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ARCHITECTURAL STUDY OF SHRINE OF HAZRAT SULTAN BAHU

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ABSTRACT

The approach taken herein to the study of Sultan Bahu's shrine is a multi-dimensional one. The history of, purpose for, and the function of Bahu's shrine along with how it is a gateway to understanding Sufi mysticism is what will be discussed. As well as that, we will investigate his philosophy and how it drove his poetry and influenced his mysticism.

INTRODUCTION

Punjab has been host to not only many ancient civilizations such as the Indus Valley civilization, but has also been the birth place of many Sufi Saints. Sultan Bahu, a figure of great significance for the religious of the area, then and now was born around 1691. Belonging himself to the Qadari order of Sufism, he founded the Sarwari Qadari tradition. Unfortunately few primary sources exist

to validate his life and works and most of what is known about him is through second hand accounts or from other works in the Sufi tradition. He is said to have been born in the reign of the fifth Mughal Emperor Shah Jehan in Shorkot. The city was given to his father, Bayazid Muhammad, for his service to the empire. His ancestors hailed from Arabia and conquered the area around Ahmadabad before establishing themselves there.

Much has been made of his early devotion to Islam that continued throughout his life. His countenance was said to cause people to convert to Islam, because of the radiant nature of his faith that showed itself on his face, that came to him from God. Later on, wishing to become a formal part of the Sufi tradition he studied under Habib-ullah Qadri in Baghdad. Having soon learned all he could, he was guided to Qadri's own master Pir Saiyid Abdul Rahman in Delhi.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY & LITERATURE REVIEW

In order to assess the architecture, observation on site was required as extant written material is sparse. Many people including devotees, supervisors, caretakers along with followers who visit the shrine were interviewed and conclusions were drawn based on what information was given. In light of the fact that despite composing some of the finest poems in the Sufi tradition his own life remains shrouded in mystery, this was essential to map any account of his life. There are certain works available but their reliability is in question, lacking the standards for authentic scholarship. Of the books that exist, two specifically, "Munqib-e-Sultan" written years after Sultan Bahu's death by Sultan Hamid and "Tawarekh Hazrat Sultan Bahu" written by Hamid Qadri are ones that are seen as most reliable by historians.

His poetry, which is essential to understanding his world view and his mysticism, was translated throughout the centuries. Notable in this regard is "Death Before Dying: The Sufi Poems of Sultan Bahu", a work of great significance in understanding Sultan Bahu. It not only covers his poetry but also touches on his philosophy of life and religion.

Related more directly to this study is the book "Sultan Bahu" which covers a wider ground and aside from his poetry, mentions his ancestors, the culture surrounding shrines prevailing in the subcontinent, as well any mythology associated with it.

Location

The shrine of Bahu is located in an inhabited area. Geographically, it is close to his city of birth Shorekot. It is also in close proximity to the rivers of Jhelum and Chenab. Its exact location is near Garh Maharaja, Tehsil Shorekot, in district Jhang, Pakistan. It is just two miles out from Garh Maharaja, making access easy for his devotees as well as any tourists or visitors.

From Lahore, the shrine is only 5.5 kilometers away. Travelling on the Ring Road onto Motorway (M-3), via Jhang is the shortest way by road. The construction of the motorway has further aided people from far-flung areas to flock to the shrine and pay their respects. We start with, as earlier stated, the

Ring Road. From there we get on the Jhang-Gojra Road, then Noorpur Thal. From there we get on the Shergarh Road via the Lahore- Islamabad Motorway. Once we arrive at Jhang we take the route through Shergarh road to the shrine at Basti Samundri.



