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***Kashi-kari* at the Mosque Wazir Khan Lahore**

\* M. Ahsan Bilal \*\* Amjad Parvez

**Abstract:**

The Masjid or Mosque is an important entity of the of life in Islam. The masjid has a significant practical as well as spiritual value for the Muslims; individually as well as on community level. Although, Islam does not define a particular structure for the masjid, but the geographical and cultural patterns shaped its structure diversely in various parts of the world. In the subcontinent, the most identifiable or iconic shape of the mosque was evolved under the Mughals, specifically after they acclaimed autonomous power in the region during and after the Akbar regime (1556-1605). Shahjehan's period (1628-1658) is particularly important for the development and constructions of notable mosques, at major cities of the Subcontinent. Badshahi Masjid near the Lahore fort and Masjid Wazir Khan inside the Delhi Gate are the remarkable milestones in the Mughal Architecture of Lahore. However, Masjid Wazir Khan, being situated in the heart of the walled city, is one of the most admired one. The fine quality and extensive coverage of the faience tile work, *Kashi-kari* mosaic and calligraphy, make it totally different, not just from other mosques in the area, but from all other constructions of the Mughal period. This paper describes the *Kashi-kari* used in the Masjid Wazir Khan. It considers how the mosque is adorned through this decorative element *Kashi-kari* and how its architecture symbolizes celestial feel and the righteousness of nature. This research unfolds the history of *Kashi-kari* as well.

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- Lecturer, College of Arts & Design
  - Assistant Professor, College of Arts & Design

## **Introduction:**

During the last half of the 16<sup>th</sup> century Mughal Empire under the rule of Akbar, Lahore became the capital city. The period (1584-1598) is specifically marked when Lahore reached its zenith as a major city under Akbar the great.

During this period, the city transformed into its new shape regarding royal architecture of Lahore Fort and the wall, with thirteen openings, around the city. Later under Shahjehan, the great *Badshahi* mosque (1673) was added to the fort surroundings. However, even before the *Badshahi* mosque, Masjid Wazir Khan was built from 1634 to 1641 by the chief physician of Shahjehan's court IIm-uddin Ansari who is more famous by his title of Wazir Khan. Wazir Khan also served as the Governor of Punjab. He originally belonged to the historical city of Chiniot in the district of Jhang alongside the flowing waters of the Chenab River.

Among several famous mosques Masjid Wazir Khan took seven years, from 1634 to 1641, to be completed. It has exuberant architectural decorations that embellish its exterior and interior surfaces. In essence these are of *two kinds* - exterior surface decorations which are chiefly in the form of glazed ceramic tile murals; and interior decorations in the form of *Naqqashi*<sup>1</sup> wall painting - a semi-dry form of fresco (painting on fine lime plaster renders). Both these forms of embellishment have integral calligraphic components drawing on the Quran and the Hadith

### **Architectural Decoration in Masjid Wazir Khan Khan:**

Masjid Wazir Khan, is comparatively a small structure in connection with the *Badshahi* Masjid. However, its beauty and aesthetically rendered ornamentation make it prominent from other Mughal style mosques. The sophistication and delicacy adopted in the decoration of this mosque, surpasses all other structures in many ways. The mosaic work, *Kashi-kari*, Calligraphy and Frescos are the main elements that this mosque present as a unique feature of its external and internal décor. Here in this paper, the focus is only on one aspect; *Kashi-kari* which can be described as glazed tile work.

Colour-pouring animation with varying combinations i.e. sharp contrast and harmonizing shades and its symbolic representation, display the unique decoration of the mosque. This mosque presents a fine composition in every angle as far as harmony, contrast, balance and focal points are concerned. It fulfills all the needs of an exquisite composition. The panels painted just above the main *Mehrab*<sup>2</sup>, is the constructed at the focal point of the whole building.

In addition, the subject matter offers variation in decorative detail, providing interesting entertainment for the vision in various directions. Along with *Kashi-kari*, it also present calligraphy in various styles of text writing, chiefly in *Khat-e Nasta'liq*, *Khat-e Tughra* and *Khat-e Thulth*. especially in the interior and exterior of the sanctuary.

