

CONDITION ASSESSMENT OF HISTORIC CHAMBA HOUSE, LAHORE BEFORE AND AFTER CONSERVATION

SIBGHA TAHIR

School of Architecture and Planning, University of Management
and Technology, Lahore, Pakistan
Email: sibghatahir95@gmail.com

FAIQA KHILAT

School of Architecture and Planning, University of Management
and Technology, Lahore, Pakistan
Email: faiqa.khilat@umt.edu.pk

Abstract

Heritage does not only include monumental buildings like forts and mosques; but also includes small-scale residential buildings, which reveals the living style of people who used to own that place. Chamba House is one of the small-scale hidden edifices located in the heart of Government officer Residence (GOR) Lahore, Pakistan. It is one of the few buildings constructed under the Indo-Saracenic style developed during the British Raj in Lahore. The house has been a residence to many nobles and still welcomes many tourists. The first impression of the Chamba House is a palace standing between the lush green trees of GOR in a very good condition, but from a closer look, it has many natural and manmade damages over the time. The study reveals the details of its architectural style, ornamentation, and most importantly the conservation carried out in 2020 of the deteriorating structures and the causes of its decay. The research identifies the conservation condition assessment that will help the authorities to mark it and that can further be saved in the same condition. The research was carried out with the aim to highlight this significant monument and condition analysis before and after the areas repaired/conserved were documented and also those areas were photographed and added to the paper.

Keywords: *British Raj; Colonial architecture; Indo-Muslim Style; Heritage; Architectural conservation*

Introduction

Lahore is a city which has matured over centuries. It is located in the province of Punjab, Pakistan and, it is the second largest city of the country according to its population. The city is particularly known for its prodigious architecture, its affluent and diverse culture. The monuments which have been built over the years during different eras has shaped the city. Every ruler has left its mark upon the city which has made it a cultural capital of the country.

- Lahore's founder is said to be Lau the son of Hindu god Ram in the 2nd century from then onwards many different empires have ruled the city.¹

Rajput empire	2 nd century-9 th century
Ghaznavid dynasty	1021AD-1186AD
Ghurid dynasty	1186AD-1206AD
Slave dynasty	1206AD-1286AD
Khilji dynasty	1289AD-1321AD
Tughluq dynasty	1321AD-1412AD
Sayyid dynasty	1414AD-1448AD
Lodhi dynasty	1448AD-1526AD
Mughul empire	1526AD-1759AD
Sikh empire	1768AD-1849AD
British period	1849AD-1947AD

Despite being such an old city Lahore does not have any architectural remains until Sayyid dynasty. Only two mosques from the Lodhi dynasty are still present in Lahore. The golden period of Lahore architecture started when the Mughuls conquered the city. When they entered India there was no concept of walled cities or enclosed gardens. In later times the Mughul period the capital was shifted from Lahore and the city starting losing its popularity. During Sikh era the city started to gain its popularity again but many monumental buildings built during Mughul period were destroyed. Every empire has left its mark by its own kind of architecture in the city.

In 1849 when British invaded Punjab they made Lahore the capital of the province. When they came into power, Lahore had already a very strong culture due to Mughul and Sikh rulers. The structures built by the former rulers were taken over by the government and they converted the structures to office buildings.² There were palaces, havelis,

gardens, mosques, tombs, mausolea in the city which the former rulers had built. Under British rule, the buildings were designed in their native architectural styles as seen in their first European development around the area known as the Mall Road and the Lower Mall, to Bhatti Gate³.

