

A Short Note on the Indigenous and Western Architectural Traditions in the Buildings of Islamia College Peshawar

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Abstract: Peshawar, being located on the cross-road between central and south Asia, has emerged to be a city of diverse cultural traditions, religious philosophies and multiple ethnicities. Owing to this strategic location it has been one of the earliest living cities of south Asia since last two thousand years, as shown by the archaeological record (Durrani, Ali & Rehman, 1997). Because of the frequent interaction with outside cultures, the art and architecture in Peshawar got developed with new traditions and elements. In addition to the glorious art of Gandhara and the Islamic, the colonial art and architecture is also noteworthy that flourished in this part of the British Empire apart from Kolkata, Mumbai and Lahore. One of the notable architectural structures of that age is building of Islamia College Peshawar that speaks the grandeur of the British Raj, which is described briefly in this paper. Architectural elements used in the Islamia College building are dexterously borrowed from eastern and western sources. They are used in terms of symbolism and style as the rationale of attraction and utility. Local elements are considerably used such as dome, arches, niches etc to enhance beauty of the building. The universal language of geometrical form and symmetrical pattern, with red brick colour in rough texture add harmony of vision to architecture that is a splendid eastern style. The British conceptualized and designed the architecture to represent noticeably the new ideas of western progress and modernity keeping in minds the eastern religious views of local inhabitants. Gothic revival architecture of consequent progress of construction technology and materials (i.e. use of concrete and steel structure) of the late 19th century with native features and enhancement of the Mughal style is adapted in structure of Islamia College.

Keywords: Islamia College, Colonial, Mughal, building, Peshawar

Introduction

Peshawar is one of the oldest living cities of Asia with rich archaeological and historical remains (Jaffer 2008). Peshawar has formed imperative way for trade and interaction between Pakistan Afghanistan and Central Asia, The city has changed many faces with the passage of time and invasion of various groups in ancient times (Dani 1995) among them are: the Persians, Greeks, Scythians, Kushans, Huns, Arabs, Turks, Mongols, Mughals, and the British. The region of Peshawar has seen, for centuries, many ups and downs, and has embraced different civilizations. The impact of these civilizations can be seen in the art, architecture, traditions and over all culture of the region in the archaeological vestiges hidden in inaccessible mounds under the city and even in the architecture and ways of living of the

people of Peshawar and the adjoining areas since several centuries. In result the ancient city became a junction and asylum of cultures and civilizations (Dani 1995). Architecture is one of high points of rich blend of different civilization that includes accumulation of expression and best achieved in Peshawar.

Various factors like geographical conditions, socio-economic elements and invasion by the different dynasties have contributed tremendously in the growth and development of architectural styles of this region. The architectural specimens found are enormous in range because of assortment found across the regions which prove that the area was always a power as far as architecture is concerned. Numerous buildings based on incredible designs

came into existence from Buddhist to British and then post-independence period.

Most of the historic buildings of this region are now in ghastly state and either partly or fully demolished but others still standing as a glory of their period. There is a strong influence of Islamic Mughal and British in the architectural manner of buildings representing as a splendor of the city. In these buildings Eastern and Western elements are visible representing their rulers and period of construction. Among these historic building stands a glorious building of Islamia College representing the fine architecture of its time.

History of Islamia College Building

The great institution of Islamia College was established with the consecrated reason to nourish the educational expansion and reveal modern education to the Muslim Youth of this part of the sub-continent to enable them to shoulder their future errands. It indicated the dawn of a new epoch, of enlightenment and development among the Muslims of this province.

Sir George Roos-Keppel, the Chief Commissioner of the Khyber Pakhtunkhwa a mixed Dutch-Swedish-English blood and Nawab Sir Sahibzada Abdul Qaiyum Khan an eminent son of the soil (Khan 1990) were those who envision the plan of launching this seat of learning enthusiastically along with their impressive companions to get it on the ground.

May 10th 1911 Roose-Keppple and Abdul Qayyum Khan visited Aligarh university where donation of Rs. 100 by “Afghan Taliban of Aligarh” (Lal Baha 1973) was given as an initial fund of Islamia College. On their return, they approached the leading Muslim gentry with the same demand and in a short period of time they get enough amounts to accomplish the task.

The Islamia College was founded in 1913 on the proposed land only six miles away from the historic Khyber Pass at the western edge of the

Peshawar valley. The foundation stone of the college was laid by Maulana Fazal Wahid, known as Haji Sahib of Turangzai in a simple but impressive way and attended by elites of the Province (Qayyum 1912).

