

## Contribution of Sufis on Thread Crafts on Multan

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### Abstract

Thread crafts of Multān are considered the major crafts of the subcontinent and is popular because of its religious, political, cultural and aesthetic paradigms. Thread crafts have a rich ideological basis, color symbolism and express a diversity of techniques and forms. The genres which will be focused are Embroidery, Zardozi, Khussa ornamentation Parānda and Patūli products. These crafts developed in Multān with a distinct identity, which expresses the rich cultural heritage of the region. The methodology adopted for this study is posteriori because information based upon personal experiences is very important to collect. After critical analysis of the context and form of the artifacts the dissertation will draw parallels between thread crafts of Multān its geography, history and more specifically cultural identity of the people.

**Keywords:** Multān, embroidery, spiritual beliefs, Islamic education, aesthetic paradigms

### Introduction

Sufis have also made important contributions to Islamic art and culture as patrons, artists, builders, craftsmen and poets. Muslīm history is filled with people who have been in the quest of truth and who dedicated their lives to unite themselves with the creator, such people are known as Ṣūfi. The term Ṣūfi is derived from the Arabic word ṣūf which means wool. Silk has been the symbol of extravagance and royalty for centuries, however the wool being



opposite of silk is the symbol of simplicity and unity with nature. The Ṣūfi saints have been preaching the peaceful religion of ‘Islām for centuries. It is well known that wherever the Ṣūfi’s went they made the whole town admirers of their conduct and hence converted majority of them to ‘Islām. Their primary motive was to bring people close to the oneness ‘wahdaniyyat’ of God without any discrimination on the basis of religion, cast, nationality or color. Sufism has been the part of the soil of subcontinent for the longest period of time. Sufism brought with it the construction of grand shrines and hence the culture of devotees, often known as murīds, started in subcontinent. The followers (murīds) sought peace, purpose and tranquility in the leadership of their Ṣūfi’s. They sought guidance in Islam, forgiveness and right path towards achieving harmony. Multān and its suburbs are known for multiple shrines filled with devotees<sup>1</sup>

Bahauddin Zakariya also known as Baha-ul-Haq and Hazrat Bahauddin Zakariya Multani (R.A) was a Sufi of Suhrawardiyya order (tariqat). For fifteen years, he travelled to different cities in order to preach Islam and finally settled in Multan in 1222<sup>2</sup>.

### **Bahauddin Zakariya Sufi teachings**

Hazrat Bahauddin Zakariya adopted a very simple and loving way for preaching and education. On the one hand he improved the morals of the people by presenting their simple life, sincerity and humanism as the great specimens and on the other hand they included Arabic and Persian words in the local language and started teaching them in their own language<sup>3</sup>. As Muin-al-din Durdai writes that “the unanimous language is essential to win the hearts of the people. Unanimous language creates unanimous thought”.

One group delivers knowledge to the people and other group creates preachers<sup>4</sup>. These saints talked to the people, advised and educated them in the local language. In this way they left far reaching effects upon the culture and language of Multān. He creates a Sufi school where students came from all over Asia and learn different aspects of Islam. Because when they go back to their country they will spread Islamic teachings in their home towns. And if they go for preach they should fully aware of the language and culture of that specific area. In this way people learn different languages and culture and then travelled for preaching in different countries. Everyone is taught

patience, perseverance, virtue, piety and purity. The goods of Multan were taken for trade in different countries and their goods taken to their own country; this is how Islam preached<sup>5</sup>.

When people came to him, he would ask them separately, “are you ready to preach for the sake of Allah”? In this way, many people prepared themselves for this purpose. Anyone who wanted to go to any country would learn the language first and then culture of that country in specific room. Two years later, he gave the teacher five thousand coins to the preacher and ordered them to settle a boat and buy useful essential items for this country. Then the boat leaves for the destination with the payers<sup>6</sup>.

Instruct the preacher while travelling:

### **Selling goods at a low profit**

Taking care of Islamic teachings in selling and buying things

Don't sell bad things but give free to the poor

Meet the buyer with a smile and good response

Do not preach Islam until the people have faith on you<sup>7</sup>.

