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# The Presence of Carpets in the Murals of Srirangapatna, Karnataka

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**Abstract:** The art of carpet weaving and design are represented in the history of many cultures from different parts of the world. Indian carpet is amongst one of the most distinguished styles that play an important role in the history of world carpet. One of the main problems to study antique Indian carpets is the fragile structure of this craft that is always threatened by vermin and the changes in climate. Hence the availability of carpet samples is limited, scholars and experts apart from using the Indian carpets and fragments tried to find other ways to investigate this magnificent craft. Historical literature, paintings, frescoes, crafts and ornamentations of historical architectures are alternative methods that researchers employ to study antique carpets that are also applicable for the Indian carpets. The murals of Daria Daulat palace, Srirangapatna are among the most extraordinary murals in Karnataka. The palace, a summer residence, was built in the middle of a garden, using the Indo-Islamic style of architecture by Tipu Sultan in 1784 AD in memory of his father, Haidar Ali. As the name itself says, (literally, 'the wealth of the seas'), is a masterpiece in its own. Carpet is also one of the objects that are frequently painted on the walls of Srirangapatna palace. They have been shown in both battle and portrait scenes. Authors have used Srirangapatna murals which have the image of carpets to study the carpets due to shortage or absence of carpet examples from the region.

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**Keywords:** Carpet, Daria Daulat Palace, Srirangapatna, Miniature Painting, Murals, Tipu Sultan, Historical Monuments

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## Introduction

Like the other Indian monarchs, Maharajas and noblemen of Mysore had a great taste when it comes to decorating their palaces and courts with fine carpets. For example, in the new palace in Mysore, the floors are covered with beautiful carpets from North India made in the Mughal style, which are also woven in Bangalore Central Jail (Figure 1). The characteristics of Bangalore Jail carpets included good quality, attractive coloring, and use of excellent old patterns. It is said that the carpet industry in the Mysore State was started in the 18<sup>th</sup> century AD by Hyder Ali (the ruler of the Kingdom of Mysore in 1720-1782 AD) with some weavers who were from Golconda, Bijapur, and North India (Harris 1908: 5/11).

