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The Ornamental Vocabulary of the Woodcarvings of Chiniot

A Study of Indigenous and Foreign Sources

Abstract

The woodcarving tradition of Chiniot (Punjab) is a renowned craft of excellence in the world. There is a horde of exquisite and meticulously carved design patterns that one witnesses in various woodcarvings from the region, particularly as architectural embellishments. The design formations use a variety of motifs which are components of an indigenous ornamental vocabulary. However, a historical examination reveals that the motifs came from indigenous and foreign sources in lieu of various cultural transitions. This study focuses traces the journey of these motifs and shows their original cultural significance and use leading to the ornamental vocabulary of woodcarving. The study brings to light how migration of motifs takes place across cultures and how the cultural and aesthetic considerations change over time. The findings of the study suggest that the motifs in the ornamental vocabulary of wood carving in Chiniot are a result of diachronic and synchronic movement of cultural and artistic sensibilities.

Introduction

There exists a dynamic interplay between culture and crafts of a region. Culture provides a repository of aesthetic and functional choices in lieu of a shared subjectivity, which is borrowed by craft and is executed through a repertoire of technique and style. The products that a craft furnishes contribute to the same shared subjectivity from where its essential aesthetic and function was borrowed. Due to this interactive relationship, the crafts of a region depict its dominant culture and the culture helps in understanding the nature of crafts. This relationship remains intact in even if the indigenous culture of a region is influenced by a foreign culture. The cultural changes by incorporating new aesthetic and utilitarian factors while craft documents such changes through a complex historical process in which craftsmen, patrons, emerging styles, symbolism, changing needs, and exposure all play their part. In regions

hosting a considerable influx of cultures, crafts also undergo an incremental process of change. Various taste profiles become absorbed and hence a layered aesthetic continues to inform craft. It is interesting to note that once an element or convention becomes a part of and art or craft, it acquires a life cycle of its own. The cultural referents of a particular element or convention may change but the form that has become a part of ornamental vocabulary somehow survives albeit with a different meaning. This phenomenon is particularly noticeable in the case of incorporation of symbols and motifs in crafts. Through an oral transmission of skill, the symbols survive and endure extreme cultural changes. Therefore, analyzing crafts of a region in terms of used symbols provides a window into the past.

The craft of woodcarving in the city of Chiniot is a clear example of the above mentioned phenomenon. The region of Punjab to which this city belongs, due to its geographical and strategic location, has been subject to an influx of foreign cultures. Chiniot is one of the oldest settlements of Punjab with a mention in Mahabharta. It was a part of the Achaemenid empire in the 6th century BCE and hosted the Greek army when Alexander crossed the region in 325 BCE. The town remained important trade center in the medieval period and all of the major invaders of the region who came from Central Asia visited and stayed in the region.[1] Under Mughals, it became a significant town being at the intersection of major trade routes as shown in the following map depicting the gradual development of the routes since Babur.

[1]Arif Hasan and Mansoor Raza, *Migration and Small Towns in Pakistan* (IIED, 2009), 57.

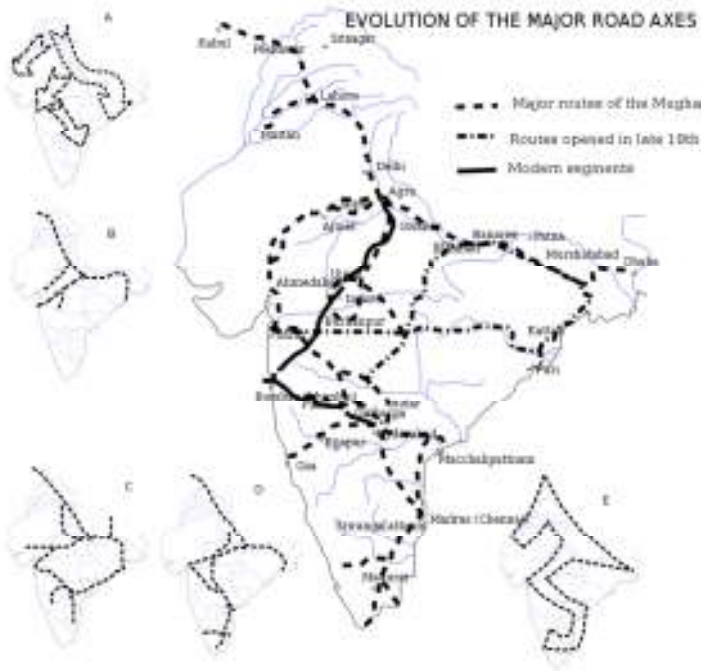

Figure 1. Major trade routes intersecting the region of Chiniot (india-transportblogspot.com).

