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**ART AND ARCHITECTURE OF SIKH BARADARI AT KURI  
ISLAMABAD: A STUDY BASED ON ANALYTICAL AND STYLISTIC  
ARCHITECTURAL EVIDENCES**

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**ABSTRACT**

This research focuses on the art and architecture of kuri Baradari Located in Islamabad. There are number of archaeological sites in Islamabad such as Rock shelters, Caves, mosques, Sarais, Baolis and Baradari. The aim of research is to explore the hidden beauty of this Baradari, the research includes the various archaeological material at the Baradari related to its art and architectural history. The area under research "kuri Shehar "is located in Islamabad and famous for many reasons. There are many archaeological sites in the area and every site has its own importance. The research includes all aesthetics of the Baradari such as use of colors, motives, floral design, architectural styles and the missing part of the Baradari complex as the surviving complex has four opening while it has massive platform around. All these elements represent the culture of this Baradari. The architecture of Baradari has very important significance in the history as it was used as the meeting place of chieftains, worship place and in some cases it was used as dancing place for the royal courtiers.

## INTRODUCTION

The Islamabad district is traced back to the Paleolithic period. This Paleolithic period dates back of two million years before present. The stone tools which belong to Paleolithic period have been found from the site of Sohan, Morgah, Rawat, and the bank of Soan River, but the history of this region goes much back than that of Paleolithic period (Journal of Asian Civilization).

The city of Pakistan, Islamabad is located in the northwestward of the northwestward of the country on Pothohar plateau. This area has been significant in history for being an element of the turning point of the Rawalpindi and the Second Earl of Guilford West limit Province. The city was built in 1960 to replace Karachi as the Pakistani capital, which it has been since 1963. Due to Islamabad's closeness to Rawalpindi, they are considered sister cities (Islamabad history.com).

Islamabad is located at 33.43 N 73.04 East the edge of the Pothohar Plateau at the foot of the Margalla Hills in Islamabad Capital Territory. Its elevation is 507 meters (1,633 ft.). To the east of the city lies Murree and Kotli Sattian. To the compass north lies the Haripur locality of North-West Frontier state. Kahuta is located to the northeast, Taxila, Wahcantt, and Attock District to the north. Dama Rebecca West, Gujar Khan, Kallarsyedian, Rawat and Mandrah are to the northeast, and Rawalpindi to the southwest. Islamabad is located 120 kilometers south west of Muzaffarabad, 185 kilometers east of Peshawar, 295 kilometers north east of Lahore, and 300 kilometers west south west of Srinagar, the capital of Indian Kashmir. (Islamabad geography).

Compared to other urban centers of the country, Islamabad is a clean, spacious and quiet city with a slew of greeneries. The site of the city has a history going back to the earliest human inhabitation in Asia. This site has seen the first settlement of Aryans, ancient invaders passing from Central Asia, and the massive armies of Tamerlane and Alexander.

The Margalla Hills. Hot summer, monsoon pelting and cold winters with sparse snowfall in the hills almost summarize the mood of this area. Islamabad also has a rich state of nature life ranging from wild boars to leopards. After the formation of Islamic Republic of Pakistan in 1947, it was felt that a new and permanent Chapter City had to be built to reflect the diversity of the Pakistani nation. It was considered pertinent to locate the new capital where it could be isolated from the business and commercial activity of the Karachi, and yet is easily accessible from the remotest corner of the area (Islamabad History.com).

When Pakistan gained independence in 1947, Karachi was its first capital of Pakistan. In 1960, Islamabad was constructed as a new capital for several reasons. Usually, development in Pakistan was focused on the colonial nerve center of Karachi, and President Ayub Khan wanted it to be equally distributed. Moreover, Karachi was located at one end of the commonwealth, making it at risk to be cut off from the Arabian Ocean. A capital which was easily available from all parts of the country was needed. The newly selected location of Islamabad was closer to army headquarters in Rawalpindi and the disputed land of Kashmir in the North.

In 1958, a commission was constituted to select a suitable site for the subject capital with particular emphasis on climate, logistics, and a thorough review of potential sites, the commission suggested the area north of Rawalpindi. A Greek firm of architects, Konstantinos

Apostles Doxiadis, designed the master program of the city which was based on a grid design and triangle in shape, with its head towards the Margalla Alfred Hawthorne. The capital was not moved directly from Karachi to capital of Pakistan. it was first shifted temporarily to Rawalpindi and then to Islamabad when the development was completed ( History of Islamabad). Islamabad provides some basic for the bolder visitor. A simpleton location function is provided but also a detailed topography map that shows the location of then earest places where you can surf, ski or passel rises(if they are close by). Ofcourse some of these will be at long aloofness from Islambad and those far flung muscavolitans are provided on the ‘nearest ‘table. If you are traveling to other cities or towns near Islamabad you will also find weather forecasts for those locations below.( Islamabad location guide).

