

Eminābād: Unveiling the Historic Charm and Vernacular Architecture

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Abstract

Eminābād is one of the historical towns of Punjab which is the land of five rivers. It is located near Gujrānwāla district. **Gujrānwāla** is a division in the Punjab Province of Pakistan. Eminābād is one of the most representative urban areas of medieval Punjab and has all the significant features such as urban structure and form, domestic architecture and architecturally and culturally valuable sites and historic monuments which coexist with traditional cultural heritage. Eminabad has lost all its glory but even now has much more to offer its visitors. In spite of the damage the town has a personality of its own which has not so far been highlighted before.

Keywords: *Muḥallā, kūcha, gali, ḥaveli, gate*



I. Introduction

Eminābād, is situated 12.8748 km to the south of Gujrānwāla and is 53.1084 km from Lahore. The Grand Trunk Road passed by Eminābād on its way to Wāhndo, Kāli Şuba and onwards to Amritsar and as it was a major town in this area, surrounded by rich and fertile farmlands it seems to have thrived well.

The name of Eminābād was changed many times in the past. The very first name of Eminābād was known as Saidpūr. Babur invaded this part of Punjab in the 16th century and sacked the Eminābād in 1521. That was the time when Gurū Nānak was also present in Saidpūr. In the hymns of Gurū Nānak, we find eyewitness accounts of the chaos in Saidpūr during that period. Gurū Nānak and his companion Bhāī Mardānā were taken as prisoners along with the population of the town. Later, a meeting was held between the Gurū and King Babur. Inspired by the spirituality of the guru, the king released all the prisoners of Saidpūr. [1]

According to the *Gazetteer of Gujrānwāla District*, Shīr Shāh Sūri demolished Saidpūr and raised a new city on his own name as Shīrgarh. Ultimately, it was Emin or Ameen Baig – a general of Humāyūn – who ransacked the stronghold of Shīr Shāh Sūrī, and so a new town was built on the name of that general in the reign of Akbar. Legend, however, attributes the name of Eminābād to Amina, the wet nurse of Fīroz Shāh (c 14th century AD) or “basis it on the word *Amn* (peace).” [2] She built a solid defensive wall around the settlement. Throughout the Sultanate period, Eminābād continued to exist, but no particular reference can be found of its importance that it later gained during the Mughal period. Although a mosque built during the K̄halji period gives clear evidence that a settlement existed during this period.

Up till the early 1940's, Eminābād was also important due to Sikh shrine Rohrī Şāhib, where Gurū Nānak, the founder of Sikh religion is

believed to have spent some time. Sikhs gather at this sanctified place once each year, normally near the Baisākhi period.

After independence, all new developmental activities took place close to the modern G.T. road. As a result of this present population of “Eminābād Moʻ” has reached the same level of Eminābād town.”^[3] Eminābād today contains many buildings of architectural and archeological importance. The *havelīs*, *sarāis*, a mosque from Lodhi period and gardens of Hindu Dīwāns, Hindu temples and Gurūdwārās are still cultural as well as historic assets of the town.

Vernacular Architecture of Eminābād

The vernacular architecture of the town Eminābād till today is a good example of typical historic cities in the province. The town is located on a relatively higher piece of land in relation to the surroundings. The general physical form of the town is based upon subconscious planning which is typical of the towns of the district. The way of construction is like Kashmiri style and teak (*sāgwān*) wood has been used. Sikh period is important in many respects in the history of urban design. “Although the examples of new towns built during the Sikh period are few, the urban growth pattern shows a remarkable continuity of grand tradition of urban design which existed in Punjab for many centuries.”^[4]

The major physical elements of the town are city gates, residential quarters, *havelīs*, mosques, temples, Gurūdwārās, gardens, water reservoirs, *sarāis* and bazars in narrow streets. The city was accessible through six gates. The town did not have a fortification wall, only the walls of the inward-looking houses served the purpose of defense. The planning was such that the outer walls of the houses served as a defensive system from the security point of view. The walls did not have any windows towards the exterior, on the ground floor level. The only traces of the concept of wall around the town are during the *Khālī* period when the town was first developed at a different site. The present town developed during the *Mughal*

period, does not have any traces of wall. Only gateways are proclaimed by their historic names.

There were six gates leading to the central square of the town. These gates differed in size and were named after the *muḥallā* or residential quarters through which they lead to the center. The gates lying on the main route or the ones having sarāis outside were larger in size. There were total six gates named; Chawki Gate, Mochi Gate, Zaildārān Gate, Mardānwāla Gate, Qāḍi Gate and Morī Gate. Springing from the six gates were the primary streets which met at the main central square called the '*baḥī mandī*'. The town was thus divided into residential, administrative and commercial quarters.

