

ARCHITECTURAL ORNAMENTATION OF SIKH HAVELI'S: A CASE STUDY OF NAU NEHAL SINGH HAVELI-LAHORE

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Received: June 22, 2024

Revised: July 31, 2024

Accepted: August 15, 2024

Published: August 27, 2024

ABSTRACT

Architecture ornamentation and the decorative arts displays the aesthetic and cultural dimensions in addition to functionality in the ornamented facades. Historically, these ornamentations not only conveyed the particular architecture style characteristics of specific era rather added the distinguished character to each of them such as the Gothic architecture is known for intricate tracery. Lahore's history is characterized by the impact of multiple governing dynasties, each of which made a unique contribution to the city's architecture and ornamental arts in Pakistan. Sikh era is notable for bringing new ideas, conceptions, and aesthetic preferences, and for making a substantial break from the prevailing environment. The current research is focused on exploring the Sikh architecture ornamentation language for residential architecture (building typology of Haveli's). The Haveli of Nau Nehal Singh officially known as Government Victoria Girls High School represents one of the finest examples of Sikh architecture in Pakistan, highlighted by the characteristic architecture ornamentation of the Sikh-period, which includes engraved work on bricks in addition to ornate brackets. Through a detailed examination of these elements, this study aims to provide a comprehensive understanding of the artistic, cultural and societal values associated that needs to be preserved for the future generations. The insights will lead towards the pathway for their restorations and preservations.

Key Words: Ornamentation, Engraved, Brickwork, Brackets, Sikh, Frescoes

INTRODUCTION

Architecture ornamentation is an expression of artistic excellence with cultural traditions reflection embedded in religious beliefs enriched with symbolic representations of societal values. The exploration of any particular decorative style unveils the hidden treasures of their construction period. The articulation of designs, materials and craftsmanship adds the depth and texture to facades that creates an artistic expression where sculpted features, patterns and motifs enhance the overall grandeur and intricacy.

Sikh architecture particularly in the Punjab region is distinguished for its intricate ornamentation with uniquely artistic features. The key elements are rhythmic symmetry to portray grandeur with frescoes and carvings. The ornamental detailing during Sikh period narrate the Sikh values of purity with religious significance while

incorporating Sikh symbolism/ motifs with fusion of indigenous elements like jharokas (overhanging balconies).

Sikh period havelis represented the unique rhythmic fusion of architectural styles and ornamental traditions with symbolism of their religious ideology giving it a distinct character. The amalgamation of local traditional styles with a blend of Sikh values of purity and spirituality originated an artistic sculpted decorative ornamentation during Sikh rule.

The fifty-year reign of Sikh Maharaja Ranjit Singh over Punjab (1799–1849) brought significant transformation to Lahore, establishing it as his Lahore Darbar. Before this period, Lahore had been the regional capital of the Mughal era, supported by many Mughal rulers and emperors, in 16th and 17th centuries. The

Royal Organizations which worked under the Mughal rule had established workshops (karkhanay) due to which the artisanship and architectural traditions easily transitioned into the Sikh period.

This study is focused on documenting the advance embellishment techniques from Sikh period, which includes engraved work on bricks in addition to elaborately detailed brackets with interplay of colors. Each of these techniques showcases the craftsmanship involved and ingenuity towards introducing its creation and development during Sikh rule.

Literature Review:

The architecture ornamentation plays a vital role in establishing the distinct character of any particular architecture style. The decorative features contribution is not only limited to the aesthetics rather they support structural system and also portrays the cultural expression. Sikh Architecture is deeply rooted and sprouted from the religious significance created ornamentation

styles depicting the purity (the major essence) with the use of white and gold combinations.

Historical Background:

Nau Nehal Singh was the eldest grandson of Ranjit Singh, he was the only son of Kharak Singh and Chand Kaur. This was constructed at the time of wedding of Nau Nehal Singh in 1837. He died at very young age, according to Kanhaya Lal, the land for haveli was acquired after demolishing the belongings of so many ordinary people, He mention that in 1892 the Haveli becomes government property, it was being used as Female School. Since the demise of Nau Nehal Singh this Haveli was housed as Government Victoria Girls High School, over the period of time, it goes under so many changes, compromising the original Architectural heritage. This Haveli (Figure-1) is situated at a furlong distance of north of the Moori Gate, this area is called as Maidan Mhaiyan, which means “Land of Brothers”. Before this Haveli, this area was supposed to be a garden, it’s a kilometer from the Lahore Fort.

