religions. Not only Indians but many foreigners also visit the dargah, a recent example being the visit of the president of France, Nicolas Sarkozi, and his wife, Carla Bruni. They went to the dargah on December 6, 2010. They also tied a red thread as an expression of their wish for a son (Hindustan, 2010). According to Michael (2001), when the Pakistani leader Pervez Musharraf was attending summit talks in Agra, his wife was escorted to the dargah to offer her prayers (Michael, 2006).

References

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