

THE INTERNATIONAL JOURNAL OF HUMANITIES & SOCIAL STUDIES

Contemporary Inlay Decoration: A Link to the Mughal Architecture

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Abstract:

The Indian architecture is world famous for its decoration. The credit goes to Mughal to brought new architectural approach, techniques coupled with colours schemes. The inlay art flourished in India during Mughal period and is evident from their buildings which are influenced by local culture, climate, tradition, material and technology. Inlay decoration techniques and designs, originated during the Mughal period, and are now being practiced in contemporary building as part of the interior as well as exterior walls and floors. The motifs such as geometrical, arabesques, floral, fruits and abstract forms used in contemporary buildings really connect us with Mughal period. This paper attempts to find rationale (i.e., aesthetic, cultural and other) for using techniques, designs and motifs for wall and floor decoration in contemporary period and explores its impact on culture. The study infers that the inlay decoration in present time relate to the Mughal as well as to Hindu culture. The artists are found to be very enthusiastic in using advance techniques with primitive flavour in contemporary inlay.

Keywords: Inlay art, Pietra Dura, Mughal Architecture, Contemporary, Designs, Motifs

1. Introduction

India is known for diverse traditions, cultures and versatile art. The art is a strong tool to reflect the culture and living style of any society. The fascinating nation is so attractive where the exotic monuments and its decorative art speak volumes about the tradition and culture of Indian people. It is same in this present research, through inlay art, this study will show the designs, theme and many aspects which belong to the great Mughal rulers and now in contemporary period. The Mughal are known for their glory, living style, and attractive architecture with its unique decoration and not needed to any introduction. Akbar was the first emperor who promotes Indian as well as Mughal art and culture in Mughal dynasty. They made much beautiful architecture in India and their architectural decoration reflects their taste, interest, living style and culture. It shows that architecture and its decoration speaks their living and traditional language. The objective of the study is to understand the influence of Mughal art on society particularly on employment and livelihood. Does Mural decoration, visual art and architecture for instance contribute to creativity as a way to stimulate job creation, learning and social unity? What is the impact of Mughal artistic creation on innovation? Why different traditional Indian buildings used similar Mughal designs? What is the social function of artistic and cultural creativity? This paper explores inlay decoration during Mughal era. It covers the various aspects of inlay decoration such as its history, style, importance and impact on contemporary art and architecture. The whole paper is discussed under six sub-headings, i.e., (i) History of Art and Architecture in India, (ii) Inlay art, (iii) Mughal Inlay decoration, (iv) Inlay designs used in Mughal decoration, (v) Inlay decoration in Contemporary buildings and (vi) Inlay designing as career.

2. History of Art and Architecture in India

“Art is not stone, brick, words, or tricks of trade; it is above all the reflection of the artist’s soul, the visible expression of the forces which drive him” (Godard, 1965, 254-255).

Architecture is the mother of the arts of sculpture, painting and the allied decorative arts, and is a continuous evolution (Nath, 1976). The decorative art in architecture of any country or region is a thorough reflection of its culture. It naturally speaks of the aesthetic standard of the people, their taste, interests, mode of living, the manners, and customs, etc. The monuments within a country or region preserve the most faithful, authentic, aesthetic standard and artistic capabilities of their builders, and it is the reason why a study of art in architecture of any country or region is of vital importance. Indian artisanship is one of the most creative and richest traditions in the world, which flowered during the reign of the Mughal dynasty, adding a new chapter to Indian architecture. ‘Mughal’ here refers to the name of the dynasty that ruled India from 1526 to 1707 A.D., during which the Mughal architecture transcended itself from weak to robust style (Sharma 2008). The Mughal monuments were directly influenced by the Central Asian, Persian, Sultanate, and Hindu constructions; that in turn had influences of Sassanian, Sogdian, Byzantine, Zoroastrian and early Islamic traditions (Dani and Masson, 1992). With the change of rulers in the Mughal dynasty, the decorative techniques saw a transition, and each Mughal ruler brought a new trend of motifs in architectural decoration, reflecting the social characteristic of that period. Nath (1976) observed the changes in the decorative designs in the Mughal monuments during the