The history of the region is such that it developed a culture that absorbed various foreign influences. None of the foreign cultures was long lived except the Mughals who ruled the region for almost three centuries. However, the incoming cultures did leave their stamp enriching the culture of region. The enrichment of culture due to foreign elements also meant development in the crafts of the region. Woodcarving being one of the oldest craft known to almost all major cultures must have absorbed the cultural amalgamation during its historical journey. As said earlier that once a cultural influence tangibly contributes to a tradition art or craft in the region, the new element acquires a life of its own. The various cultural influences therefore enriched the craft of woodcarving by introducing an ornamental vocabulary in a gradual manner. The indigenous elements acquired new cultural connotations and foreign elements were incorporated to local vocabulary. There was a two-way aesthetic flow, one came from the traditions of the land and continues till present and the other was foreign that came inward at many points in time. The following study explores the ornamental vocabulary of the

woodcarving tradition of Chiniot and maintains that the underlying aesthetic flows feature both synchronic and diachronic movement of symbols and motifs.

The Ornamental Vocabulary of Woodcarving

The ornamental vocabulary of the woodcarving tradition of Chiniot includes a variety of conventions, motifs, symbols and patterns that were either indigenous and modified in the course of time, lesser in form and greater in meaning, or completely came with foreign cultures as being part and parcel of their ornamental vocabulary. In some cases, we observe that the ornamental vocabulary of woodcarving was shared with architectural embellishments while in other cases, it came from sculpture or other art forms. The following analysis takes into account some of the frequent motifs and symbols in the woodcarving tradition of Chiniot, which went through changing connotations in the history of region but somehow they are preserved in formal appearance.

The Purna-Kalasa

The purna-kalasa found mostly at the base of wooden columns in Chiniot is an indigenous symbol of ancient origin. It is one of the most frequently used symbolic form in Hindu architecture. It can be classified as symbol due to its religious value in ancient Indian culture which continues till date. The word purna-kalasa is a composite one and means a full pitcher. In Indian religious parlance, it is known as a symbol of abundance, fertility and life force.[2] R. Nath, a renowned Indian historian, is of the view that it is one of the eight most revered symbols in ancient Indian art commemorating the richness of life.[3]The symbol formally correspond to a web of religious ideas. The lower part or the base of the pitcher is symbolically linked to earth, which again is a symbol of fertility in Hindu religion. The middle part of the pitcher is associated with water, again a fundamental life force. The neck of the pitcher is depictive of fire and the mouth with air, while the leaves represent the sky.[4] The symbolic form therefore incorporates all the essential elements of life and also keeps the order intact. Apart from religious connotations which

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[2]Margaret Stutley, *Illustrated Dictionary of Hindu Iconography* (New Delhi: Munshiram Manoharlal, 2003).

[3]R. Nath, *History of Decorative Art in Mughal Architecture* (Motilal Banarsidass, 1976), 63.

[4]Pankaj Jain, *Dharma and Ecology of Hindu Communities: Sustenance and Sustainability* (Ashgate Publishing, Ltd., 2011), 172.

undoubtedly add significance to the symbol, various cultural rituals incorporate purna-kalasa. Culturally, it is believed to ward evil during festivities of child-birth and marriage. This is why it appears in the doorways of Hindu households and probably found it place at the base of the column in Indian architecture. The pitcher also signifies the heart of a devotee and the water represents truth.[5] It is therefore an integral component of Hindu spirituality, culture and mythology.

The use of the symbol in woodcarving of Chiniot is not with the intent of invoking the essential religious connotation. The symbol probably became a part of ornamental vocabulary of woodcarving from its usage in Hindu architecture.The movement of the symbol can be traced from temple architecture (figure 2) to pre-Mughal mosque architecture (figure 3).

Figure 2. A pillar from Gupta period temple architecture showing purna-kalasa at the base.

