

Faryal Abdullah<sup>1</sup>

Dr. Rafya Tahir<sup>2</sup>

Analysing British Ornamentation of High Court, Lahore

**Abstract**

Ornamentation has been a topic of discussion for years. Its relationship with the built architecture cannot be ignored. In the context of the cultural regional history of Lahore, various rulers left their mark in the form of built heritage. This paper is based on one such British heritage building taken as a descriptive research with historical setting. Its objectives included an in-depth study of its ornamentation designs and patterns, techniques and understanding in the context of the regional style of Lahore. British built Court was selected as the sample of the study with its ornamentation motifs. The research revealed motifs were influenced from local Mughal floral patterns with a blend of British heraldry symbols, acanthus and quarter foil motifs. It was quite revealing to understand the philosophy behind using various patterns. A further in depth research on designs to preserve them for the future generations is need of the hour. This Research is helpful for art historians, design students as well heritage conservatives.

**Keywords:** *Ornamentation British, High Court, Quatrefoil, Lahore, Motifs, Heritage.*

**Introduction**

History of Lahore brings out various cultures which once made this imperial city a hallmark. Many rulers exemplified their strength and vigor in the form of architecture and embellished it with. Therefore the subject of this research becomes more important to document the extensive decorative ornamentation. Ornamentation has been discussed in many perspectives but focusing on the building and that of a British period was quite intriguing. As ornamentation was used extensively in the Mughal architecture of Lahore there was a lot to witness but observing the ornamentation from a foreign ruler was naturally important. The built structure in the British period held the philosophy of constructing a symbol of power and strength. British established an architectural philosophy that had its own features and brought forward a different ideology. The architecture built during the British period had its own characteristics with the ideology of a British symbol of power, High Court building consequently becomes an example of their civic and administrative culture.

British rulers brought forth a culture that was quite different and influenced every aspect of life in the sub-continent. This research was therefore aimed to explore the ornamentation designs used by the British architect in the original building of the Court.

Literature is available on the British monuments in Lahore but to the utmost surprise for the researcher was lack of literature available when it comes to this Court and the design vocabulary it carried. The designs were based on various civilizations and preserving these motifs was the need of the hour.

To preserve this classical heritage, documentation of the ornamentation designs was certainly felt. The exterior ornamentation has elements which shows a direct influence from the surrounding buildings. It also echoes the artistic style that prevailed during the Muslim and later Mughal architecture in South Asia, especially the tower like minarets and domes which are visible from quite a distance. The historic corridors give you a whole catalogue of designs on the doors, windows, stair case, arches etc.

The paper highlights the following main objectives to find out the impact on design patterns, this comprised of the analysis of the patterns, to formulate an understanding about the materials and styles existing in these ornamentation motifs and developing a critique about it.

**Significance of the study**

---

<sup>1</sup> Faryal Abdullah, Lecturer, Art & Design Department, University of Home Economics, Lahorefaryalabdullahkhan7@gmail.com

<sup>2</sup> Dr. Rafya Tahir Associate Professor, Art & Design Department, Registrar, University of Home Economics, Lahore [raafyatahir@gmail.com](mailto:raafyatahir@gmail.com)

The aim was to add in the existing knowledge of design ornamentation for students, art historians, educationists and even textile designers to explore the heritage motifs and identify with their own culture of ornamentation especially with the perspective of Lahore.

British administration aimed for a change in the building construction style of not only Lahore but of the sub-continent. They were clearly aware of the impact of the Mughal Dynasty and their affiliation towards their ancestral heritage of architecture. The structure relies on ornamentation for its identity and cultural meaning. Therefore the study of ornamentation becomes essential when looking at a building and its architectural ornamentation.

### **Understanding Ornament**

Ornament has been a part of almost all the cultures in various forms; its elemental motifs are so universal that many of its countless patterns have a variety of different names. For example, a quite different terminology is used for motifs in architecture and those in primitive arts and other fields. One such example can be heraldry motifs, have evolved an entire language of their own. The variations and types include geometric and natural forms as well (*Encyclopedia of World Art*, 1958). It is not an addition as is decoration. It is not merely applied but becomes one with the object it helps to create.