reign of different Mughal rulers Babur's buildings reflect the Central Asian influence, whereas Humayun introduced Iranian (Safavid) trend through a group of expert painters. In the architecture of Akbar's period, Hindu and Muslim characteristics were exquisitely composed on the red sand stone surface with the inclusion of Khurasani, Transoxian, Sultanate, Malwan and Gujrati elements in construction, as well as in decoration (Asher, 1992). These trends continued up to Akbar's period and started to dissolve later. Shahjahan's buildings were well-planned, organized, and showed maturity in style, and were exquisite in decorative details that raised the standards of the Mughal architecture. However, the trend started to decline during Aurangzeb's time (Koch, 1991). The Mughals gave a new ornamentation and outlook to the medieval architecture of India. The Hindu architecture blends sculpture and carving for decoration. The Mughals, because of their love for colour and new trends for ornamentation, adopted new methods of embellishment. The Mughal architecture is a mixture of the Islamic architecture of Central Asia and Hindu architecture of India. The development of the Muslim architecture during 1526-1707 AD is rightly called the Indo-Islamic architecture (Brown, 1975). Stone was the chief building material during the medieval period due to its easy availability in India. Stone carving in various types of relief work is the associated form of ornamentation. The Mughal constructed excellent mausoleums, mosques, tombs, forts, gardens and cities during their regime, and were great patrons of the decorative arts. In addition to the construction of beautiful monuments, the Mughal made use of different kind of designs that played an important role in providing aesthetic beauty to the monuments. The art of stucco, relief, jali work, mosaic and marble inlay were beautifully presented in the Mughal monuments. Beauty is one of the essential requisites of any architecture, and inlay art is the distinctive ornamentation from which pleasing effect can be acquired. Inlay design, geometric, arabesque, and calligraphy, were intermixed with swastika, satkonas, and other auspicious symbols (Sharma & Gupta 2012).

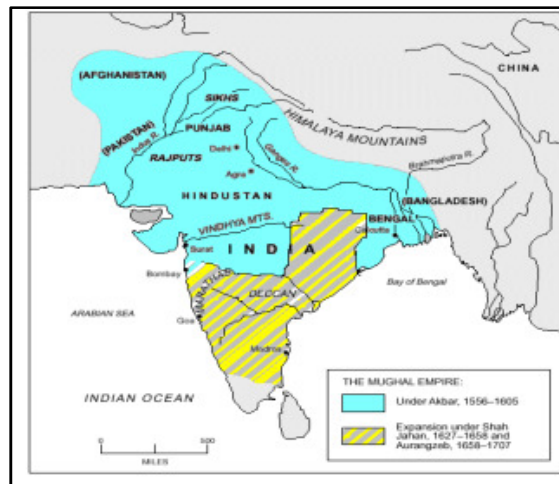


Figure 1: The Mughal empires in India (1556-1707 A.D.)

2.1. Inlay Art

Inlay is one of the most popular forms of art and also known as Pietra Dura (Stone Hard). This art was related to Persia and adopted by the Mughals. The very first example was found in the Ashrafi Mahal and Tower of victory at Mandu in the state of Madhya Pradesh (Nath 1970). Although some scholar said that inlay is the ancient art of India. But according to Nath before Mughals, some Persian artists came to India and they lived in Gujarat by changed their names. They worked as an artist and add some mural decoration in their painting. It is evident from some of the paintings of that period which left some impression in the form of architectural decoration in Gujarat. "Akbar invaded the artisans from Gujarat where they were practicing their traditional art. He employed them and provided full freedom to apply their art" (Nath 1976). But it was very simple and not in artistic way.

2.2. Mughal Inlay Decoration

In Mughal era, this art has been used first time in Humayun old fort in Delhi (Nath 2004). Humayun was an art lover, under the supervision of two artists of Iran and the great Khurasani painter Bihzad Humayun established an atelier at his court and patronized the Persian style of painting which continued to be evolved till the region Sahanjahan. The Mughal were inspired by Persian art and they had applied this art in many Mughal monuments in India, in the form of geometrical and other shapes (Sharma, 2009). However, in many monuments they used murals, the art of India. During Akbar period, it can be seen in Buland Darwaza, Fatehpur Sikri and in Delhi Gate and in Jahangiri Mahal of Agra Fort. The main contribution goes to the Great Akbar, as he was fond of art akin to his father. The tradition of employing artists from abroad was continued and the artists were involved in fine work which was influenced by local culture, climate, tradition, material and technology (Sharma 2007). In fact, the artists respect the work of others and want to adopt their style. Akbar was born in India and has respect for all religions, viz., Hindu, Jain, Sufi and Christian with deep feelings about the country and hence he proved himself as the best ruler. He spread love in the form of Din-I-illahi to fulfill his ancestor's dream of whole India. He married to a Hindu Rajput girl to make strong relations with Rajputs. The most popular example of this art is The Tomb of Itimad -Ud -Daulla near Jamuna in Agra. In the time of Jahangir this art reaches its Zenith. Jahangir was the lover of art, but indulged in drinking wine (Beveridge 2006). There are some motifs of wine vessels, perfume bottles, dishes and flower vase