[5]Bettina Bäumer and Kapila Vatsyayan, *Kalatattvakosa: A Lexicon of Fundamental Concepts of the Indian Arts* (Motilal Banarsidass Publishe, 1988), 446.

Figure 3. Quwwat-ul-Islam Mosque, Qutb Complex, Delhi, India, 14th century CE.

It is interesting to note that the symbol entered into a different religion but retained a sacred value. We find it as a secular and powerful decorative motif in the Mughal architecture as it adorns the Taj Mahal and Sheesh Mahal (figure 4,5) and then in a colorful depiction in the wooden column from Umar Hayat Mahal in Chiniot (figure 6).

Figure 4. Stone Mosaic, Taj Mahal, Agra, India.

Figure 5. Base of column, Sheesh Mahal, Lahore Fort, Lahore, Pakistan.

Figure 6. Colourful and stylized purna-kalasa in Umar Hayat Mahal, Chiniot, Pakistan.

The form of the motif also underwent transitions along with its connotation, which for a Hindu still stands the same but for a Muslim it is merely decorative. The formal change is considerable but the symbol remains recognizable. We therefore observe a journey of the symbol from a powerful spiritual and complex metaphor to a remarkable decorative and design motif.

The Lotus

The lotus is usually found as a base of wooden columns or an element facilitating transition of column. In some places, it has been used by woodcarvers of Chiniot as a motif in decorative scrolls adorning chajjas. The lotus, like the purna-kalasa, is also an indigenous symbol deeply rooted in spiritual paradigm. The lotus plant found a unique and powerful symbolic value due to the nature of its life cycle. The plant is found in muddy waters, with root in earth, the stalk in water and the flower blossoming above the water surface. The life cycle of lotus flower becomes a metaphor for purity as it takes birth above the water and is never polluted, the flower then produces seeds which then give rise to other lotus plants. In Hindu religious connotation the lotus is compared to the Vedas due to its purity. Like the lotus, the knowledge of the Vedas is considered pure and unadulterated. It is also compared to Brahma in terms of its creative potential.[6] It is believed that "when the divine life substance is about to put forth the universe, the cosmic waters grow a thousand-petaled lotus of pure gold, radiant as the sun".[7] The religious scriptures also associate lotus to goddess Lakshmi in the context of fertility and abundance.[8] The Buddhist spiritual tradition and aesthetic also found lotus as a symbol of utmost significance.

In Buddhist iconography, lotus is compared to Buddha to refer to the purity of his being. It is also compared to human heart where the Buddhist enlightenment takes place, while its petals are also seen as representative of the eight-fold Buddhist path to salvation. The lotus mostly appears as a pedestal upon which goddess Lakshmi or a bodhisattva sits or stands (figure 7, 8).

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[6]Ananda Kentish Coomaraswamy, *History of Indian and Indonesian Art* (Dover publications New York, 1927).

[7]Heinrich Robert Zimmer, *Myths and Symbols in Indian Art and Civilization* (Princeton University Press, 1946), 90.

[8]Anna LiberaDallapiccola, *Indian Art in Detail* (Harvard University Press, 2007), 12.

Figure 7. Gaja-Lakshmi. Terracotta. Uttar Pradesh. 1st century BCE. 14.6 cm height. Los Angeles County Museum of Art.

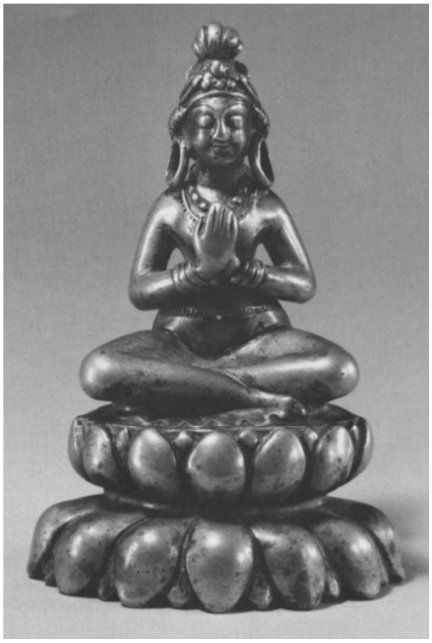

Figure 8. Seated Prajnaaramita, Brass inlaid with silver and copper, 7th century CE, Swat Valley, Pakistan.

