



Seventeenth-Eighteenth Century Painted-Printed Tent and Furnishing Fragments from Bharat Kala Bhavan

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Patterned with hand-applied mordant-and-resist-dyed cotton fragments of tent and furnishings, belonging to the 17th-18th centuries, form an important group in the Textile Section of the Bharat Kala Bhavan (BKB) Museum, Varanasi. These fragments surfaced in the art market during mid-20th century and dealers often cut these into pieces and sold. Acquired by the museums in India and abroad, this entire lot, Figs.7.1-7.21, got dispersed. The twenty-one fragments in BKB and similar examples in National Museum, Calico Museum of Textiles, Baroda Museum and Victoria & Albert Museum, London, have been studied extensively by Rahul Jain.¹ His research has revealed all the details about these painted-cotton tentage, the elements of design and centre of production and Jaipur connection on the basis of palace inventory details.

Apart from these tentage fragments, there is a fairly big part of the canopy/floor cover with the so-called "Golconda Poppy", Fig.7.22, in BKB.

The present study aims at giving an account of the BKB fragments. On the basis of design motifs used, these textiles can be divided into five categories:

- A. The twelve fragments with the Accession Numbers 3/6036, Fig.7.1; 3/6038, Fig.7.2; 3/6041, Fig.7.3; 3/6042, Fig.7.4; 3/6044, Fig.7.5;
- B. 3/6045, Fig.7.6; 3/6048, Fig.7.7; 3/6049, Fig.7.8; 3/6051, Fig.7.9; 3/6052, Fig.7.10; 3/6053 Fig.7.11 and 3/6054, Fig.7.12 represent imaginary trees and flowers within niches. Each niche remains isolated while the area in between the arches had been filled with floral patterns in red-maroon on white ground. These niches are followed by a pattern of pillars indicating gateways or wall made of cloth. When such *qanats* were installed, they would give the impression of a palace interior far away from the palace.
- C. Seven other fragments having the Accession Numbers 3/6037, Fig.7.13; 3/6039, Fig.7.14; 3/6040, Fig.7.15; 3/6043, Fig.7.16; 3/6046, Fig.7.17; 3/6047, Fig.7.18 and 3/6050, Fig.7.19, are thematically same but the flowering pattern depicted is totally different. The cotton panels were patterned using the *kalamkari* technique, whereby an artist drew designs on cotton with a *kalam* pen soaked with mordant. The lengthy process of dyeing-mordanting was repeated for each colour. Small details are then painted by hand on the cloth after the dyeing process was completed. The patterns on these fragments are very complex and elaborate, depicting a wide variety of flowers. One of the fragments with Accession Number 3/6044, Fig.7.5, belongs to a special category because this shows the floral pattern in rectangular frame. The central image is a big flower vase filled with a bouquet of flowers. The flowers in full bloom, buds and leaves are beautifully painted in various shades. A vase with handles is also added in the lower portion of the panel, filled with blossoms.
- D. One example with the Accession Number 3/9934, Fig.7.20 is identified as the ceiling of the tent. This may have been also a floor-spread. It shows various flowers arranged in vase covering the field framed with a broad floral border.
- E. One of the fragments, Accession Numbers 3/9933, Fig.7.21, depicts a scene showing birds in hunting moments. This fragment of tentage shows beautiful flora and fauna painted with red, maroon and yellow on dusty ground. The fragment shows a pair of three arched-structure, highly decorated with flowers and leaves. In the first arch two pairs of swan/flamingo(?) are seen on either side of a imaginary pattern. In the second arched-structure, two hunting scenes had been included within floral pattern. The blackbucks being attacked by giant birds is a rare motif used in the tentage.



