

New Aspects Related to Origin and Development of Mughal Inlay Art in India

Abstract

Mughal Inlay art is a remarkable feature of Mughal architecture in India and Inlay art was an instrument of dynamic expression in the great age of the Mughal Empire. The Monuments of Agra(India) provide the different stages of the development of Mughal Inlay art in a progressive sequence during sixteenth to seventeenth century as practiced under Akbar (r. 1556-1605), Jahangir (r. 1605-1627), and Shah Jahan (r. 1628-1658). This research paper will present probable aspects related to the origin and development of Mughal Inlay art. Marble inlay-‘Pachchikari’ or ‘Parchinkari’ is one of the most beautiful and popular forms of Mughal art developed indigenously in India. It is to be believed that it is typically Italian in origin and some contend it to be of the Indian origin itself. Inlay technically known as Pietra dura (Italian for "hard stone") is marble inlaid with designs in precious or semi-precious stonework. The present paper attempts to establish from written sources the possible interconnection between the inlay work during Jahangir period and its development. The Mughal Inlay art’s origin is in India and it developed indigenously as it relied on several key aspects. Ram Nath, Ebba Koch, E.W Smith, V.A. Smith and Major Kole explore some elements of the origin and development of inlay work. The findings show that it is not only an indigenous Indian art and but also that it developed rapidly during the reign of Jahangir. The points came from the visit of Jahangir in Mandu (India). When Jahangir visited Mandu, the fascinated inlay work there impressed him and as the continuous refinement of inlay work can be seen in the Jahangir buildings i.e. from Akbar’s Tomb to Salim Chisti’s Tomb and ultimately a remarkable change in the Tomb of Itmad-ud doulah.

Introduction

Mughal Inlay art is a remarkable feature of Mughal architecture in India and Inlay art was widely appreciated and debated with respect to its origin and development. In India it developed in different stages during sixteenth and seventeenth century as practiced under Akbar (r. 1556-1605), Jahangir (r. 1605-1627), and Shah Jahan (r. 1628-1658). Inlay technically known as *Pietra dura* (Italian for "hard stone") is marble inlaid with designs in precious or semi-precious stonework, such as onyx, jasper, carnelian, etc. cut into thin slices and neatly bedded in sockets prepared in the marble¹. It is not surprising that the buildings *Marble inlay-Pachchikari* or *Parchinkari* is one of the most beautiful and popular forms of Indian Mughal art and developed indigenously here. Mughal Inlay art is not an isolated phenomenon; it might have traveled over long distances before having been introduced into India and before being adopted in such a refined way by the Mughals². Some believe it to be typically Italian in origin and others believe it an indigenous Indian art. The present paper tries to find out the possible link and development of inlay work during Jahangir’s period.

The Origin of Mughal Inlay Art

Inlay work particularly on marble or *pietra dura*, generated a lot of debate as far as its origin is concerned. Some argue that the inlay art is Italian in origin and Indian artisans accomplished adapted it to their needs, gave it an indigenous touch and used the technique to carve out traditional Indian motifs that are today the crown of Indian art. Some believed it is developed slowly in India as we can observe the differences found in the inlay work of the buildings of Akbar to Jahangir and than Shah Jahan. A continuous development in Inlay art can be seen in Jahangiri Mahal (Plate No 1) to Akbar's Tomb (Plate No 2, 3) and then in Tomb of Salim Chisti and Itmad-ud- Daulah's tomb(Plate No 4, 5, 6). The tomb of Itmad-ud –Daulah supplies a link between two important phases, namely those of Akbar and of Shahjahan. It is the first notable building in white marble with its rich ornamentation in *pietra dura* that provides the impression of a miniature precious object magnified into a piece of architecture. It represents the transition from the red sandstone phase of Akbar's buildings with their direct simplicity and robustness of structural design to that of sumptuous marble with all the changes.³

