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The Historic Precedence to Floral Imagery in Mughal Architecture

Ayla Khan

Assistant Professor, Faculty of Architecture and Ekistics, Jamia Millia Islamia, New Delhi, India

Abstract: The Mughal dynasty traces its roots to the Timurids. Thus the development of the Mughal visual culture was informed by Timurid traditions and there were contemporary influences as well. The paper is a research at the chronological evolution of vegetal motifs in the history of the Islamic world so as to trace the influence on Mughal decorative motifs with emphasis on floral motifs in the architecture of Mughal monuments in India. The paper looks at the surface treatment in architectural structures from the early period. Method of chronological study has been adopted to classify them patronage wise. Particular flower species are identifiable which thus trace their root to Central Asia. The material, technique and colour has been studied and attached symbolism if any has also been analyzed.

Keywords: Visual art, Floral motifs, Symbolim in decoration, Architecture.

I. INTRODUCTION

A culture is mirrored in the art form of the civilisations. Imitations of forms from nature administer the deep reverence and respect mankind has for nature. Nature has inspired elements both in art and architecture. Architectural elements of the ancient world civilizations are prototypes to this, such as the inverted lotus bell or the feature of a lily flower in the capital of the column in the temples of the Ancient Egyptian civilization. At the base the same column is bulbous like the base of the papyrus stalk (a type of grass). Another such symbolism can be seen in the Greek orders where the capital of the Ionic column draws inspiration from a nautical shell or the ram's horns. Similarly the Corinthian style of column from the Greek order imitates the 'acanthus' leaves, a Mediterranean plant. Somewhat similar we see decoration with floral motifs on monuments of the Indo-Islamic period. In particular Mughal monuments display two forms of ornamentation (1) bas relief and (2) stone inlay, both comprising compositions of floral motifs.

Like all great civilisations of the world , Islam possesses a strong architectural and iconographic tradition. Motifs and patterns inspired from plants were used to decorate architecture and objects from the earliest Islamic period. Plants appear in many different forms in Islamic art, ranging from single motifs to extended and repetitive patterns. Many times flowers are depicted naturally and at other times plant forms are heavily stylised. Artists drew inspiration from different types of plants and flowers at different times, different periods at different locations. Hence art defines culture or the culture informs the style of art [1].

In the Islamic world architecture and the arts had long been considered as the immediate expression of the ruler [2]. There was a phase wise evolution in the architecture style and the use of material. Literal representation was forbidden in the faith and hence emerged the geometric and vegetal motifs that continued to embellish buildings in many forms.

II. THE HISTORIC PRECEDENCE

It is not known when the Islamic state first formulated its artistic policy, but decisions regarding the use of art in religious structures may have arrived from the early Ummayad times. The Arabian Muslims who established the new faith in Iran and the Mediterranean, possessed only the most rudimentary forms of visual art, not because their aesthetic sensibilities were undeveloped, but because these had traditionally been expressed orally through poetry and rhetoric.

Building traditions of the Muslim populations of the Middle East and elsewhere from the 7th century onwards found the highest expression in religious buildings such as the mosque and madrasah. The earliest religious structures were Jerusalem's Dome of the Rock (AD 691) and the Great Mosque (705) in Damascus, which drew on architectural features such as domes, columnar arches, and mosaics from the churches and cathedrals and also included large courts for congregational prayer and a mihrab. The semicircular horse shoe arch was a characteristic feature in the mosques and rich non-representational decoration was employed on surfaces. Some mosques also comprised of a hypostyle hall. The creation of the hypostyle hall in mosques at Persia were influenced from Egypt. Mosques in brick incorporated domes and decorated squinches across the corners of the rooms, the influence was drawn from Byzantine architecture.

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Fig. 1 – Façade in the courtyard of the Great Mosque in Damascus

Fig. 2– *Mihrab* of the Mausoleum of Sayyida Ruqayya

Persian architectural features travelled to India as well, and these features found expression in Mughal mausoleums like the Taj Mahal and Mughal palaces.

