The Application of Lotus Motif According to Shadhanga of Indian Art: Case Study of Fatehpur Sikri

Manu*, Prof. Ila Gupta**, Prof. Nagendra Kumar***
Department of Humanities & Social Sciences*, Professor & Head, Department of Architecture & Planning**
Professor, Department of Humanities & Social Sciences***
Indian Institute of Technology Roorkee, Roorkee, Uttarakhand 247667, INDIA

Abstract: Art and aesthetic is a composition of communication between artist and spectators which lays emphasis on high level experience through variation of motifs. These motifs associated with inspirational thoughts and powerful approach. In this context, Lotus is a impressive motif which convey the message of supreme power of universe. With the passage of time it has been depicted and carved on the temple architecture as well as Mughal architecture. Mughal emperors had keen observer of arts which may be seen in architecture of Fatehpur Sikri. The architecture of Fatehpur Sikri demonstrates the lotus motif with its spirituality, aesthetic attribute and canons of Indian art which enlighten its outer beauty as well as inner beauty. Although, Shadhanga is a combination of six limbs of Indian art which deal with the external quality of artifacts like proportion, arrangement of design as well as color scheme and so on. The paper discusses the Lotus motif in architecture of Fatehpur Sikri that represents the purity of body, eternity, divinity and so on. In addition, the paper highlights the application of lotus motif according to six limbs of Indian art which provide us aesthetic delight and mental peace.

Keywords: Lotus Motif, Mughal Architecture, Fatehpur Sikri, Six limbs

I. Introduction

Throughout the world, from the very first evidences of existence of human beings, it has been seen that man has tried to cultivate aesthetic sense in things around him. Therefore, he wants to see beauty in every aspect of nature. For instance, as early as the Indus valley civilization, he used to decorate pottery, seals and sculpture. Gradually the sense of aesthetics developed more with the passage of time. The cave paintings of prehistoric time give ample evidence of cave decoration. His simple sense of aesthetics set him to make his surroundings more pleasing and harmonious; with his very meager resources and small efforts man, even in the earliest phase of civilization, tried to make the world around him as beautiful as possible. In this context, architecture has a vital place in human life. It is said that architecture (design of dwelling place) is the fundamental need of a people. Architecture is not a composition of stone, brick and mud. Rather it is a combination of art and science of planning, designing and constructing building. It has a purpose for accommodation of human being. All over the world, there are lots of finest examples of different type of architecture which were built by emperor’s choice and taste. Dr. D.N. Shukla, who studied the VastuSastra (1960), observes: "Beauty is the soul of architecture as an art" [1]. Unless a piece of architecture pleases, it is no architecture. "The three necessary requisites of any architecture are its utility, stability and beauty [2]; that it should provide a purpose, it should be strong and composed of a substantial fabric and should not merely be a structure of the cardboard category; and, above all the entire structure should appear pleasant. In this context, architecture displays vast vocabulary of aesthetic philosophy through its utility, design element and stability. “Indian science of aesthetics thus tried to give expression to their idea of the beautiful” [3] and Indian aesthetic philosophies convey the message of “Satyam, Shivam, Sundaram” [4], which lay emphasis on inner excellence of creation. For instance, Lotus is neither a flower nor a design element of artifacts alone; rather it is an aesthetic manifestation of man’s secret desire to create a spiritual aura in the world. Lotus has always been regarded as a very important symbol in Indian art, religion and philosophy. In Rig Veda the Lotus Goddess is already called by her two names, ‘Shri and Lakshmi, and associated in every possible way with the lotus symbol’ [5]. The lotus represents the principal of growth and denotes life floating on the surface of creative water [6]. This flower opens its leaves when the sun rises and thus is a symbol for sun also. This has also been said to be the symbol of the power of both Brahma and Vishnu. In Indian religion, this has been widely portrayed because this is the only flower which has been able to sustain with its dignity beyond centuries. The padma (lotus) which has been depicted in Mughal architecture abundantly in a wide variety of forms is also an ancient Hindu symbol [7]. The most notable building achievement of Mughal, was this emperors conception and creation of an entirely new capital city at FatehpurSikri [8Brown 1968]. Akbar founded the royal city of
Fatehpur Sikriin 1569 and was the capital of the Mughal Empire from 1571 to 1585 [9]. The numerous structures at Fatehpur Sikri best illustrate the style of his works. During the Akbar’s time, lotus has been depicted variably in Fatehpur Sikri, the purpose of which may not only be decoration but also symbolic. This research will study the depiction of lotus element and the impact of Shadanga on ornamentation in Fatehpur Sikri Building.

