

Study Of Architectural Motifs Used In Aitchison College's Main Building

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Abstract

Lahore is the city which carries the architectural aromas of many races, dynasties and cultures. Aitchison's College building is one of those masterpieces that depict the amalgamation of the past and contemporary influences. Its buildings speak the story of the people once lived and governed this very piece of land. Architects and artisans are among those privileged artist whose work becomes the element of recognition of a certain place. The patterns and motifs used in an artwork is the link that attaches and all kind of artworks of a certain time and era may it be paintings, sculpture or an architectural building. These motifs also show artists affiliation or influence towards a certain religion or time or theory as many motifs are associated with different cultures and religions as well. The study of the motifs used in Aitchison's Old building helps us find the sources and influences that dominated the architects behind this masterpiece.

Keywords : Study, Architectural Motifs, Aitchison College, Building

Introduction

Lahore is the capital city of Punjab situated originally at the bank of river Ravi, which hold a great historical value both in terms of cultural legacy and rich architectural history.

While the walled city of Lahore is an amalgamation of the works and influences of its past rulers mainly Mughals and Sikhs, the road to new Lahore or the modern Lahore is Mall road and mostly buildings of this road reflects the influence and well grounded marks of British Raj. Most Buildings on the Mall road represent the triumph of the imperial style of Architecture, a grand assemble of different buildings in Neo-gothic, Neoclassical, Anglo-Indian and Saracenic styles. Aitchison College is one of those buildings. Its Architecture provides vivid evidence of the priorities of the English where the building practices and techniques of the Great Mughals were apparently irreversibly lost.

Anna Suvorova , Professor of Indo-Islamic Culture explains that the official architecture of Colonial India was a stage in the development of English, rather than /Indian, architecture. Despite their radiance and external similarity to native architecture, the pseudo -Mughal palaces on the mall derived from the same trend of European

Orientalism as the 'Chinese pagodas' in Kew Gardens and 'Indian Royal Pavilion in Brighton'.

Like in cultural understanding the gestures that we make have a meaning they are signs but only understood with the reference of the culture and society it is meant for. In architecture the gesture is made through buildings and buildings basic purpose is their functional importance and practicality but often they become more than just a functional concrete rather they become language of the era and people and culture it belongs to. Though the purpose and function of Aitchison College's old building was to cater the needs of the students of elite of that era but the design of the building is more than just to serve the practical and functional goals set for it. Bhai Ram Singh used it as a canvas to portray all his skills of beautification. The study the architectural details, it is observed that it's not just an educational institute's building but it stands tall to represent the magnificent craftsmanship and skill of Architect where we also find the influence of furniture design and also a beautiful collage of Islamic, Victorian and Hindu motifs.

Literature Review

In the book '*Architecture; A very short introduction*', Andrew Ballantyn explains how Architecture goes about doing what it does. It focuses on functional and cultural

dimension of architecture and is very useful in understanding the language a building speaks.

'Tareekh-e- Lahore' by Kanahiya Lal, throws light on the history of Lahore and its buildings and uses, which also helps understanding the architectural evolution in Lahore and the influences by the residents, owners, constructors and the governing body that leaves on its buildings.

Darcy Braddell's book *'How to Look at Buildings'* helped tremendously in understanding space as an element of design. Kamil Khan Mumtaz's book *'Architecture in Pakistan'* is a comprehensive presentation of architecture in Pakistan and his analysis on Aitchison's building is helps in evaluating different point of views and perception regarding its architecture.

'Lahore Topophilia of Space and Place' by Anna Suvorova and *'The Raj, Lahore & Bhai Ram Singh'* by Pervaiz and Sajida Vandal are two books which see the architecture of Lahore in a different light. Where Anna's description of buildings is more towards feelings and values attached to those, Mr. and Mrs. Vandal arguably highlighted the minute details of the architecture and their focus remained on Bhai Ram Singh's contributions towards Lahore's Architecture. When studying the motifs one has to dig into individual track of

each motif and sometimes it leads you way back into the history and touches different civilizations and religion. For that purpose the most beneficial books in such were '*Ornament and Decoration in Islamic Architecture*' by Dominique Clevenot, '*Islamic Ornament*' by Eva Baer, *Encyclopaedia of Islamic Art and Architecture* by Danish Yousaf, '*Indo-Muslim Architecture*' by R. Nath, '*History of Handicrafts*' by Akhtar Riazuddin, '*Arts & Crafts Pakistan*' by I. A. Rehman and '*The Iconography of Islamic Art*' edited by Bernard O'Kane.