Nath emphasizes that the Mughal monuments built during the period of different emperors having inlay work is an indigenous art and, moreover, developed form of mosaic, which has been further divided into two styles. The first style was different geometrical shapes of stones of different colours were assembled and arranged in such a way to form a pattern on a plaster surface or on a stone slab. The other was the inlaid style in which thin pieces of semi-precious stones were laid in sockets specially prepared in a sand stone or marble slab⁴ (Nath, 1970, 29). The first style can be seen in geometrical shapes of mosaic work in Buland Darwaja of Fatehpur Sikiri, Jahangiri Mahal of Red Fort and in the Akbar's tomb at Sikandara. The example of other style can be observed in the interior and the exterior of the Itmad-ud –Daulah's tomb(Plate No 5,6), Salim Chisti's tomb and in the exterior of the Taj Mahal (Plate No 7). The early example of this art has been found in the Chaumukhi Jain Temple (A.D. 1438) at Ranpur, the Qila –i-Kuhna mosque (A.D. 1542) in the old fort at Delhi, Humyun's tomb (A.D. 1565) in Delhi⁵. The buildings of Akbar- Delhi gate of Agra Fort (A.D. 1566), western facade of Jahangiri Mahal (Plate No 1), Jami Maszid, Buland Darwaja (A.D. 1565-70) at Fatehpur Sikiri exhibit almost the same style. In Jahangir reign, Akbar's tomb (A.D. 1605-12) had applied inlay art in refined manner and Salim Chisti tomb, Itmad-ud-Daulah tomb (A.D. 1627) had reached near to a stage of perfection. According to E.W. Smith, the Itmad-ud-Daulah's tomb has both mosaics in coloured marbles and inlaid work, but after Jahangir period the mosaic ornamentation gave place entirely to inlaid decoration⁶.

Inlay work on precious stone began in the workshops of Florence in Italy around the end of the sixteenth century. Ebba Koch strongly supports *Pietre dure* is an Italian origin and has European influences. She says: 'The Italian *Pietre dure* panels are embedded in a white marble surface...'⁷ and observes European forms are integrated and transformed in Mughal court art. Whereas Nath says that Mughal inlay art is a developed Indian art and the Orpheus Plaques which are the solitary example of Florentine *Pietre dure*, were imported ready made and placed in the Throne- Balcony of the *Diwan-i-Am* of Red Fort Delhi between 1707, after the death of Aurangzeb, and 1824, when Bishop Heber saw

them there for the first time, and mentioned them in his travelogue.⁸ We can conclude that the mughal Inlay art is originally an Indian art as the earliest example of Inlay art can be seen in Chaumukhi Jain Temple (A.D. 1438) at Ranpur and the Qila –i-Kuhna mosque (A.D. 1542) in the old fort at Delhi, Humyun's Tomb (A.D. 1565) in Delhi; and *pietra dure* technique came in India after seventeenth century.

The Development of Mughal Inlay Art

According to Major Cole as quoted by Smith V.A., 'the earliest example of *pietra dura* is Jagmandir palace's Gol Moandal (A.D. 1623) at Udaipur, built for Prince Khurram (Emperor Shahjahan)'.⁹ In the same period 1621-27, Nur Jahan, queen of Jahangir, built the tomb for her father Itmad-ud-Daula, which has almost the same inlay work of precious and semi-precious stones with different motifs such as floral, cypresses, creeper, wine glasses, birds, and an amazing variety of geometrical arabesque (Plate No 6). Finally, the much refined inlay art can be seen abundantly in the Taj Mahal (Plate No 7 and 9), and palaces of Agra (Plate No 8) and Delhi Red Fort during Shah Jahan period. Smith also agrees that 'Shah Jahan probably learnt this art while residing in the Jagmandir palace at Udaipur'.¹⁰ According to Nath, the earliest examples of inlaying with rare stones in Mandu at the Mausoleum in the Ashrafi Mahal (Plate No 10) and also at the Tower of Victory, are both constructed during the first half of the fifteenth century.¹²

If this all can be possible that Shah Jahan was impressed by the Jagmandir palace at Udaipur; there is also a possibility that Mandu's Inlay work fascinated Jahangir and his wife while visiting that place. The Mahmud's Madrasa of the Heavenly Vault (Asharfi Mahal) that is now largely in ruins but originally included a domed Mausoleum and a seven story tower at Mandu in Madhya Pradesh, central India¹³ (Plate No 10). We can not do a comparative study of inlay work of Asharfi Mahal to Agra's Mughal inlay work as at present this monument is not in such condition and the inlay work of that time is not available, but this paper is based on the Nath statement that the earliest examples of inlaying with rare stones are in Mandu.