The purpose of this study is to describe and explain the lotus application as per the Shadanga (Six Limb) theory of Indian aesthetics. In kama sutra written by Vatsyayana during 200-300 A. D [10], he has described sixty four arts, in which painting Alekhyam has been assigned the fourth place. Towards the end of the book a verse composed by Vatsyayana amply indicates that painting was fully developed during that period and the six limbs of Painting (Shadangas) enumerated in the Kama Sutra were already in vogue. Kama Sutra was revived by Pandit. Yashodhar during 11th-12th century A. D. Yashodhar Pandit was the court councilor of the king of Jaipur, Raja Jai Singh. His commentary on Kama Sutra was known as Jai Mangala. He described the six limbs of Indian art as follows:

“Roop-BhedaPramananiBhavaLavanya-Yojnam
SadradhyamVarnika-Bhanga, ItichitraSadangkam”

The meaning of this shaloka is as follow; Roop-Bheda (distinction of form), Pramanani (proportion), Bhava and Lavanya-Yojnam (the infusion of emotion and grace), Sadradhyam (likeness or verisimilitude), Varnika-bhanga (division of colour) [11]. For a person who is going to create something as a painting or sculpture should have knowledge of form, Proportion, Expression, Aesthetic Scheme, Similitude and Color scheme. The present researcher studied the lotus motif and its application in the ornamentation of Mughal buildings according to the six limbs of Indian painting. During the time of Mughal the craftsmen and painters did not have the modern theory of art; it may be possible that they had the knowledge of old theory of Indian paintings. Here the present researcher studied the lotus form according to the rules of old Indian aesthetic theory of “Shadanga” (six limbs of Indian painting) as follow:

A. Roopa-Bheda (Knowledge of Form or Form Impact)

Roopa means shape or form and Bheda means mystery. In the Shanti Parva of Mahabharata sixteen types of forms have been mentioned as, small, long, thin and angular etc. There are several types of forms but they are different from each other due to their chief characteristics. The forms can be perceived by eye and soul. However, they can be judged by their individuality. First of all it is the eye that sees the Roopa but after that it is introduced to the soul. Roop is an intrinsic natural beauty of visual appearance and it is brought out by skillful manipulation of line or modulation of color which effects Bheda, differentiation of form [12].

Figure 1: Various Forms of Lotus applied in Fatehpur Sikri Buildings.
The Mughal artisans knew about *roop* as a visual as well as mental aspect of form with different attributes. Herewith they also knew what they should use to depict the place which they decorate. Frequently they used lotus motifs according to the lotus position and placement where they wanted to place it in many ways i.e. bud shape, full bloomed lotus form and inverted lotus form and so on. In the decoration lotus buds have been used by Mughal artisans on the spandrel of arches as a garland [Fig. 1]. These above statements reveal that Mughal artisans were keen observers of *Roopbheda*.