In this way preachers travel like a merchants to spread Islam. They trade different goods including food items, cloths, cultural products and crafts. It is also considered that Multan has diversity in culture because many influences came from other regions. Preachers also learn different art and crafts in Multan including calligraphy khat-e-nastaliq and book binding along, naqashi, weaving and threadwork on fabric and shoes<sup>8</sup>. This paper will specifically highlight the Sufi influence on thread crafts of Multan.

Thread crafts of Multān are crafts which are created by using thread and are used for the purpose of embellishment. Thread crafts of Multān are unique in their spirit and form. Thread crafts are the most significant and popular crafts of Multān. The colour palette of these crafts and artifacts is amazing and captures the eye of every individual. There will be hardly anyone who is not found of these unique crafts. Their craftsmen have crafted techniques to great extent and their importance lies in the fact that only they are master of their crafts. Their ability and mastery have been refined by their elders and continuing working in the manner their forefathers were working. It is believed that the rich culture of Multān and the thread craft associated to it are more popular in the middle class. These affordable pieces bring out the

emotions related to cultural festivals and give a tribute to the aesthetic heritage of the region.

#### **Formal analysis of the artifacts**

This study will be focusing on analysis of colors, symbols, and designs that are used in thread crafts of Multān, and their associations with the oral repertoire. There are several reasons of selection of colors, symbols and visual language. The hot weather of Multān has made its inhabitants learn the significance of passion, labour and commitment, and the colours symbolize this running trait of culture that is why the color palette is bright and warm. Religious factor is also very instrumental for the selection of colors or any other symbol. The colour has been strongly associated to the Ṣūfi tradition, wherein, it symbolizes passion. The symbols will also be discussed in terms of their meanings and significance.

This part of the thesis is all about the investigation of symbols, their relation to religion and culture as Multān was the main route where business took place. Additionally, Ṣūfi culture & faith of regional occupants also had an effect on these symbols. After conducting interviews it was found out that the craftsmen of thread crafts of Multān believed in attending the shrines regularly. They are also enthusiastic about celebrating occasions like ʿUrs, Eīd Milād al-Nabī and Taʿzia tradition. Multān remains acclaimed for its shrines; mainly, Ḥaḍrat Bahauddin Dhakariya & Ḥaḍrat Shāh Rukn i-ʿĀlam which is taken as an inspiration to discover a connection between visual (design) and literary (inscriptions) references translated in thread crafts of Multān.

Visiting shrines is the continuous practice for craft person. Consciously and unconsciously these shrines inspires crafts person to get an inspiration of geometric and floral patterns they used continuously in repetition for years. Inscriptions and calligraphy contain symbolism connecting from Qurʾānic verses to plants, seeds, birds and animals. Crafts visual vocabulary is constructed with it.

To create a link between the symbols of thread crafts of Multān and the patterns used in Shrine of Ḥaḍrat Bahauddin Dhakariya and Ḥaḍrat Shāh Rukn i-ʿĀlam it is very important to compare the motifs and patterns of shrine with the embroidery patterns, khussa ornamentation, motifs used in

jewelry, motifs used in zardozi and parānda. This investigation will find an association between the historical backdrop of the designs utilized in thread work of Multān and where they originated from. These patterns include geometric and floral. If the pattern of the shrine and the patterns used in thread crafts of Multān are similar, the study defines the history of the patterns used in thread crafts of Multān is as old as the shrines itself.

It was not very easy to practice art aesthetically & mystically like the Muslīms did. Probably the most grounded explanation is that the otherworldly parts of ʿIslām are portrayed in the type of geometrical symbols. It is because ʿIslām is faith in one God, the Powerful and the Absolute who is invisible and is without any specific form. Shrine of Ḥaḍrat Bahauddin Dhakariya and Ḥaḍrat Shāh Rukn i-ʿĀlam is the best expalme of geometric designs which can be seen in thread crafts of Multan.

Shrine of Ḥaḍrat Bahauddin Dhakariya and Ḥaḍrat Shāh Rukn i-ʿĀlam  
Born in 566 AH, Ḥaḍrat Bahauddin Dhakariya at Kot Karor, was a saint, son of Shaikh Wajeeh-ud-dīn also called Muḥammad Ghaus. It is not sure if his mother was from Kot Karor or Baghdād. He died in 7<sup>th</sup> of Safar 661 AH. He built his Shrine himself<sup>9</sup>. He came to Baghdad after successfully completing his education as well as attending various religious schools too. He became a student of Shaikh Shahāb-ud-dīn Suharwārdī who said that he was like a dry wood who is ready to catch fire. It is thought that he also builds a khanqāh & sarai<sup>c</sup> near his mausoleum. Fakhr-ud dīn Irāqī who is a much acclaimed poet was his son-in-law<sup>10</sup>.

