

1. BLUE AND WHITE POTTERY AND ITS INFLUENCE

By Niranjani and Narendran

Picture 1: Niranjani and Narendran in front of their Panel. *(In cases where such photographs are not available, we can independently ask for the photographs, need not be in front of the panel.)*

The journey of the craft:

Persian blue-and-white pottery reached India through trade and migrating artisans during the early Mughal period. Local production developed under the Mughals when Emperor Akbar invited Persian potters to royal karkhanas and encouraged the use of local materials such as earthenware and quartz with tin glazing and low-temperature firing. Designs gradually shifted from Persian styles to Indian floral motifs. Under Jahangir and Shah Jahan, the craft was refined and widely used in architectural decorations on walls and tiles. The tradition later reached Jaipur through Rajasthani artisans trained in Mughal courts. Sawai Jai Singh II supported these artisans by providing food and accommodation, asking them in return to teach and practice the craft, which led to the development of Jaipur blue pottery as a distinct decorative tradition.

Craft as a product of Cultural Diffusion:

Blue-and-white pottery reached Persia from China mainly through the Silk Road trade routes and later through maritime trade across the Indian Ocean. During the Yuan and Ming periods, Chinese blue-and-white porcelain was exported as luxury goods and diplomatic gifts. Persian merchants and rulers highly admired these ceramics, which inspired local potters to imitate their style using available materials. But Persian potters did not have access to kaolin clay used in Chinese porcelain, so they used fritware, made from quartz powder, crushed glass, and a small amount of clay. To create a white surface, they applied tin-opacified glaze, and the blue designs were painted using cobalt oxide.

Jaipur blue-and-white pottery is an example of cultural diffusion because it grew through the natural movement of ideas, skills, and artisans from one region to another. The technique began in China, was reshaped in Persia, and later reached India through Mughal and Rajasthani craftsmen. In Jaipur, these influences were adapted to local materials, designs, and preferences with royal support, creating a unique art form that reflects the blending of multiple cultures.

Building Study:

The aim is to study the influence of Chandra Mahal in City Palace, Jaipur on the development of Jaipur's blue and white pottery with reference to royal patronage, shared aesthetics and persian design influence.

This study adopts a case study approach focusing on Chandra Mahal, City Palace, Jaipur. It begins with an understanding of Maharaja Sawai Jai Singh II and the City Palace master plan, followed by the spatial and architectural analysis of Chandra Mahal. The study examines Mughal and Rajput architectural influences and the Persian connections seen in motifs and aesthetics. It further analyses the materials used and their use of application within the building.

Drawings, photographs, diagrams, and comparative references support the architectural and cultural analysis.

History of the Building;

Maharaja Sawai Jai Singh II (r. 1699–1743) commissioned the construction of the Jaipur City Palace, including Chandra Mahal, soon after founding Jaipur in 1727. He selected the site at the centre of the planned city and established the palace as the seat of governance, royal residence, and ceremonial core.

Jai Singh II supervised the planning through his chief architect Vidyadhar Bhattacharya, ensuring a strict grid layout aligned with Vastu Shastra principles. He promoted the use of locally sourced red sandstone, Makrana marble, and lime plaster, while encouraging decorative techniques and motifs influenced by Mughal and Persian aesthetics.

Through sustained royal patronage, he employed craftsmen for stone carving, ceramic work, stucco work, mirror decoration, and painting, shaping the City Palace into a lasting architectural and cultural landmark of Jaipur.

The opulence and grandeur of Chandra Mahal are breathtaking. It is a giant seven-story marvel with wide-open windows and doors that provide serene views of the city. It symbolises the Rajput and Mughal gridded patterns and showcases spacious floors, rooms, pavilions, and an open dome. The Chandra Mahal is one of the City Palace's oldest structures with seven well-crafted and meaningful Levels. Sukh Niwas (house of pleasure) is on the first two levels, followed by the Rang Mahal (also known as Shobha Niwas) with its coloured glasswork, and finally, the Chhavi Niwas with its gorgeous blue and white decor. Finally, the Shri Niwas and Mukut Mandir, literally the palace's crowning pavilions, reside on the top two floors.

Maharaja Jai Singh Ji and his family spent significant time in Chandra Mahal. It was the King's well-known residence, known for its grandeur and comfort. This massive edifice took five years to build, and the construction stretched till 1732.

The formation of the city palace resulted in the establishment of rural villages alongside the palace. This was then transformed into an urban centre of trade and marketplace. Its massive seven-story structure consists of magnificent artworks. The paintings on the wall are fabulous, while the pottery and other crockery items depict the greatness of an era gone by. These are intricately painted and carved motifs. Moreover, one can find antique luxury made of precious metals and diamonds which

surround the mansion. There are mainly five craftsmen engaged in the construction of the Chandra Mahal. The stone workers worked on red sandstone and marble works, workers engaged in lime mortar and stucco techniques, carpenters, craftsmen engaged in reverse glass paintings, gemstone work and finally craftsmen engaged in ceramic work which included the blue and white pottery techniques.

Blue and white pottery as a case for cultural diffusion in the context of Chandra Mahal in Jaipur Palace.

Persian courts actively patronised artists and craftsmen, spreading styles. In Chandra Mahal, Jaipur rulers employed and supported artists trained in Persian–Mughal traditions. This patronage enabled the transfer of Persian motifs into architecture, painting, and crafts like blue pottery.

The Blue Room (Sukh Niwas) and interior wall paintings use deep indigo and white floral patterns. This palette directly relates to Persian tilework and miniature painting, and later influenced Jaipur blue and white pottery.

“... floral patterns reflect cultural and artistic influences through their motifs, colours, and style of representation. The use of stylised flowers and tree forms shows inspiration from Persian and Mughal art, where nature was idealised and arranged symmetrically rather than depicted realistically. The blue-and-white colour scheme points to influences from Islamic decorative traditions and Chinese blue-and-white ceramics, which entered India through trade and royal patronage. At the same time, the simplified forms and repetitive patterns adapt these foreign influences to local Indian craft traditions, creating a hybrid style that expresses cultural exchange, royal taste, and regional identity.” (Source last name of the author, year of publication)

Conclusion:

Chandra Mahal, City Palace, Jaipur, embodies an integrated relationship between historical context, royal patronage, planning, architecture, material use, and cultural practices. Maharaja Sawai Jai Singh II played a decisive role in establishing it as the administrative and ceremonial centre of Jaipur. Analysis of the City Palace plan, spatial organisation, and architectural expression reveals a balanced synthesis of Rajput, Mughal, and Persian influences. The materials and their applications reflect climatic and regional suitability. These aspects demonstrate how cultural exchange, shaped by local traditions and royal vision, formed a distinct architectural identity for Jaipur rooted in cultural exchange.

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