

GHULAM RASOOL BUILDING – A CASE OF NEGLECT OF BRITISH PERIOD ARCHITECTURAL LEGACY – ON MALL ROAD, LAHORE

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Abstract

Lahore is a city that grasps time through capturing and conserving intelligent human development in standing structures. The diversity of Lahore culture is rich and so is its architectural heritage but unfortunately some of this historic treasure has suffered in terms of its functionality. Due to the community's dis-interest, its historical value and original purpose is lost. This paper is an effort to identify one such neglected monument Ghulam Rasool Building, which is still a stunning example of glorious colonial architecture named after Haji Ghulam Rasool Tarar. Ghulam Rasool building constructed in 1916, was a landmark mostly because of the tenants "Ferozsons", International Sports were the originally known attraction of the Ghulam Rasool Building. The surrounding buildings are also marvelous examples of great colonial architecture. As these buildings belong to the British period there is a dire need of proper conservation policies for such heritage structures specially located on Mall Road so there they could be restored to their previous splendour. This paper discusses the architectural significance of the Ghulam Rasool Building with regard to the protection of important structures. It has been neglected over a period of time due to private ownership. The study reveals that this structure is in a condition that needs to be considered for protection and there is an urgent need to formulate an appropriate adaptive revival plan for this structure. A proper rehabilitation plan should be proposed for it, under the guidelines of conservation and preservation.

Keywords: Ghulam Rasool, Lahore, Archeology Department, Colonial Architecture, British Raj

Introduction

Lahore is a historical city located near the river Ravi and the Indian border named Wagha and it is also known as the city of colleges after the important and rich heritage of the Mughul Empire. Lahore came to eminence with Islam in South Asia. Historically Lahore is about 2000 years old. Due to its rich history, Lahore has been divided into four eras. The Lahore Fort, Shalimar Gardens, Badshahi Mosque, Jahangir's and Noor Jehan's mausolea as examples of Mughul Architecture are very popular tourist spots in Lahore. The combination of Hindu and Muslim styles of construction is known as Sikh architecture. GPO (General Post Office), Lahore High Court, and many older buildings like universities also represent the Mughul-Gothic style which was originally built by the British. The other traditional elements like Domes, Pilasters, Moorish, Crenellated Parapets with Western elements like Turrets, Spires, Pediments, Cornices, Caves, Roof Truss, Florentine, windows used by Mughuls which was the fusion of Indo European's style¹. Ghulam Rasool Building is one of the historic monuments which we should seek to revive and conserve. It is situated on Mall Road in Lahore. It was constructed during the great British Raj². Mall Road has many official houses of high-ranking dignitaries like Governor House, Quaid-e-Azam Library, etc.

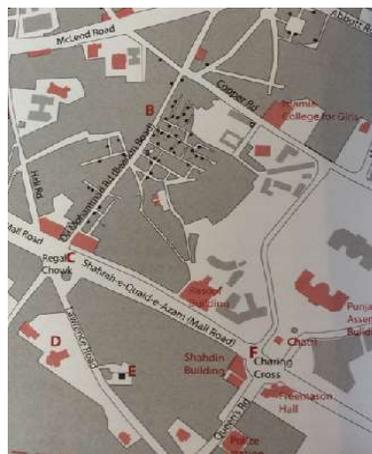


Fig 1:
Location Plan of Ghulam Rasool Building

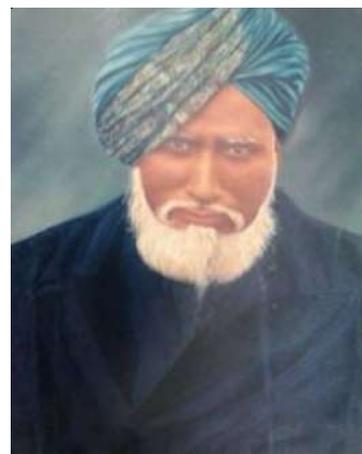


Fig 2:
Hajji Ghulam Rasool Tarrar

Source: Lahore the Architectural Heritage by Lucy Peck

The building was finished in 1916 during the colonial period embodying inspirations from the Mughuls, Victorian and Gothic styles, which were

