

The origin of tomb architecture in Indian sub-Continent

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Abstract

Current paper is aimed to review the origin of the tomb architecture in the whole of Pakistan and India. The study encompasses about all of the aspects of its origin, including historic perspectives, influences of pre Muslim period, etc. The paper is posed to the researchers and scholar as an integrated tool.

Keywords: *Origin of Tomb Architecture, Indian sub-Continent, Muslim Architecture*

Historical Perspective

In the beginning of the 2nd decade of the eighth century CE during the Umayyad caliphate the Arab Muslims carried the banner of Islam Spain in the west, Bactria and Soghdiana (the valley of Oxus and Jaxartes) the east, and lower valley of river Sindh up to Multan in the south. The lower valley of the Indus was annexed to Umayyad caliphate and a governor appointed in Sindh in 711-12. This practice continued till CE 750. After the overthrow of the Umayyad's, the Abbasids maintained their grip over Sindh as a province under the caliphate of Baghdad till about the last quarter of the 9th century CE. Thereafter the active control of Baghdad over Sindh like other peripheral territories became loose (Haig 1987: 9).

In the last quarter of the 9th century CE two Arab chiefs succeeded in establishing their dynastic rule in Sindh with their capital cities at Mansura in the south and Multan in the Punjab. In principle, Multan and Mansura recognized the spiritual and political suzerainty of Baghdad. In 871 CE Sindh finally broke away from caliphate. During this period a new doctrinal propaganda initiated perhaps first in Multan from where, in the course of years it spread to the rest of Sindh. This propaganda was known as Ismaili doctrine, backed by the Fatimid's of Cairo (Egypt). With the military support of the Fatimid's, the Ismailis first captured Multan in 977 and after sometimes overcame the Hibbaris of Mansura. The Ismailis started reciting Khutba in the name of the Fatimid and

also destroyed the Sun Temple of Multan, which had been spared by the most liberal minded Arab Muslims. They ruled for about 28 years when they were subdued by Mahmud of Ghazna in 1005. About twenty years later Mahmud also invaded Mansura while he was returning to Ghazna after the invasion of Somanath (Akram 1989:46).

With the death of last Udi Shahi ruler Bhimpaladeva (1026) the kingdom of Kallar, founded in 821, was brought to an end (Rehman 1993:31) and the Peshawar valley (ancient Gandhara), the Punjab including Multan, and Sindh were annexed to the kingdom of Ghazna. The Ghaznavid political domination continued over this region (Indus) till the defeat of its last ruler Khusro Malik who was killed by Shahab-ud-Din Muhammad b. Sam, the Ghurid, in 1186. Walking in the footsteps of their predecessors Ghurids established their rule in the Punjab and attempted to extend their rule, to the plains of Indus. But Shahab-ud-Din was killed near Rawalpindi in CE 1206 and was succeeded by his slave general Qutb-ud-Din Aibak who founded first Muslim Sultanate in the Indian Sub-continent with its capital at Delhi in the same year. Thus, he became the first Turkish Muslim King of Delhi Sultanate. In its early days it was feeble, fragile and precarious, as its independent existence was threatened by the other generals of Shahab-ud-Din such as Taj-ud-Din Ildiz and Nasir-ud-Din Kabacha who declared themselves equally legitimate claimants for the crown of Delhi. However, Qutab-ud-Din, inspite of severe political unrest, upheavals and turmoil, kept his nascent Delhi Sultanate under his control and intact. But his reign proved short as he died after falling from his horse while playing Polo at Lahore in 1210 where afterwards he was buried. Qutb-ud-Din was succeeded by his son Aram Shah on the throne of Delhi but because of inexperience he was dethroned by the nobles of Delhi who raised Shams-ud-Din Iltutmish to the throne. He was son-in law of Qutb-ud-Din Aibak and was the governor of Bada'un. Shams-ud-Din is regarded as a real founder of the Delhi Sultanate. Being an ingenious statesman as well as inborn soldier he fought against the centrifugal forces and succeeded in establishing himself as a paramount ruler of Delhi, Bengal, Peshawar and Sindh. He ruled for about 24 years (Quraishi 1947: 253-261). Like his predecessor he also showed keen interest in art and architecture, as the erection of a number of monuments is also attributed to him, not only as a governor of Bada'un but also as king of Delhi. He built a magnificent tomb as a memorial to the untimely death of his son

Nasir-ud Din Mahmud which is, sometimes, erroneously regarded as the earliest tomb ever built in the Indian Sub-continent (Rakhshanda 2011:30).

