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The Conceptual, Cultural and Artistic Significance of *Purna-Kalasa* and its Use in Hindu and Muslim Architecture of the Subcontinent

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Introduction

Indian art and its iconography represent one of the richest expressions of philosophical thought and religious devotion known to man. From initial conception of the Vedas to the prevailing symbolism in both art and culture, there is a historical continuity in which thought and expression persist and display an unwavering integration. Each and every symbol used in Indian art, be it painting, sculpture or architecture, is loaded with layers upon layers of meaning. An inquiry into the concepts that enrich the cultural significance of a symbol inevitably leads one the fundamental paradigms of Indian thought, which primarily assumed a philosophical character and then in the wake of political, cultural and economic needs fostered Hinduism and subsequently Hindu culture. In a presumably dialectical fashion the symbols we find in art feed the Indian culture with philosophical resonance of the past.

The significance of symbols is thus, threefold. First, they are tangible expressions of various philosophical doctrines that defined the relationship between the microcosm (individual) and the macrocosm (universe). Second, they reinforce and regulate religious practices in their essence and form and third, they transform the whole activity of art into something that is both creative and cultural. This threefold significance, throughout Indian history, has kept satisfying the primordial needs of being and becoming experienced by man in various degrees. Interestingly, the symbols, which used natural elements instead of abstract signs, found a greater cross-cultural acceptance. This acceptance had two dominant reasons. One was the need to associate man with nature, which has been one of the core features of every civilization, and the other was the involvement of aesthetic considerations of the sublime that albeit their cultural variance largely converged on representation of nature. Moreover the by default power of symbolism to feed culture in a simple yet meaningful way, encouraged representation.

The subject of the present study is the well-known symbol of *purna-kalaśa* with its threefold significance and cross-cultural acceptance. The inquiry is directed to elaborate upon the conceptual underpinning, religious association and

cultural significance of *purna-kalaśa* and its cross-cultural use in Hindu and Muslim architecture of the Sub-Continent.

The Significance of Symbol

Figure 1. The Purna-Kalasa

Purna-kalaśa (Figure 1), is a prominent motif of the Hindu architecture. It is a combination of two words; *purna* means 'full' and *kalaśa* stands for 'pitcher'. It is considered to be a symbol of abundance, fertility and an overflowing life force (Stutley). It is also called *Soma-Kalasha, Chandra-Kalasha, Indra-Kumbha, Purnaghata, Purna-Virakamsya, Bhadra ghata,* or *Mangala ghata*. It is referred to as an earthen pot, which is full of water in the Vedas (Chandra 5). According to R. Nath, it is one of the eight auspicious symbols of classical Indian art, symbolizing fullness and prosperity of life (Nath 63). Also known as *purana ghata and purna-kumbha*, it is a living tradition in Hindu households. A pitcher full of water is filled with mango leaves, which are supposed to ward away evil or negative forces. A coconut is placed on the leaves and topped with flower offerings. It is worshipped in all Hindu festivities related to childbirth and marriage in addition to other rituals. Each component of *purna-kalaśa* has a loaded meaning and significance. For instance, the vase is compared to the heart of a devotee, while the water symbolizes truth and life force as it liberates one from conditioned existence (Achari 18). As a symbol, it has been widely used in architecture particularly at the base of the columns. The significance of this symbol is threefold. It has a powerful philosophical undertone, a frequent use in religious and cultural activities and a considerable artistic value.

The Philosophical Roots

The development of philosophy in India has been a diverse undertaking. From the Vedic sources (Vedas and Upanishads), there emerged six principal systems of philosophy, namely, 1) *Nyaya*: elaborates the use of reason, 2) *Vaisesika*: concentrates on physical nature of things, 3) *Sankhya*: represents nontheistic dualism 4) *Yoga*: explains the art of self-discipline and realization 5) *Karma-mimamsa*: mainly focuses on action and duty and 6) *Vedanta*: summarizes the teachings of Vedas. The philosophical underpinnings of the significance of *purna-kalaśa* can be traced in all these systems. All these systems more or less agree on the same fundamental principle in which the essential reality of the universe is identified as Brahma (the eternal, non-material existence or being without attributes), which permeates all that exists. The world that human beings perceive is a world of forms (Maya), which is thought as an illusion but also a necessity. The purpose of individual life is to grow beyond the illusion of Maya and achieve salvation through self-realization which is actually Brahma-realization. The realization of inner essence of things by eradicating, in thought and emotion, their appearance is supported by four component ideas, which need brief exposition. These component ideas are Brahma, Maya, self-realization and divine intent.