Figure 1 location map Shrine of Sultan Bahu

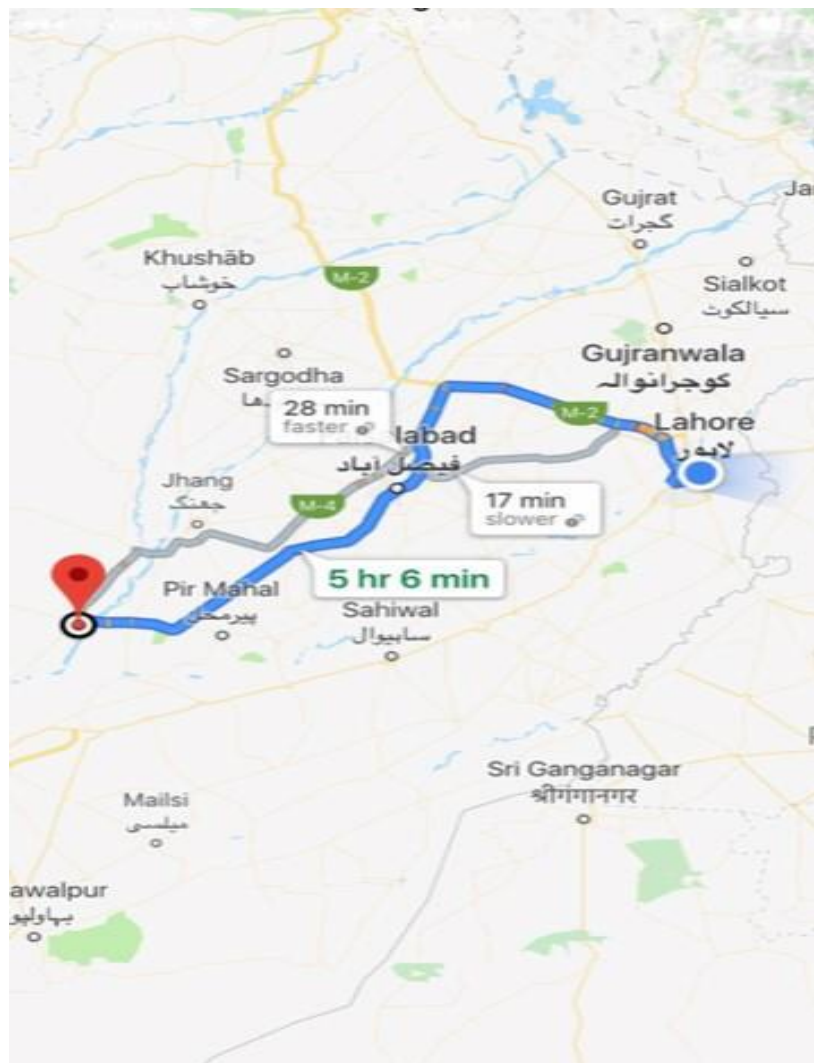


Figure 2 Road map to Sultan Bahu's Shrine from Lahore



Shrine of
Hazrat Sultan
Bahu

Figure 3 Basti Samundari Sultan Bahu's shrine can be seen in distant

The Shrine

We should start by defining our terms before talking about the specifics of the subject. A shrine is distinct from a tomb, or even a mausoleum. The latter terms indicate that a person's physical remains are present in the specific place. A shrine can be dedicated to a person and does not require that the person to whom it is dedicated be buried there.

Sultan Bahu's shrine was constructed on his gravesite originally, at Fort Qehrgan on the banks of the river Chenab. The shrine remained there, according to some sources that are of dubious reliability, for about 78 years from his death till about 1767. By this time Lahore had been captured by the Sikhs under the rule of Jhunda Singh and Gunda Singh, and Sultan Bahu's descendants had migrated from their homes. Faqeers used to live in the shrine at this point along with others with connections to the shrine. According to an apocryphal story, the Chenab drowned the fort near this time. The people residing there were able to relieve many of the tombs but Sultan Bahu's could not be retrieved. The people started wailing in disappointment until Sultan Bahu told them telepathically, that someone would come the following morning and help get the body out.

This relieved the people who believed what they were being told. The following day, a person came in a green veil and took out the body immediately which caused a wave of great frenzy among the crowd. The body had not decomposed and was in fact quite fragrant, so much so that the fragrance was said to have spread for miles upon miles. At this turn of events, Sultan Muhammad Asghar Ali, a successor of Sultan Bahu, said it was Bahu himself who was the man behind the veil that brought the body, one of a number of miracles attributed to Sultan Bahu.

