

Architecture of Ranbir Singh Baradari, Muzaffarabad, Azad Jammu and Kashmir

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The rich and versatile architecture of ancient India has always been the center of focus for the scholarly and non-scholarly world for its distinctive style, masonry, artistic features, high quality construction and the variety of cultures and periods covering Prehistoric to historic periods i.e. Hindu, Buddhist, Jain, Muslim, Sikh and colonial period. The current paper deals with a monument from Dogra period, rich in its architecture and focus of attention because of its picturesque beauty and location at the junction of two legendary rivers i.e. Jhelum (Vitasta) and Neelum (Kishan Ganga) in Muzaffarabad, the capital city of Azad Jammu & Kashmir. The said monument is a Baradari (rest houses of rulers), erected by Maharaja Ranbir Singh, the ruler of Dogra Raj. The architecture of Baradari is so individual and unique in its style which has been never seen before in any monument of its kind involving a range of artistic features highlighting its beauty with its presence along the both banks of river Jhelum.

Keywords: Baradari, Architecture, AJK, Kishan Ganga, Vitasta.

Ranbir Singh, born in August 1830, was the son of Maharaja Gulab Singh, occupied the throne of the princely state of Jammu and Kashmir, becoming the Maharaja from 1857-1885 C.E. He was the head of the Jamwal Rajput clan of Dogra Dynasty which continued up to 1949 C.E. He was known to be a reformer in the state in the administrative, military and civil affairs and revival of Hindu customs and culture by opening a number of libraries and study centers of Sanskrit and building infrastructure including a number of bridges in Anantnag, Baramulla, Srinagar and Jhelum (Dewan, 2004; Suharwardy, 1983). This Baradari is also a sequence of Ranbir Singh's constructions over river Jhelum as mentioned in the literature above.

Baradari, which literally means a building having twelve doors (Parihar, 1999:125) i.e. bara- twelve and dar-door, but it, was not necessary to have twelve doors in all Baradaris. The concept of Baradari was introduced by the Mughals along with several other innovations in the sub-continent. The Baradaris built by these Mughal rulers include Kamran ki Baradari, Lahore (Chaudhry, 2000: 53), Wazir Khan Baradari, Lahore (Dar, 1982: 20) and Behram ki Baradari, Attock (Rahman, 1991). The Baradaris were actually the meeting places of the Chieftains, statesmen as a site where political affairs were discussed and dances and musical performances were organized (Jeratha, 2000:138). Chieftains or rulers used to build these houses near water sources or on high altitudes to have a sigh of relief during heat of the summers. The tradition of Baradaris transfers to the next rule, when Punjab and Kashmir came under Sikh and Dogra Raj. These rulers introduced their own innovation in Baradari architecture according to their use and purpose.

Ranbir Singh Baradari

Ranbir Singh Baradari was built by Maharaja Ranbir Singh in 1885 at the junction point of two legendary rivers i.e. Neelum (Kishan Ganga) & Jhelum (Vitasta) in the mountainous valley of Kashmir at the site locally called *Domel* in the capital city Muzaffarabad (Bates, 1980). It is built in two parts along both banks of river Jhelum providing a platform for a modern iron bridge suggesting that it was among the old bridges built by the Maharaja as we find through literature, making it an important historic site. Unfortunately, this important historic building was never mentioned in archaeological literature before, thus, providing a reason to be documented for the first time by Taxila Institute of Asian Civilizations, Quaid-i- Azam University, Islamabad.

Architectural Features of Ranbir Singh Baradari

As we look at the architecture of this picturesque monument, we find various interesting facts about the neglected treasure of the land. Its building was constructed in a double storey style originally, (Fig. 4) which was later destroyed by the havoc of natural disasters in the valley in shape of floods and earthquakes. Currently, we see a single storey building as we see in (Fig.5) at both sides of the river containing two rooms each measuring 12.39x14.28 in meters, but the preservation condition of Eastern building is in much better state. It is reached by 35 steps down towards the platform from the old Quaid-e-Azam Bridge¹. The construction of the steps is so perfectly made by the architects of its time that each step is of equal measurement i.e. 23x126 cm. The Baradari is in lime stone masonry. Although the stone is of good quality and in good state of preservation but, it is chipped off due to weathering at few points. The wall along the main stairs is defaced and disturbed not only due to natural calamities but the negligence of the authorities. The stairs are supported by a row of 7 symmetrical pillars with equal height i.e. 11.62 in meters leaving one which is smaller than the rest. The decrease in the height of the seventh pillar is in accordance with stepping down of stairs. Along with the supporting pillars, small chambers are also constructed beneath the stairs to give support as seen in (Fig.8). These chambers are decorated with different floral patterns multiplying the aesthetics of the monument. Every two pillars contain brackets on both sides forming an arch shape. The Baradari is constructed in two segments i.e. Eastern and Western, which is joined through a passage that leads to the western side measuring 1.58x 3.54 meters. The front arches of the passage are multi-foiled decorated with floral designs as seen in (Fig.11). The whole Baradari is provided with a fascinating arcade of shoulder arches on both sides covering its rooms as in (Fig.14). Arcade is also a prevalent feature in Baradaris constructed by the Mughals (Siddiqi, 2000:30; Schrenk *et al*, 2012: 693; Mitchell & Davies, 1989: 467; Asher, 1992).

