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Potohari Haveli- A symphony of Art and Aesthetics in Punjab (Pakistan)

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Abstract

The landscape of Potohar in Punjab, Pakistan is host to a number of havelis belonging to Muslims, Hindus and Sikhs. The haveli is word of Persian origin which denotes a great mansion associated with wealth, status and size. In architectural terms the haveli was merely a very grand version of the common urban house. This paper discusses the haveli architecture in Potohar region of Punjab, Pakistan. The paper deals with special architectural features of Potohari haveli. The havelis of two tehsils, Kallar Syedan and Gujar Khan of Rawalpindi district in Pakistani Punjab, has been discussed in this paper. All the information comes from the interviews that I made with the residents of the respective villages and towns of Potohar.

Introduction

Potohar region in Punjab, Pakistan lies between the Indus River and the Jhelum River and stretches from the salt range northward to the foot hills of Himalayas. The Potohar region thus embraces the major portion of Attock, Jhelum, Rawalpindi and Chakwal districts. Dani believes that the ancient name of Potohar was originally *Prshthwar* of Sanskrit origin-“Prshta” meaning back of the Indus River and War meaning area (In Saleem 1997:2).

A clear definition of the term haveli is not available. The origin of the word is traced to ‘*haowala*’ meaning partition in old Arabic (Prasad 1987). Jain (2004:20-21) believes that it is related to term *hawaleh*, meaning all round or ‘round about’ and the Persian word ‘haveli’ with same meaning. Moreover, it is evident that the Mughals used this term for defining a piece of land like English term ‘estate’. Initially used for land as estate, later on the term was used for the land along with dwelling on it.

A Potohari haveli was not merely a residence but a symbol of prevailing mores. It is the remnant of the opulent community which once controlled the business of the region.

Almost every small and big town in Potohar boasts havelis of the then notables of the respective towns and villages. Among these Khem Singh Bedi haveli in Kallar Syedan, Atam Singh Gujral haveli in Daultana town, Sikh and Hindu havelis in Narali, imposing

haveli of Bakshi Ram Singh in Kontrilla, splendid haveli of Ratan Singh in Sagri, neglected and forgotten havelis of Sikhs and Hindus in Gulyana village are quite prominent.

Every door of the haveli has some carving indicating the taste and aesthetic of the builder. However, the main door or entrance doors are more ornately carved. One of such ornately carved door can be seen in the haveli of Dr.Zaman in Basali village in Rawalpindi district.

Jharoka, an important architectural element of the havlis in Potohar also received special treatment by both the artist and owner. These are generally used in upper floors. In the hot and cool weather of Potohar, Jharoka was used by both males as well as females. However, the central Jharoka was always occupied by male members of family while the flanking jharoka was used by the women. The number of windows and Jharokas indicate the affluence of the owner. Balconies are also dominant element in the haveli architecture of Potohar. Special care is taken while making balconies. In some havelis, tower generally on the upper floor play a dominating role in the haveli architecture of Potohar. Such marvelous towers surmounting the havelis can be seen in the haveli of Bakhshi Ram Singh in Kontrilla and in the haveli in Wah town. Generally, the upper floor of the havelis either terminates in the tower in the square room apparently constructed either to have panoramic view of the town or village or enjoy the cool breeze in the evening and at night. The beautiful square rooms on the top of the havelis can be noticed in the Atam Singh Gujral haveli and Jeevan Singh haveli in Daultala, and in many Sikh and Hindu havelis of Narali village.