Now the question that had to be settled was where was Sultan Bahu's body to be buried? This was settled by the veiled person in question. In the town of Samandari, near Chenab was a mansion that was surrounded by a wall that separated it from the nearby well for the people. Whoever entered it was said to have fainted, so no living creatures, including the livestock of the people could step foot in it. The veiled person commanded the body to be buried there. This was because it was close to where the shrine had originally been. The shrine was constructed in the center of the mansion, with the well facing westward. In contrast to a burial, the body was kept on the ground rather than be buried under the earth, and the shrine constructed around it.

It is a popular shrine that sees many visitors at the time of the Urs, an annual pilgrimage. Sultan Bahu had a tradition of holding an annual Urs in Muharram in sobering remembrance of his ancestor Hussein's sacrifice at Karbala. People maintain this tradition to this day, visiting his shrine in the first 10 days of Muharram.

Despite its importance to the locals it remains neglected. Aoukaaf, a governmental body in charge of record keeping and maintenance of shrines and mosques in Pakistan has not taken charge of it. This is because of administrative constraints that render it incapable to keep track of all shrines. Sultan Bahu's shrine is just one of the shrines that has remained untended. Therefore, the history of its building, as well as other architectural facts are not easy to access, particularly those pertaining to its history. The maintenance of the shrine for these reasons, has been left to a committee appointed by the Jhang court. The future of the shrine is in dispute however, as two parties both of whom belong to Bahu's family are fighting a case for ownership of the shrine in the courts.

The burial chamber, where Sultan Bahu's body is buried is on one end of the shrine. Immediately next to it is the mosque, a pathway connecting the different areas of the complex, and graves of Sultan Bahu's family throughout the generations. The shrine and the adjacent mosque, is surrounded on its sides by a "Veranda", essentially open space that accompanies many structures in Pakistan. It contains the original well that still stands even though the people now rely on alternate sources to access water. As is customary for many shrines, there is a "Lungar Khana", an array of kitchens that feed up to a thousand people daily.