Façade, which is always been one of the most fascinating and fixated feature of a monument (Stage, 2018; Hearn, 1985: 192; University of Iowa, 1984; Jafa, 2012), is at the eastern side of the Baradari, decorated with horizontal panels displaying a plethora of floral and geometric designs. These panels are seventeen in number covering the whole wall of façade. The most dominant design engraved in the Baradari is a combination of circular and semicircular shape with floral motifs. Besides, alternative bands projecting from the top of the wall consist of the architrave; friezes and the cornice commonly known as entablature (Parker, 1838: 33) are also constructed to enhance the beauty of the building. At the lintel of the façade, the name of Baradari "**Ranbir Singh Baradari**" is painted in black on a white marble slab in *Persian* script along with floral patterns.

Another interesting architectural element of the Baradari is a tunnel which remained an important feature in Mughal architecture buildings especially in forts (Rana, 2005; Potteiger & Purinton, 1998: 142; Layton & Yucko, 2003: 37). This tunnel is 2.39 meters long passing from eastern to western side of the Baradari as seen in (Fig.15).

The western side of the Baradari above the passage is similar to the eastern side with ornamental bands called molding, floral patterns, and niches with decorated spandrels, arcades, pillars and alcove (Davie and Jokiniemi, 2012: 457). As this Baradari is built on the river to enjoy the serenity of the valley and the river, thus, to reach the river Jhelum, nineteen stone steps measuring 2.32 m are provided. There is a local myth about this Baradari that it was used as *Shamshan Ghat*² by the Hindus in later periods because of its ideal location on the river. The Baradari was also provided with a well to get clean water but it is filled with soil now and only the traces are visible from the surface.

In more recent times, this Baradari was used as a public amusement place by the city authority by providing safety grills along the river side, cleaning the building and installing food stalls. But, with a heavy flood in last decade, it was again abandoned. Since then, the magnificent Ranbir Singh Baradari was again left on the mercy of times.

¹ Another modern concrete bridge is constructed parallel to the old iron bridge over Baradari, and is used for traffic. The old iron bridge is only used by the pedestrians.

² A wharf used by Hindus to cremate their deads and flow the ashes in river (Soni 2016; Larriva 2010: 59).

Conclusion

Ranbir Singh Baradari and its splendour have kept the name of its builder alive even after centuries which remained a key reason the royals built such marvellous monuments. Contrary to the splendour and beauty, Ranbir Singh Baradari has never been reported in archeological literature before. Hence, to preserve the aesthetics of the Baradari, it was documented in detail for the first time. Although, Baradaris were already built by the Mughals in the Sub-Continent, but Ranbir Singh Baradari is entirely unique in style and construction. A huge variety of its floral designs, geometric patterns and the masonry work is highly captivating. The Baradaris were constructed by the chieftains, rulers or statesmen as their meeting places where dances and musical performances were organized to get relaxation and amusement which is visible through the location, high quality work and style of the Ranbir Singh Baradari. In today’s continuous rise in population of the world, where tradition, culture, religion are either dying or their original form is distorted; this study is a small contribution to preserve the glory of this monument for future generations. The study also suggests the dire need of protection, preservation and conservation of this important historic monument of Dogra Period before it gets disappear from the face of this world.

Figures



Fig. 1 Map of Kashmir (Wikimedia, 2017).



Fig. 2 Map of District Muzaffarabad (Wikimedia, 2017)



Fig. 3 Location of the Ranbir Singh Baradari, Muzaffarabad (Wikimedia, 2017)

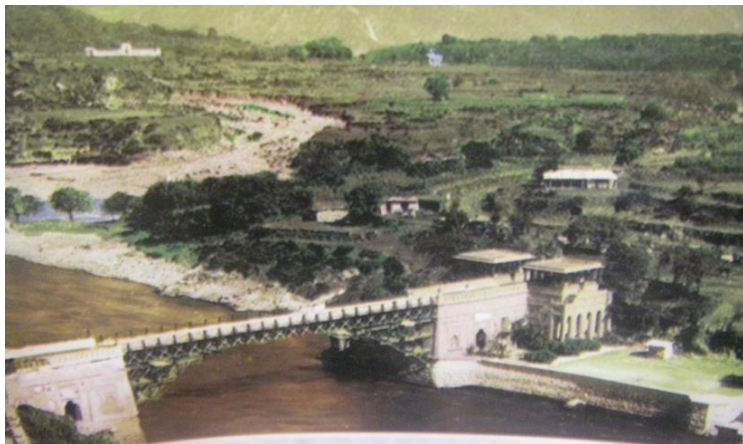


Fig. 4 View of Ranbir Singh Baradari (original status)