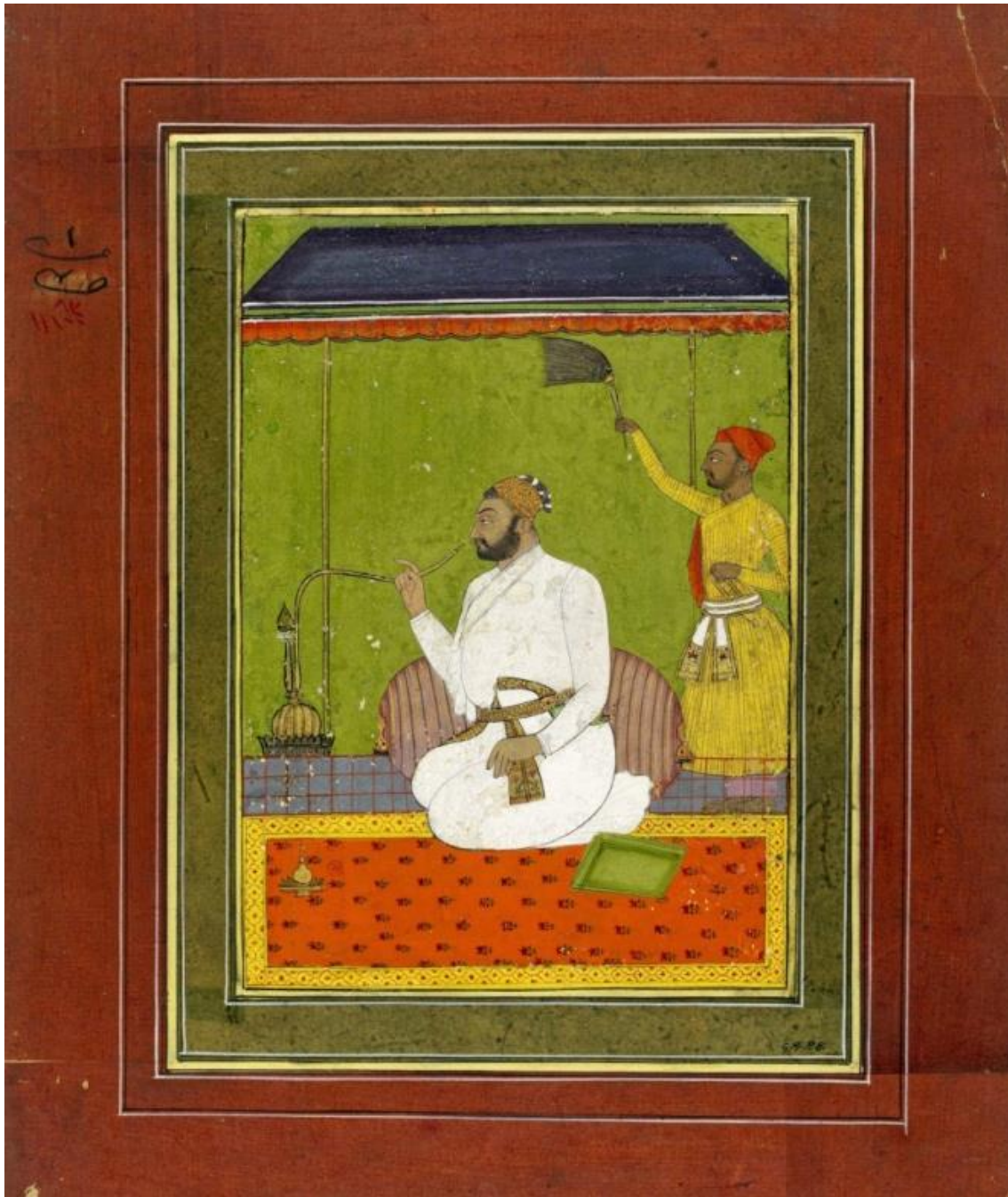


Figure 1: Eighteenth Century Painting of Smoking Ruler, Mysore, Victoria and Albert Museum (Source: collections.vam.ac.uk)

The painting in Figure 2 depicts Mysore weavers working on a big floral carpet, while a master who is sitting in the right corner of the loom is guiding the weavers by reading the design that is called *Talim*. The scene reminds us of carpet workshops in the courts of Mughal emperors that were described by many travellers and historians such as Abu al-Fazl ibn Mubarak (1551-1602 AD), the vizier of the great Mughal Emperor Akbar. (Blochmann 1873: 55). The vertical loom, tools such as scissors, knives, combs, etc., are significant sources to study if the tradition continues today.



