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Mughal's Flora and Fauna: Implementation of Cultural Designs on Modern Textiles of Pakistan

Abstract

The purpose of this paper is to search out impact of flora and fauna on Mughal period's textiles and their implementation on contemporary textile designs of Pakistan. Textile designs of Mughal's period portray socio-cultural role to know about the design trends of that era: through richly embellished decorative arts applied in their courts, official audience halls and throne rooms. It is observed that unusual natural and stylized designs of flora and fauna with a variety of different kinds of vegetative motives and birds are used by the Pakistani textile designers of 21st century. The purpose of this study is to search out the stimulating and exclusive traditional influences of Mughal's flora and fauna design trends on the contemporary textile designs of Pakistan. Implementation of lotus, lily, tulip, narcissus, iris, carnation, sun-flower, chrysanthemum, zinnia, dahlia, hibiscus, jasmine, rose, poppy and morning glory in pure white, pale, orange and red colours catches attention in thick green vegetation, full bloom flowers and birds all will be discussed in present research. The study will not only explore that how the cultural traditional designs become an integral part of contemporary designs of Pakistani textile but also its importance, demand and trends involved.

Key Words: Cultural Heritage, Decorative Arts, Mughals, Textiles, Designs, Modern.

Introduction

Cultural heritage defines the characteristics of the area. Every region has its own style and kind of classification system according to its climatic, geological and geographical factors. In South Asian region, Mughals established one of the greatest empires. During their ruling period they developed artistic intellectual status and produced splendid art works. Besides their profound love to built monumental buildings with different decorative techniques of surface decoration: painting, jewelry-making, rug, ceramic, costume designing with decorative motives and unique embroidered fabric surfaces were also favoured to Mughal

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rulers. Flora and fauna as major source of inspiration always played an important roll to adorn the surfaces with different techniques.

The word "flora" is used to discuss plant life in which different kinds of floral motives with rich compositions are applied. While the word "fauna" refers animals and birds motives in the design arrangements. Through the ages plants motifs, patterns and animals were used to decorate textile surfaces belonged to different dynasties. All appear in different forms developing from single motif to elaborate patterns and portray shrubbery foliage in realistic and sometimes stylized simplified depiction of nature. The patterns produced variety of grids, reflections, symmetry, individual and compositional designs in different techniques according to the requirement of planned design compositions.

Mughal ornamentations with flowering plants show creativity of the artist. Miniature paintings' drawing, *neem rang*¹ and *gad rang*² show sensitive rendering and shading of flora and fauna design elements of entire composition with great care. Ram's head in marble carving belongs to 17th century Mughal period and powder primer flask in ivory with gilt metal spanner are the famous examples of fauna application on decorative arts. Mughal textiles present outstanding examples of flora and fauna, which are mentioned in the following text.

Mughal Designs

Mughal's luxury and relaxed lifestyle provided lavish and rich look to their entire collection and creativity. They vigorously enjoyed implementation of natural vegetation, birds and animals to adorn their surfaces belong to textiles and decorative arts. Imagery of the natural world was applied for aesthetic appearance. Mughal designs have traces of Persian art with the amalgamation of their regional style. Persian influences are dominant on the designs created during Jahangir's period but different from its prototype. The motifs are organized in patterns with repetition along vertical and horizontal axes among bunches of blossoms and leaves. The repetition of pattern is suggesting geometrized version of cartouches and medallion designs. The pictorial designs like bulls, horses, leaping cheetah, loin, elephant, deer, and falcon are arranged in symmetrical patterns repeated in mirror reverse and sometimes in asymmetrical manner. The designs offer strong compositions with artistic expression. Pictorial carpets during 1590- 1600 were designed with floral motifs, niches and colorful birds. The combination shows balanced composition, attractive pattern of blooms, scrolling vines and variety of beautiful birds arrange in asymmetrical but unlikelike formations (figure 1).

Aesthetically Mughal carpets and textiles are so closed to Safavid prototypes. An example of Iranian Seljuk's silk velvet fragment of 16th century, "Khusru and Shirine³" depicts figure of Nizami's Khusrau with rich composition of scrolls, split leaves, flowers and horses. On the other hand Safavid's court carpets belong to 16th century show borders fill with floral patterns and the central parts are based on imagery of wild animals and naturalistic landscape. Depiction of birds on trees and different wild animals such as lion, tiger, crocodile, deer and antelope are surrounded by rich substantial foliage of colourful flowers against bright red background⁴.