Fig. 5 View of Ranbir Singh Baradar (present condition)

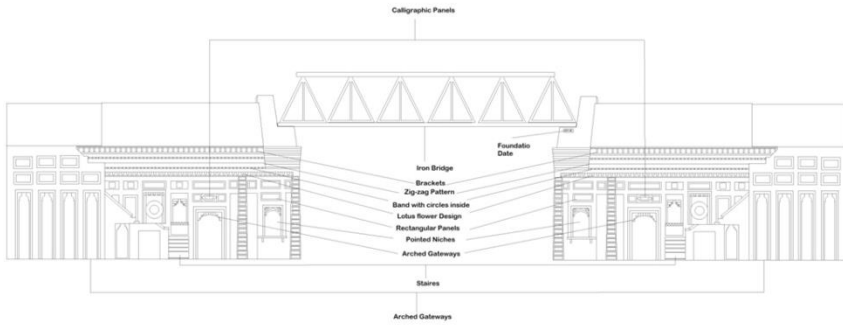


Fig. 6 Elevation of the Ranbir Singh Baradari



Fig. 7 View from Eastern side

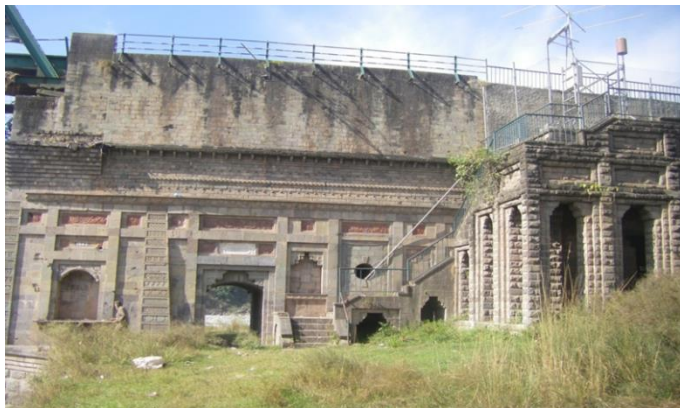


Fig. 8 Front view of Baradari (Eastern side)

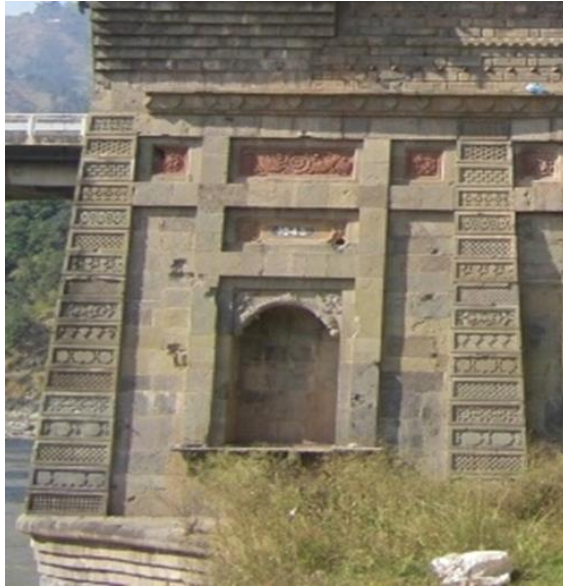


Fig. 9 Façade which is decorated with horizontal panels



Fig. 10 Room of Baradari (Eastern Side)



Fig.11 Passage that leads to western side of the Baradari



Fig. 12 Front view of Baradari (Western side)



Fig. 13 Alcove on western side



Fig. 14 Arcade

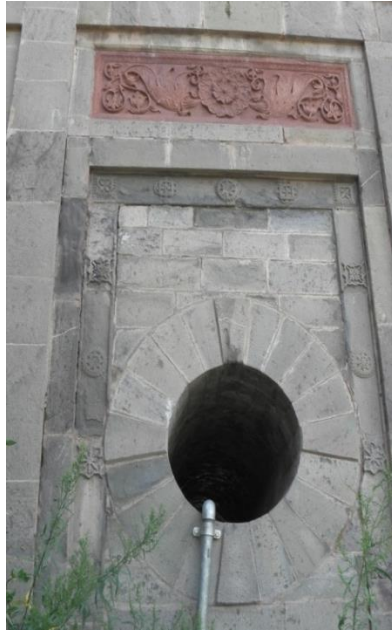


Fig. 15 Tunnel passing from eastern to western side



Fig. 16 Blind Arch



Fig. 17 View of second part of Baradari



Fig. 18 Another view of the second part of Baradari

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