Architectural Style of Islamia College Building

An architectural style is the representation of the features that make a building structure prominent and historically identifiable. It may comprise elements as form, shape, space, construction methods, materials and regional characters. Most architecture can be classified as chronology of style with the emergence of new ideas, technology, or materials, and religious beliefs which make new styles possible. These styles often spread from one place to another, so that the style at its source keep on expanding in new ways as other countries follow with their own blend of culture and religious beliefs. Architects adapt new ideas with modification and it usually does work.

The British amalgamated Victorian Gothic concept with Mughal ideas to create new building style in the Sub-Continent. The Mughal Gothic or British Raj style can be seen in the buildings one of the best example is Islamia College Peshawar. The analysis of the secret of Islamia College building: pattern and technique needs to be unveiled for its aesthetics. According to Dani (1995), the architectural style of Islamia College is peculiarly Curzonian with a touch of Mughal appeal in the different components. It is true because Islamia College is the physical demonstration par excellence of the zenith of two great cultures.

Architectural elements used in Islamia College building are genius borrowed from Eastern and Western sources. They are used in terms of symbolism and style as the rationale of attraction and utility. Indigenous Eastern elements are significantly used such as dome, arches, niches

etc to enhance the building. These eastern elements are the synthesis of Central Asian, Persian and Indian influence in architecture. The universal language of geometrical form and symmetrical pattern, with red brick color in rough texture add harmony of vision to architecture that is a splendid eastern style. The British conceptualized and designed the architecture to represent noticeably the new ideas of western progress and modernity keeping in minds the eastern religious views of local inhabitants. Gothic revival architecture of consequent progress of construction technology and materials (i.e. use of concrete and steel structure) of the late 19th century with native features and ornamentation of Mughals was adapted in construction of Islamia College.

The fundamental architectural principles of Islamia College building are truly associated with beauty, proportion, symmetry and geometry. In the analysis of above diagram the plan of building is horizontal which is mostly seen in the Mughal buildings like Shalmar garden, Badshahi mosque etc. R. Nath (1976) describes Mughal buildings as an incomparable art which can be seen in the spacious lofty construction evoke a sense of marvel and a source of aesthetic experience with symmetry and balance in structure. The Islamia College building features same with large play grounds around the main building. The flowing water from the fountains arches and profusion of domes gives it an extension of eastern period.

Significant features of Islamia include corinthian columns, octagonal turrets employed as piers, and multi-cusped arches, in varying sizes organized and interwoven with asymmetrical progression of niches and colonnades as eastern elements to create visual interest. The role of domes with inverted lotus flower, chatris, cupolas and finial creating a highly articulated skyline in eastern architecture has been considerable and the same is adopted in Islamia College building. As late as

the 19th century, these domes had been integrated into Western architecture. The distinctive eastern architectural motifs used in Islamia College building are radiating structures, repetition, and rhythmic geometrical patterns are the key utility. Western practice of modelling and creating the illusion of light and shade in the building created a new interest in textures and surface effect. This western art was adopted by Mughal as creative reinvention. These art forms were adapted to recommend allegorical meaning to the narrative structures in the Islamia College building in geometric pattern.

The central clock tower purely a western approach added with eastern domes above and around to control the proportioning and visual effect of the composition. The domes and chatris and total façade also delineated in ornamental brickwork, reflective of the finesse of material used in Islamia College buildings. Eave brackets in red bricks throughout the building, for the column and the arches with the occasional use of elaborate jhorakas or decorative windows finished with terracotta in beautiful cuts shape used in jallis in geometric patterns bespeak of the mastery of the craft men. The verandahs are screened with inter-lacing arches of red brick adopted from Mughals architectural style.

Arch is one of the focal elements of Islamia College building. Pointed cusped or scalloped types of arches are embraced from the eastern element. An interesting feature found in Islamia College building is that these arches are cusped from outside while pointed Gothic from inner side. Recessed arch is beautifully arranged by various architectural elements e.g. the upper portion of it is classified into three parts: central part in square shape whereas flanking sides a triangular shape all of them filled with fret work technique below these three Gothic arches are provided with uniqueness in arrangement the central one is larger as compared to the arches on either side. Arches provided to bear the load of

the structure and for the enhancing the beauty of the building are the combination of eastern and western style.

Western Gothic arched doors and windows in wood inserted with glass panels and use of large windows of 9x9 ft with glass to make a class room well ventilated and lighted gives it a western touch. These doors and windows are fabricated on opposite ends of the room to make it easily approachable from both ends and for cross ventilation as well.

Roose Kepple hall is embellished with stucco

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tracery details, blind arches, built-in Corinthian Columns and an imposing gallery resting on sandstone brackets all in white colour, makes the interior a symbol of purity with dignified height of the ceiling. The use of geometric pattern wood flooring and stage gives the whole interior a dramatic western look.

Unafraid from both the eastern tradition and the western influence, Islamia College building is a unique composition and highly textured facade, which continue to be lively and charming from past 100 years.

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