The main Chawki Gate of the town, now known as *Bāb Abū Bakar Ṣadīque*, leads into a crowded, narrow bazaar and lies to the west of the town, leading to the main commercial street (fig.1). Like the town this bazaar, too, is a victim of changing times: in the 1880s the new railway line between Lahore and Rawalpindi was laid some three miles to the west of Eminābād. The Grand Trunk Road naturally aligned itself with the new railway and from then onward history bypassed the once important town. Most of these have been vanished with the passage of times

¹ Salman Rashid, *Gujrānwāla: The Glory That Was* (Lahore: Sang-e-Meel Publications, 1992), 35.

²Rashid, *Gujrānwāla: The Glory That Was*, 28-38.

³Abdul Rehman Dar, *Historic Towns of Punjab: Ancient and Medieval Period* (Lahore: Ferozsons Publishers, 1997), 250.

⁴Aizid Razzaq, "Historic and Urban Morphological Characteristics of Eminābād", (MPhil thesis., Engineering University, Department of Architecture Lahore, 1984), 50.



Fig.1. *Bāb Abū Bakar Ṣadique*: main entrance of the Town Eminābād

Mardāñwāla Gate (fig.2) is to the north of the town. Due to the presence of mandir series at this site can be established that this may have been the entrance to the town for travelers. This gate leads to *Muḥallā* Damdama. The visual effect of the gate is not pleasing as it is damaged. Just the arch proves its existence which is a “beauty in itself and thin brick patterns set a tough to beat standard in masonry aesthetics.”⁴



Fig.2. Mardāñwāla Gate.

Streets originating from the main town gates are the main or so called the primary streets. These streets divide the town into a number of *Muḥallās*.

Muḥallā was originated from Arabic word mohallah, meaning “to settle”, “to occupy” and derived from the verb halla (to unite). It is an administrative unit in many Middle Eastern countries, used for autonomous social institute built around familial ties and Islamic rituals. Today it is recognized also by non- Muslims as a neighborhood in large cities and towns. *Muḥallā* lies at the intersection of private family life and public area. [4] The width of these streets varies from 8 to 14 feet. The street pattern of the town is typical of the historic towns of the area like Lahore walled city. There is extreme irregularity and narrowness of streets, often without any expansion of width. However, there is a clear difference between the main and secondary streets. The narrow, irregular streets with frequent turns, closures and dead ends produce repeated visual surprise.

The Eminābād town is a good surviving example of traditional urban form where the intricacy of the spatial experience is based upon the close packing of the component parts. Some of the vernacular terms very frequently used are known as *muḥallā*, *kūcha*, *gali*, *Kaṭrā*, *ḥaveli* and *ḥaggā* etc. *Kūcha*, *kaṭrā* and *muḥallā* suggest zones (neighborhood). *Gali* is a linear entity implied in the use of *gali*. A *Kaṭra* can be defined as a market with residential quarters usually with storage facilities, enclosed by a wall entered through a gate. Thus, only *gali* could be seen as street in the conventional sense bearing in the mind the complex activity that they support. When the upper floors of two opposite buildings are connected with the help of a bridge the term *ḥaggā* is used. It is best for shade, light and air making a significant impact on the street scene.

A *muḥallā* is clearly a residential area, mostly fronting on a spine street. There is a network of secondary and tertiary streets reaching out from the spine to the interior. Many of the tertiary streets terminate into blind alleys. Some connect to other streets through gateways or square crossings or two or more streets. The *muḥallā* is also a social unit that relates to the occupation, cast, language and geographical origin of the *Muḥallā* dwellers. An inhabitant of the town traditionally relates to his *muḥallā*. Likewise cast etc. can be determined from one's occupation. Most of Eminābād is even today constructed from the thin, narrow tiles that were used in mediaeval India and have been cannibalized from older buildings. It is not unusual to see a modern brick wall growing onto one built perhaps almost two hundred years ago.

The planning of the houses in the town is classic. Most of the houses have been built in the same scale or size. Some are different in plan. The size factor in turn is controlled by the location of the particular house or so called *ḥaveli*. The houses belonging to the poor or middle class at that time were situated in the south of the town. These houses had fewer number of rooms as compared to the houses and *ḥavelīs* of elite class sited in the north of the town. The sizes of the rooms were the same in both parts. The only thing that varies in a small house and a large *ḥaveli* is a number of rooms. The smaller houses have less rooms while the spacious houses or *ḥavelīs* have many rooms. The strategy of these *ḥavelīs* is only better in scale as compared to small houses of Eminābād. But the perception of planning remains the same.

