

Investing the Aesthetics of *Gulāb Bāgh* Gateway: A Diminishing Mughal Monument

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Abstract

The city of Lahore has been controlled by several dynasties throughout course of its history but it reaches its apogee of its splendor under the Mughal Empire between the late 16th and early 18th century and served as its capital city for many years. The Mughals were endowed with remarkably taste for constructing magnificent structures. *Gulābi Bāgh* gateway is one of those monumental structures, built during Mughal Empire. On the facade of *Gulābi Bāgh* gateway, there are inscriptions in Persian language which have symbolical connotations. The structure is embellished with frescos painting. The internal worn-out walls are decorated with lotus flowers and cypress tree which also have symbolical representations. There is no doubt that Architectural structures are helpful to understand the chronological notions about the situation of city especially gateways which are erected for so many reasons. This paper is an effort to interpret the meanings from the symbolic

inscriptions and embellishments carved on the walls of the magnificent piece of art and architecture i.e Gulabi Bagh. In contemporary period the Mughal architecture is one of those remaining structures which are considered as a heritage of Pakistan. This research also highlights the fact that such buildings are ruined by public who torn up their history by the ancestries and are not even conscious of the loss.

Keywords: Gulābi Bāgh gateway, Mughal Architecture, Monument, Inscriptions, Heritage

Introduction

There are so many dynasties who took rule over area of Lahore. “By the end of 10th century, Lahore was ruled by the Hindu Shahiya dynasty. The first historical reference to Lahore as a Muslim city begins in the 11th century (1026 AD) when it was taken by Maḥmūd Ghaznī. And during the reign of Muizz-al- Din Behrām Shāh Lahore was devastated by Mongols (1266-1286) but Under the Khaljīs and Tughlaqs it remained in obscurity. In 1397 AD there was invasion of Timūr and city was taken by a detachment of his forces. But in the period of Lodhī Pathāns (1416-21) renaissance of Lahore has been started.”¹ Zahir-ul-Din Babur established the Mughal Empire in 1526 A.D. by defeating the Sulṭān Ibrāhīm Lodhī at combat of Pānīpat. The Mughals were endowed with remarkably taste for constructing magnificent structures. “Humāyūn, who succeeded Babur, forced into exile in Persia by Shir Shāh Sūrī in 1540 A.D. The construction of Shīr Mandal, an octagonal pavilion and prototype of Timūrid garden is attributed to Humāyūn.”² The synthesis of Timūrid and indigenous design formed the architecture of Lahore whereas Jehāngīr had a distinctive passion for miniature paintings. Shāhjahān is known as master constructor. During his reign that Mughal architecture reached its apogee. He developed the new building material as well as new techniques. There are the verities of gardens built during the Mughal Empire and most of them are existed in Lahore. The Mughal architecture under Shāhjahān’s period is fusion of power and grace, supremacy and aesthetics, matter and nimbleness. Chandar Bahn Brahman’s

narrative is quite interesting in terms of its physical environment. He wrote that, “Lahore is like a paradise on earth...fruits and vegetables are abundant and it is like a mole and increases the beauty of the earth.”³ Mughal emperors were used to love gardens and found of heaving distinct gardens earmarked for special fruits and water thus there one of them is *Gulābi Bāgh* gateway.

Gulābi Bāgh

Gulābi Bāgh gateway is situated rather more than half way on the left to *Shālimār* Garden. “The very word used for ‘gate’, in different languages, signifies might and power...in the Muslim tradition, the word gate has a supplementary mystical connotation, in medieval cities, not only were gates a means of defense but they also had various social function.”⁴ In Lahore the *Gulābi Bāgh* gateway is monumental structure with high portals. A few paces distant from *Gulābi Bāgh* gateway, on the north side is the grand mausoleum of Dā’i Anga. *Gulābi Bāgh* gateway is also one of the historic monuments neglected by government and local people as well. It is declining day by day. So, the objective of the study are as follows:

1. To document the significance of historical gateway and its current state.
2. To explore the hidden meaning of the inscriptions carved on the walls of the gateway.