7.1

This furnishing, Accession Number 10/302, Fig.7.22, is highly famous and identified as the so called "Golconda Poppy". The fragment of this furnishing can be seen in various museum collations like V&A Museum,² London; Museum of Fine Arts, Boston; Nasli & Alice Heeramaneck Collection; Brooklyn Museum & MET, New York; Indische Museum, Berlin; National Museum,³ New Delhi and Calico Museum,⁴ Ahmadabad. The BKB fragment had never been published earlier nor mentioned by any scholar. It is an archetypal Mughal design of a stylized poppy plant in staggered row.⁵ In Mughal palace, fine "summer carpets" were used widely. The flower design of this immense floor-covering created an indoor garden for people sitting on the floor. The poppies are typical of the reign of the Mughal emperor Shah Jahan (r.1628-1658), when naturalistic flower patterns were used widely, from manuscript borders to architecture. This piece was printed and dyed possibly at Burhanpur, Madhya Pradesh, around 1650. The series of alternate poppy plants appear upside down in the row in repetitive manner. Most of the scholars identified that the motifs had been block-printed but examined closely, it shows details of hand-painting with fine brush. The strokes can be clearly noticed above the flower, leaf and stem, pollen grains and filament. The brush strokes on the stem and leaves are also visible. The red color of flower petals and border on green (olive) are also shaded with comparatively darker tones with brush. Such shading is not possible in block printing.

References

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2. Gupta, Vivek, 'Splendour of the City: Nagarshobha', (Roda Ahluwalia) *Reflections on Mughal Art & Culture*, Niyogi Books/The K.R. Cama Oriental Institute, Mumbai, 2021, Fig.5, pp.236-237.
3. Pathak, Anamika, 'Renovated Textile Gallery at the National Museum, New Delhi', *Marg*, Vishnu Chandra Ohri and Roy, C. Craven J. (eds), Vol.05.0, 1998-1, p.70; 'Tent Panel illustrate *Gandaberunda*, Textiles and Clothing', *Research Centre e-Journal*, Vol.1, Issue 1, February, 2017, pp.6-8.
4. Jain, Rahul, *op.cit.*, p.110.
5. Skelton, Rebort, *Indian Heritage: Court Life and Arts Under Mughal Rule, Textiles*, 1982, pl.226, p.230.

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Figure Captions

- Fig.7.1 : A flower vase within a cusped arch, tent panel (*qanat*), Coromandel coast, South India, mid-17th century, cotton patterned with hand-drawn mordants and resist, 25696 cm, Acquired from A.K. Essajee, Mumbai, BKB, Acc. No. 3/6036
- Fig.7.2 : Flower within arch, tent panel, Coromandel coast, mid-17th century, cotton patterned with hand-drawn resist and mordant, 33594 cm, Acquired from A.K. Essajee, Mumbai, BKB, Acc. No. 3/6038
- Fig.7.3 : Flowers in vase under arches, tent panel, Coromandel coast, mid-17th century, cotton patterned with hand-drawn resist and mordant, 320191 cm, Acquired from A.K. Essajee, Mumbai, BKB, Acc. No. 3/6041
- Fig.7.4 : Flower in vase within a cusped arch, tent panel, Coromandel coast, mid-17th century, cotton patterned with hand-drawn resist and mordant, 34297 cm, Acquired from A.K. Essajee, Mumbai, BKB, Acc. No. 3/6042
- Fig.7.5 : Flower in vase, tent panel, Coromandel coast, mid-17th century, cotton patterned with hand-drawn resist and mordant, 290110 cm, Acquired from A.K. Essajee, Mumbai, BKB, Acc. No. 3/6044
- Fig.7.6 : Flower vase within arches, tent panel, Coromandel coast, 17th century, cotton patterned with hand-drawn resist and mordant, 290110 cm, Acquired from A.K. Essajee, Mumbai, BKB, Acc. No. 3/6045
- Fig.7.7 : Flowers in vase within arches, fragment of a *qanat*, Coromandel coast, 17th century, cotton patterned with hand-drawn resist and mordant, 321190 cm, Acquired from A.K. Essajee, Mumbai, BKB, Acc. No. 3/6048

