

Exploring Tourism Opportunities: Documentation of the Use of Spaces of the Pre- Partitioned Temples and Gurudwaras in Punjab, Pakistan

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Abstract:

This research study deals with documentation of the use of spaces of the Hindu and Jain temples and Sikh *gurudwaras* in Gujranwala and Narowal districts of Punjab province. These worship places that once served as the religious centers before partition of the subcontinent have now been inhabited by refugee families that came to Pakistan from east Punjab in 1947. The spaces are now been converted into domestic ones and their utilization from places of worship has been altered in order to fulfill the domestic needs. So, this study would highlight how the present inhabitants perceive those spaces and how they deal with them. It will also be explored whether the people have any information of the historical significance and importance of these structures or not and how they treat various sections of these buildings. The paper finally explores how preservation of heritage can contribute to tourism development and boost up the economy of the people.

Keywords: Sacred spaces, Significance, Temples and Gurudwaras, Domestic, Tourism Development

1. Introduction:

Partition of subcontinent was one of those few events in human history that profoundly affected the lives of millions of individuals in a variety of ways. The people not only had to leave their ancestral homes and property behind but their places of worship were also had to be on the other side of the border. Most estimates of the numbers of people who crossed the boundaries between India and Pakistan in 1947 range between 10 and 12 million which have led many commentators to describe the movement as the largest migration of its kind in world history to that point (Brass, 2003).

That is what exactly happened to thousands of Hindu and Jain temples, Sikh *gurudwaras* and private homes located in West Punjab (Now in Pakistan) when the non-Muslim population evacuated the province in the aftermath of communal riots and violence . Apart from it, there were many places left by the people; in this case Hindus and Sikhs who moved to other side of the border. These places included homes, *haveli*¹, communal gathering places and places of worship. The same thing happened on the other side of the border, where Muslims had to leave their homes and places of worship.



Figure 1. Jain temple, View of Shikhara from the roof.

When a large number of refugees poured from the Eastern side of Punjab, there were not enough arrangements to settle them. So the government had to make temporary shelters. These shelters included the evacuee property and sometimes temples and *gurudwaras* of people who migrated towards India. At first, the government gave these buildings to refugees on temporary basis because they had nowhere else to go and it was thought that once the rehabilitation arrangements are completed, the inhabitants of these places would be relocated and these structures would be handed over to Evacuee Property Trust Board (EPTB) who would properly take care of them. But and the people somehow settled in these places. Eventually, they happened to alter the original use of the religious places and converted them into something else in order to suit and fulfill their domestic needs.

This research study is an attempt to look at the phenomenon of how the sacred spaces built for the purpose of worship are now being used for other purposes. In addition, some important questions like –what do the present inhabitants think of these spaces, do they respect them being religious buildings of another community or do they just take them as their ordinary homes without a significant history or past background—will also be addressed here . The concepts of sacred vis-à-vis profane would also be discussed in

relation to these old religious buildings and their usage in contemporary terms. It will also be looked at like how one community belonging to a different faith utilizes the spaces created by another community.



Figure 2. Facade of the Jain temple.



Figure 3. Jain Temple in Chaukhandimuhalla.

In order to study the above mentioned themes and subjects, a preliminary field work has been conducted across two districts of Punjab namely Gujranwala and Narowal. Although, both of these cities contain innumerable buildings that were left behind by Hindus, Sikhs and Jains, most of these structures are now either demolished or are in very dilapidated condition. In this research, only urban areas have been visited and two Hindu temples, two Sikh Gurudwaras and a Jain temple, located in urban localities of district Gujranwala and Narowal, have been selected. All of these places have now been occupied

by Muslims who migrated from East Punjab at the time of partition of subcontinent. Therefore, their former function as places of worship has now been totally altered and now they serve as homes.

2. Background of the Study :

At the time of partition in 1947, millions of people got displaced changing the religious, political and cultural landscape of the two newly emerging nation states i.e. India and Pakistan. This divide not only forced people to move out but also to leave behind everything that they once held dear. Innumerable houses, communal gathering places and worship places were abandoned. We are talking about the Punjab province of Pakistan (formerly Western part of the greater Punjab) where Hindus, Sikhs and a smaller Jain community were living and who had to evacuate their spaces moving towards East Punjab (now in India).

