

## AN ANALYSIS OF ARCHITECTURAL FEATURES OF THE COLONIAL PERIOD IN DISTRICT ABBOTTABAD

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### ABSTRACT

*The present paper aims to highlight the diagnostic architectural features of the colonial period architecture in Abbottabad district of the Khyber Pakhtunkhwa where the principal author has located several monuments including schools, temples, gurudwaras, mosques, general buildings etc. Different architectural components based on Islamic and European style were employed in the British Age in the Indo-Pak subcontinent.*

**Keywords:** Abbotabad, Colonial Heritage, Architecture, Buildings.

### INTRODUCTION

Abbottabad is one of the beautiful city of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, Pakistan, in terms of scenic beauty, hills, valleys, forests, natural springs etc. It was built during the British era in 1849 by James Abbott, the then Deputy Commissioner. Being a military city of the British Empire there were a large number of important buildings constructed inside the city that still enhance its beauty. Some of these buildings are in good conditions and are fully functional whereas some of them are in bad state of preservation due to negligence. These buildings consist of schools, churches, Hindu temples, gurudwaras, mosques and general buildings and the same has been discussed herein.

### HISTORY OF HAZARA AND ABBOTTABAD.

On the land of Hazara region different cultures and traditions developed. Presently there are several different tribes living with diverse cultural traditions. The archeological study in Hazara region shows that the area was occupied by the Indo Aryan and Gandharan people. Moreover, SWSwynnerton found the earliest hand axe at Thandiani, Abbottabad (Qazi, 1998:6) and E.Johnson, in 1964, discovered microlithic tools from Khanpur cave. The latter site was excavated by Prof. Farid Khan of the University of Peshawar, who further confirmed the microlithics (Dani 1999: 19). Further M. Saleem unearthed traces of Neolithic stone tools (shoulder axes) near Thakot Bridge in the Alai region that shows continuation of cultural activities in the region since prehistoric times (Qazi 1998: 11). In a recent survey conducted by Department of Archaeology Hazara University Mansehra Gandhara Grave Culture sites have been discovered in Abbottabad and Mansehra districts showing that the so-called Indo-Aryans

not only settled in the ancient region of Gandharabut also moved eastwards to the present Hazara (Ihsan, Ali, Abid-ur-Rehman and Mehir Rahman, 2006-2007: 145-193)

On the arrival of the British, in Indo-Pak subcontinent they developed their own infrastructure, administrative blocks and established educational and judicial institutions and systems. Unlike the Sikh rule, significant cultural changed took place. A new elite class of government servants began to emerge, technological advancement took a new turn and women participation in social spheres of life gained recognition.

Abbottabad is the divisional headquarter of Hazara and the third biggest city of Khyber Pukhtunkhwa. It is located between 33° 50' and 34° 23' north, and 73° 35' and 73° 31' east, and bordered by Mansehra, Muzafaffarabad, Rawalpindi, and Haripur districts. Abbottabad today is a thriving business and tourist city. It is traditionally a military city.

## **ARCHITECTURAL FEATURES OF COLONIAL BUILDINGS IN ABBOTTABAD**

A survey of the Colonial building in Abbottabad has recently been conducted by the principal author for his MPhil dissertation, which located dozens of monuments representing the colonial style. Those buildings which are still in use by different public department are in good state of preservation whereas the rest are in a pathetic condition. Description of the architectural elements and decorative designs is beyond the scope of this paper, therefore, some of the diagnostic features will be discussed here. Some features vary from building to building depending on its nature whereas most of the structures have certain common features. However, some of them have certain unique features as well.

### **VAULTED ROOFS**

Vaulted Roofs were designed especially for rainy season and snow fall. The technique applied was very simple, one foot interval molding is made to join both the sheets as well as strengthen the roof of the structures. These sheets are supported by wooden rafter in every 6 inches of distance. The joints of rafters were united by nut- bolt system.

