

Historiography of Architecture

Extent & Restraints of Conjecture

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Introduction

The dictionary meaning¹ of the word “conjecture” is “the formation or expression of an opinion or theory without sufficient evidence for proof”. A conjecture is an unproved proposition that appears correct and has not been disproved.² Karl Popper³ (1902-1994) introduced the use of the term “conjecture” in scientific philosophy.⁴ Conjecture is contrasted by the term hypothesis (theory, axiom, principle), which is a testable statement based on acceptable grounds.⁵

Resources for historiography, in general, are Written Documents, Un-written Documents and Oral tradition of history is a significant basis for tracing out facts for historiography which are not available in the form of Written or Un-written Documents and are transferred verbally from one generation to the next. Conjecture and hypothesis occurs in historiography when the study of extant documents leads to a suspect, beyond the facts which they directly divulge.⁶ These facts are revealed in no extant historical documents, or at least no one has perceived them. At once the investigator sees that here it is possible to discover more than what is known from the available documents. With this hope he begins to read extensively, to interrogate in every sense, a great many works and all the documents relating to the fact with which he has been keenly impressed, to study the persons concerned in it, or the age in which it took place.

1 <http://dictionary.reference.com/browse/conjecture>

2 <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Conjecture>

3 Sir Karl Popper was an Austro-British philosopher and a professor at the London School of Economics. He is regarded as one of the greatest philosophers of science of the 20th century.

4 <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Conjecture>

5 *Ibid*

6 *Ibid*

“*Tehqīqāt-e Chishtī*” written by Maulvi Noor Ahmed Chishti⁷ is among the few preliminary expositions⁸ about the religious and heritage buildings located in and around Lahore. It gives a historical perspective of the Indian subcontinent through dynasties, divulges the conquest and defeat stories of the invaders and occupiers, delineates life sketches and achievements of Sufis and Sultans and describes the architectural setting and features of mosques and shrines belonging to the Muslim, Sikh and Hindu faiths. In the outset, Chishti portrays the structure and format⁹ of the book, the information collected and his main focuses. Regarding the buildings, Chishti sets the format for information as given for shrine and mosque whether it is registered in Government Record or not.¹⁰

Vandals wrote “The Raj, Lahore & Bhai Ram Singh” to address the issue of “an appropriate architecture for Pakistan”. The work started in year 2000, but four articles under the subjects i.e. Bhai Ram Singh¹¹ (1985), Model Town¹² (2001), Early Colonial Period Development of Lahore¹³ (1993) and Lahore Cantonment¹⁴ (2001) were written and published by the authors prior to the publication of the book.

7 Noor Ahmed Chishti, after getting education, joined the profession of teaching like his father A Bukhsh Yakkil and grand father Ghulam Hussain. After 1849 A.D., when British took over the control of Punjab, Chishti started teaching Urdu, Persian and Punjabi languages to the English people. Till 1864, he taught more than two thousand British; among them were R. Temple Commissioner Lahore, Edward Thornton Commissioner Punjab, Lord Lawrence Governor Punjab, C.U. Aitcheson Lt. Governor Punjab etc.

8 The book was written on the desire and direction of Mr. William Cold Stream Assistant Commissioner for the purpose to record the historical details of shrines, mosques, mausoleum and buildings.

9 The pattern adapted gives information whose shrine or mausoleum is this? When and where he was born? What was its reason for popularity? When he died? Who were famous among his descendants? How many *sajjadah nashins* continued after death? If presently, someone is alive, who and where is he? His family if exist, how and what status they have now, how the income is distributed among descendants.

10 Chishti has set format for attached properties. What is income and expenditure from? Who and How many are the stakeholders, or in how many parts its income is divided and where it is spent? When the *urs* of the Sufi buried in is celebrated and what are the rituals and ceremonies? And details related to these buildings and their rulers have also been provided.

11 Bhai Ram Singh, Nayyer Ali Dada and the Future” presented in UIA Region IV Conference in Karachi, dated 2-4 December 1985

12 Published in *The Daily News* 24 June, 2001

13 An Analysis of Urban Development in Lahore During the early British Period 1846-1900 A.D., published in Journal of the Indian Institute of Architecture, April 1993.

