

Pietra Dura Decorations of Naulakha at Lahore Fort

Pietra Dura is a Latin term composed of two words, Pietra and Dura. The word Pietra means hard stone and Dura means inlaid, hence pietra dura is the inlay of hard and precious or semi-precious stones. In Persian pietra dura is known as percheenkri,¹ which literally means to decorate with stone into stone. Pietra dura was not practised by the Persians, so it cannot be their introduction. Shah Jahan's Court historian, and author of *Shah's Jahan Nama*, Mohammad Saleh Kamboh² has repeatedly used this term. This craft passed through different stages in its execution.

1. Cutting out of stones in one or several pieces according to the desired design.

2. Cutting in the body of stone, a cavity of the shape and measurement of the design to be inserted therein.

3. The design is inserted in cavity and finally finished and polished. The process of the execution of work is as follows :

- (i) The drawing of the design is made on paper, then its details such as leaves, flowers, stems and buds, etc. are traced out on a mica sheet put on from the paper.
- (ii) The design is cut from the required stone by means of drawing on the mica sheet.
- (iii) From the mica sheet the design is cut out, and with the help of those cuttings the design is carved out of stone.
- (iv) The stone piece of the design is mounted on a plate of tin cut according to the drawing on the mica sheet.

Only opaque stones are used in pietra dura work, stone-cutter's

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1. Binyon, Op. Cit, 109.
2. B.W. Robinson, Persian Drawings, (Newyork. 1965), P. 22.
14. B.DC, M.A., Tr, the Tabaqat-i-Akbari, Vol, II, Calcutta, 1936, P. 99.
15. Abdul Baqi Nahavandi, Maathir Rahimi, Vol, I, (Calcutta 1924) P. 584-90.
16. Basil Gray, Indian Painting, P. 77.
17. Seddon, Op. Cit., P. 208.
18. Shafi, Op. Cit. P. 81.
19. Binyon, Op. Cit., P. 118-9.
20. Brown, Op. Cit, P. 111.
21. Shafi, Op. Cit., P. 86.
22. Brown, Op. Cit., P. 55.
23. Quoted by : M.A. Chughatai, 'Mir Sayyid Ali Tabrezi, Pakistan Quarterly, Karachi, Autumn issue, 1954, P. 27
24. Shafi, Op. Cit, P. 82.
25. Douglas Barrett and Basil Gray, Indian Painting, London, 1978, P. 83.
26. Binyon, Op. Cit, P. 119-20.
27. Blochmann, Op. Cit. P. 107.
28. Abdul Qadir Badaoni, Muntakhab-ul-Tawarikh, Vol. III Tr. Sir Wolseley Haig Karachi, 1978 (Reprint of Calcutta, 1925) P. 291-92.
29. Shafi, Op. Cit. 86.

proved from contemporary sources, that Mir Sayyid Ali was engaged in the work of illustration upto his departure for pilgrimage.

Through a happy chance more than 60 pictures of Dastan Amir Hamza in the Vienna Museum and 25 in the South Kensington are preserved but it is unfortunate that none of them can be definitely attributed to Mir Sayyid Ali.

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2. (a) T. W. Arnold and Wilkinson, the Library of A. Chester Beatty, A. Catalogue of the Indian Miniatures, Vol, 1 London, P. XX
- (b) Laurence Binyon, Wilkinson and Basil Gray, *Persian Miniature Painting*, Dover Publication, P. 119.
- (c) Authur Upham Pope, Editor, *A Survery of Persian Art*, (Tokyo 1964-65), Vol. V. P. 1880.
3. Article is included in (*Maqalat Maulvi Mohammad Shafi*, Vol-II, Ed, Ahmed Rabbani, Lahore 1972.
4. Maulvi Mohammad Shafi, *Maqalat Maulvi Mohammad Shafi*, Vol. II, P. 83.
5. *Ibid*, P. 85.
6. A.U. Pope, *Op. Cit* Vol, 9, Plate, A.P. 901.
7. Binyon, *Op. Cit*. P. 168.
8. Basil Gray, *Persian Painting*, (Ohio. 1961), Plate on P. 140.
9. Binyon, *Op. Cit*, P. 119.
10. Brown, Percy, *Indian Painting under the Mughals* (Oxford, 1924) P. 53.
11. C.N. Seddon, Tr. Ahsanu,—L.—*Twarikh of Hasan-i-Rumlu*, Oriental Institute (Baroda, 1934), P. 2.8.