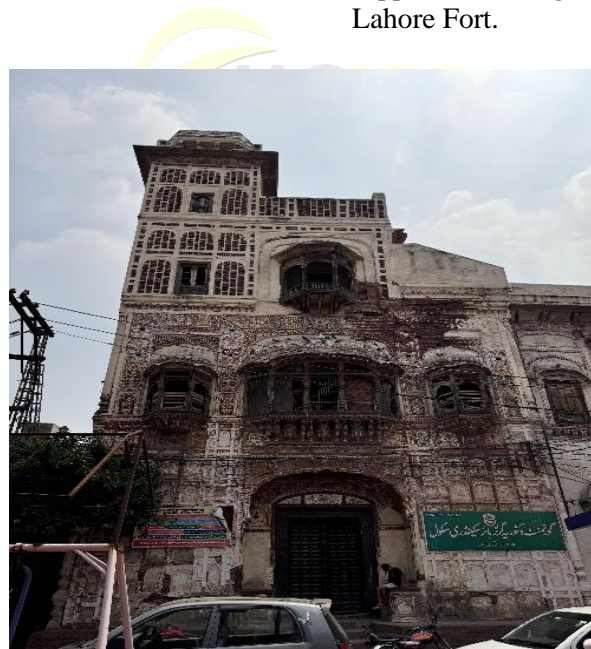


Figure-1. Nau Nehal Singh’s Haveli, facade, Lahore. (Source-Author)

The architectural ornamentation style of Nau Nehal Singh Haveli offers an intriguing study, especially when compared to the Government Victoria Girls High School. This analysis seeks to delve into the historical significance, design elements, and cultural implications of both

architectural landmarks, shedding light on their unique ornamentation styles.

Nau Nehal Singh Haveli displays a rich variety of design elements, featuring delicate frescoes, ornate balconies (jharokhas), and intricately carved woodwork. These aspects are visually

appealing as well as functional, acting as a buffer zone between the indoors and the outdoors. It also provides ventilation in addition to the aesthetically appealing surface. Additionally, the use of vibrant colors and nature-inspired motifs adds to the architectural charm of the haveli. On the other hand, the Government Victoria Girls High School part presents a more understated design style, with symmetrical facades, neoclassical columns, and minimal decorative features. The focus on symmetry and proportion embodies the rationalist principles of Victorian architecture, which aim to create an environment of order and discipline suitable for learning.

The plan of the Haveli was found to be rectangular with segmented facades and well decorated main entrance (Figure-2). This is considered as masterpiece of Sikh era architecture that showcases the delicate Stylized sculpture along with fresco work on both eastern and western façade of Haveli. On eastern side, the brickwork that is carved with different ornaments and relief work are significant for multiple reasons. They reciprocate the range of craftsmanship activities during Sikh era in Lahore along with flaunting the magnificence and power of this art piece.



Figure-2 Western Façade of Nau Nehal Singh Haveli. (Source: Author)

Research Methodology:

The research is focused on the documentation of the ornamentation styles of Sikh architecture that started with the literature mapping to understand the origins and the typologies within the various architectural ornamentation styles prevalent at that time. The literature (Figure-3) emphasized the influence of the regional and traditional elements. It was further established through the analytical studies that the harmonious amalgamation with blended religious

significance of purity and spirituality generated the characteristic Sikh ornamentation styles. This was further complemented with the visual surveys and physical observations for collection of evidence-based data. The thorough site surveys and visual observations enhanced the hidden detailing of these ornamentations. The comprehensive documentation highlighted the design philosophy and the selection of particular elements in addition material/ color combinations.