The oldest of Indian scriptures, the *Rig Veda* (1900-1100 BCE), contains hymns that express speculations about the creation of the universe from nothingness as well as from pure being. A more comprehensible formulation of the concept of Brahma, which is relevant to this study, is found in the *Upanishads* composed between 400-800 BCE. The sages of *Upanishads* propose that Brahma is a Being of beings, an essence that exists in all that exists. It has been explained as the Absolute and Infinite substance that is self-sufficient. The universe is seen and contemplated as a multitude that emerged from the oneness of being and it is believed that due to the primordial oneness there is an inherent order or purpose to creation. The *Vedas* and *Upanishads* proclaim that 'in the beginning there was only the *Brahman*, and it knew only itself, thinking, "I am the *Brahman*". From that, everything came into being. It is the imperishable principle, the thread upon which all realities are woven'(Bartley 9).

The Brahma is defined as a self-conscious being and is further qualified as complete in itself and therefore pure bliss (Ramabrahmam). The individual as everything else in nature contains the essence but unlike other things, it has the privilege to know and realize its essence. The essence of the individual which is *atman*, in its indivisible nature, is Brahma (Garbe).

In *Brhadāranyaka Upanishad*, the inner essence is rendered unknowable. It states that 'you cannot see the seer who sees. You cannot hear the hearer who hears. You cannot think of the thinker who thinks. You cannot perceive the perceiver who perceives objects. The soul within all is this soul of yours' (Bartley 10). But then there is also a guideline for realization. In *Chandogya Upanishad* a metaphor explains that 'from one lump of clay one understands the nature of anything that is made of clay – the modification being a name, a taking hold by

speech, while the truth is that it just clay' (Bartley 11). In line with this metaphor the *Upanishads* inform that 'it is the soul that should be seen, heard about, reflected upon and contemplated. When the soul is seen, heard about, reflected upon and contemplated, the cosmos becomes understood' (Ibid). These beliefs and ideas put a greater emphasis on knowing the self and this knowing or self-realization is inexorably a result of outgrowing Maya.

Maya stands for the phenomenal reality that one experiences in the mind (De 25). This reality has been explained as something which is neither existence nor non-existence. It is not existence since existence is only for the Absolute or the Unchangeable. It cannot be called non-existence since phenomena could not unfold without it (Vivekananda 40). At best, it can be a reality that is in eternal flux. The individual soul, differentiated, is seen as a creation of Maya, while, undifferentiated, exists as unified with Brahma. The illusion of self is therefore a man thinking of himself in separation to whole or opposed to whole and is considered the cause of unhappiness. The Upanishads declare, 'where one hears another, one sees another that is small. Where one does not see another, and does not hear another, that is the greatest, that is God. In that greatest is perfect happiness. In small things there is no happiness' (Gupta 81). This idea, as a logical corollary, became the basis of the concept and philosophy of 'self-negation' and consequent 'self-realization'. Peggy Holroyde elaborates:

> The concern of India's religious thinkers (philosophy never having become an entirely academic discipline cut off from individual spiritual action and motivation in this world) with Maya dominates Indian thought. Maya is the concept of illusion, false reality. The immediately recognized material world is questioned on the validity of its realness. Humanity takes it for real, not realizing the opaqueness our ignorance gives to the outer form. Real reality is within the essence of a thing rather than in its outer shell, just as the molecular structure of life, unseen, is the prime cause of the visible outer shell…Illusion-maya-is something from which Hindus must eventually escape to moksha or mukti-liberation. (Holroyde 34–42)

The fourth component idea is about the divine intent. The Upanishads define the initial condition of the universe and draw attention towards the divine intent. It is revealed that 'in the beginning there was just Being (*sat*), one without a second. . . . Being reflected, May I become many. Let me become productive. It generated heat. Heat generated water. Water generated food' (Bartley 11). The divine intent is to exist as many and produce new forms and the initial sequence of events in this regard has been heat generating water and water producing vegetation.