Mostly, plan of a *ḥaveli* comprises a middle open courtyard which is surrounded by arcaded rooms on four sides that was built by wealthy aristocrats to house their families in the palace type structure. These structures were often multi-storied that were high with one or more courtyards in the interior. In most of the mansions the courtyards are semi covered with a wooden beam supported by wooden columns and wooden arches. The enclosure walls of *ḥavelīs* were built like fort walls with a sufficient height that ensures domestic privacy. Before entrance the house, an entrance lobby called *dewḥi*, exists in the center of the external facade fronting the street. The *harem* or *zenānā* portion was built at the back of the mansion and *zenān-khāna* and *mardān-khāna*, duly segregated from each other for the purpose of privacy. The ground floor area was mostly used by the male and women stayed on the first and second floor. By the side of *dewḥi* the rooms flanking on both sides were used for the guests. The location of lavatory and kitchen is on the top or so called the intermediate floor. Thick load-bearing walls, arches and wooden roofs are the main dominating structural elements of a typical Eminābād house or *ḥaveli*. The external walls are thick and laid down with mortar in kiln burnt bricks. These bricks are load bearing. The thickness of internal walls is lesser than that of the external walls. The interiors are generally plastered with occasional colored relief patterns. Same is true for the exteriors of large houses and *ḥavelīs*. Massive wooden beams support the roof systems (fig.3). Wood is also used in *jharokās* and ventilators as a beautification element in the form of *jali*. (fig.4). Most of these houses and *ḥavelīs* have three stories.



Fig. 3. Massive wooden beams supporting the roof systems.



Fig. 4. Finely carved wooden arches

According to R. Nāth, “a ḥaveli is a building complex for residence, often multi-storied with profuse stone work; its architectural merit lies in its façade and superstructure.”^[4]

Sikhs built a number of *ḥavelīs* in Gujranwala Division because Gujranwala was the major centre for architectural contribution of Sikhs and are set example of urban secular architectural tradition of that period. Gujranwala was the birth place of Mahārāja Ranjīt Singh. In the middle of nineteenth century, Gujrānwāla under Sikh rule was focused to Sikh architectural constructions because their hands fell heavier on this area. The Sikh and European generals of Mahārāja Ranjīt Singh’s army had built large gardens and *ḥavelīs* which can be observed in the miniature paintings of Imām Bakhsh Lahori who was *Kotwal* of Lahore. Naveed Aslam mentions “*ḥavelīs* of Sikh period are mostly located near forts or old gates of a city because of the residential purpose. According to him Sikh *ḥavelīs* were built over the ruins of Mughal ḥaveli which over all, resemble to a small-scale house.”^[4]

The major Hindu Dīwāns of Eminabad: Rāja Dhyān Singh, Dīwān Lachman Dās and Dīwān Bahādur Amar Nāth from rich Hindu families of Eminābād built their own *ḥavelīs* in the north and northeast of the town which were aesthetic additions to the urban architecture of Eminābād.^[4] There are existing seven *ḥavelīs* of seven brothers next to each other (fig.5), but now few of them survived.^[4]

Sikh *ḥavelīs* are situated in *Muḥallā ḥaveliān* in Eminābād known as *Sat bhaiān di ḥaveli*. Where a Muslim family is living now since many years. These rectangular large *ḥavelīs* are three to four stories among which only one has a pretty façade comprising of central large multifoil arch with a doorway on the ground floor, pierced by three window openings on the first floor. The façade with an inbuilt impression has *jharokās*, animal figures, cut brick and stucco work. Another *ḥaveli*, which lies in the front of *Sat bhaiān di ḥaveli* has a remarkable carved door wood (fig.6) with the images of Hindu deities of the Vedic pantheon (fig.7). These *ḥavelīs* dominate the skyline and are best to study the vernacular architecture of Eminābād.



Fig. 5. Northern façade of a *Sat bhaiāṅ di ḥaveli* at Eminābād.



Fig. 6. A wooden door of a Sikh ḥaveli, Eminābād.



Fig. 7. Detail of a carved wooden door with the images of gods and goddesses of the Vedic pantheon.

Results

The presents paper concluded that the architecture of the Eminabad presents a unique blend of styles ranging from the Mughal period to the modern times. The planning of the town of Eminabad till today is a good example of typical historic cities in the region. Most of the Eminabad is even today constructed from the thin and narrow tiles that were used in medieval India and have been cannibalized from older buildings. It is not unusual to see a modern brick wall growing onto one built perhaps almost two hundred years ago. Amid the course cemented structures of today it is not impossible to come upon a profusely carved door here or a multi cusped arch there – the town is an interesting admixture of the ancient and the modern.

References and Bibliography

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⁴R. Nāth, *Jharokā: An Illustrated Glossary of Indo-Muslim Architecture* (India: The Historical Research

Documentation Program, 1986), 57.

⁴ Sheikh Naveed Aslam, *Pakistan ke Āsār-e-Kadīmā* (Lahore: Book Home, 2008), 432.

⁴ The area was held in *jāgīr* by Raja Dhyān Singh of Jammu and for a number of decades after that the

prime ministers, Dīwān Lachman Dās and Dīwān Bahadur Amar Nāth, for the state of Kashmir came from the rich Hindu families of Eminabad.

⁴ Salman Rashid, *Gujrānwāla: The Glory That Was* (Lahore: Sang-e-Meel Publications, 1992), 39.