

## **Khem Bedi Singh Haveli at Kallar Sayedan Rawalpindi, Center of Socio Cultural and Religious Activities**

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**Abstract:** This research paper is a kind of a case study of a residential building almost 200 years old, which has not been documented. Such building complexes were not only used for residential purpose, but also for some kind of religious or social significance in Subcontinent. They are commonly known as Havelies, a Sanskrit word for a Residential palace like structure for the Elite of the area. It has been discussed in detail that these kinds of buildings (Havelies) commonly had other structures attached to the residence in the same boundary, like stables, guard rooms, worship areas and sometimes graveyards. This specific Haveli or Mansion is so rich and fascinating in its architectural style and art of Mural painting that it not only tells us about the religious stories from Hindu Epics, but also of Sikh Gurus and stories from the life of the Maharajas (kings) of India. The wood work in the building is also very intricate especially doors and windows are carved with floral and geometrical designs. The architectural style used in this Havelies is a combination of Hindu and Mughal building style. The technique used in Murals is Fresco. The general condition is deteriorating. The main objective to document this Haveli is to take the attention of the authorities for the restoration and preservation of such buildings, which are dying or vanishing with the passage of time and because of the negligence of the Archaeology Department and Ministry of Culture and Heritage. This building is commonly known as Bedi Mehal (Bedi Palace), which has been a place of social and religious gathering and was used as a center for the Sikh people of the area of Kallar Sayedan at the time of partition, when they moved to Indian side. And present condition of the building is pathetic, which needs attention of the tourists also.

**Keywords:** Bedi, Kallar Sayedan, Margalla,

### **Introduction**

It is important to mention here that the area of Rawalpindi is overwhelmingly filled with Hindu Sikh Havelies and buildings. During this research about Bedi Mehal, it was revealed that this place has always been having some religious and social significance. Before creation of Pakistan Haveli was owned by Bedi family, which is a Sikh family of religious importance and they also had prominent positions in the Government organization. They used this building for residential as well as a religious and social purpose. They had certain halls in the building that were used for organizing events of social and religious importance. During partition of India and Pakistan, Khem Bedi Singh Haveli has been used as a safe place for the Sikhs of Kallar

Sayedan. After Independence of Pakistan in 1947, this Haveli was handed over to Government High School for boys Kallar Sayedan. It is very regretful that this important building has not been documented in detail, and never caught the eye of the authorities like Archaeology department or ministry of Culture, so that they could work for the restoration and preservation of this important building. The result is that this Haveli has never been documented (except for a survey report published in TIAC journal 2010) although a great number of eminent people belonged to this area which is known as Kallar Sayedan. This negligence of the local people and the school authorities became one of the major reasons for the destruction of this building. Before partition of Subcontinent, along with the Hindus, Muslims, Jains, Buddhists,

another religious and political community that established in this area is Sikh. The religious leader was Baba Guru Nanak and the religious book is known as Guru Garanth Sahaib. Before the division of Subcontinent there was a lot of syncretism in different religions of this area. The reason for this syncretism was the Culture. The Cultural amalgamation with religion has been a source of influence for each religion.

This dissertation will open a window to the past, that how the owners of this haveli not only respected their own beliefs, but beliefs of other religions. May be that is the main reason that none of the Sikhs have been reported killed in Kallar Sayedan, but all the residents were transferred to Indian side safely. Since partition of India and Pakistan is considered one of the greatest uprooting in the history. It was not monitored by any authority (Lamb, Alastair 1993: 1- 3). This is not less than a miracle that all the residents undamaged reached their destination.

