

***Darbār* Hall of the Governor House, Peshāwar: Preliminary Report on its Recent Restoration and Conservation**

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Abstract

The British laid down foundations of the vast Peshāwar Cantonment to the western side of the old city in 1868 and made it the frontier headquarters. For better administration, they constructed buildings, roads and railway tracks etc. throughout the North-West Frontier Province (the present-day Khyber Pakhtunkhwa). Similarly, establishment of Governor House Peshāwar; (the then Government House), is also at their credit. This historical building represents a typical Greco-Roman architecture of the British-India. This historical house comprises many structures, gardens and lawns etc. Amongst these structures, Darbār Hall is very important due to its historical and architectural significance. Most of the tribal affairs were discussed and settled in this hall and occasionally, it was also used as a ball club or dancing club during the British period. Due to its continuous occupation since the British era, the building is facing many conservation issues. The present paper outlines the conservation and restoration work initiated in the recent years to tackle with the cracks found in the hall. The task was carried out by the National Engineering Service Pakistan (NESPAK) which is a civil engineering forum. The present study is based on the author's observations during his visit to the Governor House Peshāwar; as an archaeological-expert (Graduate-Archaeologist) on behalf of the Directorate of Archaeology and Museums Government of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, Peshāwar; to make a comprehensive field-report and highlight the true nature of the archaeological mound exposed in this area during the hall's restoration process.

Keywords: *Darbār* Hall, Governor House Peshāwar, Conservation, Restoration, British, History, Archaeology, N.W.F. Province.

Introduction

The Governor House Peshāwar was earlier known as Government House and the residence of the Chief Commissioner North-West Frontier Province (henceforth NWFP) during the Colonial period (Pl. 1). The term Government House is used many for residences of Governors, Governors-General and Lieutenant-Governors in the State and the remaining colonies of the British Empire. It was used as the place for the Governor's official business, office and residence

of the Chief Commissioner as well as for hosting private functions/receptions. After creation of the province of NWFP in 1901, for its administration, Government House Peshāwar was commissioned in between 1902-3. For executive purpose, Civil-Secretariat was also built nearby the Government house and it remained under the direct control of Chief-Commissioner. As per record of the Archives & Libraries Department Peshawar, after the creation of North-West Frontier Province on November 9, 1901¹, an officer from Punjab Works Department, was sent to meet Lieutenant-Colonel,

1. According to the Imperial Gazetteer of India, NWFP (1908) 'the new Province was constituted in 1901, under a Chief Commissioner and Agent to the Governor-General, with head-quarters at Peshāwar, in direct communication with the Government of India in the Foreign Department. In political questions, there is no intermediary between the Chief Commissioner and the local officer-an arrangement designed to secure both prompt disposal of references and the utilization of the expert knowledge of frontier conditions for which the head of the administration is selected'.

Sir Harold Arthur Deane the then Commissioner N.W.F. Province who also served as Viceroy's agent, for briefing him about the construction of Chief-Commissioner house. After selection of place for building, on 26 April 1902, a budgetary allocation of 43,000 rupees was sent for approval to the Government of India (Delhi). After approval, construction work was started. During the construction, Viceroy-i-Hind Lord Curzon also visited to see the progress. Its construction-budget escalated with the passage of time due to changing in the plan and additions. Construction of the Governor House finally completed in October 1903, in 18 months' (Imran 2002: 144-47).

Presently, the Governor house Peshāwar serves as official residence of the Governor of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa province. It is located on the opposite side of the Peshāwar Museum on main Saddar road (Fig. 2). This Colonial period compound was built by Khan Bahadur Nawab Abdul Hameed Khan of Badrashi, who was a famous British era contractor. It was built by following the traditional Greco-Roman design prevalent in other grand British buildings across India of the contemporary era². This well-planned edifice was considered as the Frontier's 'Viceregal palace'. Its architecture is a splendid example of a legacy from the British-era. This magnificent white structure with its lofty columns and extended verandas resides upon a high mound. Fountains and lush green sprawling lawns surround the building on all sides. Many important world statesmen and royalty from around the world stayed here. Internally it is ornamented with a fine display of items and souvenirs that

symbolize the grandeur and lifestyle of the British-Raj. Portraits of Frontier administrators, vintage photographs, oil paintings, old furniture, animal furs and trophy-heads. *Darbār* Hall is a spacious hall where important meetings and official balls took place³.

It was constructed on an Archaeological mound during British period. Evidences of the cultural remains were reported at the site by D. B. Spooner. According to him,

"In November 1906 certain coolies, engaged in cleaning away some earth from the southern edge of the Government House grounds in Peshāwar, found at a depth of about 9 or 10 feet a small undecorated earthenware vessel containing a large number of badly corroded coins, which they divided among themselves. As soon as this fact was reported to me, I consulted with the Deputy Commissioner, and, thanks to the energetic measures he took, 61 of the coins were recovered, though it is to be feared that some had already been disposed of in the bazaar" (Spooner 1909: 150).