Fig. 1: Umayyad Mosque, Damascus or the 'Great Mosque', courtyard façade showing painted decoration on arch spandrels

Islam considered itself the primordial religion of mankind, as it assimilated the art associated with earlier faiths. So thorough was the process of assimilation that today the floral and geometric arabesques are identified with the architectural style (at places like Spain, North Africa, Egypt, Syria, Mesopotamia, Iran, Anatolia, and India) . Although many of these abstract themes and patterns may have originated in Coptic Egypt, pre-Islamic Syria, Iran and among the Nomads of Central Asia [2].

A. *Early period: the Umayyad and ʿAbbāsid dynasties*

Great mosque of Damascus built by the Umayyad dynasty has soffits of the arches covered with floral scrolls and plant forms in mosaic . Umayyad Palace at Mushattah, Syria has a richly carved façade in which vine and acanthus scrolls are set inside triangles, octagons and lobbed hexagons are set inside triangles, octagons and lobed hexagons. The plant forms of the Mushattah are still naturalistic in conception.

Samarra capital city built by Abbasid a century after Umayyad palace shows that naturalistic aspect of plant forms was considerably reduced. Its ruins reveal three types of decoration: styles A, B and C first two are similar to that of Mushattah but with floral element within the geometric shapes become progressively more stylized. Style C was the first example of Central Asian influence. This form of decoration was purely abstract and covered the entire surface leaving no space between the component forms. It was created by pressing wooden moulds on wet stucco [1].

B. *Fāṭimids dynasty*

The Fāṭimids (909–1171) dynasty was established in Tunisia and Sicily in 909. In 969 the Fāṭimids moved to Egypt and founded the city of Cairo. They soon controlled Syria and Palestine. Many factors may have been significant in influencing the development of the visual arts: its heterodoxy, its Egyptian location or wealth of the established empire. An excellent example is the Mihrab of Sayyidah Ruqayah built in the Fatimid Egypt [Fig.2]. A combination of typical geometric and floral arabesque appears in its earliest forms in this period. Carving became deeper and the scrolls and tendrils finer and more cursive.

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C. *Seljuq period*

The Seljuk stone masons of Anatolia introduced motifs unknown elsewhere, they enlivened blank surfaces with elaborately carved geometric or floral circular bosses, perhaps inspired by the sight of hardy perennials growing on barren ground. Seljukes in Anatolia displayed a preference for star shapes which often appear as flowers, rosettes and sunbursts. Patterns were simpler, they were made up of regular geometric shapes like octagons and hexagons, interwoven in countless different ways.

D. *Moorish Style*

Cordoba in Spain displays plaster decoration attached to the older decorative tradition of Ummayad Syria, from which most of the Arab settlers had originated. The finest plaster decoration however is that of the Alhambra (14th century) . It is the decorative plasterwork which gives the Alhambra an almost fragile appearance. It is suggested that the way in which plaster and tilework cause surfaces to 'dissolve' is done quite deliberately to reflect the transient , temporary character of all earthly structures, and imply thereby the impermanence of human existence [4].

E. *Mamlūk Dynasty*

The Mamlūks were originally white slaves, chiefly Turks and Circassians from the Caucasus and Central Asia, who formed the mercenary army of the various feudal states of Syria and Egypt. The best architectural example from this period is the Qayt bay tomb which displays the dramatic use of floral and geometric forms and an increased use of star-polygons. Stars were stretched to make contact. In addition fillets included far eastern (Mongol Iran) elements like peony blossoms. West Asia practiced superimposition of calligraphy and figures over floral arabesque backgrounds.