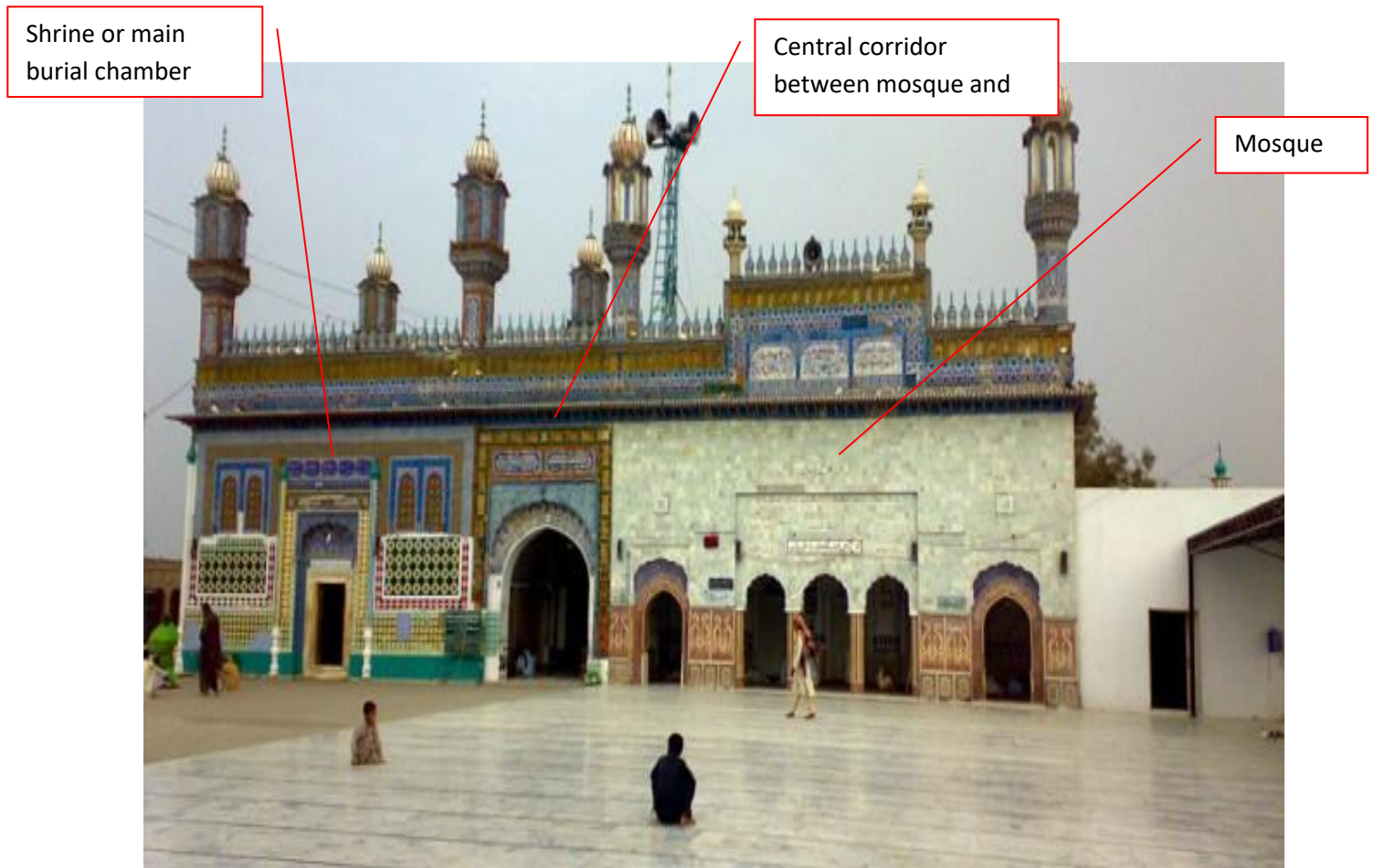


Figure 4 Front facade Sultan Bahu's Shrine

On the walls of the shrine one can see a montage of artworks including many in traditional form. Kashi, a form of Pakistani painting that depicts ceramic products. This involves foliage and branches, and other parts of a tree, and the plethora of colors used are indicative of the Persian influence that permeates through the paintings. This art has been heavily influenced by the Chinese Mongols, as a result there is speculation that its origins can be found in Kashghar, China.

On the exterior of the shrine we can see glazed tiles. This is reminiscent of the mosques built in the Punjab region dating back to Muhammad bin Qasim's invasion and the building of the first one around 900 A.D. Because of the importance the first mosque holds for Muslims, Multani tiles have seen a regular appearance on the architecture of the region since then. Some other famous buildings that have employed the use of these tiles include the Talpur tombs in Sindh, the Nawaban mosque etc. It has also been commonly associated with shrines, being part of the shrine of Abdul Latif, Hazrat Haqani and Uchh Sharif. It is of such immense popularity, that even the Lahore museum features it.



Figure 5 Back Entrance to the burial chamber



Figure 6 Decorative Motifs on the inner cornice

One can see the floral décor on the inner regions here. It is made of stucco and is elaborately designed. Similar designs can be seen in other structures around Punjab as well.

a



Figure 7 Mirror mosaic on the ceiling of the mosque

Painted and exquisitely crafted woodwork as well as mirrors, grace the ceilings of the shrine and the mosque. It is set in geometric patterns to appeal to the viewer. Work of this kind is famous in Sindh such as can be seen in the Sheesh Mahal.