The front of every structure, a gable structure is projected upward between the saddle and sloping downward in two parts from a central ridge to form a beautiful style of architecture, this style is called gable roof. This is also unique and commonly practiced in colonial architecture the plinth and arches give more beauty and strength to the structure (Begg 1911: 2)

### **CHIMNEY**

Long Chimney is one of the important feature of the colonial architecture in South Asia. The Chimneys in the buildings are usually square in shape about 2x2 feet with from

2 to 3 feet height from top of the vaulted roofs. Rectangular sloping base is constructed for support and enhancing height of chimney. Double and somewhere single cornice molding is beautifully added to the top of chimney as part of decoration as well as strengthening it as at chimneys of forest offices. (Khan et, al 2013: 394)

## **VENTILATORS**

Huge and long projected ventilators are also one of the essential feature of the buildings of this age. In the colonial as well as Islamic and Hindu architectures ventilators have been designed inside the walls, which were being supported by wall lintel or roof, but here in the colonial period buildings, they have been made projected ventilators called dormer are emerged from the top of the roof by length of about 3 feet supported by a square or rectangular window about 2 feet high emerged a projected built out of a sloping roof called dormer window (Arif 2013: 46).

## **CEILING**

The British engineers built low budgeted buildings in Abbottabad. Imported steel in the days of the British rule were used in the constructions of ceiling in the structures, which were however, replaced later on by local steel factories of Kolkata, India. Ceiling building of Abbottabad are mostly made of wood, and its nature contained almost flat, called dropped or suspended ceiling covered the inner ziggurat structure and rafters of pyramid roofs, In order to give finishing of roofs from inside of a building.(Khan et. al 2013: 307)

The ceiling of Saint Luke's Church is different from the rest of the buildings having no suspended or dropped ceiling because of the earliest building in Abbottabad, while the style and features are purely Gothic.

The roof of Saint Luke's Church is another special designed like a European church which is supported by triangle rafters of slanting ceiling subsequently triangle shaped wooden truss rested on a pendant post. The wings of the series of arched beams rested on decorated brackets of both sides of the wall inside the hall.

## **WINDOWS**

Most of the buildings of British regime in Abbottabad city are constructed in a simple manner. The styles of windows of buildings of earliest times are square in shape and concealed in walls. The weight of the wall is hold by beam/lintel on top of the window. This type of window can be seen in the building of forest offices

Later on the style of the windows slightly changed and its construction diverted to decorative in shape and size. Semi-circular arched shaped window were introduced by British, flanked by archivolt while the keystone of archivolt is arose by 1 inch. Each window decorated by a small balconied on its front. The back side windows of the

buildings were covered with a gable like shaped roof over to protect the window from sun and water.

In addition to this feature far ahead the windows of the building emerged in new and dynamic style. The windows are projected from the wall outward about 3 to 4 feet's and goes down to earth. Arch windows with double lights, columned mullions and pierced, quarter, multi foil or trefoil tracery were quite commonly on the rest of colonial architecture in India (Gupta 1985: 138).

## **DOORS**

The colonial structure usually has shape with semi-circular arch surrounded on top of the wooden door called fanlight window decorated by wedge shape key stone in the middle of arch. Though large number of structure has the same similarity in doorways but the decorative border on top of the doorway is changing by the architect. Studying the arch entrance of Sikh Gurdwara, the square gate way is recessed by cusp arch flanked by decorative pilasters, while surmounted by straight eave supported by decorative columns from both side show Islamic influence on the secular architecture.

As far as the door way entrance of the facade of Babu Ishar Das house is concerned the features are more decorative and unique as compared to the rest. Semi-circular arch door way is recessed by cusp arch having floral motif on the archivolt of both the arches.

## **COLUMNS /PILLARS**

Rectangular columns of wood are commonly observed in most of the verandas of the British period buildings, but some structures have semi-circular as well as circular columns.

The pillars of Ilyasi Masjid is octagonal in shape capped by capital having leaf motif and stand on a square base with bases relief. The veranda of chief conservator house makes an arcade of shoulder arches by square wooden pillars rising to a height of about 7 to 10 feet. The pillars of verandas of the district account office verandas pillars are square in shape and constructed of stone blocks surmounted by segmental arches.

