

MUSLIM ARCHITECTURE IN KASHMIR: A STUDY OF SOME IMPORTANT STRUCTURES AND THEIR STYLES

SHAISTA RASOOL*

*Research Scholar, Department of Islamic Studies, Islamic University of Science and Technology, Awantipora, Jammu & Kashmir, India

ABSTRACT

Kashmir has its unique architectural style and values. The Muslim architecture in Kashmir flourished under the Muslim rule in 14th century. They invaded this province and established their rule, providing a new quality to the city, both in cultural and physical form. The style of architecture associated with the domination of the Valley by Muslims in the 14th and 15th centuries is almost of wood and bricks which received a distinction of its own. The main purpose of the paper is to set up an initial framework of architectural description of Muslim architecture in Kashmir within the context of architectural concern of 'style.' The main concern is to elucidate clearly the different architectural styles of Muslim architecture and to discuss how the wooden architecture became the chief building taste of Kashmir's master hands and how it assumed the position of religious architecture of Kashmir.

Key Words: Islamic Architecture, Masonry Style, Wooden Style, Tombs.

1. INTRODUCTION

There are different definitions on the term Islamic architecture or Muslim architecture, but in general the concept of Islamic architecture refers to the characteristic of building by Muslims to serve as their identity.¹ Architecture in Kashmir is one among the major spheres which underwent a major change on account of the Persian and Central Asian influences. Prior to the Muslims, stone was preferred over wood and brick as a building material for constructing the temples. The Muslims, on the other hand, mainly patronized the wood and brick work, stone being used only for foundations and special uses. Many factors are attributed to this substitution of stone by wood and brick. It is argued that the change of religion required the hasty erection of buildings for public worship on a

¹ Dr Alarabi Hassan, *The Reference Architecture* (Rabat: Aharrov Magazine, 2007).

much larger scale than had been required by Hindu ritual.² Wood was abundant and could be easily worked; hence its substitution for stone. It is also suggested that the replacement of stone by wood and brick was also necessitated by the frequent earthquakes which rocked the Valley. Abul Fazl while referring to the rationale behind the construction of wooden buildings says, “The buildings of Kashmir are not constructed of stones and bricks but of wood, because of its abundance and constant occurrences of earthquakes in the Valley.”³ However it is also suggested the woodwork derived considerable impetus largely from the patronage of the sultanate ruling class, whose tastes were greatly influenced by the fashions of Iran and Central Asia where the religious edifices were mainly constructed either of wood or bricks. Furthermore it is also suggested that Islam, too appropriated the old wooden architecture of the region considering its utility in the cold climate and its artistic excellence. The Sultans, whose frame of reference was Persian and Central Asian cultures, also patronized this style of architecture.⁴ The Muslim architecture of Kashmir can be divided into three heads viz, masonry style, wooden style and the pure Mughal style.⁵ The buildings belonging to first category which still exists are the Tomb of Zain al-Abidin’s mother and the Tomb of Madin Sahib, where as the Masjid of Khanqah-i-Mualla and the Jamia Masjid of Srinagar belong to second category, the Pather Masjid and the Masjid at Hari Parbat were built entirely of stone displaying the pure Mughal master hands of architect.

2. TOMB OF ZAIN AL-ABIDIN’S MOTHER

One of the oldest Muslim buildings of masonry style is the high and massive domed mausoleum built by Zain-al-Abidin (1421-1472 C.E.) in 1427 C.E. entombing the mortal remains of his mother. He was also called Bud-Shah – the great king.⁶ It is actually constructed on the plinth of a Hindu temple but the brick structure above the plinth is built in the style of Muslim tomb. In plan it is square, with the angles cut off and replaced by rectangular projections. The whole structure consists of a single chamber in the middle and is surrounded by five cupolas,⁷ four small and one large central dome. All the domes however possess more or less the same features. This feature of cupolas at four corners with a dome in the center appears for the first time on this building in the

² *The Calcutta Review* (Digital library of India, 1872), p. 3.

³ Abul Fazl, *Aini Akbari* (Calcutta: Asiatic Society of Bengal, 1891), p. 360.

⁴ Muhammad Azam Diddamari, *Waqiat-i-Kashmir*, trans. Shams al-Din (Srinagar: Islamic Research Center, 2005), pp, 44-46.

⁵ W.H.Nicholls, “Muhammadan Architecture in Kashmir,” *Annual Report of Archeological Survey of India*, 1906-7, (Calcutta, 1909), p. 161.

⁶ M. Kaul, *Kashmir: Hindu, Buddhist and Muslim Architecture*, (New Delhi: Sagar Publications, 1971), pp.123-139.

