The Royal Necropolis of Derawar: A Prism of Islamic Architecture

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ABSTRACT

Royal cemetery of Derawar is an eternal resting place of the ruling family of former Muslim princely state Bahawalpur. This graveyard has historical importance in the sense that eight rulers of an independent state are inhumed at one place. The other striking feature is its architecture, which is an amalgamation of local and Islamic style and recalls the splendor of early Muslim age. Cemetery has two contrastive style of architecture: flat-roofed tomb and doomed mausoleum. Main hall reflects the customary local style with blue and white glanced tiles. There are seven tombs with domes, two of which are outstanding marbled tombs, which are reminiscent to Tāj Mahal. The most significant grave is that of Katharine, the wife of Nawāb Sadiq V, situated on the back of main hall, surrounded by delicate marbled screen.

Keywords: Princely Bahawalpur, cemetery, Islamic architecture, local art.

Introduction

It is believed that royal cemetery stands right on the ruins of old graveyard belonged to the early Islamic era. Located in the sandy terrain, this funerary proved to be the most enigmatic in the entire region. The foundation of cemetery was laid down by the Nawab Mohammad Bahawal Khan ʿAbbassi-II (1772-1809). He moved the center of royal family as well as their dead ones from Bahawalpur to Derawar owing to the consisted attacks of Durrāni rulers of Kabul on Bahawalpur. He initiated this cemetery to bury his elder brother who died during his lifetime and was the first one engraved over there. Its initial structure was in form of an ironed projection (Chhajjah). In the subsequent period, there occurred some slight changes. However, the present edifice of royal cemetery was constructed by Sir Sadiq Mohammad Khan ʿAbbasi-V (1924-1966). He actually wanted to fabricate such a lofty edifice, which may speak for a long time with a mute tongue of his master’s high magnanimity. On the Islamic monuments particularly on tombs and mosques, the pictorial art styles are disallowed rather the art of calligraphy and floral patterns have significant place as alternative of the former. Based on local traditions, the decorative style of Derawar cemetery makes an excellent contribution to Islamic ornamentation.

Historical Perspective of Necropolis

Derawar is an ancient settlement located in the midst of the desert Cholistan,
which is a part of Former Muslim State and present division of Bahawalpur (Punjab). Historically, Cholistan tract is better known and has not always been arid. Once it was populated and cultivated by an old river, locally known as Hakra. The site of Derawar is located on the northern edge of dry bed of Hakra. In archaeological accounts, it belongs to the Hakra Wares phase of Indus Valley Civilization.

During medieval period, Derawar was well known for its magnificent fort that was founded by Rāwal Dev Rāj in the 834 A.D. (909 Sambat). In 18th century A.D., Sindhi warriors Daudputras landed in this region and obtained a Jagīr of Choudarri from Mughal governor of Multan where they established a new town being their capital that was the expression of their Muslim identity as they named it ‘Allahabad’. This jagīr was fertile being located on the eastern bank of Indus and Punjnand. Gradually, they extended their control over the surrounding area and knit them into one political unit. They apprehended the fort of Derawar in 1733, which was a stronghold of Bhatti rulers of Jaisalmer. This possession gave the Abbasids a powerful stroke to the defense of Northwestern frontiers of the State for all times to come. Derawar very soon turned into a hub of political, social and cultural activities of the State. But, Rāi Singh, raja of Jaisalmer regained Derawar with the mediation of Mughal governor in 1747. Nevertheless, Rāi Sing voluntarily turned in Derawar back to the Nawab Mubarak Khan in 1759. In return for this possession, the Nawab had to pay half share in the taxes at Derawar.

As Derawar slipped away, the Nawab Bahawal Khan founded a city Bahawalpur as new capital because it stood on a very ideal location. It was situated right in the center of their possessions and viable to watch their all territories while first capital Allahabad was at a distance on the westwards. With the establishment of Bahawalpur City, Daudputras formed the region into a State and all political activities moved towards this new capital. The Abbasids make great strides to flourish their new abode. Bahawalpur also became the burial of royal family. Actually, the founding father of the State, Mohammad Sadiq Khan Abbassi-I (1727-1746) engraved in Shikarpūr Sind that was former abode of Daudputra Abbasids while two rulers; Amir Bahawal Khan I (1746-1749) and Amir Mubarak Khan (1749-1772), along with some other family members were enshrined in the Malook Shah graveyard at Bahawalpur.