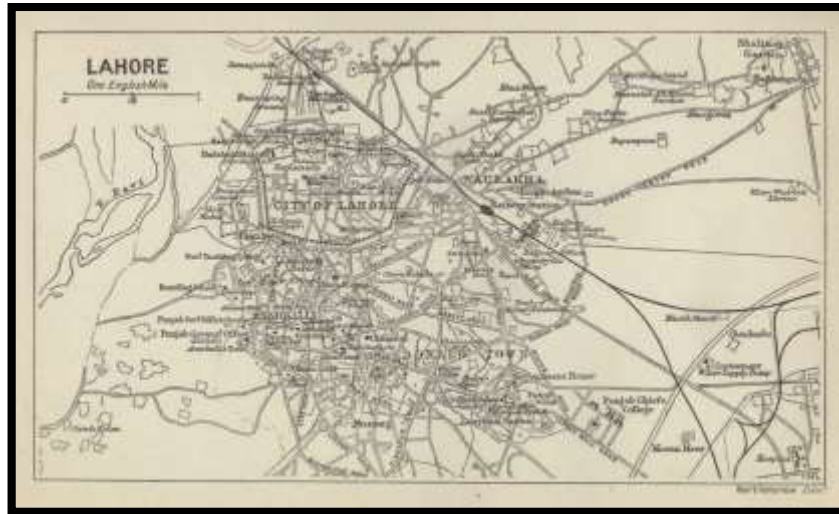


Figure 1A: Historic Map of Lahore
Source: Reddit

Different architecture style from colonial period is found in Lahore e.g., the Gothic style architecture as seen in the Cathedral Church of Resurrection, Mall Road⁴ and Saint Mary Magdalene Church Lahore Cantt (1856) also known as Mian Mir cantonment church. Cathedral of Sacred Heart was built in a Roman Byzantine architectural style. Another hybrid style of architecture was introduced that was the culmination of Indian, Muslim, Arabic style also known as Indo-Saracenic style. Indo-Saracenic architectural style was introduced in late 19th century that celebrates the local existing architecture. Indo-Saracenic designs were introduced by British imperialist colonizers, promoting their own sense of “rightful self-glorification”. Stylistically, the Chamba House does not appear to reflect anything colonial/ European architectural tradition which otherwise is seen in various churches and other secular buildings such as Government College/ University, Lahore. Public and Government buildings were intentionally constructed in this style⁵. The architect behind this style was Lockwood Kipling (1837-1911). He was deeply impressed by Indian arts and crafts. Under Kipling the Mayo School of Arts was the first colonial institution to promote and teach Indian arts and crafts and to emphasise the artistic rather than commercial

elements of art. ⁶. Kipling and his most talented pupil Bhai Ram Singh who joined the Mayo School of Arts after attending carpentry school, worked together. By 1881 Bhai Ram Singh had impressed Lockwood Kipling so much that he worked on the design of the new building for the school. Ram Singh was from the first generation of westernized native architects. They designed a variety of buildings which included residential projects, educational projects, and museums.




Type of constructions during British period	Pictorial representation
Educational projects	
Museum	
Residential projects	

Table 1: Type of buildings designed in Indo Saracenic style

Many residential projects were constructed during that period on a garden city concept, introduced by Basil M. Sullivan for the government officials named as GOR in Lahore. This residential area was away from the dust and pollution of the city so eight summer and winter houses were planned there. One of them is Chamba House also known as Federal

Lodges, named after the Maharaja of Chamba, Raja Ram Singh, son of Sir Raja Bhiri Singh. It is a true example of Indo-Saracenic architecture created by Bhai Ram Singh fulfilling the requirements of an English style residence. The house was once a state guest house, later it was handed over to Pakistan Public Works Department (PWD) and is now used as a civilian guest house. The Chamba House is a royal mansion, a bungalow style residence designed for the state's maharaja. The mansion built standing tall between the lush green fruit gardens over the land of almost above than an acre. It had been a residence to many viceroys and nobles before partition. After partition it had always been a personal interest for the rulers up till President Ayub Khan.

During the time of Prime Minister Zulfikar Ali Bhutto, it was declared as the state guest house. Many important meetings were held there as well as many noble international leaders stayed there during their visit to Lahore. During the rule of Chief Minister Pervez Elahi, it was used for media meetings. The building also served for the National Accountability Bureau (NAB) headquarters for twelve years. After taking it back from NAB, PWD constructed three new lodges in the vicinity having no match to the tremendous beauty of this heritage. Finally, in 2020, it came under the consideration of caretakers and they tried to conserve it for the conservation process. The restoration was carried out using old and new materials.

Location:

The Chamba House is located in the vicinity of GOR-1, Lower Mall Lahore (figure 2). The area is thickly surrounded by trees which protects it's from all kind of noise pollution around the city. It has an easy access through China Chowk placed right between Shahrah-i-Quaid-i-Azam, Mall Road and Ghous-ul-Azam Road, Jail Road. The building is located at the back side of famous Jilani Park, Race Course.

Research Methodology:

This a qualitative research based on site surveys, photography and interviews of the authorities present at the site and as well as the members of PWD under which the building is cited as a heritage. A deep and through study of its architectural style, elements and materials was done over a period of time to produce effective research for the conservation done of this hidden jewel of Lahore.