current then. It was owned by one of the richest tycoons of the city named Haji Ghulam Rasool Tarar, a well-known businessman and a zemindar, who was originally from Koulo Tarae village in Hafizabad. Despite being an attractive period piece the present condition of the building is very heart-breaking. It has been completely neglected, according to the Punjab Archaeological Department. In July 2012 heavy rains seriously damaged the building. The dome almost fell and some part of the dome was destroyed and some ornaments damaged. The district management examined the building and declared the structure not safe and sealed it to prevent any incident in the near future, before the necessary repairs. They also informed the Archaeology Department about the building's condition and later issued a notice to the owner.

Methodology

The research was carried out by ethnographical study analyzing the social and cultural aspects of the building in the real-life environment. To get a deeper knowledge of the architectural legacy, the data was collected from a range of viewpoints and sources, including observation, open interviews on-site, and site documentation, as well as audio-visual resources such as recordings and photos. Thereafter, further help was taken from the websites, newspaper articles as no data has been compiled earlier on this building.

This building has historical significance because of many factors; firstly because of the name of the building itself, as Chaudhary Ghulam Rasool Tarar was one of the richest magnates of that time in Lahore. He helped the British overcome the uprising of 1857 for which he was generously rewarded. Secondly, it had housed Ferozsons for almost a century, one of the oldest & largest bookshops and publishers of Lahore who recently had to vacate after losing a legal battle³.



Fig 3:
Exterior side view of Ghulam Rasool Building



Fig 4:

Exterior front view of Ghulam Rasool Building

Thirdly, it has elements of colonial architecture in its front elevation which depicts Mughul miniature paintings and Mughul architectural elements, although it was British era at that time. After Ranjit Singh died, in 1849 the region of Punjab was annexed by the British. By the end of British rule, Lahore had two architectural styles: one was in the ancient city, and the other was the colonial-style Cantonment and Civil Lines. In British structures, a new design language was noticed. This style combined traditional Mughul elements such as domes, minarets, columns, cupolas, brackets, Moorish and multi foiled arches, piers, pilasters, crenelated parapet, pavilions, and *chhatris* with western elements such as pediments, dentils, cornices, eaves, turrets, spires, Venetian and Florentine windows, truss roofs and stained glass. This architectural style may be seen at Lahore Museum, High Court, and Town Hall.

Ghulam Rasool building is legally a trust property (*Waqf-ul-Aulad*) and cannot be sold. Currently, this famous property is rented to lawyers. It was a building planned to cater to commercial activities although there were residential facilities also, at a certain time. The building is surrounded by a commercial area. A service road of 20' wide is in front of the building and further, is the most fashionable commercial strip i.e Mall Road⁴. It is surrounded by commercial buildings of the British Era. Some of the known places in the vicinity are the Quaid-i-Azam Library, Jinnah Park, Punjab Assembly, Charing Cross, Panorama shopping center, Felatties Hotel, Govenner House and Al-Hamra Arts Center⁵. Now at the present, the main ground-floor hall is used for commercial purposes which is a double-height area around 35'-0". The upper floor area is currently designated for lawyer's offices. One part of the Ground floor is also a commercial area for a sports equipment shop.