The Haveli of Khem Bedi Singh at Kallar Sayedan is a great contribution of the Bedi family. Bedi family was not only known and respected because of their financial position but also for their religious affiliation, which is considered to be the 5<sup>th</sup> or 7<sup>th</sup> decedents of Guru Nanak, the religious leader of Sikhs. When this Haveli was visited first time, a senior teacher Mr Sallahud Din of Government Boys High School Kallar Sayedan (Working in the vicinity of the Haveli) had been a great help not only accompanied us for visiting the Haveli, but was a great source of oral information, which he heard from his forefathers. He also referred us to an important personality of Kallar Sayedan, Master Karamat Husain, who is an author of many books about Kaller Sayedan named as *Tarikh-i-Kallar Sayedan* (History of Kaller Sayedan) in five Volumes.

It is said that during the partition of India and

Pakistan when Sikhs were moving from the area of Kallar Sayedan all the Sikhs of this area took refuge in this Haveli (Husain, 2007: 27). Apart from Architectural details this mansion has great treasures of aesthetic significance, especially Mural paintings (Plate 1).

### **Geography of Rawalpindi**

Rawalpindi is situated on the Potohar plateau, and from the ancient time it has been used as a cross-road of history and commerce. It lies at the foot of Margalla hills in the middle of Soan and Haro rivers.

A. H. Dani said in PTV show “if excavation was carried on along these two rivers there might not be any land without the signs of any old civilization. He believed that this whole area is very rich archaeologically. Rawalpindi is 510 meters above sea level. The climate of this area is extreme.

Gakkhars ruled the area for a long time. Even Jahangir mentioned in his Tuzk-i- Jahangiri that Gakkhars had animal instinct to fight with each other. Jahangir tried to stop them but failed. Finally, Sikhs, Malakha Singh tried hard to develop this city and succeeded who silently handed over to the British (Abidi, 2005: 47- 49).

### **Sikhism**

Sikhism is the religion which started in Subcontinent, Punjab in 1500s. It is considered the fifth largest religion of the world. The term Sikh is from Sisya meaning disciple or learner. Guru Nanak is the founder of this religion. Guru Nanak’s family was upper caste Hindus, but he was against Hindu rituals from the very beginning. Guru Nanak believed in Compassion, contentment and truth. The stories of the life of their Guru are important for the Sikhs (Stronge 1999: 33). Guru Nanak the religious leader or apostle of Sikhs was born in Nankana Sahaib in the center of West Pakistan. Like all other

religions that arose in Subcontinent, Sikhism was also a product of the reaction against the dominant Brahmanism and its rigid cast system. People, who supported Sikh religion and worked for its growth, their minds were influenced by the impact of Islam in subcontinent. The work of Muslim Sufi Saints is worth mentioning here because it became a major source of inclusion of the non-Muslims in their group. So to some extent we can say that Sikhism was more influenced by the Muslim theology of equality of mankind (Khan, 1962: 1). Guru Nanak's family was Hindus of the Bedi cast. He was born on 15<sup>th</sup> April 1469 in Punjab and died in 1539. Within half a century of their tenth Gurus death, Sikhs became a major political force and established a state of their own. In 1799 Ranjit Singh, the 19 year old leader of Khalsa band seized powerfully the city of Lahore and was proclaimed Maharaja two years later (Stronge 1999: 37-38).

### **Kaller Sayedan**

Kaller Sayedan is a tehsil of Rawalpindi District since 2004. It is located about 45 km from Rawalpindi. The name Kaller Sayedan is derived from the Sayed families, settled here long ago. Another belief is that Kaller was a waste land and all the wells here had *Khaara Pani* (a term used for rough waters). So, the term Kaller is derived from *Kharaa*. The wells of Kaller Sayedan still have rough water (Plate 2).

Baba Khem Singh Bedi one of the founders of the Singh Sabha movement, was born on 21<sup>st</sup> February 1832 at Kallar Syedan who was a direct descendant, in the thirteenth place, of Guru Nanak. He was knighted in 1898. ([http://www.chohakhalsa.com/folder\\_2/khem\\_singh\\_bedi.htm](http://www.chohakhalsa.com/folder_2/khem_singh_bedi.htm))

According to Hussain, he was born in 1838, whereas according to other sources his date of birth is 1832. The construction of the haveli started in 1840. Most of the construction work

was completed by Khem Bedi Singh, but since this was a large project, it was continued by Guru Baksh Singh Bedi. Khem Singh Bedi died in 1904 (Plate 3).