Aitchison College

Aitchison College was established by the British as an elite institution with the objective of educating "the relatives of the Ruling Chiefs of the Punjab, youths of good family, and the minors under the guardianship of the Court of Wards." It is an independent, semi private school for boys established in 1886 as Punjab's Chiefs' College that was renamed Aitchison College on November 13, 1886. The site was selected with great care within a prestigious district located east of Government House (now the Punjab Governor's House). Being positioned midway between "Civil [Anarkali] and Military Stations [Mian Mir Cantonment]" the placement permitted the students to attend with ease all government functions, whether the garden parties of the Lieut. Governor or the military

functions in the Cantonment. The campus, set up in almost 200 acres, was irrigated by an abundant supply of canal waterⁱⁱ.

The Building and Design

Construction of its most famous building – ‘Old Building’ – began in 1887 and was complete by 1890. Its existence is owed largely to three men: Bhai Ram Singh, Colonel Samuel Jacob and John Lockwood Kipling.

Bhai Ram Singh was one of the first graduates of Mayo School of Industrial Arts now National College of Arts. He was a carpenter’s son who with the help of John Lockwood Kipling rose to the position of the leading architect of Lahore. Colonel S.S Jacob was the chief Engineer of Jaipur state in 1867 and was responsible for the promotion of the Indo-Saracenic¹ style of Architecture. In 1912 Jacobs designed the Daly College, Indoreⁱⁱⁱ.

The committee was much struck by the exterior design submitted by *Bhai Ram Singh*, finding it to be unusually pleasing and graceful. However at the same time, it thought that the details of the ground plan and construction seemed open to grave objection, and to

¹ The Indo-Saracenic Revival (also known as Indo-Gothic, Hindoo or Hindu-Gothic, Mughal-Gothic, Neo-Mughal) was an architectural style movement by British architects in the late 19th century in British India. It drew elements from native Indo-Islamic and Indian architecture, and combined it with the Gothic revival and Neo-Classical styles favoured in Victorian Britain.

be generally inferior to the design submitted by *Col. Jacobs*. So it was decided by the committee that both designs should be merged together, the exterior design of the main building was of Bhai Ram Singh's design and interior was mostly from *Col. Jacobs*. The focus on details and beautification of design in those times was given the immense importance. Even the minute details related to this very building were never overlooked.

Interestingly when one observes the design of Main Building, it's not very easy to judge that which side of the elevation is the main front side. As this amazingly designed building appears beautiful from all four sides, although the front façade faces towards Mall road yet the other three sides when observed separately give the feeling that they are the front elevation like the side facing Davies road or the one facing towards boarding houses. Even the south and east façade design and architecture is different and not same like in most architecture the parallel sides are usually identical.

The Motifs used on the exterior of the Main Building

The Main building of Aitchison College is like a collage of different motifs and patterns. One can see the glimpse of Bhai Ram Singh's forte in making a beautiful amalgamation of different motifs.

Jali's (*jālī*)

Jali or Latticed screens were the important part of Indian Architecture due to its function as a ventilation device also it lowers the temperature of the building also when the air passes through these jali's or latticed screens its velocity increases. These jali's used to be an integral part of Mughal architecture. Jali patterns used in Aitchison's Main building are much simpler as compared to the Mughal architecture but the technique is the one Mughal used that is carved and pierced double sided red stone screen with geometric designs. Seven to eight different Jali designs were used in this building. The motifs which make jali patterns are not complicated but rather simple.



Figure 1: The Jali design motif 1

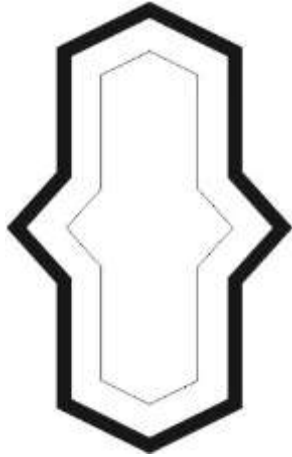


Figure 2 The Jali design motif 2



Figure 3 The design formed by Jali's negative space



Figure 4 Jalli design 4



Figure 5 jali design

The design in figure 13 is the the jalli used within arches, this motif is combination of different geometrical shapes that is flower inclosed in a hexagram which is enclosed in a hexagone which than is enclosed in circles. The material used is pink and white marble.