Fig. 1. A View of Atam Singh haveli at Daultala

Atam Singh Gujral Haveli in Daultala

The haveli of Atam Singh Gujral in Daultala is remarkable for imposing wooden windows and Jharokas (Fig. 1). It is believed to have been built by Atam Singh Gujral in 1921. It is a three-storied haveli with 27 rooms. The façade of the haveli is decorated with Jharoka and seven small and large windows. One of the windows just below the Jharoka is decorated with a miniature dome. This window is flanked by two other similar windows. The main entrance door of the haveli has some carving on it. From inside, the haveli carries an ornate wood carving. There is an imposing wooden railing around the upper story. From this wooden railing, one can observe the chowk or main courtyard of the haveli. To right

side of the courtyard are the rows of seven rooms with beautiful arched entrances. To the left side of the chowk is located a wall with stairs which leads to the upper floor. One also finds grill bracket on the wall beside the stairs. The top of the floor of the haveli had a pavilion. Around this, top pavilion are closed wooden windows.

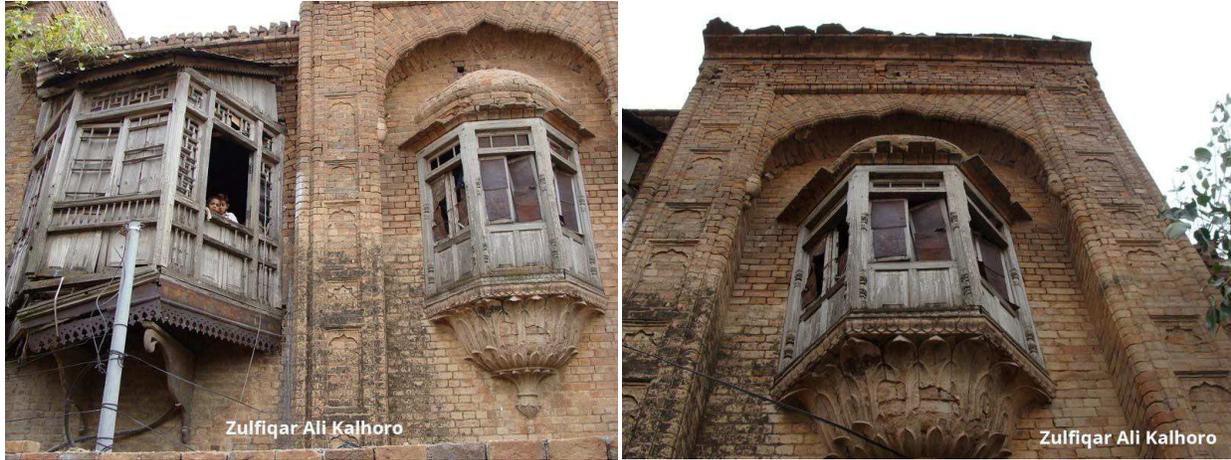


Fig. 2. Facade of Jeevan Singh haveli & Fig. 3. Jharoka in Jeevan Singh haveli in Daultala

Apart from the haveli of Atam Singh Gujral, the haveli of Jeevan Singh also grace the landscape of Daultala town. The notable feature of the haveli is the carved wooden door and *jharoka* that decorate the façade of the haveli (Figs. 2 & 3). Besides, there are four other havelis located in the same street in Daultala. All these havelis are noted for beautiful balconies and *Jharokas*. Apart from *Jharokas* and balconies, the platforms along with the portico of the haveli also received special attention of the builders. These are and were used for sitting. Mostly, the elders of the family used to sit and watch the activities of the people in the street where once a number of shops were also located.