14 The Establishment of Lahore Cantonment, presented in Annual History Conference held in Lahore on 14 October, 2001.

Conjectures Used by the Historians

At the outset of *“Tehqīqāt-e Chishī”*, the author asserts that his approach is scientific. He states that he starts with methodology, gives the references of consulted books and elaborates the format for collecting and compiling the available information under strong tradition of oral history, but the content of the book is devoid of such acclaimed characteristic.

While writing about any Sufi, Chishti simply says *“Mujāwar of the shrine informs that he (the Sufi) was born, migrated, settled etc.....”* and confidently glorifies the historical events through imagination. Without making substantial efforts in finding out the references or sources for the authenticity of data collected, the author quotes the first hand information in a descriptive way. Chishti believed and included the self created and fabricated stories as told by the *Mujawārs*. This has also been criticized by Syed Muhamad Latif who has rightly mentioned in the preface of his book:¹⁵

“That of Chishtis’ is full of stories of supernatural powers supposed to have been possessed by local saints, whose tombs still so numerous in the neighborhood of Lahore”.

Further he asserted,

*“The work (of Chishti) is full of discrepancies and errors”.*¹⁶

By adapting the casual approach, Chishti has spread disinformation regarding many historical events and personalities which, in fact, is not proven. As the years passed, the information given by Chishti became established as historical facts. People started accepting it with their hearts. Following are the two examples where one can study and analyze the impact of conjecture in historiography as used by Chishti in his book.

Shrine of Hazrat Bibi Pak Damana: A Conjecture

The shrine of Hazrat Bibi Pak Damana is located in *Muhallah* Muhammad Nagar, near Shimla Hill, Lahore.

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Latif, S.M. (1892) *Lahore-History and Its Architectural Remains*, Sang-e Meel Publications Lahore
Ibid, p. V

Auqaf Department (established in 1960 A.D.) took over the administrative control of all important shrines in the province of Punjab being Muslim *waqf* properties but ignored the shrine Hazrat Bibi Pak Damana and its attached *waqf* properties being not important. It was September 9, 1967 when control of the shrine and its property was assumed by the Auqaf Department as a *sunni* shrine. On July 27, 1971, a conflict arose when names of four caliphs were written on the walls of the shrine by *sunni* devotees, after its re-construction. At that time, among the seven members of the Religious Purpose's Committee¹⁷, six were from *sunni* sect and only one was from *she'ia* sect.

The shrine became significant to the people of *she'ia* sect first time in 1994, after the patronage of the Prime Minister of Pakistan.¹⁸ On her direction, its extension and master planning was conceived and developed. The flow and layout of the devotees belonging to the two sects was kept in view (Ref. Fig. 01). After entering the hall, two separate entrances were provided for *she'ia* and *sunni* sects leading to a courtyard, further divided into two parts with the placement of a small mosque in the centre. In one courtyard, if *majālis* are arranged by *she'ia* sect, in the other courtyard *melāds* are celebrated regularly by the people of *sunni* sect. These two courtyards end up in a single small courtyard, low in level with the centrally located shrine of Hazrat Bibi Pak Damana also known as Hazrat Ruqayyah (?), constructed on a raised platform.

This whole situation is an outcome of a conjecture made by Noor Ahmed Chishti in the year 1864 A.D. Previously, no historian has mentioned that Hazrat Bibi Pak Damana was daughter of Hazrat Ali (R.A.). Chishti was the first who informed that the real name of Bibi Pak Damana was Ruqayya Bibi (?) and she was the daughter (?) of Hazrat Ali (R.A.). Chishti further elaborated the story of her migration from Karbala to Lahore along with five other pious ladies¹⁹ who were daughters of Hazrat Aqeel (?), brother of Hazrat Ali (R.A.). Chishti simply says, "as it is said....." and then starts

17 Auqaf Department constitutes Religious Purpose's Committees on shrines and mosques for participation of local devotees in up-keep and celebration of religious and 'urs ceremonies. Such committees are formed for one year and usually have one chairman and five or more members.