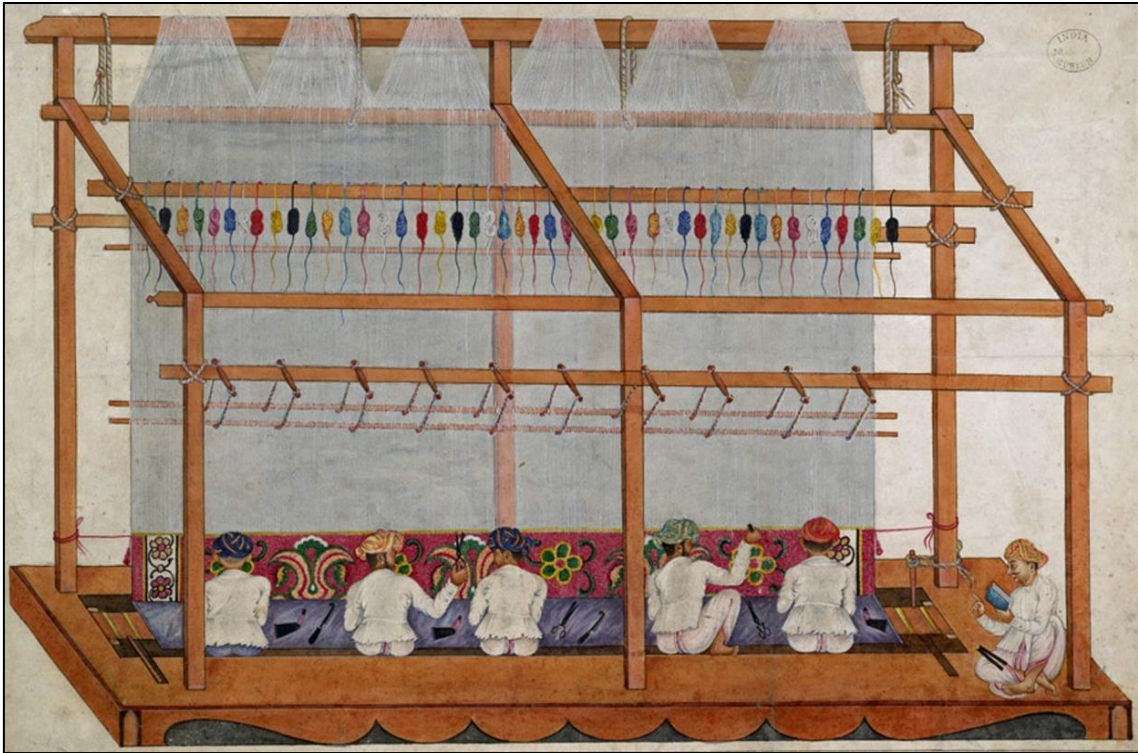


Figure 2: Plan and elevation of Pile-Carpet loom (Mysore, 1850 AD. Watercolor with pen and ink. Dimension: 44.5 x 62 Cm) with men at work (Source: [www.bl.uk](http://www.bl.uk))



Figure 3: The battle scene (Mural Painting) of western wall, Daria Daulat palace (Source: [tipu.expresstechsoftwares.com](http://tipu.expresstechsoftwares.com))

Unfortunately, there are not many carpets recovered intact or found in fragments from the region. Studying surviving carpets or fragments is an accurate method to investigate carpet design. In case of not having enough samples or lacking surviving pieces, the information obtained from the historical literature, ornamental designs from various crafts, and paintings of the same period can be significant sources to study carpets which once existed in this area.

To study carpets made in Mysuru, the scholar decided to use other forms of arts, crafts, and architectural decorations since very few historical carpets or fragments have survived from different centuries. Dariya Daulat palace and its mural paintings are good examples for understanding the carpet making crafts in Mysuru. Dariya Daulat Palace is located at Srirangapatna, near Mysore. Karnataka has one of the best specimens of medieval mural paintings in India and has several images of carpets depicted in paintings. The summer palace built by Tipu Sultan in the late 18<sup>th</sup> century AD has been covered with amazing wall paintings, each of which has unique and informative images.

### **Presence of Carpets in the Murals of Srirangapatna**

As one of the Southern states of India and a historically important place, Karnataka has contributed its share to the history of Indian mural painting. Murals have been part of palaces, temples, houses, etc. and are sometimes inspired by historical literature. Mural paintings result from a collaboration of architects and mural artists known in Karnataka as *Bhittichitra*. The murals of Dariya Daulat palace (Figure 3) are among the most extraordinary murals in Karnataka. The palace was built by Tipu Sultan in 1784 AD in memory of his father, Haidar Ali. As the name itself says, (literally, 'the wealth of the seas'), is a masterpiece in its own. The palace, a summer residence, was constructed in the middle of a garden, using the Indo-Islamic style of architecture (Shekar. 2010:36). "The delicate rhythms of Persia, the lush sensuality of Southern India, the restraint of European and Ottoman Turkish portraiture, all contributed to its uniqueness" (Shekar. 2010:95).

Before studying these paintings, it is important to understand the history of Karnataka in the 18<sup>th</sup> century AD, which includes the social and political situation of the area that could have had an impact on the cultural characteristics of the court and society. If any, the internal and external influences are also important in reading the murals better.