### **Architecture of Khem Bedi Singh Haveli**

After 1947, some of these rooms of the haveli were occupied by revenue and education departments. One of these rooms was used as the office of the Head Master (Plate 4). On the Western side was a big stable, is not existed now. It is said to have been well equipped with all kind of horses, dogs of expensive breeds and all of animals were kept there". According to Husaain, Khem Bedi Singh was very fond of animals. Mostly Muslims were employed to take care of the stable animals, and they were handsomely paid. There is an iron pillar in the middle of the old Haveli building and the new school building near the grave of Hotay Shah (Plate 5). This Pillar is said to be 250 years old. The grave of Hotay Shah is known as Hotay Shah *kaa takyaa* (Final living place of the dead).

### **Grave of Hotay Shah**

In the middle of the old Haveli building and the new school building is a bed shaped platform This is the grave of a Sufi Saint Hotay Shah (Plate 6). It is also said that this Sufi Saint was generally forgotten by Muslims, but Bedi family took care of him. The prevailing tradition of syncretism in religion before partition through these Saints in Subcontinent, Hotay Shah was buried by Sikhs by all religious fervor of Muslims. It is also a strong belief of the locals that it was because of the blessings of this Saint that no one from the non-Muslim population was killed at the time of partition in 1947. All the Sikhs of Kaller Sayedan were safely transferred to the Sikh majority population area on Indian side without any killing which is nothing less than a miracle.

Another Sufi Saint has also been mentioned by the locals of the area who lived almost 100 meters

away from Bedi Mehal, she was a lady known as *Mai Faqirni*. This also proves that the area of subcontinent is famous of these Sufi Saints, who had *Murids* or devotees from all kinds of religious and social background, same is true for this lady Sufia (lady saint), who had many devotees from Sikh and Muslim community. After her death, the body was brought to Bedi Mehal for respectful burial of this Lady Saint. People from all walks of life who were devotees of this Sofia (lady saint) could come for the *Didar* (Visual experience) of their *piir* (Husain, 2007: 74- 79).

In this respect, we can say that Bedi Mehal was also used for social activities of the time. All the buildings including Stable and gardens have not even a single mark of their existence in the compound of the Khem Bedi Singh Haveli now. This reveals the great heritage and historical loss.

The ruins of this Haveli tell us that this must have been a beautiful building, generally a mixture of Hindu and Muslim style of architecture. This residential cum religious building is heavily decorated from inside. They have not only used the wood extensively for the doors windows and balconies but also have painted pictures on the wall of most of the rooms. These Fresco paintings depict two kinds of subjects religious and secular, and at many places they are mixed with each other. Such paintings are very common in the buildings of 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> century specially palaces and Havelies. That is why the same kind of decoration can be seen in some other important Sikh buildings in Punjab such as Haveli of Hari Singh Hawli in Gujranwala, Saman Burj in Wazirabad, the residence of Maharajah Ranjit Singh, Haveli of Nounahal Singh at Lahore and many other Sikh buildings.

### **Material, Construction and Plan**

The original complex of Khem Bedi Singh haveli had many other structures included in the area inside the boundary wall. But now only the

residential place exists in its original condition and is deteriorating fast with the passage of time (Plate 7).

It is said that in construction of this building the best masons from Attack and Rawalpindi were employed. Stone is the prime material used as material for the construction of haveli, acquired locally. The building is constructed in Ashlar masonry. The structure of this building resembles a lot to the Muslim and Hindu buildings. The walls are plastered with lime and Jute fiber, which is a very strong binding material for the stone and hence is the reason for survival of this building without any restoration work till about 200 years. This binding material is stronger than modern cement but needs a lot of effort to prepare. The stone measures 4x12x3 inch. The over- all construction work of the haveli started by the father of Khem Bedi Singh and was carried on by Khem Bedi himself. It almost continued for about 50 to 60 years with minor additions to the building.

