

Madrassah of Shaikh Isa Langoti at Makli Hill, Thatta (Sindh): An Analytical Study

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Location

The Madrassah pavilion of Shaikh Isa Langoti is situated to the west of his tomb complex which itself lies to the north of the Samma cluster at Makli Hill.

Historical background

Shaikh Isa Langoti (Langot means “short gymnastic costume”, being used by Hindu Sadhus and local people) came to Thatta from Burhanpur in Central India and settled here during the Samma rule. After his death he was buried to the east of his madrassah pavilion.

A young contemporary of Shaikh Hammad Jamali, Shaikh Isa Langoti, during his life time, was giving Islamic education to the students. Allama Niamat Ullah Abbasi was also one of his students. At the time of the birth of Pir Murad, Shaikh Isa Langoti was present there. Shaikh Isa Langoti breathed his last three days after the birth of Pir Murad (Qani, 2002, 720; Sadarangani, 1956, 11; Durrani, 2010, 35). Shaikh Hammad Jamali frequently visited the madrassah of Shaikh Isa Langoti during his life time (Qani, 2002, 76-7), showing his importance among the contemporary religious scholars.

Keeping in view, the above cited scanty information, concerning the life history of Shaikh Isa Langoti, question arises, that when and where he was died and buried? In this process, Qani in “Makli Namoo” recorded, that he died in AH 831 (Qani, 1994, 76). He further mentioned that Shaikh Isa Langoti died three days after the birth of

sayed Muhammad Hussain better known as “Pir Murad Shirazi” in AH 831 (Qani, 1994 76; 2002, 720; Sadarangani, 1956, 11). Whereas, Dani places his demise in the year AH 831/ AD 1427 (Dani, 1982, 33; Nadiem, 2000, 28). While Lari recorded, that his death took place in AH 831/ AD 1428 (Lari, 1997, 62) and was buried to the east of his madrassah pavilion.

The other important question, which arises here, that when his tomb was constructed? Since we are unable to find any literary and epigraphical record to date his tomb therefore, it can be assumed, that his tomb was most probably constructed after his demise, which may be placed somewhere between AD 1428 and AD 1440. This date may be determined in the case of Malik Rajpal tomb at Makli Hill AD 1458-62 (Qani, 1994, 130; Dani, 1982, 51; Lari, 1997, 72; Bukhari, 2001, 176; Durrani, 2010, 15). However, on stylistic grounds, the later seems much improved as compare to the former example, secondly both these examples have been erected in two tiered style. The square tomb chamber (first tier) is crowned by the hemispherical dome (second tier). These are some of the identical features, which can be seen in the tombs under discussion. However, the tomb of Malik Rajpal seems to be slightly imposing in height moreover, in the latter case unlike the former precedent entrances have been provided to the four sides making the beginning of a new style at Makli Hill. A style appeared for the first time in the Seraiki region, which can be seen in the tomb of Sadan Shaheed AD 1175-87 at Jalaran near Muzaffar Garh (Ali, 1991, 136; 1997, 63).

This mode of work is denoting its derivation from the Persian “Chahar Taq”, a style gained fame during the Sassanian domain (Pope, 1965, 71; pl. 68). Besides the case of Malik Rajpal, the squinch system became more improved as compare to the tomb of Shaikh Isa Langoti. All these analysis proves, that the at issue tomb seems to have been constructed much earlier than that of Malik Rajpal, perhaps after his death between AD 1428 and 1440. It may be further pointed; that presently this tomb has been white washed and seems to be in the bad state of preservation.

Architectural Description

This unique looking stone built madrassah of Shaikh Isa Langoti is externally square in plan and due to the diagonally laid pillars at the angles internally it is converted into octagonal shape (Fig. 1 and 2). This madrassah pavilion is measuring 21.9x21.9 feet.