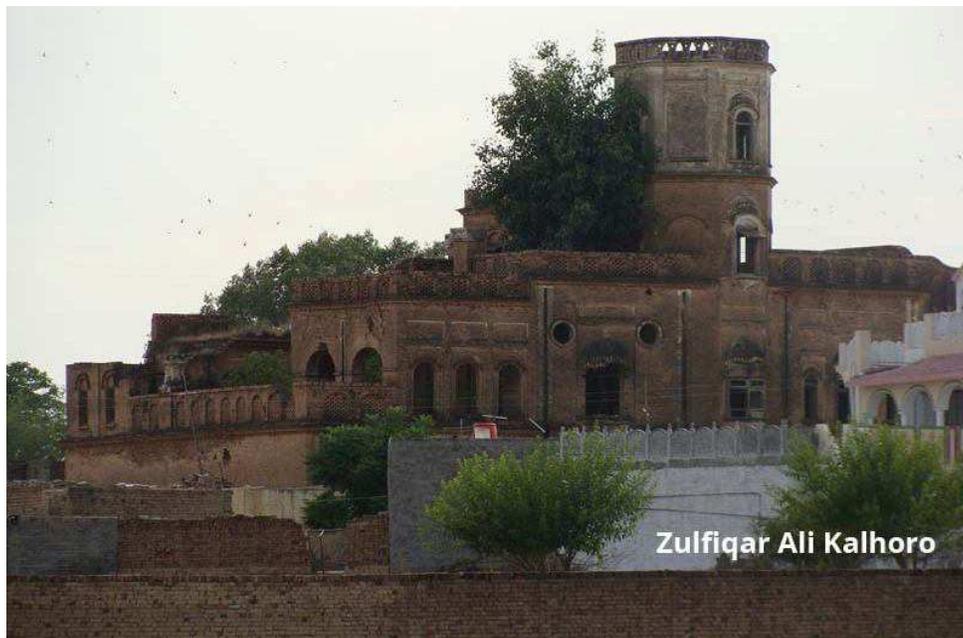


Fig. 4. Haveli of Bakhshi Ram Singh at Kontrilla

Haveli in Kontrilla

Kontrilla 15 km west of Gujjar Khan is historic town of Potohar. It boasts many buildings of historical significance namely Eidgah, funerary wall enclosure of Mughal period and a haveli and high school building of Sikh period. However, the Bakhshi Ram Singh haveli is quite prominent and grace the landscape of Kontrilla (Fig. 4). It is conspicuous from the distance and reminds the visitor the past glory of Kontrilla.



Fig. 5. Inscription in haveli of Bakhshi Ram Singh, Kontrilla



Fig. 6. Broken balcony of Kontrilla haveli of Bakhshi Ram Singh

the upper and lower. The wooden ceilings of both the balconies also bear beautiful carvings. Unfortunately, the wooden screens or fretted panels of both the balconies once adorn the balconies are now broken (Fig.6).

Apart from the balconies, jharokas also lend beauty to the haveli (Fig.7). There are five jharokas that decorate the outer walls of the haveli. Jharokas were made to block the view of ordinary people to see the women sitting inside the jharokas. The women used to sit in the jharokas and view down to notice what was going on in the street. Mostly elder women not young

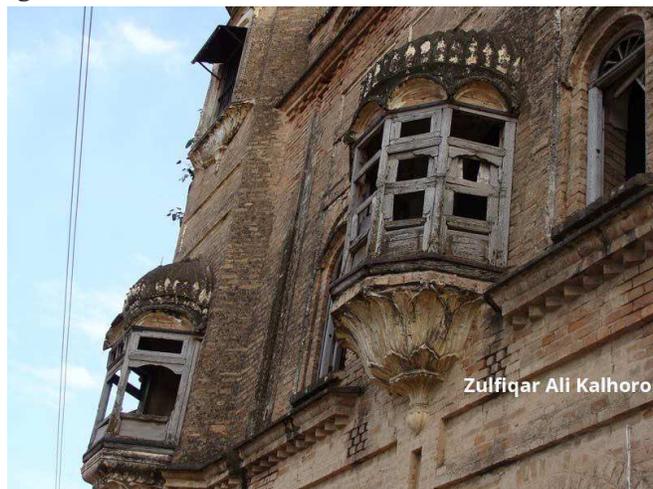


Fig. 7. Jharoka in the haveli of Bakhshi Ram Singh

ones sat in the jharoka. The young women seldom used to sit in the jharokas. Apart from the functionality of the jharokas, they are also made to indicate the aesthetic of the builder. There are two prominent havelis in Gujar Khan tehsil which are famous for impressive jharokas that include the haveli of Atam Singh Gujral in Daultala, which described above and the haveli of Bakhshi Ram Singh.

