

MOSAIC TILES IN SHRINE ARCHITECTURE IN THE NORTH-WESTERN SUBCONTINENT

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ABSTRACT

The art of mosaic (*kashi*) tiles occupies a place of prominence in the history of Islamic art. Mosaic art (*kashi kari*) practiced with traditional art techniques was introduced in the subcontinent by Muslim artisans. Sufis have a great impact on the culture and traditions of the subcontinent. The architecture of Sufi shrines reflects regional traditions and cultural diversity because these spaces serve as community places. It has been well documented that mosaic tiles have been used on mosques, mansions, palaces, Havelis and other public buildings. However, the use of these tiles on the Sufi shrines is largely unknown. The present study will highlight the significance of mosaic tile work as distinctive ornamental features of architecture of Sufi shrines in the north-west subcontinent. On the exterior and interior spaces of Sufi shrines of this region, qualitative research will be focused on the unique mosaic tile work with intricate, geometrical patterns. Using the study's results and summary, it can help preserve the heritage of mosaic tiles especially on Sufi shrines.

Keywords: culture, mosaic tiles, Sufi shrines, tradition.

1 INTRODUCTION

Visual arts produced by people who live within the geographical area where culturally Islamic people inhabited or ruled from the 7th century onwards are referred as Islamic arts [1]. Consequently, it is a difficult art to define, owing to the fact that it covers many lands and numerous peoples over more than 1,400 years. In addition, it is not art that is specific to a religion, time, place, or a single medium. The Islamic art of architecture includes calligraphy, mosaics, painting, glass, pottery, wood inlay work, stone art such as inlay work and stone carving, as well as textile arts such as carpets and embroidery [2].

The word "*kashi*", an abbreviation of *kashani*, was already understood to mean tile in Persian by the end of the 13th century because the wide range of tiles were produced in Kashan, a city in nowadays Iran [3]. Traditionally, the occupation of potter was inherited from father to son. In the north-western subcontinent (present day Pakistan), the word "*kashi*" is used to produce a specific kind of glazed tiles and pottery which are commonly known as blue pottery.

According to Islamic culture, geometrical patterns are used to purify the mind and soul, and to bridge the physical realm to the spiritual [4]. Many mystics and theologians have enjoyed using geometry as a means of contemplation, as it allows a glimpse of the underlying order of both the cosmos and the natural world [5].

Since it is considered forbidden to make pictures and related objects in Islamic religious buildings, then making Islamic geometrical patterns, calligraphy and floral ornamentation in religious buildings is a good way to express the spiritual conditions. For this reason, Islamic arts are made in the mausoleums of Sufis in a very fine and abundant way. As for mosaic art (*kashi kari*), it was very popular at the Sufi shrines at that time in which Islamic art and its related decorative ornamentations were displayed.

The roots of blue and white ceramics can be traced back as far as the Uighurs of the 8th and 9th centuries. The major developments happened during the Karakhanids, Ghaznavids and especially the Persian Seljuks. Their height of success occurred in the 16th and 17th



centuries [6]. Until the 11th century, tile production in Islamic Persia was virtually unknown. The tiles were found at Ghazni, the capital of the Ghaznavid dynasty (977–1187) located in Afghanistan. A fragment of a square, polychrome-lustre tile with a bird motif was discovered during excavations in Samarra, the capital of the Abbasid dynasty from 836 to 883 AD. Tunisian potteries produced tiles possibly for export to Samarra. Persia's religious buildings, imperial palaces, and palace residences of dignitaries were lavishly decorated with mosaic tiles during the Islamic period [3]. The craftsmen of this art came from Kashan with the help of Sufis due to the invasion of Mongol and there they started making healthy bricks for decoration of buildings especially for mosques and tombs [7].

