

Monumental Legacy speaks through the ruins of Pranāmī Temple at Malkā Hāns

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Abstract

This paper is based on Hindu iconography as well as conceptual understanding towards cultural identity. There are remarkable cultural and regional amalgamations which give the new strength to religious architecture of Hindus in subcontinent. Among them the grandeur of Pranāmī Temple is still survived at Malkā Hāns, a small village near Pakpattan in Pakistan. This temple has not only improvised the history but also interpreted the psychological approach of architects towards religious architecture. The Pranāmī Temple is considered as monumental inheritance of Malkā Hāns. This site is acknowledged as having heritage significance due to its historical associations, iconographical interpretations and architectural features. The Pranāmī Temple has its own uniqueness within cultural characterization but today this heritage is in perilous condition.

Keywords: *Improvisation, psychological Approach, Patterns, Identical framework, synthesis*

Introduction

The evolution of the temples begins with the small village shrine. But now the various stages of this sacred place are observed, a considerable lot of them are still being developed at various levels. The Oxford Dictionary delineates the term “sacred” as that space set apart for or committed to some religious persistence, whereas the English word temple stems from Roman “*templum*” that is referred to a square area fenced off for divination. In Sanskrit the temple is stated by several terms, one of which is *vimana*. The temple itself is perceived as god’s chariot. ¹ Throughout the history this religious place is considered as visual articulation of the universe which reflects the Hindu philosophy of the cosmos. The willingness of the gods and goddesses of Hinduism to make themselves visible and accessible to man is emphasized everywhere in Hindu literature. The temples are places where gods make themselves visible is conveyed by the very terms used to designate a temple: a seat or platform of god (*prasada*), a house of god (*devagriham*), a residence of god (*devalaya*) or a waiting and abiding place (*mandiram*).²

The history of the subcontinent is prevalently acknowledged by the Indus civilization, as earliest achievement in architecture. It was only in the latter half of the 7th century that the temple architecture in its medieval features instigated to take shape. The major architectural characterization which is gradually developed echoed the devotee’s psychosomatic approach towards religious architecture. The Arabs, before they came to India as conquerors, were extraordinary admirers of the Indian architects. Al-Birūnī visited India during early 11th century



said, “Our people when they see them, wonder at them and are unable to describe them, much less to construct anything like them.”³ The Muslims who carried with them architectural standards and practices from Assyria, Egypt, Northern Africa and Sassanian Persia as well as indigenous Hindu masons, who possessed and extraordinary synthetic power. This creativity is not limited only towards architecture but also aesthetically appeared in the fresco paintings as Havell defines, a continuous development of Indian building traditions was a result of altered societal and politically awareness, changes in religious ritual and symbolism and thus the structural requirement kept evolving.⁴

In the historical context of the subcontinent, the stylization of architecture has been divided into many classifications, the first, known as the *Pathan*⁵, refers to the structures raised by Turkish and Afghan rulers of Delhi, whose reign lasted more than three centuries (1200-1550 AD), the decline of Sultanate dynasty resulted in the weakening of central power and thus led to the development of a new form where architecture became communicative of their local particularities under the pressure of foreign domination. Later on, the Mughal style flourished from about the middle of 16th century till about 18th century. Mughal style and British (in contact European during 17th to 19th century), principles of architecture developed a distinctive sense of stimulation and consequently, most of religious and secular buildings are outcome of this emergence in the subcontinent and these buildings are not only structurally magnificent, but aesthetically rich.

The entire superstructure is made of rough dressed bricks and lime plasters. Percy Brown defines “mind materialized in term of rock, brick or stone.”⁶ Pranāmī Temple is interpretation of this statement, where ultimate truth and spirituality is more imperative rather than imaginative or materialistic characterization. Temple building seems to have been a sincere expression of the devotion and piety of the ruler. Hindu literature frequently describes the merit that is due to the patron of the temple. ‘Let him, who wishes to enter the worlds that are reached by meritorious deeds of piety and charity build a temple to the gods,’ suggests the Brihatsamhita, an early text, while the later Shilpaprakasha, a manuscript on temple building, ensures that the patron ‘will always have peace, wealth, grain and sons.’⁷

The Pranāmī Temple has simple, rectangular and somehow symmetrical plan, though sporadically asymmetrical. Throughout the temple the external and internal walls are constructed with solid bricks, covered by plaster layer. Canonical texts that described the plan of the Hindu temple allude to its astronomical basis. The Hindu sacred geometry isn't distinctive in origination of conception as of sacred geometry of other ancient cultures. *Rig Veda* has a brief description of rituals and their philosophy. It is however, has a separate addendum called *vedanger Jyotisa*⁸ or astronomical treatise of the *Rig-Veda*.