Lotus retained a sacred value in the Hindu culture but with Muslim architecture particularly in the Mughal period, the symbol found a new

usage. It initially became a prominent visual element in architecture as it can be witnessed as, forming the base of a royal fountain (figure 9) or consistently adoring the top of the domes (figure 10) but later on it became a part of arabesque pattern and its usage became decorative.

Figure 9. Lotus fountain, Diwan-e Khas, FatehpurSikri, India.

Figure 10. Inverted lotus on the Dome of Taj Mahal, India.

It is interesting to note that the Persian and Central Asian ornamental vocabularies included lotus as a motif much before the arrival of Muslims in the Subcontinent. Lotus as a motif can be observed in the remains of monuments such as Taq-e Bostan(figure 11) and it was one of the major motifs used in metal work that reached its zenith in Timurid period. It was frequently used as a decorative motif in Persian architecture. It seems that both traditions, the Indian and the Persian, coincided with Mughals. The usage that is more than decoration may be attributed to the local significance of lotus, while the decorative usage seems to be a continuation of the Persian tradition. The movement of the

motif seems to be composite. In the woodcarvings of Chiniot, lotuskalasa appears at the base of the columns (figure 12). The symbol that in its initial usage formed the pedestal for the divine transformed into a decorative feature of a column.

Figure 11. Lotus under the feet of Mehr god, 4th century CE, Taq-e Bostan, Iran.

Figure 12. Lotus used as decorative element used as base of column at Chiniot, Pakistan.

The Bell

The presence of bell motif in the woodcarvings of Bhera and Chiniot certainly represent an indigenous continuity. Bell has a significant place in Hindu religion since ancient times. It is associated to sound, which is

considered to be the fundamental source of creation. Sound in ancient Indian culture is known as Nadabrahma and identified with creator of the universe.[9] It is a combination of Ahat Nada and Anahata Nada. The latter which is unstruck sound is considered to be the mystic realization of the universal order[10], or the sound of silence.[11] This dual conception of sound has fostered a spiritual significance and therefore each temple has a bell installed on the gateway of inner sanctum. The sound of the bell is considered as a means of invoking gods. The Hindu deities such as Kali and Siva carry a bell. Similarly bell is considered as one of the twelve weapons of Durga.[12]In Buddhist iconography, the bell symbolized the voice of Buddha.[13]It was believed since ancient times that ringing the bell would protect from evil.

The bell motif has been a component of indigenous ornamental vocabulary since the beginning of the first millennium. The carvings on a beam from Amarvati show the use of bell motif (figure). The stone railings from Bharhut also display the bell motif used in series (figure). The symbol seems to merge into the Muslim repertoire at the Qutub complex where columns from Hindu temples were reused (figure). The Shah Rukn-e Alam mausoleum also displays the use of bell motif (figure). By 15th century, the bell motif was incorporated in woodcarving as wooden doorway of the tomb of Mauj Darya in Pak Pattan, Punjab shows the use of motif. It is not surprising that the motif continued in the woodcarvings of Chiniot as a part of indigenous ornamental vocabulary. However, the connotation of the motif changed in the Muslim culture. The spiritual connotation was initially an influence as we find it being used in mausoleums but in the 18th and 19th centuries, the motif also adorned residences purely in decorative spirit.

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[9]Peter Lavezzoli, *The Dawn of Indian Music in the West* (A&C Black, 2006), 17.
[10]N. Ramanathan, *Musical Forms in Saṅgītaratnākara* (Sampradāya, 1999), 417.
[11]The Wire, *Undercurrents: The Hidden Wiring of Modern Music* (Bloomsbury Academic, 2002), 62.
[12]Stutley, *Illustrated Dictionary of Hindu Iconography*, 50.
[13]ThichNhatHanh, *Stepping into Freedom: An Introduction to Buddhist Monastic Training* (Parallax Press, 1997), 73.

Figure 13. Carvings on the beam of Amarvati, India.

Figure 14. Bell motif from stone relief, Bahurat, India.

Figure 15. Bell motif at the Qutb Complex, India.

Figure 16. Bell motif at the tomb of Shah Rukn-e Alam, Pakistan.

