

APPROACH PAPER

Seminar on

Islamic Culture and Art

Dates: December 30, 31 and January 1, 2012

Hyderabad (A.P.)

Focus of the Seminar will be on the following areas:

Islamic culture offers a unique cultural heterogeneity for the reasons that it came to encompass diverse geographical regions ranging from Spain to Indonesia and ancient cultural spaces like Iraq, Persia and India. The successful assimilation of supra-Islamic identity of Muslim rulers, Sufis, traders, etc. to these new lands was possible because Islam, both in theory and practice, accommodated native sensibilities in terms of literature, art forms, architecture, concepts of politics, economy, etc. as long as they did not outrightly violate the *Shariah*.

Islamic Arts reflect the spirit and world view of Islam

As we seek to explore the overall evolution of Islamic cultural forms, starting from the inception of Islam itself, we would joyfully expect the participants to present their research focusing on the cultural inter-connectedness of Islamic civilization in the context of Arabia, Persia, Central Asia, South-east Asia and India. With regard to architecture, the contribution of Romans, Byzantians, Umayyads, Muslim Spain, Abbasid, Timurids, etc. can be taken up as the focii of research to trace the major components of evolution of Islamic civilization and its final manifestation in the Indian subcontinent. Likewise, the role of Persian and Central Asian agency to provide new ideas, intellectual input and various practices to Sufism could be another focal point to show an inter-connectedness between cultural progress that took place before Islam's advent and after its proliferation into the Indian subcontinent.

I. Medieval Way of Life: stability, peace and harmony:

Muslim encouragement to the element conducive, to the creation of a pluralistic society is significant. The first task, therefore, will be to explain the social environment created by Muslims in India which embraced composite culture, leading to the practice of living together despite racial, linguistic and religious differences.

We invite scholars to present their researches in the section on Islamic culture on this 'great role of Islam'. **This theme takes within its ambit all political norms, development of urban centres, horticulture, new industries, increase in the volume of trade (both domestic and foreign), social organization, flourishing of literature, growth of regional languages, spiritual life (bhakti cult and sufis), lifestyle, etc.**

It will be appreciated if the scholars emphasize continuity and change in Islamic culture in a historical perspective, pointing to various influences impacting on the character of Islamic culture.

Sub-themes

1. Muslim contribution in creating a pluralistic society.
2. Islamic determinants of social behavior.
3. Islamic concepts of an ideal life as reflected in the social life.
4. Patronage extended to the regional languages by the rulers and the sufis. Religion brought closer to people through the vehicle of regional language.
5. Assimilation of ideas and concepts and their role in the formation of a composite culture.
6. The viability of the Islamic art forms in the wake of the colonial onslaught.

II. Islamic Art:

Islamic art encompasses the visual arts as varied as architecture, calligraphy, painting, and ceramics, among others.

Islamic art is not an art pertaining to religion only. The term "Islamic" refers not only to the religion, but to the rich and varied Islamic culture as well.

Architecture

The most important expression of Islamic art is architecture, particularly that of the mosque, tomb, palaces and forts.

Architecture was accorded a place of honor within Mughal art, with the development of a distinctive plan and style in Islamic Architecture, which were used in the creation of various monuments at Delhi, Agra, Fatehpur Sikri, Lahore and Aurangabad.

One important feature of the Islamic architecture in India is arch. From the 13th-century Alai Darwaza in Delhi to the 16th century arches of Humayun's tomb and Buland Darwaza in Fatehpur Sikri and those of the Taj Mahal are outstanding examples of true arch developed by the Indian Muslims over a period of 500 years. The role of domes in Islamic architecture has been considerable. One of the prominent domes is that of the 17th century Taj Mahal. And as late as the 19th century, Islamic domes were incorporated into Western architecture.

Forts, palaces, bridges, dams, palace gardens etc., with several prominent features are a living testimony of the Muslim contribution to architecture.

Two styles developed under the Muslim rule in India, one is called Imperial Style while the other is known as Provincial or regional style. In the seminar papers will be invited on both styles.

Sub-themes

1. Development of Islamic architecture and fine arts in the Arab world: Early Islamic period, Umayyad period, Abbasid period: heritage, continuity and change.
2. Main characteristics of the pre-Islamic native architecture and fine arts and the extent to which they were assimilated into Islamic architecture and arts across the world.
3. Development of Islamic architecture and fine arts in Medieval India: Imperial and provincial or regional styles of architecture; the Mughal school of painting: subjects, technique, influence.
4. Dissemination of hegemonic Islamic cultural values among the regional elites.

Calligraphy

Calligraphic design is omnipresent in Islamic art, and is usually expressed in a mix of Qur'anic verses and historical proclamations. *Kufic* and *naskh* scripts are found adorning and enhancing the visual appeal of the walls and domes of buildings, the sides of minbars, and so on. Illuminated scripts, coinage, and other "minor art" pieces such as ewers and incense holders are also often decorated with calligraphy.

Manuscript Illustration and Miniatures

The Mughals also gave rise to a magnificent art of manuscript illumination, in which a strong European influence may be perceived, both through the utilization of perspective and during the late period the use of European engravings as models. Nevertheless a strong Persian influence remains.