This building is rectangular in plan and divided into two portions entered by two different doors. First portion has rooms on three sides and the fourth or Eastern side has a wooden gate to enter the building. The first portion must have been used for social and religious activities because it has an enormous assembly hall on northern side and there is line of 3 rooms on southern side might have been used to accommodate the guests who were there to participate in the event. The second portion appears to be used for residential purpose and also social and religious activities in which women also participated either from the upper galleries or from the balconies and windows. This building has five stories including basements (will be discussed at the end) and the upper most gallery. There are stairs going upwards to each story at all the four corners. At the turn of each story there is a bath room.

All the outer wall or boundary walls of haveli are

3 feet wide, but inner walls are 18 inches wide (Plate 8). The first rectangular portion of the ground floor serves as citadel also, because the 2<sup>nd</sup> entrance to the inner square in plan building is also enormous. This entrance is very high because of the inner construction that it separates the inner building from the rectangular outer building.

There are over all 15 rooms in the first rectangular portion of the ground floor. Small room under the stair case is also included in this.

The width of the Gate is 5.5 feet and the height is 7.5 feet made of wood. The wood used in haveli is Shisham. The wooden door is intricately carved and inlaid by star shaped nail like metal knobs to join the carved parts with the door (Plate 9).

### **Inner Area Description of First Courtyard and Rooms**

After entering from the gate, one approaches in a guard room. It has a less decorated simple arched window and a rectangular door on the left, which leads towards the courtyard. There is an arched stair case going up turning to the right is another guard room, on top of the lower one.

### **Assebmly/Event Hall**

Across the courtyard is a big rectangular Hall that has been used as an assembly or meeting hall at the time of Baba Khem Bedi Singh. According to the locals, this Hall is used to be a piece of artistic decoration. Assembly hall was ornamented with a big chandelier in the middle, even after 1947 (Plate 10).

While looking at the hall from the court yard we can see that there is a big wooden Jharoka with a half dome at the top ornamented with lotus petals. It is 25 feet high and almost 6 to 7 feet wide. Jharoka is in quite destroyed condition. The wood work in it a master piece of carving. The half dome has five patelled floral motif all around it.

The rectangular Jali in the arches is filled with star shaped geomatric paterns. There is a ventilator on top. On the right side is the entrence door leading to the 2<sup>nd</sup> courtyard. This door is also a masterpiece of carving. Sikh architecture has a combination of Muslim and Hindu architectrul styles. The same kind of influence can be noticed in the decoration style here. These Islamic patterns on top of Jharoka arches prove that the Sikhs were interested in adapting any good element from others that can make their buildings more attractive (Plate 11).

In earlier times this big hall was very well decorated with a chandelier in the center, which was sold to a rich person of that time in only 500 hundred rupees in an auction, which meant a lot in 1948. The big rectangular hall is divided both length and width wise in to two separate rooms by a big semi- circular arch. The rectangular part is 36 feet wide whereas the partition of the hall is 7 feet wide. This hall is divided from the width by three big arches, which had a basement that has all fallen down.

In the first court yard after the guard room on the left wall or the Western side opposite to the 2<sup>nd</sup> entrance gate with the portrait of Khem Singh Bedi, there are five multi foiled Niches (Plate 12). These niches may be used for oil lamps. Niches have been a tradition of Subcontinent in all religious as well as residential buildings. On the Eastern side of the first court yard there is another carved door with a big multi foiled arch that takes us to the gallery or the next part of the building. The windows are also a piece of masterly carved wood work, small arched windows.

These windows are with thin attached columns in between. In the middle of this multi foiled arched entrance gate there is a sculptured and painted portrait. It is said to be the portrait of Baba Khem Singh Bedi himself painted like a sun god (Plate 13).