***Darbār* Hall**

It is located inside the Governor House compound. *Darbār*⁴ Hall, which is the focus of the present paper, is currently used as for conferences and to discuss the tribal affairs of the province by the Governor Peshāwar. During British period it was also used as a ball or dancing club. This hall is the best example of a Colonial architecture.

2. [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Governor%27s_House_\(Peshawar\)](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Governor%27s_House_(Peshawar)).

3. http://peshawar.kp.gov.pk/page/visit_peshawar.

4. *Darbār* or *Durbār*, a Persian word used for 'Noble or King Court'.

Later, a new hall was built with the name of *Jirga*⁵ hall for the arrangement of conferences and to discuss tribal affairs. In the plan of Governor House, *Darbār* Hall was specially designed by the architect, because architecturally it is entirely different from rest of the building. It was built on typical Colonial style, with a flat-roof and its walls are 12 feet high. Inside this Hall, a ministerial-gallery and arms were displayed. After the inauguration of Government house, a tea-party was arranged at 'Grand Hall' which was later named as *Darbār* Hall. In 1905, Prince of Wales held a *Darbār* here. And later, many Viceroys and Chief-Commissioners also held their *Darbārs* (Imran 2002: 147-48).

Due to its continuous occupation the *Darbār* Hall, faces many conservation issues, which needs to be resolved on priority basis to minimize the threats to the important historical building. Recently, some cracks noticed on the rear part of the *Darbār* Hall and the officials decided immediate repair of the affected structure (Figs. 3 & 4) to save the building from further damages⁶. During the course of restoration, the National Engineering Service Pakistan (NESPAK), engineers observed traces of Pre-British bricks debris. Later, the matter was put to the Governor Peshāwar Sardar Mehtab Ahmad Khan Abasi and on his recommendation archaeologists from the Directorate of Archaeology and Museums Government of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, Peshawar were also engaged in the repair and restoration activities.

Demolished Portion

The cracked portion was completely removed from rest of the structure of *Darbār* Hall (Pl. 5). This portion was connected with *Jirga* Hall from backside through a door. The roof of the hall is made of steel girders-frame, overlapped by rectangular burnt-bricks (*chawka*). Furthermore, wooden-ceiling provided to the roof (Pl. 6). The thickness of the walls is about 85 cm, provided doors and windows at regular-intervals, having symmetrical height. It is also provided wooden-floor, which is 118 cm high from original floor-level like Peshāwar Museum main hall (Pl. 7).

Section

For removal of a cracked portion of *Darbār* Hall, the concerned engineers selected an area of about 1300 sq. ft. towards the north-eastern side for digging foundations of the hall (Pl. 8). The selected area was dug out up to the depth of 210 to 220 cm. The depth shows a complete profile in the section-wall. The original floor-level shows hard surface made of burnt-bricks, small & large pieces of broken bricks etc. Below the original floor-level traces of layers can be observed at the depth of 55 to 85 cm, with a thickness of 20 to 25 cm, varied at different portion in the section-wall. The said layer is composed of stucco/lime, local reddish soil (*khakka*) and pebbles. This layer continuously runs through the section (Pls. 9 & 10). One of the most important findings reported from this section was a concrete-pipe, exposed at the depth of 85 cm, it measures 14 cm in diameter (Pl. 11). The exact location of the pipe is unknown, from where

5. Local Pashto & Urdu word, used for traditional assembly of leaders that make decisions by consensus and according to the teachings of Pukhtoonwali

6. On the directives of the Director Archaeology & Museums Government of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, Peshawar, send the present author to examine the *Darbār*-Hall on-going rehabilitation work.

it starts and where it ends. Another similar pipe was exposed in the northern section-wall (Pl. 12), at the of depth 115 cm. During the digging and removal of debris both the pipes were damaged. Most probably, these pipes were used for drainage during the Colonial period.

Material

During the restoration and conservation work in the damaged part of the Darbār hall, the following materials were recovered i.e. including burnt-bricks of various shapes and sizes (30 x 15 x 7, 30 x 15 x 5 cm). Mostly, these bricks were rectangular having sufficient width (Pl. 13). The bricks, which were used here, are the typical colonial period bricks thicker than the Waziri bricks, used by Mughals and Durranis. The binding material reported in the form of stucco/lime, mixed with local reddish-soil (*Khakka*), with a small amount of crush, which is later blended with the modern material providing better safety.

Discussion and Conclusion

- The Governor House Peshāwar is an important monument as discussed above. This British period compound was built on archaeological mound that has been attested by many researchers. Imran Rashid Imran (late) also mentions in his book titled '*Peshawar Saddar Tareekh Ke Ainey Me*' that "the Governor House Peshawar was built on an archaeological mound that belonged to Gandhara. In the support of this evidence, Dr. Spooner also reported punch-marks⁷ coins in 1909-10, as discussed above in detail. Furthermore, before the arrival of British, the said area

was occupied by the modern graveyard and when British captured this land, they removed the graveyard and built their official buildings to run the affairs of their government.