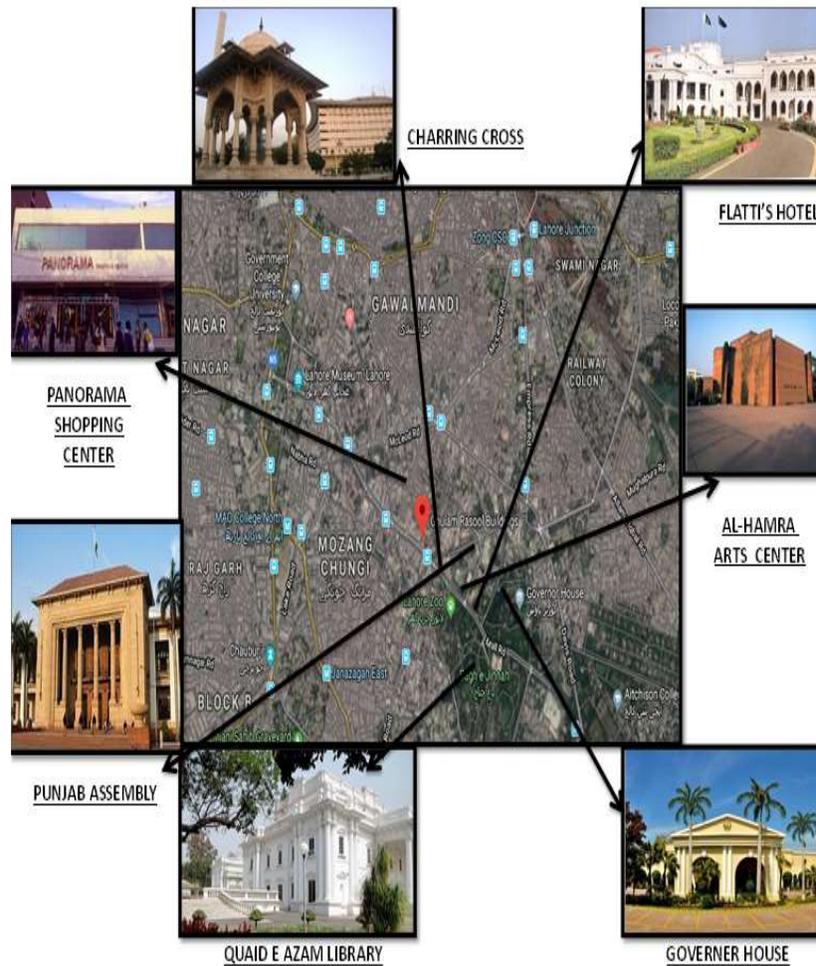


Fig 5:

Location Plan of Ghulam Rasool Building with famous landmarks

Architectural Significance

The building covers 5,000 square yards which are 45000 square feet or 10 kanals. The building is an architectural masterpiece having a central dome. The building is divided into five units with a central staircase located in the central module connecting all units. All units are divided by a 36-inch-thick stone wall. The design is innovative, the building has three portions: basement, ground floor and first floor. In that it has five

units, each unit with a 36-inch wall separation between them. Indo-European, an emerging style as stated. The materials used for construction were Lime Mortar, Brick Masonry, Brick Tile, Wood (Purlin, Batten) Concrete Plate and Marble Chips on the floors.