The hexagram means a six pointed star that is the most prominent motid of the round

marble cut jali's within the arches is belived to be associated with many anciaent cultures and beliefs including Hinduism, judism and aslo widle associated with astrology. This motif is used again and again in many Mughal buildings during Akbar's reign, the most eminent was on Humayun's tomb and throughout the Mughal era, and the hexagram remained an identifiabile sign of the dynasty.^{iv}

These patterns are Bhai Ram Singh's designs trade feature as the same jalli designs can be seen in other buildings designed by him during same period like the same jali patterns are used in the building of Punjab University Old Campus and Mayo School of Arts.





Figure 6 Jali Designs used in Aichison College (Photograph by the researcher)

Motifs on the Pillars, Parapets, Friezes, Arches, Niches and Cornices

The pillars or orders used in the Main Building of Aitchison College are adorned with different motifs, mostly semi circular motifs of sun flower. Flower motifs in artwork, furniture and architectural ornamentation may carry symbolic relation to religion, celebration, or superstition, and many other things but In architecture during colonial period in Indian subcontinent, it is observed that the use of flower as a symbolic element is rather less than its use merely for decoration and beautification purpose of the building.

In Aitchison's building the flower motifs are used for the decoration purpose only, also these kinds of motifs were popular in the hand crafted wooden furniture of that time.

Bhai Ram Singh who himself was the son of a carpenter and a skilled carpenter himself used such motifs in his furniture and wooden lattice work produced by Bhai Ram Singh

for the various Exhibitions displaying the Arts and Crafts of Punjab during the Year 1877 to 1884^v.

The pillars in the verandas supporting the arches are made with red and white marble.

Whereas the pillars in the inner side (plasters) like the ones in main passage between the hall and the terrace in the west are made with concrete and bricks.

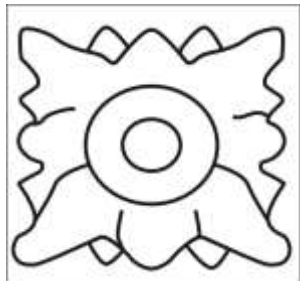


Figure 7 motifs in the capital in the corridor

The flower motifs dominate on the pillars of Aitchison's Main building. On the shaft of the pillars one can see the semi sunflower shape (figure 16), three layers of petals are enclosed in an arch shape. All three layers contain eight petals. Interestingly two slightly different motifs are used on the pillars, at first glance one feels that both motifs in figure 16 and figure 17 are same but only when one take a closer look we see that though both are semi sunflowers in an arch shaped motif yet are totally different from each other. It seems that different artisans or misterys² worked on them and may the difference in unintentional.

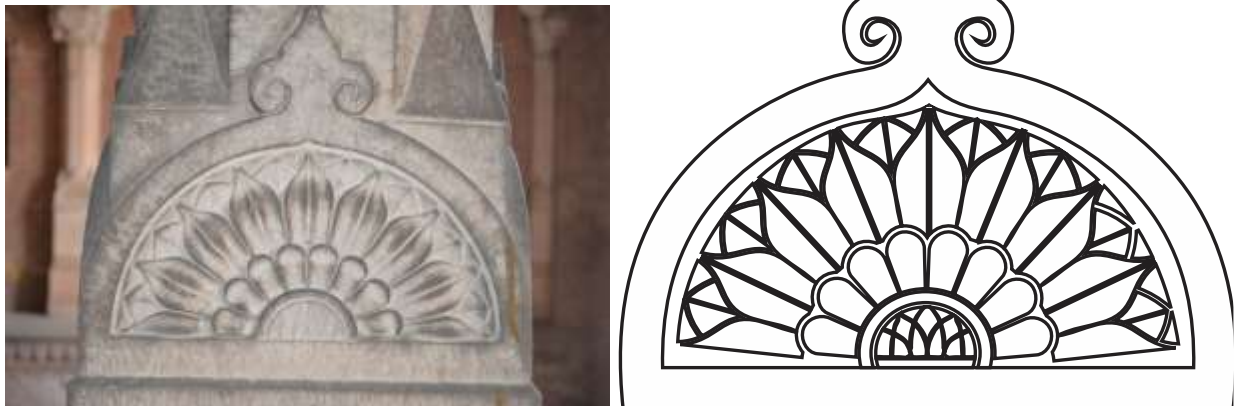


Figure 8 Semi Sunflower motif (a) on the base of the capital Aitchison College's old building

²² Misterys were the local name for the workers or laborers specialized in construction work.