Figure 2: Location of Chamba House
Source: Google maps

Literature Review:

The Indo-Saracenic architecture style was developed by British rulers to show that they respect the local culture and traditions all over the sub-continent by combining the Hindu, Muslim and Persian architecture. The examples of Indo-Saracenic architecture, found in Sub-Continent are also found in Britain. The most prominent features in Indo-Saracenic architecture were, Onion (bulbous) domes, overhanging eaves, pointed arches, Cusped arches or scalloped arches, domed kiosks, miniature domes, vaulted roofs, domed chatris, towers or minarets, pinnacles, harem windows, open pavilions or pavilions with Bangla

roofs, and pierced open arcading. These are some of the important features which were included in the designing whereas the roofs, lintels walls all were designed in accordance to that.⁷

The residential style of British architecture which was then merged with Indian architecture started growing rapidly in Indian residential buildings which was commonly known as the bungalow style. This style was originally used in California but then later seen commonly in British India⁸. At first these were built for the officers of upper scale in late 19th century to earlier 20th century. But later on, these styles were commonly built until mid-century⁹. The bungalows had some distinctive features e.g., overhanging roofs with rafters, front porch with columns, central corridor with vaulted roofs, mostly double story houses surrounded with lush green gardens.¹⁰

A new feature which was added to these houses was the drawing room which easily depicts the rank of the officer residing in the house¹¹. Mostly these types of residential buildings were designed under the umbrella of central public works department where they worked with different architects of that particular area. Another important feature was the construction material used in this hybrid style buildings. Initially, the British used the local Mughul material such as bricks, lime mortar, wood later on they started using reinforced concrete, cement and steel.¹² A number of similar residential buildings were built under this style all over the Sub Continent including, Mysore Palace, Karnataka, India, Chepauk Palace in Chennai, Ahsan Manzil in Dhaka and Chamba House, Lahore. These types of residential buildings were first used by British elites and the nawabs of India and now most of them are used for other purposes like museum or state guest houses.

Ahsan Manzil, Dhaka:

Ahsan Manzil, also known as Pink Palace, Dhaka was used as the presidential palace built during late 19th century in Dhaka, when the Chamba House was built in Lahore. Both buildings had similarities as they were designed under the same architectural style. More or less their plans were also alike as both have open verandas, huge halls, square plans with huge green area, miniature domes, arches lintels and beams becoming the most interesting architectural elements in the buildings. The building was primarily used as a guest house but after its conservation it is used as Bangladesh's national museum.¹³

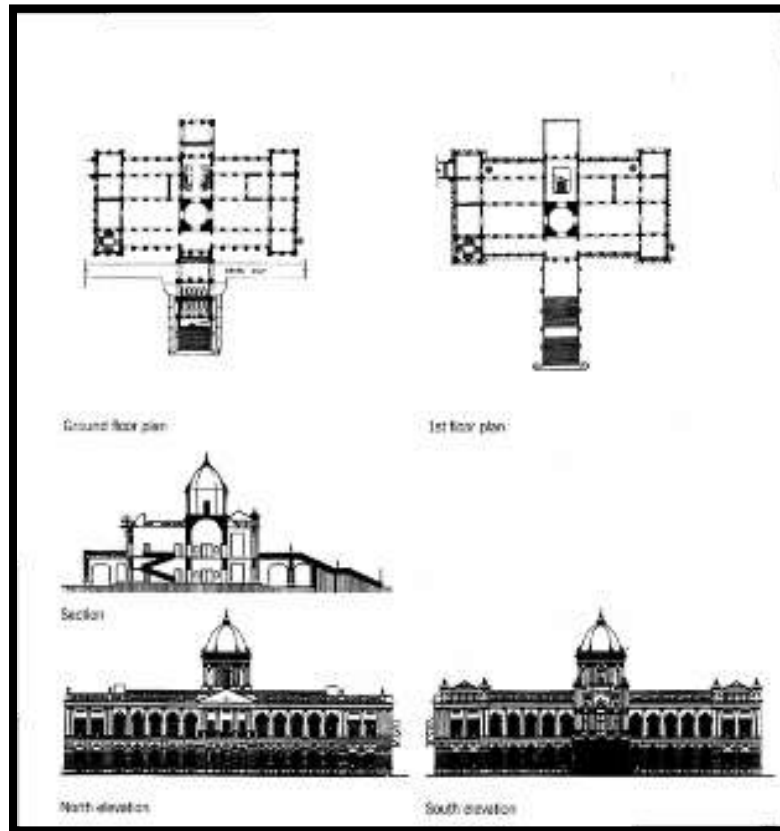


Figure 3: Plans, Section & Elevation of Ahsan Manzil

*Source:*¹³

Historical Overview of Chamba House:

A house designed as the summer palace in the heart of Lahore GOR named as Chamba House was designed by, as stated, Bhai Ram Singh according to the Indo-Saracenic trend. It was designed for the Raja Ram Singh son of Sir Raja Bhuri Singh, a house at eight -acre land for the lord of Chamba state. It was one of the few houses which were designed in GOR all were built at an area of eight acre¹⁴ After partition, it was declared as the state guest house. Originally the building was surrounded with lush green gardens with tall primeval trees from British Raj, with a horse stable in the garden. Later three lodges were added during different eras which are not of the same calibre, standing beside the heritage monument. Chamba House is now again under the supervision of Pakistan Public Works Department (PWD) and they

declared it as federal lodges. Over a period of time many changes have been brought to this building, not in the exterior but in interior as wooden roofs have been changed. In 2018 Prime Minister Imran Khan ordered the conversion of Chamba House from federal lodges to Governor House¹⁵.



Figure 4: Ahsan Manzil
Source:¹³



Figure 5: Stamp of Chamba state displayed at the entrance of Chamba House
Source: Author



Figure 6: Chamba House
Source:¹⁶

Legislative Bodies

In year 1939, it was officially given to public works department PWD which after partition was changed into Pakistan Public Works Department. Chamba House was used as federal lodges until 1998 when it was converted into NAB headquarters. In 2011, the Government of Punjab took it back from NAB and converted it to state guest house. In 2017 a bill was passed in senate to restore the building and finally in 2020, the conservation of Chamba House took place. In November 2020 Ministry of Housing took over Chamba House and it was used by ministers or bureaucrats whereas the other three guest houses built afterwards were used by other government officials.

Conservation Analysis of Chamba House:

The architecture style of Bhai Ram Singh shows integrity of design with a masterly handling of the details of construction, in proportion, texture and rhythm. Ram Singh imparts to his building that touch of genius that differentiates the ordinary from the truly inspired works of art. Indo-Saracenic style of architecture was the perfect blend of colonial and Indian architecture which can be easily depicted in the all the work done by Bhai Ram Singh. Chamba House is one of those stupendous creations of his.

Chamba House was the only main building present inside the boundary but later on time to time four more structures were added to the complex for the need of time. (Figure no.7 and 8) The conservation work was carried out in 2020 by the department of PWD who are the current caretaker of this complex whereas it comes under the ministry of housing. Only a few changes in plan have been made which have been discussed. Major work of conservation done was carried out in the elevation of the building.

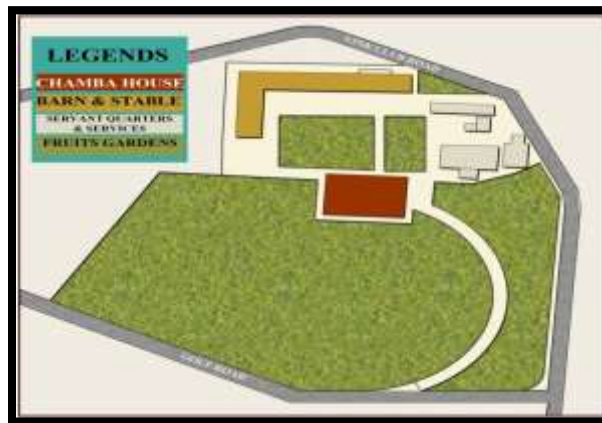


Figure 7: Original master plan of Chamba House, Lahore
Source: author



Figure 8: Existing master plan of Chamba House, Lahore
Source: author

Horizontal Features Analysis:

The layout of the building is a typical colonial style layout with a harmonized pattern. The simple symmetrical building consists of all the necessary utilities which were used by the elites of that time and surrounded with the verandas, included drawing room, dining room, bedrooms with attached washroom, an in-house pantry and storage area with huge open terraces.