⁷ The dome shaped ornamented structure located on the top of larger roof.

history of Indo-Muslim architecture.⁸ Each wall face has been provided with an arched opening. The inner doorway is in the semi-circular form and the exterior walls are studded at intervals, with glazed blue bricks.⁹

3. TOMB OF MADIN SAHIB

The tomb is an example of masonry style situated at Zadibal, Srinagar and is supposed to have been built about 848 A.H/1444 C.E. during the reign of Zain al-Abidin. This is the tomb of one the great Sufi Madin Sahib, who is said to come as an envoy to Kashmir from Madina in the reign of Sultan Sikandar (1389-1413 C.E.).¹⁰ It has a unique square shaped tile work with different colors on the same tile, which according to sources is said to have introduced from Persia.¹¹

The important feature of the building was the representation of a beast with the body of a leopard and the trunk of a human being, apparently shooting with bow and arrow at its own tail which ends in a kind of Dragon's head while nearby a fox was quietly looking on from among the flowers and cloud forms. According to sources the use of cloud forms and dragon's head are of Chinese and Persian influence.¹²

4. JAMIA MASJID SRINAGAR

The most impressive and outstanding representation of wooden structure in Kashmiri style of architecture is the Jamia Masjid at Srinagar. The type of its architecture, its massiveness, complexity, size and perfection of design makes it one of the most extraordinary achievements of early Islamic art in the Valley.¹³

Jamia Masjid, Srinagar was built by Sultan Sikandar in 1394 C.E. father of Sultan Zain-al-Abidin. He is said to have laid its foundation in 1398 C.E. and completed it in 1402 C.E. Sadar al-din Harasani was the engineer of the Masjid.¹⁴ After a time it was burnt, but was rebuilt by Sultan Hassan (1472-84 C.E.) and Sultan Zain al-Abidin is reported to have greatly exerted him in adding to its aesthetic attractions. During the reign of Sultan Jahangir, a fire broke out and nearly three thousand houses were burnt. Jamia Masjid also burnt the 2nd time on the occasion of Eid.¹⁵ By the order of Jahangir, Malik Hyder Chadura rebuilt the Masjid in 1620 C.E./1029 A.H).¹⁶ The

⁸ Muhibul Hassan, *Kashmir Under the Sultans*, (Delhi: Aakar Books, 1959), p. 286.

⁹ Idem.

¹⁰ Ibid., p. 288.

¹¹ Idem.

¹² W.H.Nicholls, *Archeological Survey of India, 1906-7*, op. cit., pp. 163-4.

¹³ S.L. Shali, *Kashmir: History and Archaeology through the Ages* (New Delhi: Indus Publishing Company, 1993), p. 24.

¹⁴ Mufti Zia al-din. *Tarikh-i-Masājid* (Jammu, 1990), vol I, p. 244.

¹⁵ *Tuzuk-I-Jahangiri*, trans. Alexander Rogers (London: Royal Asiatic Society, 1914), p. 142.

inscription on the gate of the Masjid shows that Malik Hyder Chadura built it. The Masjid again caught fire during the reign of Aurangzeb in 1672 C.E. while the governorship was in the hands of Iftikhar Khan (1672-75 C.E.). It was the third occasion when the Masjid devastated by the fire.¹⁷ The inscription on the southern doorway of the Masjid mentions the interest of Aurangzeb for its reconstruction.¹⁸ The plan was the same as it was originally constructed in fourteenth century. It was reconstructed during Aurangzeb's times by using the bricks and wooden pieces of equal size of bricks.¹⁹

The Masjid is a quadrangle and roughly square in plan, and is composed of four huge and wide colonnades. The space covered with pyramidal colonnade is not the invention of the Muslim in Kashmir, but it resembles with the architectural style of the Stupa court of the Buddhist monasteries or the prototype of Hindu Temples.²⁰ Its principal features are the four *minars*, one in the middle of each side. They are covered by a series of pyramidal roofs, which terminate in an open turret crowned by a high pinnacle. The western colonnade represents the *mehrab*. The other three, eastern, northern and southern colonnades have arched entrance. It also has a stone slab with Persian inscription in Nastaliq script. The centre of the Masjid is an open space with a large tank or *Houze* represents a fountain in the centre which also serves purpose of ablution. Jamia Masjid with its unique architecture has majestic 378 wooden deodar pillars, each one an entire tree-trunk of deodar.²¹ The grand mosque of Jamia Masjid even in its present condition reflects a remarkable current of religious fervor witnessed in the valley soon after its occupation by the Muslims.

5. MASJID OF SAYYID ALI HAMMADANI OR KHANQAH-E-MUALLA

The Masjid of Shah Hamdan or Khanqah-e-Mualla is one of the oldest Muslim structures in Kashmir situated on the banks of river Jhelum above Zaina Kadal. It is a typical example of the wooden architecture of the Valley.²² The Masjid was originally constructed by Sultan Sikandar (1389-1413 C.E) in 1395 C.E by the orders of Mir Muhammad Hammadani.²³ The foundation of Masjid is composed of the material remains of ancient monuments. It is nearly square in plan and is double storied. The lower portion is comprised of a large hall which is decorated with finely carved wood while the upper story is quite simple. There are fourteen chambers out of which seven

¹⁶ Ibid., p. 442.