Srirangapatna has been one of the places under the governors of the Hindu empires such as Ganga dynasty (5<sup>th</sup> to 15<sup>th</sup> century AD), Vijayanagara Empire (1336-1646 AD), and Wodeyars (1399 AD onwards), that were soon conquered by the Muhammedan dynasty. After the fall of Vijayanagar in the mid-sixteenth century AD, the Wodeyars in Mysore got control over Srirangapatna in 1610 AD. During the second half of eighteenth century AD, Haidar Ali, who was the son of Fateh Muhammed, assumed control of the entire kingdom of Mysore. He died in 1782 AD and was buried in Srirangapatna. His son Tipu Sultan succeeded the throne in 1782 AD. The reign of both



father and son impacted the political and cultural landscape of the time and consequently had a major role in the art and culture of the region. (Shekar 2010:27-28).



Figure 4: Mural Paintings on the Eastern wall of the Daria Daulat palace  
(Source: hiveminer.com)

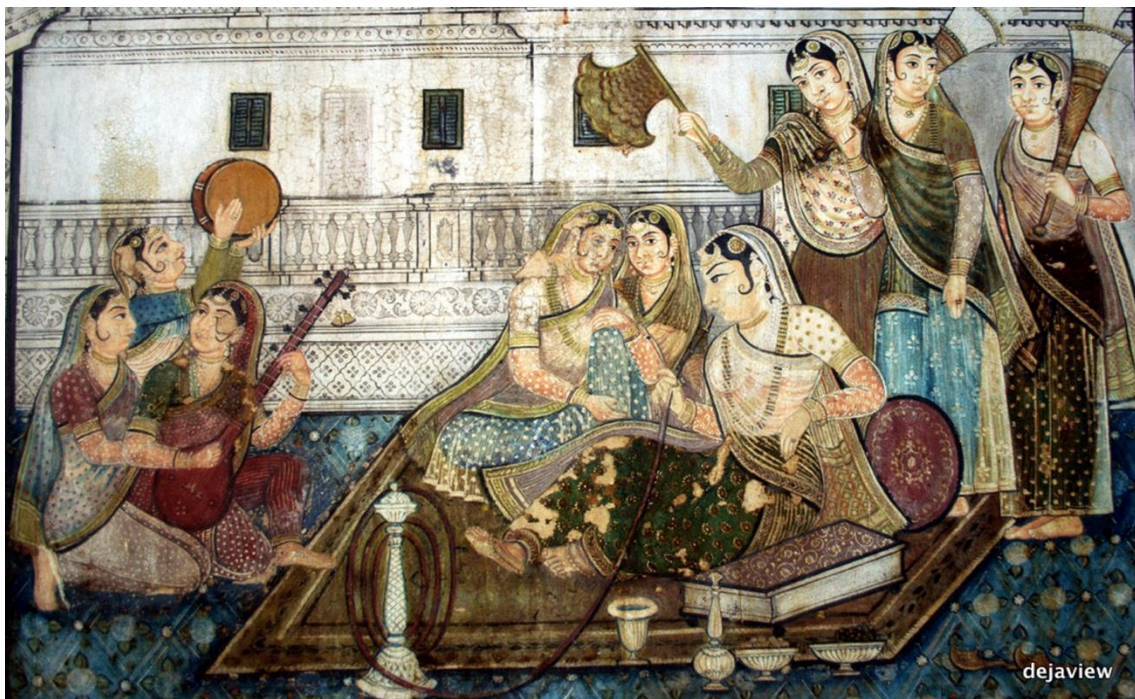


Figure 5: A mural from the Eastern wall of the Daria Daulat palace  
(Source: nirlek.wixsite.com)

Coming back to the murals of Srirangapatna, a significant point concerning these paintings is that they paint an informative picture of the society of their period, which is a mixture of several cultures, i.e., the Indo-Islamic influence as well as colonial influences during the period of French and British colonisation. The palace paintings are unique in their own, with three different themes: battle scenes, portraits, and floral designs.