The façade of temple has *jharokā*, which rests under a multi foil arch; the measurement of *jharokā* is 7m, in length while the total facade is in 8m in width. The arch is flanked by carved

pilasters, attached to the surface of wall. The spandrel of arch shows faded paintings apparently taken from different *shatras*.⁹ The chevron designs on both pilasters are adorned with projected small *jharokās* on both sides of outer wall. The series of frescoes is adorned the soffit of arch. These frescoes are not visible in details but there few sights give us the indication of their aesthetic level.

The shape of *jharokā* is in a half hexagonal form within three openings. The panels used above the windows have been almost lost, only fluted pillars in wooden form are surviving and their details are being carved rather than embossed. The parapet is in fret works, which is called *pinjrā* design, though most of its part has been broken but remaining are still stunning and beautiful. Talib Hussaain states that the wooden *jālī* work is called *mashrabiyyā*, lattice work formed of small pieces join together.¹⁰

The use of metal strips is to bind its various fragments that give strength to this structure. In the entrance, a projected balcony considered one of striking feature of this temple. The *jharokā* further rests on a corbelling which is carved in the form of upturned lotus flower which is considered as one of the utmost symbols in Hinduism portraying enlightenment, growth, purity, and birth (fig. 1).



Figure 1. *Jharoka* balcony set above the main entrance of wooden door at Pranāmī Temple, Saima Sharif, JPEG image.

The main entrance wooden door which rests beneath the *jharokā* measures 1ft. in length within frame. The top of this door is carved in marble relief; geometrical and floral patterns is running in the technique of low relief on the three sides of door, while the continuity of design takes break on the right and left sides, due to the broken condition and bricks are appeared from inside.

While the top rail is divided into five squares, each square comprises in 30cm in length, similarly its width is 30cm. The total length of wooden door within frame is 3m, while the width of only wooden door is 2m. The width of three wooden carved vertical panels (wooden frame) in recessed form is 30cm in length and 32.50cm in width. The lower horizontal portion beneath the door sill is also carved in floral motifs (figs. 2,3).



Figure 2. Detailed view of design, Saima Sharif, JPEG image.

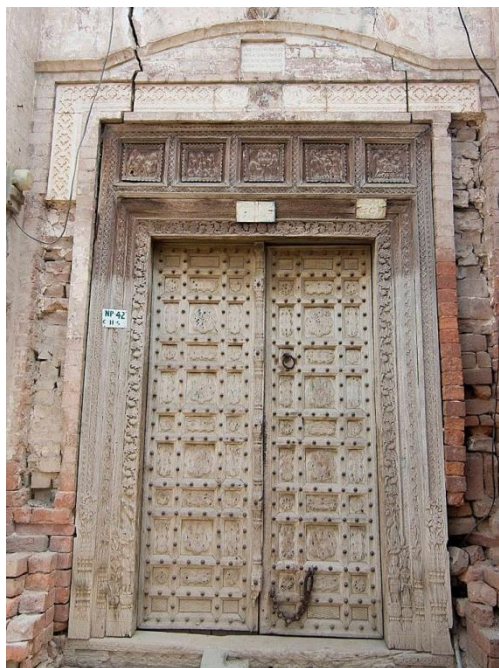


Figure 3. Entrance door with carved marble design, Saima Sharif, JPEG image.

The entrance of Pranāmī Temple is located on Eastern side while this has two openings one leads towards the North, which is mostly closed and other which is considered as main

entrance is positioned on Eastern side. Unlike the conventional style, this temple is not sited on high plinth or leading high satires, the approach to the entrance door is through a flight of single step. This temple belongs to very rare class of temples in Pranāmī sect. It is open-air quadrangular structures consisting of a three stories, which are in poor condition but most of remains still stand.