Bakhshi Ram Singh haveli is three storied building. It contains 11 rooms and two underground chambers. As one enters into the haveli, one notices the main courtyard. The main feature of Indian haveli is the courtyard called chowk. All activities of the family members are defined by that space. Likewise rooms are allotted to married and unmarried family members. The elder family members both male and female usually observe the activities of the females from the upper story. They used to sit and observe the household chores. The courtyard always gets especial attention while building the structures. One finds imposing decorative niches on the outer walls of the courtyard.

The distinctive feature of Bakhshi Ram Singh haveli is the tower that surmounts structure. There are two towers one square and other octagonal. The octagonal is made for aesthetic purpose which is decorated with ornamentation. The square tower has stairways to climb up. From this square tower, one can have the panoramic view of Kontrilla and its surroundings. In the summers one can also enjoy evening breeze to beat the scorching heat.

Unfortunately, the ceilings of some of the rooms have caved in. On some walls the vegetation has grown up thus defacing the original beauty of the structure. After partition, the haveli was also used for some years as boys' hostel. Now, it is in a dilapidated condition and is not used for living.

This haveli is believed to have been built by Bakhshi Ram Singh during the British period. He was the businessman and man of the influence during the British period in Potohar.

Havelis in Narali

Narali was an important village of the Sikhs and Hindus. The village boasts four havelis built by Sikhs and Hindus. One of the havelis is near the Bakhshi Tejai Singh tank (Fig. 8). This haveli is a double storey building with 7 rooms and noted for beautiful stucco work. The main entrance of the haveli is flanked by two doors. All the doors have intricate carvings. Above the central door are floral designs in stucco. All other havelis are noted for wooden balconies and are double story buildings. These havelis are located

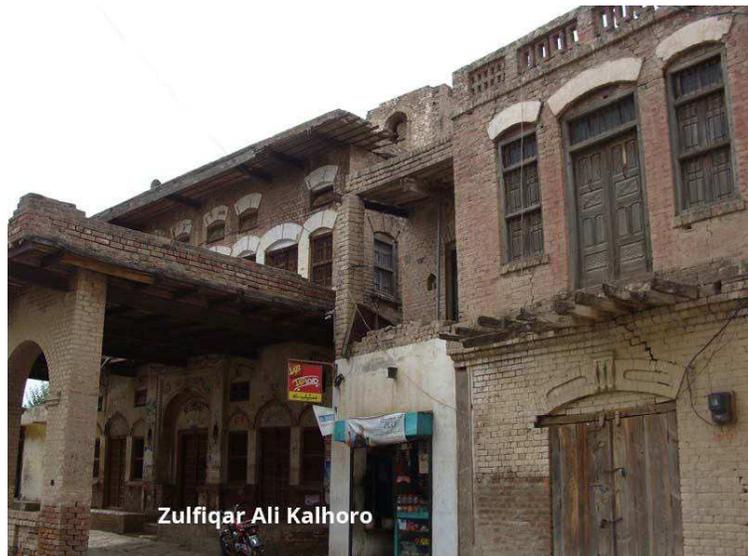


Fig. 8. Haveli near Bakhshi Tejai Singh tank in Narali

2 hundred meters west of the Radhe Sham temple in a narrow alley. The most imposing haveli is that with tower. The tower either octagonal or square is the distinctive feature of a Potohar haveli. One finds a tower in almost every haveli, the prominent towers are those of the of havelis of Bakhshi Ram Singh at Kontrilla, Atam Singh at Daultala, Khem Singh Bedi Haveli at Kallar Syedan and Wah haveli at Wah town. The Narali haveli has square tower which was used for enjoying the evening breeze. Some towers are functional and others are symbolic which adds beauty to the structure.