Mughals were great patrons of miniatures. Many of these are preserved in different museums spread all over the world. The imperial style, like in architecture, also inspired various regional schools of painting. Besides the art techniques, the medieval paintings provide visual evidence with regard to the lifestyle of various categories of people. Social and cultural life is also depicted in the medieval paintings, giving insights into ceremonies, customs, beliefs and many other practices. That the medieval society in India developed a liberal attitude towards life is well illustrated by the examples of Mughal paintings and this aspect has to be focused in the seminar.

Dresses and jewelry

It would be legitimate to trace the origins of contemporary fashion industry to the medieval dresses. Design, embroidery of various types of dresses and jewelry are being directly taken from the medieval Indian culture. This aspect deserves scholars' attention. Deccan has made rich contribution in this area. Deccani clothes, dresses and jewelry continue to attract the eyes of fashion loving people across the country.

Music

It has been asserted that what passes for classical "Indian" music today is, in fact, a re-creation of the ancient Hindu system under the influence of dynamic Islamic culture. During the five and a

half centuries from Amir Khusru to Sadārang, the latter was a court musician at the court of the last Mughal emperor Bahadur Shah Zafar, the Muslims changed the very character of the Indian music. With their rich heritage and vital ideas they gave to the Indian culture much that is true, good, and beautiful in its music. This rich heritage needs to be emphasized to convey to the entire world as to how music brought people from various cultural stocks together to strengthen the concept of unity of all human beings. Muslim contribution to music was immense. It also included the invention of several musical instruments.

Pile carpet

Carpets were used both in ancient and medieval India. But the skill of carpet weaving touched new heights only during the Mughal era in the 16th century.

The favorite motifs of these Mughal carpets were scenes from court life, floral patterns and designs of animals. These Indian hand knotted carpets were made of silk and were brightly colored. They had as high a number as 4224 knots per square inch.

The motifs on Indian carpets are an exquisite blend of original Persian patterns, and ethnic Indian designs. There are about fifteen popular patterns woven into carpets.

Pottery

From the eighth to eighteenth centuries, the use of glazed ceramics was prevalent in Islamic art, usually assuming the form of elaborate pottery. Tin-opacified glazing was one of the earliest new technologies developed by the Islamic potters. Another significant contribution was the development of stonepaste ceramics, originating from 9th century Iraq. The first industrial complex for glass and pottery production was built in Ar-Raqqah, Syria, in the 8th century. Other centers for innovative ceramic pottery in the Islamic world included Fustat (from 975 to 1075), Damascus (from 1100 to around 1600) and Tabriz (from 1470 to 1550).^[18]

Another innovation was the albarello, a type of maiolica earthenware jar originally designed to hold apothecaries' ointments and dry drugs. The development of this type of pharmacy jar had its roots in the Islamic Middle East.

The medieval Islamic world also had pottery with animal imagery. Examples are found throughout the medieval Islamic world, particularly in Persia and Egypt.

In India, Muslims evolved their own style of art, while producing beautiful ceramic tiles, porcelain, pottery, plates, bowls, tapestries and rugs, and lamps. The seminar will focus on elements of continuity and innovation in the Indian pottery in medieval India. Even in our times Muslims continue to produce ceramics, for example, the ceramic industry in Khurja is flourishing. Whoever be the owners the artisans and the craftsmen are largely Muslims.

Minor arts

The arts of **jewelry** and **hardstone carving of gemstones**, such as jasper, jade, rubies, diamonds and emeralds are mentioned by the Mughal chronicler Abu'l Fazl; the series of hard stone daggers in the form of horses' heads is particularly impressive.

The Mughals were also fine **metallurgists** they introduced Damascus steel and refined the locally produced Wootz steel, the Mughals also introduced the "**bidri**" technique of metalwork in which silver motifs are pressed against a black background. Famous Mughal metallurgists like Ali Kashmiri and Muhammed Salih Thatawi created the seamless celestial globes.

III. Special Session/s on the contribution of Urdu in the making of Composite Culture

The purpose of holding a special session on the above theme is to invite scholars to examine the contribution made by Urdu in the socio-cultural life of India. It is well known that Shaikh Gesudaraz's *Miraj al-Ashiqin* was an early work in Urdu. From Sufis Urdu entered the heart and mind of the rulers and the ruled. Some Sultans of the Deccan chose Urdu as a medium of poetry. But it was Wali Deccani (1688-1744) was the first poet to use Urdu with great success. When he came to Shahjahanabad, his composition began to be sung by faqirs. His poetry was so effective that the poets of Shahjahanabad soon adopted Urdu as the medium of their poetic expression and aesthetics. By the middle of the eighteenth century Urdu had become the most favourite language for poetry. From that time onwards Urdu never looked back.

Urdu is believed to have promoted composite culture. Scholars are invited to present their studies on this theme, showing the assimilation of ideas and concepts belonging to different cultural stocks, indigenous as well as foreign.

Sub-theme

1. Role of Urdu in creating and disseminating the best cultural ethos that had been developed in the medieval and early modern period of Indian history.