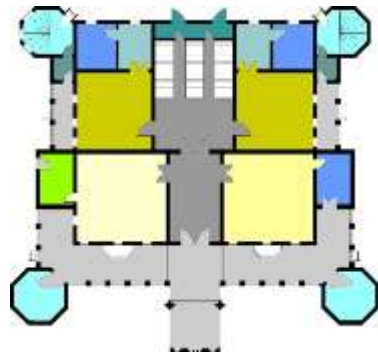


Figure 9: Ground floor plan

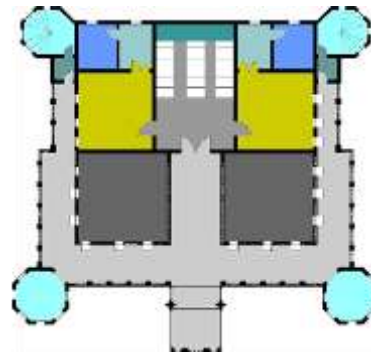


Figure 10: First floor plan

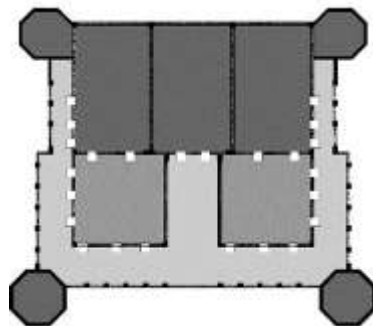


Figure 11: roof plan
Source: author

Codes	Typology
	Dinning Room
	Drawing Room
	Bedroom
	Dressing Room
	Washroom
	Lobby
	kitchenette
	Corridor
	Storage
	Staircase
	Staircase Entr



Figure 12: Original flooring
Source: author

At present, the building is sensibly given up for adaptive reuse. Whenever the building was given a different purpose, the only circumspect mechanism was that there is no change brought to its planning layout. However, the material used on the flooring is different from what it was in the past and is somewhere neglected. (Figure 12 and 14) The original flooring which was used in verandas and stair halls is still there and in good condition after the restoration process. (Figure no.13)



Figure 13: Difference in material of stairs
Source: author



Figure 14: original flooring in stair hall
Source: author

The main terrace of the main building (Figure 15), the original condition of the floor was not in a good state but after the conservation in 2020 the original essence has vanished from those mesmeric terraces and the covered verandas. (Figure16)



Figure 15: Original floor at the terrace
Source: author



Figure 16: Present condition of the terrace
Source: author

As shown in figure no.17,18,19, the building was in a deteriorating condition and had many problems of seepage and cracks specially on the exterior walls, which has been treated well.



Figure 17: Conservation plan of ground floor

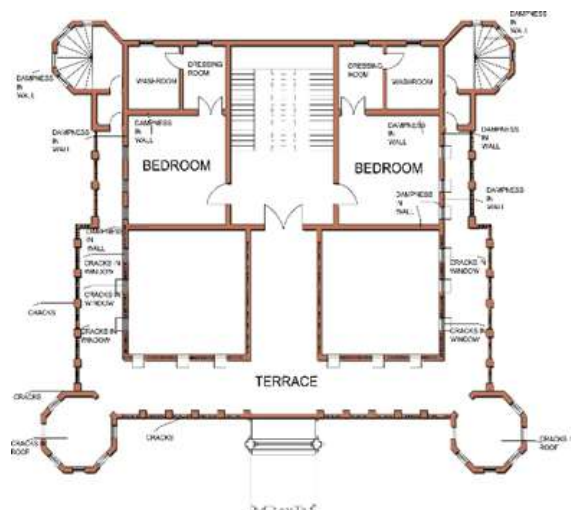


Figure 18: Conservation plan of first floor

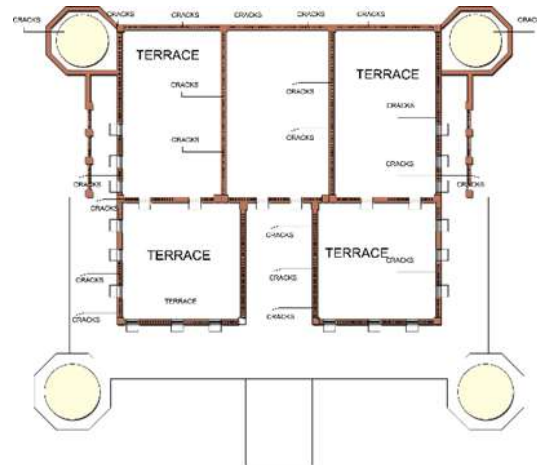


Figure 19: Conservation plan of roof top
Source: author

Vertical Arrangements:

The façade is exquisitely covered with red bricks with two kinds of arches, the main arch which can be easily seen is the scalloped arch and which shows its relation to the Mughul architecture. The domed shaped chattris, cupolas, domes and finials were used to create a highly articulated skyline. The lintels and sills were ornamented with intricate detailing which represents the Sikh influence in Indo-Saracenic style. Double heighted rooms with vaulted roof are the main elements in interior with wood and plastered detailing at the roofs.