Fig. 3– (*left*) The dome of Qaytbay's mausoleum, Cairo

Fig. 4– (*above*) The Court of the Lions, an example of Moorish style of ornamentation and garden design

F. *Mongol Iran: Il-Khanid and Timurid period*

Under Maḥmūd Ghāzān and his successors (the Il-Khan dynasty), order was reestablished throughout Iran, and cities in northeastern Iran, especially Tabrīz and Solṭānīyeh, became the main creative centres of the new Mongol regime. Il-Khanid architecture was defined by well composed buildings and coloured tiles were used to enhance the building's character.

The Timurids were the final great dynasty to emerge from the Central Asian steppe. In 1370, the eponymous founder, Timur (Tamerlane), who belonged to a Turko-Mongol tribe settled in Transoxiana, became master of this province and established Samarqand as his capital in 1370 (Jamaluddin,1995). Samarqand was laid out with gardens , mosques and madrasas by Timur. Mughal emperor Babur on his visit to Herat in 1507 was deeply impressed by the gardens and buildings there (Asher,1991).

Timur brought craftsmen from different conquered lands to his capital in Samarqand, thus he initiated one of the most brilliant periods in Islamic art. Timurid art and architecture provided inspiration to lands stretching from

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Anatolia to India. Samarkand was not only the capital of Timur's Empire but also one of the major centres of Islamic world's overland trade with China [Fig.5].

G. *The last period*

The last period of the Islamic artistic expression created within a context of political and intellectual independence was centred in the Ottoman, Ṣafavid, and Mughal empires. Although culturally very different from each other, the three imperial states shared a common past and a common consciousness of the nature of their ancestry and of the artistic forms associated with it. Painters and architects moved from one empire to the other, especially from Iran to India; Ottoman princes wrote Persian poetry, and Ṣafavid rulers spoke Turkish [8].

The grand tradition of Ottoman architecture, established in the 16th century, was derived from two main sources. One was the complex development of new architectural forms that occurred all over Anatolia, especially at Manisa, İznik, Bursa, and Seljuk in the 14th and early 15th centuries. The other source of Ottoman architecture was the Byzantine tradition, as embodied in Hagia Sophia. Byzantine influence appears in such features as stone and brick used together or in the use of pendentive dome construction. Also artistically influential were the contacts that the early Ottomans had with Italy. The Ottoman version of colour tile decoration was distinct. There was growth of several distinctive Ottoman schools of pottery: İznik, Rhodian, and Damascus. geometric motifs were almost entirely superseded by floral ones, which however were quite different from the traditional foliate scrolls of Seljuk art. There arose a new naturalistic floral style which, was aided by the development of polychromatic techniques in ceramic production. By the second half of 16th century, interiors were being decorated with tiles painted in seven different colours using an underglaze technique and showing tulips, carnations, hyacinths, peonies and various species of tree blossom rendered entirely naturalistically [6].

Safavids in 15th and 16th centuries introduced tile faience mosaic and brought it to perfection. It comprised geometric and floral patterns, often the latter alone, executed in tile faience, were laid one above the other to create a series of levels. Multiple level floral arabesques provide complexity, a web of contemplative complexity; their form and colour associations suggest a whole series of possible reactions. The basic blue and green symbolize water and cultivation, the essentials of civilization in an arid land; they are the colours of the oasis, goal of the weary traveller. Flowers mean spring and the re-awakening of life, evoking Koranic descriptions of Paradise, the goal of existence. Vines, flowers and foliage descending from the sky, as in the interior of a dome, recall the tree of Bliss, often represented in prayer books in diagrammatic form, planted by the prophet in Paradise and growing downwards through the eight heavens.