The entrance door opens into rectangular chamber which is measures 4.68 m in length and 2m in width. This chamber leads towards porch which has two opening on left side and three arch ways on right side. Among these openings, left side opening leads towards staircase; measuring 1.38m in width while 2m in length, while the reaming openings are closed with bricks latterly. On the left side, there are three opening archways, temporarily two are closed while only one is open. The length of these multifoil arches is in 2.84m, while their width is 1.70m. The base of this chamber as well as porch is uneven and patchy, mostly bricks are scattered and does not give any idea of its original design. The roof is built of wooden planks in trabeate style. The roof throughout the temple is similar in design. This arch opens into a courtyard (fig. 4).



Figure 4. Entrance porch at Pranāmī Temple (Leads towards main courtyard) , Saima Sharif, JPEG image.

This arched opening enters into a square courtyard measuring 11.63m in length. The temple has many notable features though its structure is extremely unpretentious in plan and design. An arcade seems to be wrapped around the main courtyard. This square complex has two large rooms with three openings on Southern side; each room has wooden doors with the adornment of projected geometrical designs placed in multi foil arches. The complex is existed on square plan (fig. 5). The geometry and symbolism in architecture has a strong relationship with each other. The square is considered as a fundamental form in temple architecture, a numerical figure has sacrificial symbolism, lend it many variations. In *Ā'in-i-Akbarī*, Abu'l Fazal also describes the accounts of Hindu sciences and their influences.



The temple is not only constructed on concise measurements but also base on extreme geometry. Behind physical matter of geometry the ultimate truth is hidden as Pythagoras avowed that numbers themselves were sacred. They had a distinct and physical actuality and were not just expedient counting emblems. The uniformities derived from such numbers, be they musical, astral or architecture, were also sacred. This idea is at the essence of sacred geometry.¹¹ “Even Plato believes that all things grew forms, simple 3-D geometry and immutable patterns that shape the backbone of reality.¹² The *S’ulvasūtras* indicate that the Hindus, perhaps as early 800 BC, applied geometry in the construction of altars. Kaya states that construction of squares and rectangles, the relation of the diagonal to the sides, equivalent rectangles and squares, equivalent circles and squares.”¹³

In Hinduism, “the philosophical concept of *vastu-purush-mandala* is a perfect square, divide up into equal squares, creating a sequence which begins from 1 and goes on to 4, 9, 16, 25 ... right up to 1024. In temple architecture, the most frequently used *mandalas* are those of 64 and 81 squares, with the numerous divinities owed places in accordance with their status and with the mystic potentials. The *mandala* is not a plan rather it represents an energy field. Its center suggests both *shunya* (the absolute void) as well as *bindū* (the world seed and the source of all energy). In all *mandalas*, at this center is located *Brahmana*, the Supreme Principle. According to Hinduism, when the cycles of reincarnation ate finally over, and the *ātma* (individual soul) is released from each one of us, it goes to *Brahmana*, that is, to the center of this energy field.”¹⁴ As “French academician Gaston Bachelard has pointed out, the intuitive insight of the artist (or for that matter the seer) cannot be explained through the cause-and-effect structure of scientific reasoning, but, like a depth charge, explodes in the center of our being, releasing to the surface the debris of our unconscious. This is why, the invisible, the mystic, the sacred will always be central of arts.”¹⁵



Figure 5. The square courtyard inside temple, Saima Sharif, JPEG image.

The construction of Pranāmī Temple is built on a variety of symmetrically designed within apt spaces and volumes. There are not interspersed landscaped. The juxtaposing of internal as well as external dwellings in this labyrinthine building is formally established and cultured during the period of subcontinent. The ultimate architectural forms are springing out of the structure is basically the way to express the constructor's conception of the divine as self-manifesting within the synthesis of indigenous characterization.

There is also synthesis of the indigenous and foreign architectural features culminated in the emergence of a peculiar style of the architecture, based on treabeate and arcuate principles of structure. The local craftsmen integrated and adapted foreign architectural strategies, which is perceptible in the construction of rose window above the Gothic arch which is foreign character. At this floor only a single building is remained. The top of this building have a wall that contains a series of merlons, which give the shape of battlemented parapet (fig 6).