The super structure of this building is resting on twenty four pillars. They are varying in shape and width. The outer pillars are square in shape and placed above the square bases. These pillars are crowned by four armed bracket capitals (Pl. 1). The lower sides of these arms have been engraved. It may be further added, that the space between the two outer pillars, is covered by a curtain wall, built of stone blocks. The western and northern sides curtain walls are provided with square shaped perforated screen, just above the floor level. They are executed in geometrical fashion for receiving light and fresh air. The inner side of this building can be entered through two porches one each on the eastern and southern sides.

These porches are resting on four pillars. The outer pillars are octagonal and resting on square bases. The shaft is crowned by four armed bracket capitals. Whereas, the inner

two pillars are square in shape and yields four armed bracket capitals. The rectangular shape lintels are placed above these pillars, which supported the lantern shaped ceiling.

The pillars provided to the inner side of this madrassah pavilion are octagonal in design and resting on the square bases. The shafts are surmounted by the two armed bracket capitals. It is indeed significant to elaborate further that due to the diagonally laid pillars and the architraves above have internally converted the building into an octagon over which the circular rim of the bell shaped dome is resting. The true domical ceiling has been veneered through the corbelling method, which is the earliest of its kind in the category of pavilion shaped buildings in the whole of Makli Hill cluster.

The merlons of parapet are arranged in pointed arches. The sloping eave has been wrought through the rectangular stone slabs.

Likewise, the two porches and the true domical ceiling, the bell shaped dome is marking its first appearance at Makli Hill necropolis (Pl.1; Fig. 2), as well as in the entire Pakistan. Moreover, it is the only one recorded example known at Makli Hill cluster.

The dome is crowned by the Kalasa element which has been veneered in nectar vessels pattern, representing first of its kinds in the Makli Hill monuments (Pl. 1).

It is significant to elaborate further, that the whole building is plain and devoid of any architectural embellishment, except the fret work (perforated screens) for light and fresh air.

Comparison and Conclusion

Apart from the mausoleum of Shaikh Isa Langoti, the other worthwhile issue is the

construction of his madrassah pavilion. In this connection, the vernacular chronicles such as Qani, Masum, Nisyani, Beglari and Khudadad Khan are absolutely silent. Moreover, Henry Cousens, Maulvi Muhammad Shafi, Dani, Hasternath, Shaikh Khurshid and Ali Ahmad Brohi are also silent about the construction of the at issue building. Although Sohail Lari and Yasmeen Lari have proposed a tentative date that is AD 1412 till 1428 makes this issue more controversial in order to determine the exact date. A question arises that when was it erected? Whether in AH 816/AD 1412 or perhaps during AD 1412 to 1428. Now if we consider this later version, then the Saint is known to have died in AH 831/ AD 1428 (Lari, 1997, 106, col. I) but it makes no sense. Whereas, in the former version, it would mean to say, that it was built in AD 1412 and remained in use until his death in AD 1428 seems to be more logical. Since, we have no reference in the contemporary accounts regarding the construction of the said madrassah pavilion therefore; it seems very difficult to date this building.

However, some of the historians proclaim that this madrassah was built during the 14th century AD (Nadiem, 2000, 28). Now a question arises here that in which particular year or decade of the 14th century, the structure under study was constructed? In this regard the historians generally agreed that Jam Tamachi the ruler of Samma dynasty constructed the madrassah of Shaikh Hammad Jamali at Makli Hill Thatta in AD 1388-92 (Durrani, 2011, 91-94; Qazi, 2010, 83, col. II). Since it is generally believed that both the saints were almost contemporary therefore, it can be proposed that the said structure might have been built during the last decade of the 14th century AD or perhaps slightly later, because, the madrassah pavilion of Shaikh Hammad Jamali seems to be more developed in terms of architectural treatment and surface decoration. The