There is a veranda going all around the court yard

with murals, and rooms around the veranda. There are all together 20 rooms in the 2<sup>nd</sup> courtyard. To the left is the small room with the stair case going upwards and a small entrance with the stairs going down wards to the basement.

Coming back again to the entrance to this veranda going right there are two rooms one of them must be a basement which is totally destroyed (Plate 14). This veranda is 60 feet long on all sides of the arched court yard in the middle with murals. There are two balconies on both right and left side on the 1<sup>st</sup> floor, which are finely carved, still in good condition (Plates 15 & 16). One can see the fresco paintings fading gradually.

### **First Floor: Plan, Art and Architecture**

As discussed, 1<sup>st</sup> floor building is constructed mostly on a square plan (Plate 17). There are only few rooms built above the first portion of the ground floor, which is rectangular in plan. According to the construction style of Sikh buildings in general and architecture style of Khem Bedi Singh haveli in particular, it is a common practice to create stair cases at all corners of the building. This floor consists of 20 rooms on three sides, connected via doors. Western side only has two small rooms due to the height of the ground floor hall. These two small rooms have windows opening in the ground floor hall. Only two guard rooms are constructed on 1<sup>st</sup> floor of the first rectangular portion. The guard room on the left of main entrance is 7.6 feet wide and 13.4 feet long. The other guard room above the main entrance is 8 feet wide 12 feet long and its height is 10 feet.

To the right of the stairs is a door leading to a room, measuring 24.8x11.3x10 feet, divided with a wooden arched partition, which has intricate carving of floral and geometrical motifs (Plate 18). The area or the rooms on the northern side seem to be specially fixed for the females, because we find many paintings of females - may

be from the families of the religious people or Bedi family itself. The first room is a small room which is 11x11x10 feet, filled with frescos. But other small connected rooms are filled with geometrical and floral designs. This kind of wall painting can be seen in many Sikh buildings and also in all rooms of this haveli and in the courtyard murals. It seems that the owners had love for painted walls, because this kind of patterns has been used in all the frescos of the haveli as background.

These two-storey ground floor and first floor are very rich as far as the mural paintings are concerned, but 2<sup>nd</sup> and 3<sup>rd</sup> floors are simple. Probably 2<sup>nd</sup> floor was used for residential purpose (Plate 19).

### **Second Floor: Plan, Art and Architecture**

There are stair cases on all the four sides of the building that take us to the 2<sup>nd</sup> floor (Plate 20). Rising 14 stairs from the southern side reached the 2<sup>nd</sup> floor of the haveli. Coming out from the stairs room, turning to the left on western side are 5 rooms, two small rooms on both sides and a bigger one in the middle. There might be a small bath room constructed in a small place under the staircase. There is only one room constructed on the 2<sup>nd</sup> floor on the frontal side of the building that is on the main event hall of the first courtyard, which is a guard room.

The protecting small wall for the central courtyard is made of bricks. Apparently, there are hardly any signs of mural paintings on this floor. The main room on the eastern side of the 2<sup>nd</sup> floor is the one with three steps. This room has a beautiful balcony at the back, decorated with perforated *Jali* and with beautiful geometric designs. But these *Jalis*, which are badly destroyed now but their design can still be seen. The owner of this haveli might have been enjoying the view of Kaller Sayeda from this balcony at the back of his room. The door leading

to this balcony is very delicately built with attached pillars supporting the door. The remains of the balcony and the frontal wall prove that it was carefully designed.

The three rectangular areas in the balcony have different designs of Jali. The middle one has diamond shape and checkered, the right Jali has octagonal (eight sided) circular Jali, which is in original condition. But the left side Jali is all broken. The pillars, half defaced, have a beautiful decorated Corinthian capital, with inverted leaf motif. Shaft has grooves and projections. There are two pillars on both sides of each door and window of the balcony.