Figure 17. Bell motif in the preserved doorway from Chiniot, Lahore Museum, Pakistan.

The Tree of Life

The 'Tree of Life' is an ancient motif and corresponds to a variety of mythological ideas in major belief systems of the world. All the basic features that are associated with trees such as growth, and bearing fruits assumed a metaphorical dimension invariably across cultures and this the reason why Tree of Life became a cross-cultural motif.[14]In most cases, it represented three worlds interacting with each other. The roots referred to the underworld, the trunk signified earth while the leaves represented heavens.[15]However, there have been slightly different cultural interpretations. In China, it was believed that the fruits of the tree could bestow immortality.[16]The Egyptians thought that the tree connected

[14]LalehBakhtiar, *Sufi: Expressions of the Mystic Quest* (Thames and Hudson, 1976), 27.
[15]Johannes Kalter and Joerg Drechsel, *The Arts and Crafts of the Swat Valley : Living Traditions in the Hindu Kush* (Thames and Hudson, 1991), 146.
[16]Jeremy Roberts, *Chinese Mythology A to Z: [A Young Reader's Companion]* (Infobase Publishing, 2004), 93.

material and spiritual worlds.[17]The Indian culture with its plethora of deities believed that it was a shrine of a deity.[18]Brahmins used to worship the tree associating it to Agni, the goddess of fire.[19]For Buddhists, it was connected to the idea of enlightenment and knowledge.[20]The Christians associated the tree of life as a symbolic manifestation of Jesus and its fruits as spiritual knowledge.[21]In Muslim culture, the tree assumed a sacred status due to its presence in paradise, planted by God.[22]In Sufi literature, it was associated to wisdom. The universal symbolic significance of the Tree of Life, understandably made it a frequent symbol in art. Its usage in art can be observed in ancient Mesopotamia, Egypt and Indus Valley civilization.

In the Subcontinent, the motif appears in Hindu temple architecture in the 3rd century BCE (figure 18) Buddhist stupa architecture (figure 19) and more frequently in the Sultanate period architectural embellishments. For instance, mosques built in the reign of Ahmad Shah display the motif (figure 19), represented along with a vase as the base. The carved lattice window of the SidiSaiyyed Mosque in Ahmedabad, built in 1573, is an exquisite example (figure 20).

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[17]Barbara S. Lesko, *The Great Goddesses of Egypt* (University of Oklahoma Press, 1999), 84.
[18]ArchanaVerma, *Temple Imagery from Early Mediaeval Peninsular India* (Ashgate Publishing, Ltd., 2012), 16.
[19]David L. Haberman, *People Trees: Worship of Trees in Northern India* (OUP USA, 2013), 72.
[20]Chris Hoffman, *The Hoop & the Tree: A Compass for Finding Deeper Relationship with All Life* (Council Oak Books, 2000), 17.
[21]Elliot R. Wolfson, *Along the Path: Studies in Kabbalistic Myth, Symbolism, and Hermeneutics* (SUNY Press, 1995), 78.
[22]Bakhtiar, *Sufi*, 57.

Figure 18. Temple Pillar 3rd century BCE,Besnagar, India.

Figure 19. Tree of life depicted in Buddhist Stupas.

Figure 20. Examples from Sultanate Period mosques showing the use of Tree of Life.

Figure 21. Motif represented in the carved lattice window of the SidiSaiyyed Mosque in Ahmedabad, India.

The formal qualities are in accordance to the appearance of motif in Persian architecture as examples from Dome of Rock and Great mosque of Damascus display the motif. The Mughals also made a frequent use of the motif a we find it in Akbar's tomb in Sikandara (figure), in Taj Mahal (figure) and at Masjid Wazir Khan (figure). The motif continued its journey and we also find it in Sikh period, at the gateway of MahrajaRanjit Singh's Samadhi (figure).

The motif appears in Chiniot and surrounding areas such as in Bhera in two forms. The Chiniot version is more akin to the formal appearance of the motif in Hindu art, while in Bhera it is closer to the Islamic form. In Chiniot we find the tree arising out of a mound instead of a vase, which is closer to the Hindu version of the motif (figure 3.56, 3.57). This is

probably due to the fact that Chiniot was a region of Hindu dominance before thirteenth century, it was destroyed in 14th century and was rebuilt before Babur took control of it.[23]However, given the variety of the motif at different periods of time and within Islamic culture, it is difficult to state this with certainty. The Tree of Life motif had a journey in which every major culture contributed but the richest contribution came from Persian and Central Asian sources.