madrassah of Shaikh Isa Langoti is veneered in pavilion gesture, however, the space between the two pillars on the outer sides are filled with dressed stone blocks. Moreover, as compare to the latter case, in the former structure the style of pillars, brackets and the arrangement of the diagonally laid lintels are alluding the imitation of a new style at Makli Hill. These architectural components can be seen in much improved form in the later examples that is because of his royal disciple, who patronised the project in the honour of the Saint. This seems to be the only reasons, which makes it more exquisite in terms of architectural treatment and embellishment work as compare to the pavilion of madrassah under discussion. Nevertheless, both these madrassah pavilions are the only surviving examples at Makli Hill, which is showing a new trend that is being formed due to the cultural interactions, which assimilated in the area of our study.

It is important to mention here that later on the internal arrangements of these two madrassah pavilions such as the diagonally laid pillars and the architraves above have been very successfully continued by the Tarkhan builders at Makli Hill in their buildings. Such examples can be clearly noticed in the Chaukhandi tomb of Qazi al-Mulk AD 1590-1600 (Qazi, 2010, 128-29) and Tughral Beg AD 1649 (Qazi, 2010, 132). Keeping in view, all these comparative analysis concerning the beginning of the madrassah pavilions at Makli Hill and the continuation of the internal arrangements, which converts the square into octagon, seems to have been developed in the vernacular fashion.

In this regard, we can see a lot of such precedents in the case of Hindu and Jain temples, which were erected during the 6th-7th centuries AD and continued until the 13th and 14th centuries AD. In such cases, the *mandapas* and the *garbagrihas* were built

through the style under discussion. These pavilion shaped structures constructed during the Islamic domain are undoubtedly denoting the continuation of the early Hindu and Jaina traditions (Havel, 1927, 64). However, Harle has recorded the earliest existing pavilion shaped temple at Aihole locally known as Gaudargudi temple dated to the end of 6th or to the early 7th century AD. Similarly the Durga temple AD 700-725 at Aihole is the other significant example (Harle, 1986, 173-75; fig. 131-32) that has been veneered in the style under discussion. In these examples, one can clearly observe the four armed brackets and the style of the architraves, which were later on, successfully continued in more improved form, such can be seen in the Surya temple at Modhura dated to the 11th-12th century AD (Rowland, 1953, 178, fig. 27; Harle, 1986, 223). Although, this pavilion shaped temple is octagonal in plan, however, the four armed brackets and the attached pillared porches yield close affinity to the in question style.

The pavilion shaped structures resting on twelve pillars having the diagonally laid

pillars and architraves were also adopted by the masons during the Solankli period. In such cases the Kupagar or well houses provided with such structures can be noticed at Ahmadabad and Gujarat during the 10th and 11th century AD (Nath, 1976, 22-23). Thus in the light of these investigations it can be proclaimed that the idea of pavilion or pillared shaped temple was started in the form of Hindu and Jain temples in the Indo-Pak sub-Continent. These examples can be visibly observed in Rajputana, Deccan, Gujarat, Ahmadabad and Kathiawar, which eventually transmitted through Kutch to the Sindh valley. The Samma ruling dynasty, a local Rajput family of Kutch (Lakho, 2006, 1; Qazi, 2010, 83, col. I), was actually responsible for the introduction of this glorious heritage at Makli Hill. Thus, it appears that the bilateral cultural interactions eventually caused for the introduction of this style was started during the Samma domain and reached to perfection in the succeeding centuries.