Figure 1: Mughal Carpet with flora and fauna dated 16th Century, collection Museum of Applied Arts, Vienna.

Source: <https://www.khanacademy.org/humanities/ap-art-history/west-and-central-asia>

Mostly Mughal court carpets of 16th Century also show Safavid inspiration in their design compositions (figure 2). Rows of natural flowers with petals and leaves on bright red background were preferred for woven carpets. Though the flowers have blossoms woven in white, yellow and blue threads and invariably set against brilliant red backgrounds, the overall impression is somehow one of an actual garden with flowers planted in regular rows, arranged in central axis. Among the most accomplished achievements of the Mughal *karkhana*, these garden carpets attain a satisfactory visual balance between floral motifs drawn from nature and

the demands of the woven medium, in which decorative elements need necessarily be regularly repeated.

Pictorial carpets with palm trees, ibexes, and birds related to late 16th and early 17th century are unforgettable examples of marvelous designs of the period. Decorative motifs, foliage, date palm trees and animals such as, deer, loins, flying birds ducks and swans are designed with rich strong composition idealized spring landscapes. Designs with tree pattern, cypress, flower blossoms and leaves on border design were also part of the composition.



Figure 2: Detail of Mughal carpet inspired by Safavid design, collection by Metropolitan Museum of Art.

Source: https://www.metmuseum.org/toah/hd/safa_3/3hd_safa_3.htm

Beside carpets, elegant costumes and fabric designs always attract human nature. Mughals' textiles are a measure of taste and a mirror of royal life, presents cultural perception through the courts, audience halls and throne rooms. The richly embellished elegant costumes show their exclusive taste towards lavish life style of the rulers and nobles. Their costumes were embellished with the fusion of different designs, rich vibrant colours, use of unique fabric surface and skilled embroidery with precious and semi precious stones on costumes with ample details. Royal family members of the Mughal period wore stunning and expensive clothes stitched in magnificent style with fine materials such as silks, velvets, brocades and they also prettified themselves with expensive jewelry from head to

toe. Floral motives embellished various costumes, especially with gold and silver threads and covered with realistic depiction of *booti*, lotuses or poppies as well as more stylized grids of blossoms and leaves. Through Mughal miniature paintings it is evident that use of *booti* and paisley patterns were common to adorn their textile surfaces.

Comparative analysis of floral motives used in Mughal and 21st century Pakistani Textile designs

Nature was the immense source of inspiration for Mughal designers. The rhythmic composition in harmonious colours and exquisite design patterns suggest an instinct appreciation. The textiles were used to adorn their costumes, tents, audience halls and private apartments. Mughal emperors took interest in flowers and considered them as part of their overall delight natural world. As Shah Jahan said that, no such paradise could be completed without flowers and flowing water. Among other decorative designs lotus was the one of the most common floral motifs used for the designing of Mughal decorative arts. Lotus was not new for Mughals, before them it was used to adorn various surfaces of the region like: Ajanta murals, sculpture of Bodi-Sitva, lotus capital of Asoka pillar in Subcontinent and ceiling of Jami Mosque Ajmir. Later this flower was abundantly used for the decorative arts of Mughal period. In Mughal textile this flower has valuable contribution to enhance the design motifs. So many examples are noted where this motif has been applied as key element of design composition in the form of lotus flower and lotus bud. Such kind of floral motives are also used by Pakistani textile designers of 21st century to maintain tradition of the region, which provide numerous examples for viewers and researchers. Modern appearance of lotus shows its abundant use without interference of any other design motif and schematic composition.

Another famous flower of Mughal era was lily. It was other prominent floral appearance, which is traced from several objects and surface decoration of historical monuments and Mughal miniatures of the region. e.g. lily on the soffit of Taj Mahal, decorative motifs of Muhabat Khan Mosque Peshawar, lily patterns on Naulakha Pavilion Lahore fort mirror work, lily and tulip in Zikarrya Khan Mosque Lahore, lily Patterns in Jahangir's Tomb, inlay work of Badshahi Mosque Lahore and Wazir Khan Mosque Lahore. The design element as a part of foliage is also richly used for decorative arts with high aesthetics. In contemporary textile designs of 21st century lily appears with repeated design patterns in realistic manner and sometimes in stylized simplified mode.