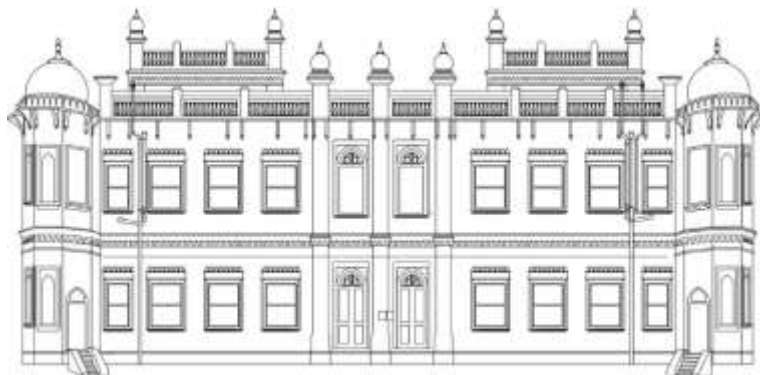


Figure 20: North Elevation
Source Author

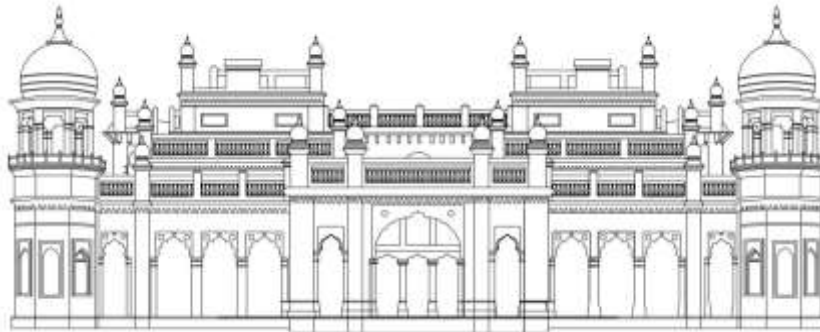


Figure 21: South Elevation
Source Author

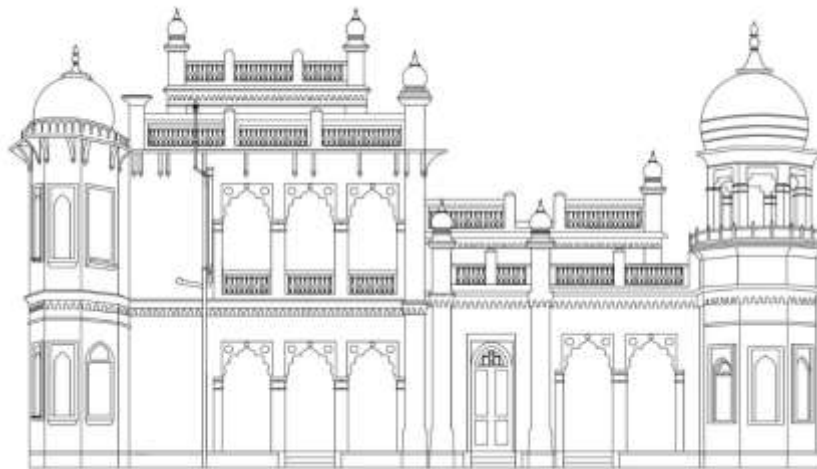


Figure 22: East Elevation
Source Author

Over the period of time due to the negligence of governing authorities the building started losing its beauty but as every heritage has power in itself to sustain its essence due to which it is still present there.

Exterior and Interior Walls:

The colour of the building has faded over the time which is now restored by using the crushed bricks powder (figure no.23 and 24).