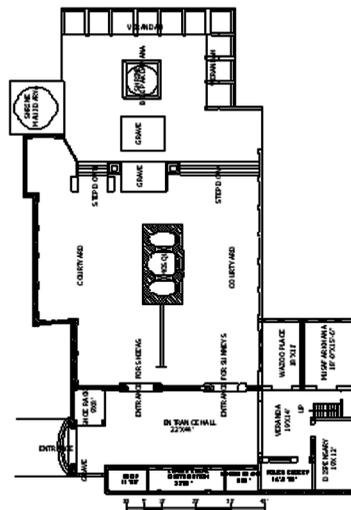
18 On May 2, 1994, Benazir Bhutto, being Prime Minister of Pakistan visited the shrine and directed Auqaf Department to prepare a development scheme for up-gradation of its physical and spiritual environment

19 Chishti, Noor Ahmed; *Tehqiqat-e Chishti* (1864) Re-printed by Al-Faisal Lahore. pp 159-161

building stories of migration of these pious ladies, without giving any historical reference, in a very impressive way with details as if he was as eye-witness to all the happenings from Karbala to

Lahore. He also added many miracles attached to Hazrat Bibi Pak Damana to catch the attention of the readers.²⁰ This assumption has established a new acceptance level of the shrine in the perception of *shei'a* devotees who believed that it was the grave of daughter of Hazrat 'Ali (R.A.). This perception and acceptance has enhanced the sacredness of the grave even in the eyes of people of *sunni* faith. After 150 years, the shrine has established its new identity.

According to a second view point that is widely accepted by renowned historians²¹, these pious ladies were daughters of a Sufi named Syed Ahmed Tokhtah, who migrated from Kirmān and settled inside the walled city of Lahore²². His shrine still exists inside the walled city. After his death, when the city became under the attack of the invaders, these pious ladies shifted from the Walled city of Lahore to its suburb area for security reasons.²³



F. 1

Layout Plan of Shrine Hazrat Bibi Pak Damana at Lahore

20 “When Bibian reached Lahore, they stayed in the vicinity where brick manufacturers were settled. Fire of their kilns was extinguished and it was assumed that some friend of Allah has come in the area.
 21 These includes Kanhayya La’l Hindi, Syed Mateen Hashmi, Professor Muhammad Aslam, Dr. Muhammad Baqir, etc
 22 Hindi, Kanhiyya Lal; *Tarikh-e Lahore* (1884) Majlis-e Taraqqi-e Adab Lahore
 23 The shrine of Bibi Pak Damana is a constant threat for the security agencies. During this year (2010-11), the shrine was closed for devotees many times. This year during *’urs* days, the *she’ia* devotees were not allowed to celebrate the ceremonies and rituals.

Now, the devotees belonging to both *sunni* and *she'ia* sects are not ready to step down from their points of view. The situation has become very critical and alarming. Sometime, the situation of law and order gets out of control of the local district administration. The present Prime Minister of Pakistan, being a Gilani Syed, has allocated Rs 23.00 million for its re-construction and expansion, and if its extension is initiated under this scenario, the strong resistance from *sunni* devotees and the *gaddi nashin* will not stop it from becoming purely a *she'ia* shrine in 21st century.

Chillah Gah – Another Conjecture

Noor Ahmed Chishti had made another conjecture regarding the *chillah gah* of Khwajah Mueen al-Din Chishti of Ajmer located on the southern side of the shrine of Hazrat Ali Hujwiri (Ref. Fig 02). He writes,²⁴

“in year 500 A.H., Khwajah Mueen al-Din Chishti visited the shrine of Hazrat Ali Hujwiri and did meditation.(sic) On the southern side of shrine, inside boundary wall, the room is still present”.

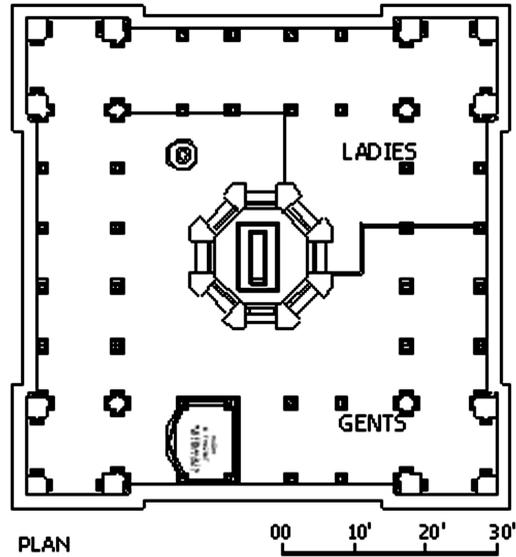
Without any historical clue, Chishti had made this conjecture simply based on the oral history as told by the *mutawalli* of Hazrat Ali Hujwiri. Earlier writers like Dara Shikoh, Khwajah Nizam al-Din Awliya, and other Chishti Sufis have not mentioned any such *chillah* of Khwajah Mu'een al-Din Chishti at shrine of Hazrat Ali Hujwiri. The mention of the visit of Khwajah Mu'een al-Din Chishti to shrine of Hazrat Ali Hujwiri is available but not of his conducting *chillah*. This *chilla gah* is properly constructed, and on 6th Rajab of every Islamic year, *'urs* ceremonies and rituals are conducted here regularly parallel to those at the shrine of Khwajah Mueen al-Din Chishti in Ajmer.