### **Third Floor: Plan, Art and Architecture**

Third floor has four guard rooms or watch towers in four corners of the building. The boundary wall of the third or top floor has small turrets at different intervals. There is a narrow stair case going up on the roof top from eastern side, which is 2.5 feet wide. On the northern side, there are stairs going up and down, with small watch tower. The size of this room is 12 x 8.4 feet. On the south-western side, there is a guard room or watch tower and a small toilet and stairs. Every guard room has two doors and almost 6 windows. The walls of top roof also have turrets. The whole floor is segmented in to four sections with one guard room in every section (Plate 21).

### **Parapet Wall**

The walls are almost 6 feet high. The parapet walls of this floor are simple and smooth with lime plaster. Parapet wall is interrupted by alcoves (niches or recessions in the walls). There is symmetry in the arrangement of alcove and turret. Three alcoves and one turret are arranged in the parapet walls of the 3<sup>rd</sup> floor. All the niches are not closed but some of the niches are open on both outer and inner walls, may be for better ventilation and watching purpose. The dome of the turret sometimes has a pointed metal vertical

bar and some time it has been covered with the same construction material of the dome (Plate 22).

The tradition of implanting turrets in the parapet wall is still carried on in Indo Pak Subcontinent. The turrets are from the 3<sup>rd</sup> floor. The dome is raised on three small pillars, with four small arches on all sides. The neck of the dome is like a projected fillet. The dome is with inverted leaves in the centre and at the top ending part of the dome.

### **Basements of the Haveli**

There are altogether eight rooms in the basement of the Haveli. The purpose of these basement rooms is not clear. These rooms are very small in size, with limited number of doors and windows. No efforts have been made to beautify the basement, except designs on the small window. Only one basement is still surviving out of 8 basements of the Haveli. But the staircases and their fallen roofs indicate that they were of the same style and design in the whole building.

The basement on eastern side in the 2<sup>nd</sup> courtyard with mural paintings is in the best condition so far. The size of this basement and all other basements on this compound are 12 x 11.2 feet. It has one door one window in the stairs that opens in the basement and two ventilators (Plate 23).

### **Conclusion and Recommendations**

Havelies are fortified structures that are actually a complex of multiple buildings within a boundary. They are called havelies either because of their enormous size or these buildings have some other social or religious significance. This research is mainly related to the Sikh Havelies in District Rawalpindi with a case study of Khem Bedi Singh Haveli at Kaller Sayedan. During this research about Bedi haveli it was revealed that this place has always been having some religious

and social significance. Before creation of Pakistan Haveli was owned by Bedi family, which is a Sikh family of religious importance and they also had prominent positions in the Government organization. They used this building for residential as well as a religious and social purpose. Sikhs stayed here for more than hundred years with their adaptable nature. During their stay, they adopted many ideas from Hindus and Muslims. So, it is inevitable to ignore importance of Sikh period. I suggest that Sikh

architecture is very important, because they added many Gurdavaras and havelies before partition of India and Pakistan. These buildings are vanishing with the passage of time and intolerant behavior of the residents of the area. I suggest and conclude that Sikh period especially Sikh art and architecture should be included in curriculum at college and University levels, which will further ensure restoration and conservation of such historical monuments.

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Plate 1. Courtyard with Murals



Plate 2: Location map of Kallar Syedan



Plate 3. Portrait of Khem Bedi Singh



Plate 4. Court rooms



Plate 5: Iron pillar



Plate 6: Grave of Hotay Shah



Plate 7: Stone wall



GROUND FLOOR PLAN

Plate 8: Ground floor plan



Plate 9: First entrance's door



Plate 10: Jharoka



Plate 11: Detail of the Jharoka



Plate 12: Second entrance gate



Plate 13: Arch with portrait



Plate 14: Balcony



Plate 15: Fresco painting



Plate 16: Fresco painting





Plate 17: Plan of first floor



Plate 18: Room with wooden partition



Plate 19: Fresco showing a woman with children



Plate 20: Third floor plan



Plate 21: Viwe of the guardroom and parapet wall



Plate 22: close up view of the kiosk



Plate 23: View of the basement