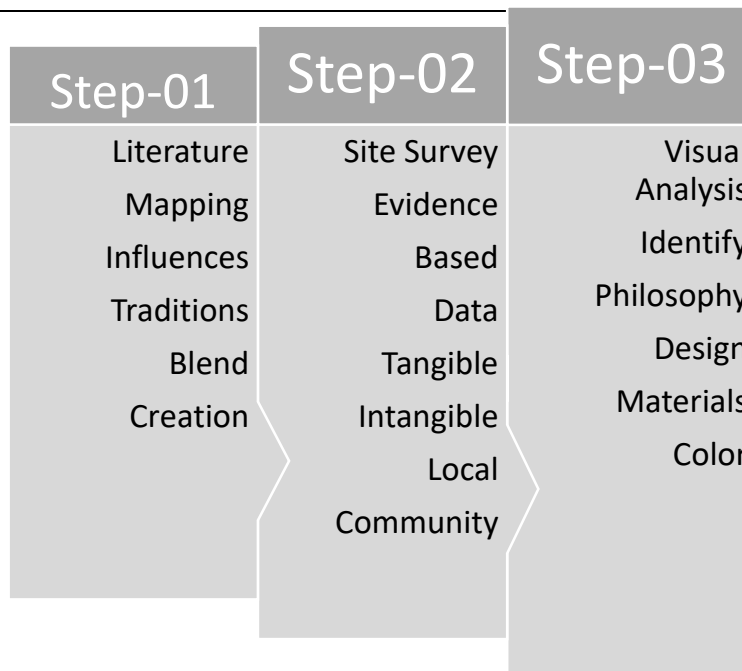


Figure-3. Research methodology sequential process (Source: Author)

Results and Discussion:

Sikh Haveli’s were usually designed for the wealthy class during the Sikh period. The architecture style in this particular era originated from the unique blend of traditional elements with Mughal/ Persian features resulting into a characteristic aesthetically appealing Haveli style. The layouts were comprised of large courtyards, high ceilings and spacious rooms reflecting the grandeur more than the functionality. These structures were heavily decorated with well elaborated carved elements using the local materials and interplay of colors to create a deep rooted design philosophy based on purity. Architecture Ornamentations of Haveli’s displayed the artistic creativity embedded into religious significance with cultural expression.

Façade and Entrance Design: The facades of Sikh Haveli’s were well elaborately decorated with carvings and motifs in addition to overhanging balconies (jharokas) and domes (chattris) adopted from Mughals. All these elements not only served the artistic purposes but

also provided shades and ventilation to fulfill the functionality aspect. The front facade's initial part is richly embellished with vibrant murals and stylized sculptures of fish, parrots, and fairies at the cornice. From the exterior, one can see four stories (Figure-1 and 2). The main entry on the ground floor features a wooden door carved in a gorgeous arch adorned with vibrant frescoes (Figure-5). On the first floor, above the entry, is a massive bay window in the style of a jharoka, with oriel windows on either side. Styled fish, fairies, and parrots are depicted in vivid relief on the bay window's cornice. The low relief arches with geometric and floral designs sit atop the vivid flower frescoes that adorn the oriel windows and the spaces between them.

The neighboring room has perforated jali arches with a wooden window in the center, and the second storey has a wooden jharoka with perforated prison work. Similar design elements can be found in the third storeys, where every opening serves as a means of solitude and ventilation. (Figure-4).



Figure. 4. Perforated Jharoka in Nau Nehal Singh's Haveli, facade, Lahore. (Source-Author)



Figure. 5. Carved wooden door of Nau Nehal Singh's Haveli, facade, Lahore. (Source-Author) Situated at recessed arch type niche with a cusped arch, the entrance's original carved wooden doorframe is now partially blocked by brick, preventing entry from the west side. There are carvings made of cord and leaves on this arch, and a flower sits at the top. These elements, which serve as seats for guards or doorkeepers, are essential to the subcontinent's magnificent entryway. The recessed recesses on either side of this arched entryway are now adorned with pointed hood-molds. The second level of frontal façade is simpler as compare to others, low relief arches that set windows along with miniature columns depict the Sikh era. The wall is bifurcated in rectangular

panels, adorned with relief sculpture of elephants on the top of rectangular panels, we can see the perforated jali wooden work at the basement level of façade.

Back side elevation of Haveli (Figure 6 and 7) is in contrast with the façade, is decorated with fin cut brick works and stucco work that displays delicate motifs. Sikh era was full of craftsmanship and these façades are evidence of their excellent craftsmanship. Doors are noticeable due to the wooden carving. The lower portion of façade had a huge main door flanked with two windows by side. The upper portion is balanced with the help of jharoka with delicate baked clay relief pattern. At the central Dreecha windows, we can experience the Pair of Lion's

relief work, they are positioned between the side jharokas and central large window.