Geometric patterns provide definite space to every part. The simple shapes like octagonal, squares, pentagons, hexagons and star-shapes form the borders, adorning the floor of the courtyard and the prayer chamber in various interwoven styles. Similarly, floral forms cover greater spaces of the mosque, giving the allusion of paradise garden. Various decorative patterns have been executed in fresco and stucco (interior), and mosaic (exterior) most effectively.

#### ***Kashi-kari* at Masjid Wazir Khan:**

The exquisite *Kashi-kari* work done on the mosque makes it an exquisite Mughal monument in the whole subcontinent. It presents colourful pictures of variegated glazed tiles and mosaic work. The octagonal minarets carry motifs of the cypress tree and stars as part of the decorative scheme. The enamel of motifs shines brightly in the sunlight. The exterior and interior of the façade of vestibule on the east, the northern enclosing wall on the bazaar side, the lofty minarets etc., all are richly embellished with this mode of decoration. (Fig. 1)



Figure 1. Detail of the *Kashi-kari* on the minaret showing panels and the octagonal part of the minaret

The Main gateway viewed as a whole look like a huge upright rectangular panel which accommodates in the centre, a high arch and is marked on both sides by two engaged columns, decorated by chevron pattern in blue and white and four projecting narrow bands which encircles them at regular intervals. Their bases are in the form of trilobite moldings in red brick colour. The tops of the columns are adorned with white small cupolas bearing foliated bases. The façade of gateway has rectangular border framing the deep recess of the main entrance. The border is composed of decorative panels of various sizes. Above the arch it takes the form of single elongated horizontal panel depicting calligraphy in blue on white background. (Fig. 2)



Figure 2: faced with gaily-coloured glazed mosaic tiles.

On lateral sides of the entrance, the border presents a combination of eight panels; four on each side with identical designs. Out of these panels, the two uppermost; smaller and horizontally placed white panels depict Persian inscriptions in blue. Below them on each side is a projecting balcony supported on four beautifully carved and coloured brackets. The roof of the balcony with two pinnacles on top and projecting eaves stands upon small white columns inter connected by grills at the base level. The area below the balcony is occupied by an upright arched panel depicting Persian inscriptions in blue upon white ground. The empty space in all the calligraphic and inscribed panels have miniature floral decorations.

The lowest most portion just beneath the inscribed panels are marked with monochromic, red brick-coloured, carved decoration. It reveals three rows of twenty-one horizontal and square very small panels. The uppermost of the façade is framed by a broad band having a row of alternating elongated and square panels.

The huge entrance gateway has panels with *Kashi-kari* in geometric and floral patterns. The colours used are yellow, orange, deep blue, two shades of green (lighter and darker shade), Turquoise, and maroon. The severity of the walls is relieved by the division of the surfaces into rectangular panels, alternately vertical and horizontal, and slightly sunk for the reception of enameled tile decoration. Colours and designs show the inside of the entrance gate with panels of enamel decoration. There are varieties of designs, each panel have different one but in some cases it is repeated. The spandrels of the arches are decorated with delicate floral designs and intertwining creepers. The main spandrel on top has a white background, with design in blue, orange and green colours.

The top parapet has a Marlon shape decoration (Fig. 3). The panel on the inside of the entrance gateway, with background is white, the flowers in orange and maroon, the leaves and stems in green and the vase deep blue with patterns in a lighter shade, shows Chinese influence, in the use of such motifs as “Chinese clouds” on top of the flowers and the shape of the vase. There is a plant design with three-petal flowers on either side of this vase. The

spandrel of this arched panel is decorated with an intertwining design.



Figure 3: showing in front parapet, and kiosk and in the background minaret

A panel on cloister wall with white background depicts a tree with flowers like daffodils. On either side of the tree are plants with flowers looking like irises. The whole design is conventionalized. The ground is orange; the stems are green maroon almost brown. The flowers are orange with green leaves. This design is repeated on numerous panels, with change of colour, sometimes the background is orange instead of white. Another design is the vase without flowers.

On the sanctuary wall, the calligraphy in blue, against the yellow background, display an absorbing combination. This wonderful colour combinations applauds the skill and aesthetic sense of the Indian tile makers. The inscriptional arched panel, found on the sides of the two flanking arches on either side of the high framed central arch.