Figure 9 Semi Sunflower motif (b) on the base of the capital Aitchison College old building

On the pillars of the jharoka's of this building full sunflower motif is used. The style of this motif is different to the other semi sunflower motifs discussed earlier. It is a twelve petal and three layered flower enclosed in a pendant like shape.



Figure 10 Motif on the shaft of pillars at the entrances

The use of sunflower motif in architecture was not new at that time. But surely not very common either, its use as a building embellishment was seen in the Chaukhandi Tombs in Sindh, which were build during 15th to 18th century. (See figure 19)

Thomas Jeckyll, a London based architect and designer used sunflower motif on one of his most famous designs a cast-iron Pavilion or Pagoda for the Philadelphia Centennial Exhibition, 1876. That is ten years before the stone laying ceremony of Aitchison College. Jeckyll was certainly not the only one to use the sunflower motif in an Arts and Crafts

context – William Morris had popularised it a generation earlier – but as a member of a London-based circle of connoisseurs of oriental art he was one of the first to apply it within the Anglo-Japanese Aesthetic Movement.^{vi}



Figure 11 Chaukhandi tombs Sindh, Pakistan



Figure 12 Sunflower motifs on metal by Thomas Jeckyll



Figure 13 Base of the Pillar to the entrance to portico (photp by researcher)

Figure 21 shows another beautiful floral motif used on the base of the pillars to the entrance, here the motif is of tulip, which other than its beauty also considered sacred symbol in Hinduism and Indian culture, Lotus flower is mentioned in almost all Hindu scriptures^{vii}. Although Lotus being the major motif Associated with Hinduism yet we cannot say that the use of this motif on the base of Aitchison College's pillar depicts the architects association with Hinduism as over the past centuries Mughals adapted this motif in their mosques and palaces, the major example is of Taj Mahal and also one finds Lotus flower a symbol of creation in Hinduism as a most favorite embellishment for the springing of domes in the Deccan and also base decoration of minarets in few Indian mosques^{viii}.

On the base of the pillars on the inner side of the corridors and on the first floor the flower motif is used again but this time a smaller eight petal flower motif surrounding by leafy patterns and enclosed in a trefoil arch shape. (See figure 22 and 23) Use of trefoil arch as a decorative motif along with floral pattern is not new but the earliest instances that has been discovered and penned down states that trefoil frame filled with interwoven stems,

carved on a brick, found between the Meshhed road and Tomb of Omar Khayyam in Iran in eleventh to twelfth century^{ix}. (See figure 24)



Figure 14 Motif (a) on the Base of pillar/ Pilaster



Figure 15 Motif (b) on the base of Pillar in Aitchison College



Figure 16 Trefoil Arch motif. East Iran 11th to 12th century, Picture scanned from book *Islamic Ornament* by Eva Baer



Figure 17 leaved crown motif

The leaved crown motifs figure 25 are seen on the capitals pillars around the veranda of western side of the building. These are made with pink and white marble. Some pillars towards the inner side have the same brick. These kinds of motifs on the capitals are not new as these motifs of leafed Corinthian capital with two or more crowns can be seen in the *Mosque of Al Salih Talai's* court yard in Cairo which was completed in year 1160 in the Late Fatmid era.^x (Figure 26)



Figure 18 leafed Corinthian capital, Cairo

Although the use of these leaved motifs is found in Islamic architecture of Egypt yet these motifs cannot be termed Islamic because these motifs style is somewhat replicated on the capitals of Gurduwara in Aitchison College. (See figure 27) The same leafed crowned style is also used on the pendants or knobs around the staircase railing. (See figure 29)



Figure 19 Leafed crown desin on the capital of a plaster

The same leafed crown is used on the cornice in the Aitchison's main building if seen from below. (See figure 30)

The pillars supporting the inner walls of the corridors and veramdas are simpler in construction and design. They are made with bricks and simpler motifs are used on most of these smaller supporting columns. One centered semi-circular arch shape motifs are

used on each side of the pillar. Almost the same motif of an arch is repeated on the base of the pillar but inverted that is both arches the one on the capital and the other on the base are pointing towards each other.