Figure 6. Series of merlons at second floor, Saima Sharif, JPEG image.

The porch also rests on two twist pillars which are 1.04m in length respectively. Along with these twisted pillars, there are two other pillars, which are same in length as 1.04m in height, but its astragal is decorated with converted lotus. Its base is simple and shaft is in fluted fillets form. Behind these pillars there are frescoes are painted in blind niches, measuring 1.04m in height while its width is about 76.2cm in width (fig 7,8).



Figure 7. Terrace of sculptural facade, Saima Sharif, JPEG image.

The lower part of roof is sustained by brackets which are carrying esteem of male figures and surmounted by lotus scrolls. Among these brackets, the one which is represented at the corner is measuring 91.5cm in length.

These brackets are also booming with the fragmentation of decorated frieze within floral motifs, while the central portion of frieze is based on composition of Krishna in dancing posture with cowherds. Such figurative composition of dancing figures with musical instruments has a religious essence. Within a few expectations the central figure is Krishna while musician are male that is surrounded by female singers and dancers. Most of these compositions depicted on frieze. The composition is measured by 30.52cm in length while its width is 61cm approximately.

This manifestation justified Michell's statement that the form of symbolism has several layers of significances, which is open to interpretation at various levels. These niches are flanked on both sides, measuring 1.27m in length, and its width is 81.28cm framed by small attached pilasters which are 38cm long and crowned by peacock. The measurement of peacock is 22.86cm in length and 20.32cm in width. These are containing divine couple of Krishna and Radha, the measurement of Krishna (in relief form) is 38cm in length but Radha (sculpted in relief) is in 30cm. This subject matter is representing in the form of iconography throughout in the temple and considered as remarkable icon of divinity.

Along with this divine couple, the devotees are also standing on each side with holding and playing some kind of musical instrument in hands. They are 0.26m in height, while the spandrels are decorated with acanthus twigs holding by carved hands stunningly. The lower plinth on both sides of this facade have open rectangular small hallow covered spaces inside, measuring about 1.09m in length and its width is 0.737m.



Figure 8. The sculptural facade leads towards western enclosure, Saima Sharif, JPEG image.

There is another erection, which is also considered distinctive feature of this temple. This is an octagonal shaped structure, which is resting above this *garbhagriha*, which measures about 4.58m in length and 2.14m in width. All four sides of it have multifoil arches for the opening. The isolated tower is existed at the outer side of south western corner. The free standing tower is built in bricks.

The straightforwardness in its design is reflected through the multifoil curves and its appearance of solidness is given by the profundity of four curve opening on each side. The interior however is very simple. A different approach was taken for the construction of this octagonal structure. The octagonal form could be definitely integrated with square and rectangle. The plan steadily evolved from square to the octagonal square through way of chamfering or recessing the directions by eradication of the corners, in subcontinent Mughal adopted this plan for their shrines. The octagonal form is used by almost all religions for symbolic theme throughout the history of art. It has a close association with the sacred space (fig 9).



Figure 9. An octagonal structure in the courtyard, Saima Sharif, JPEG image.

The total measurement of Western enclosure is 14.64m in length. There is a cloister on the Northern side within the octagonal tower. This cloister is comprised on the series of massive columns which is supporting the roof over the cloister. The small time is used in these massive

columns as well as in walls which is measuring about 17.8cm in length and 11.4cm in width and 1 inch in thickness. The arches of this cloister are 2m in height while width is 1.50m.

Along this cloister and tower there is a passage which leads towards upper storey. This passage marked some cusped and pointed arches which gives an indication of lower level building. It is safe to say that there is a possibility that some secret part of this temple might have been existed during the earlier times.

The following passage is now in a very poor condition is filled with cracks which gives a proof of structure's instability. It's not possible for anyone to try and stroll on this section because of its inconsistent condition. This is also built in mud, bricks and mortar. The arches on the right side were closed later on (fig. 10).



Figure 10. Passage above the cloister room, Saima Sharif, JPEG image.