Materials & Methods

This research adopts the exploratory method to find out aesthetic approach of frescoes in *Gulābi Bāgh* Gateway. The methodology adopted is basically a conscious approach towards its architectural embellishment. The objective of this research determines the nature of data based on the remnants of iconographical approach. Primary data is collected through surveys, photography on site. An investigation of the architectural composition along the horizontal and vertical axes was conducted on the site and secondary data is collected from the historic literature about the famous architectural structure of *Gulābi Bāgh* gateway. Secondary sources such as books, research papers, and reports were used to compile the literature. Analytical study

approach was adopted to critically assess the literature references gathered and site surveys, and visual surveys. Then, using critical and historical analysis, major conclusions were drawn. The information was analyzed in terms of architectural arrangement, ornamentation, and inscriptions on both the exteriors and interiors.

Results & Discussion

Literature Review

Ayesha Pamela Rogers highlights the significance of *Gulābi Bāgh* Gateway in her article "*Pakistan the crises of conservation; personal narratives of Heritage places.*" She defines that heritage of Pakistan is under serious threat. These monuments are ignored and gradually going towards devastation due to lack of maintenance. She has expressed some narrations by local people. In the book "*India of To-day*" by Walter Del Mar has written that Gulabi Bagh or Rose Garden, existed in a square double storied architectural setting which is covered with brilliant coloured enamel on stucco. The gateway is all that remains of the Garden laid out in 1655 by Sultan Beg, the cousin of Itimad-ud-daula and son-in-law of Shah Jehan.

Syed Muhammad Latif states significance of *Gulabi Bagh* in his book "*Lahore: Its History, Architectural Remains and Antiquities.*" He expresses on the road of Shalimar, rather more than half way on the left, is the gateway to Gulabi Bagh, or the Garden of Rosewater. The splendid arches entrance of glazed tiles still stands. This picturesque gateway is remarkable for profusion and excellence of its colored pottery and enameled frescoes, which are vivid. The beauty of the words Gulabi Bagh lies in their serving as the name of garden as well as giving the the chronogram, the numeral value of the words expressing the era in which the building was constructed and garden laid out. Though the Garden is no longer exist but its grandeur glazed titles gateway stands to witness the beauty of this *Gulābi Bāgh*. An inscription on the gateway importations that it was constructed by great Persian architect Mirzā Sultān Baig "who was the Admiral of the fleet and a cousin of the husband of sultān Begam, daughter of *Shāhjahān*."⁵ The gateway was completed in 1066 A.H/1068 A.C.

It was during Mughal period (1526-1799) that Lahore became one of leading city in India. Barbur's passion for gardens is well understood. Mughals traditions are amalgamation of many other traditions of Central Asian Minor. "Mirzā kāmṛān who lived here and enhanced the city with gardens, Akbar spent for fifteen years in this city, "who made Lahore his capital in 1584-1598 and at the same time thirteen city gates was built...the British indigo merchant, William Finch, who visited Lahore in 1611 during the Jahāngīr's reign there are twelve handsome gate for the entrance of castle, three of which open to the bank of the river, and the other nine towards the land."³ Shāhjahān spent his time and his son Dārā Shikūh was a disciple of Saint Miān Mīr. Dārā Shikūh in his book Sikīnā-tul-Aūliya, mentions some thirty places in the suburb of Lahore where Haḍrat Miān Mīr used to retire for his meditation. Among these places some nineteen at least were the garden which were surrounded the city of Lahore."⁶ Nevertheless, gates and gardens played as fundamental role in Lahore's communal setup during Mughal period.