The necessary role of ornament could be understood like the various roles hierarchies have to play in any structural system, the same can be applied to the ornament (Meyer,1958).

Ornament has been an integral part of almost all the cultures; its motifs are so widespread that many of its countless patterns have a variety of different names. Like for example, a quite different vocabulary is used for motifs in architecture and those in primitive arts and other fields. Such as heraldry, have evolved an entire language of their own. The basis can be summarized on geometric and floral characters for a basic element of understanding (*Encyclopedia of World Art*, 1958).

Jones (1856), suggested propositions on the same subject in his book, *Grammar of Ornament*. He elucidates as to how the conventionalism of art formulates an outline for decorative art. According to his principles whenever a style of ornament is based on a concept to be appreciated, the ornament will therefore be designed in accordance to its form in nature. However varied the expression, the idea on which the original design is based goes through moderation and transformation.

The *Styles of Ornament* by Alexdendar Speltez (1904) carries illustrative information about the styles from the entire range of ornamentation starting from pre historic cave art till the middle of 19th century and different uses to it are illustrated. This book uses over 4000 drawings to illustrate 6000 years of historical design.

The *Grammar of Ornament* (1856) presents arguments which leads to the fact that the decorative art has a close connection with architecture and lays down suggestions bringing into light architecture as one's expression to present one's ideology as well as individual talents with reference to the period in which it was expressed.

Ornamentation has been a topic of exploration for years; therefore, a study of the ornamentation style is much needed from the perspective of their design and identifying influences in this part of the world.

The term ornamentation has vast and diverse background and with distinctive changes according to the culture where it exists. The regional history of the subcontinent has provided a source book of design patterns not only observed in the Jain, Hindu, Buddhist or even Mughal ornamentations but also through the British architects. A number of buildings were built during the Raj period buildings and can be witnessed in Lahore. The change in the political environment led to a change in the local culture from the patronage of the ruler.

During the British period Lahore expanded to a considerable extent. As Khan elaborates

in his book *Architecture in Pakistan* (1988) on how the initial years of British period

lead the Govt. designed and executed plans but for general public, utility buildings were

understandably pushed down below in the order of priorities.

Over the centuries ornamentation became the most distinguishable art practice and in order to observe any community and their cultural set up, its embellishment of built structures is an expressive aspect to observe.

It was a common practice to construct lofty and magnificent structures in the conquered lands as to establish the strength and power of the rulers.

This distinctive element associated with architecture makes it easy to adapt and left a mark even in South Asia. Latif (1892) explains how such an activity adds to a feeling of supremacy in the lands taken. was through the magnificence and grandeur of buildings structures as a presenter of the strength of the emperor just like in the history of Central Asia, Asia Minor or even Iran. Architecture with ornamentation takes the observer back into the historical context.

Khan (1985) in the book titled *Architecture in Pakistan*, has highlighted the 18th century British period architecture and focuses on buildings like Aitchison College, Lawrence and Montgomery halls, Tollinton

Market etc. He elucidates on how a battle of different styles could be felt during this era of British rule and left behind a blend of Gothic to Classical period revivals as could be observed in the Sindh High Court. His description on the Lahore High Court, is focused on the exterior features only.

A brief outline of the characteristics of ornamentation is also elaborated as it was necessary to attain and enhance our learning of an understanding of the various descriptions of ornamentation characteristics in contrast to the various materials as well.

Studies of ornamentation lead the researcher to also observe the giants of the topic including Owen Jones and Louis Sullivan.

Lahore, Architectural Remains and Antiquities, is one of the frequently referred book about Lahore by Latif (1892), had an eye for the environmental and architectural changes, the book is an insight into Lahore since its origin and evolution over the phase of time. He also discussed few architectural elements about High Courts' exterior and details, the materials used like

marble, deodar and teak wooden doors and roof respectively. Allahabad tiling, arches

with terracotta trellis work, roof timbers can also be observed.