The four octagonal minarets are decorated with panels of flower designs. The decoration changes from stage to stage (base, octagonal shaft and kiosk). The square base upper row has three upright panels. The central panel accommodates an arched motif in

white and depicts a vase placed over yellow saucer having variety of flowers. The spandrels of the arches are blue with white floral designs. The yellow panels on both sides of the central one are similar in design. Their yellow surfaces are adorned with blue vases containing bouquets of flowers. The flowering plants in blue colour on both sides of the vase make the composition more balanced and attractive. The central part is consisting of three square panels which, show geometric designs in thick dissecting blue lines. In the centre, there is a white six-corner star placed within the yellow and orange colour shapes; around it, blue and orange flora is prevalent. The side panels are also adorned in the similar manner with white tetramerous flower and its yellow carpels, enhanced with orange patches upon white petals. The bottom row is alike the topmost row in design. The octagonal shaft, bottom portion has no decoration. The area above is divided into two unequal parts by cornice. In the lower part each side of the octagonal shaft is relieved by two upright rectangular panels larger in size which alternate with two horizontal and smaller panels. This arrangement repeated on all sides. Thus total number of panels on the shaft is thirty-two. The small panels enclose large amulet-patterns filled with colourful floral designs, whereas the large vertical panels enclose white and yellow cusped arches alternating with each other. Under the arch in each case stands single branch tree in the middle of the panel. The spandrels of the arched panels have tiny floral patterns.

Above these panels a decorative broad band can be seen in golden and brown harmonizing colours, Geometric shapes here form a central row of stars. In the upper part are sixteen vertically placed closely spaced elongated arched panels. The panels in the middle of each facet have blue flowering plant on white surface, whereas the other eight panels alternating with the former are adjusted at the corners of the octagonal sides and are decorated with single tapering cypress tree in turquoise blue with intertwining grape vine on either side. The pointed ends of all sixteen panels have *Ghulab-kari*<sup>3</sup> pattern slightly projecting to carry the balcony. The base of the balcony has three decorative colourful bands. The kiosks on above the minarets have white dome. The dome shows bright blue

lines and the cylindrical neck of the dome has two narrow decorative bands encircling it in various colours.

Thus, on the upper stage of the minarets below the stalactite geometric decoration in various colours, all round the minarets, are alcoves. These contain cypress and a tree with star shaped flowers alternately. The cypress as a decorative motif in enameled *Kashi-kari* work appears first time here. The cypress is in turquoise colour with dark maroon almost brown stem on yellow background. On the background, a grape vine creeper with bunches of grapes hanging on both sides of the cypress, has been placed nicely. Other plants with blue flowers and white centers have also been added.

The other panel in the alcove has a tree with star shaped flowers or leaves, in green and turquoise. The stems are dark maroon with plant designs on either side on a white background. The tile work with *Kashi-kari*, found in this mosque is on a plaster base, made up of a composition of siliceous sand with lime and other ingredients held together with cementing material. Several colours are cut to shape in the manner of coloured glass in stained glass window and then embedded in matrices of mortar. The colours used are vivid, glowing and perfect.

The door-ways of small rooms, *Hujras*<sup>4</sup> have decoration only in their spandrels and in lintels in the form of rectangular panel creating harmony and infinity in the courtyard of the mosque. The floral scrolls in the spandrels are executed beautifully upon bright blue, yellow and white grounds. In the arched recess just above the lintel of door, horizontally placed rectangular panel has floral vines in blue, white and yellow.

The vestibule is architecturally two storied square chamber (square externally and octagonal internally), crowned with four square pavilions at each corner and large bulbous dome in the centre decorated with lotus cresting and a pinnacle. The square pavilions are placed on a raised platform and their *Chattri*<sup>5</sup>, consisting of a spire and high dome rests on rows of columns, four on each side. The two bracketed oriels flank the outer face of the vestibule. Inside there are galleries and small rooms divided by open doors on each storey. The whole outer surface of the façade is divided into various sunken panels for the purpose of decoration and

avoiding monotony. The exterior of the façade is decorated with tiles having *Kashi-kari* as well as Arabic and Persian inscriptions done in the same mode. The main inscription gives the Kalima and the date of the construction of the mosque. The exterior wall of the vestibule proper facing the courtyard has been beautifully adorned with decorative panels upon red-brick patterned background. This face of the wall is like a huge upright panel divided into three main vertical sections of which the middle one is broader and larger in size. (Fig. 4)



Figure 4: panels of the vestibule from the courtyard side showing Kashi-kari in sunken panels. The middle one is broader and larger panels

The spandrels of the central arch have bright-coloured floral vines upon white ground. This arch encloses two open arches of which the lower, larger in size leads to vestibule and has coloured flora in blue spandrels. The arch above, opening in the upper storey has decorative spandrels. The lower portion of this arch has perforated white screen in three sections. The space between the two open arches is occupied by a larger colourful inscribed panel. The bright

blue Persian verses present sharp contrast with mustard yellow background.