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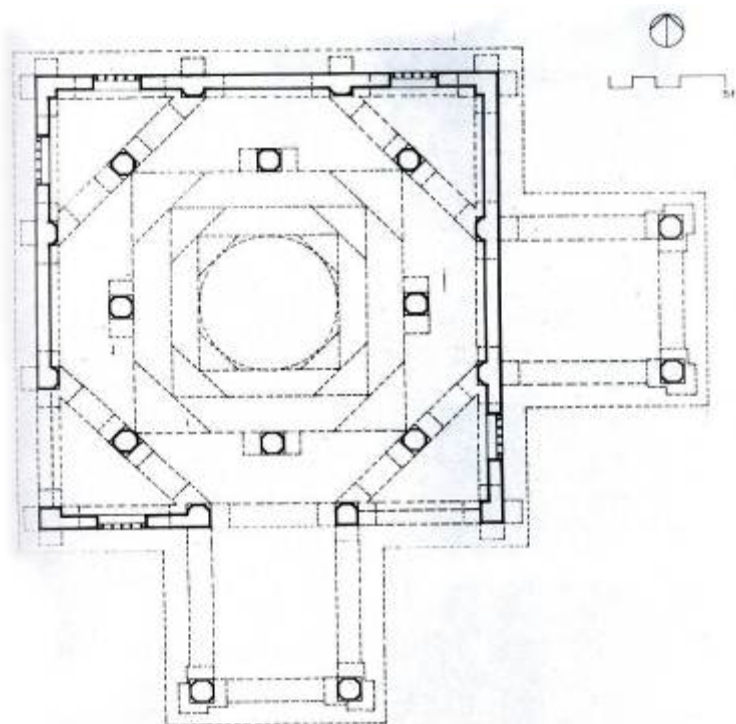


Fig. 1 - Plan: Madrasah of Shaikh Isa Langoti (scanned copy, Lari)

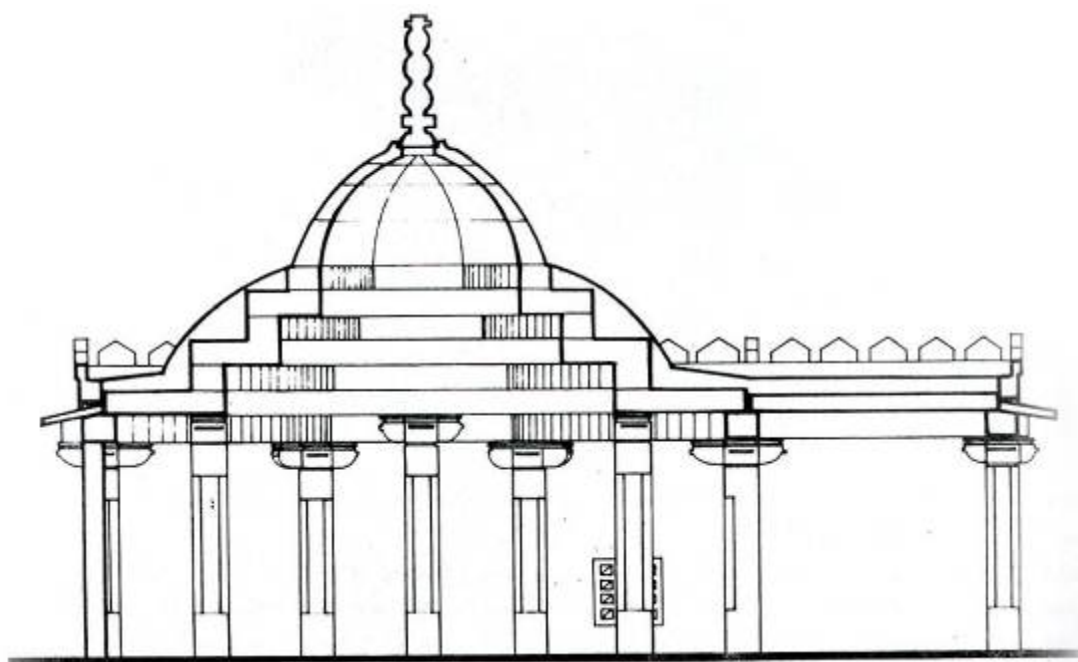


Fig. 2 - Section: Madrasah of Shaikh Isa Langoti (scanned copy, Lari)



Pl. 1 - Madrasah of Shaikh Isa Langoti: General view