(Sharma 2008). The complete building looks like a jewel box decorated with many different precious stone. Most of the motifs used in this building have been taken from Iran because the daughter of Itimud-ud-dulla and wife of Jahangir Nurrazahan was a Persian lady and most of the artists were Persian. Many safavid artists, that are, Aqa Riza, Ghulam emigrated from safavid lands to the court of Jahangir (Okada, 1998). Inlay decoration in the Tomb of Itimadud-Daulla and TajMahal are showing the beauty of Inlay decoration (Fig. 2a & 2b). ShahJahan was very fond of architecture than paintings which is evident from the world famous monument 'Taj Mahal'. Shahjahan made many monuments in India with beautiful mural decoration. Figure (1) shows the coverage area by the different Mughal rulers which clearly depicted the roots of Mughal Empire in India.



Figure 2: Inlay Decoration in the Tomb of Itimad-ud-Daulla and TajMahal (Source: By Author)

2.3. Inlay Designs used in Mughal Decoration

Geometrical motifs, Arabesque, Calligraphy, Floral and many motifs from Hindu mythology adorn the beauty of the Mughal decoration (Sharma 2007). Floral designs have been given more importance among all because of many reasons such as: First, the Mughals were very much impressed by the Persian style, as they introduced paradise gardens under Persian inspiration (Jose, 1994). Mughal adopted their theme of paradise effect. They used many type of different geometrical shapes and in middle they placed a seat for his majesty. So they can felt themselves in paradise with natural beauty. According to Begley and Desai (1989) the poet kalim also points out "Mughals have inlaid stone flower in marble, which surpass reality in colour, if not in fragrance, red and yellow flowers dispel the heart's grief". Secondly, these rulers were fond of flowers and natural objects and liked full embroidery in their clothes as well as tent. Their tents and walls were fully decorated with motifs. In every monument, the subject has been made according to the ruler's taste as in the tomb of Itimad-ud-dulla (Sharma & Gupta, 2012).

2.4. Inlay Decoration in Contemporary Buildings

In present time, inlay is considered to be the most trendy and utilizable art and is the centre of attraction in India and outside as well, because visitors were found to be impressed by the inlay decoration of Tajmahal. They fell in love with the Taj mahal and all the beautiful marble tiles with their lovely floral designs with semi precious stones. The impression of this art can be seen in the many buildings. For instance, Dayal Bagh temple of Agra, Durga Mata Temple in Ludhiana (Fig. 3a & 3b) and Kala-kriti Emporium in Agra. The Dayal Bagh temple Agra is the holy samadh decorated with floral motifs in inlay. The floral designs are using at same level as in Mughal period (Sharma & Gupta 2012). Now the artists are making these designs in advance style. They are giving light and shade in the flower, as an artist applies in oil colour. This style enhances overall beauty of the design. Moreover, inlay designs are being used for decorative purposes in many household items as table, chess, pot, pen-stand, plates, etc. Interestingly, we can see inlay designs in all type of buildings (i.e., residential, religious, shops, metro subways and offices).

The supremacy of Mughal dynasty has gone. The court and respected slogans chanted by their followers are no more. Although their physical appearance is not here but their soul is present and depicted through the inlay decoration in famous monument. They were not Indian still they enriched the height of Indian architecture and its decoration. Perhaps this power of art came in their decoration due to cosmopolitan characteristic which was forced by geographical changes. The Mughal have their route from Persia, where Persian traditional art and living survived.