Figure 203: Chamba House in 2014
Source:¹⁷



Figure 24: Present condition of Chamba House
Source: author

The beauty was fading away due to the natural phenomenon of rain and extremely hot sun rays. Figure 22 shows the difference between years 2016 and 2021 of the exterior wall of the buildings. As captured in 2016 have the chipped of paint from the chattris and the wall faded. Whereas the captured image in 2021 (figure 25) the building has come to life again with exterior wall treatment. The dampness effects and cracks have been treated well so they don't harm the heritage further.



Figure 25: Chamba House 2016 v/s 2021



Figure 26 (a&b): Embellishment at the door 2016 v/s embellishment at the door in 2021

The interiors are surrounded with airy verandas from three sides (figure9) and were one of the main elements of British style bungalows meant for family sitting area with views of lush green gardens. The main portico still has the stamp of Chamba state (figure 26a) with the intricate design but with the passage of time it lost its original colour and was painted with white colour. (Figure 26b)

As it can be clearly seen in the figure no.27 (a and b) the difference between the colours used at the main entrance corridor in different times experimenting dissimilar kind of colour palate was developed here in Lahore might been influenced by the colours used at Chamba palace, Chamba, Himachal Pradesh, India which shows the rich colourful culture of the state.

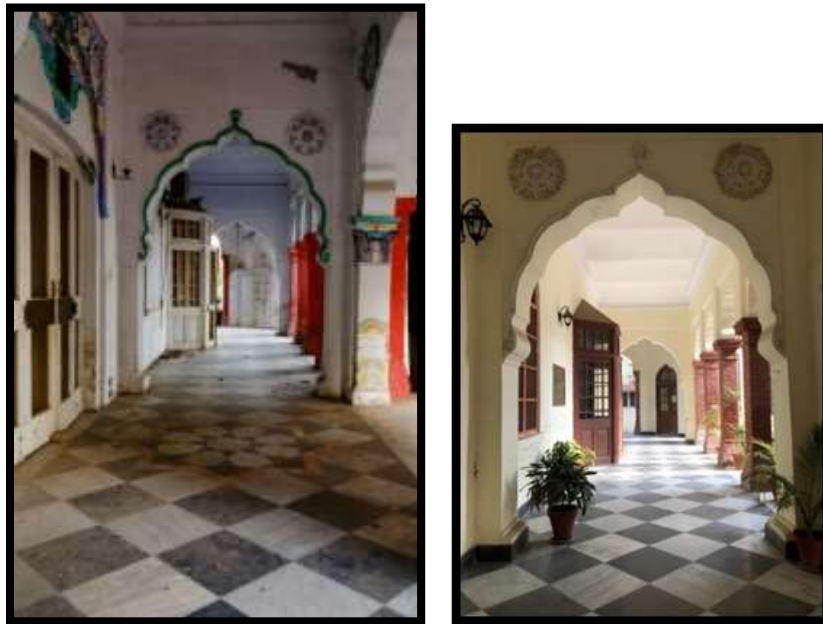


Figure 27 (a&b): Main portico of Chamba House during 1960s v/s main portico in 2021

Coming towards the exterior of the first floor, the main part conversation the work was carried out by the authorities is fair enough to sustain its beauty. Here the terraces are present at two levels (Figure 28, 29). and then there is a roof top which can only be accessed through the wooden ladders. The main terrace can be accessed through the main stair hall and the also form the octagonal structures at the back of the Chamba House. The octagonal structures which are the main element in the design were in a very bad condition (Figure 30, a & b) and have been restored as before. (Figure 30b, 31, 32).



Figure 28: Terrace in 2016
Source: author



Figure 29: Terrace in 202
Source: author



Figure 30 (a&b): Octagonal turrets at each corner of Chamba House 2016 v/s 2021

Source: author



Figure 31 (a&b): Condition of turrets in 2016 v/s 2021

Source: author



Figure 32: Interior of dome 2016 v/s 2021
Source: author

One other major difference which have been brought to this heritage is the removal of wooden wind catchers and shades and that have

been replaced by the iron ones (Figure 21 and 34). The flooring is partially changed with tiles on level 1 terrace figure no.30 and material transformation on the main terrace.