¹⁷ Khwaja Mohammad Azam Diddamari, *Waqiat-i-Kashmir*, op. cit., p. 257.

¹⁸ W.H.Nicholls, *Archeological Survey of India Report 1906-7*, op.cit., p. 163-4.

¹⁹ C.B.Hugel, *Travels in Kashmir and Panjab* (Jammu ,1972), p.119

²⁰ S.L. Shali, *Kashmir: History and Archaeology through the Ages*, op.cit., p. 249.

²¹ Muhibul Hassan, *Kashmir Under the Sultans*, op. cit., p. 293.

²² Ibid, 291.

²³ Khwaja Mohammad Azam Diddamari, *Waqiat-i-Kashmir*, op.cit., p. 72.

number are at each southern and northern side of the hall. The decorated wooden pillars support the entire hall from the four corners. Each pillar is about 20 ft in height. However, the Masjid with its eight sided pillars with foliated bases and capitals, arched and recessed *mehrab*, paneled walls, painted ceilings in multicolored designs and the valuable prayer carpets of different colors on the floor give it an air of elegance and dignity.²⁴ The tomb chamber is decorated with glass and glazed work.

The Khanqah-e-Mualla in Srinagar has undergone lots of additions and alterations The Masjid was destroyed by fire for the first time in the days of Sultan Hassan Shah (1772-84 C.E.). He rebuilt it in 1479 C.E.²⁵ The Masjid was burnt for the second time in the days of Abul Barakat Khan, the Mughal deputy governor of Kashmir and was again rebuilt by the order of Mohammad Shah in 1733 C.E.²⁶

6. PATHER MASJID

Pather Masjid (literally Stone Masjid) located in Zaina-Kadal is the largest surviving example of Mughal architecture in Kashmir. This stone Masjid of polished grey lime stone was built by Nūr Jahan, the wife of Emperor Jahangir; in 1622 C.E. It is known as Shahi Masjid also.²⁷ It is believed that the construction was supervised by the renowned architect and a well-known Mughal historian Malik Hyder Chadura. The construction of the Masjid has been undertaken on the plinth of heavy stone boulders used as foundation, a few feet deeper from ground level. The enclosure of the Masjid has been executed in bricks. There are nine horizontally constructed arches in the facade, the middle one being the largest. On both the northern and eastern sides of the prayer hall are windows openings executed in stones. The roof was laid out by stone slabs and the gaps were filled with terracotta pipes. The roof consists of twenty-seven domes, the central one of which is the largest. The enclosure wall is built of brick masonry, with a coat of lime plaster.

CONCLUSION

The Muslim architecture of Kashmir is characterized by its amazing woodwork. It exhibits a generous array of stupendous constructional wonders. Most of the wooden constructions in this province were done by deodar trees. The Wooden architecture indicates Kashmir's ancient history. Due to the presence of wood in abundant amount, suitability to the climate, country, needs of the people, the wooden constructional method became in regular use.

²⁴ Muhibul Hassan, *Kashmir Under the Sultan*, op. cit., p. 291.

²⁵ Idem.

²⁶ Khwaja Mohammad Azam Diddamari, *Waqiat-i-Kashmir*, op.cit., p.72.

²⁷ Ghulam Muhiuddin Sufi, *Kashir*, (Lahore, 1948). vol. ii, p. 515.

REFERENCES

1. Dr Alarabi Hassan, *The Reference Architecture* (Aharrov Magazine, Rabat, 2007).
2. *The Calcutta Review* (Digital library of India, 1872).
3. Abul Fazl, *Aini Akbari* (Calcutta: Asiatic Society of Bengal, 1891).
4. Muhammad Azam Diddamari, *Waqiat-i-Kashmir*, trans. Shams al-Din (Srinagar: Islamic Research Center, 2005).
5. W.H.Nicholls, "Muhammadan Architecture in Kashmir", Annual Report of *Archeological Survey of India*, 1906-7, (Calcutta, 1909).
6. M. Kaul, *Kashmir: Hindu, Buddhist and Muslim Architecture* (New Delhi: Sagar Publications, 1971).
7. Muhibul Hassan, *Kashmir Under the Sultans* (Delhi: Aakar Books, 1959).
8. S.L. Shali, *Kashmir: History and Archaeology through the Ages* (New Delhi: Indus Publishing Company, 1993).
9. Mufti Zia al-din, *Tarikh-i-Masājid* (Jammu, 1990).
10. *Tuzuk-I-Jahangiri*, trans. Alexander Rogers. (London: Royal Asiatic Society, 1914).
11. C.B.Hugel *Travels in Kashmir and the Panjab*. (Jammu, 1972).
12. Ghulam Muhiuddin Sufi, *Kashir* (Lahore, 1948).