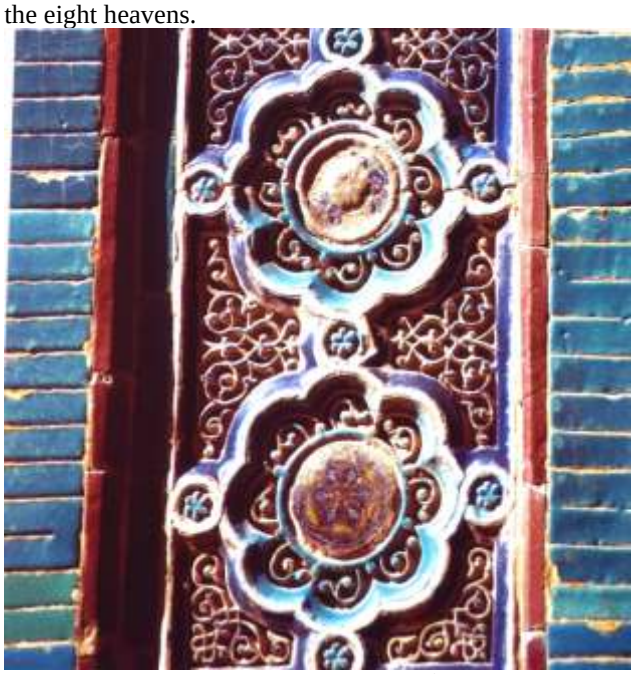

Fig. 5– Decoration in the mausoleum of Shad-e-Mulk Agha, Samarqand

Fig. 6 – Sunburst pattern tile faince, Gazar Gah, Herat

III. SURFACE DECORATION STYLES AND TECHNIQUES OF CENTRAL ASIA THAT INSPIRED A UNIQUE MUGHAL STYLE

Artists across the Islamic world working on building decoration made no distinction between different materials like stone, wood, tile and stucco. There was representation of motifs similar in nature and character. The art of decoration inside buildings was so as to create dissolution of all the structural elements and thus create weightlessness in the structure. On the outside there was use of mosaic, painted decoration on tiles (with lustre and

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polychrome), use of moulded or deeply cut stone and plaster. There was use of every conceivable technique. Patterns ranged from geometry and abstraction of pure forms to intensive floral patterns and Koranic inscriptions in calligraphy. Patterns were developed such that they could be repeated as well as the patterns bore the idea of repetition in ways of representing a visual infinity. Rich decoration covered facades of arcaded courtyards, minarets, iwans, pishtaqs, and domes. Patterns were rigorously standardized; repetitive motifs were made using glazed bricks and multicolour tile mosaic displayed vegetative motifs, ornamented *kasha*. The building that was sought to have reached unified design was the one using a variety of motifs and multiple techniques including glazed bricks, mosaics, pierced screens and sculptured friezes [6].

Foliate imagery was the ultimate element in decorative art. It gave the culture's decorative art motifs from living forms where some were imbued with scientific naturalism and others endowed with abstraction and formed an element in the arabesque, lending the continuous and unending pattern. Artists of the region were keen observers of nature and tried to imitate nature in their designs with great accuracy. A style of naturalism was created in three empires Ottoman, Safavid and the Mughal [3]. Main areas of illustration of floral representations was in manuscripts, textiles, objects and buildings. Parallel artistic style emerged in Europe as well and European botanical records served as great inspiration for Mughal artists.

The prevalent Indian architecture in India was using traditional methods and the advent of Ghaznavids and Ghurids initiated technical constructional methods. The architecture from Iran and Transoxiana brought in forms and spatial organization of buildings, their-four centered arches and symbolism. In ornamentation there were arabesques to monumental inscriptions, from interlace to geometrical motifs and from patterns based on stars to flowering branches. Instead of brick and ceramic, Sultanate and Mughal buildings in India were built and rendered in red sandstone and marble.

A. *Use of Material*

1) *Brick* :

The earliest examples of buildings decoration show use of brick. Brick was laid in different planes to create a dramatic effect of light and shade on the building facades [4]. Iran where the birth of Persian culture happened also used fired brick as a building material. Example, the Seljuq tomb at Qarraqan in Iran shows there are several brick patterns emphasizing different architectural elements . Customized brick shapes were also used for calligraphy on the building. Tomb of Samanids at Bukhara, this example is the apogee in the style of decoration. Exterior and interior both surfaces are covered in fine brick pattern.