These initial conceptions had a profound influence on Indian thought. With realization of Brahma and Maya, various systems of Indian philosophy assimilated to form the conceptual core of Hinduism and suggested various ways to achieve self-realization. In light of above, we may conclude that in its initial

systematization, Indian philosophical thought defined the macrocosm in terms of its essence, the Absolute and Unchangeable Brahma existing in pure consciousness and bliss and intending to express itself. The man is seen as connected to the Absolute through the inner essence of being or soul but is also entangled in Maya (Vitsaxis 155). The path to happiness of man is the negation of differentiation caused by Maya and become one with the Absolute. In this context, an individual human being can be perceived as a vessel through which Brahma reveals itself.

The symbol of *purna-kalaśa* reflects this very principle of existence. The vase symbolizes man or the world, the water represents the life force and the vegetation refers to the productive nature of life force, its will to be many (Bäumer and Vatsyayan 446).

The Religious and Cultural Significance

Purna-kalaśa possesses a highly significant place in Hindu rituals. The daily acts of worship are initiated with invocation of the symbol. It is believed that invocation of *purna-kalaśa* is also an invitation to deities. The sprinkling of water from the vase is seen as a blessing and a source of bliss for the devotees. *Purna-kalaśa*s are installed on both sides of the entrance of a religious venue to welcome participants. They are also used to benedict a new home, adore temples, and carried along in weddings and other festive processions. The *purna-kalaśa*s are also worshipped at Hindu ceremonies like *Griha Pravesha* (house warming), child naming, and *haven* (fire-sacrifice).

Mostly, a single *purna-kalaśa* is deemed sufficient for a religious event but in some cases a specific number and a certain arrangement of the vases is obligatory. For example, a 2+8 combination represents *Shiva* and *Parvati* along with guardians of the eight points of the compass ("Kalaseshwara Temple | River Bhadra | Sage Agasthya | Kalasa"). Similarly, for a ritual in praise of goddess *Durga*, 51 vases are arranged. The *purna-kalaśa* is also seen as an attribute of gods. It is seen in the hands of Hindu deities such as *Brahma*, *Shiva* and *Lakshami*. The *purna-kalaśa* and its associated myths also provide the rationale for the *Kumbh Mela* for which up to 70 million pilgrims gathers together at one location.

Each component of *purna-kalaśa* holds a certain religious or cultural importance. The earthen or metal pot is a metaphor for material being. Depending upon context, it is interpreted as earth, womb, individual, or heart (Bäumer and Vatsyayan 446). The mango leaves represent *Kama*, a deity of love and become a symbolic reference to fertility. In some cases, these mango leaves are representative of five senses. The coconut being a cash crop stands for prosperity and abundance and, on a deeper note, symbolizes God's head or consciousness (Sivkishen). Its hard shell inspires one to have tolerance and do hard work for attaining success. The coconut is also broken before a deity in the temple, signifying the soul's breaking out of the shell of the ego. The water in the vase (ideally taken from Ganga for its purity) is seen as a creative force that gives birth to life. The vase can also be filled with rice, coins or gems to signify the diversity

and beauty of creation. Sometimes, a sculpture of a goddess is attached to the *purna-kalaśa*. In this combination it represents mother earth with water and vegetation.

*Purna-kalaśa*s are also associated with five primordial elements in Hindu mythology. The wide lower part of the vase symbolizes *Prithvi* (Earth), the expanded middle part refers to *Ap* (Water), the upper part or the neck is associated with *Agni* (fire), the mouth of the vase is an expression of *Vayu* (Air) and the coconut and leaves represent *Akasha* (Aether) (Jain 172).

In most of India, the religion does not exist as something separated from culture. In fact, there is no single word for 'religion' in Sanskrit. The only word is *Dharama*, which denotes a way of life or a culture. As compared to philosophical roots, the significance of *purna-kalaśa* in religion is more emphasized in relation to deities; however, given the socio-economic structure of the population, the cultural needs are well integrated.