The debate on the style of architecture of Lahore has also been discussed thoroughly in *The Raj, Lahore & Bhai Ram Singh* (2006), with reference to the native architect Bhai Ram Singh and his work in Lahore. According to Vandal & Vandal (2006), the local architecture was admired but not followed upon; architects were usually imported from England. British learned the art of controlling India through the Mughals, observing closely their glory, and to proclaim a historical power, and presented themselves as the unchangeable successors of the state. Research on the architectural heritage shows the increasing interest in this process due to great developments in technology and tools but to summarize the literature review, it is concluded that research is available on British monuments and their architectural style. But despite the historical, architectural and national significance of the High Court building, there is a lack of available literature pertinent to it. This research was basically focusing closely on the patterns and motifs so as to bring to light the experimentation and design study of this building.

A number of catalogues and manuals carrying ornamentation design details used by various cultures are available. A few carries the design and history as well as the style in accordance to architecture. Reference of architecture is readily available with impact of the climatic environment and materials available. But not much was available in the context of Lahore and its British monuments therefore the aim was to add in the existing knowledge of design ornamentation to explore and identify with our own culture of ornamentation designs.

An important factor to consider here is the fact that how different architectural styles vary from those styles which deliberately avoided such decorative embellishments. Some buildings are significant because of the quality and detailing of the ornamentation designs. The features of such an historic and cultural building also signifies with specific features, prominent from others based on their high artistic quality.

### **Methodology**

Historical research was chosen for this research since it helps exploring the events of the past with an effort to understand the facts. The analytical process is based on how the researcher can bring into light the details and analyze the characteristics of the subject (Creswell, 2009). The qualitative research design was used. Data was collected using photographic images and later converted into infra-red images, they were further examined while working on the critique. The collected data was later analyzed on the basis of the construction material. This article is specifically focused on the material of wood.

High Court buildings' ornamentation patterns were taken as population of the study. Focus was kept purposefully on the ornamentation designs present in the original High Court building. Purposive sampling technique was adopted. Design patterns available in the original Court building were selected only.

### **Analysis**

An analysis was developed on the basis of the subject matter observed. Original building ornamentation is based on different materials. The wooden dice of the Chief Court has a symmetrical ornamentation pattern repeated eight times in a single panel. The emphasis of the design is on the quatrefoil pattern made on the base. Each quatrefoil motif is placed carefully in a carved wooden circle. The design has no base; plain wooden panel with its own polished tint surface has been used at the back. The quatrefoil motifs are carved out completely in wood. The quatrefoil has also been used in art and architecture and traditional Christian symbol. It is also used as a heraldic charge. So the use of this ornament takes its impression from the British (*Encyclopedia of World Art*, 1958).

Chairs of various carved patterns were also witnessed for their distinctive patterns. Two slightly different kinds of ornamentation designs with the emphasis point in the middle can be observed on the chair. One of the chair belongs to the senior most judge of the court and it is indicated with the carved motif of a crown in the middle. An intricate fabrication of a stylized design inspired from the natural plant acanthus can be observed on the top rail of the chair at the Chief Court.

Jones (1856), states a very stimulating notion about the art work of the India in his famous book on ornamentation that the Indians add nothing without a purpose in their art work, whether it is architectural, metal work or wood, and interestingly that design cannot be removed without disadvantage. The researcher thus observed that the different kinds of ornamentation patterns seems to serve a purpose or has an objective behind it. No doubt this highly crafted chair is only reserved for the senior most Judge.

The two full-blown flowers are carved in detail, near the borders of the back rail of the chair with two flower buds on each side of the fully blown flower, making interesting composition

springing from the crown and popping out in downward direction in symmetrical balance on the sides of the crown. Stylized acanthus leaves also surround the edge of the back rail, with their serration pointing towards the downward direction. The unity of the surface of the object

decorated is not destroyed. Greco-Roman Influence can also be seen in the use of acanthus

leaves. The border of the back rail on the lower side indicates medieval motif of acanthus leaf

and conventional style of foliage ornamentation.

### **Discussion**

Recording the ornamentation designs was tedious effort and later identifying the materials brought into light materials like wood, stone, brick, and marble. Few motifs were found recurring in the exterior and interior locations. The use of Islamic geometric ornamentation on the marble trellis in the corridor of the Chief Court is quite visible. The marble arch is patterned with geometrical designs, carved out making a tracery. The ornamentation designs are designed a way as if they are filtering sunlight for the interior space adding not only aesthetic beauty but also enhancing the exterior space. One cannot ignore the local cultural influence linked with the tracery. Mughal monuments like, Lahore fort, *Badshahi* mosque, Jahangir's tomb all have glimpses of marble. The main wooden door of the Court is kept simple with design patterns only on each corner of the stiles. The wall inside the Chief Court has ornamentation in the form of blind arch and columns with lotus inspired capitals, such columns date back to the Egyptian period ornamentation.