2) *Stucco* :

Gypsum stucco was in universal use throughout the region as a medium for decorative ornament. It was cheaper than stone. The ingredients of the mixture differed as a result of cultural regions but technique was same and the base material comprised of gypsum or lime. Dried layers laid out were polished until they shone like the marble. The Abbasid period marks the ingenious method of building where gypsum was mixed with pebbles and covered by a stone veneer. Wherever stone columns were present they were carved out. Stucco relief looks like decoration in stone, only stucco work has more flexibility than stone. Some examples from across the Islamic world – Friday mosque at Reza'iyeh, Iran: the mihrab is ornately decorated. Deeply cut lacings, circular bosses, stylized foliage, and a foliate band of calligraphy. Mamluk mosque of Sunkur Sa'di, Cairo, built in 1315. It is decorated overall with stucco ornament. It also has window grills done in stucco.

3) *Tiles*:

Tiles clad over walls was a common feature in the middle east and Iran. The history of tile cladding and decoration spans over a long period. It had been an ancient practice in Iran, it was revived by the Sassanid's. But more Glazed tiles were used as decorative finish over brick buildings from the Abbasid dynasty , at Sammara onwards. From here it spread to the Fatimid Egypt and Spain. The art graduated to a more complex form in Iran in the 13th century leading to the emergence of hexagon and star shaped lustre tiles. Mosaic in tiles also developed from here onwards in Iran. The decorative style came to its climax in Iran and Turkey in the 16th and 17th centuries with the use of painted tiles. Illustrative examples are ; Sircali Madrasa, at Konya was the first building to be entirely clad in tiles. Dome of Madarsa-i Shah at Isfahan displays brilliant tile workmanship of the saffavid period and design applied shows ornate motifs, representing scrolls of leaves and flowers.

Timurids and Safavids in 15th and 16th centuries brought tile faience mosaic to perfection. Floral decoration in tile mosaic was achieved by cutting tesserae with great precision from plain coloured tiles. Assembling of the motif with varied coloured pieces was done with face down and liquid mortar was filled in the cracks to create a complete panel. An example of one such great mosaic faience panel is in the shrine complex of Khwaja Abdullah Ansari in Guzar-Gah, north-east of Herat, completed in 1428 [Fig.6].

4) *Stone*:

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It was used both for construction as well as decoration. Noteworthy examples are – Mosque of Sultan Baybars at Cairo, it was built in the year 1269 . The entrance portal is decorated in zig-zag pattern (which originated in ancient Arabia). The spandrels are decorated with circular motifs which were seen in buildings of the sultanate and Mughal period in India. Another example is the Buyuk Karatay Madarsa, at Konya which has a polychrome stone decoration. With muqarnas, floral and geometric motifs some calligraphy can also be seen on the architrave. Alai Darwaza at Delhi built in 1305 also displays a deft handling of red sandstone and marble. This style of decoration became the trade mark of Mughal architecture.

IV. SURFACE DECORATION PATTERNS

Surface decoration patterns as they evolved in architecture of the Islamic world [11].