Qalabi

The inscription in the geometrical panels above the facade is *Qalabi*. The word *Qalabi* is Persian word, which means pear (fruit). It is assumed that the *Qalabi* word, what may now *Gulābi* and now this huge monument is known as *Gulābi Bāgh* gateway which associated with pink color or pink flowers. So, flowers or fruits are main charisma of garden. The inscriptions on facade have symbolical representation of Prophet Muhammad. According these inscriptions, prophet is deferential persona, and his personality personify to garden. As his personality is like flowers and universe is descending in his fragrance, he is like tree and his lovers are the fruit. It means, how much fortunate are those who are dear to him.

محمد عربی کا بروی ہر دوسرا است
کسی کہ خاک درش نیست خاک بر سر او
بانی باغ سخاوت فاتح باب کرم خوش
آنکہ از داری گردوں ساخت باغ چوں ارم

بانی باغ سخاوت فاتح باب کر
آنکہ از داری گردوں ساخت باغ چوں ارم
آن باغی کی دارد لاله داغش
ز تقویم خرد پر سید غازی
کلی خورشید و مہ زبید چراغش
گلابی باغ شد تاریخ باغش،

Islamic world has habitually been acknowledged as a lover of flowers. A western traveler in Iran in the early part of nineteenth century wrote about “the Iranian’s extraordinary love of the rose. In no country of the world does the rose grow in such perfection as in Persia; in no country is it so cultivated. Their gardens and courts are adorned with vases. There are also contemporary accounts about tulip which appeals in a same way in Turkey, whereas in the Mughal India the rose, tulip and lotus all has seductive appeal.”⁷ The huge architectural structures of Mughals are reflection of such floral exquisiteness which evolves through the sense of aesthetic application.

Inscription of Hadith

On the facade of the gateway, an inscription of *ḥadīth* is also above mentioned on frieze, which has a deep connotation. To recall Allah and his prophet is considered a stunning act. The practice of repeating Allah’s name or some *ḥadīth* is the *wazifah* or *wird* or *zīkr*. “The repeated and virtually endless lines, scrolls, phrase in the pattern reproduces the theme and effect of both multiplicity of nature and the repeated word of *zīkr*. God’s creation is infinite, and his infinitude is so to speak concentrated in Him, in His name. So, recite and recall Him is the infinitude of His power. *Zīkr* is more spectacular for man’s soul.”⁸ The rhythm and harmony between the vertical and horizontal letters produce patterns that create a sense of adornment in art. Ralph Wilson thinks that religious taboos didn’t encourage the artist from signifying living forms which was the restricted due to prejudice. So artist found an outlet and converted his vision into ornament of lines and colors.” Architecture is considering one of the most symbolical forms of the arts since the man’s antiquity. “During the thousand years when the unlettered commonalty could not think in the abstraction of verbal imageries,

architectural symbolism was a natural mode of imaginative thinking because it was only by means of comprehensible forms that ideas, perception, and beliefs could have any convincing reality and general rationality.”⁹ So man’s inclination towards architecture is to relate space and its eternity and its best expression is gardens. Space is considered as vital fragment of architecture, which is dignified as martial of an architect, who carves the inner space in such a way that becomes fully visible and has inherent value. Therefore, the space or form led behind a strong concept or an idea. The architecture during Mughal period is erected on the principle of exaggerating the effect of space. The Mughal architects combined the indigenous seasons with the concept of aesthetics. “In every building and garden nature is subdued by man. This conquest of nature is an Islamic concept. Man, according to Qur’ān, is the only agency that can mollify and tame nature to his will and purpose.” Gardens contributed a major share in the built of environment. The idea of space is actual create a sense of relaxation, peace and coolness which is sign of surrender to faith. “Mughal garden corresponds to the narratives of paradise in Qur’ān.”¹⁰