According to one of the principle of ornamentation ( Jones,1856) , the variety in the design can be created using a combination of the different leaf and flowers and by adding the form of any natural leaf or flower on the same principle there will be no limit to an artist's invention. The design gives the idea of continuity of stylization of the leaf . It is visible since the foliage is used to cover the surface. This style is also influenced from the medieval era when making use of the conventional form was mixed up with the natural forms and their details (Jones, 1856).

The central ornamentation on the chair is a symbol of the crown of Britain, which is the sign of the power of the monarch (*Encyclopaedia of World Art,1958*). The influence of the British monarchy can be seen through the use of its emblem, the cross pattee , with arms concave throughout, also known as iron cross. A cross pattee is particularly associated with crowns in Christian countries (*Encyclopedia of World Art, 1958*). This form appears in the early medieval art forms and also in Britain, its example comes from the start of the age of heraldry is found in the arms of Baron Berkeley, a feudal title (Maclean, 1885). The ribbon beneath the crown is also an insignia of the British. Three fleur-de-lys motifs are carved on the crown. The centre of the crown usually has a monde (not very visible in the chair ornamentation), the point at which a Crown and half arches meet. A small cross pattee motif appears again. An indication of the Golden Jubilee celebrations connected with Queen Victoria the fourth monarch to rule for 50 years, Queen Victoria's Golden Jubilee in June 1887. The construction of the High court was inaugurated in 1887 (Sidhawa,1966).

Special coins were issued to mark the Royal jubilee celebrations in Britain. The British were

setting up the infrastructure for law and enforcement; chances are that they used their symbol to co-relate it with the highest rank since the powers bestowed to the judges were through the

Crown. The same kind of foliage ornamentation is applied on the back rail of another chair.

But on this one the central motif is an acanthus flower instead of the crown. The design found on this chair is again in wood ornamentation. Its inspiration comes from the flower stylized on the capital at Pantheon, in

Rome. Exquisite details are added to the design, with intricate and fine carving of wood. The Roman acanthus, which was used for capitals, is commonly composed of conventional clusters of olive-leaves; a modification arising out of the necessity for strong effect in the massive lofty temples of the Romans: but this peculiar traditional leaf does not occur otherwise than on the capitals (*Analysis of ornamentation, 1856*). The floral design seems to be adopted from the Roman repertoire of acanthus leaf stylization.

The most recurring motif at the Chief Court is acanthus leaf. Its history dates back not only to the ancient art of the Celtic as noted by Owen Jones that acanthus motif introduced the Celtic

ornaments by giving it a graceful curve or is applied in painfully intricate manner. Stylization of the acanthus motif in the both the chairs is visible.

The difference in the quality of the ornamentation in the chairs, is strikingly obvious. The design is somewhat the same with a difference that the central panel owns the emblem for justice used in Pakistan instead of the British symbol of royal court. The three different stylization of acanthus leaf on the chair can be observed closely in slightly curved state. Crudeness of carving is quite clear. All the chairs are highly polished.

The wooden dice of the Court has a symmetrical ornamentation pattern repeated eight times in a single panel. The emphasis of the design is on the quatrefoil pattern made on the base. The quatrefoil has also been used in art and architecture and traditional Christian symbol. It is also used as a heraldic charge. So the use of this ornament takes its impression from the British (*Encyclopedia of World Art, 1958*).

Few motifs were observed repeated. Mughal monuments like, Lahore fort *Badshahi* mosque all have glimpses of such ornamentations. The main wooden door of the Court is kept simple with design patterns only on each corner of the stiles.

Double arches are also present on the niche behind the dice of the Chief Justice. They are also made in wood. It also has acanthus motif at the edges.