The Sarv

The Sarv motif appears in Bhera and Chiniot as a decorative motif in doorways and colonettes. The Sarv or Cypress tree has been one of the frequently used motif in the ornamental vocabulary of the world. Cypress has been seen as a symbol of fertility in Masopotamia[24], of eternity in Greek culture, as a sign of death amongst Romans.[25] In Islamic culture, the cypress tree came to symbolize *tawhid* or unity.At another instance, while describing the state of union, Rumi compares himself with cypress: 'In a dream I saw myself as a cypress, my face as bed of tulips, my body as roses and jasmine'.[26]Saadi of Sheraz also uses the cypress in a symbolic reference for the height of the Beloved.[27]

Indeed, the motif arrived in the Subcontinent from Persian and Central Asian sources. However, the origin of its decorative use goes back to pre-Islamic Persia. For example, the stairs of Apadana façade in Persipolis display the use of motif in a frieze (figure).

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[23]James Sutherland Cotton, Sir Richard Burn, and Sir William Stevenson Meyer, *Imperial Gazetteer of India ...* (Clarendon Press, 1908), 81.
[24]John Clark Ridpath, *The West Aryans (Cont.) Semites and Hamites* (Jones Bros. Publishing Company, 1893), 324.
[25]FarrinChwalkowski, *Symbols in Arts, Religion and Culture: The Soul of Nature* (Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 2016), 14.
[26]Jalal al-Din Rumi, *Mystical Poems of Rumi* (University of Chicago Press, 2010), 247.
[27]Sa'dī, *Translation and Explanation of the Fifty Odes of Saadi (51-100) Prescribed for the Previous Examination of 1893: Together with an Account of the Life of Saadi, Proverbs and Figures of Speech Occurring in the Prescribed Odes, the Metres and Feet of the Same, Etc* (Mrs. RadhabaiAtmaramSagoon, 1893), 5.

Figure 22.Apadana façade in Persipolis, Iran.

The motif became a part of ornamental vocabulary in Iran in carpet making and became an inevitable component of the Mughal aesthetic.The Mughal quarters were adorned with custom made carpets and tapestries echoing the same theory of art vocabulary as the architectural surface embellishments. The Mughal miniature paintings also show a frequent and favored use of the cypress motif. Similarly, it was used in architectural decoration such as in Taj Mahal (figure). It was an essential component of Mughal gardens depicting paradise and is usually found planted on series along the pathways. An 18th century mausoleum of Lahore, known as *Sarv WalaMaqbara*, shows an unusual usage of the motif (figure). It is quite clear that the motif came from Persia and was incorporated into local vocabulary.

Figure 23. The use of Sarv motif in the interior of Taj Mahal, India.

Figure 24. The use of motif in Sarv WalaMaqbara. Lahore, Pakistan.

The Acanthus

The journey of acanthus leaf motif from its ancient origins to the ornamental vocabulary of the woodcarving of Chiniot is not linear. It seems to be a foreign motif that came to the Subcontinent from Greece where it gained prominence as a decorative element in the Corinthian capital. In Greek culture, it had a symbolic value as it was considered to be protective and was known to ward off evil.[28]The decorative usage of

[28]Robert Adam, *Classical Architecture* (Harry N. Abrams, 1991), 228.

the motif in Corinthian capital can be seen in various Greek monuments of antiquity such as the Tholos of Epidaurus (figure). The motif came to the Subcontinent with the Greek invasion. The Gandhara art that came into being with an amalgamation of Greek and Indian elements. In Gandhara sculptures, we find both the Greeks gods and depictions of Buddha. The acanthus leaf appears adoring the base of stupas, however, due to carving in a different material, the expression is rather muted as compared to Greek examples. The motif however found a new positioning in the Subcontinent (figure). Although it appears in columns but it also becomes a part of canopy over Buddha's depiction.[29]

Figure 25. Corinthian column from the Tholos at Epidaurus, Greece.