Figure 33: Condition of terrace in 2016 v/s 2021
Source: author



Figure 34: Before and after of wind catcher in 2016 v/s 2021
Source: author

The handrail and small cupolas on it have been also conserved and it's been conserved in exactly the same condition like the old ones (Figure 35 and 36)



Figure 35: condition of cupola in 2016 v/s 2021
Source: author



Figure 36: Condition of handrail in 2016 v/s 2021 on 1st terrace

The seepage and damp proofing on the interior side of the building is treated well (Figure 37) that uplifts the drawing and dining area by adding panelling on the walls which give them more of a Victorian style.



Figure 37: Condition of interior walls of Chamba House 2016 v/s 2021
Source: author

Conclusion and Recommendations:

After detailed research on the history and the architectural elements it can be concluded that the structure has passed through various phases and finally the conservation work done in 2020, is somewhat worthy. After the conservation in 2020 the first impression of the building became mesmerizing in terms of enhancing its real beauty pinkish red coloured walls and domes. The cracks and the broken structures are replaced with exact pieces. The problem of seepage inside the building is treated well. The custodian authorities have played their vital role to enhance the exquisiteness of the building but the different material used is lessening its originality. If it is analysed in accordance to the antiquity act then a few elements are not conserved according to that, like the terrace flooring or the ornamentation in the portico. The most remarkable conservation work done here is the conservation of the overall exterior the exact colour on the walls of the building which can easily be seen in all of Bhai Ram Singh's building in Lahore. Overall, it is a good initiative by the authorities to step forward to preserve this remarkable heritage from colonial period.

Notes and References:

¹ Syed Muhammad Lateef. *Lahore: Its History, Architecture Remains and Antiquities*. Edited by Khan Bahadur. Lahore: Sang-e-Meel publications, 1892.

² Naeem U. Din "Shadows of Empire: *The Mughal and British Colonial Heritage of Shadows of Empire: The Mughal and British Colonial Heritage of Lahore*." City University of New York Cuny, n.d.

³ Lucy Peck *Lahore The Architectural Heritage*. Lahore: Zaheer Salee Ferozsons (Pvt), Ltd., 2015.

⁴ Faiqa Khilat, , Muhammad Yusuf Awan, Sana Malik, and Beenish Mujahid. "Documenting the Architectural Characteristics of the Cathedral Church of the Resurrection, Lahore." *Journal of Research in Architecture and Planning* 22, no. 1 (2017): 43–52.

⁵ Chisholm, Fellowes, Henry Irwin, Edwin Lutyens, and Charles Mant. "Ijpm.Eu." *International Journal of Pure and Applied Mathematics* 118, no. 22 (2018): 1737–42

⁶ Peck, *Lahore The Architectural Heritage*.

⁷ Gudur, Technology. "A Study On Indo-Saracenic Architectural Heritage." *International Journal of Pure and Applied Mathematics* 118, no. March (2018).

⁸ Google. "Residential Architecture of the 19th and 20th Centuries," 1870.

⁹ Joan lang y Mādhavī Desāī, Miki Desai, *The Bungalow in Twentieth-Century India The Cultural Expression of Changing Ways of Life and Aspirations in the Domestic Architecture of Colonial and Post-Colonial Society* (Florence Taylor and Francis 2012, 2012).

¹⁰ PHMC Pennsylvania Architectural Field Guide, "Bungalow/Craftsman Style 1900 - 1930," pennsylvania historical and museum commision, 2015.

¹¹ Mādhavī Desāī, Miki Desai, Joan lang. *The Bungalow in Twentieth-Century India The Cultural Expression of Changing Ways of Life and Aspirations in the Domestic*

Architecture of Colonial and Post-Colonial Society. Florence Taylor and Francis 2012, 2012.

¹² Kabir, Najma, Ghulam Abbas, and Khizar Hayat. "A Historic Journey of the Lahore City, to Attain Its Identity through Architecture." *European Journal of Interdisciplinary Studies* 8, no. 1 (2017): 87. <https://doi.org/10.26417/ejis.v8i1.p87-97>.

¹³ *Bangladesh, National Encyclopedia* of. "Banglapedia," n.d

¹⁴ R Rehman et al., "Basil Martin Sullivan: Architectural Contributions of a Legendary British Architect of Colonial Lahore" 8, no. 1 (n.d.): 2–22.

¹⁵ Hamid Khan Wazir, "PM Forms National Oversight Committee for Conversion of State Buildings," *Pakistan Today*, October 2018.

¹⁶ Wikimedia, "File Photo of Chamba House," n.d.

¹⁷ Khan, Qasim. "No Title." Lahore City History, 2014.