Figure 8 A close up of the mirror work on the ceiling of Sultan Bahu's Shrine

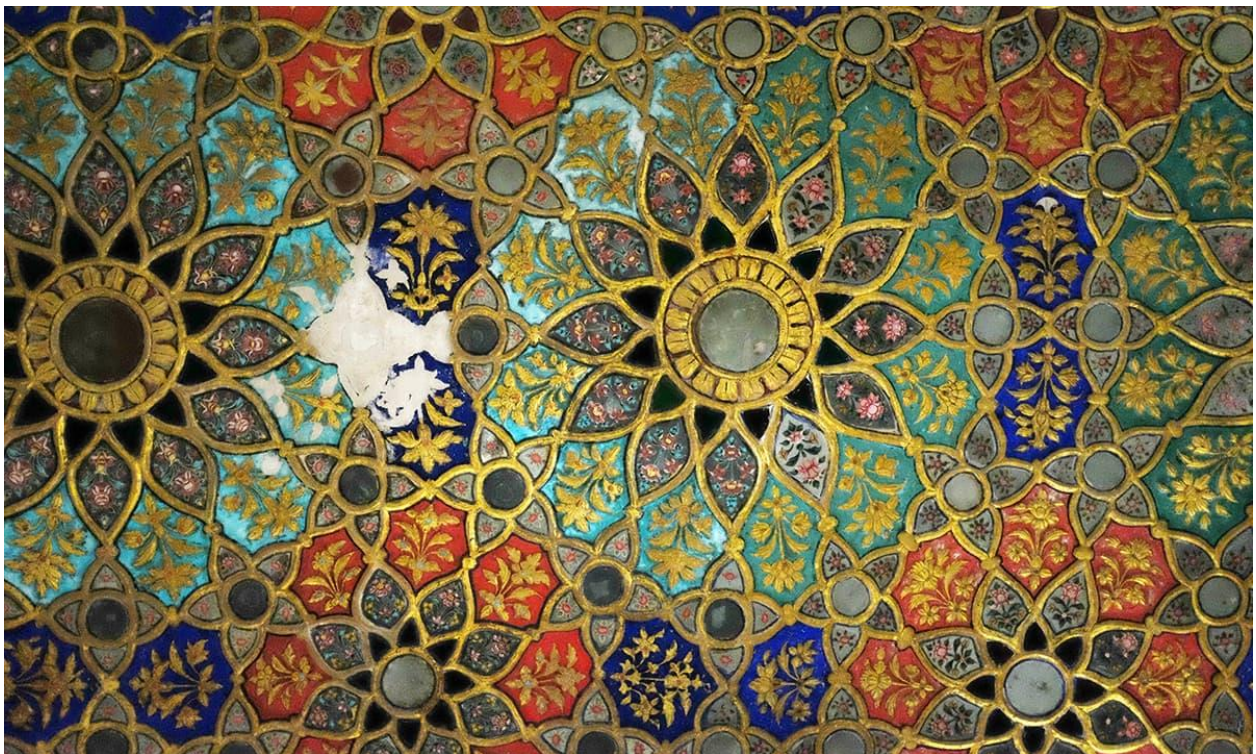


Figure 9 A close up of the mirror work on the ceiling of Sheesh Mahal



Figure 10 Decorative Jali (perforated stone slabs)



Figure 11 jali design two

As part of the architecture, one can see different motifs in a lattice framework, that enhances the beauty of the shrine. One exception to this is the hail work, neither intricate nor very refined, but consisting of two different design patterns. One of these contains a dome, a minaret and a bird. The other is comprised of a motif of grapes with a tulip flower. Both have been made with the same material: concrete or cemented jali even if the motifs are distinct.



Figure 12 Arch and path way between Mosque and Burial chamber

The outer part of the main arch displays kashi gari (seen in figure 12) . The triangular spaces or spandrels left behind are filled with floral patterns with Quranic verses inscribed as well. The sides again show the glazed tiles

mentioned earlier, in both an earthly terracotta and olive green colors. Because of wear and tear, and lack of maintenance by the central authorities, some tiles have been replaced with English tiles that appear out of place.



Figure 13 Wishing well or Talab

There is a famous pond inside the shrine which is barely a feet and a half deep. The belief is held by many that it is sacred water and that money can be thrown in it to get one's wishes fulfilled. For a child, a couple may throw in a doll or something similar. It is said to be of a miraculous nature because notes have been known to be retrieved from it weeks after being thrown in that are unscathed.