- In the early period buildings were usually built in sun dried brick. Important features or elements were emphasized through a layer of stucco patterned with ornamental motifs created either with moulds or by carving.
- Quranic text was sacred and inscriptions in kufic script appeared in arches, friezes and mouldings. Such a kind of decorative detail also bore cultural symbolism.
- Decorative patterns were created with bricks as well as it was used in the building of the structure. Bricks were used in all possible variations; such as recessed, projecting, set at an angle of 45 degrees and presented in rhythm through repetitive patterns.
- Through out Central Asia or the dominant part of Eastern Islam, buildings in mud brick structures were clad in tiles. Through introducing a technique of the 'seven colours' or *haftrangi*. Colour was achieved through covering one side of the burnt brick with a monochrome glaze. The brick tiles were baked to have an enduring life over buildings and also got a lustre. The tiles were used to form imaginative mosaic patterns , in a traditional colour palette of Persia, that was called *Haft Rang* or 'Seven Colours'. There were alternatives of geometrical compositions with repetitive motifs of squares, stars, polygons, lattice work, nets and edgings.
- The technique of *haftrangi* also helped to introduce coloured inscriptions of the verses from the Quran.
- The dome became a characteristic feature of Islamic architecture after the Seljuk period. A structurally stable element was achieved by achieving a gradual transformation from a square base to a circle. Ingenious solutions such as the use of corner 'squinches' was made to create an octagon that could merge into the circle. Muqarnas was another complex of interlocking geometry in which several arches were superimposed to bridge the corners. Hence the Muqarnas was also a decorative pattern.
- Gradually under the Mongols, Timurids and Safavids all building surfaces were covered with coloured tiles, "The trend was accompanied by the introduction of floral motifs – rinceaux, foliage, vases and bouquets of flowers." [11]
- To all their mausoleums, mosques, madrasas the Persians introduced at the entrance recessed gateways pointed at the top which were called *aywan* or *iwan*. The kind of entrance gateway continued to be an outstanding structural feature of all Iranian-influenced medieval Islamic architecture from Anaolia to India. It was a threshold marking symbolically the other holier gates inside the complex such as that of the *Mihrab* or that of the shrine. Spandrels of arches in *iwans* and *pishtaqs* displayed floral motifs in the *haftrangi* technique. Following laws of symmetry the patterns in the spandrels of arches was repeated in mirror image on either side.
- Window grills were a unique feature employed in all phases of architecture determined by Islam. Beginning from geometric grills of the great mosque of Damascus to the magnificent carved screens in stone of Mughal India [4].

Decoration in Islamic architecture were defined by some underlined fundamental principles [3].

- Same patterns appear in varying time and space, there may be change in medium and repetition of design on different scale.
- Patterns are also attributed with the quality of expanding and diminishing with symmetry and repetition.
- Primary grids of the pattern co-ordinate with the building and secondary grids harmonize different elements within the pattern.

V. AN UNDERLYING SYMBOLISM TO THE DECORATION

The floral motif forms a prominent part of decoration in Islamic architecture, it had distinct associations with paradise. It was a symbolic gesture enabling the believer to contemplate the goal of existence. No form of geometric or floral decoration was specifically associated with either domestic or religious architecture. David James in his study on Islamic art concludes that an arabesque pattern bears a spiritual and contemplative quality in potential. The potential may be realized when the decoration occurs in the mosque in conjunction with Koranic calligraphy, it may lie submerged in the palace as the background of another motif [2].

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Several monuments in Central Asia studied by scholars have had indepth analysis not only of the architectural layout but also of the entire compositions against the context in which they exist. One such being an ancient shrine in Herat, the Mazar-e-Sharif. Here 'Tree of life' and 'Hanging Gardens' are suggested through a symbolic metaphor. The shrine on its entrance facade displays meticulously slender columns twisted into cable-mouldings, rising from larger mouldings which in profile represent jars like vases just above the plinth. The stalk like shafts turned and twisted to meet atop the monumental gateway; "such shafts depict Trees of Life, one of the more ancient cosmological symbols of the Near East" [5]. the Mazar-e-Sharif, Herat in Afghanistan is near the border to Iran, it stands amidst a yellow desert expanse, clad in the dominant 'blue' colour tiles to which Barry draws parallels of just like an oasis in the desert ; "the shrine's walls tendered a wide expanse of cool blue orchards like Hanging Gardens of Babylon petrified in mosaic but forever in leaf. Arabic terms describing such decoration are *tashjir* , 'what is tree like', and *tawriq*, 'foliage' " [5]. Barry observes that the blue on the domes dominantly seen throughout the larger Islamic world is most emphatically intended both to mirror and to figure the sky – "the classical Persian language in turn calls heaven the Gombad-e Mina". The octagonal and hexagonal stars intertwining over the dome correspond to the stars of the sky. Therefore the domed shrines and mausoleums with motifs of the 'Tree of Life' and a stylized image of the sky together form the heavenly garden. The concept of Paradise in India is replete in Mughal architecture. The only difference therein being that the domed tomb structure (except the tomb of Itimad-ud-Daula and Akbar which did not have domes) sit in a garden that was laid around the tomb to manifest the idea of paradise on earth.