Artistic Significance

It is not surprising that Indian art developed within the above mental framework. In India, art was seen as a means for self-realization (Holroyde 47). The most celebrated Indian aesthetic theory which is also called theory of *Rasa* maintains that art should produce a certain kind of aesthetic experience in the viewer, an experience that could detach him from the mundane world of everyday emotions and transcend him to higher planes of bliss and consciousness. According to Swami Prajnanananda, *Rasa* 'creates an ecstatic joy in the heart of the enjoyer, and leaves upon him an impression of delight. It is compared to the bliss, enjoyed by a Yogin where he is in union with the Self' (Prajnanananda 295). Lewis Rowell explains it as:

> The awareness of rasa is an awareness detached not only from our personal emotions but also from all those conditions that stimulated that awareness, a form of pure idealism that is surely in harmony with the traditional doctrines of Indian philosophy. These doctrines have taught us to value the unseen above what is seen and to appreciate the emotions shared within a culture above those feelings that are attached to specific objects, persons and concepts. In this latter sense, the experience of art is liberation from constraints, moksa. (Rowell 330)

In the light of above, the integration of Indian art with Indian philosophy, religion and culture can easily be understood. It is because of this deep rooted spiritual background that Rasa is considered as the ultimate objective of art in Indian parlance. Although, the term rose to prominence in the context of Indian theatre and then music around 2nd century BCE, but, in essence it applies to all Indian art. It implies that the fundamental aim of an artist is to create an aesthetic experience, which may enable to viewer to realize the cosmic principle of creation, the Brahma. In this context, *purna-kalaśa* is of utmost value. Its frequency in the

temple architecture depicts the objective of Indian art reminding an individual about the course of individual and cosmic life; an aim that every Indian artist is bound to follow for greater cultural acceptance.

Use of Purna Kalasa in Hindu and Muslim Architecture

A common idea found in Hinduism is that the temple represents cosmos in a symbolic miniature. It was a transfer of *Vedic* sacrificial rituals performed in open space to the closed space of temple (Blurton 47). *Purna-kalaśa* has been an integral component of Temple architecture in India particularly since the consolidation of Hinduism. We find first clear usage of *purna-kalaśa* in Gupta period, which stood at the intersection of Buddhist and temple architecture. One of the early examples of the use of this symbol in temple architecture can be seen in the fragment of a column from Mathura (Figure 2). It is depicted in a columnar shape in which kalasa is distinctly recognizable on both the top and bottom along with representation of deities and leaves.

Figure 2. Decorated Pillar from Gupta Period

Another notable example can be observed at the base of the main frame encompassing the central sculpture in a Temple at Deogarh. This example dates back to 500 CE and the *purna-kalaśa* is used to adorn both the base and top of the main pillars surrounding the sculpture of the deities (Figure 3).

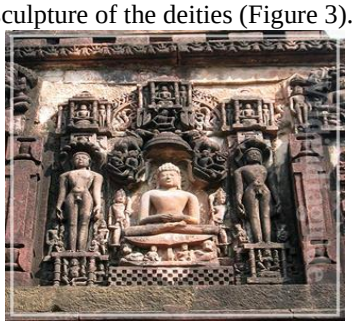

Figure 3. Purna Kalasa, Deogarh Temple, 500 CE

The Deogarh temple features Vishnu as savior god and the niches are used to narrate puranic stories (Mitter 47). We find a use of the motif, deeply engraved in

religious ethos. The *purna-kalaśa* is a frequent motif in the Kalasa Temple (Figure 4) constructed in the 8th century in Ellora, Maharastra, India. The symbol is visible along with elements and motifs of Buddhist architecture. We do not see a clear stylistic development as yet. The Buddhist influence is clear and fundamental.

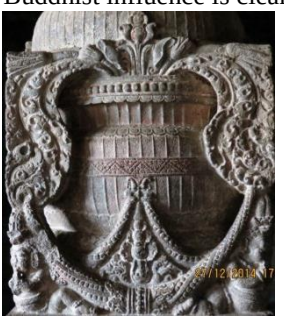

Figure 4. Purna Kalasa at Ellora Temple, India, 8th century CE

The form of the symbol remains almost same as we move forward in history. For instance, at the beginning of second millennium CE, we find more elaborated use of the symbol as the carving becomes more precise but the design element remains largely faithful to original. Notable in this regard are the Temple at Bhuvanesvara circa 1000 CE (Figure 5).

Figure 5. Baitala Deula, Bhuvanesvara Temple, Orrisa, India, 11th century CE

The Step-Well at Patan in Gujrat (Figure 6), India includes various pillars that are intricately designed and display the *purna-kalaśa* in a developed stylization. In South India, the development in stylization was much slower. For instance, in Murugan architecture (Figure 7) a simplified but dominant use of *Kalasa* is notable as a base structure of columns. This design is different from what we find in North India and is more closely linked to Buddhist Stupa architecture.