[29]Elizabeth Errington, Ancient India and Iran Trust, and Fitzwilliam Museum, *The Crossroads of Asia: Transformation in Image and Symbol in the Art of Ancient Afghanistan and Pakistan* (Ancient India and Iran Trust, 1992), 205.

Figure 26. A Corinthian column with Buddha and acanthus leaf, Gandhara period.

It can be noted that the motif unlike the above mentioned ones, had a transition from decorative to symbolic. Another movement of the motif into the Subcontinent came with Mughals who drew inspiration from Central Asian traditions, which in turn, had their share of vocabulary from the Byzantine Empire and the Persian Empire. The examples of earlier traditions can be seen in the Dome of the Rock (figure).

Figure 27. Acanthus leaf used in decoration at the Dome of the Rock, 7th century.

The acanthus motif became a part of the ornamental vocabulary of the calligraphers in Iran and when Muslims from Central Asia invaded India,

the motif made a second contact with Subcontinent. The use of acanthus motif in QutubMinar is a clear evidence (figure).

Figure 28. Acanthus ornamentation at QutubMinar, 12th century, Delhi, India.

The Mughals particularly in the reigns of Jahangir and Shahjahan were exposed to the decorative work of Italian Renaissance, which featured frequent use of acanthus motif. Therefore, the exquisite and fine use of acanthus motif in the pietra dura of Taj Mahal is no surprise (figure).

Figure 29. Acanthus motif in pietra dura of Taj Mahal, 17th century, Agra, India

In the woodcarvings of Chiniot, the acanthus leaf motif can be found in the columns and arches with similar finesse. The movement of the motif started with a decorative use in Greece, transformed into a symbolic form

in Gandhara region and then again entered the ornamental vocabulary through Muslims. The Italian input contributed to the sharp and fine form which then continued to the woodcarvings of Chiniot where the acanthus leaf motif frequented arabesque patterns (figure).

Figure 30. Acanthus in arabesque pattern, woodcarving, Umar Hayat Palace, Chiniot, Pakistan.

Conclusion

The ornamental vocabulary of the woodcarvings of Chiniot is characteristically decorative, however, all the motifs in their ancient and original usage were rooted in mythological, religious and spiritual traditions. It can be stated that the journey of the motifs tells the story of changing cultural significance. At each point in time, each motif had a cultural underpinning but the incorporation of the motifs into a tradition of craft such as woodcarving gave birth to a life cycle of motif that was not dictated by their spiritual or cultural connotation but by the aesthetic parameters of the craft. The woodcarvers are not essentially aware of the background or the significance of a particular motif, their focus have been different and that is mostly informed by aesthetic and material considerations for purposes of decoration. For an art historian, the transitions of the motif from one cultural realm to another are significant since these transitions provide a comparative understanding of the cultures, of changing values and worldviews and of changing aesthetic needs. Some of the motifs such as the lotus, the bell and the purna-kalasa were deeply rooted in the indigenous sensibility of the region. These motifs survived the changes in culture and assumed new meanings. The

more powerful the initial imprint on the local subjectivity was the more resilient was the motif. Since the region of the Punjab was subject to foreign influences whether coming from Central Asia, Persia or China, therefore a variety of motifs and symbols was incorporated in the ornamental vocabulary. However, in the absence of a woodcarver's awareness about the origins of the motif and its spiritual significance, the only criteria that was functional in inclusion of the motif was its design profile. For instance, the acanthus leaf motif which is abundantly used in the woodcarvings of Chiniot was initially conceived in Greece due to its decorative potential. It is the only motif that had a secular trajectory accept for the use in Gandhara art. But the spiritual positioning of the motif could not continue beyond Gandhara period. The decorative use dominated with Mughals who also imported conventions from the Italian Renaissance. The lotus motif also went through similar transition. It was deeply rooted in the religious sensibility of the Subcontinent but with Muslims it gradually shifted to the aesthetic sensibility. The Sarv motif was entirely a foreign motif that came to the Subcontinent with the Muslims. The Tree of life motif was a universal motif and it retained a spiritual value in all cultures, but again, in the woodcarving tradition it remained decorative. We may conclude that the ornamental vocabulary of woodcarving in Chiniot is a result of diachronic and synchronic movement of motifs and in their final form, it was not their cultural significance but their design profile that sustained their use.

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