- As per the current visit's analysis and literature review, the section and the deposit of exposed area revealed that the site is made of dump or reused material. It contains loose soil composed of pieces of burnt-bricks, small pebble-stones, lime fragments, several pieces of potsherds and a small amount of charcoal. Furthermore, the section-wall shows that the *Darbār* Hall was filled by using remaining material during its construction. The demolished part of the hall is going to be restored in its original form by using the same material. Its conservation and restoration work will protect the hall from further damages.

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7. Punch-marks were the first coins, which is struck in Indo-Pak Subcontinent around 6th century BC.

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Plate 1: The British Government House or Chief Commissioner House, Peshawar (1930)

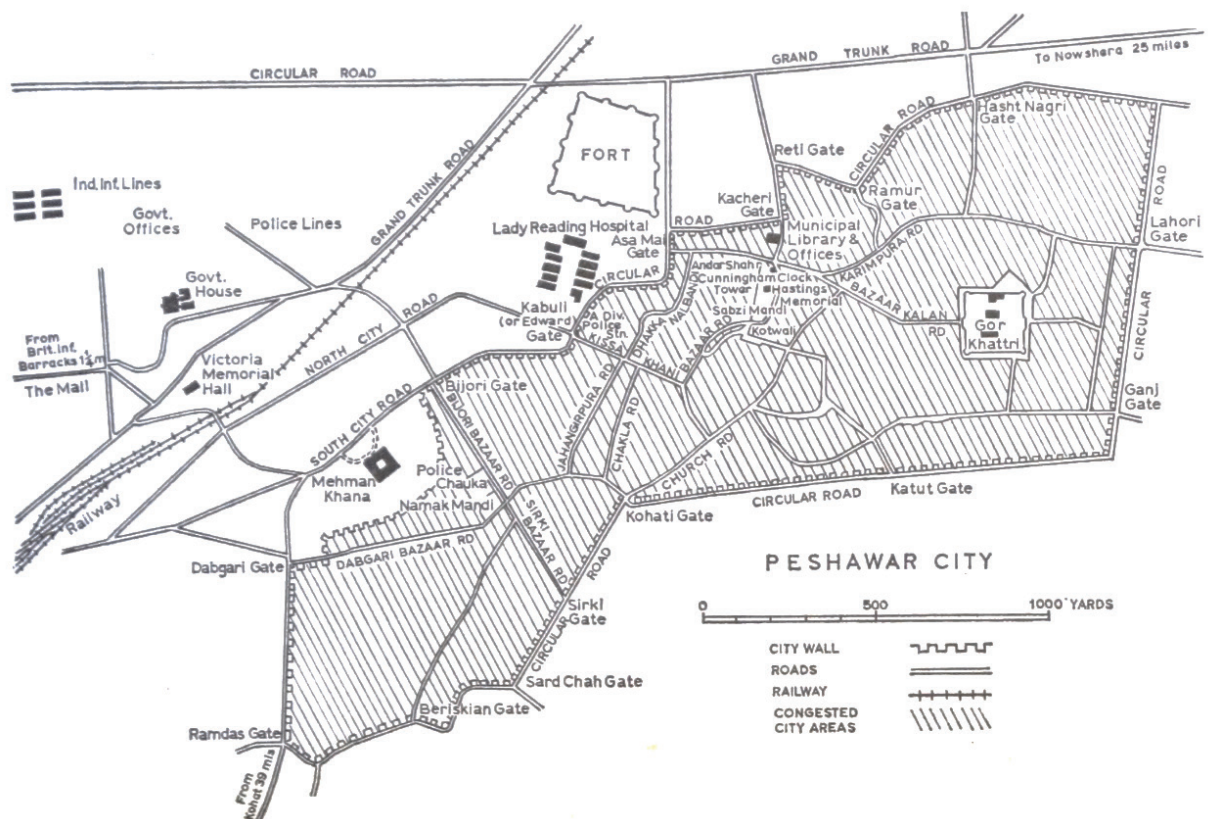


Figure 2: Peshawar city Map, Courtesy: North-West Frontier People and Events (1967)



Plate 5: Demolished Portion



Plate 6: Roof-ceiling from inner side



Plate 7: Wooden floor-level



Plate 8: Foundations are clearly visible after removal of cracked portion



Plate 9: Western section with foundation of a wall structure



Plate 10: Southern section



Plate 11: Concrete-Pipe, western section



Plate 12: Concrete-Pipe, northern section



Plate 13: Various types of burnt-bricks recovered during restoration work at *Darbār* hall