Figure 6. Pillars at Step-Well, Patan, Gujrat, India, 11th century CE

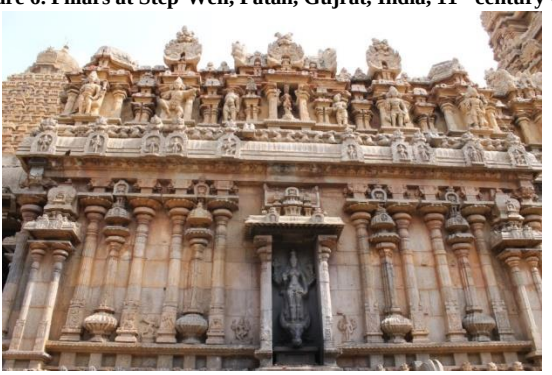

Figure 7. Kalasa bases in Murugan Temple Architecture, Tamil Nadu, South India, 9th century CE.

The transfer of this symbol to Islamic faith, culture and architecture is shrouded in mystery. It is debatable that whether the use of this symbol in Muslim architecture is an Indian influence or it came from Persia. It is well known that the cultural amalgamation that took place with the arrival of Muslims in the Sub-Continent was also a blending of Persian and Indian aesthetic sensibilities. The first use of the symbol in Islamic architecture was without a conscious intent. The verandah of the Mosque in the Qutb complex was constructed in 14th century CE by using columns of destroyed Hindu and Jain temples of the area (Figure 8) (Hearn 54). The presence of *purna-kalaśa* does not mean that the Muslim rulers adopted it for its religious significance. At best, the choice was aesthetic or a praxis of re-use. The design is similar to the depictions observable in temple architecture from 5th to 11th century CE.

Figure 8. Quwwat-ul-Islam Mosque, Qutb Complex, Delhi, India, 14th century CE

In the Sultanate period, there are various examples where *purna-kalaśa* has been used as a decorative motif in mosque. This is the time when the design element takes a qualitative leap. For instance, the Qutbuddin mosque (Figure 9), which was raised in 1446 by Qutbuddin during the reign of Sultan Mahmood II distinctively used *purna-kalaśa* as a prominent motif. The vegetation is beautified with the signature arabesque pattern coming from Persia.

Figure 9. Qutbuddin Mosque, Ahmadabad, Gujrat, India, 15th century CE

Under the rule of Ahmad Shah I in Gujrat, two mosques named after queens of Mehmud Begada depict the symbol in exquisite stylization. In Rani Rupamati Mosque (Figure 10), which was built in 15th century, the motif depicts the synthesis of Indian symbolism and Muslim aesthetics. The blend is the first of its kind with vegetation springing from the vase is a combination of acanthus leaf and arabesque pattern. A similar treatment is found in Rani Sipri's mosque (Figure 11) which was also erected by Mehmud Begada in Ahmadabad. The arabesque pattern

is more pronounced as vegetation along with the use of lotus symbol. The Jamia Masjid, Champaner (Figure 12) also built by Mehmud Begada displays the use of *purna-kalaśa* as a simpler but frequent motif. The vase is used in a smaller size without arabesque patterns.