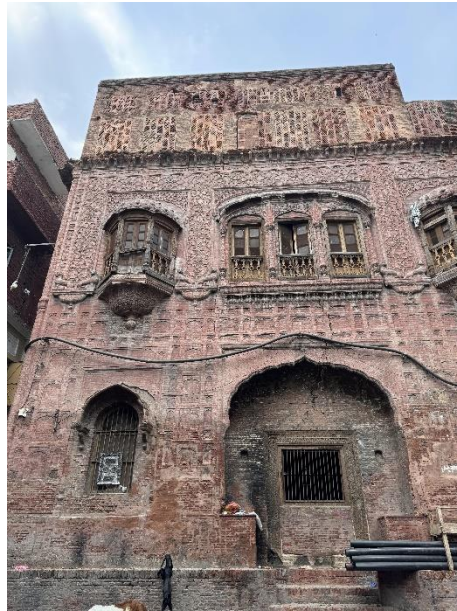


Figure-6. Back side elevation of Nau Nehal Singh's Haveli, Lahore. (Source-Author)

Woodwork: The woodwork is extensively used for lavish interiors as well as elaborated exteriors. The Sikh haveli's doors, windows and particularly ceilings were found to be heavily decorated and carved from solid wood. They displayed the traditional Sikh symbolism with intricate detailing to create an artistic spell. The gold is also used at some places with wooden

elements to show the grandeur and power of the rulers. Third and Fourth storey rooms of Nau Nehal Singh's Haveli were still found to have the original woodwork with geometrical patterns (Figure 7 and 8). All the openings of these rooms are fitted with Perforated Jali work that allow light to get in, keeping the privacy maintained.



Figure-7 wooden ceiling with mirror in the center (Source: Author)

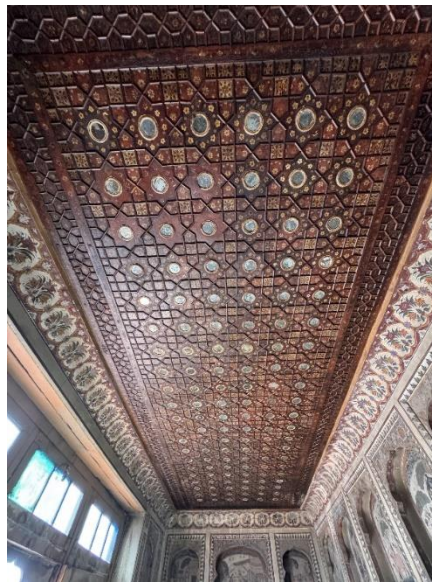


Figure-8 wooden ceiling with mirror work(Source: Author)

Paintings and Frescoes: The Frescoes and paintings were also found abundantly in highly decorative interiors and exteriors in Sikh Haveli's. The colorful interplay of design, forms, colors were used for depiction of historical events, religious articulations as well as everyday life portraits. These artistic compositions displays the cultural traditions as well as significant values attached.

Nau Nehal Singh's Haveli, Lahore consist over 40 rooms, its main feature is the huge central courtyard with adorned interior intricate details of frescos in the courtyard walls. The original ornamentation of Sikh time period can be seen at the two main elevations of interior of courtyard as shown in the figures 9,10 and 11.



Figure-9. Central courtyard of Nau Nehal Singh's Haveli, Lahore. (Source-Author)



Figure-10. Interior courtyard details of Nau Nehal Singh's Haveli, Lahore. (Source-Author)



Figure-11. Fresco work details in central courtyard of Nau Nehal Singh's Haveli, Lahore. (Source-Author)

Decorative Tile-work: Sikh haveli's also extensively decorated with the ceramic tilework with beautiful colored patterns. The tilework was

used mostly on the walls and floors and were mostly influenced by Persian and Mughal origins (Figure-12).



Figure-12. Decorative tilework of Nau Nehal Singh's Haveli, Lahore. (Source-Author)

Marble Jali and Inlay Work: The most striking feature of these Haveli's is the marble inlay work with vibrant colors embedding stones. The intricate design and detailing were the key features that creates the interlocking to create the harmoniously knitted surfaces. Mostly the

geometric patters and floral motifs were used to depict the artistic excellence at that time. Nau Nehal Singh's Haveli, displayed the white marble perforated Jali (Figure-13) that not only served the decorative purpose but also act as filter to scorching sun in addition to ventilation.