Devotees from all over the Pakistan, who cannot go to Ajmer, visit it to participate in the ceremonies.

This conjecture, made in 1864 A.D. as told by *mutawalli* of Hazrat Ali Hujwiri, had established a sacred place related to a Sufi who visited the shrine of Hujwiri but there is no mention of his *chillah*

F. 2

Chillah Gāh of Mueen al-Din Chishti at shrine Hazrat Ali Hujwiri



in the *malfuzat* of Chishties, or anywhere else. This intervention has significantly influenced the built environment of the shrine of Hujwiri.

Orientation of Qiblah – a True Conjecture

Chishti, with reference to Dara Shikoh’s *Safinat al-Auliya*, wrote about the *qiblah* orientation of the mosque built by Hazrat Ali Hujwiri, when he settled in Lahore in 11th century. Dara Shikoh informs us that when Hazrat Hujwiri constructed the mosque, its *qiblah* direction was some degrees towards the south.²⁵ People raised an objection. Hujwiri, after completion of the mosque invited them for prayer. When they were saying their prayer, Hujwiri asked them to look at the true *qiblah* direction. Everybody saw the *qiblah* in person, just in front.

In the year 1984-85, when work of reconstruction of a new mosque for Hazrat Ali Hujwiri commenced, Survey of Pakistan and Pakistan Air Force Authorities were requested to find out the true *qiblah* direction.

When it was compared with the *qiblah* direction of the old mosque, a very minute difference appeared²⁶ that may be because of the repeated reconstruction of the mosque during last 900 hundred years but when it was compared with the orientation of shrine, it was exactly the same. Dara Shikoh wrote *Safinat al-Awlyia* 600 years after the death of Hazrat Ali Hujwiri (1072 A.D.). Having no evidence, he wrote the story of the *qiblah* direction, that has been proven after another 350 years. In this way a conjecture made by Dārā Shikoh in year 1639-40 A.D. while writing the *Safināt al-Auliya*, became scientifically proven.

Conjectures Used by the Architect-Historians

Both Pervaiz Vandal and Sajida Vandal are architects by profession and have bestowed prime time of their lives on teaching and practicing architecture while residing at Lahore for the last forty years. They have daringly used this technique of conjecture in their book²⁷ while conducting the research to identify the buildings designed by Bhai Ram Singh. The architects, who are professionally trained and have deep insight to identify and critically analyze the architectural works of the old masters, have a different approach from the general historians. They study and identify the architectural features and construction techniques of the buildings designed by the same architect and establish certain bases for conjectures. This requires a responsible judgment before putting it on paper; otherwise, there are equal chances that the credit of some work may be given to someone else.

While analyzing the designed and constructed work of Bhai Ram Singh, Vandals use the tool of conjecture to find out the various un-identified buildings whose architects are un-known.

But they don't make bases for their conjecture and bring into use their prediction. Regarding the Boarding House, Vandals have used the words like "appears to be designed by Bhai Ram Singh" and then give the justification "it has the typical articulation and careful brick detailing that mark his design".²⁸

26 *Qiblah* direction by Survey of Pakistan (9d-47m), Pakistan Air Force (10d-19m), shrine of Hazrat Ali Hujwiri (9d-13m). (Source: Official record of Auqaf Department)

27 Vandal, Pervaiz; & Sajida Vandal (2006), *The Raj, Lahore & Bhai Ram Singh* National College of Arts Lahore

28 *Ibid* p:217

Only an architect who has a keen eye on architectural work of someone, can pass such declaration with confidence. At another place, Vandals claim;²⁹

“The building has the typical features of Bhai Ram Singh’s design, the tiered/layered effect achieved through the varying heights of the veranda, the rooms and the hall, a highly articulated and textured brick exterior, rich in details using ornamental and molded bricks”.

