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Topic – Floral Motifs: Decoration and Meaning in Mughal Architecture of India in 17th Century

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The study and analysis of decorative floral motifs of the Mughal period extended to a broad framework of various disciplines . The research highlights significance of flower motif illustration in various mediums expressing Mughal art, authority and a definite imperial style of a certain period in the whole of the Mughal rule that spanned across three hundred years. The various mediums in which floral art had been expressed such as miniature paintings, poetry and objects of imperial use has been analyzed in the context of their influence on the Mughal gardens and its flora. Mughal architecture laid foundations of a remarkable style in India speaking volumes of their ability through an imperial architectural style.

Primary observations of the Mughal tomb complexes were synthesized to conclude that amongst the represented vegetal motifs comprising of full blooming flowers, stylized buds, trees, vines with blossoms, scrolling stems and a variety of leaves, mostly stylized ; some motifs showed significant illustrations. For example the Cypress was the only tree that has repeated representation in the Taj Mausoleum and Itimad-ad'Daula's tomb. Textual references of the cypress tree in Mughal gardens repeatedly mentions that it was planted in rows. The cypress tree was also popularly

represented in other mediums such as Mughal carpets generally used as an element to frame the floral design in prayer carpets. Amongst other significant representations of trees there was only a single image of a palm tree, a banyan tree and only leaves of trees like *Chinar* and the *Peepal*.

Through variables listed for identified flowers from motifs it was analysed that plants such as Chrysanthemum – *Chrysanthemum indicum*; Larkspur – *Delphinium cashmerianum*; Sunflower – *Helianthus annuus*; Cockscomb – *Celosia cristata*; China rose – *Hibiscus mutabilis*; Lotus – *Nelumbo nucifera*; Marigold – *Tagetes patula*; Banyan – *Ficus benghalensis*; Pipal – *Ficus religiosa*; Dhak – *Butea monosperma* are indigenous plants. All these plants found representation either through plant form, flower or profile of their leaf in motifs observed at the Mughal tombs. Of these the Lotus and the leaf of Pipal are represented frequently and stylistically on a various architectural elements.

Three ornamental flowers like Hyacinth – *Hyacinthus orientalis*, Windflower – *Anemone sp.* and Crown imperial – *Fritillaria imperialis* do not find any mention in texts of having been observed growing in the Mughal gardens in the plains of India. Hyacinth and Anemone are popular flowers that find references in Persian poetry. Crown imperial finds an elaborate description in the *Tuzuk-i-Jahangiri*. Amongst the other listed ornamental flowers such as Iris, Lily, Daffodils and Tulip find references in *Tuzuk-i-Jahangiri* of being found growing in the natural landscape. These three plants are propagated through bulbs and were naturalised in India. The three flowers also find popular representation as motifs in relief on Mughal monuments of Shahjahan's reign. It

also interesting to note that all three flower are represented in white colour. White is symbolic and the somber colour to express grief.

The listing also helped identify plants that have red flowers, these include *Fritillaria imperialis*, *Dianthus caryophyllus*, *Lilium* , *Tulipa linifolia*, *Papaver orientale*, *Punica granatum* (fruit), *Nelumbo nucifera* and *Butea monosperma*. The cenotaphs of Jahangir, Shahjahan and Mumtaz mahal find a great representation of red flower motifs as an expression of love. The pomegranate is the only fruit that is seen as a fruit motif in both tombs that is Itimad-ad Daula and the Taj Mahal.

The Mughal mausoleums apart from an obvious material hierarchy that structured the Mughal architectural buildings and spaces, they also followed a decorative hierarchy which is apparent as one enters the tomb gardens. It revealed an extraordinary contribution of certain flower motifs appearing at strategic places and imbuing, the highest sense of the paradisiacal symbolism.

- Mughal style of floral motifs was fueled by an existing Persian culture of the courts which they developed according to their own taste.
- To classify the plants which have been observed in detail we realize that the Peepal, Lotus and Poppy can be accorded in the indigenous category, whereas Cypress and Chinar have Persian origins, herbaceous perennials such as Iris, Narcissus and Tulip native to the Turkish lands from where they found cultivation and propagation in Europe and extensive illustrations.

- Decorative patterns in Jahangir's reign were an engagement of geometry and stylized motifs, where stylized motifs drew a lot of Persian inspiration in representation of the flower.
- Shahjahan's style emerged independently of any other previous emperor. The work done in Shahjahan's reign can be ascribed to the aspiring perfection, symmetry, refinement in workmanship over the years by the Mughal dynasty and it was the culmination of all talents.
- The Mughal mausoleums apart from an obvious material hierarchy that structured the Mughal architectural buildings and spaces, they also followed a decorative hierarchy which is apparent as one enters the tomb gardens.
- This aspect also revealed an extraordinary contribution of certain flower motifs appearing at strategic places and imbuing, the highest sense of the paradisiacal symbolism.
- The extensive palate of flower motifs draws from a range of plants imported, naturalized and indigenous to India it made the plant inventory culturally rich.

Building ornamentation gave permanence to an evergreen existence of the historic Mughal gardens.

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