Environmental Geology of the Islamabad: the environmental geology of the Islamabad area that has been collected by cooperative projection of the Geologica survey of west Pakistan and the U.S. geological survey, supported by the U.S agency for international ontogenesis . Many of the interpretations in this theme are based on the geologic map of the Islamabad – Rawalpindi area at unity: 50,000 scale of measurement that was compiled by the first three authors of this report and released separately ( Williams and others, 1999,U.S Geological survey open- file study 99-0047). Century, 000-scale map plate included with this report shows environmental map unit of measurement that are based on the geology, landforms, and slopes; resources of construction materials; technology conditions; and geologic hazards. This approach is one example of how geologic information can be organized to care urban architectural plan in the south Asia region. (IqbalM.Sheikh 2010).

Capital of Pakistan is home to many migratory from other realms of Islamic republic of Pakistan and has a cultural and religious diversity of larfe antiquity. Due to its location on the pothohar plateau, remainder of ancient cultivation and civilization such as Aryan, Soanian, and Indus Valley civilization can still be 2 senses of find in the region. A 15<sup>th</sup>Gakharfort, Pharwala fortress, is located near Islamabad which was flesh on the remains of a 10<sup>th</sup> Hindu fort. Rawat fort in the region was builit by the Gakhars in 16<sup>th</sup> century where the grave of the Gakhar chief, sultan sarang khan located (cultures of Islamabad). Kuri shaher is located near the bharia enclave in Islamabad, it is right beside the construction site of the head start school campus.kuri lies 18 KM south east of zero point local inhabitants of kuri have often claimed that the town has very rich history there can be two etymological possibilities about the nomenclature of the kuri. The name kuri shaher drives from kauri or kaur which means princes or lioness and is a common title for many Sikh women in India and elsewhere. According to mr.azhar the title was revered throughout the community. As this area remains under Sikhs mainly before partition so it is said that this name kuri has sikh evolution.

The name of kuri village is actually kurishehar signifying an important historical probability of presence of a kuru inhibited village on outstrips of Rawalpindi that is historically believed to have been traditional home of pandavas race and their descendants though shehar is a Persian word manning urban area or town. The site of research lies in Kuri, a famous baradari named as kuri baradari from Ranjit singh period.

### **Significance and Objective of the research**

The topic is of prime importance in the field of art and architecture, art history of Baradari and its architectural concepts detailed history with the archaeological point of view like its

architecture, floral details, measurement, stone used in masonry work of the Baradari will be reported. In today's continuous rise in population of global village where tradition, culture, religion are either dying or their original form distorted, the study is a small contribution for future generation to learn from this research. The objective of the study is to provide a detailed account of Kuri Baradari from archaeological point of view which is not reported in detail before. The research will focus on its historical origin and architecture. Work on the Kuri Baradari would also throw light on the need of its preservation as an important archaeological site and cultural heritage of Islamabad, which is deteriorating due to mishandling in natural calamities.

### **Research methodology**

The research will be of descriptive and analytical nature. The site was visited several times to document the data which includes measurement of arches, floral design, stone and patterns by using different scientific gadgets and plans. History of the site would be ascertained by anthropological techniques. Comparative study would be done by comparing secondary data with already available primary data in literature about Baradaris in subcontinent built by Mughals. The primary sources would be the books, articles which would be consulted for the research. The secondary sources will be drawings, plans, field diary and photography.

### **Literature review**

There is plenty literature on Baradaris, however the most relevant literature is listed below.

The Mughal introduces the concept of Baradair in their architecture in subcontinent. Baradari, literally meaning a building having twelve doors (parihar 1999:125).

Baradaris work on constructed in a style of open arch doors supported by fluted columns on which dome shaped roof, with its concave ceiling rested. The height of ceiling from the floor used to be more than twelve feet to facilitate the flow of air ( Jeratha 2000:138)

The new Cambridge history of India 1, for architecture of Mughal India by Catherine B. Asher.