Origin of Tomb Architecture in South Asia

The erection of a building over a grave is disapproved in Islam. After the death of the Caliph al- Muntasir, however, his Greek mother requested, and obtained permission to erect a mausoleum for him. It lay in the neighbourhood of the Qasr al Sawami and the Caliph al- Mutazz and Muhtadi were subsequently buried in it also. On the strength of these facts Herzfeld suggested that the Qubbat al- Sulaibiya was possibly the mausoleum of these three Caliphs. In 1911 he excavated the place and found three graves. It was obviously built after the death of al- Muntasir in June CE 862. The building is octagonal in shape and has an outer and inner octagon with a corridor running in between. This is the first ever tomb in Islam (Herzfeld 1911:86). The intention and purpose of such imposing construction was well understood, as tomb building was originally intended to glorify the deceased personage. Thus, tomb structure emerged definitely as a secular building without any kind of religious association. Very soon, however, it was felt to sanctify the burial chamber and transform its secular character.

No tomb building or structure of the time of Arab governors who ruled over the lower Indus valley from Debal to Multan almost for two hundred and sixty six years (711 to 971 CE) has survived. So far as the origin of tomb architecture is concerned, probably, the history of tomb or mausoleum architecture may not be traced earlier than the tomb of Qubbat as-Sulaibiya. Some of the tombs are claimed to have been built earlier than Qubbat as- Sulaibiya, but, serious doubts are expressed regarding the originality of their surviving structures and proposed dates (Baluch 1980:64-65). Nonetheless, what appears true is that once Muslims initiated the erection of tomb chambers, being inspired and influenced most probably by Roman and Christian tomb traditions, over the graves as memorial or commemorative buildings to glorify the deceased person, the idea sprang up and diffused throughout the Muslim world and was much appreciated, and was never discarded. In the course of centuries typical styles and forms of Muslim tomb architecture were developed which, afterwards, became models, and were imitated and copied across the countries and continents.

Regarding the earliest Muslim tombs in South Asia it was believed that the fortress burial chamber of Nasir-ud-Din Mahmud, locally known as Sultan Ghari, built by his father sultan Shams-ud-Din Iltutmish at Delhi in 1231, was the first funerary building of its kind (Brown 1942:14). However, archaeological activities, after the creation of Pakistan brought to light certain burial chambers which were definitely built before the construction of the tomb of Sultan Ghari at Delhi.

Tomb of Muhammad b. Harun

One such building, located in the Lasbela district, is allegedly identified as the last resting place of the Arab general Muhammad Bin Harun. However, the tomb (Fig. 1) structure is traditionally attributed to a saintly personage known as 'Peer Ari'. The number of graves (six in all) shows that it was a family burial chamber. Seemingly the tomb came to be known after the name of the person first buried. If this is so, the first person for whom the tomb was originally built was a certain "Peer Ari". Who precisely this "Peer Ari" was, is not known for certain. The technical aspect of the building such as the style of architecture, mode of masonry, its composition and the ground plan, suggest a date not earlier than 15th Or 16th century, as a large number of tombs or burial chambers containing the graves of the Muslim saints and tribal chiefs are reported from Baluchistan (Taj Ali 1991:51), which share common architectural features with it. In fact, the tomb of Peer Ari at Lasbela is not an exception, we have other similar examples and one of them is a group of tombs situated in the district of Dera Ismail Khan known as the tombs of Lal Mara Sharif after the name of the village located nearby.

Had this tomb of "Peer Ari" not been renovated, a circumstance which has hidden its original shape, it might have given more conclusive information pertaining to its identification and style of architecture. Explaining the word "Peer Ari" N. A. Baluch suggests:

"The place may be identified with the locality where the time honoured the tomb of Peer Ari stands outside the Bela town. The existing baked brick structure of the mausoleum appears to be of Ghaznavid period, and its antiquity suggests that the grave may be of Muhammad b. Harun

(=Ibn Harun=Harun further shortened into Ari in later centuries). ‘Ari’ (in urdu) is the prestigious ancestral title in the Baluch genealogy, and he might have been called ‘Ari’ by the people if Muhammad b. Harun had entered into family relationship with the Baluch people.”(1980:64-65).