However, the Afghan attacks on Bahawalpur between the periods from 1785 to 1788 caused to move their cemetery in Derawar during the last decades of 18th century. Taimur Shah (1747-1793), Afghan sovereign vandalized the Bahawalpur city and turned it into ashes. Therefore, the first precautionary measure of Daudputras was to secure their three priorities; their treasure; their woman; and their dead ones. Against any disruption by antagonists, they had already moved first two primacies to Derawar that became the center of their military strength and therefore, was free from collateral threats so the royal cemetery was also established over there at a distance of 500 yards from the fort of Derawar. Accordingly, Derawar
assumed a political worth mainly due to its grandiose fort that was the hub of political and administrative activities and at present being the interment of former royal family. However, royal cemetery is an heirloom of Abbasids who kept it lock and watched by two guards. The construction of the present building of cemetery started on 5th January 1934 and completed on 22nd September 1952.

The main hall is the nucleus of cemetery as eight rulers of former Muslim State are keeping eternal rest. Their graves are built in an array. The table 1 demonstrates the list of eight rulers of the State inhumed over there. The first grave from the eastern side is the burial of Jindwada Abbassi, brother of Bahawal Khan II and died during his lifetime while Bahawal Khan II, was the first ruler buried in the royal cemetery. Sir Sadiq Muhammad Khan-V the originator of the present edifice was the last Nawab of the State enshrined over there. He breathed his last on 24th May, 1966. After partition his services, and financial contribution for the sake of new country, deserve a separate and more detailed treatment. He annexed the Bahawalpur State with Pakistan without any condition. He refused to accept any sort of material advantage offered by India and turned down many offers made by Jawahir Lāl Nehru. The edifice of graveyard gives us an insight of his grace, his piety, love for beauty and art. This is an expression of his refine nature from a strong ruler to an obsessive lover for architecture.

In the last grave, Amir Mohammad Abbas Khan, the eldest son of Sir Sadiq Khan V who was the former governor of Punjab. He was born on 22 March 1924, and died on 14th April, 1988. The space for two further members of royal family is specified on the royal chamber in the west of hall; Amir Salahuddīn and his eldest son Bahawal Khan. Adjaecently, four kids of royal family are buried in this marvelous hall. They are: Sahibzāda Fateh Khan the son of Bahawal Khan-IV, Rahimyār Khan the son of Sadiq Khan-IV, Phulan Khan, grandson of Bahawal Khan-III and Abdullah Khan, son of Sir Sadiq Khan-V.

Table 1 Rulers of the Bahawalpur State inhumed in the Royal Cemetery.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Sr.</th>
<th>Cenotaph of the Rulers</th>
<th>Time period</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Nawab Bahawal Khan II</td>
<td>1772-1809</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>Nawab Sadiq Muhammad Khan II</td>
<td>1809-1825</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>Nawab Bahawal Khan III</td>
<td>1825-1852</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>Nawab Fateh Khan</td>
<td>1853-1858</td>
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<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>Nawab Bahawal Khan IV</td>
<td>1858-1866</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>Nawab Sadiq Muhammad Khan IV</td>
<td>1866-1899</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7</td>
<td>Nawab Bahawal Khan V</td>
<td>1899-1907</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8</td>
<td>Nawab Sadiq Muhammad Khan V</td>
<td>1907-1954</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Mohammad Hafeez ur Rehman, Ziker e Kram (Delhi: Mahboob Ul Matabe Press.1937), 79.
Architecture of Necropolis

Derawar cemetery comprised the total area of 289 x 167 feet with a single entrance from the eastern side. The main gate is made of wood, measured by 12.3 x 8.9 feet. The graveyard is a multi-structured edifice. It contains main grave hall with flat roof, seven tombs with dooms, and three graves under a pavilion. The backyard of main hall is also crowned with a grave, elegantly wrapped in marbled screen. Some other members of ruling family are engraved in front open yard. The entire structure of graveyard fulfills the aesthetic aspect and looks pleasant to the eye.

The architecture of Royal graveyard is inspired by the funerary memorials of Uch and Multan, which present an amalgamation of Iranian, Central Asian and local elements. In this region, foreign style of architecture is introduced through constant relations with Central Asia started with the arrival of the Ghaznavids in the Subcontinent. Moreover, in 13th and 14th CE, the Iran and Central Asia came under dark clouds caused by the Mongol hordes. A large number of population including artisans moved to the southern parts of the Subcontinent. Accordingly, funerary buildings were embellished with a new style of architecture. As Ahmed Nabi Khan posits that the soil of above mentioned areas was the first and foremost which absorbed the Iranian and Central Asian style of architecture. Sheikh Khurshid named it as Seraiki architecture:

This style of architecture is rooted in central Asia. It was however first developed in the Seraiki speaking area of the Gomel valley and even in certain areas of Baluchistan like Sibi and Kharan, maturing finally at Multan.