Narcissus and Dahlia were popular in Mughal textile designs. Several textiles are found with tulip, carnation, sun-flower, zinnia, hibiscus, jasmine, rose, poppy and morning glory in pure white, pale, orange and red colours, chrysanthemum, iris

and cypress designs. In modern era these all kind of flowers are vital part of textile designs of the region. For the sake of modernity, sometimes the realistic appearance of their patterns are exaggerated or formed in stylized and simplified manner. Cypress and cypress scrolls were commonly used for the carpets designing of Shahjehan's period. Cypress, pomegranate, piple, date palm, chinar tree sunflower, tulip, willow tree, banyan tree, piple tree, chinar tree, blossoming trees, grape vine, grape leave, acanthus leaves, piple leaves, vegetal floral vase, fruit dishes, stylized flowers palmette leave, Jasmine motif, banaras paisley and stylized floral designs, all were the common motifs of their textile design compositions, and modern designers appreciated such natural representations by using them in their design compositions.

Beside flora, fauna was also important for their textile designing. Peacock, parrot, birds, flying birds, ducks, cocks, loin, elephant, camel, deer, fish, antelope and horses played an important role in their design composition. In Pakistan, boutiques, newly introduced fashion brands and textile clothing outlets display loose fabric and pert influenced by the Mughal flora and fauna, in which implementation of swans, flying birds and birds in cages are direct inspiration from tradition (figure 3,5). Especially digital prints of stitched and unstitched collection launched in 2016-18, by a Pakistani boutique Sapphire⁵ are perfect examples of the revival of past in present. The designs entirely capture forms of different flowers, twirling petals, stems and curling leaves of actual flowers, even these are combined in non-realistic symmetrical formations.



Figure 3: Mughal's flora and Fauna, Shah Jahan Period.
Source: Bhandari, Delhi 2004.



Figure 4: Pakistani contemporary designs with flora and fauna. Variety of Fauna designs in different forms are applied with colourful flowers and variety of leaves



Figure 5: Contemporary fauna designs on dresses, preferred by boutiques and fashion designers.



Figure 6: Hunting Jacket of Mughal's period with detail close-up of the motives. The riding coat is superb example of Mughal Period's flora and fauna designs on clothing.

Source: Bhandari, Delhi, 2004.

This blend of realism and nonrealistic appearance of flora and fauna also observed on the cushions designing of modern era of Pakistan, especially in the splendid bunches of flowers. While contemporary fauna designs are extensively, used for kids garments in highly stylized form, formally arranged in row or single presence in front of children's shirts and frocks.

Dresses of aristocrats, commanders, kings and courtiers were decorated with pictorial designs of human beings, animals, birds, flowers, scrolling vines, plants, as well as scene of war and feast. On some fabrics, figurative designs with hunting scenes show deer, horses, and loins with stylized floral motives. Mughal's riding coat or hunting jacket of early 17th century, is remarkable example of the Mughal period's exclusive fabric design expressive through embroidery and gem like detail with coloured silk threads on satin⁶ (figure 6). The detail of the design can be traced from the late Timurid period. Flying swans, butterflies, rabbits, tigers, loins and different kind of flowers with verity of bushes and scrolls all are the part of rich well composed composition of the riding jacket of the period. During the ruling period of Jahangir and Shah Jahan, the number of paintings and murals were produced, echoing Timurid's art style.

According to the tradition usually male members dressed with the short-sleeved *caftan*⁷ as a top coat on the long dress. Usually *caftan* was made of silk or satin with application of decorative materials on the surface specified in gold thread and "four flowers" style developed by Ottomans in the mid-fifteenth century. These dresses were made by a special designated group of the court. Mughals used wide range of surfaces like cotton, variety of expensive brocade⁸, zari⁹, silk, satin, velvet, lampas, atlas and fabric with metallic thread (kemha). Design application is witnessed for their aesthetically rich and creative approach.

A Mughal miniature painting, "squirrels in a plane tree" painted by Abd-ul-Hassan in 1610 century, is a meaningful example of depiction of flora and fauna. It has sensitive drawing of scampering squarls in different actions with bright leaves in warm colours and rich background of olive green, representing autumn foliage is direct source of inspiration of prevailing textile designs of the region. Comparatively in modern designs fauna has been omitted but trees with rich foliage and stylized floral designs have been composed for beautification. Similar formation of tree trunk is followed for modern shirt design with two types of colour combinations and leave motifs in stylized form: at first in warm colours and secondly in cool tints and shades.