When the Muslims came to the subcontinent in the 8th century, they were accompanied by a large number of Sufis [8]. It was due to the establishment of Sufi monasteries that Islam gained more popularity in Indian subcontinent. A Sufi monastery is a hospice, lodge, community centre, or dormitory run by Sufis [9]. The other major function of a Sufi monastery was of a community shelter. Many of these facilities were built in low caste, rural, local vicinities. Depressed and spiritually hungry members of the caste received free meal services as well as basic education. Sufis spread their teachings of love, spirituality, and harmony by creating egalitarian communities within caste systems. People were attracted to Islam by the example of Sufi brotherhood and equity [10]. Soon these monasteries became social, cultural, and theological epicentres for people of all ethnic and religious backgrounds and genders [9], [11].

When Islam was introduced in the Indian subcontinent, mosaic art was also introduced at that time. The two most famous centres of glazed pottery (especially for glazed tile making), Hala and Multan, lie in sandy plains. It was on its peak during the Mughal rule. In 1853, when a large-scale excavation was carried out at Kahna Qasim Bagh, a fort in Multan, glazed tiles were discovered which experts believe were made in the 9th century AD [7].

2 SUFI SHRINES AND THEIR ARCHITECTURE

During the 10th century AD and onward, some Muslims migrated from Iran, Iraq, Afghanistan, and Central Asia to the ancient gateway of the subcontinent known as Multan and nearby areas such as Uch Sharif and Sindh. Whenever there is a tomb there was once a monastery, a place where a Sufi resided (however simple the place may have been, it was the place of the Sufi's abode) from where the Sufis disseminated spiritual education among the local communities. Each monastery (*khanqah*) was invariably connected to a mosque. However, after the passing away of Sufi, his monastery was transformed into his tomb, which became his memorial. These complexes of tombs and mosques in the subcontinent remained centres for the development of tangible Indigenous arts such as architecture, calligraphy, fresco painting, and tile-work, all of which were used to ornament the tombs of the saints and mosques [12]. Bunce [13] notes that the layout plans of the Sufi shrines were constructed in square, octagon shape or a combination of both shapes with the series of columns inside or verandas around building or corner towers extending at 45°. Mosaic tiles have been used extensively on the shrines of Sufi mystics.

Mosaic tiles' contribution to the architecture of Sufi shrines in this region has not been examined earlier in detail. This study includes those Sufi shrines in Sindh and Punjab where mosaic art work has been done extensively and the style of tiles, design patterns and use of colours are very similar. The data of the shrines situated in Punjab province (of Pakistan) is collected directly; however, the data on the shrines situated in Sindh province is gathered from secondary sources. The order of the data has been kept according to the geographical location and arranged from the south and ending in the north.



2.1 Shrine of Sakhi Hashim Shah

Shrine of Sakhi Hashim Shah is located in Matiari, Sindh. He was the great grandson of Sakhi Ruknuddin Shah. Great Sufi Saint Shah Abdul Latif Bhittai spent some of his infancy days in the company of Sakhi Hashim Shah.

2.2 Shrine of Shah Abdul Latif Bhittai

Shah Abdul Latif Bhittai's mausoleum is located in Hala, Sindh and the city of Hala is known as a centre in mosaic tiles work. Blue, white, orange, turquoise colours have been used in mosaic tiles. The exterior walls of the mausoleum have been elaborately decorated with mosaic tiles and the interior walls of the mausoleum have also been adorned with different geometrical and floral patterns which is a unique feature in the designing and decoration of this mausoleum.

2.3 Shrine of Sachal Sarmast

The mausoleum of Sachal Sarmast is located in Sindh province. The architecture of this mausoleum is deeply influenced by the culture and traditions of Sindh. Mosaic tiles have been used extensively in which white, blue, green, gold, orange and turquoise colours have been used very well. From the dadu area to the parapet wall and then to the dome and minaret, the work of mosaic tiling has also been done with great sophistication.