Figure-13. Decorative tilework of Nau Nehal Singh's Haveli, Lahore. (Source-Author)

Rang Mahal of this Haveli, is the best-preserved feature, there is a gallery on roof top (Figure 14). Wooden ceiling is adorned with geometrical patterns along with mirror. we can see the

miniature works in niches like blind arches, these miniatures depict Mughal and Sikh era along with some Hindu Themes, featuring Radha, Krishna and Gopis.

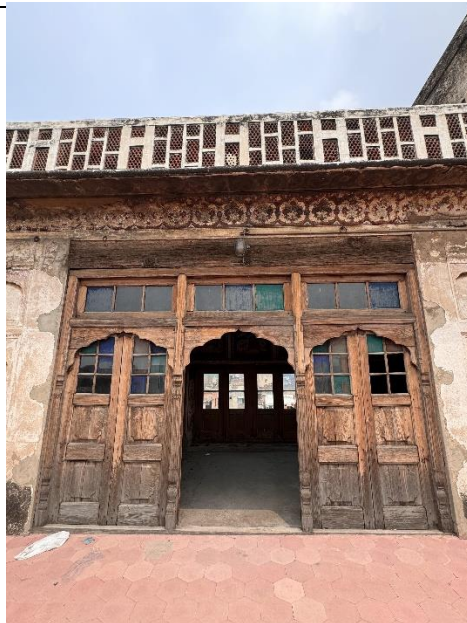


Figure-14. Rang Mahal of Nau Nehal Singh's Haveli, Lahore. (Source-Author)

Sikh craftsmen excelled in this type of masonry, evident in the sharp, precise, and accurate brick carving under the jharokas (oriel windows) and cornices. Wood carving is noticeable on the doors, windows, and columns at the corners of the jharokas. Brackets, being architectural element are significant features in Sikh-period buildings, welcome every viewer, it not only plays decorative role but functionally they serve as load bearing element. Mainly crafted in brickwork or plaster, these can be seen in various animal figures along with floral pattern. We can see these in Lahore Fort's Jahangiri Quadrangle. From historical background we can experience a different characteristic of bracket that were crafted in 19th century. Another place where you can see these are at Maharaja Ranjit Singh's haveli in Gujranwala and his samadhi in Lahore, on the other hand on the exterior façade of Gurdwara Janamasthan, Nankana Sahib, we can

Conclusion:

The research concluded that the architecture ornamentations during Sikh period not only created for aesthetic purposes rather carried the cultural and symbol significance. The concept of religious purity is fully embedded in the use of pure materials to create an artistically spiritually sculptured ornamentation for decoration. The amalgamation of different traditions and their

see animal figured Brackets along with some fruits cluster. Coming to our Site, Naunehal Singh's haveli also possess exceptional Sikh-period bracket designs. The façade of Naunehal haveli possess a symmetrical composition along with doors, named as Tajdar darwaza on left edge. A huge Arch is centralized with a rectangular frame, here comes the ornamental brackets at the base of this arch, these brackets play a significance role in drawing the attention of tourist. In between these bracket's pair, sculpture use semi hexagonal Bukharcha along with painted birds' figure, the base of these arches possesses 3 arched openings, containing flower, plant and animal figure. This building is currently facilitating as a school since last 100 years, this is surrounded in densely populated area of Old Lahore, that need a prompt action towards conserving it for future generations.

unique blend is also one of their religious significances for openness that is also reflected in their architecture style. The uniqueness is further enhanced by the use of symbols and motifs from Sikh origin for reinforcement of the religious, cultural and societal values. Sikh art and architecture had a natural relationship to earlier visual languages and practices due to inherited

social context. Not only did this keep the heritage alive, but it also gave it new vitality, a contribution that is rarely recognized. This viewpoint emphasizes how these forms of material culture and artistic expression naturally evolve over time, but also how they take on new and significant forms in the hands of the mistrīs hired by the Lahore Darbār. The examples shown here show a setting in which individuals with artistic instincts were allowed the freedom to express themselves freely and the necessary encouragement to grow. This creative explosion

began and ended in a little over four decades, and it held great promise and the capacity to blossom into a powerful style all its own. This particular ornamentation style is necessary to be investigated for the transformations in the colonial period. The Sikh period Haveli's still stands for their unique architectural and historical values and achievements with intricate ornamentation reflecting the rich blend of artistic traditions and cultural influences. These structures should be studied and preserved for the future generations.

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