

Bahmani Sultanate-Their contributions towards Art and Architecture

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Abstract

During the five hundred years after Prophet Mohammed's (S) death in A.D. 632, Islam spread far beyond its place of origin in the Arabian Peninsula. As Islam spread, a distinctive style of Islamic art gradually developed. It was used mainly for religious architecture, book illustrations, and the decoration of pottery, metal-ware, and other useful objects. Islamic art was influenced by the artistic styles included late Roman, Byzantine, and Persian art. The new chapter which was opened in the Islamic period led to the creation of remarkable religious buildings. Iranian arts such as calligraphy, wall paintings, stucco (Plaster-cut), mirror work, tile work and metal art became closely tied together in this new era. Islamic architecture and building decoration are among the most beautiful means of expression. Decoration does not play such an important role in any other type of architecture. Islamic art not only describes the art created specially in the service of the Muslim faith but also characterizes the art and architecture historically produced in the lands ruled by Muslims artists. Calligraphy is the most important and pervasive element in the Islamic art. A striking example of this influence is seen in the north Karnataka i.e., in Gulbarga, Bidar and Bijapur the most beautiful wall paintings and stone engravings inside the tombs and outer parts of the architecture.

Keywords

Islamic art and architecture, Bahmani Empire, Deccan Sultanate

Islamic Art in Bahmani Sultanate

In the twelfth and thirteenth centuries A.D. a magnificent style of architecture was in vogue (fashion) in the Deccan, some specimens of which in the form of religious shrines are still preserved.

The history of Islamic art starts in south India from the first Muslim ruler Sultan Alauddin Hasan Bahman Shah from 1347 that made Gulbarga in Karnataka his capital for eighty years. Later, the capital shifted to Bidar by Ahmed Shah Wali Bahmani. The late Sir W. Haig, on the basis of the Gulbarga fort Jama Masjid inscription which bears the surname Bahman Shah, for Alauddin, the founder of the dynasty, had concluded that all the information contained in Persian histories which stated that the king had been a slave of the Brahman Gangu, and had adopted the title Bahmani, a shortened form of Bahman Gangu, and old master, was false. The mention or incorporation of an amusing story is not extraordinary in books on history, but in this case the agreement of all absolutely clear record shall have been secured. The mere mention of the title Bahman Shah, or a reference to the decent of Bahmani kings from Bahman and Faridun in some

inscriptions of the dynasty, may only be the eulogy of court panegyrists to please their king, and should not be treated seriously. Firishta's opinion on this point is very illuminating and may be quoted here:

'Alauddin Hasan being once asked how he contrived without great treasures or armies to attain royalty, he replied, by kindness to my friends, generosity to my enemies, and by courtesy and liberality to all mankind. It has been asserted that he was descended from Bahman, one of the ancient kings in Persia, and I, the author, have even probably only framed, after his accession to the throne, by flatterers and poets, for I believe his origin was too obscure to admit of being traced. The appellation of Bahmani he certainly took out of compliment to his master, Gangu, the Brahmin, a word often pronounced Bahman. The King himself was by birth an Afghan.'

Later, Bidar was made the capital of Bahmani Empire in 1429 by Sultan Ahmed Shah al-Wali. The 'Palmyra of the Deccan' as Bijapur is often referred to, was the capital of the Adil Shahi dynasty founded by Yusuf Khan, younger brother of the Sultan of Turkey, Muhammad in 1490.

In the beginning of the fourteenth century Deccan was flooded by the number of eminent men from Delhi, including apparently architects, engineers, tile-manufacturers, metal engravers, painters and calligraphists.

Gulbarga: The largest collection of Islamic art is seen only at the domed ceiling and walls are adorned with painting containing calligraphy designs and floral, flower and plants and geometric patterns inside the tomb of Sufi saint Syed Shah Qhabulullah Husayni with natural colours. By religious restrictions the artist was prohibited from depicting living beings in the interior of tomb, and his imagination was therefore employed either in inventing new designs for religious texts or in adding further delicacy and subtleness to the geometric and floral devices by making the drawings more and more intricate. A small tomb situated beside the said Sufi's tomb also has an excellent work painted flower plants on ceiling. Another vacant Shor Gumbad outside the city also having delicate designs on its domed ceiling is superb.

The walls and ceiling of the tomb of Sultan Firuz Shah Bahmani can be appreciated which, although in monotone, represents faithfully the various creepers and floral patterns, the numerous geometric devices, and several calligraphic styles. The most notable building, however, of this period is Jama Masjid of Gulbarga fort, built by Persian architect named Rafi in 1367 during the reign of Muhammad Shah Bahmani I.