2.4 Shrine of Khawaja Ghulam Farid

Shrine of Khawaja Ghulam Farid is located in Kot Mithan. The shrine is octagonal in plan with domes at the top. On the parapet wall of the verandah adjacent to the shrine, the work of mosaic tile is found in abundance which is in dark blue, sky blue and white colours. There are minarets on all the corners of the roof which are decorated with blue and white mosaic tiles. Horizontal and vertical sections are made on each side of the dome's drum of the shrine which are decorated with gold, blue, turquoise and white mosaic tiles. There was lotus ornamentation on lower portion of each dome of the shrine which had been additionally adorned with mosaic tiles.

2.5 Shrine of Musa Pak Shaheed

The doorway on the north side of the shrine of Musa Pak Shaheed has been elaborately carved in which Qur'anic verses have been written in calligraphy and floral designs have been made with the help of mosaic tiles.

2.6 Shrine of Shah Rukn-e-Alam

The mausoleum of Shah Rukn-e-Alam is located in Qila Qasim Bagh, Multan. There are minarets on every corner of which domes have been built. Mosaic art plates have been installed at the entrances of the shrine and dark blue and turquoise collared mosaic tiles have been installed around one of the doors. The installation of mosaic tiles with mud burnt bricks indicates the historicity of the building.



2.7 Shrine of Shah Shams Tabrez Sabzwari

The mausoleum of Shah Shams Tabrez Sabzwari has a completely unique popularity amongst all of the mausoleums in Multan in which the art of mosaic tiles is reflected. The front door, horizontal and vertical sections across the doors, indoors and outdoors walls, minarets and domes in addition to the extraordinary graves within the boundary of shrine are embellished with mosaic tiles.

2.8 Bibi Pak Daman Mausoleum

She was the mother of eminent Sufi saint Shah Rukn-e-Alam and also a student of Bahauddin Zakariya who introduced the Suhrawardiyyah order of Sufism to Multan. After her death in 1295 AD, she was buried very near the temple of Mai Totla. The tomb is rectangular in shape and is decorated with mosaic tiles. Its east facade is adorned with triple arches resting upon double columns, providing access to a deep portico that houses a number of graves.

2.9 Shrine of Sultan-ul-Arifeen Sultan Bahoo

Shrine of Sultan-ul-Arifeen Sultan Bahoo, which is located in Shorkot, Jhang district, is built in Mughal style architecture. Entrance arch with spandrel area, muqarnas below spandrel, horizontal and rectangular sections over spandrel, calligraphic inscription on the front facade of shrine, brackets below the roof shade, elements of parapet wall, minarets of shrine and mosque, floral patterns over the doorway of hall among shrine and mosque have been thoroughly adorned with various colourful mosaic tiles (*kashi kari*).

2.10 Shrine of Shah Sadiq Nihang

The mausoleum is constructed in conventional style with a square base, an eight-sided drum, and a hemispherical dome. The designs are quite similar in form, though the latter monument is considerably smaller but much more highly decorated, with the exterior clad in blue mosaic tiles for which the region is justifiably famous.

3 FEATURES OF MOSAIC ART (*KASHI KARI*)

Mosaic tiles are extensively used in Sufi shrines in a fine and sophisticated manner by the hands of highly skilled craftsmen. The interior and exterior walls of shrines are decorated with mosaic tiles. It is evident from the variety of colours available in mosaic art that the different regions in this area (Pakistan) present a divergence in culture, traditions and landscapes. In Hala and Multan, two of the most prominent centres of mosaic art, blue and white seem to be the most popular glazing colours – one for its soothing effect on people who are exposed to a burning sun, and another for heat-repelling qualities. With white-on-blue and blue-on-white, the painter creates endless variations of a design that reminds him of what he is missing from the sand dunes around him [14].

Since the earliest period of Islamic history, the ornamental traditions of Muslim cultures have found expression in a wide variety of styles and media. Throughout this vast wave of ornamental diversity and historical longevity, there has remained one essential Islamic quality that differentiates this tradition from all others. One of the main features responsible for such cohesion is the ubiquitous triadic nature of Islamic ornamentation [15]. Mosaic tiles use a variety of colours, including white, cobalt blue, turquoise, aqua, teal, mardasang (brown colour glazed) and gold. From the beginning, this ornamentation tradition used three main

Table 1: Geometrical pattern on shrines.