**B. Prama (Proportion)**

In Indian art, “measurement and proportion are indispensable for strength and beauty, and measurement is considered the soul of all arts” [13]. *Prama* means correct knowledge of the proportion of different forms. *Prama* gives us strong theory of proportion and measurement with logical calculation. There should be harmonious division in the composition and measurement of the form drawn. *Prama* does not detect measurement of nearness and distance only but it also gives the basic information as to how much exposure of a thing will make it beautiful. It denotes that *Prama* is not an estimation of mathematics but our inherent consciousness which includes our inner and outer world also. The more we use it the more it will be sharpened. If we stop its use it will lose its sharpness. During the Mughal period, craftsmen had keen vision and awareness about *Prama*. They used lotus form as a chief decorative and enchanted creative aspect with full awareness of where it should be placed and what should be the size. Therefore, they didn’t cover whole dome with lotus form, they used it according to right measurement. Another example of this is the arches. The craftsmen used lotus motifs on both sides of arches but in a proper size. It is quite appreciable that they depicted lotus in same size on each arch. We can get evidences of right proportion in Mughal monuments[Fig. 2].

![Figure 2: Proportional Lotus Form applied at Birbal’s House Fatehpur Sikri](image)

**III. Bhava (Expression)**

Beauty and grace cannot be imparted to the image by any cut and dried rule. It must come from the heart of the artist and sculptor [14]. *Bhava* is the representation of sentimental grace in posture and is the action of feeling of form. The expression of sentiments has been taken as one of the most important things in painting. Our eyes see the emotions and the same are expressed by graceful distortion of face. But the deepest expressions of the same are felt by heart only. Thus showing of disposition or posture only is not enough in a painting.

The *Bhava* is an expression of inner sensation which comes naturally through visual representation of object. We can easily see the overt expression of sentiment by our eyes, but only heart can feel its covert form. It is invisible action of visible condition which creates inner delight to the spectator. In Indian theory of art *Bhava* is the essential aspect of artifacts. For instance, *Ajanta* paintings became famous in the world only because of the beauty of expression of *Bhava* in them [15]. The craftsmen at the time of Mughals had their limitations to express any feeling; they could not use any human figure to express the inner meaning. By observing their work we can say that they did great research about the motifs which they wanted to use to express something. These artisans were very much fascinated by Lotus motifs because apart from having natural beauty it also has a symbolic significance. That’s why lotus motif had been adopted by Mughal artisans with its symbolic and spiritual image. For Mughal artisans it was a medium of expressing the universal feeling and emotion through its visual image. Lotus flower has a great potential to arouse several emotions in a single figure which makes it valuable as a decoration element. For example, to show peace they used its inverted form on the top of the dome of a building structure and to express the feeling of victory they used it in full bloom form at frieze of facade at Buland Darwaza at Fatehpur Sikri [Fig.3]. Thus it can be concluded that the craftsmen used lotus flower to express the secret meaning and inner pleasure in the absence of human and animal figures.
Figure 3: Reflection of Veer Rasa in Full Bloomed Form of Lotus at Frieze of Facade at Buland Darwaza, Fatehpur Sikri

IV. Lavanya-Yojnam (Aesthetic Scheme)
Lavanya-Yojnam enhances the beauty and grace of artifacts. The painting will look monotonous if beauty or grace is not there. Shri Avanindra Nath Tagore has elaborated the Lavanya-Yojnam in his "Six Limbs of Indian Painting." "Bhava is the expression of inner beauty and lavanya is the making manifest of the outer beauty by adding grace and charm to it. Lavanya-Yojnam gives gleam to beauty" [16].

As the food without salt is tasteless, in the same way a painting is tasteless without Lavanya-Yojnam. But as the improper use of salt makes a meal bitter and tasteless in the same way the un-proportionate Lavanya could not make a good painting, so only balanced Lavanya-Yojnam should he there in a painting or work of art. Mughal art and architecture is well recognized for its attractive designs and unique style. In this context, lotus has been used as a divine symbol from ancient time which displays different aspects of life as well as grace through its visual image. It can be said that despite knowing the existence of lotus in mythology, it has been adopted by Mughals emperors as an element of design and decoration in Mughal paintings, art and architecture. It may be in the fitness of things to say that the Mughal artisans wanted to present more and more through a small image. That’s why they depicted lotus in both simple and complex forms in attractive and aesthetic manner. Figures are given below to justify the role of Lavanya-Yojna in the architectural decoration of Fatehpur Sikri; in one picture the façade without the ornamentation looks dull and empty. Artisans added the lotus motifs into this to add beauty and Harmony and to generate visual interest among the viewers.