But it is well known that Baluch tribes moved into Baluchistan in the 15th CE (M. S. K. Baluch:1, 45). Therefore no family relation between Muhammad .b Harun (CE 715) and Baluch tribes could be visualized. At present, we have a domed square structure, built of burnt bricks which reveals unpretentious architectural composition in all respects. The tomb building stands on a cultural mound in the midst of a graveyard and is locally known as burial chamber of ‘Peer Ari’. Unfortunately nothing is known about the history of this certain ‘Peer Ari’. However, it appears that saintly personage buried at Las Bela, after his death came to be known by prestigious Baluch title “Ari” instead of his real name.

At the time of the conquest of Makran the territory of Lasbela was known to Arab geographers and historians as Armanbel or Armanbil or Armanbela (Dawson:156-157) which may be translated as ‘Islands of Arman’. So far as the Arab commander and governor of Makran Muhammad b. Haroon is concerned, no doubt, he joined the army of Muhammad b. Qasim while latter launched military expedition against Raja Dahir. The tomb of Muhammad b. Harun is believed to have originally been constructed in 11th or 12th century. Brigadier (rtd) Usman (2002: pls 1, 21) gives two photographs of the time before conservation.

Tomb of Saif-ud-Daula

Another dilapidated stone structure situated in Zairan about 5 kilometers from Parachinar is allegedly identified as the tomb (Fig. 2) of Saif-ud-Daula Mahmud (Rahman 1989:79) which reveals a square plan with a sunken arch that accommodates an entrance with a window above. It seems that this scheme of sunken arched entrance and a window above would have originally been repeated on all sides. There is no trace of an arched niche or Mehrab in the Qibla or western wall as a directional element. Moreover

this derelict tomb building is extremely unpretentious and originally stood as a solitary structure without any surrounding wall or enclosure. Nothing is known about the precise date of its construction as no inscription was found from the body of the monument. However, it appears as the only tomb ever erected for any Ghaznavid prince or governor on the soil of medieval Pakistan. What role precisely did it play in the history of tomb architecture in the sub-continent is not known except that the tomb of Saif-ud-Daula Mahmud seems to be the earliest of its kind ever built for any Muslim ruler or governor in this region the structural remains of which still survive. Moreover, it may be suggested that with the construction of the tomb of Saif-ud-Daula Mahmud the funeral architecture took its initiation in Indian sub-continent.

Tomb of Khalid Walid

Multan fell into the hands of the Ghurid's when Shahab-ud-Din Muhammad b. Sam defeated the Ismaili dais in CE 1175 and Ali Karmakh was appointed as governor by the conqueror. During the Ghurid's early days a funeral mosque was constructed under the orders of the Ali b. Karmakh, the governor of Multan (EC 1175-1186) as known from an inscriptional record, recovered from this monument (Farooq 1988:246). At first sight it appears to be a fortress-like monumental structure, erected at a solitary location apparently possessing no political significance. Quite naturally the monumental nature of this building raises a number of questions. Though, inscriptional evidence records that it was built on the commands of Ali b. Karmakh, there is nothing in historical literature regarding to the importance of the place where now it stands. The place is locally known as Khatti Chur. What does this name signify still remains a question mark. It may only be assumed that Khatti Chur had achieved the status of an administrative-cum-political centre or a residence of a saintly personage by the time of the erection of the building. The monument marks the site of an ancient cultural mound, about fifty feet high from the ground level, covering a considerable area. It is adjacent to a graveyard still used by the people of Khatti Chur. Not far from it are the remains of a serai and a mosque locally known as Shahi masjid. There is everything to suggest that it was situated upon a highway and must have been the headquarters of sub-district in the early medieval period.

The tomb is situated near a small village named Khatti Chur in the district of Kabir Wala, Punjab (Pakistan) and is about 40 kilometers away to the south-east of Multan. The actual tomb building, originally built on a 15 feet high plinth (Siddiq & Rehman 1991:41) is surrounded by a fortification wall about 30 feet in height externally. Internally the height of the defensive wall, due to the raised inner surface is much smaller. This imposing boundary wall of immense size gives the monument a fortress-like look (Fig: 3).