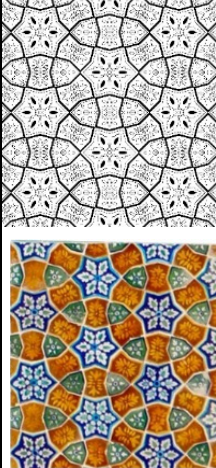
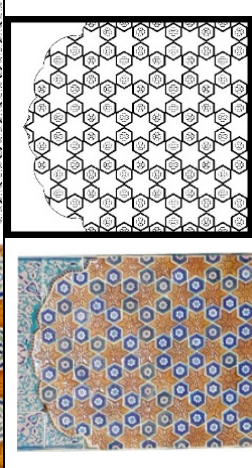
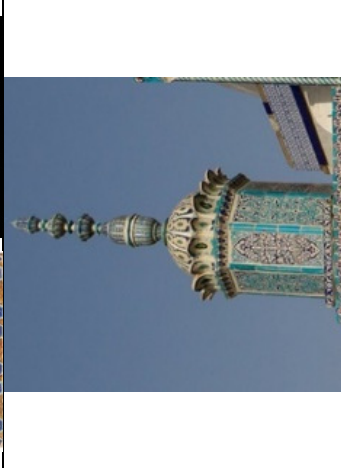
No.	Title design	Placement/location	Design description (colours)
01		<p>This portion of decorative tiles is located at the dado (the lower part of a wall) on the exterior wall of the shrine of Sakhi Hashim Shah.</p>	<p>A variety of geometric shapes were used to decorate this section, including the dodecagon (12-sided polygon), the six-pointed star, the octagonal bow tie, and the octagonal kite shape. There have also been various floral patterns created within the geometrical shapes. (Colours: Cobalt blue, white, orange, golden, aqua blue, teal (green shade))</p>
02		<p>This adorning portion is located on the front facade of the shrine of Sakhi Hashim Shah. this decorative section appears four times on the front facade of the shrine.</p>	<p>This arch has two parts. The first is the spandrel (highlighted in blue) and the second is the inside of the arch, which is highlighted in cobalt blue and golden colour. Spandrel section has been decorated with floral and vegetational designs. Area inside the arch is decorated by combining the two geometrical shapes hexagon and six-pointed star (hexagram). (Colours: Aqua blue, cobalt blue, orange, golden and white)</p>
03		<p>Minaret of the Shrine of Sakhi Hashim Shah.</p>	<p>The shaft of the minaret is octagonal in shape, each side is decorated with multiple vegetable decoration. Lotus flower is decorated over the shaft of minaret and there is a small dome above it and a funnel above it. All surfaces of minaret from shaft to funnel is decorated with mosaic tiles. (Colours: Aqua blue, cobalt blue, white)</p>

Table 1: Continued.



No.	Title design	Placement/location	Design description (colours)
04		<p>Vertical panels over dado (the lower portion of the wall) beside the entrance door of grave chamber of shrine of Shah Abdul Latif Bhittai.</p>	<p>Both geometric patterns and floral decoration can be seen in this picture. Vertically, this section is adorned by the repetition of a beautiful combined 12/6-fold rosette. Areas along this geometric panel are decorated with floral pots. (Colours: White, cobalt blue, aqua blue, orange and teal green)</p>
05		<p>Base and shaft of the minaret of the shrine of Sachal Sarmast.</p>	<p>The mosaic work on the mausoleum of Sachal Sarmast is an excellent example of high quality craftsmanship. The given picture is part of base and shaft of the minaret in which firstly the lotus has been decorated then vertical and square sections have been made on the part of the shaft in which the work of floral patterns has been done very meticulously. The sections or frames are decorated with vegetational detailing. (Colours: Cobalt blue, green, white and aqua blue)</p>

Table 1: Continued.