Apart from the aesthetic side of murals in Srirangapatna, irrespective of whether they follow the proper artistic convention or not, they have been considered an important source of information about all the aspects of the period. The Srirangapatna paintings are, in essence, the artists' representation of the lifestyle of the court. "Subsequent generations of immigrant artists from Vijayanagar kingdom could have decided to come to Mysore during the reign of Haider Ali. These artists naturally carried with them the Deccani painting style of miniature art that already was a blend of Persia, South India, and Maratha styles" (Shekar. 2010:96).

The western wall of the palace has murals with battle scenes like the battle of Polillur, the second Anglo-Mysore war in which Haidar defeated the English people and ended with the seizure of Arcot. Interestingly, the horses, elephants, and camels, which are shown, are covered with various carpets. A few elephants are carrying howdahs. In one, Haidar Ali is seen sitting smelling a rose. In another scene, Tipu Sultan is seen sitting on a white horse with a beautiful golden colour carpet. Simultaneously, on other panels on the same wall, carpets are represented as decorative objects on the backs of horses, camels, and elephants.

Like the western side, the eastern wall also has incredible murals. The difference is that the style of paintings is more advanced than the west side. It brings the hypotheses that it might have been painted in later years or repainted on the top of earlier murals during English colonialism. The murals represent people with various social statuses. An interesting feature of the murals is the representation of daily utensils, costumes and furniture which emphasize the status of the person concerned. Items like hookah, decorated boxes, cushions, curtains, chairs, and many other objects have been painted in the compositions of the murals (Figure 4).

Carpet is also one of the objects that are frequently painted on the walls of Srirangapatna palace. They have been shown in both battle and portrait scenes. As this research aims to study carpets, it has used murals which have the image of carpets in their composition. In the case of paintings from the Srirangapatna, almost every wall in the palace has a mural painting. However, in a few of these paintings, the images of carpets can be seen. Several carpets are painted in the various scenes of the palace. Some of these carpets cover the floors of palaces to show royalty and status. Royal men and women are seated on these carpets with cushions for more comfort. Mir Hussein Kirmani, the Mir Munshi of Hyder and Tipu, wrote their biographies in Persian. In a few parts, he has mentioned the use of fine carpets by these monarchies that indicates



the continuation of the Islamic tradition of using carpets in their houses, courts, palaces, etc. He mentions, “Hyder Ali was a plain man and free from vanity of self-sufficiency. He was not fond of delicacies or particular in what he ate. He was fond of chintz, the ground of which was whitely strewn with flowers. He wore diamond rings on his fingers. He slept on a small silken carpet; and this, and two or three pillows, were all he required for his bed” (Kirmani 1965: 506-507). It is indeed difficult to determine the true origin of these carpets that were woven in India – whether it was from northern part of India, or in the south – or even imported or gifted from other countries.

Unfortunately, a few sources mention the carpets from this period and their features, which the scholar cites as follows. Firstly, in the letter from Tipu Sultan to Mirza Mahommed Khan Behadur Sumsamul Mulk (A Mughal prince), dating back to 24<sup>th</sup> April, 19<sup>th</sup> Century AD, he mentions some gifted carpet. He says; “The rosary, kneeling-carpet (The *Sejde* was the original word used, which is the Prayer carpet, or *Mehrabi*, woven in small size and used for praying), etc., which you sent us as tokens of friendship, arrived, and afforded us the utmost pleasure...” (Kirkpatrick. 1811: 280-81). The quote indicates a few important points; firstly, the habit of exchanging valuable presents between noblemen in Southern India was a practice as common as among Northern Muslim kings. And secondly, the carpets that had been given as a present were expensive and elegant ones as to be mentioned in the letter to Mirza Mahommed Khan Behadur Sumsamul Mulk.



Figure 6: Mural from the Eastern wall of Daria Daulat palace. It contains information on the lifestyle in south India in the 18<sup>th</sup>/19<sup>th</sup> century AD (Source: hiveminer.com)

In two other letters written by governors in reply to Tipu Sultan's letters, they have mentioned carpets as valuable treasures and properties. Another letter from Meer Mahommed Sadik, Son of Meer Ali Nuky, reporting the property of a nobleman to Tipu Sultan, mentions magnificent carpets. He mentions the value of belongings and says, "...furniture of the Ashoor-Khaneh, carpets, lamps, etc. about Rupees 5,000..." (Kirkpatrick 1811: Ixvi).