This book covers the development and spread of architecture under the Mughal emperors.

Professor Asher considers the entire scope of architecture built under the patronage of imperial Mughal.

History of Mughal architecture vol 3 by R. Nath in 1994. This book deals with the transitional phase of color and design of Jehangir and covers each in separate chapter, public works, garden and garden pavilion: palatial mansions and shikargahs picture wall of the Lahore fort and tomb, built during his reign ostensibly in the prevalent architectural style.

Medieval Indian history and architecture by R. Nath in 1995. This book deals with the history and architecture of the medieval India and also covers the different aspects of Mughal architecture designs.

Mughal architecture: an outline of its history and development by Ebba Koch in 1991. This book describes the monuments built during the period starting from Babur till Aurangzib rule.

Forts and palaces of western Himalaya written by Asoka Jeratha in 2000. This book covers the forts on the left and right side of the Ravi and also deals with the Baradari of Raja Balwant Dev and Baradari of Wazir Khan slathia.

Discover Punjab written by Parminder Singh Grover and Davinderjit Singh Grewal in 2011. The aim of this is to aware people or tourist about Punjab's rich culture, various monuments, religious places and fair and festival.

Kuri Baradari article published in journal of Asian civilization vol 33, N0.2, December 2010. Taxila Institute of Asian Civilization, Quaid-i-Azam University, Islamabad. The Baradari is of Sikh era and article gave a detailed description of the Baradari.

Bahram KI Baradari Near Attock article written by Inayat –ur- Rehman published in Ancient Pakistan vol 7 in 1991. This article deal with the graceful monument near Attock , Known as Bahram ki Baradari. The article accounted a detail history and architectural design of the Baradari.

### **History and Origin of Baradaris**

Baradari, literally meaning a building having twelve doors (Parihar 1999:125). Baradari, the summer houses with several open entrances meant for cross ventilation, were in vogue in erstwhile hill states. Chieftains, persons of high magnitude used to build these houses near water sources or on high altitudes to have a sigh of relief during scorching heat of the summers. These Baradaris were constructed in a style of open arched doors supported by fluted columns on which dome shaped roof, with its concave ceiling rested. The height of ceiling from the floor used to be more than twelve feet to facilitate the flow of air (Jeratha 2000:138).

The subcontinent has a long tradition of such buildings that served as getaways where the rich whiled away the pleasant hours of day. They did not serve as residences. Some Baradari became so famous that they were included in history as a part of the structure where the politics of the times was discussed. They were the meeting places of the Chieftains, statesmen and a site where dances and musical performances were organized for the witness of royalty and courtiers (Jeratha 2000:138).

The Mughals introduced the concept of Baradari in their architecture in sub-continent. When Punjab and Kashmir came under Sikh rule, they introduced their own innovation in Baradari architecture and it was not necessary of Baradaris having twelve doors that were constructed by Sikhs. The architecture of Baradaris built by Sikhs differs according to their use and purpose.

### **Famous Baradaris located in Pakistan**

1. Kuri Baradari, Islamabad
2. Bahram ki Baradari, Attock
3. Kamran Baradari, Lahore
4. Wazir Khan Baradari, Lahore
5. Hazori Bagh Baradari, Lahore.
6. Baradari at sheikhpura
7. Sher Singh Baradari, Lahore

There are a number of Baradaris which are built in Kashmir by Mughals and Sikh including SerarBaradari (Poonch), Two Baradaris built by Mughals in KotieRuti on the bank of river Ban, Baradari at Kotli; Baradaris in Mughal's Gardens (Srinagar) namely, Shalimar, Nishat, Cheshmashahi, Dara shikoh, Verinag gardens (Dewan 2004:151).

There were various types of gardens developed under Mughals. In Delhi, Agra, Lahore and Kashmir they developed many different gardens. They brought with them a good taste for architectural decorations reflected the tradition of Iran, Turan, Turkey and other countries of Central Asia (Dar 1982:7). Such garden had Pavilion or Baradari in the centre. Like Mughal garden each Sikh garden had a central pavilion or Baradari (BaghRatanchandDarriwala, Bagh Mahan Singh, Baghlehnasingh, baghtejasingh, baghkushhalsingh, baghdiwankirpa ram, bagh rani gul begum, baghchhotalal. In two cases Bagh Dina Nath and BaghKirpa Ram we knew that the central pavilion was in the midst of the tank (Dar 1982:31). Baghchotalal, on the West was a Baradari whose roofs were supported on beautiful columns. Further South in the garden was another Baradari which was decorated with full size human Paintings (Dar 1982:44).