Khaliq or Khalid b. Waleed, a saintly personage, is said to have travelled to Multan from Afghanistan or Central Asia or Iran along with the armies of Mahmud of Ghazna for the preaching of Islam. Having reached Multan the saint finally chose a place as his residence now known as Khatti Chur. Presently it consists of a hamlet of more than 100 families (Khan 1990:75). Unfortunately, nothing is known about the saint from historical sources of the region.

If anything in the form of battlement or merlons on the fashion of pre-Muslim Indian tradition existed on top of the defensive wall is now missing. However, a frieze or chain of connected circles is running all around on the upper part of this wall. The uppermost portion of the bastions has disappeared. The utter plainness of the external face of the wall is only interrupted by slightly recessed arched windows, irregularly placed in upper half on three sides. Set between turrets close to the north-eastern end, a flight of steps provides access to the walled enclosure. The interior face of the enclosure wall is not dissimilar to that of the exterior, as plainness and the burnt brick masonry prevails everywhere. The steps lead up to a raised courtyard or enclosure, rectangular in shape, in the centre of which the domed burial chamber of the saint stands. The actual tomb building was originally surrounded by vaulted galleries on all sides, but now they have collapsed leaving remains of the barrel vaults along the perimeter wall. The burial chamber of the saint was flanked on north and south by vaulted halls, which are now in a decaying condition (Fig: 4). The composition and arrangement of central burial chamber surrounded by galleries and flanking halls seems to be a novel idea. Wherefrom this idea was borrowed is not known. Tapering wall is a characteristic of the Tughlaq architecture but here we have a much earlier example.

The actual burial chamber is a square structure of burnt brick masonry measures 24 feet a side (Fig: 5). The walls of the chamber was originally pierced by openings one on each side. At present, except for the eastern opening the rest have been walled up. The entrance consists of a modern wooden door-frame set within an arched opening. The tapering tendency, of the wall can only be discerned at corner angles. The phase of transition shows arched squinches in the corners, about five feet above the floor which converted the square into an octagon. To transform octagon in a circular base, the spandrels of the squinches are filled with stepped recessed niches. These are executed by placing bricks in zig-zag position. This architectural device is generally termed as 'phase of transition', which was commonly used in the Muslim monuments of Central Asia, before the erection of the tomb of Khitti Chor. Thus, the dome of the tomb of Khalid bin Waleed was facilitated. So far as the original form or the shape of dome is concerned, it has lost its originality due to successive repairs. However, at present a pointed dome crowns the whole lower scheme.

Mihrab

The Mihrab consists of a half-vaulted niche, placed in the middle of the western wall. This may confidently be termed as the earliest surviving Mihrab ever built in this region. This architectural feature emerged in the mosques at first, and was later also incorporated in the body of tomb structure as a directional element. At Khatti Chur the grave chamber being devoid of a Mihrab, it is fixed in the middle of the western wall of the fortress, and is externally marked by a rectangular projection. The façade of the Mihrab consists of three receding pilasters which originally carried inscriptional bands. The curves of the niche are now missing. The front wall of the Mihrab is decorated with a trefoil arch and sides are left untreated. The pseudo-Corinthian pilasters are used as support to the main arch as well as the trefoil arch. Moreover, the façade and the interior of the niche was originally profusely decorated with foliated Kufic inscriptions consisting of Quranic verses, the attributes of Allah, the names of the last Prophet and his companions such as Abu Bakr, Farooq, Usman and Ali. The cut-brick technique was applied in carrying out such a wonderful piece of art. The foliated form of Kufic characters was created by carving or cut-brick technique for which Indian craftsmen appears to have been engaged. Except for the Kufic characters and theme of the

inscriptions, every other aspect of the Mihrab speaks of local art traditions such as the form of the main niche, interior trefoil arch in relief on the front face, pseudo Corinthian pilasters as well as decorative elements including foliation of conventionalized acanthus, dentil moulding, floral tendrils, series of lotus leaves, series of roundels, and foliated Kufic characters (Fig: 6).