The magnificent lofty flat roofed structure is standing on square plan. In the cosmological view “form and idea both are directly related to particular as square is considered a symbol of earth. Gardens are generally based on *chāhār-tāq* plan in which rectangle plan divided into four equal squares. The square here stands for the four quarters of the universe.”¹¹ The whole structure is built on high plinth which have lotus patterned frieze in burnt bricks. The height of building has shown the emperor’s power. The half domed central arch flanked on each side by pointed niche at the lower level, which have two balconies and an opening having multi-cusped arch at the upper level. “The main façade is alienated into three bays, delineated by rectangular lines reminiscent of timber-framed town houses.”¹² The double storied volume is surmounted by two arched windows in the two side bays. These storey height openings are arranged one above the other, the narrow stair case is going upward from the north side of gateway, the cylindrical octagonal shafts

placed at the four corners of structure like pilasters in floral pattern. Like other splendor Gardens, *Gulābi Bāgh* gateway is also somehow extinct today. The facade of the gateway is embellished with mosaic tiles in blue, yellow, green and white with floral tendrils. Such embellishing friezes in same colours are also found in Chuburjī. The gateway has one arch opening on two sides. In the interior of both stories, the ceilings and faces of the walls are adorned with traditional Mughal architecture feature of mosaic. Most of them are disappeared. “The word mosaic itself is derived from the Greek *mousaikon* (polished) or from the Latin *museum*. Robert Byron states the beauty of mosaic in the words. “To talk quality of mosaic is to praise not only its colors, its sharp cold turquoise clashing with purple-toned lapis, intervolved with daffodil yellow and punctuated by red and green or black and white; and they are joined so closely and create an effect of painting. The ultimate virtue is in the design itself.”¹³

Color

Colors are deliberate choice and mosaic patterns on panels have a high sense of color contrast and combination. Green, white, blue and brown create rich and diverse effect which is cause of strength and splendor of its simple structure. The colour scheme of course, white to make blue more vivid. Among them blue color is prominent. Modern psychologist identified it with cool and calmness, the opposite of excitement and mental tumult.” A blue tile above the facade of *Gulābi Bāgh* gateway appeases the mental strain, rest the eyes and motivate the inside to concentrate. According to *Shāh Nāmāh*, blues varying in shade from turquoise to lapis were used as a national colour of Persia...whereas white associates with Umayyeds.”¹⁴

Kashikari

Tile work rouses a great attainment of seventeenth century’s native tile workers. “*Kāshī-Kāri* or mosaic was first introduced by the Chinese and later developed in Persia, which used to be the Centre of this art. When Moḥammed bin Qāsim invaded India, a number of *kāshigars* came with his invading army. The painted tiles have been used since the 9th century.”¹⁵ Glazed tiles were used to execute tile pictures by Mughals. The Mughal

mosaic of the pre-Shāhjahān epoch is consider the less vivid and radiant and lustrous than Persian. “The colours are passive and more subtle...beauty lies more in the intelligent mixing of colours and in the ingenious arrangement of design than in pure splendor. The Shāhjahāni mosaic, like everything else it touched or stimulated, is a cascade of allure, mixing the serious with the stunning and abstemious with the ecstatic.”¹⁶ Different colors fluctuate in rhythmic tone on the both sides of façade. There are ten, vertical panels, ornamented with floral motifs, which are balanced by three horizontal panels.

Tazakari

Apart from the spandrels, which are containing the usual floral tendrils, the design consists of floral or inscriptional panels with raised brick frames plastered and painted with imitation brick work or *tazākāri*. The Brickwork was employed by some schools of architecture to a mystifying effect. By laying on the brick in different ways-vertical parallel, angular and spherical and create a rhythmic effect. “Saljūqs outdid everyone else in creating monumental miracles in brick.”¹⁷ The pattern laid on floor of gateway in geometrical form and each segment as it emerges into sight and craft a design in its own right, and such similar design is also found on the brick floor of Dā'i Anga. A jailed window with patterns based in sand stone, on the second storey. The patterns of six-sided star form which is also said to be the Babylonian hexagram. The sun, the moon and star figure are also prominently in Saljūqs art. Such geometrical pattern has much similar to the *Alā'i Dārwāza* (1305). The star is symbol of spirit struggling against the forces of darkness.” And sun light shows its lucidity when passes through the jailed window and creates shadows which suggest a diverting mood by the changing time from dawn to dusk. The coherent geometrical forms and light evolve the beauty.