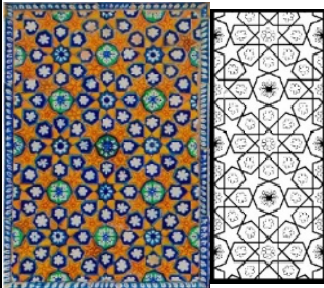
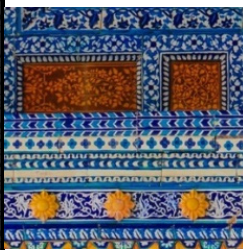
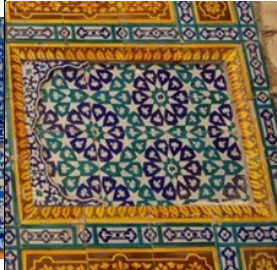
No.	Title design	Placement/location	Design description (colours)
06		Rectangular panel on the exterior wall of the shrine of Sachal Sarmast.	8/4-fold rosette is surrounded by the different polygonal shapes. The same pattern is repeated in this whole frame. (Colours: Golden, cobalt blue, white and green)
07		These vertical and square sections are located at the entrance door of the shrine of Sachal Sarmast.	Floral patterns have been created in the rectangular and square sections. Areas around these sections are decorated with floral patterns and rhombus shape patterns with mosaic tiles. (Colours: Cobalt blue, Aqua blue, white, golden and brown shade)
08		Rectangular panel over the drum of dome of the shrine of Khawaja Ghulam Farid.	This image shows a rectangular cusped arch made of mosaic art. It has three sections, the outer frame of arch is decorated with golden colours with the detail of petals. The second part is the spandrel of the arch with floral decoration and the third part is the one in which the work of geometry has been done very meticulously. In this section 10 fold rosettes have been made around which various geometrical shapes have been made and with them the 10 fold rosettes have been repeated. (Colours: Golden, grown shade, cobalt blue, teal green and white)

Table 1: Continued.

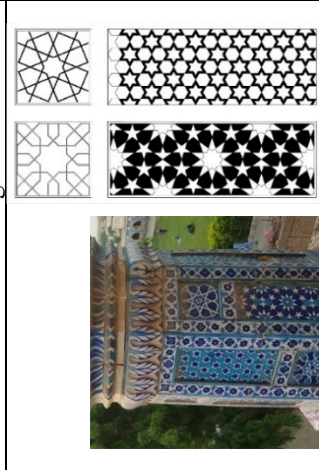
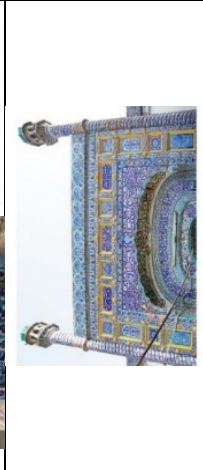
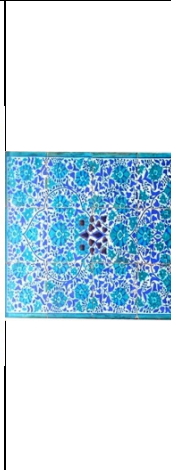
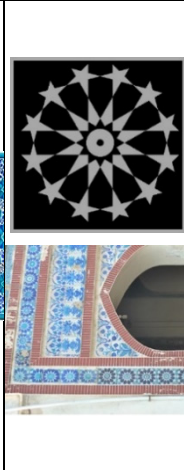
No.	Title design	Placement/location	Design description (colours)
09		Shaft of minaret of the shrine of Khawaja Ghulam Farid.	The shaft of the minaret is octagonal in shape (eight sides) and has square and rectangular segments on each side. These segments are divided by borders that are richly embellished with floral details, and all three segments have multiple different geometrical patterns. The upper portion of the shaft is decorated with lotus detailing, which is also decorated with mosaic tiles. (Colours: Cobalt blue, aqua blue and white)
10		Main central arch of the shrine of Musa Pak Shaheed.	Entrance arch is decorated with multiple art work like floral decoration, Islamic geometrical patterns and calligraphic inscription. (Colours: Cobalt blue, aqua blue, golden and white)
11		Square panel over the door of the shrine of Shah Rukn-e-Alam.	Complex vegetational decoration work is done in this plate which depicts the traditional Islamic craftsmanship. (Colours: White Aqua blue, cobalt blue)
12		Arch spandrel and its surroundings on one of the doors of the shrine of Musa Pak Shaheed.	Spandrel of arch and its upper portion is decorated with vegetational patterns. Vertical and horizontal sections over the spandrel section are decorated with Islamic geometric mosaic tiles. (Colours: Cobalt blue, aqua blue and white)