- Fig.7.8 : Imaginary trees under arches, fragment: circular ceiling of the tent, Coromandel coast, 17th century, cotton patterned with hand-drawn resist and mordant, 316315200 cm, Acquired from A.K. Essajee, Mumbai, BKB, Acc. No.3/6049
- Fig.7.9 : Flowers set in vase, fragment: circular ceiling of the tent, Coromandel coast, 17th century, cotton patterned with hand-drawn resist and mordant, 31030622 cm, Acquired from A.K. Essajee, Mumbai, BKB, Acc. No. 3/6051
- Fig.7.10 : Flowers in vase, fragment: circular ceiling of the tent, Coromandel coast, 17th century, cotton patterned with hand-drawn resist and mordant, 31619512.5 cm, Acquired from A.K. Essajee, Mumbai, BKB, Acc. No. 3/6052
- Fig.7.11 : Vases of flower under arches, fragment of a tent, Coromandel coast, 17th century, cotton patterned with hand-drawn resist and mordant, 336180 cm, Acquired from A.K. Essajee, Mumbai, BKB, Acc. No. 3/6053
- Fig.7.12 : Flowers in vase under arches, Fragment of a Tent, Coromandel coast, 17th century, cotton patterned with hand-drawn resist and mordant, 330180 cm, Acquired from A.K. Essajee, Mumbai, BKB, Acc. No. 3/6054
- Fig.7.13 : Floral arabesque, fragment of a tent, Coromandel coast, 17th century, cotton patterned with hand-drawn resist and mordant, 285216193 cm, Acquired from A.K. Essajee, Mumbai, BKB, Acc. No. 3/6037
- Fig.7.14 : Floral pattern within arches, fragment of a Tent, Coromandel coast, 17th century, cotton patterned with hand-drawn resist and mordant, 268206 cm, Acquired from A.K. Essajee, Mumbai, BKB, Acc. No. 3/6039
- Fig.7.15 : Floral pattern within arches, fragment of a Tent, Coromandel coast, 17th century, cotton patterned with hand-drawn resist and mordant, 203153 cm, Acquired from A.K. Essajee, Mumbai, BKB, Acc. No. 3/6040
- Fig.7.16 : Floral patterns within arched panels, fragment of a tent, Coromandel coast, c.17th century, cotton patterned with hand-drawn resist and mordant, 205152 cm, Acquired from A.K. Essajee, Mumbai, BKB, Acc. No. 3/6043
- Fig.7.17 : Floral patterns, fragment of a tent, Coromandel coast, c.17th century, cotton patterned with hand-drawn resist and mordant, 225225300 cm, Acquired from A.K. Essajee, Mumbai, BKB, Acc. No. 3/6046
- Fig.7.18 : Floral arabesque within arches, fragment of a tent, Coromandel coast, c.17th century, cotton patterned with hand-drawn resist and mordant, 206148 cm, Acquired from A.K. Essajee, Mumbai, BKB, Acc. No. 3/6047
- Fig.7.19 : Floral patterns in arched panels, fragment of a tent, Coromandel coast, c.17th century, cotton patterned with hand-drawn resist and mordant, 202177 cm, Acquired from A.K. Essajee, Mumbai, BKB, Acc. No. 3/6050
- Fig.7.20 : Floral arabesque, canopy or floor cover, Coromandel coast, c.17th century, cotton patterned with hand-drawn resist and mordant, Acquired from Rusi & Dinshaw Gazdar, Mumbai, date of acquisition: 15.12.1959, BKB, Acc. No. 3/9934
- Fig.7.21 : Imaginary animals and birds under arches, fragment of a wall panel, Coromandel coast, c.17th century, cotton patterned with hand-drawn resist and mordant, 234198 cm, Acquired from Rusi & Dinshaw Gazdar, Mumbai, date of acquisition: 15.12.1959, BKB, Acc. No. 3/9933
- Fig.7.22 : A field of poppies, fragment of a floor spread, Burhanpur(?), mid/late-17th century, cotton patterned with painted and printed resist and mordants, 322151 cm, date of acquisition: 11.11.1967, BKB, Acc. No. 10/302



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▼ Detail of Fig.7.5







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▼ Detail of Fig.7.10



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▼ Detail of Fig.7.13











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▼ Detail of Fig.7.17









7.20

▼ Detail of Fig.7.20







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▼ Detail of Fig.7.22