### **History Art and Architecture of Kurri Baradari**

KURI town in Islamabad is host to many historical buildings. Each of the narrow alleys of the town boasts the havelis and kothis of the Hindus and Sikhs. Most of the buildings retain their original beauty, particularly their wooden doors. Of these, however, the Mosque Mughal emperor Akbar and baradari are quite prominent. There are two baradaris in the territory of Islamabad. Of these, one was located near Golra Sharif, which does not exist and the other is located in Kuri town, which also stands neglected. However, this structure is noted for its floral paintings that decorate the inner space of the building. This baradari is believed to have been built during the Sikh rule. Apart from this Baradari, the territories of Islamabad and Rawalpindi are dotted with Sikh buildings. The gurdwaras, palaces, forts, all were built during the Sikh period and still grace the landscape of Rawalpindi and Islamabad.

Baradari from the Sikh era located in Islamabad. The Baradari is octagonal in plan and approached by eleven steps. It has been built on high platform in burnt bricks masonry with lime mortar. The Baradari has four entrances built in multi cusped arches and four false arches. The building of the Baradari has been plastered with lime mortar internally and externally on which traces of fresco paintings, floral and geometrical design in red yellow and green colour reported. Human figure, most probably of Maharaja Ranjit Singh the ruler of the Punjab is also painted. The traces of structure around the Baradari shows that the Baradari was once fortified.

The baradari at Kuri, which is believed to have been built during the Sikh period, lies in a very bad condition. It is octagonal in shape and it is built on an octagonal platform. This octagonal plinth imparts an imposing look to the structure, which was decorated with foliated pillars. Eleven stairs on the eastern side lead to the main chamber. There are arch entrances from four directions. There is a boundary wall around the baradari, which has now crumbled.

It was adorned with paintings. A closer look reveals paintings of Sikh gurus. The traces of the paintings of Baba Guru Nanak with his companions Bala and Mardana is still visible on the eastern and southern walls of the Baradari. Unfortunately, the locals and the visitors have

defaced most of the paintings. Likewise, the plaster of the Baradari has begun to come off. One can see some traces of the paintings on the outer walls. A close look at some of the panels reveals depiction of some Sikh gurus. It is also adorned with paintings from inside. The ceiling of the baradari is decorated with floral designs. There is an inscription in Gurmukhi script on the western panel of the outer wall.

The mosque, which is believed to have been built by Mughal emperor Akbar, still dominates the landscape of the Kuri town. It was noted for its lofty domes and entrance gate, which has intricate carvings. It has recently been renovated thus playing havoc with its original beauty. Formerly it was decorated with paintings. A retired government official by the name of Mr. Muhammad Azhar claimed to know the story of this monument and the locality of Kuri Shehar. I met him at his residence, which was near the complex. The official was apparently highly regarded by people in the area, who spoke of his strong ties with the Sikh and Hindu inhabitants of Kuri Shehar. This is what he told me: The monument is known as 'Barah Dari' or 'Twelve Doors'. It is mentioned in a book about the area, authored by Vikram Anand and Asha Dar. Mr. Azhar read out the history of the site to me from this book in his living room. "Vikram and Asha had mentioned the various clans and castes that inhabited the area, which includes Aroras, Bhagats and Brahmins. These were the first Sikh and Hindu castes that inhabited this locality, so one can safely come to the conclusion that this was where it all began. The Sikhs before Partition in particular owned massive swathes of land here, where a total of 8 kanals on average would constitute one house on average." (This passage was read out from the book by Mr. Azhar with his eyes glued to the text.) "And what about the monument?" I asked. "Is this the first Sikh Temple in the country?"

### **Sikh women were raped and dumped into this well**

"No, not the first as far as I can recall but definitely one of the first. This area had approximately fifty temples of which only the ruins of four remain. The monument that you are referring to had twelve doors and was comparatively larger, but much of it was destroyed in 1947. The area surrounding the temple was also home to numerous confectionary shops that were owned by the Sikhs, where they preached their religion to the masses and converted many Hindus to Sikhism. The building was originally made of marble and had a 200 foot long flagpole with the Sikhism insignia on it. After Partition, it was plundered to the very core by Muslims."