The architectural design of the royal edifice has two different categories: flat roofed tomb and tombs with dooms. Both are discussed separately.

Part one - Flat Roofed Royal Mausoleum

The main entrance of grave hall has been flanked by two doors on each side, which are a fine model of wood carving. A stripe of blue tiles in vertical shape, imprinted with the Qur’anic verses of Ayātul Kursi, embrace the door. On the parapet of hall, the ninety-nine names of Allah are printed on blue tiles, in calligraphically style. The roof is beautified with twenty-eight cupolas. Four shafts at each corner of hall rise high and taking the shape of Minarets with cupolas. The conception of a wonderful memorial is presented in its finest and beautiful expression in the interior of grave hall.

The Royal Chamber is gorgeously ornamented with traditional Islamic non-figurative art, measured by 118 x 18 feet. Almost every inch of interior is covered with decoration. The ceiling of the hall is adorned with the flat glass. Mirrored roof embellished with a border of brittle wood with conventionalized floral scrolls and carefully arranged in harmony. Actually, ceiling decoration with glass is a Mughal tradition.
Walls are garlanded with painting on floral pattern. Plants have curves style of leaves and are ornamented with the Iranian style. There are bouquets to suggest the ever-blooming vases of flowers symbolic of immortality. Colours and motifs are infused in a brilliant form. Glazed tiles of blue and white colours have been used for the frieze of four-sided wall. In fact, wall painting is an Iranian tradition, which reached in its full gloom during Mughal era, particularly in the period of Jahangir.\textsuperscript{19} The first use of floral-pattern in the Bahawalpur region was started in the tomb of Bi Bi Jindwâdi (lady of long life) at Uch. Animated motifs of the tomb of Bi Bi Jindwâdi are most illustrative of this phenomenon. This tomb was constructed by the prince of Khurasân in 1493.\textsuperscript{20}

Likewise, enameled tile work (Kashikari) presented in figure 1 is lavishly used in the whole building. Tile decoration is apt for the atmosphere of the deserted area because it can bear the intensity of climate like excessive heat, rains and cold. The choice of blue colour, used in the tile work of graveyard, in different shades of cobalt blue, indigo blue and turquoise, which represent a symbol of nobility, truth and fidelity. Tile work was generated from Iran and then transplanted to Islamic world. The earliest evidence of Iranian styled blue and white tiles is found in the tomb of Baha-ud-din Zakaria at Multan (1264-1286).\textsuperscript{21}

\textbf{Figure: 1 Local Decorative Art with Traditional Kashikari}
The floor of main chamber has geometrical pattern with white marble. Each cenotaph has 7.9 feet length and 3.11 feet width, and enclosed with white marble along vertical strips of black marble. The graves are different in style and design but Sūrat Al Ikhlās is carved on the each cenotaph which is an expression of their heart believes in monism. All cenotaphs are covered with white sheets of cloth except the grave of Sir Sadiq-V that is covered with green sheet. White marble columns are found on the head of graves like tombstone. Nine columns have an equal height of 4.7, but one is longer with the height of 5.4 ft. these columns are a handsome presentation of carved flowers on marble tiles. Similar columns are found in the tomb of Yousuf Gardesi at Multan.

The exterior of royal grave hall is a flat roofed, rectangular room. Actually, the flat-roofed tomb is an indigenous tradition. It has an indirect inspiration from rectangular tomb of Yousuf Gardesi (d.1136 A.D) at Multan. The tombs of Jalaluddīn Surkh Posh (d.1291 A.D), Jahāniya Jahān Gasht (d.1383 A.D.), and Sadruddīn Rajān Qatal (d.1424 A.D.), at Uch, had also flat roofed. These tombs of saints at Uch were renovated by the Nawāb Bahawal Khan-III in 1845 and Sadiq khan-IV in 1882, subsequently. On the outer side of hall, there are twenty-eight windows, nine of which are made of white marble and remaining are in red sandstone. Windows are covered with lattices, which are painted in white. The Qur’ānic verses of surah ya’asī are imprinted on a strip of blue tiles around the wooden windows. These verses are thus religious in essences and philosophical in character. Muslims traditionally recite them at the time of death or any crucial moments and these have been very judiciously selected for inscription in the tomb.