Nature of Monument

The provision of a mosque in the tomb chamber had become a well established tradition by the 12th century CE. Its absence in the present case and its provision in the perimeter wall suggests that both the structures were raised simultaneously. Regarding similar funerary mosques R. Hillenbrand remarks:

“Frequently the very wording of an inscription or a text enforces the interpretation that a given mausoleum also served some other and non-funerary function. Example of this are ribats, zawiyas, funerary madrasas, and even funerary mosques, such as the one at Turbat-i-jam. These cases show clearly enough how funerary architecture was part of the warp and weft of medieval Iranian society. Such joint- or even multiple - foundations brought the mausoleum into the orbit of society at large and made it natural to extend the functions of a tomb structure beyond simple burial. This did not prevent the secular mausoleum from becoming a symbol of conspicuous consumption. Nevertheless, for patrons desirous of perpetuating their names and at the same time flaunting their piety or, benefitting the local community, or making atonement for their sins by engaging in good works, such joint foundations were ideal. The mausoleum provided, as it were, a stamp of ownership for the entire foundation. By a natural transition the mausoleum would acquire sanctity from its very surroundings and indeed might become in due time a supplementary place of worship”.
(1994:277-78)

In the light of above mentioned observation the nature of monumental structure of Khatti

Chur may be understood. In fact, it seems an extension of a new ‘funerary mosque concept’ in which worship place was combined with burial chamber intending to transform the secular nature of tomb building into a religious one. The idea of structural arrangement or composition of such a building seems to have been copied from some existing monument from some close neighbouring countries where funerary mosque architecture had taken firm grounds.

Tomb of Sultan Ghari

Qutb-ud-Din Aibak was the first ruler of the sultanate of Delhi. He died after falling from his horse and was buried in Lahore in CE 1210. No burial chamber erected over his grave. Present mausoleum dates from 1970’s. Before this the Ghurid ruler Shahab-ud din Muhammad b. Sam is believed to have temporarily been buried at Dhamek (district Rawalpindi) where he was assassinated in CE 1206. His dead body was finally taken to Ghazni. A nice looking mausoleum has been erected over the grave by Abdul Qadir Khan Ghori. About fifty five years after the erection of the tomb of Khalid b. Walid another mortuary chamber was built for a prince at Delhi—the capital of the nascent Muslim Sultanate in Hindustan. In 1231-32, Sultan Shams-ud-Din Iltutmish built a tomb for his son Nasir-ud-din Mahmud about 5km away towards the east from Delhi. The mausoleum of Sultan Ghari (Fig: 7), (=Sultan of the cave) as it is known locally because his burial chamber consisted of an underground chamber, is in an octagonal form covered with flat roof. Two-thirds of the burial chamber is below the ground level while the octagonal roof was originally covered by a pillared pavilion, which is now missing. The burial chamber is enclosed by a fortification wall perforated with arched windows and strengthened at corners by circular turrets. The tomb is approached through a gateway in the middle of the eastern side. The fortress-like appearance of Sultan Ghari shows striking structural analogy with the mausoleum at Khatti Chur, as both share monumental fortifications, bastions or turrets and arched windows, and were raised on platforms approached by flight of steps. Such similarities between the tomb of Khalid b. Walid and Nasir-ud-Din Mahmud suggest that the mausoleum of Nasir-ud-Din Mahmud would have borrowed the layout from Khatti Chur. In other words it may be remarked that the mausoleum of Khalid b. Walid, with all probabilities had served as a model for the tomb of Delhi.

Concluding Remarks

The concept of burial chamber, the way they glorified the deceased bodies of the Kings, saints, nobles and queens brought by Muslims into India. In the course of countries they developed tomb architecture by borrowing new styles from neighboring countries, as well as the innovative skills of the indigenous masons. The Muslim invaders did not hesitate in adapting and introducing indigenous architectural traditions in their plans and compositions. They showed unfailing sense of adaptation to the environmental, geographical factors and climatic conditions. They employed indigenous masons and appreciated their age-old artistic skills and decorative arts and schemes, which now we observe in Muslim monuments throughout the length and breadth of Indian sub-continent.

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Figures



Figure 1. Tomb of Peer Ari at Lasbela (cira 15th, 16th Century CE)



Figure 2. Tomb of Saif-ud-Daula Mahmud, Zairan, (Parachinar) cira. 1086 CE.



Figure 3. Tomb of Khalid b. Walid, Kabirwala, Punjab (Pakistan) 1175 CE.



Figure 4. Fortification wall of Tomb of Khalid b. Walid.



Figure 5. Barrel vault Of the Tomb of Khalid b. Walid. Kabir Wala, Punjab,



Figure 6. Mehrab inside the western wall of the tomb of Khalid Walid.



Figure 7. Tomb of Sultan Ghari at Delhi (1231-32 CE)