Today, the temple stands as a cultural distinctiveness in the sense of modern erection within the idiosyncratic inspirational elements. The iconographical interpretations as well as physical appearance of architectural forms provide us the glimpses of the evidences of its

modernity. The physical environs sometimes leave a more permanent impression on psyche. Some pictures are revealing with the evidence that were observed by the author during last visit. These sculptures are manifested with full energy and strength. The woman figure is erected on the façade and adorns the beauty of terrace or porch, while the other male figure was signified on the bracket. But unfortunately now these are in dilapidated condition. The remaining sculptures are now six out of the series of eight standing female figures. Moreover, its head is detached from the body. It is deeply regretted to see this sculpture being thrown by residents on debris (figs. 11-17).



Figure 11. The sculpture was in its original form, Saima Sharif, JPEG image.

Figure 12. The original manifestation of sculpture, Saima Sharif, JPEG image.

Figure 13. Broken sculpture without head, Saima Sharif, JPEG image.



Figure 14. Bust of female figure adorned with jewelry, Saima Sharif, JPEG image.

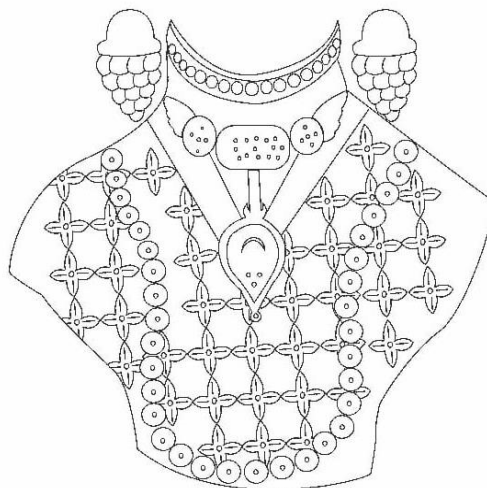


Figure 15. Drawing of Bust

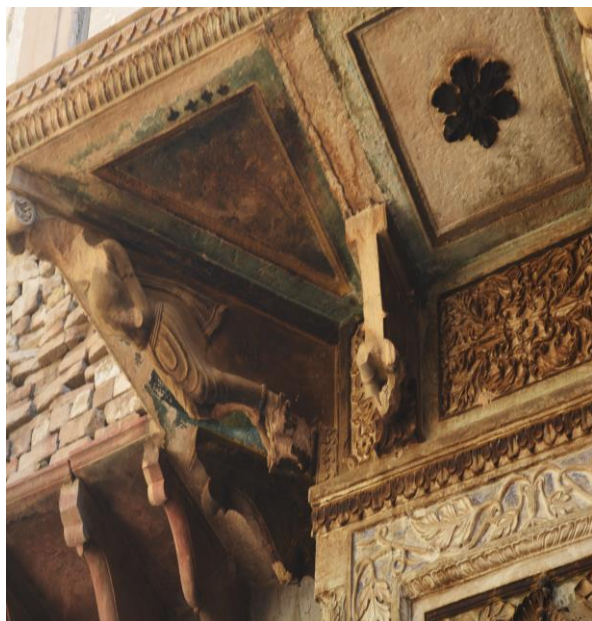


Figure 16. Bracket in its original form, Saima Sharif, JPEG image.



Figure 17. Broken bracket without head and feet, Saima Sharif, JPEG image.

Conclusion

This paper concludes with the frantic state as heritage of Pakistan is in hazardous condition. Either, it is ignored altogether or it is mismanaged under the garb of new development and incentive of upkeep. This situation is shared by many other historic cities of Pakistan as well. However, it must be realized that the monuments are not only the combination of brick and mortar but a composition of histories that develop a unique characterization of cultural identity; this is an amalgamation of narratives that make up the distinctive feature of the place-with stories



about the place constantly evolving. Various noble edifices were raised in the period of subcontinent, especially in the field of religious (temple) architecture; they have left magnum opus, which continue to excite the wonder and admiration of the world. The survival glimpses of Pranāmī Temple speak its majesty and dignity, but unfortunately this grandeur now is in pitiable state.

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- ⁵ *Pathan* is an Iranian ethnic group native to Central and South Asia.
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- ⁸ This is one of earliest known Indian texts on astrology (*Jyotisha*). The text is foundational to *Jyotisha*, one of the six *Vedanga* disciplines.
- ⁹ *Shashtra*, is a Sanskrit word that means "precept, rules, manual, compendium, book or treatise" in a general sense.
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