Another letter mentions carpets as valuable goods. "The land establishment of the *Kuchurries* was fixed as follows: *Mirzaey Dufturs*, Hindoooy Writers, *Furrash*..." (Kirkpatrick. 1811: Ixxxi). The term *Furrash* included the carpets and the camp equipage. Secondly, there were relations with Persians and trade connections probably through merchants. However, the designs on the carpets painted at the Srirangapatna palace do not have Persian bearings, so there must have been a local manufacturer.

As the evidence shows, the murals at Srirangapatna are either inspired by the battle scenes of the Mughal miniatures or Persian paintings, especially paintings of the *Shahnama* of Firdowsi, a copy of which was in Tipu's royal library. A few sources mention the similarities between the murals at Daria Daulat Bagh and the paintings at the Chehel Sotoon palace in Isfahan, Iran. For example, J.D. Rees has discussed the similarities (Rees. 1901). Last but not least, that carpet weaving centres in South India might have been the source of supplying these carpets. In his work "*Room for Wonder*", Stuart Cary Welch mentions a painting in the Indian office library that indicates a carpet-weaving loom in Hunsur. It proves the state of Karnataka once was the centre for carpet workshops. "The border design of the carpet is a continuous running pattern of flowers with stem — like a carpet. The colours used are all bright, very much like the Persian carpets. The designs, though, are very amateurish and seem to be added merely to avoid plainness" (Shekar. 2010:118). Unfortunately, there are no carpet workshops anymore in places such as Hunsur due to lack of patronage and the economic problems that weavers had faced.

## Murals of Srirangapatna

For the study, the researchers have chosen a few scenes from the Srirangapatna murals, which have the image of carpets in their composition, to investigate and understand the carpets' designs.

One of the significant paintings of the Eastern wall of the palace is the frame depicting the Queen and her attendants smoking the hookah. (Figure 5) The main focus in this mural is on the queen seated at the centre of the composition. However, the attendants, including the musicians, play a secondary role in the frame. The queen is sitting on a big golden camel-coloured carpet with a round pillow behind her. The carpet follows a simple design. The border is covered with the scroll design. Meanwhile, the ground, which is not clear, seems to have an all-over flower design (Shekar. 2010:85). Many portraits that have been painted on the Eastern wall of the Daria Daulat palace. The murals portray images of emperors, queens, noblemen, and so on. A few of these



characters have been identified, though many of them have mysterious identities yet to be unravelled (Figures 3 - 6).



Figure 7: Mural scenes in Daria Daulat Palace (Sources: [hiveminer.com](https://hiveminer.com/)/[twitter.com/blogvirasatehind.com](https://twitter.com/blogvirasatehind.com))

The study of these panels gives much information about different aspects of political relations, court life, customs, etc. In a way, the mural paintings in Daria Daulat palace are like a movie that shows the lifestyle of the period to the audience. As objects valued for their aesthetics and artistry, carpets were regarded as much more than daily objects in court life as to be represented in almost every frame in the murals in the Eastern wall of the Daria Daulat Palace that. These carpets can be divided into two categories:

1. Carpets with a plain design which were presumably flat-woven carpets. These flat-woven carpets were available in local places. (Figure 6)
2. Carpets with more complicated designs. Either these carpets are among the carpets gifted from other countries, or they were woven in Deccan regions and the Northern part of India (Figure 5).