Figure 20 Motif quench



Figure 21 Freeze design near the domes

The pattern on the frieze is arabesque that is interlocking pattern, associated to Islamic art and architecture.



Figure 22 Design pattern frieze Aitchison College

Arabesque like ornament border on the frieze carved in concrete. The beauty of this design is in its balance, symmetry and rhythm. This motif on the frieze adds a pinch of Mughal and Islamic flavor to the architecture of Aitchison College. Such patterns and motifs were in use in Islamic architecture in ninth century^{xi}.



Figure 23 Stone work, Cairo, Egypt Picture by Delfina Bottesini

The Jharoka's in the Main Building are fully ornamented in white Marble. Geometric sunflower kind of motif is used on the brackets along with various simple borders.

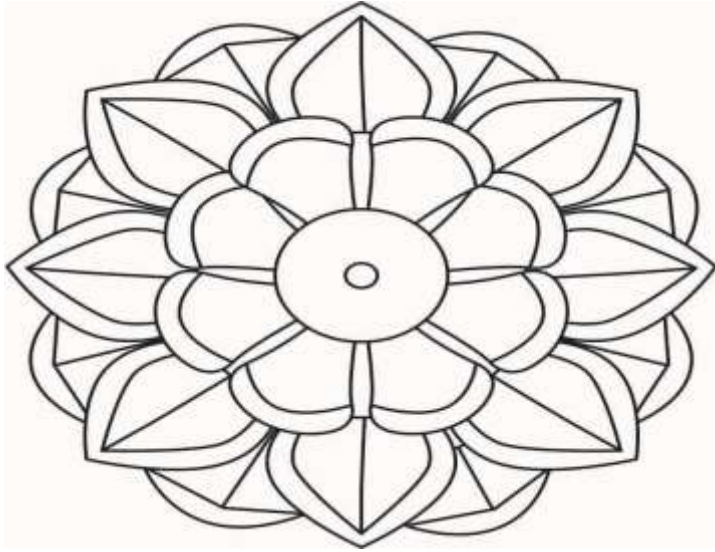


Figure 24 flower motif on the brackets under jharoka's

On the edges of the capitals supporting Moorish arches in red/pink marble are some simpler motifs that make the border. These are not deeply relief designed but more like line work or etching.

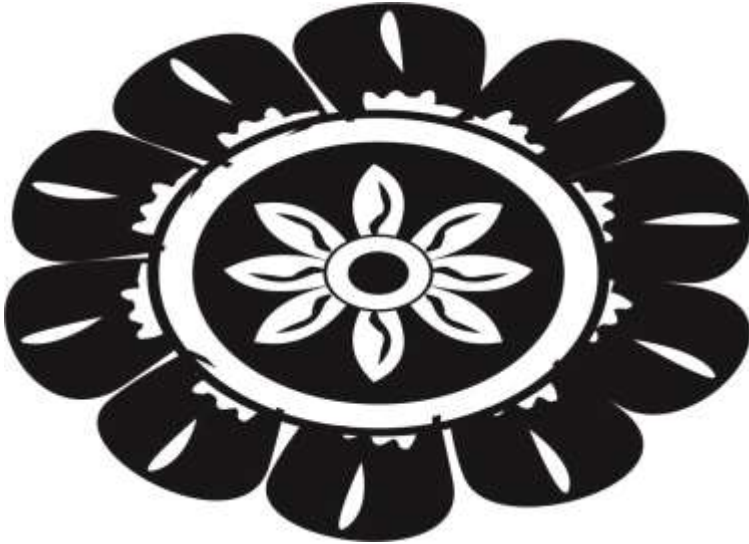


Figure 25 flower motif on the inner spandrels of the arch

The obsession of flower motifs is so evident on the whole architecture of Aitchison College. On the inner side of the terrace one observes some beautiful ornamentation with gold colour the designs are slightly embossed and some motifs look like simply painted. On the inner spandrels small flower motifs are highlighting the beauty of the terrace. This motif is like a flower within flower. Golden and white shading adds depth to the flower. This motif is unlike the other more geometric flower motifs than this one.