The city of Mandu was the fifteenth century capital of the erstwhile Sultanate of Malwa. It presents a preview of the Mughal custom in a non-Mughal city. Malwa's independence came to an end in 1531 when it was occupied first by the Sultan of neighboring Gujrat and later in the same year, by the second Mughal Emperor, Humayun and from 1564 on it remained a permanent part of Mughal India.¹⁴ Mughal Emperors had great interest to spend a good part of every year outside their capitals that contribute increasingly in the pleasure and growth of other Indian cities. The day to day events of Jahangir's stay of seven and half month at Mandu were described in detail in the *Memories of Jahangir*. This record is supplemented by Sir Thomas Roe (Ambassador of Queen Elizabeth) who traveled with Jahangir to Mandu. On 6th March, 1617, Jahangir arrived at Mandu after leisurely journey of four months¹⁵. The magnificent buildings of the Malwa King drew his admiration; he celebrated the peace by a magnificent reception in Mandu of the Bijapur envoys.¹⁶ Jahangir visited the beautiful Friday mosque, a superbly simple and dignified building from the early fifteenth century.¹⁷ Jahangir himself moved his court that gives a graphic description of the luxury of his camp equipage, with the ladies of the

court¹⁸ and he had a delightful picnic with his ladies in the Nilkanth summer house.¹⁹ “On the 24th March I rode to go round and saw the buildings of the old kings.”²⁰ Jahangir enjoyed the time spend at Mandu. According to Brand, Jahangir spent a full five and a half years in Mandu which is almost a quarter of his reign.²¹ It shows the possibilities of impact of this place increasing because where we spend much time it leaves their impact on our mind and the same happened with Jahangir’s continuous visits to Mandu.

With a remarkable eye for excellence in design and execution in the arts and crafts, Jahangir encouraged talent and promoted merit without discrimination. Jahangir had taste for the fine things of life - for beautifully designed artifacts, the enjoyment and appreciation of cultural activities. In his memories, he says that there should be such grand buildings in all great cities as might be fit for royal accommodation²². Probably when Jahangir visited Mandu, the fascinating inlay work of Mandu impressed him and the continuous refinement of inlay work can be seen in the Jahangir buildings i.e. from Akbar’s tomb to Salim Chisti’s tomb, and ultimately a remarkable change in the tomb of Itmad-ud doulah. It may as well be possible that there could have been interaction between Mandu’s artisans and Jahangir’s architect. Jahangir had sent his architect Abdu-I-Karim to look for the repair of the buildings of the old rulers in Mandu²³. It is predictable that Abdu-I-Karim would have come in contact with the local artisans of Mandu and would have shared their techniques which inspired them to do it more minutely. Another possibility is that Nur Jahan, the wife of Jahangir, would have been fascinated by the inlay work of Mandu. As explained about the visit of Nur Jahan with Jahangir in the *Memories of Jahangir*. she saw all the places of Mandu as per the instruction of her husband. It is expected that Nur Jahan was inspired by the inlay work and applied the same in her father’s Tomb with much sophisticated style.

In Shah Jahan’s period, the *Musamman Burj*, the *Diwan-I –Aam* , *Diwan-I –Khas* of Agra Red Fort; the Taj Mahal, Agra (1631-1652), Red Fort and Palaces, Delhi (1639-1648) were the examples of its most refined and perfect stage and it was an incessant phenomena in the field of Mughal Inlay art. From 1630 onwards, *pietra dura* appeared in buildings as well as on moveables, small objects as decorative panels, with bird and flower motifs, suitable for cabinet fronts and tabletops. Unlike the *pietra dura* of Italy and particularly the Florentine tradition, Indian inlay work is not three-dimensional but more flat. It is not appropriate to say that the inlay art came from Europe but it is a continuous development of Inlay work. It is observed that there is no European inlay motif in the Jahangir period and there is not much difference between the inlay technique of Itmad-ud-Daulah’s Tomb and technique of Shah Jahan’s buildings inlay work. It reached its most gracious position in the period of Shah Jahan with the placement of inlay motifs and in the use of negative and positive space of the inlay motifs.