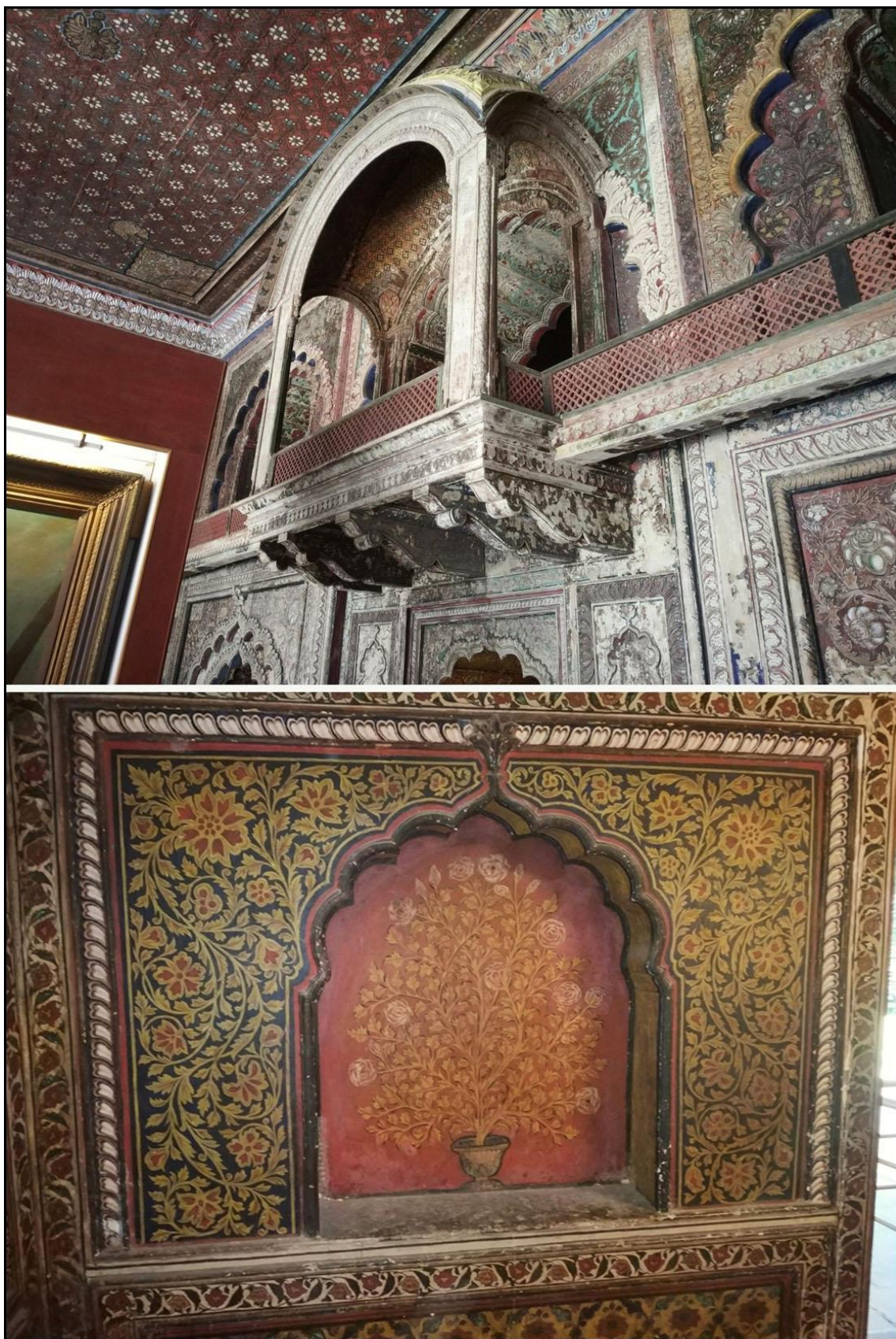


Figure 8: Floral designs on the walls of Daria Daulat palace (Source: flickr.com)





Figure 9: Wounding of Khan Kilan by a Rajput during his march to Gujarat (Mughal Miniature, 16<sup>th</sup> Century, Painted by Miskina/Kesav Khord (Source: V&A Museum)



The carpets represented in three scenes in Daria Daulat palace's murals (Figure 7) have shrub and flower buds in their design on the main ground. These resemble the carpets that have been depicted in many miniature paintings from South India (Figure 1). The similarities can be seen in decorations on palace walls as well. (Figure 8) The ceilings are covered with segmented patterns and floral designs (Figure 8 up) seen in some carpet designs depicted in the murals. Likewise, other patterns and motifs used in the architectural decorations of Daria Daulat palace share similar designs with carpets depicted in the compositions of mural paintings of the palace. One is the designs (Figure 8 down) seen in carpets in the Srirangapatna and other parts of Karnataka.