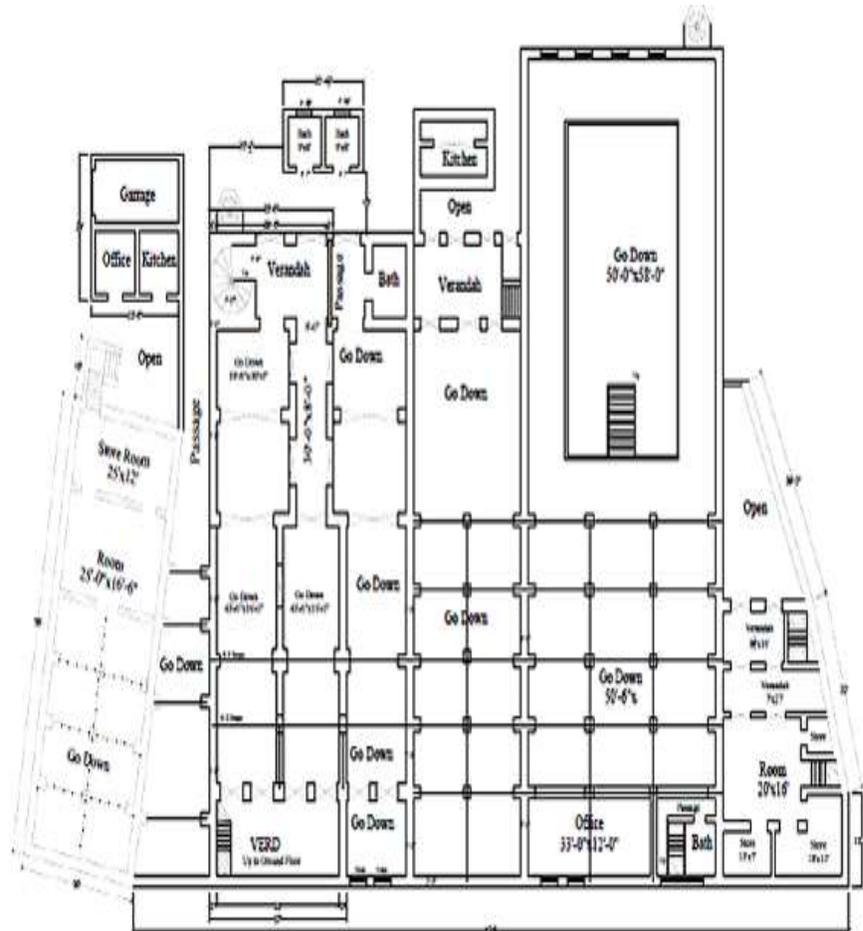


Fig 6:
Ground Floor Plan

(Source: Reproduced by Author, originally from town hall archives)

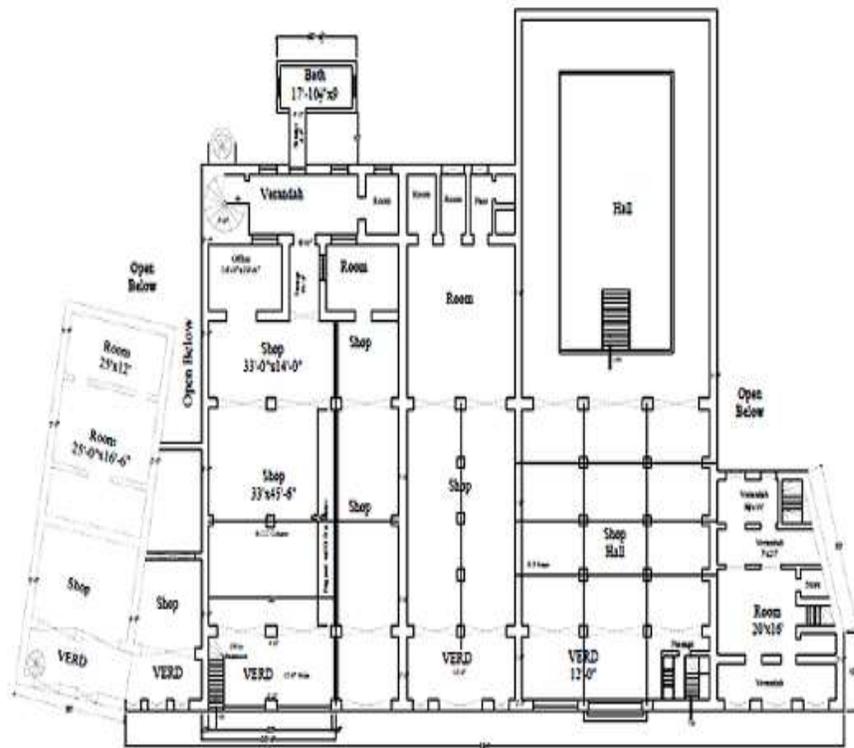


Fig 7:
First Floor Plan

(Source: Reproduced by Author, originally from town hall archives)



Fig 8:
Intermediate floor plan

**Fig 9:**

Panoramic view of Ghulam Rasool Building

(Source: Reproduced by Author, Originally from town hall archives)

Structural cracks can be seen on the front facade of the building as well as in the first-floor accounts room which is at the end of the office area through which a staircase leads to the rooftop. In-appropriate materials such as cement, sand and gravel are used to support the collapsed dome. Facial decay and deterioration have occurred due to structural cracks which are dangerous for the life of the building still, repairs are not being carried out by the authorities. An environmental loss, like birds eating the grains has deformed the structure of the dome.