Part Two - Domed mausoleum:

The domical roofing on memorials in the Sub-Continent was made for the first time in the tomb of Muhammad bin Ḥaroon in 854 hijra, at Bela in Baluchistan and Khalid bin Walīd’s tomb at Kabirwāla in Khanewāl district. In southern Punjab, the first doom was found on the tomb of Bahauddīn Zakaria (1262 A.D) at Multan. In Bahawalpur region, the mausoleum of Shah Gardez at Adam Wahān, near Bahawalpur, was considered the first doomed tomb. It is composed of mud brick and burnt bricks. External base of dome is decorated with a frieze of glazed tiles, in blue and white with painted word of Allah. Its date and other information’s are not known however, Ahmad Nabi Khan considers this tomb to be forerunner of the tomb of Bahauddīn Zakaria.

The royal cemetery has a bunch of seven domed-mausoleums, which presents a very welcome contrast in the architectural accomplishment. The female members of royal family are buried in the enclosed tombs with domes. It is a tradition of royal family that names of female members are not to be disclosed for public. Besides, no male can enter in these tombs except their family members because these women are considered in veil even after their death.
Tomb.1 From the eastern side of cemetery, first tomb is the burial of the mother of Sadiq Khan-IV.\(^{25}\) It is a simple brick structured tomb on a square plan. Its second story has octagonal shape with seven windows, which are covered with cemented lattices. On the outer border of lattices, there are strips of blue tiles having Qur’ānic verses as well as floral designs. The drum of its onion shaped dome has lost its paint but other structure is maintained. Eight cylindrical turrets made of burnt bricks wrap it. The parapet has a simple border of cut bricks. The wooden door has also a border of blue tiles imprinted with Qur’ānic verses.

Tomb.2 This is the burial of the wife of Sadiq Khan-IV. This tomb is standing on eastern side towards the outer gate. The exterior has been ornamented with glazed tiles cut into square shape. Each square is decorated with a complete design of pottery, fruit dishes, pots, trays, of typical Multani style. It is fully adorned with blue and white mosaic work. It looks like a grand repository of decorative panels. The use of faience mosaics is a part of traditional Multani style, which first used in the tomb of Bahauddin Zakaria at Multan. There are six bands of blue tiles embracing the tomb. This mausoleum contains three wooden lattices of Central Asian style placed on the outer side of windows.

Tomb.3 This is funeral of the mother of Sadiq Khan-IV. She has credit to offer the British to take over the administration due to the perplexing situation prevailing in the State in 1866.\(^{26}\) She died in 1878 AD. Her tomb is standing on square plan. Its second floor held the octagonal shape, and decorated with blue tiles. Its dome is embellished with blue tiles, which are decaying with the passage of time. Turrets have glazed tiles. The mausoleum is constructed of burnt bricks of excellent quality. Wooden door is decorated with different Qur’ānic inscription.

Tomb.4 In this tomb the mother of Sadiq Khan-V is lying. The tomb is standing in front of the main hall, with plain dome. It has octagonal upper storey with eight windows, beautified with lattices. The walls are adorned with well-textured cut bricks. Its facade has a band of red bricks having triangle shape used into different directions. Actually, this pattern has been derived from Hindu tradition, according to which the triangle is the representatives of the elements of water, air, fire, and earth. A strip of white and blue tile with floral pattern is embracing the windows and door.

Tomb 5, 6, & 7. Three mausoleums are situated on the north of graveyard, in the same line, having the same area of 76.8 feet. The other female members of royal family are enshrined over there. One tomb is made of red brick, with decorative details of blue tile and cut bricks as well. It has upper storey and its dome is strengthen by eight turrets, which are round in shape and slightly tapered toward the top. The other two tombs are marbled and placed on inlaid marble platform. Both marbled tombs create a very fantastic and striking ambiance. The one marble tomb has blue tiled floor. Its windows are embellished with colourful glass in green, blue and yellow. The first marbled tomb in the Subcontinent was that of Saleem Chishti constructed in 1572 CE.
These tombs are beautified with equal twin columns on each corner of square. The top of all domes of graveyard is crowned with a complex finial, placed on the base of lotus. The use of glass in all these tombs is definitely for the purpose of decor as well as to save the interior from dust as locating in the desert. The domes of all tombs are directly placed over the walls and have Mellon like Samarqandi style.²⁷

Figure: 3 Marbled Latices
Backyard

The special feature of this graveyard is its impressive backyard. On the backside of grave hall, there is a unique and fabulous tomb of the British wife of Sadiq Khan-V, named ‘Katherine’. She was the cousin of Queen Victoria and aunt of Mother Queen Elizabeth. She embraced Islam and renamed as Fatima. Field postulates her eternal feelings for the Nawab in these words;

“Outside and around to the south stood another gleaming white tomb with a marble tracery retaining wall, giving the effect of white lace. Here lay the remains of the present Ruler’s English wife who begged to be buried “at his feet” since, by tradition, she could not be inside the main mausoleum. She was just outside near the space provided for the ruler when he dies.”