The techniques and the quality of rendering has been exquisite in the Chief court when it comes to wooden patterns and designs. The high quality of designing skills were a hallmark of the Mughal artisans in materials like marble and wood. It seems that the focus on one major source of inspiration was not the target but on many elements. Like the various crafts being practiced in the original building. This historic design focusing on the grand eclectic ideology behind them. There is still a lot to explore in this monument which is full of historical facts in the form of designs and patterns which are hard to ignore be it the exterior or the interior part. The authorities are taking measures to conserve, an important step which will preserve this design heritage for generations to come.

### Bibliography

- Brown, Percy. (1956). *Indian Architecture (Islamic Period)*. Bombay: D.B.Tarapovala Sons & Co. Pvt, Ltd.
- Creswell, J.W. (2009). *Research Design .Qualitative, Quantitative and Mixed Method Approaches*, Sage publications India Pvt ,Ltd.
- Creswell, J.W & Plano Clark, V. (2007). *Designing and Conducting Mixed Methods Research*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.
- Feilden, B. M. (1982). *Conservation of historic buildings* (5<sup>th</sup> ed.). London: Butterworth
- Golden Jubilee celebration (n.d.) Retrieved on 11 -06-2019  
[http://www.windsor.gov.uk/dbimsgs/Top%2012%20Windsor%20Jubilees%20\\_fi nal\\_.pdf](http://www.windsor.gov.uk/dbimsgs/Top%2012%20Windsor%20Jubilees%20_fi nal_.pdf)
- Jones, Owen. (1856). *The Grammar of Ornament*, London: Beuard Quaeitch
- Latif, Muhammad Syed (1882). *Lahore, Its History, Architectural Remains and Antiquities*. Sang-e-Meel Publications.
- Metcalf, T. R. (1989). *An Imperial Vision: Indian Architecture and British Raj*. London: Faber and Faber Publications
- Mitrache, Anca. (2012). Ornamental Art and Architectural Decoration. *Procedia - Social and Behavioral Sciences*. 51. 567-572. 10.1016/j.sbspro.2012.08.207.
- Merriam-Webster. (n.d.). Ornament. In *Merriam-Webster.com dictionary*. Retrieved April 5, 2020, from <https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/ornament>
- Myers, S. Bernard, (1958). *Encyclopedia of World Art*. London: MccGraw-Hill.  
<http://www.higman.de/Henry%20Irwin/indo-saracenic.htm>, Retrieved 20th May, 2019.
- Mumtaz, K.K. (1985). *Architecture in Pakistan*. Butterworth-Heinemann, Asia
- Metcalf, T. R. (1989). *An Imperial Vision: Indian Architecture and British Raj*. London: Faber and Faber Publications
- Meyer, Franz .Sales. (1849). *A Handbook of Ornament*. Retrieved 10th Feb 2019, from <https://archive.org/details/handbookoforname00meyeruoft>
- Petersen, A. (1966). *Dictionary of Islamic architecture*. London: Routledge.
- Picon, A. (2011). Ornament et Subjectivite, de la Tradition Vitruvienne a L'age Numerique. *Le Visiteur* 17: 65-75, 176-180. Retrieved from <http://nrs.harvard.edu/urn-3:HUL.InstRepos:12638041>
- Sidhwa. S. R. (1966) . *The Lahore High Court and its Principal Bar*, Pakistan Times Press, Lahore.
- Stephen Markel. (2008). *Mughal Jades: A Technical and Sculptural Perspective*. Asian art Retrieved June 14th 2015, from ,
- Stormberg, (2014). *Glossary of Architectural terms*. Retrieved on 10th June 2019, from <https://www.scribd.com/doc/69537458/Stromberg-Architectural-Full-Glossary>
- Vandal,P. & Vandal,S. (2006). *The Raj, Lahore and Bhai Ram Singh*. NCA Publications
- Wonrum. Ralph.N, (1856). *Analysis of Ornament*, Retrieved 14th June 2019, from <https://archive.org/details/analysisornamen01worngoog>
- William, Barry. (1828). *Encyclopedia Heraldica; or, Complete dictionary of Heraldry*. Lambeth ,Sherwood , Gilbert and Piper.
- Wornum, R.N. (1856). *Analysis of Ornament* (3rd ed). Piccaddily,London: Chipman & Hall.