Fresco

The angles are marked by slender octagonal minaret like pilasters which are brilliantly executed by frescos. Mughal frescos reveal the interesting phenomena and ascent towards the stylization of natural floral motifs or suggesting; towards venerating of the natural motifs...The aesthetic theme is

created a sentimental tone. “The floral pattern used on pillars, panels as buds’ flowers, plants, leaves, twigs and branches, in faithful imitation of nature.”¹⁸ The beautiful floral designs are more protruding in red, green and red colors. As it is mentioned in “the seven colors of Safavid *haft-rang* are divided into primary three and a secondary foursome...the primary symbolizes the ‘way’ of creation. The subsequent four red, yellow, green and blue, symbolize the four seasons, the four cardinal directions, the four elements and qualities through which mankind experiences the world of his senses.”¹⁹ The inner sideways of gate is divided into two chambers, and both have same ornamentation. Along with these chambers, its north and south sides comprised two attached rooms, on the entrance of rooms, there are representations of natural motifs in the form of tree and Cypress tree composed in square sunk niches, which has symbolical meaning as “the cypress tree in Ottoman architecture is eternal life.”²⁰ Its growth towards sky creates a sense of infinity. Cypress tree is common in the landscape of miniature paintings. The post-impressionist artist, Van Gogh painted cypress tree near to church. In Greek mythology the cypress tree relates to their infernal divinity.

First Floor

In the upper storey which leading a narrow brick staircase, and façade of this storey is comprised in three cusped arches and above all *chajjā* is supported by brackets. The acanthus flowers are set within a cusped arch; acanthus provides another common motif design. The interior decoration is generally entails of painted floral and conventionalized approach, although most of them are disappeared but still giving a beautiful glimpse. Floral chains run through the panels and fill the interspaces. The trees and flowers have their own philosophy “the motif of flowers in a vase symbolizes the gift of nature, emerging from the water of life, creation dispensing forth from its primordial source.” The circle of flower signifies the center and it is “hence the archetypal image of soul.” To produce a diverse, and hence a stunning effect, the design is associated with vase and flowers. The vase contains a kiosk (*chatrī*). The similar motif is revealed in stylized form in the tomb of Itmad-

ud-Daulah . The depiction of a human figure epitomized under kiosk (*chatrī*). The flowers are also typically Persian as tulip, iris, narcissus, etc. The lotus is used in multiplicity of forms throughout the Mughal architecture.

Interpretation About Flower

There are diversified interpretations about flower in the various religions. The lotus symbolizes an important position in Hindu Buddhist Cosmology. It symbolizes purity or divine manifestation. It is often present with water that is source and support of everything. In Buddhism lotus is like wheel and wheel is symbolize the cosmos or the soul.” In the frescos painting on the upper storey the lotus flowers are floating in the water. These paintings are comparatively different than those which are painted in lower section. The painting in the *ḥammām* of mosque Wazīr Khān has similarities with such kind of frescos which are in *Gulābi Bāgh* gateway.

Interpretation About Tree

The trees Along with lotus the water symbolizes life. “Life flows on like a great river, issuing forth from the mountains like a spring (birth), becoming a brook (childhood), developing into a stream (youth), maturing into river (middle age), broadening into a delta (old age), and falling into the ocean (death) to which it really belonged and which it had ever been a part.”²¹ The tree has its own significance it is relate with the life simultaneously in the state of both birth and death and both transactions eternity. “Its branches are the heavens; the lower branches where they grow are the plan of earth; the roots, tumbling into subterranean levels are the abysses; and the trunk is the world axis that centers support these numerous words.” There is representation of fruits with tray and glasses. Fruits seem are melons and apples. The depiction fruits in such architecture may add to show the royal power. The apple signifies totality because of its spherical shape. It is also symbolic of earthly desires or of indulgence in such desires.” So perhaps emperor had desire to show their strength and majesty over the state. “Cups and goblets are so characteristics of the age of Jehāngīr.”²² Such types of paintings are also found in *Shīsh Maḥal*.