Table 1: Continued.


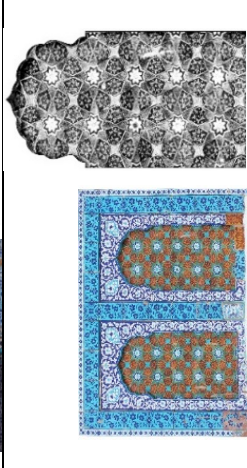

No.	Title design	Placement/location	Design description (colours)
13		<p>Exterior wall of the shrine of Bibi Pak Daman.</p>	<p>It is fully decorated with same geometrical design patterns over mosaic tiles that is covered by geometrical bordered mosaic tiles. (Colours: Cobalt blue, aqua blue and white)</p>
14		<p>Area parallel to spandrel of arch of the shrine of Sultan-ul-Arifeen Sultan Bahoo.</p>	<p>There is very well decorated combination of mosaic tiles with the variation of colours, Islamic geometric patterns and vegetational decoration. In geometric pattern, there is repetition of eight fold rosette found with eight-pointed star in centre of each. (Colours: Cobalt blue, aqua blue, turquoise, and teal green and brown shade)</p>
15		<p>Central entrance between the shrine of Sultan-ul-Arifeen Sultan Bahoo and mosque (situated in this shrine complex).</p>	<p>There are multiple colours, ornamentation details found in this area of the shrine. It includes calligraphic inscription above the arch. Floral pots decoration on soffit of arch are found here. Vegetational decoration is found on the spandrel area of arch. Horizontal sections above the spandrel are decorated with floral pots. Vertical and horizontal panels cover the whole area decorated with floral designing and at the top of all brackets are also decorated with mosaic tiles floral patterns. (Colours: White, green, aqua blue, cobalt blue, turquoise, black and brown shade)</p>

Table 1: Continued.

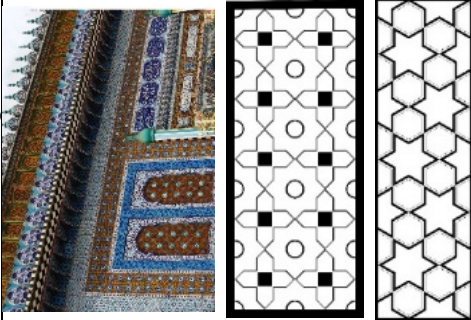
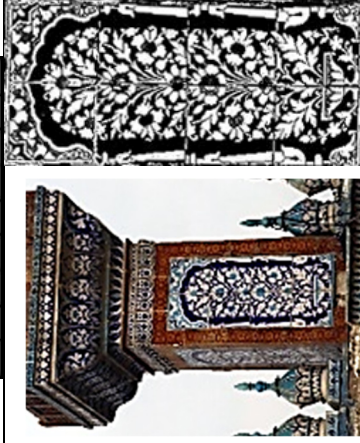