Figure 3: Inlay Decoration in Contemporary Dayal Bhagh (Agra) and Durga Mata Mandir (Ludhiana) Source: By Author

2.4. Inlay Designing as Career

India is renowned for its abundance of historical monuments as well as for the stone craftsmanship that is exhibited in several historic places, marble inlay emporiums and contemporary buildings in the region. This craftsmanship has created a niche for itself in the global market. With the establishment of organizations such as Development Commission and the Handicrafts Board, the growth of such art is further accelerated. Today, apart from Florence in Italy, Agra is the only place in the world where any kind of marble inlay work is being performed. The marble inlay work is found on large and small boxes, pill boxes, plates, table tops, and decorative articles, small hangings and in contemporary buildings. Inlay works executed by contemporary artists, are undertaken as per the architectural plan in modern buildings. The basic characteristics of the contemporary inlay art are that work is done by hand (Fig 4a & 4b), which have artistic and aesthetic value (Khale, 1963), establishing connections with the Mughal period. These inlay pieces are objects of utility as well as of decoration.

The art of marble inlay (*pachchikari or pietre dura*) has passed from a generation to generation, for example, from the craftsmen who made the Taj Mahal and Fatehpur Sikri to the present time (Sharma & Gupta 2012). Survey was conducted and interviewed 100 craftsmen specialized in inlay work in Agra (Uttar Pradesh). It is evident from the result that this art saw its revival. The traditional Inlay artists were making traditional objects, whereas designers and manufactures included a number of new designs that are fascinating to the customers. Traditional artisans generally have lack of knowledge and means to increase the quality and productivity of design input (to meet typical market requirements). However, it is a matter of pride that these craftsmen were playing an important role to preserve the high ideals of the master-craftsmen who brought honour and prestige to the Indian decorative art through the ages. Many craftsmen or artisans of this field are following their ancestor's art (Sharma & Gupta, 2012). During survey, these artisans informed that they have learnt this art through their ancestors, who were workers/ employees of the Mughal dynasty. In personal interview with inlay artisans working for the temple Dayal bagh in Agra, it can be easily understood that how this art travelled from generation to generation, for example, from the craftsmen who made the Taj Mahal and Fatehpur Sikri to the present time and earning livelihood for their family. Now, they have chosen this art as their career opportunity because of inherent skill. Interestingly, some of the workers have started their own workshop and businesses whereas some became contractor. They have asked to start degree or diploma for such kind of art so that the work can be undertaken at high level using modern technologies. Though, manufacturers and exporters have changed style and improved the quality through exchange of knowledge and technology. For example, manufacturers and exporters are utilizing diamond cutters and machines, thereby able to provide and modify designs according to change in demand of the customer.

Inlay decoration has potential market and is popular essentially because of its uniqueness and luxury with durability, although costly even than people of upper middle and high class do not hesitate to spend money. The other main point is that it breaks the monotony in building and adds aesthetic sense with harmony of colours and forms, rhythm and unity (Sharma 2009). Many foreigners visiting India to see Taj Mahal were found to be attracted to inlay items/panels because of its unique style and presentation. They want to use this style in their home but due to lack of the artisans in their country and they carry these beautiful inlay products from India by shipping.



Figure 4: An Artist showing equipments and performing inlay work (Source: survey by Author)

3. Conclusions

Art and culture is the bone of any society since it linked every aspect of our present life with past. Inlay art has a great significance in understanding and reconnecting contemporary decorations with that of the Mughal period. The main features such as variety of designs, colours and true devotion of artisans made this art world famous. Arabesques, floral and geometrical inlay designs are commonly used in Muslim architectural decorations. In the Durga Mata Mandir, Ludhiana (Punjab) and the Holy Samadh, Agra (Uttar Pradesh) applications of these designs are presenting continuity of Muslim architectural decoration trends. The traditional Inlay artists were making traditional motifs, whereas designers and manufactures included a number of new designs that are fascinating to the customers. The technique shows their technicality with aesthetic approach through calligraphy and geometrical patterns. Careful study and minute observation leads to the conclusion that many characteristics of inlay designs have been inspired by prototypes from throughout the Mughal inlay decoration in contemporary buildings. This art travelled a long distance and the contributions of artisan who transferred the skill from generation to generation are worth appreciating in preserving the high ideals of the master-craftsmen through ages. Presently, manufacturers and exporters are utilizing diamond cutters and machines, thereby able to provide and modify designs according to change in demand of the customer. The study concludes that inlay decoration used in these contemporary buildings is revival of Mughal tradition. Though the Mughals are not with us still people are demanding their style in advance techniques. It is well said by Aristotle, "The aim of art is to represent not the outward appearance of things, but their inward significance."

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