Figure 10. Rani Rupamati Mosque, Ahmadabad, Gujrat, India, 15th century CE

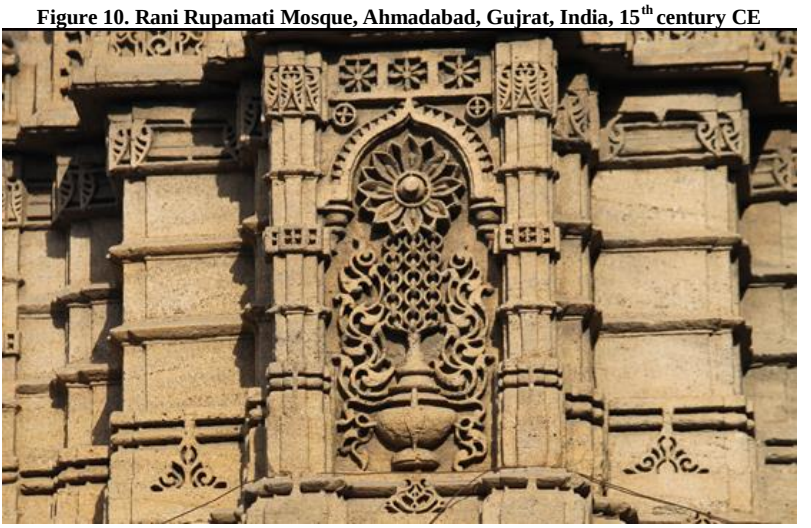

Figure 11. Rani Sipri Mosque, Ahmadabad, Gujrat, India, 15th century CE

Figure 12. Jamia Masjid, Champenar, India, 16th century CE

Kusumba mosque Naogaon, Bengal, which was erected in 1558 CE under the Suri rule displays the symbol embellishing arches and mihrab (Figure 13). The perforated treatment observable in the upper section is indeed a Muslim addition. The kalasas grow in number and acquire a variety of forms.

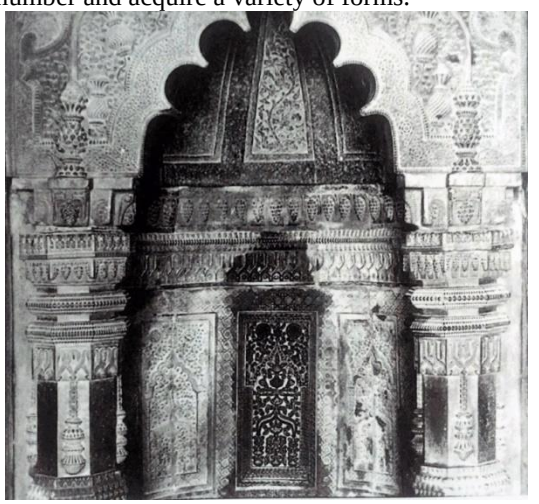

Figure 13. Kasumba Mosque, Bengal, 16th century CE

The Shershah gate built by Shershah Suri in 16th century also depicts *purna-kalaśa* motif (Figure 14). In this case the vase is carved with a hexagonal base and is relatively simpler to that of Ahmadabad. However, the floral patterns on both top and at the base display Islamic arabesque curvatures and stylization.

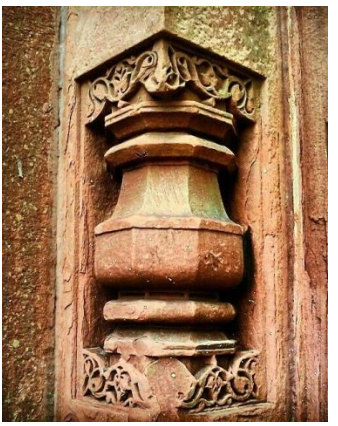

Figure 14. Shershah Gate, Delhi, India, 16th century CE

The architecture of the Sultanate period in Punjab includes various examples of the use of this motif particularly in the funerary architecture. The tomb of Ruknuddin Alam in Multan (Figure 15) represents a wood carving of the motif. A lesser known tomb of Ahmed Kabir located in Duniyapur, district Lodhran (Figure 16) uses the motif in a surprisingly similar way as seen is ancient temple architecture. The tomb of Saddan Shaheed in Muzaffargarh (Figure 17), displays the *purana-kalaśa* along with calligraphy. The amalgamation of original symbol with Persian aesthetic and local preferences resulted in a more stylized form in comparison to a more or less plastic rendering found in the early Hindu architecture. Perhaps the local artisans engaged in the construction had hands on experience and expertise for this symbol. It can also be the case that since the visual form of the symbol was not religious, the earthen pot and vegetation as decorative motifs were incorporated in the Muslim repertoire. As a decorative motif, the use of vase and vegetation was not entirely new to Muslims.

Figure 15. A Wooden Design of *Purna-Kalasa*, Tomb of Rukn-e-Alam, Multan, Pakistan

Figure 16. Tomb of Ahmad Kabir, Duniyapur, Lodhran

Figure 17. Tomb of Saddan Shaheed, Muzaffargarh, Pakistan

The encoded motif of a plant arising from a vase is apparent in the mosaic ornamentation on the spandrels of the arched verandah at the Dome of the Rock (Figure 18). The motif was crafted in jewel like glass pieces by Christian craftsmen who had a developed expertise in mosaic decorations (Ali 26).