and supervision work.? The query has defixed as yet a satisfactory answer. The experts have been successful in tracing Mir Sayyid Ali's personal touch in the execution of single illustration of the Romance of Amir Hamza, Binyon writes about it as follows :

"The Boston example, one of the Hamza illustration was tentatively attributed to Sayyid Ali by Dr. Coomaraswamy mainly on the grounds of similarity in the drawing of a flock of sheep with a similar motive in the Nizami picture."²⁶

Is there a possibility that Mir Sayyid Ali must have painted many pictures during his stay in India. They might have been lost but there is no denying the fact that he was busy in his work till the last moment of his existence. Authentic historical sources like, *Ain-i-Akbari* of Abul Fazal, *Muntakhab-ut-Tawarikh* of Abdul Qadir Badayuni and *Nafais al-Manthir* bear ample testimony to it. It appears from the statements of these authors that they had seen in person the works of Mir Sayyid Ali.

According to Abul Fazl "He has made himself famous in his art and has met with much success."²⁷ In his biographical note on Mir Sayyid Ali who used Judai as his nom-de-plume, Badayuni writes as follows :

"Judai, he is Mir Sayyid Ali the painter a versatile man, each page of whose painting is a masterpiece and who may be described as a second Mani in India. The story of Amir Hamza in sixteen volumes was illuminated and completed under his supervision. Each volume of it fills a box, and each page of it measures a yard wide, by a yard long and on each page is a picture".²⁸

The author of *Nafais al Maathir* writes "Since seven years, Mir Sayyid Ali is engaged in the Royal library in the illustration and illumination of the Romance of Amir Hamza."²⁹

There is no doubt that the number of illustrations as told by Badayuni is contestable, any comment on this number tantamounts to futility. But with reference to the present study, it has been

tion and rendering. It is unique for its realism. He does not over decorate his miniatures with texture and arabesque design but leaves some of the areas flat.

Aga Mirak and Sultan Muhammad the most outstanding painters of the royal atelier of Shah Tehmasp, emphasize the idealistic outlook in their paintings, mostly the court scenes, the charming faces and the princely grace which lacks character and expression. Contrary to them, Mir Sayyid Ali Tabrezi selects scenes of common life and every day activities and present them as an captivating background for the main theme. So far as the treatment and style is concerned, he keeps to the Persian traditions. He uses similar style and humanistic approach in "a scene in the city" This picture is also from *Khamsa Nizami*. The grouping of the figures in the architectural setting shows his ability to design a complex and difficult composition.

The "Encampment" is also from the same *Khamsa*. In this picture the rendering of animals like goats and camels etc, indicate his interest in realistic aspects of life. From which the later Safavid painters like Muhammadi and Aga Raza Abbasi were inspired.

The work of Mir Sayyid Ali is a documentary of the contemporary life in town and the countryside with a variety of colour, movement and vividness.

Paintings executed in India by Mir Sayyid Ali and reliably attributed to him, are a great rarity. The House of Tiamur and its attribution is also a controversial issue. No critic has been able to vindicate his point of view and argue its attribution successfully. There are critics who trace the picture to Khawaja Abdus Samad, others attribute it to Mir Sayyid Ali.

It is a recorded fact of history that Mir Sayyid Ali was entrusted with the work, according to the technical tradition in India, dozens of painters were employed to execute the great project of illustrating Romance of Amir Hamza. To what extent did Mir Sayyid Ali participate in the work personally besides the direction