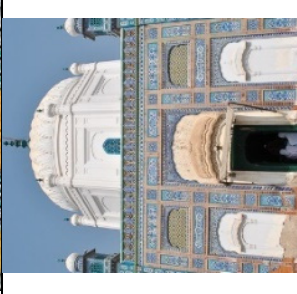
No.	Title design	Placement/location	Design description (colours)
16		<p>Front facade of the shrine of Sultan-ul-Arifeen Sultan Bahoo.</p>	<p>Different types of geometric patterns have been used in each section which include eight-pointed star, cross shaped tiles, six-pointed star, squared frieze tiles and different polygonal shapes. Soffit area is decorated with muqarnas art with the mosaic tiles. Different floral pots and vegetational art have been done over the spandrel area of the arch. (Colours: White, cobalt blue, aqua blue, turquoise, teal green shade, mardasang (brown shade) and golden shade)</p>
17		<p>Minaret of the shrine of Sultan-ul-Arifeen Sultan Bahoo.</p>	<p>The entire minaret is the best example of mosaic art, but the skill with which mosaic tiles have been applied on the shaft of the minaret and its canopy is unparalleled. The hexagonal shape is prominent in the geometrical patterns, which is connected with the help of triangle, and the rest of the space is decorated with floral and vegetational detail. (Colours: White, cobalt blue, aqua blue, turquoise, teal green shade and mardasang (brown shade))</p>

Table 1: Continued.

No.	Title design	Placement/location	Design description (colours)
18		<p>Exterior wall on the external gate of the shrine of Shah Sadiq Nihang.</p>	<p>Area above dado is divided into vertical sections. These sections are decorated with mosaic tiles in very bright colours with Islamic geometrical patterns and floral detailing. (Colours: White, cobalt blue, aqua blue, teal green and bright yellow)</p>
19		<p>Front facade of the shrine of Shah Sadiq Nihang.</p>	<p>Front facade of the shrine is fully decorated with mosaic tiles with different geometrical patterns and floral decorative patterns. (Colours: Teal green, white, yellow, reddish, cobalt blue and aqua blue)</p>

design languages i.e., geometrical patterns, floral patterns and calligraphic inscriptions. Here we will study the geometrical patterns.

3.1 Geometrical patterns

Islamic geometric design patterns are created in mosaic tiles. Following geometric designs combine different designs to create excellent patterns: eight-pointed star, cross shaped tiles, six-pointed star, hexagonal star, squared frieze tile, rectangular frieze tile and triangle shape tiles [3]. Multiple geometrical patterns are found at different Sufi shrines, which have similarities in design as well as in colour combination. Analysed data is shown in Table 1.

After the study of the designs of the shrines, it is found that the common things in all the buildings are the number of colours in mosaic art, the frequent use of Islamic geometrical patterns with floral decoration and the calligraphy's expression on the building according to the era.

4 CONCLUSION AND FUTURE PROSPECTS

Upon visiting various shrines and analysing their data, it becomes apparent that the religion, local culture, civilization, and traditions influenced the architecture of the Sufi shrine by making the mosaic tile art part of the walls, arches, domes, and graves of the shrines, even in multiple colours that were popular locally. A great deal of craftsmanship has been carried out to incorporate not only colours but also Islamic geometric patterns, floral ornamentation, and calligraphic inscription into Sufi shrines architecture. As a result of this research, mosaic art work on the Sufi shrines of this region is explored. Future studies can investigate further on this subject in a new direction that can incorporate vernacular Islamic architecture, local culture, and traditional practices.

The cultural art of mosaic tiles is in decline for a number of reasons. This work of mosaic art is very important to be preserved and restored. However, it would be possible only when the conservation experts of this art are also present to carry out such tasks. There was a decrease in the number of learners of this art over the time, due to which this art has become almost extinct today. Some of the existing buildings are in a dilapidated condition. Since the use of industrial materials and modern materials has increased, the work of this mosaic tile has come down drastically. In other words, the materials made by the industries have also contributed towards making this art extinct. If there is one thing that can save this art and current dilapidated condition of the shrines, it is simply to teach the art of mosaic tiles to as many people as possible so that the buildings are safe and the art can be passed on to future generations. Mosaic art represents great cultural heritage in South Asia which needs attention of academia as well as the policy makers.

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