Another decorative motif that emerged as a popular element was the Shamseh or "sunburst" which has at its centre a motif surrounded by smaller motifs arranged radially around it. Barry interprets it through philosophies of the Islamic version of Neo-Platonic mysticism he says it is like "an image of the Divine Principle of Light emanating into celestial hierarchies". A surface that is replete with the Shamsehs and is viewed from a distance the surface appears as a field of stars [5].

Cordoba (Islamic Spain) was attached to the older decorative tradition of Umayyad Syria, from which most of the Arab settlers had originated. Plaster decoration appeared first time here before that only marble and stone had been used. The finest plaster decoration however is that of the Alhambra (14th century). David James observes that it is the decorative plasterwork which gives the Alhambra an almost fragile appearance. The fragile nature of this plasterwork illustrates another aspect of Islamic non-representational decoration, which he says that some scholars believe to be intrinsic. It is suggested that the way in which plaster and tilework cause surfaces to 'dissolve' is done quite deliberately to reflect the transient , temporary character of all earthly structures, and imply thereby the impermanence of human existence [2].

In an another example Lutfullah mosque (1602-1616) the dome is covered with a delicate pattern of lozenges with arabesque floral trails. The pishtaq covered with tile mosaic panels displays great refinement . there are exquisite floral motifs with their poppies, buttercups and lotus flowers between vine scrolls. Over the door leading into the mosque is a tympanum made of a single slab of red Yazd marble. Its austere simplicity serves to heighten by contrast the rich profusion of vegetation framed by a twisted moulding around the doorway. This motif which we have just seen in the Lutfullah mosque and which appeared in Timurid madrasas springs like the stem of a vine from vases derived from a distant classical source which in Islam symbolize immortality [11].

Often floral patterns were executed in tile faience with the pattern laid one above the other to create a series of levels. Multiple level floral arabesques provide complexity, a web of contemplative complexity; their formal and colour associations suggest a whole series of possible reactions as suggested by James. The basic blue and green symbolize water and cultivation, the essentials of civilization in an arid land; they are the colours of the oasis, goal of the weary traveller. Flowers mean spring and the re-awakening of life, evoking Koranic descriptions of Paradise, the goal of existence. Vines, flowers and foliage descending from the sky, as in the interior of a dome, recall the tree of Bliss, often represented in prayer books in diagrammatic form, planted by the prophet in Paradise and growing downwards through the eight heavens [2].

When tile faience had taken over it enabled large patterns, sometimes whole plants like plum trees in blossom, were extended over several tile squares forming an oblong panel and often combined with solid rectangular panels, several feet high. Plant forms, even though quite natural in appearance, were certainly part of a widely understood religious symbolism. Pictures of the rose for example appear in Turkish prayer books, where stamen is identified with God, the petals with prophet, and the lower leaves with his companions [6].

VI. CONCLUSION

The region in which the Islamic faith spread is designated as the Islamic world. For an understanding how the decoration in architecture evolved, it can be categorized into three phases . This establishes a context for the decoration that followed into Mughal buildings.