## **CAPITALS AND BASES**

Capital too is an important segments of columns which provides strength and beautify. Entrance of the Sikh Gurdwara was highly decorated with flora motives, its arched entrance flanked by two circular pillars which is surmounted by Corinthian capital Acanthus leaves were highly elaborated in the capital below the helix showing Greek influence on the architecture. The shafts of the columns are simple having no representation of any type of work but the bases of the columns were ornamented with lotus petals.

**ARCHES**

In many structures of the colonial age in South Asia the point of arch is provide by a simple process of notching into the keystone. This is of course against the principles of the true Gothic form, where the arch is made by the joint of two arch segments without a keystone at all (Gupta 1985: 138).

Typical gothic arches have been observed in the structure of St. Luke's church on the entrance and windows. The entrance is constructed with a pointed arch having low height, which recessed by a series of architrave. Windows of the church represent lancet arches high in length like orthodox churches of the European countries.

**GABLE AND PEDIMENTS**

In all the private and public buildings in the British colonial age, the common feature is the gable ventilator and hallows pediments. The porches, facade and veranda of depict pyramid structure at regular intervals of the roof tops, known as hallow pediment. Being borrowed from the Greeks styles, this unique feature of British architecture is used in almost all buildings of Colonial age in South Asia. This style not only strengthens roof of a structure but also gives light and fresh air to the interior of the building.

**BUTTRESSES**

A buttress attached to a building too is a common feature of European architecture, which are being used for two reasons in most of the buildings. On one hand it gives height to the structure as well as controls the weight of walls and strengthens the structure on the other

Saint Luke's church is the only building here that is constructed under this style where the buttresses are properly designed and added to every corner closely resembling the European churches. This idea is added in the second half of 19<sup>th</sup> century throughout India

**BRACKET AND CORBELS**

Brackets and corbels technique is very important in the constructing of vaulted roofs in a building. The British applied this technique not only in this region, but also worldwide where they ruled.

The roof of the Saint Luke's church is supported by a frame of wooden rafters which makes a series of arched rafters' spring from stone made corbels beautifully designed to support the weight of the roof. The eaves of windows and doors at Ilyasi Masjid are also supported by cemented brackets decorated with floral and geometrical motifs.

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## **DOMES**

Dome is one of the basic architectural component in non-secular buildings. But in the colonial architecture dome in most of the buildings are rarely seen due to three reasons apparently, first and for most important one is due to heavy cost in this summer camp area, the second is that the building are constructed for summer camp of military where the roof are made vaulted so British did not give attention to this feature.

## **MINARETS/ TURRETS AND PARAPETS**

Minarets and turrets too are the basic and identical features of Islamic architecture throughout which were later on also employed by the colonial architects in the secular and non-secular buildings. Ilyasi Masjid is the best examples where minarets, turrets and parapets all the four side of the building have been beautifully constructed during the colonial times. All the four minarets are highly decorated with floral and geometrical designs.

## **MATERIALS**

It is observed that most of the buildings here are made of dressed grey stone of 10x 5 inches size. These are brought from the surrounding hills of Shimla and Galliate. The qualities of the stone in these hills are soft in nature for dressing and good for the building purpose. In the early era of the British Raj mud brick along with mud mortar are used (e.g. Govt. High School No. 1 Abbottabad) and mud plaster is coated in a refined manner to finish interior and exterior of the walls. Besides, lime mortar is also extensively used in the stone structure due to its easy availability and giving strength to the structure.

Timber is very important material used in the construction of certain elements in a buildings such roof frames, windows, doors and ceiling, which are mostly made of wood. Abbottabad is surrounded by lofty hills of Galliat and Shimla which produces a good quality of durable wood of pine family e.g. deodar. This availability paved way to the builder for construction of colonies on large scale. Later on backed bricks of stander size 9x4.5x2.5 inches introduced in the British architecture which is cemented with lime plaster.

Corrugated iron, meshed iron frames and girders were brought from Manchester, UK in early era for construction of building and bridges in Indian. But later on steel factory was built in Calcutta (now Kolkata) for easy and low cost production of steel.

## **CONCLUSION**

As we discussed about the city of Abbottabad that it is a beautiful and peaceful city of the country, here we found buildings regarding the history of the British Raj in which most of the buildings are demolished with the passing of time while some of them are still in good condition, these buildings should be preserved and saved for the coming generations.

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