His grandson is Shaikh ul ʿIslam Ḥaḍrat Shāh Rukn i-ʿĀlam, the son of Sadr-ud-dīn Muḥammad Ārīf. Born 649 AH, he spent his early life with his grandfather. He was given the position “Shaikh ul ʿIslam” by Alaūddīn Khilji. This position was previously held by Shaikh Bahauddin Dhakariya during Khilji Dynasty and Tughlaq era<sup>11</sup>.

### **Description**

The Shrine of Ḥaḍrat Bahauddin Dhakariya is a square building with dimensions (53'x 53') internally and 61'x-9x 69'-9 externally) the exterior. On the top it has a hemispherical dome that has an octagon shaped second storey. The building itself is three floored; the first floor being square, the second octagon shaped and the third is semi spherical<sup>12</sup>.

Shrine of Ḥaḍrat Shāh Rukn i-<sup>c</sup>Ālam has an architecture dominant in the Tughlaq period. The floor is octagonal with slanted walls and corner turrets. The 2<sup>nd</sup> floor is the same except the corners. It has Multānī tiles on each side of the octagon with an opening with grills. A kiosk at each corner of each storey is present with a dome on the third floor. The building is 100 feet tall and the dome is 40 feet<sup>13</sup>.

### **Octagon**

As number 8 is considered to be symbolical for ‘renewal’, the octagon found in artwork is considered to portray eternal life. Many religious buildings have this shape especially on the domes at the top. Same symbol can be seen in khussas of Multan.

### **Circle and Square**

Circle is a simple shape but has many meanings. It portrays beginning and ending of life, spirituality. It doesn’t have an end so it is considered being infinite. It is considered to be whole, complete God (“God is a circle whose centre is everywhere and whose circumference is nowhere”).

In ancient times people built temples in circular shapes while with time and advancement they started making square shrines. Proclus, who was a Greek Neo-Platonist, said the circle was the symbol for the heaven and united the elements<sup>14</sup>. The Christians thought of the circle as eternity symbol<sup>15</sup>.

Squares are believed to be stable, having a firm base. It depicts balance & integrity. Shāh Rukn i-<sup>c</sup>Ālam has an inner Square. Square shape can be seen in thread crafts of Multān as well as in the phulkārī patterns the Punjāb. In the Muslīm World, The Holy Ka<sup>c</sup>ba is a square cube and the Muslīms move around in circular movement. Circular movements around Ṣufi graves are also an old tradition in Muslīms.

The great Ṣūfi poet Jalāl al-Dīn Muḥammad Rūmī wrote in the Mathnāvī that he moved around with nine planets in every Heaven. The Persian Ṣūfi poet Shaikh Maḥmud Shabistari in his book ‘The Secret Rose Garden’ compares God with the circle. Rūmī differentiated the circumference of the physical world with the Circle of Creator. He also claimed that even the Sun and the planets circling around it can be found in a grain of sand when dissected<sup>16</sup>. There is a connection of opposites between a square and a circle.

### **Triangles and Zigzag**

This shape shows neutrality along with positivity and negativity. Female energy is represented by the downward points and male energy by upward points. The Five basic elements of the world are represented when the two triangles come together. Many consider it depicting the genitals of the male and female. The multiple shapes which combine to form the triangles include rhombus, zigzag and triangle. The female sexual region is defined by the combination of the shapes. The sharp and pointed corners harness the power and ability to ward off the evil eye and it symbolizes the trinity power in a number of religions such as that in Christianity and pagan as found in the text of the Slav mythology where the shape is found to be similar to the three headed deities<sup>17</sup>.

The religious importance related to the five proto-historic painted designs from Balochistan were explored by Kūmār. It is used as a symbol of fertility to worship in the Sub-continental region<sup>18</sup>.