The first phase includes the early centuries of Islam which were ruled by the Ummayad dynasty in the 7th and 8th centuries. The decoration comprised of mosaic on walls and floors. There was an eclectic fusion between different cultural strains. Such as the Greco-Roman elements were mixed with eastern ideas and this was apparent in Umayyad

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buildings. cross-cultural exchanges were largely influenced by Byzantine art and architecture. The Ummayad dynasty was also the first dynasty to use decorative imagery in wood relief showing the classical motif of vine emerging from the vase. In a study on the great mosque of Damascus by Finbarr Flood an art historian who has interpreted that the represented themes in mosaic relate to the verses from the Quran [7]. Such as the verse quoted below:

Then let man look at his food / (and how We provide it): / For that We pour forth water in abundance, / And We split the earth in fragments, / And produce therein corn, / And grapes and nutritious plants, / And olives and dates, / And enclosed gardens, dense with lofty trees, / And fruits and fodder (Surah 80:24-30).

The Second phase witnessed a strong eastern influence on Islamic decoration. The style was predominantly seen in Iran, Afghanistan and Turkestan. The decoration was characterised with use of geometric brick and terracotta patterns, which were sometimes combined with stucco and coloured glazed tiles. Monumental variations in the decoration can be seen in the Mosque of Ibn Tulun, Cairo; the Great Mosque of Isfahan (older parts); Tomb of Ismail the Samanid in Bukhara and Quwwat al-Islam Mosque at Delhi. From the tenth century onwards the decoration of portals was emphasized.

The last phase and the third phase was marked by the use of glazed colour tiles. Initially they covered only the lower part of the walls with geometric patterns. In the later centuries the art developed to incorporate floral imagery in its designs. In Iran and Central Asia this technique covered entire wall surfaces. The palette for the ceramic tiles had shades of blue, turquoise, white, yellow, black, green and pink. Significant work can also be seen in the Safavid and Qajar periods. Such as the work seen in Masjid-I Shah, Isfahan and later in Ottoman architecture. Iznik- in Ottoman times, down to 18th century was a major centre for ceramic production. Mosque of Rustom Pasa Istanbul, Turkey, built by the famed Ottoman architect Sinan was richly decorated with Iznik tiles . Islamic art of this phase transposed the representation of the lotus motif from China and the vine and scroll motif of classical architecture into confined, regular and symmetrical designs in coloured tiles. Green Mosque and Mausoleum of Bursa in the Ottoman period displayed that geometric motifs were almost entirely superseded by floral ones, which however were quite different from the traditional foliate scrolls of Seljuk art. There arose a new naturalistic floral style in the period which was aided by the development of polychromatic techniques in ceramic production. By the second half of 16th century, interiors were being decorated with tiles painted in seven different colours (haftrangi) using an underglaze technique. There were representations of tulips, carnations, hyacinths, peonies and various species of tree blossom rendered entirely naturalistically.

Mughal buildings in India reflect similar principles of decoration as was in Iran aiming at an overall effect and no sharp contrasts of texture. Although they did not use tiles but natural stone was used making them look more sober than the buildings in Iran because of a limited colour range in natural local stone. The decorative art of the period brought a close relationship between architecture and the minor arts through design of carpets, manuscript pages, miniature paintings and decorated accessories. There was slow and uneven patronage towards decoration with floral imagery in the Mughal dynasty, periods where there was a spur in this particular art was because of a personal interest and ardent patronage of the emperor. The climax of the art of decoration with floral motifs was a representation with naturalism.

Therefore it is concluded main elements of Islamic vegetal ornaments comprise of singular leaves, bi-lobed leaves, palmate leaves, stem scrolls, flowers and buds. Following observations were made in a chronological order. The earliest periods (ie Umayyad's) were marked by representation of trees in mosaic. The Lotus flower motif was introduced from the period of Seljuks (1037-1194). Timurid (1370-1507) style of decoration showed identifiable flowers such as lotus, poppy, carnation and peony. Ottomans (1299–1923) brought a new level of naturalism and detail in the design of flower motifs. They introduced Cypress tree, Tulip and hyacinth to the already existing motifs like lotus, lily, peony, chrysanthemum and carnation. Saffavids (1501 - 1726) showed similar motifs such as the Timurids but larger and more detailed flowers. The Ottomans and Safavid were ruling contemporaneous to the Mughals in India.

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