The surface of the sides of the central arch in each case is relieved by seventeen rectangular panels in three rows depicting various subjects. In the middle row the uppermost smaller horizontal panel shows a conventional design, whereas the two upright panels below it has single flowering plant. The panel in the middle of these three has a perforated screen in the middle, opening into the interior in the flight of the steps. The two vertical rows on the sides have similarly designed panels. Of these two uppermost upright panels show a single flowering tree in dark colours upon light coloured background. Below these are two smaller horizontally placed panels with a conventional design. They alternate with two large upright panels having a single flowering plant. The upper edge of the four sides of vestibule proper is topped by a parapet with continuous coloured pattern.

The side entrances of the mosque facing south and north a similar in design. The northern side entrance very much resembles the main gateway, but is smaller in size with engaged columns and chevron-pattern in blue, white and yellow, once on each side whereas the southern one has been walled up.

The façade of the prayer chamber is rectangular with a line of five domes above and stately minarets at each end. The façade is interrupted by five open arches. The central arch is larger. The façade presents marvelous decoration in colourful *Kashi-kari* on bands, panels and spandrels of the arches which are composed beautifully on red and white brick pattern' background in true fresco. The upper edge of the façade is lined with a parapet, decorated in *Madakhal*<sup>6</sup> pattern. Beneath the parapet line there is a narrow projecting band, next to which small gap appears broader calligraphic band following the path of the parapet line. This band frames the central arch along three sides. On the north and south of the central arch this and reappears but here it is broken into three elongated, horizontally placed bands. The elongated bands are adorned with verses of Holy Quran. All these panels are framed with geometric floral borders, composed of one row of tetramerous flowers.

Thus the patterns of *Kashi-kari* are spread at the outer walls of the mosque Wazir Khan while there is no ornamentation at the back side wall, where bricks construction pattern is prominent but the ridge of the outer back wall is decorated with *Kashi-kari*. In the construction of mosque, wherever there is an arch or dome, are decorated with the fine work of *Kashi-kari*, even the door frames are decorated with the same ornate work. In reality there is a movement of *Kashi-kari* patterns in the whole mosque

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### **Conclusion:**

The mosque or masjid Wazir Khan is clearly like a jewel of the Walled City Lahore with its alluring exterior and mesmerizing interior. This structure with amazing mosaic work, matchless frescoes, crafty calligraphy and many miscellaneous decorative motifs, has always been a subject of interest for art historians and art students. The tile mosaic or the kasha-kari on the exterior and interior panels of the structure display a skillful and matchless view to the spectator. This tile mosaic work, the *Kashi-kari*, could be titled as one of the best that the Shahjehan era produced in the Subcontinent. The most enthralling feature of this work is the colour scheme and the precision of the floral or vegetation motifs enhanced further with geometric exactitude. The large scale of these *Kashi-kari* panels is also unbelievable which, speaks loud of the skill of master artisans and artists. As Lockwood Kipling has described Wazir Khan Mosque as, “This beautiful building is in itself a school of design” (Lari 21).

The *Kashi-kari* work at Wazir Khan Mosque, along with other decorative elements, could be titled as monumental as for centuries, it has inspired, not only the local visitors, but foreign tourists as well. Furthermore, the aesthetic quality and the technique of this art has played a significant role in the study requirements of the art students from the Mayo School of Arts (Now NCA), Fine Arts Department of the Punjab University, Lahore College for Women University, GC university, Naqsh School of Arts and many other art institutions from all over Pakistan.

## References

- <sup>1</sup> A piece of decorative work cut in stone, wood, or any other material.
- <sup>2</sup> The main arch
- <sup>3</sup> Patterns imitating rose or *Gulab*
- <sup>4</sup> A small room
- <sup>5</sup> A Small umbrella like structure
- <sup>6</sup> An opening or introitus of a channel or canal.

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