Blossoms arranged in symmetrical but unlikelike formation with the arrangement of lotus, lily, stylized tulips scrolls, vine leaves and split leaves applied on Mughal textiles can also be seen on the modern designs of Pakistani fabric designs of "*Khaadi*¹⁰." Red and orange floral bunches applied on beige background with regular formation adorn entire surface have direct Mughal influence (figure 7). Mughals' individual design compositions of decorative vases with floral bunches in stylized form normally set in the borders of miniature painting and monumental walls of their historical buildings, which are commonly implemented on curtain and sofa and cushion designs of contemporary Pakistani designs. The remarkable diversity of embroidery techniques and style with traditional innovative designs

and patterns define aesthetics of artifacts, which provide a solid base to further representation evolving social and cultural values of the people of modern time.



Figure 7: Red and orange floral bunches applied on beige background.

Mughal's influences on contemporary costume designs of Pakistan can be seen on *Andrakha*, *pishwas*, *lehanga*, *chooridar pajama* and *turban*. Sometimes contemporary costumes of Pakistan are designed with the fusion of traditional and modern cuts and stylized floral motifs.

Aesthetics

The aesthetic was characterized by naturalistic flowers with birds and animals either arranged in rows or shown against plain background. In history various costumes designed with floral motifs were embellished with gold and silver threads and covered with realistic depictions of paisley, lotuses, poppies and many types of flowers, as well as more stylized grids of single blossoms and leaves. Appearances of naturalistic flowering plants with variety of different fruit trees in stylized and realistic way against plain background give balance compositions, which are giving new stylish touch to contemporary designs. Contemporary floral cushion designs show patterns combining various flowering plants blossoms traditional motifs formally arranged in rows and scattered manner. All these are based on decorative motifs by arranging in solid compositions through strategic schemes involving design elements on variety of fabric surfaces. Latest technologies of design implementation are adopted to provide new touch and meet the requirement of latest trend. Floral motifs with rich composition are applied with high complexity. The vegetative motifs printed on cloth represents more natural and brilliant colours repeated in an unrealistic manner in typical Mughal style. Fusion of traditional designs with latest techniques like marbling and aquarelle technique are composed for creating atmosphere of the panoramic view and sometimes for optical illusion.

Conclusion

The aim of present study is to search the tremendous and unique traditional designs and their direct or indirect influences on the contemporary textile designs of Pakistan. And examine that how Mughals' flora and fauna designs take place in industrial textile designs of modern time period. The result reveals that the fabrics and designs commonly used by the emperors have royal look because of their extensive use of gold and silver threads, expensive fabric like velvet, brocade, satin, *atlas*, *kinkhabs*, *zari* and highly embellished design motifs. But comparatively modern designs and fabric used by gentry is simple having stylized or extreme natural designs with the use of digital prints on cotton, chiffon or silk. The use of fabrics gradually changed but never loosed its richness. Mughal influences are seen on bridal costumes made of *zari* woven fabrics and having lavish embellishment of gold and silver threads and semi precious stones. In modern times textiles are selected according to the season and occasion. But in Mughal heritage heavily embellished expensive dresses were preferred.

It is observed that unusual natural and stylized designs of flora and fauna with a variety of different kinds of flowers, vegetative motifs, and birds are used by the Pakistani textile designers of 21st century. Contemporary floral cushions designs show elaborated patterns combining various flowering plants blossoms. Rows of floral motifs with various colorful birds and butterflies were favoured fabric design elements of Mughal designers. Such kind of designs with flora and fauna as major key element of design composition are still in use of contemporary designers of Pakistan especially the fabric designs of Sapphire and *Khaadi*.

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¹ Technique of Mughal miniature painting with the characteristics of drawing in monochrome colours with a little colorful touch.

² Technique of Mughal miniature painting using all colours with sensitive rendering.

³ https://www.metmuseum.org/toah/hd/safa_3/hd_safa_3.htm

⁴ Safavid Court Carpet belongs to mid 16th century, with implementation of flora and fauna

Source: https://www.metmuseum.org/toah/hd/safa_3/hd_safa_3.htm

⁵ Pakistani textile clothing brand for stitched and unstitched clothes.

⁶ Kind of fabric

⁷ Mughal fashioned costume

⁸ Kind of richly beautified shuttle woven fabric.

⁹ Kind of fabric

¹⁰ It is Textile clothing brand