Our conversation shifted from the details of the temple to the locality of Kuri Shehar. The name 'Kuri Shehar' derives from 'Kauri' or 'Kaur', which means 'Princess' or 'Lioness' and is a common title for many Sikh women in India and elsewhere. According to Mr. Azhar, the title was revered throughout the community. During the violence that accompanied Partition, the attempt to eliminate Sikh women from the locality by Muslims came in the form of brazenly raping them and dumping them into the very same well which was dug into the ground in the complex.

Mr. Azhar's son, Danish, who is a student of Electronics at Isra University and is acutely aware of his family background (the clan has resided in Kuri Shehar for long) hinted that Sikhs from across Kuri Shehar would flock to Barah Dari and bathe in a nearby river and offer prayers to 'Vaheguru' or God. At the same time he also lamented the sad state of the remaining temples,

which are in jeopardy because of the neglect of bureaucratic authorities and the ignorance of residents and visitors.

The area which constitutes Kuri Shehar today is a throwback to pre-Partition days, where residents hailing from an array of different backgrounds live in small houses, with narrow lanes and poor access to basic facilities. It was hard for me to imagine any Dharmic religions originating in a town where a typical clientele politics in favour of the Pakistan People's Party has dominated the area for most of its history. Present-day Kuri Shehar is located near the Bahria Enclave in Islamabad; it is right beside the construction site of the 'Head Start School Campus' another one of Naznin Murtaza's projects. The ruins of the temple are daily clouded by the churning noises of bulldozers. The holy river beyond the hill, once a bathing hub for religious Sikhs, is now a dirty body of filth. Surely this place deserved more than being a dump site for waste from ambitious CDA projects nearby. Ironically, the security guard who watched over the temple began to protest vociferously when I told him that this was a sacred place. He looked upon me as an apostate and said that nothing was more scared than the local mosque of Kuri Shehar. When I asked him if he knew the story of the place where he was standing, he replied with a gruff "Mainukipataa?" in Punjabi. ('What do I care?')

Apart from this it is said that there were rooms just in front of the main complex which were used by the Sikh religious people when they were staying there for worship later on these rooms were destroyed but one can see the basis of these rooms there. It was the meeting place of the chieftains, dancing place and also a place of luxury for the Sikh royals where they can enjoy by the time of stress. Music and dance were performed there for the royals. Later on it became the sacred place for Sikhs. The concerned authorities should save these precious crumbling structures of Kuri town for the posterity and the tourists.

## **ANALYSIS AND CONCLUSION**

Kuri baradari and its splendor have kept the names of its builders alive may be one of the reason that the royals have this point in their minds while building such marvelous monuments. Kuri baradari is a link between our present and past. Kuri Baradari has been reported in detail for the first time in Archaeological research and restoration.

Analytical and scientific study of Kuri baradari reveals art and culture of that time in which it was built. It is interesting to notice that it was built at a time when Sikh rule was on decline after the sale of Kashmir by the British to Maharaja Gulab Singh under the treaty of Amritsar.

The art and architecture of Kuri baradari like its floral designs, different geometric patterns and stone used in masonry work are marvelous and captivating. Mughals introduced the concept of baradari in their architecture. Literally, Baradari means having twelve openings or doors but it is not necessary of baradaris having twelve doors in their architecture. The architecture of baradaris built by Sikhs differs according to their use and purpose.

Architectural features like ornamental bands called molding, niches, arcades, pillars having bracket and Alcove or blind have been used in Kuri baradari. It was observed architectural features commonly used in other baradaris reported in current study. Another observation was



the baradaries were built near the bank of rivers and in a serene environment to spend leisure time.

They were the meeting places of the chieftains, statesmen's and sitting place where dances and musical performances were organized for the witness of royalty and courtiers. Kuri bradari is not only rich in architecture but also from artistic point of view. The art depicted in Kuri bardari has a blend of different cultures like Mughals, Greek, Persian, Buddhist and Hindu.

In today's continuous rise in population of the global village where tradition, culture, religion are either dying or their original form distorted, this study is small contribution for future generation to learn from.

The research work on the Kuri baradari which already has lost its glorious architecture also highlight the need of its preservation as an important archaeological site of Islamabad which is deteriorating due to mishandling and natural calamities.



**Fig.1. A view of Kuri Baradari ( By researcher)**



**Fig.2. A blind arch having some traces of paintings ( By researcher)**



**Fig.3. Ditrurbed complex of baradari need to be preserved ( By researcher)**





**Fig.4. The main complex of Baradari ( By researcher)**

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