The parapet of Aichison college old building carries a flower like shape on each arch of parapet. It's a six pointed star inside twelve petaled flower or a star. The six or eight pointed star is another basic pattern or motif which was used and associated with

different religions and cultures but most prominently this geometric motif was being implied in islamic buildings many centuries before this. One can see this pointed star making a pattern on the window grilles of the mosque of Ibn Tulun in Cairo, at the Tomb Tower at Demavand or in stucco carvings above the mehrab of the tenth century mosque at Nayyin.^{xii}

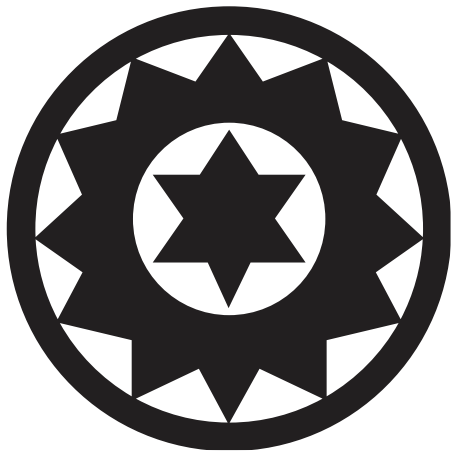


Figure 26 Motif Detail on the parapet (Aitchison College)

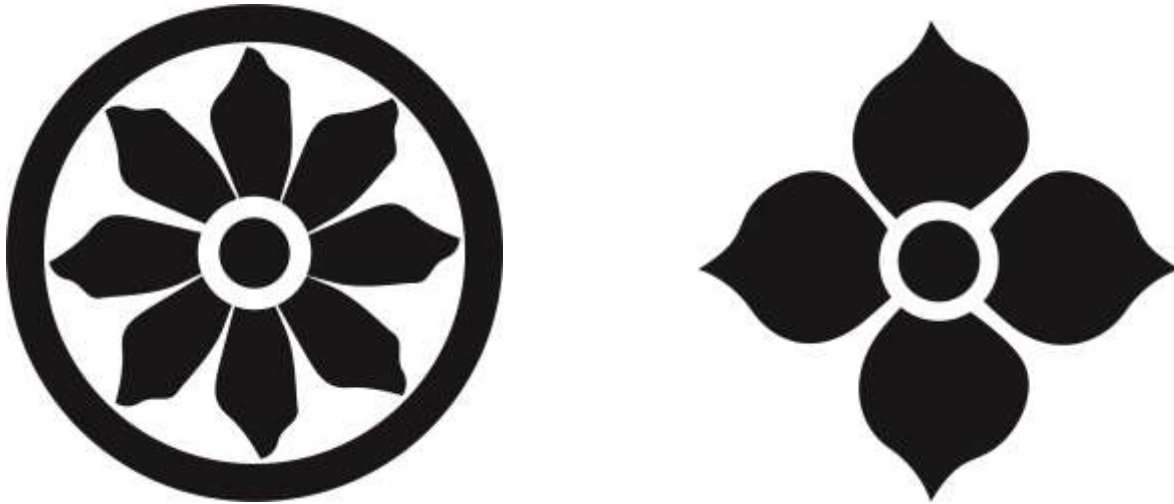


Figure 27 flower motifs inside the Jharoka (flower motif a and b)

For many centuries and in many cultures, flower motifs carried symbolism relating to religion, celebration, or superstition, and many other things. But when we see flower motifs on an educational building one only see the purpose behind the use could just to enhance the beauty and grandeur of the building. Here in Aitchison College's main building the use of flower motifs does not strictly follow a religious theme or a periodical representation. Even if some flower motifs belong or have been symbolically used by certain religions it merges so beautifully on this one building. In figure 52 we see two flower motifs one four petal simple flower and the other eight petal flower in a circle. Both these flower form a decorative pattern on inner walls of jharoka. In figure 53 we see another flower motif embellishing the spandrels of the chatris. It could be a form of rosette motif, as rosette is a round, stylized motif mostly used as a decorative motif. It's

derived from natural shape of botanical rosette. The formalized flower motif is often carved in stone or wood to create decorative ornaments for architecture and furniture.