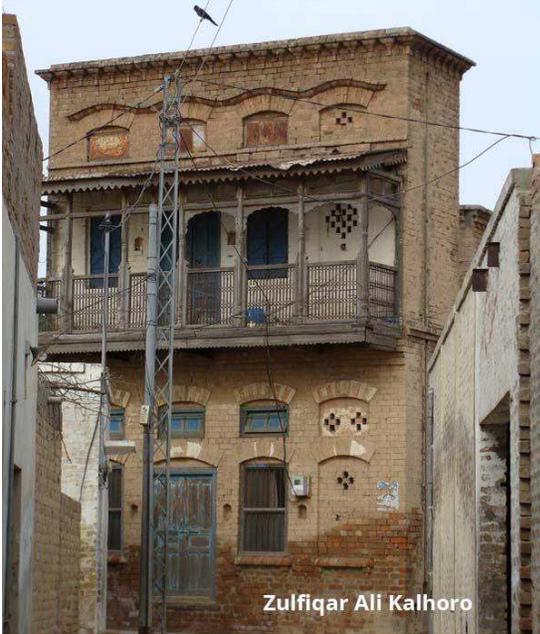


Fig. 9. A haveli in Narali village

Other two havelis are decorated with beautiful wooden balconies (Fig.9). The intricate wood carvings on the balconies reflect the taste and aesthetics of both the builder and the artist.

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Havelis in Gulyana

Gulyana, a historic village of Potohar, is located 10 km south of Gujar Khan. The old buildings that were erected before the birth of Pakistan are splendid havelis, fabulous temples and Sikh Samadhis which still dominate the landscape of the village.

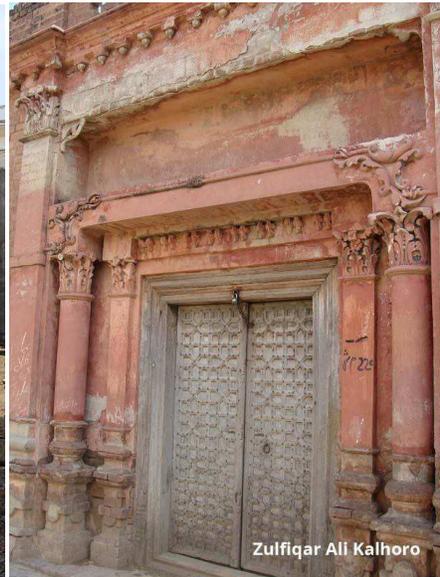
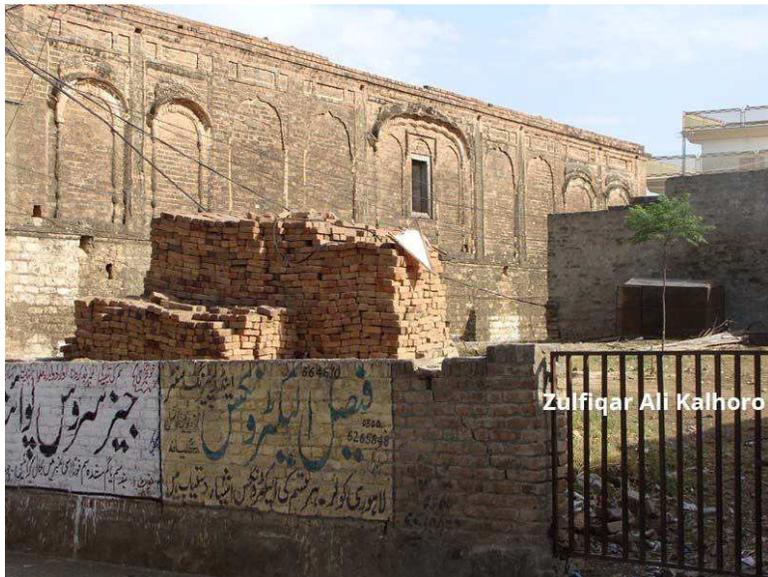


Fig. 10. A Sikh haveli in Gulyana & Fig. 11. Main Entrance to Tara Singh Haveli

Gulyana was predominately inhabited by Hindus and Sikhs before partition. Diwan Prithvi Chand, Tek Chand and Bakhshi Moti Ram were the notable Hindus of Gulyana who controlled the business of Gulyana and neighboring towns.