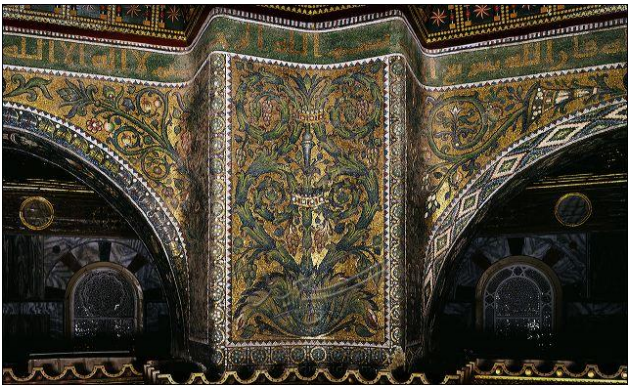

Figure 18. Mosaic, Dome of the Rock, Jerusalem, Israel, 7th century CE

Whether this motif was imbued with any meaning at this stage is debatable. It is argued that this motif developed into a complex symbol in consequence of Muslim interaction with Buddhism on their travels to India. The exchange of ambassadors between Chinese and Muslim courts between the tenth and fourteenth century can be a reason for influx of Buddhist, Taoist and Zoroastrian elements into Islamic aesthetic (Nakumra).

A vase motif can also be observed in Heraclea Lyncestis, Macedonia (Figure 19) making it an influence coming from Byzantine art however, the lotus flower signifies Buddhist influence.

Figure 19. Heraclea Lyncestis, Macedonia, 6th century CE

The meaning of the symbol in Byzantine art is unclear, but, the visual form found continuity in subsequent art traditions. According to Henri Stierlin, the symbol of vase, usually with two handles, with tendrils appearing to grow from the vase, is a favored Timurid image. It is witnessed on numerous medieval Persian architectural surfaces. It is observed in the Ottoman repertoire as well. Apart from surface decoration, it appears on numerous occasions in textiles and carpets (Stierlin 97).

The vase motif along with the spray of floral bouquet or tendrils is abundantly used in Mughal architecture. Given the Persian background, conceptually, it may be linked to the Mughal preference and idealization of the paradise. In the Mughal period, this motif often appears with naturalistic floral bunch emerging from a vase. The stone mosaics of Taj Mahal are a clear example (Figure 20).

Figure 20. Stone Mosaic, Taj Mahal, Agra, India

The Mughal miniatures points to the use of this motif as supporting the Peacock throne of Shahjehan (Figure 21).

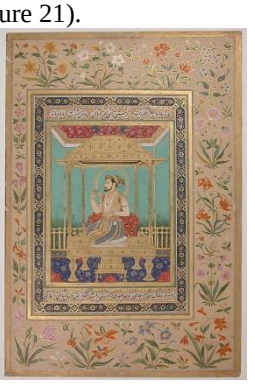

Figure 21. Miniature depicting Peacock Throne of Shahjehan

Figure 22. Mughal Pillar Base depicting *Purna-Kalasa* with Acanthus leaves

The use of this motif in Mughal architecture may also be linked to European sources. The "acanthus-decorated baluster" column was introduced to the Mughals through the Antwerp Polyglot Bible brought to the Mughal court by the Jesuit missions (Koch). The Mughals borrowed and adopted various European motifs

like cherubs and crowns into their art vocabulary. The baluster column decorated with acanthus leaves was blended with the *purna-kalaśa* (Figure 22). Later on, the vase became smaller and a greater emphasis was laid on floral patterns. The columns of Sheesh Mahal, Lahore Fort can be seen in this regard (Figure 23). On the walls of Naulakha Pavilion, a prominent use of *purna-kalaśa* is visible (Figure 24), however, under Shahjehan, it became stylized to the extent that it is difficult to attribute its origins to Indian temple architecture.