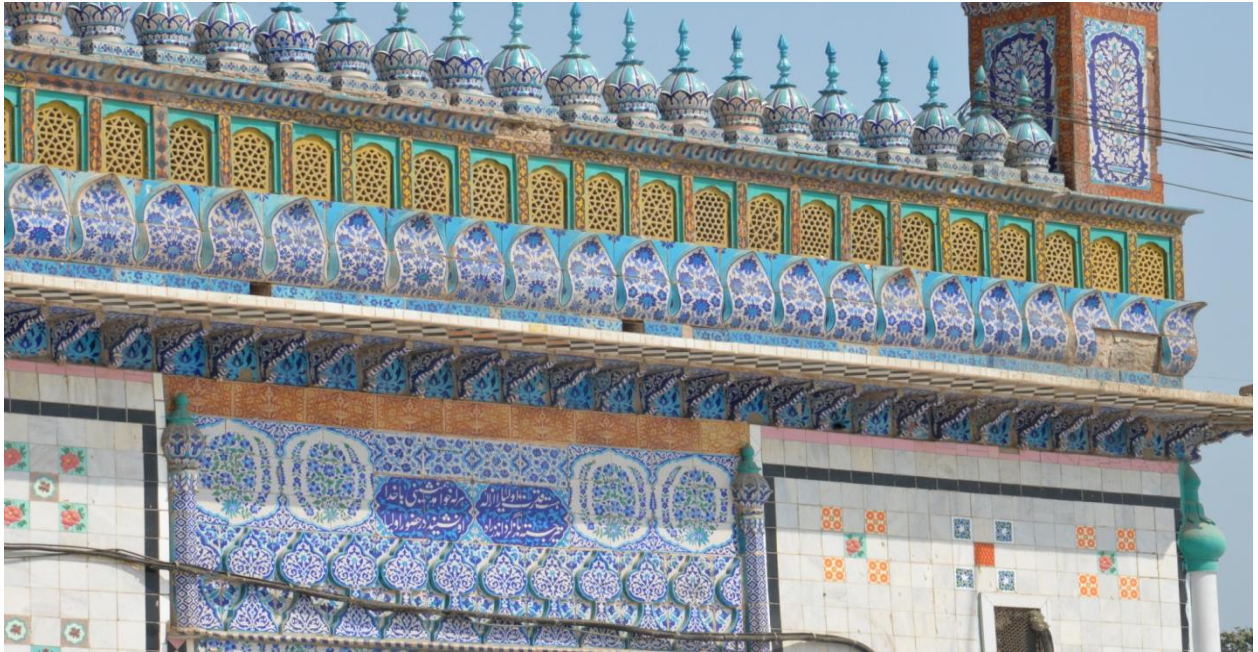


Figure 14 Blue tile work and lattice work on the parapets and frieze

The best work is also on the exterior. The Multani artisans (the influence of Multani artisans is evident from the paintings) have written Sultan Bahu's poetry in his honor and so supplicants can see and feel themselves closer to him as they read it.



Figure 15 floral carvings on spandrel



Figure 16 Outer entrance gate to the complex
 The entrance to the shrine is simple, covered in Quranic verses of white marble. On the sides, like in other parts of the shrine some chip work can be seen.



Figure 17 Main entrance



Figure 18 carved marble foot stone at the entrance door

The entrance of the burial chamber features engraved marble footstones. The colors that once filled these have withered completely with the passage of time.



Figure 19 Entrance door to the main chamber

Overhead, on the entrance one sees the border made of white marble cut finely.



Figure 20 Name of the *Kashigar* painted along with the floral patterns on the central arch

Names of the *Kashigar* Artisans and meysteries are painted on the arch too. Faqir Abdul Razzaq's is mentioned as *Kashigar* and Muhammad Hussain Punjabi as Mystery. (see figure 20 and 21)



Figure 21 close-up of the arch



Figure 22 veranda floor

The courtyard, central to the complex, is a chip design with floral patterns of gold and white.



Figure 23 inner chamber

On the inside of the main shrine, the walls are covered quite elegantly with glazed tiles. Chaddars and woodwork are placed above Sultan Bahu’s grave, with Islamic verses inscribed on them.



