

An Analytical Study of the Decorative Scheme in the light of Religious Significance, Employed in Muslim Tomb Buildings in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa Province, Pakistan

Abstract: *The decorative scheme adopted in the Muslim tomb buildings appeared for the first time in the 13th and 14th centuries AD in the shape of glazed tiles (Shakir 2012: 78-79) while the painted decoration is noticed as first appearance in the Early Mughal period tomb of Shaikh Qutb ad-Din at Dilaz k, Peshawar, assigned to the time of Jalal ad-Din Akbar (Rahman 1984: 107; Shakir 2012a: 164-165). The present study is an approach to analyze this overall decorative scheme employed time to time in the Muslim tomb buildings in the light of the religious significance.*

Key words: *Caliph, Islam, Muslim, Religious, painting*

The decorative media employed in the tombs mainly is comprised of paintings, glazed tiles, calligraphy, lacquer work, glass work, stucco and brickwork. Of these, the first three occur throughout whereas the last four are confined to the latest structures erected during the British period. The most popular medium of the first three was painting. Its use was confined to the inside of the grave chamber in the form of murals, which technically may be described as *tempera* paintings. No frescoes – paintings done rapidly in water colour on wet plaster on a wall or ceiling, so that the colours penetrate the plaster and become stable when it dries – are reported.

This abundant use of the medium brings us face to face with the question: is the use of paintings in such religious buildings admissible under Islamic law? There is no specific mention of pictures in the Holy *Qur'an* and the real import of the verse (Qur. V. 92) quoted by later *Ulemas* (theologians) in support of their utter condemnation of pictures was the avoidance of idolatry. The theological basis of the censure on pictorial art must therefore be sought for elsewhere.

A more distinct utterance upon this subject is found in the Traditions (*Ahadith*) of the Prophet (PBUH), and it is from this theological source that the hostile attitude prevailing throughout the Muslim world derives its sanction. If there is no clear verdict in the Quran on the subject of paintings, it is very much there in the Traditions. The Prophet (PBUH) is reported to have said that those who will be most severely punished by God on the Day of Judgement will be the painters (see *Bukhari* (ed. Juyaboll), vol. V, p.104, (No.89)). Again (*Bukhari* (ed. Juyaboll), vol. V, p.106 (No.97)), on the Day of Judgment the punishment of hell

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will be meted out to the painter, and he will be called upon to breathe life into the forms that he has fashioned; but he cannot breathe life into anything. The reason behind this total condemnation is obvious. By fashioning the form of a living being the painter, it was believed, attempted to assimilate himself to God by usurping His creative function. The futility of the painter's claim will be brought home to him when he fails to breathe life into the form fashioned by him.

The Arabic word for painter is "*mu awwir*" which literally means "the one who forms or fashions". In a wider sense this equally applies to the sculptor because he also makes forms looking like animals or human beings. The blasphemy in the appellation is more apparent to the Muslim mind in that this word is applied to God Himself in the *Qur n* (LIX, 24): "He is God, the Creator, the Maker, the Fashioner" (*mu awwir*).

The painter was not the only one to be condemned to hell for such a sin. There are other sinners who will be likewise punished in company with the painter. (see *Bukh ri*, ed. Krehl, vol. II, p. 43 *fin*). A certain *wn b. Abi Ju ayfah* relates:

"I saw my father buying a slave who was a cupper (i.e. Phlebotomist), and he ordered him cupping instruments to be brought and broken to pieces. When I asked him the reason for this, he said: 'The Prophet forbade men to take the price of blood, or the price of a dog, or the earning, of a maidservant, and he cursed the tattooing woman and the woman who has herself tattooed, and the usurer and the man who lets usury be taken from him, and he cursed the painter' ".

In some other Traditions, the painter is associated with the kind of abominations, which severely degrade his position. It is said, "the angels do not enter a house in which there is a picture or a dog" (*Bukh ri*, ed. Krehl, vol. II, P. 311 (*ad fin*) et saepe). And then "Those who will be most severely punished on the Day of Judgment are the murderer of a Prophet, one who has been put to death by a Prophet, one who leads men astray without knowledge, and a maker of images or picture". "A head will thrust itself out of the fire and will ask, where are those who invented lies against God, or have been the enemies of God, or have made light of God? Then men will ask who these three classes of persons are? It will answer, The sorcerer is he who has invented lies against God; the maker of images or pictures is the enemy of God; and he who acts in order to be seen by men, is he that has made light of God ('Ali al – Muttaq , *Kanz al – Umm l*, vol. II, P. 200).

These utterances are put by later theologians in the Prophet's mouth are not borne out by events that took place during his life and show a tolerant attitude. Some of these are noted below.

During his last illness, two of his wives – Umm Salmah and Umm Habibah – who had been to Abyssinia and had seen pictures in a church, sitting round his bed, discussed how impressed they were by the beauty of these pictures. The Prophet joins in the conversation and explains that it is the custom of the Abyssinians, when a holy man dies to build a house of prayer over his tomb, and paint such pictures in it. Such a conversation is inconceivable by the deathbed, what to speak of the Prophet, even of a Muslim saint of a later generation. In support of a tolerant view on the part of the Prophet is the story which tells us that when, after his victorious entry into Macca, he went inside the Ka ba, he placed

his hand over a picture of Mary and ordered the rest to be obliterated. Further, the Prophet does not appear to have objected to the figures of men or animals, so long as they did not distract his attention while engaged in prayer, and so long as they were in their proper place. The great danger to be avoided was idolatry, any deviation from the absolute loyalty due to the One and Only God. Similarly, the Prophet does not appear to have taken exception to the dolls which *isha*, his youngest wife, brought into the house; on one occasion he asked her what she was playing with, and she replied, "The horses (or horsemen) of Solomon (Ibn Sad, *Biographien*, vol. VIII, P.42). Even the rigid Caliph Umar used a silver censer, with figures on it, which he had brought from Syria, in order to perfume the mosque at Medina (*Ibn Rustah, al-A l q al-Naf sah* 1891: 66). When, subsequently, opinion against paintings became hardened, the governor of Medina, Ibrahim b. Yahya b. Muhammad, in AD 783 had the figures on this censer erased (*Ibn Rustah, al - A l q al - Naf sah* 1891: 66). Primitive Muslim society, therefore, does not appear to have been so iconoclastic as later generations became, when condemnation of pictorial and plastic art won general approval in the Muslim Society.

In the third century of the Hijrah, the Traditions took permanent and authoritative form in the great canonical collections connected with the names of *Bukhari*, Muslim and others. No further doubt was possible for the faithful as to the illegality of painting and sculpture. The hatred of idolatry caused a statue or a picture to be regarded with suspicion. Its possible influence on the faithful by leading them to *Shirk* (or giving a partner to God) was most abhorred by Muslim theologians. It was this abhorrence, which guided the tomb builders of present Khyber Pakhtunkhwa province throughout the centuries.

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