Figure 4: Reflection of Lavanya (aesthetic scheme) through the Lotus application at Turkish Sultana House and Birbal Place Fatehpur Sikri Building
V. **Sadradhyam (Similitude)**

According to Avanindra Nath Tagore, to express the *Bhava* of any form with the help of any other form is the function of *Sadradhyam* [17]. *Sadradhyam* means the ascertainment or determination of the real form or resemblance or similarity in form and ideas. The painting should be clear. If lotus is painted it should look like lotus and not like any other flower. In the decoration of Mughal buildings the artisans created an effect of beauty and sometimes they depicted the lotus motif in highly stylized way. This stylization created confusion in understanding the lotus motif. When they used lotus in Indian style it looked like a lotus but when they used it in Persian or Chinese style it lost its originality. The reason behind this may be that this form came from Persia and China, and their craftsmen were not aware of this flower’s form or they had never seen this flower earlier [Fig. 5]. There is one more reason behind this, in Islamic religion the artist could not depict anything in natural way so they used this flower in this way and also they had no knowledge of the theory of Indian cannons so they were free to use any form in their own way.

![Figure 5: Depiction of Lotus at the soffits of archways and cornice of pendentives at Jami Masjid Fatehpur sikri [19].](image)

VI. **Varnika-Bhanga (Color Scheme)**

The combination of two words *Varnika* and *Bhanga* is called *Varnika-Bhanga* which conveys the knowledge of color scheme. It means the use of color in an artistic style for creating an aesthetic sense. There should be an appropriate color scheme to express the idea and atmosphere in a painting. Opposite or wrong colors should not be used otherwise the painting will be unattractive. For this the painter should be versatile and dexterous in the application of color. He should have keen knowledge about color and the ways to handle it. He should have the knowledge of what color scheme can make a definite atmosphere lively. Each and every color has its own intensity and identity which reflect the prominent mood of human behavior. *Varnika-Bhanga* has been placed in the last of limbs of Indian painting so that after the completion of a picture the colors may be properly added. It is written in. During the time of *Mughals*, The craftsmen had great knowledge of the color but they were also bound by the limitation of material. Red sandstone was the largest medium of ornamentation in Mughal buildings and they chose lotus as the best element because they didn’t have to color it and according to *Chitrasutra* that a painter should try to make a painting only in one color it is also “considered to be focused on primary colors obtained as pure or unmixed and not the three basic colours from which all other shades can be produced” [18]. So, the lotus forms are carved in red sand stone on a large scale. But sometimes artisans worked in other techniques too, such as inlay, painted murals and stucco [Fig. 6], but in these other methods they followed the proper color scheme as per rule of *Sastras*.

![Figure 6: Colored Lotus depiction inside the Tomb of Salim Chisti at Fatehpur Sikri Agra](image)
VII. Conclusion

On the basis of this study it can be concluded that artisans under the Akbar worked on the imperial architecture with the application of six limbs of Indian art. These six canons have a vital place in art and aesthetics because these increase beauty, grace and quality of artifacts which is the basic requirement of an object. The artisans who were employed by the Akbar had inherited these unbroken traditions and these undoubtedly became fundamental lines of guidance for them. They initiated lotus motif in an expressive manner through Fatehpur Sikri monuments. No wonder that there is no record of any new canons in the grand and exquisitely superb Mughal architecture. They did not need any new perception and canons. Such canons had already been evolved and perfected. Akbar gave them the necessary propulsive inspiration; they only revived and revitalized the old principles.

References

[4]. Ibid. pp-34.
[17]. Ibid., pp-36.
[19]. Smith E.W., “The Mughal Architecture of Fatehpur Sikri”, Vol. IV, New Delhi: Caxton Publications, 1896, Plate No. XXXVI, XLI [Source of Figure 5]