While discussing the architectural achievements of Bhai Ram Singh, Vandals take another stance and express their soft feelings to accentuate the creative potential of Bhai Ram Singh, in these words:³⁰

“Ram Singh may also have been involved in the design of other buildings of the Mayo Hospital and its attached medical college, which were constructed during the period under the supervision of the Executive Engineer, Rai Bahadur Ganga Ram”.

To support their assumption, Vandals argue that since Ganga Ram, Executive Engineer in Lahore of the time, frequently associated with Bhai Ram Singh for the design of buildings that were constructed under his supervision, hence the other buildings of Mayo Hospital and attached K. E. Medical College, constructed under Ganga Ram’s supervision, may also have been designed by Bhai Ram Singh. This argument may not be convincing for general readers, but until proved otherwise, there is no harm in believing it.

To give credit to Bhai Ram Singh for the architectural design of Faridkot Block, Vandals use words like “possibly involved in the design of superstructure”.

29 *Ibid* p:216

30 *Ibid* p:191

“The block named the Faridkot Bloc ... was probably completed after Ram Singh returned from England in April 1893, and thus he was possibly involved in the design of the superstructure. The architectural vocabulary used for the Faridkot Block, bears great similarity to the Albert Victor Hospital and has the refinement of brick detailing reflective of other buildings known to have been designed by Ram Singh. His grasp of wood carving is echoed in the textured brickwork facades of the Faridkot Block of the Medical College”.

Regarding the design of building of Islāmiah College Peshawar (1912-13), Vandals sophisticatedly use the words as “he is reputed to have designed”.³¹

Regarding the buildings of good architectural vocabulary, Vandals do not leave any chance to avail to give the credit to Bhai Ram Singh, but when the building features are not remarkable, Vandals straightforwardly decline to accept the buildings designed by Bhai Ram Singh, although the evidences prove it. Regarding the Bahawalgarh Palace and Club House, which were constructed under direction of Nawab of Bahawalpur, Vandals are not inclined to accept their being designed by Bhai Ram Singh, and use the same logic for their conjectures;

“Nawab of Bahawalpur wanted to commission Ram Singh to prepare designs for the Bahawalgarh Palace and a Club House in the state. Correspondence between the offices of the Lt.

Governor and the Nawab ensued...Shortly afterwards on 12th July, Muhammad Din, the Chief Secretary of the State, wrote to Bhai Ram Singh, asking him to prepare the designs of these new projects in the state.³²

“It is not entirely clear whether Bhai Ram Singh actually designed any of the palaces which comprise

31 *Ibid* p: 209

32 *Ibid* p: 224

the group of palaces in the fortified Bahawalgarh palace complex. The Mubarak Mahal (Durbar Mahal) constructed in 1904 does not appear to be the work of Bhai Ram Singh, neither does the Club House. Both designs are awkward, with none of the *fineness of form, proportion and detail which was the mark of Bhai Ram Singh's design*"~

Similarly, to appreciate the creative potential of Bhai Ram Singh, Vandals safely assume that with the reputation that he had acquired as an architect, his services for his religion must often have been called for.®

Conclusion

In the conjectures used in historiography by general historians and the architect-historians, there is a difference. General historians get support from the oral history and without any critical appraisal, they write down whatever is stated by the people. Similarly, the architect-historians use their aesthetically and professionally trained mind and confidence and give him the credit of even those buildings which have no proof of being designed by Bhai Ram Singh. It is also the responsibility of the historians to find out the reasons why *Mujāwars* claim that Khwājah Mueen al-Din Chishti performed *chillah* at the shrine of Hazrat Ali Hujwiri, whereas we find no mention of *Chillah Gāh* of Mueen al-Din Chishti at the shrine of Hazrat Ali Hujwiri before 1864 A.D. There is a big question mark - WHY? Now, if we have no documentary support to prove our claim, we can look for help from archaeologists who after careful excavations can trace out the presence or absence of old foundations of this room in the premises, if it exists.

Bhai Ram Singh worked in the end decades of 19th century and early decade of 20th century (till 1916) when record of every activity was kept at government level. It is required to dig out the evidences and proofs of buildings designed by Bhai Ram Singh, who served as a teacher in Mayo School of Arts and worked as a consultant under tutelage of J. L. Kipling. These conjectures may

consume many years of research of scholars to prove or disprove the propositions made by Vandals. This can not be an objective of historical writing. We cannot use words like “appears to be designed by”, or “may also have been involved in the design”, or “he is reputed to have designed” etc.