**Fig 10:**

Main Entrance



Fig 11:
Central Staircase



Fig 12:
Reception Area



Fig 13:
Roof detail in the main
Entrance of the building



Fig 14:
Roof detail in the main
Entrance of the building



Fig 15:
Arched door detail in the Entrance of the building.

Source: Author

On July 18th, 2019 the Local administration declared Ghulam Rasool Building unsafe and sealed the building. The management informed the Department of Archaeology that only one portion of the building has been declared unsafe. The Ghulam Rasool building was declared protected under the Punjab Special Premises Preservation Ordinance 1985⁶. The building owner was instructed by the Archaeology Department to get the dome repaired. One of its stationed and famous book shop Ferozsons cherished by generations of the Lahoris caught fire in 2012. The fire burnt the books yet the structure managed to stay safe. This incident caused many damages to the architecture of the building. Recently in June this year, the dome collapsed because of heavy rainfall due to which the building was sealed as some portion of the buildings became dangerous. The historical building's restoration was done the next year in 2013 by *Dilkash Lahore*, a project aimed at rehabilitating Lahore's historical sites and preserving the city's heritage. Lahore Conservation Society protested against the demolition of the Ghulam Rasool building dome⁷.



Fig 16:

Before demolition of the first-floor area at the leftmost section of the building



Fig 17:

After demolition, removal of architectural Elements like arches, the addition of electric wires

The left elevation also needs to be restored as it is not painted and has material (brickwork) exposed with no plastering even. The difference between the above-shown pictures of past and present conditions of the façade is visible, we can examine the architectural decay and decline although most of the portion is still in the same old condition; work is needed to be done on it for conservation. The dome has collapsed clearly in some recent rains in Lahore. Apart from just the dome, the rest of the building has also been in dilapidated condition. Other building decays are fungal stained harmful growth of vegetation, erosion of mortar, negligence of structure, ill-planned tenant history, paint discolouration and cracks in the roof and structure. The whole structure has depreciated due to unchecked management by the owner and the caretaker. The tenant history is just continued by only a few old and known offices and lawyers' suites yet the famous book store, left years back leaving the famous icon just another building of the vicinity.



Fig 18:
Back view of the building



Fig 19:
Corner view of the building



Fig 20:
Collapsed Dome on roof



Fig 21:
Fallen dome from the roof



Fig 22:
Damaged column



Fig 23:
Rear Side of the building



Fig 24:
Damaged flooring marble



Fig 25:
Damaged flooring marble - chips
and tile used at different places



Fig 26:
Damaged Staircase



Fig 27:
Damaged Plaster



Fig 28:
Discoloured Paint



Fig 29:
Damaged window

Source: Authors

Conclusions and Recommendations

Ghulam Rasool Building is an architectural icon of the British period. The building has seen many damages through the years. This wear, tear and vandalism have caused the building to deteriorate in a bad manner. The dome of the building has collapsed which is supported by a modern pillar that does not match the old facade. We have to support the dome with traditional brick coated with Kankar lime plaster. We should cover the dome with some temporary structure to protect the dome from birds. After this, we have to restore the dome to its original state. For the long term plan, the recommendations are

- The Exterior of the building should be preserved in its original condition.
- The use of new material on the exterior should be avoided.
- The boundary of the site be lined with trees.
- Incorporation of Kankar lime plaster for filling.
- Planting of trees around the structure to protect it from traffic pollution.
- Enhance the environment of the surroundings by removing small huts from near the site.
- Provide proper seating area for visitors to promote tourism.
- Provide proper sitting arrangements for the visitors.
- Construct a water canal along the path for aesthetics and a peaceful environment.
- Provide colourful flowers for the beauty of the site which shall be appealing to the visitors.

There should be a fine for vandalism like writing on the walls railing split of gage (pan) inside and outside the building.

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