The mural (Figure 3) depicting the battle scene of Polillur in the second Anglo-Mysore war. Apart from the soldiers, there are horses, elephants, and camels carrying people. Interestingly, they have been covered with clothes that resemble carpet designs or with light-weight carpets made from silk. It is assumed that the noblemen in the mural (Figure 3) used light, fine silk carpets, instead of using tick clothes for their saddles which are common until these days. Though the material used was different, the designs are simple, following plain borders and mineralized grounds, sometimes covered with geometrical patterns. These designs mostly resemble the Deccani carpets rather than the Northern style that have especially been painted in Mughal miniatures (Figure 9).

## Discussion and Conclusion

It is evident that carpet making as a functional art caught the attention of the Deccan rulers. The interior part of the palaces, courts, and even the garden pavilions were decorated with beautifully designed carpets that give sophistication and uniqueness to the ambience and surroundings.

The early Deccani carpets show Persian influences on designs, colors, motifs as well as techniques. Later carpet designers tried to bring new elements and features to make it unique and adorable, as exemplified by the Decani Carpets in Bijapur Museum. The carpet designs, as observed in these samples, display a higher level of sophistication in terms of composition, subjects, and motifs. The sources used for creating motifs and patterns in Deccani carpet include:

- Influence of Persian carpets
- The artists' own creations
- The influence of other styles from different part of India, such as Mughal carpets
- The influence of other arts and crafts as well as ornamentations in Deccani Architecture

Like any art, the carpet design follows its own principles of composition, such as symmetry, geometry, or use of oriental motifs. Carpet weaving was one of the handicrafts that produced luxurious items used to embellish the palaces and to lend a spiritual aura to their interiors of those palaces of the Muslim kings. Therefore,

comparing its color, size, and designs with other patterns from different arts and crafts from the same period can help viewers understand its composition especially in the case of the Deccani carpets.

Jagdish Mittal, an Indian artist and art collector says that the similarities between some artefacts such as carpets, textiles, paintings, embroideries, metalwares, etc. (Especially in motifs designs belong to the same period) are not merely subconscious inspirations. The artist has noticed these similarities, particularly in Mughal and Deccani arts and craft (Mittal. 1987: 134-140). Mittal continues that Mughal and Deccani emperors, known as patrons of art, craft, and architecture, hired a few painters to produce designs for other objects like arms and armor, carpets, textile, etc. Thus, most probably, the similarities seen in these works and architectures result from artists, who designed various arts and crafts, and sometimes even for the decorations in monuments (Mittal. 1987: 134-140).

The similarities mentioned helped scholars to find out many significant characteristics of the South Indian carpet in case of lack of adequate number of surviving artefacts, especially carpets. The fragile structure of carpets in general, specifically the South Indian ones, which are threatened by vermin and climate change, has affected the availability of samples from these areas. However, by studying these similarities, we can understand a few important points. Firstly, in case of shortage or absence of samples, these similarities help determine the designs and patterns, which the same artistes probably made for various arts and crafts (if accept Jagdish Mittal's assumption). Secondly, the influence of Mughal designs on the South Indian art and craft, especially from 17<sup>th</sup> century A.D onwards, is another aspect that is considered by scholars who have worked on Indian art and architecture.

The article has attempted to examine samples from the murals of Daria Daulat palace, Srirangapatna to verify these assumptions. Despite of the aesthetic aspect of these murals, there are numerous factors that lie hidden behind these extraordinary works that provide reliable information for the scholars and expert to study different aspects of arts and crafts from the region, of which the carpet was one of the examples.

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