Two of the eminent Sikh merchants of Potohar Bali Singh and Tara Singh also belonged to Gulyana. These merchants and philanthropists erected schools, hospitals, havelis, temples and gurdwaras.

Today, the buildings constructed by Hindus and Sikhs break the skyline of Gulyana village. There are some four havelis (Figs. 10-11), one temples and the two Samadhi, which are in bad sate of preservation.

The haveli of Tara Singh, which still dominates the landscape of Gulyana, is three storied which is noted for its wooden windows and ornately carved doors. The main entrance to the havelis is decorated with floral designs.



Fig. 12. View of Khem Singh Bedi Haveli at Kallar Syedan

Khem Singh Bedi Haveli in Kallar Syedan

The Khem Singh Bedi haveli is located in Kallar Syedan Town (Fig. 12). This haveli is believed to have been built by Khem Singh Bedi. The legend has it that he hired some of the celebrated masons and artists from Attock. The haveli is conspicuous from distance reminding the visitors and travelers its past glory. It is four storied structure with 22 rooms and three basements. Most of the rooms of the haveli are adorned with paintings

depicting the Sikh Gurus, saints, and heroes of Khalsa movement of Guru Gobind Singh and Hindu deities (Figs.12-16)



Fig. 13. A Sikh lady seeing her decoration in the mirror, Khem Singh Bedi haveli, Kallar Syedan & Fig. 14. Depiction of a Sikh woman in Khem Singh Bedi haveli at Kallar Syedan



Fig. 15. The interior walls of the haveli is decorated with portraits of Sikh ladies & Fig. 16. Depiction of Golden Temple in Khem Singh Bedi Haveli

Ratan Singh Haveli in Sagri

This haveli is known to have been built by Ratan Singh, then influential person of Sagri town (Fig. 17) The haveli of Ratan Singh is a double storied with 8 rooms. It is reached by

narrow alley which was formerly covered. The grill brackets still adorn the wall which carried the covered roof. The notable features of the haveli are carved entrance door and the balcony with intricate wood and grill work. Unfortunately, roof of upper storey has caved in. One can find the painting on the upper storey of the haveli.



Fig. 17. Ratan Singh Haveli in Sagri town

Haveli of Dr Zaman in Basali

The haveli of Dr. Zaman is located in Basali village in Rawalpindi district. He was known to have constructed the haveli during the British period. This haveli has 11 rooms. The entrance door is flanked by platforms which are used for sitting. After entering into main door, one has to pass a *dedhi*, built for the sake of purdah. Near the *dedhi* is the door which opens to haveli. This door is tastefully carved. (Fig.18). According to owner of the family, Dr Zaman brought the artists from Peshawar to make carved wooden doors.

Conclusion

Majority of the havelis are believed to have been erected during the British period. The distinctive features of the Potohari haveli are jharokas, wooden balconies, carved wooden doors, raised platforms, *dhedi* (built for purdah, mainly in the Muslim havelis) and towers. Compared to other havelis in Punjab, Potohari havelis have octagonal towers that are

rarely found in other parts of Punjab. Like other architectural elements of havelis, Potohari Hindus and Sikhs also gave a special attention to towers that crown the havelis. These haveli-towers are also decorated with paintings and a few has miniature jharokas.

Most of the havelis are also adorned with painting representing both Hindu and Sikh mythologies. Muslim havelis are only decorated with geometric designs. The opulent residents also used white marble at the porticos and bedrooms and courtyards of the haveli. Intricate carvings have also been observed on the marble in some of the havelis of Potohar.



Fig. 18. Wooden Carved door of Dr Zaman Haveli in Basali

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