Conclusion

To recapitulate briefly the three major points about the visit of Jahangir at Mandu that have bearings on the origin and development of the Mughal Inlay art are the following: Firstly, when Jahangir visited Mandu, the fascinating inlay work of Mandu impressed him and as the continuous refinement of inlay work can be seen in the Jahangir buildings

i.e. from Akbar's Tomb to Salim Chisti's Tomb and, ultimately, a remarkable change in the Tomb of Itmad-ud Doulah. Secondly, the research also finds the possibility that there was an interaction between Mandu's artisans and Jahangir's architect. The other possibility can be that Nur Jahan, the wife of Jahangir, too got impressed by the inlay work of Mandu during her visit along with her husband. As a result she applied it in her father's Tomb with much refined manner. To sum up, in Jahangir period a remarkable change can be seen in Mughal Inlay art, which is not only an indigenous Indian art but also developed rapidly in the period of Jahangir rather than Shah Jahan.

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Appendix-1

Table No 1: The Mughal Emperors & their Monuments having Inlay Work

Emperor	Reign	Famous Monuments	Monuments of Agra having Inlay Work
Akbar	1556-1605	Humayun Tomb, Delhi (1560s), Arab Sarai, Delhi (1560s), Agra Fort, Agra (1565-1570), Jama Masjid, Fatehpur Sikri (1571-1580), Skaikh Salim Chishti Tomb, Buland Darwaza (1571-1581), Islam Khan's Tomb, Buland Darwaza, Fatehpur Sikri (1601)	Delhi gate of Agra Red Fort, Jahangiri Mahal, Jami Maszid and Buland Darwaza Fatehpur Sikri
Jahangir	1605-1627	Akbar Tomb, Sikandra (1605-1612), Mariam-uz-Zamani Tomb (1622), Skaikh Salim Chishti Tomb, Itmad-ud-daulah Tomb (1622-27), Jehangir Tomb, Lahore (1627)	Akbar Tomb, Skaikh Salim Chishti Tomb, Itmad-ud-daulah Tomb
Shah Jahan	1627-1658	Musamman Burj Agra (1628-30), Anar Sagar Pavilions, Ajmer, Diwan-I-Khas (1635), Shish Mahal, Mina Maszid, Nagina Maszid, and Diwan-i-Am in Agra Fort (1631-40), Taj Mahal, Agra (1631-1652), Black Pavilion. Srinagar (1630), Red Fort and Palaces, Delhi (1639-1648), Jama Masjid, Agra (1648), Jama Masjid, Delhi (1650-1656), Fatehpuri Masjid, Delhi (1650), Moti Masjid (Agra Fort), Agra (1648-54)	Musamman Burj Agra, Diwan-I-Khas Agra Fort, Taj Mahal

Appendix-2

Illustrations



Plate No 1: *Inlay, Western Façade, Jahangiri Mahal, Agra Fort (Agra)*



Plate No 2: *Inlay, Central Portal, Akbar's Tomb, Sikandra (Agra)*



Plate No 3: Arabesque, spandrels, Akbar's Tomb, Sikandra (Agra)



Plate No 4: Arabesque, spandrels, Gateway, Itmad-ud- Daulah's Tomb, (Agra)



Plate No 5: *Geometrical in Inlay, Itmad-ud- Daulah's Tomb, (Agra)*



Plate No 6: *Inlay, Exterior, Itmad-ud- Daulah's Tomb, (Agra)*



Plate No 7: *Inlay, Exterior, Taj Mahal, (Agra)*



Plate No 8: *Inlay, Musamman Burj, Agra Fort, (Agra)*



Plate No 9: *Inlay, Main Entrance, TajMahal, (Agra)*



Plate No 10: *Ashrafi Mahal, Tower of Victory, Mandu (M.P.)*