Her tomb comprises an area of 57 feet in oval with carved melon like roof. It has black and white marble floor with checkerboard pattern, which can be understood in terms of its illusionary effect. A beautiful marble screen with the height of 7.10 feet surrounds the cenotaph. The screen is consisted of the most delicate and subtle lattice of imperial splendor. It has a sentimental appeal for the spectators and creates loveliest phenomena. The use of marble screen is induced in the subcontinent, on the main entrance of Khāngah Faridia Pak Patan by Allauddin Khilji (1296-1320). In addition, the tomb chamber of Nizamuddin Auliya is also
flanked by marble lattice screen. The same screen is used in the tomb of Saleem Chishti (1572) at Fatheh Pur Sikri. Nevertheless, the use of marbled screen in full bloom was accumulated in Taj Mahal of Agra where the cenotaph of Shahjahan and Mumtaz Mahal, were wrapped in the elegant marble screen, but with the difference of lattice.

**Figure: 5 Tomb of British wife of Sir Sadiq Khan V (Fatima)**

On the right side of Katharine’s tomb, there is a marbled grave of the daughter of Sadiq Khan-V. On the opposite of Katherine’s tomb, there is another grave of wife of the Nawab Sadiq-V in open area. On the right side of yard, there are three graves with square pavilion and one grave in open yard. Some other cenotaphs have canopy structure.

It is understood that the first expression of artisanship of man was in wood. Woodcarving was integral to Islamic architecture as one of its chief decorative devices. However, in Derawar necropolis, woodwork has subdued role because of its perishable nature in hot and arid climate of plains. Woodwork is found only on the doors, windows and very little on the ceiling in form of delicate frames for decor. However, these minor specimens of wood are exquisitely carved with floral designs by the artisans of Sitpur even the door frames are also carved with floral pattern. Their rhythm is marvelous. Metal has subordinated place in the architecture of graveyard. Only the knobs, knots, door pulls and foils of domes are made of metal. The glazed tiles, cut bricks and marble are the major component for the decor of the cemetery.
Conclusion
The cemetery has an exclusive position that such a number of the head of a former Muslim princely State are enshrined at one place. In this context, this is a unique paradigm of its own kind, which hardly is found anywhere else or at least in South Asia. The splendor of the State that starts from the glorious projects for the wellbeing of its masses comes to an end in this graveyard. In spite of several ecological obstacles like the dust, the heat and the deserted terrain, the necropolis presents a place of spiritual solace and its atmosphere is not gloomy. Islamic funerary art is substantial attribute of this cemetery. It reflects the certainty that the dead will live in this sort of paradise setting. It serves not only a purpose of cemetery but also invokes in us the feelings of contentment, peace and holy vows.

References

10. Shahamet Ali, PP. 74-75.
16. Seraiki is local language, widely speaking in the districts of Bahawalpur, Dera Ghazi Khan, Jhang, Multan, Mianwali, Muzzafer Garh and Rajanpur. It traced its roots in the old valley of Derawar. It is a tint of Sindhi language but has its own tone and tenor. Its special feature is vocal music, sweetness and burning passion of love. See for details Nurul Zaman Ahmad Auj, Cholistan: land and people, PP. 54-58

21 A tile is a thin, flat slab, usually of burnt clay, used structurally or decoratively in buildings. Sind and Multan is the centre of this art.

22 Sheikh Khurshīd, P. 51.

23 Ibid.

24 He was an Arab governor and killed in 854, during era of Mutawakal Billah. Its doom is composed with brick work. See further in Ahmad Nabi Khan, *Islamic architecture of Pakistan*, 73.

25 Aziz Ur Rehmān, *Tarikh Derawar*, PP. 22-23

26 Aziz Ur Rehmān, Subah Sadiq, P. 136.


29 This can be seen in the palace of Amber (Jaipur, India), which was made by Jai Sing 2nd in the 17th century. Henri, PP. 204-206.

30 Ahmad Nabi Khan, *Architecture of South Asia*, P. 73.


32 Sitpur is a small town of Tehsil, Alipur, District Muzzafer Garh, Punjab. It is the centre of wood carving in Southern Punjab.