It was considered a miracle when a woman had the ability to produce children. After 18<sup>th</sup> century it was known that sexual intercourse was the reason for production of children, the belief was disregarded. Witches were thought to hold power in it. The worst witches to be thought to have existed were in eastern Siberia where they thought they could sense souls in the thread loops. People who live around the basin of the Amour River in eastern Siberia thought.

Embroiderers are the worst witches of all. Men do not embroider nor would they approach a woman doing so for fear that watching the threads being twisted around would cause them to become disoriented when hunting. The evil eye is envious and wishes to destroy perfection: brides and babies are particularly vulnerable. Evil spirit in general, can attack the body and cause illness or even death. Against them three aspects of embroidered decoration are considered effective the position, in which the embroidery is placed, patterns that hold a mystic power and assertive material. That's why mystic pattern used as a protection can be found in embroidery all over worldwide<sup>19</sup>.

Triangle is the basic design found in the clothes of various regions like in Ākhā hill tribes of northern Thailand and Būrma. Some villages guarded by sacred gates keeping triangle shaped wood decorations and painted zigzags to ward off 'hawks and wildcats, leopards and tigers illness and plague, leprosy

and epilepsy, vampires and were tigers. Their ritual triangle swings tower above their villages<sup>20</sup>.

Triangles can be seen at the entrance door of Shāh Rukn i-Ālam Shrine. The same triangles can be seen in various textiles one of them is chope phulkārī of Punjāb. The chope is made by the maternal grandmother of the bride and is given as a gift to the bride on her special day. Green yellow pat (silk thread) runs on both sides of the shāwl with triangular motifs running down the corners of the shāwl. Triangle represents the traditional Indian jewelry where on forehead on her wedding day called tikka. The triangles are often set in opposite direction to each other. In each triangle, further geometric motifs are embroidered<sup>21</sup>. Zigzag pattern commonly used in mosques, domes, niches<sup>22</sup> and in different historical buildings including Jahāngīr Tomb and Shāh Rukn i-Ālam Shrine. Location of the pattern is inner side of mihrābī at Shāh Rukn i-Ālam. The same zigzag pattern is also used in textiles, embroidery and weaving. The same zigzag pattern used in phulkārī bāgh of Punjāb named as liheriyya (weaves) da bāgh.

#### **Cross**

Shāh Rukn i-Ālam also has this pattern on the outside. Similar pattern is used in phulkārī bāgh of Punjāb known as vellan bāgh. Vellan is rolling pin is an essential part of a traditional kitchen. Different rows of rolling pins drawn on all four sides of the shāwl. These rolling pins represent the cooking responsibility of married women.

#### **Chequer Board Pattern**

Chequer board pattern is very common in historical buildings and is also placed at Shāh Rukn i-Ālam outer side. The same pattern can be seen in kaūdī phulkārī bāgh was often worn by women who wanted to bear a child. It has white square shaped pattern embroidered inside to depict female fertility.

#### **Leaves**

Leaves can be rendered in an ordered fashion either as motifs repeated in an all-over pattern, or as field of decoration. Sometimes arabesques become so abstracted<sup>23</sup>. Leaves pattern is placed in outer side of Shāh Rukn i-Ālam and can be seen in various textiles and embroidery patterns one of them is khussa ornamentation.

## Miḥrābī

Miḥrābī is the popular motif used in so many historical building and mosques and it is placed in outer side of Shāh Rukn i-Ālam. Miḥrābī motif is also used in different styles and in textiles and ornamentation on khussas of Multān it has versatility.

## Flowers

The flower has inspired designs in every medium, each vastly different in conception and purpose<sup>24</sup>. There are numerous reasons for the popularity of floral designs in art and architecture, but it is clear that flowers are attractive for their colour, their symbolism and their capacity to convey feelings of wealth and luxury. However, in embroidery textile art we often encounter more abstract and stylized floral forms<sup>25</sup>. This flower motif is placed at outer side of Shāh Rukn i-Ālam and similar pattern can be seen in Multānī males wedding khussas.

## Conclusion

Over the centuries, the spiritual beliefs, rituals, and practices of Sufis (mystical adherents of Islam) have inspired poets, artisans to create extraordinary verses and artworks. This study explores the Sufi teachings of Bahauddin Zakariya for the promotion of Islamic education and creates resources for the income of their devotees. The study explored the Sufi influences on thread crafts of Multan.

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