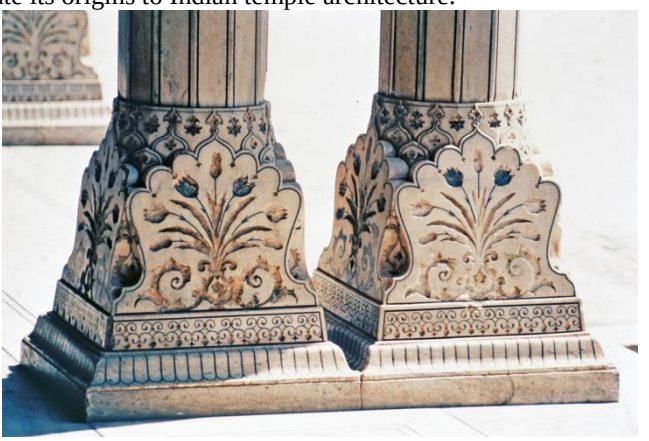

Figure 23. Sheesh Mahal, Lahore Fort, Lahore, Pakistan

Figure 24. Naulakha Pavilion, Lahore Fort, Lahore, Pakistan

In the frescos and mosaics of Wazir Khan Mosque, Lahore, *purna-kalaśa* appears in exquisitely embellished form (Figure 25).

Figure 25. Fresco with Purna-Kalasa as central motif, Wazir Khan Mosque, Lahore, Pakistan

In Badshahi mosque vases with flowers appear expressing rich decoration in the main gateway (Figure 26).

Figure 26. A Panel from Badshahi Mosque, Lahore, Pakistan

In later Mughal as well as Sikh architecture, this motif is again created by combining acanthus as well as lotus and mango leaves. The base of the column uses acanthus, while the vegetative motif emerging from the vase depicts mango leaves. The Samadhi of Ranjit Singh in Lahore as well as other major Sikh edifices, such as Golden Temple in Amritsar, displays the *purana-kalaśa* in all doorways. The use of *purna-kalaśa* in columns in Chiniot is stylistically similar to those of Samadhi. The stylized acanthus forming the pot like form, the elongated leaf enveloping the bulbous shaft, and the elaborated vegetal presentation above it, create a unique version of this symbolic motif (Figure 27). The people residing in the city of Chiniot were Hindus, Muslims as well as Sikhs and they embraced this

motif as a permanent form of blessings for their abodes, thus linking it to the indigenous tradition (Arshi 121).

Figure 27. Colorful and Stylized Purna-Kalasa in Umar Hayat Mahal, Chiniot

Another compound motif in the Bhera doorways as well as Chiniot carvings is the bowl with floral spray or fruits (figure 28). This motif is indicative of paradisiacal context. The profusion of floral motifs also indicates the attempt to replicate a paradisiacal setting. While the bowls with fruits or floral bunches also is indicative of the same concept.

Conclusion

The above identification and description shows that the *purna-kalasa* symbol developed in the womb of Indian philosophy, religion and culture. Its significance as a symbol referring to cosmic law and journey of life has been known for centuries and hence its use in Indian art, which also developed along similar aims. The initial use of the symbol in temple architecture has been simple but consistent. It was used as a simple base of columns around 5th century CE, particularly in the architecture of Gupta dynasty. In a span of 500 years, its depictions did not develop and the stylization remained in the Hindu aesthetic purview as it drew on Buddhist motifs. With the arrival of Muslims in the Sub-Continent, we see a gradual shift towards stylization ornamented with curved lines and infinite scroll patterns, in which Muslim aesthetic preferences slowly seeped in.

Given the unscrupulous historical accounts, it is difficult to conclude that the use of vase and floral motifs by Muslim architects was a direct influence of temple architecture. It might be the case that the craftsmen involved in erecting Muslim

monuments were well trained to execute simpler forms of the motifs and therefore Muslim rulers accepted it. Another possibility is familiarity with the vase and floral motifs as they were used in Central Asian architecture and mosaics. However, in case of Sub-Continent, as history progresses through the Sultanate period, we observe a stylized use of the motif and with Mughals the stylization reaches at its zenith. The vase reduces in size and floral pattern is signature arabesque fashion continue to adorn monuments.

It can be said with certainty that even though Muslim architecture can be seen as inspired from Hindu motifs but the significance of the motif has been quite different for respective culture. The Muslim rulers and architects could not relate to its religious and cultural significance in Indian parlance but as a decorative motif they could appreciate it and develop it. By implication, it would have generated a positive impact on the general public which was cultured in Indian tradition and since the Muslim rulers always looked for acceptance amongst the indigenous people therefore the use of this motif could have been a preferred choice. The significance of *purna-kalasa* as a decorative motif still echoes in Muslim culture as various tombs, mosques and *havelis* in present Pakistan display stylized forms of this motif.

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