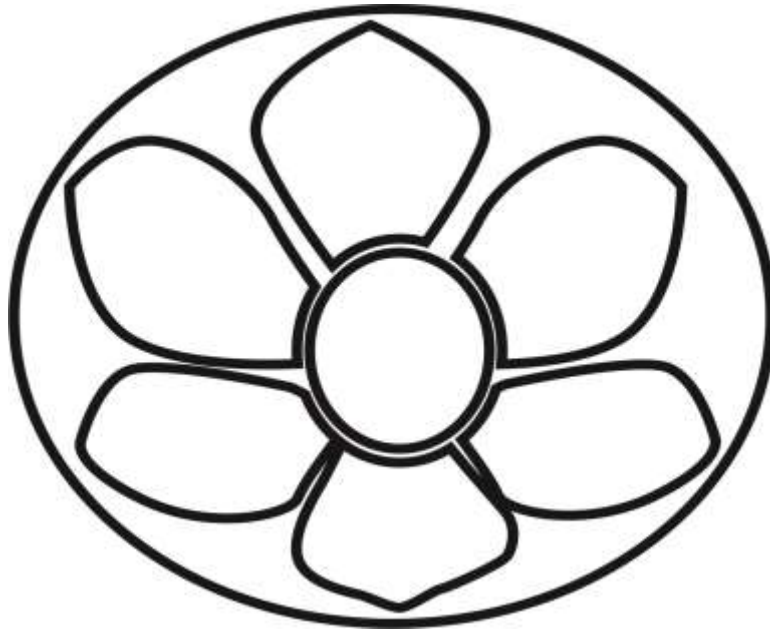


Figure 28 flower motif on the spandrels

One of the earliest appearances of the rosette in ancient art is in early fourth millennium BC Mesopotamia. It can be seen on shell plaques, on the head dresses, and on many other artifacts.^{xiii}

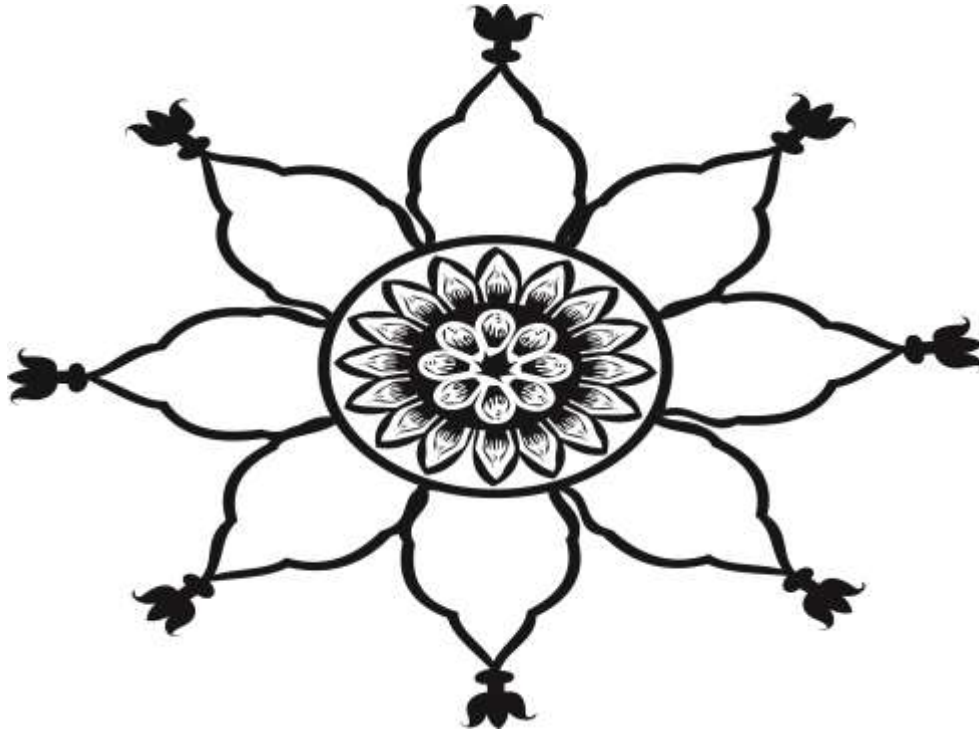


Figure 29 Sunflower Motif on the walls near the terrace

On the walls adjoined to terrace and the main porch are white painted on the walls a decorative design is made with gold. The center of attraction of these walls is four big sunflower motifs, two on each side drawn with golden foil or paint. These motifs are about two feet in radius and are framed in a square simple border. The most inner circle of flower is composed with eight rounded edged petals. Then encircling these is another group of sixteen pointed petals. Then a circle is drawn around it making them one unit. Next round of petals are much bigger and are elongated arch shaped petals.

There are various small niches becoming a part of Aitchison College 's Main Building, apart from their functionality these niches adds to the beauty of the building. The arch of the niche is made with bricks and building material and is a two asped arch but the lower part of the niche is made of marble. The whole piece is like a lotus flower. On the top of the Arch another flower shape in relief on the wall is seen.