Soffits

The soffits are decorated with harmonious arabesque design. “The symbolism of the arabesque is as unending as the ornament’s lines and scrolls. It is theatrical in its use of plan like web which create illusion...it generates a sense of inestimable growth through the flow and intersection of its parts.”²³ Such intermingled lines craft a supple effect on the frozen surface; the relationship is created between forms and surface, between physical and metaphysical. These arabesque designs have resemblance with those patterns which can be seen in the apex of Dā’i Anga’s mausoleum. Though most of design is disappeared and interior of dome and squinchs give a flat effect in brick skeleton. The irregular surface ornamentation of parapet plays hides and seek but its curvilinear patterns give glimpse of its full appearance.

Niches

The façade niches are splendid with muqarnas. Such muqarnas are also be obliged its evolution in Islam. In *Gulābi Bāgh* gateway’s muqarnas are ornamented with foliage pattern composed of slender twigs, twisting leaves. The three-dimensional effects is formed in brick or stone on the section of the vault. “Its form seems to have been derived from the Egyptian ‘gorge’. The Persian occupied Egypt in the 6th century B.C. and with them it came to Iran where it first appeared as a honey-comb motif.”²⁴ But with the passage of time a decorative motif is become a contrivance with aesthetic sensibilities. The huge structure is enclosing with four pilasters which also have decorative motifs. This pilaster has octagonal form and one side is attached with building which have very close similarity to the pilasters of Mosque Wazīr Khān.

Conclusion

There is no doubt that Architectural structures are helpful to understand the chronological notions about the situation of city especially gateways which are erected for so many reasons. In contemporary period the Mughal architecture is one of those remaining structures which are considered as a heritage of Pakistan but alas, such buildings are ruined by public who torn up their history by the ancestries and are not even conscious of the loss. For the last three years the place is observed by PHA and garden become green again.

Otherwise, it is place for drug addicts and very difficult to visit alone especially at night. The gardens play important role in miniature painting and we can say that no doubt these miniatures are source of inspiration for artisans. It is indispensable element of narratives of miniature paintings. Generally, gardens are taken as place for contemplation and prayer. In Mughal miniatures paintings often depict emperors talking, with a Sufis or *dirwaish*, in the garden. There are countless miniatures represent lovers embracing in the garden.

Some plants of this scheme appear to be copies from master pieces of Persian paintings. The *ḥāshiyas* depicted plants, landscapes in bright colors, sometimes realistic, sometimes fantastic. The borders of miniature paintings are borrowed their conventionalized and vegetation patterns from Persian art.²⁵ These borders composed of sprays of flowering plants. "Such miniatures, because of their inherent beauty and superb aesthetic effect, much impressed the architectural decorator, who translated them into stone." The same pattern and floral motifs are represented on the dados of the upper storey. Dados are filled with carved floral petals in natural bands and curves. N.C. Mehta made a similar observation independently; "I have no doubt that there was vital connection between the arts of the Mughal painter and stone cutter---especially during the reign of jehāngīr and Shāhjahān."²⁶ In the tropical climate, gardens were, generally speaking, the most comfortable place to be during the hot season."²⁷ Numerous works of medieval European literature attest to the popularity of the theme of 'enclosed garden,' which is connected with Marian symbolism and notion of the Mary's Garden.'²⁸ The gate is a metaphysical fissure and a symbol of transition. In ancient mythological the gate is symbol of duality. Passing through a gate symbolized initiation and purification from sin and evil among the Etruscans. In Islamic view point gardens have their own significance. The funerary garden has its own significance as it relates to the eternal life of one's.

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