Bidar: The city is well known for its metal art i.e., Bidri Art, the black items engraved with silver or gold wires or sheets. The two most important buildings of Sultan Ali Barid's reign are Rangeen Mahal and a tomb which he built during his lifetime. Rangeen Mahal literally means the 'Coloured Palace' and this name was apparently given to it on account of its wall paintings have being decorated with colours, lovely wood-carvings and mother-of-pearls and tiles of different hues, traces of which still exist on the facade of the eastern halls inside the fort.

Tomb of Ahmed Shah al-Wali Bahmanis interior, although somewhat dark, is artistically relieved by splashes of most brilliant colours which have been used in the paintings of walls and vault.

Among these gold and vermillion are prominent, but almost every tint in the colour-box of the painter has been used, there being several shades of cobalt and grey.

The side walls of Dargah of Hadrat Shah Abul Faid arch are decorated with tile-work representing chiefly floral designs and the front portion of door is fully filled with flower and plants in Persian style using blue, yellow and other vibrant colours.

The written exhibits art of high order and as in tile-decoration the painters and the calligraphist worked out jointly at Mahmud Gawan Madrasa. The design is very simple, but at the same time most effective, and shows the ingenuity of the artist in placing it near an elaborate pattern for the purpose of contrast. The tiny squares are shown in white, yellow, light green, light blue and deep blue, thus producing a kaleidoscopic effect.

The other artistic outstanding monuments are The Hall of Audience, The long Gun, Chaaubara, Chaukhandi, Tarkash Mahal, Gagan Mahal, Takht Mahal, and Tomb of Alauddin Bahmani II.

Bijapur: Bijapur is strewn with monuments of historical significance as well as religious interest. Most of the monuments of the period are credited to the Adil Shahi rulers are representations of Islamic art. They are single-handedly responsible for the cultural legacy of Bijapur and the various works of paintings, plaster embossing, engraving and architecture that abound in the city.

The most dominant architectural constructions are the various palaces or Mahals of notable significance is the fact that all these palaces are huge, lofty structures with paintings, intricate carvings and pillars. All the palaces have beautiful ceilings which are remarkably constructed and adorned. A few of the most noted Mahals include the Asar Mahal, Gagan Mahal, Anand Mahal, Saat Manzil, Chini Mahal etc. Other kinds of historical monuments are also to be found here, such as the remains of the fort built by the Adil Shahis, Landa Kasab, Hathi Khana, Mehtar Mahal etc.

Mehtar Mahal dated to 1620 is one of the most elegant structures in the fort; the entry gate in particular has been built in Indo-Saracenic style. The façade has three arches, which depict exquisite “cornice supported on carved corbels”. A gateway leads to the Mehtar mosque, which is a three-storey building. It has two slender minarets that are covered with delicately carved birds and rows of swans. The carvings are in Hindu architectural style, in the form of brackets supporting the balconies and stone trellis work. The building has a flat roof and minarets have rounded top.

Jama Masjid has the large west-centre Mihrab arch with beautiful calligraphy and wall painted in geometric patterns in ultramarine-blue and original gold leaf on plaster embossed where the Imam take place to perform the Namaz. Mehtar Mahal is one of the beautiful monuments of its king in North Karnataka especially carved in black stone consisting freehand designs. Its flat stone roof has been puzzle to engineers, which is supported by delicately carved stone brackets of birds. The other noted tombs are Gol Gumbad, Ibrahim Rauza.

Conclusion

The glory of the towns in north Karnataka really waned with the decline of Bahmani dynasty, although Barid Shahi and Adil Shahi kings kept up its beauty during their chequered rule.

Royal patronage played an important role in the making of Islamic art, as it has in the arts of other culture. From fourteenth century onwards, especially in the eastern lands, the books of art provide the best documentation of the courtly patronage.

Today, the finest arts are found in India, Turkey, Iran, Syria, Pakistan, Egypt and Morocco, where the legacy of Islamic arts remain live and strong.

Surprise was given the landmark exhibition entitled *Sultans of Deccan, India 1500-1700: Opulence and Fantasy*, organized from April 20-July 26, 2015 at The Metropolitan Museum of Art in New York, America, exhibited some 200 of the finest works from major international, private, and royal collections of Gulbarga, Bidar, Bijapur, Ahmadnagar, Berar and Golconda. The show has been organized by Navina Najat Haidar the Met's curator of Islamic art, and Marika Sardar, an associate curator at the San Diego Museum of Art. It was a kind of show after the 1851 Great Exhibition held at Crystal Palace in London.

However, for several decades after Independence, Western art connoisseurs and dealers did manage to collect avidly in the Deccan. “Indian institutions and individuals never really went out and collected, which is why, while we have a few important things, the A plus-plus category of Deccan art is abroad.” Even the scholarly work on Deccan art, has been West-led.

(In the year 2014, the names of Gulbarga and Bijapur were officially changed to Kalaburagi and Vijaypur by the Government of Karnataka.)

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