An interesting and different motif style and pattern found on the Iron pipes on the Aichison College can be seen in Figure 58, different in sense that they don't seem to gell in to the other motifs emblished on to the Aitchison College building. The flower drawn on it is simple in its form and the zig zag pattern along with small circles is no way seems to belong to that era when this building was made. This pattern seems very modern to its age also could be the work of a plumber or worker who might have just drawn it without much suggestion or approval. These patterns though are modern and widly used now a days in fabric design but are also common decorative patterns in villages around Punjab and Sindh.

Conclusion

The study of the Architecture of Aitchison College's Main building and the motifs used on it brings to the point of conclusion that the building design of Aitchison College's Main building is not new for its time neither the motifs used were very innovative but all the motifs were previously used in this very area of land by Mughals, Rajputs and many religions. None of the motif is used here for the very first time but most of the motifs were been part of the ornamentation since centuries and centuries ago. Now the point is what makes this building so special, the answer is the use of what already been used but not in traditional way all the time. This building portrays the fine craftsman ship and no doubt the time when it was build the Arts and crafts movement was at its bloom. One cannot minus the role of Col. Jacobs and Kipling in the design of this building. It's a beautiful merger of Bhai Ram Singh's crafts and skill with the vast experience and practicality of Col. Jacobs. One person cannot take the full credit of this because if that been the case the price money for this design would have been given to one of the above mentioned names. In fact bigger share of price money was awarded to Col. Jacobs.

Here we can also conclude that all the motifs and native detailing and ornamentation of this building is convincing consistent and well integrated with the Baroque mass of the structure it adorns^{xiv}. This is not a Mughal Building but is an answer to those buildings by British Raj. They tried to inculcate the European architectural traditions with the architectural language of native Craftsman.

Bhai Ram Singh applied what he knew best, the motifs he used were his forte, and he did use it in remarkable way that we are mesmerized by the grandeur and beauty of this piece of Architecture. Here I would like to quote Rawal Singh Aulakh, assistant professor at Guru Nanak Dev University's comments about Bhai Ram Singhs work "The proportions, scale, rhythmical fenestrations, series of horizontal bands, flanking tower-like minarets... They were not a copy of any specific architectural vocabulary, but were a result of an abstraction of existing designs."^{xv}

As the Vandals quote in their book, 'The Raj, Lahore and Bhai Ram Singh' – to the brick-makers of Lahore to develop new shapes.

"tease out of brickwork the carved texture of wood." His walls "change with the sun, now shining with strong light and later brooding in the setting sun; they convey messages..."^{xvi}.

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- ⁱ Lahore, Topophilia of space and place by Anna Suvorova, page 202
- ⁱⁱ Aitchison College Lahore “the first 100 years by F.S Aijazudin
- ⁱⁱⁱ Aitchison College Lahore “the first 100 years by F.S Aijazudin
- ^{iv} Ornament and decoration in Islamic Architecture by Dominique Clenenot
- ^v The Raj Lahore and Bhai Ram Singh by Pervaiz Vandal And Sajida Vandal
- ^{vi} (Iron , Ornament and Architecture in Victorian Britain: Myth and Modernity by Dr. Paul Dobraszcyk. Page number 59)
- ^{vii} <http://www.indianmirror.com/culture/indian-folklore/Lotus-Flower.html> (sited 11:15:2017 at 6:25pm)
- ^{viii} Indo-Islamic motifs in art & architecture by Sajjad Shahid
<https://timesofindia.indiatimes.com/city/hyderabad/Indo-Islamic-motifs-in-art-architecture/articleshow/12397557.cms>
- ^{ix} Islamic Ornament by Eva Baer, page 74
- ^x . (Iconography of Islamic Art, Edinburgh University Press, page 24)
- ^{xi} (Islamic Ornament by Eva Baer, page 12)
- ^{xii} (Islamic Ornament by Eva Baer ,page 49)
- ^{xiii} <https://aratta.wordpress.com/the-rosette-symbol/>
- ^{xiv} Architecture In Pakistan by Kamil Khan Mumtaz, page 124
- ^{xv} (<https://www.thesikhencyclopedia.com/arts-and-heritage/architecture/ram-singh-sardar-bahadur>)
- ^{xvi} The Raj Lahore and Bhai Ram Singh by Pervaiz Vandal And Sajida Vandal