Figure 24 front facade (darbar entrance)



Figure 25 minarets



Figure 26 open Kitchen Lunger khana



Figure 27 Arched gate at the entrance to the surrounding houses near the shrine



Figure 28 doves/pigeons chamber in the shrine

In the backyard doves are kept in cages, as many Pakistanis do with similar birds. They are said to proclaim the name of Sultan Bahu in his remembrance.



Figure 29 Green and yellow checked pattern on the façade

We see more evidence of the ornate fittings, with glazed yellow and green tiles in a pattern resembling a chess board.



Figure 30 central Arch

Here we see intricate mirror mosaic work on one of the spandrel. (figure 30)



Figure 31 other graves and the wishing tree

Many stories are associated with this tree at the back yard of this shrine. Under the tree we see many other graves of the family members of Sultan Bahu. Women sit under the tree and also tie wishing treads and small cradles to it.



Figure 32 tile work

The outer facade is covered in Italian tiles, representing the diversity of building material used in the shrine's construction.



Figure 33 Marble Jali window facing the grave.



Figure 34 wishing chains

The sacredness of the shrine leads people to treat the whole of it reverentially. Threads and locks are tied to the charity boxes in hopes that it would lead to people's prayers coming true.



Figure 35 Courtyard containing a covered pond and a few trees

The courtyard has some trees and is made from white marbles like certain other parts of the shrine. It acts a prayer area for people coming there.

Spiritual Lineage

Like all Sufis that came after him, Sultan Bahu also claims to be a follower of Abdul Qadir Jilani. The latter occupies a special place in Sufism, as while there are many traditions of Sufism, they are united in believing the special place that Abdul Qadir Jilani holds. All of them claim him to be their spiritual guide and believe a special debt is owed to him therefore. As mentioned in the introduction to this work, he started his own tradition of Sarwari Qadiri. His own ancestry from the Prophet Muhammad through the Prophet's maternal grandson can be traced directly and is recorded in many works.

Poetry and Literature

Sultan Bahu's poetic legacy has remained relevant to the subcontinent to this day. Not only are his works popular but they have influenced generations of poets since. He wrote countless books, 40 of which are on Sufism. A non-exhaustive list of these includes:

- Abyat e Bahu
- Risqila e Rahi
- Sultan ul Waham
- Kashf ul Israar
- Ganj ul Israar
- Deewan e Bahu
- Fazl ul Liqa

His poetry revolves around the idea of divine love attained through inner reflection. By negation of material desires, and by turning towards God, Bahu believes that we can attain faith and union with God.

He wrote in the Punjabi language, native to his homeland. Through short verses, and rhyme, his poetry is a means of translating complex issues in simple terms that the reader can understand.

His most famous poetic verses in Alif Allah are (translation given below)
Its English translation is as follows:

In My Heart Has Been Planted the Jasmine of Allah's Name by My Master,
My Denial of the Reality of Creation and Embracing of God as the Only Reality,
Have grown the seedling from its Core,

When Mystery's Buds Unfolded Into Revelation's Blossoms, God's Fragrance
Comes to Fill My Entire Person,

May My Master Who is Responsible for this Planting Ever be Blessed, O Bahu!

CONCLUSION:

Sultan Bahu's poetry is an apt metaphor of his life as a saint and his devotion to God is a blessing for his followers who can heed lessons from his example. His poetry is distinctive because of its simplicity and exposition. It expresses a desire to seek God and dissatisfaction with worldly concerns. It also has many layers to it that render it a masterpiece. For instance, on observation one sees that every other "nukk" ends in "hu", a name of Allah. Its repetition is considered a mark of his superior stature, making it a deliberate addition that accentuates his works.

To conclude, Sultan Bahu's life acts as an inspiration for believers of Sufism and followers of Islam more generally, who desire to seek his blessings and intercession. The Urs to his shrine is a great way to celebrate the life of a man who profoundly impacted the local populace's practice of Islam. The deeds of Sultan Bahu also permeate his shrine, where despite the tide of time, they still resonate with any who gaze at it.

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