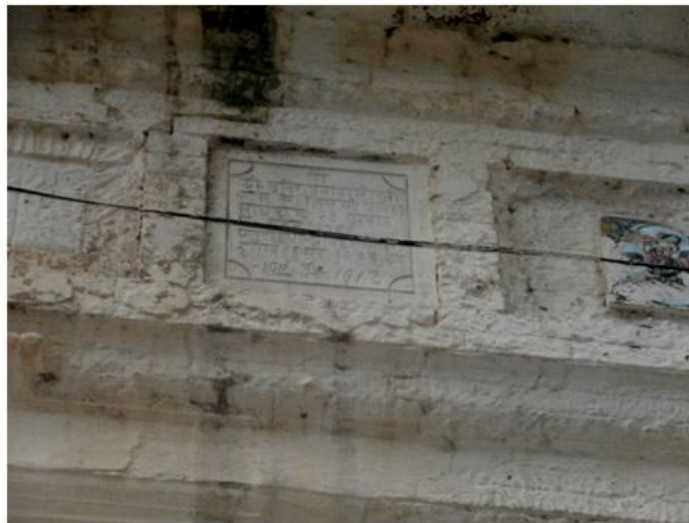


Figure 4. The plaque.



Figure 5. View of the courtyard.

For that purpose, I have selected two cities in Central Punjab which have had a considerable number of non-Muslim populations before Partition i.e. Gujranwala and Narowal. This study would use a two pronged approach, firstly location and documentation of the temples and gurudwaras and second to describe and interpret how the once sacred places are now being modified by the present inhabitants.

3. Temples and Gurudawaras:

Before proceeding further it is important to look at the forms and basic features of temples and *gurudwaras* that we will discuss in detail later in this article. In Hindu religion, a temple is not only a place of worship but it also plays an important role in maintaining the communal fabric. Building a temple which belongs to whoever paid for it or to the community that occupies it is believed to be a meritorious deed recommended to anyone desirous of heavenly reward. The site is chosen with the help of astrological divination. The size of a temple varies significantly ranging from small household shrines to monumental temple complexes. (Kiuper, 2011 p.105)

a temple basically comprises the three main components:

1. **Shikhara:** The domed structure that superimposes the temple.
2. **Mandapa:** The prayer hall where devotees gather for worship.
3. **Garbhagriha:** The 'womb-house' where the main deity of the temple is placed (Hassan, 2008).



Figure 6. View of the central niche of the garbhagriha.

The Jain temple is a bit different from its Hindu counterpart but many features are also similar. Usually a Jain temple is known as Derasar in areas of Rajasthan and Gujrat. Although Jain temples frequently share the architectural and artistic elements found in

temples of other religions, they are distinctively Jain. Their religious buildings are specifically adapted to Jain spiritual ideas and ritual practices. There are three striking features of Jain religious buildings. Firstly, there is usually more than one shrine in a temple. Next, most are surrounded by additional buildings that form part of the religious building. Lastly, temples are frequently clustered together to produce temple complexes or temple cities (Hegewald).



The term *gurudwara* literally means the house or abode of the Guru. The essential feature of a *Gurudwara* is the presiding presence in it of the holy Sikh scripture, the *Guru Granth Sahib* or *Satguru*. The other main component is the holy congregation called the *Sadh Sangat*, in which people assemble in this sacred structure in humble obedience to the principles laid out by Sikh Gurus (Sikhi Wiki).

The *Grnath Sahib* is central object of Sikh worship and ritual. In all temples, copies of the *Granth* are placed under a canopy. The book itself is draped in cloth, usually richly embroidered. It is opened with prayer and ceremonial each morning, and similarly closed in evening (Singh, 1952 p.54).

4. The Concept of Sacred and Profane:

The notions of sacred and profane are often associated with religion and also include the material or tangible aspects of religion. Eliade (1959), the sacred is the opposite of profane. It is a manifestation of reality that does not belong to the profane world, and it is equivalent to power. Space is sacralised by religious man because this enables him to be with the real, with the gods. Profane space on the contrary provides him with no possibility of true orientation because it represents complete no homogeneity and non-being

5. Description of the Temples and Gurudaras :

The religious structures that are studied in this article are now all been occupied and people have converted them into homes except a small *gurudwara* that is located in market and is now closed. In the following paragraphs, each of these structures would be described in detail and it will also be studied how their spaces are now been used, altered or modified by present inhabitants.

5.1 Narowal and its Temples:

Before partition, Narowal was a small town situated in tehsil Raya, district Sialkot. According to the district gazetteer of Sialkot (1920), it was situated on the Lahore-Jammu Road and also had a railway line, because of which its status was considerably raised. If One looks at the communal statistics of the district Sialkot, it had a total population of 1,190,497, out which non-Muslims accounted for 451,279 according to the census held in 1941 (Abid, 1989).

Inside the old neighborhood of Narowal city, there used to be 5-6 temples spread across a large area. But with the passage of time, most of them are either destroyed or are in a bad shape due to weather conditions and a lack of repair and maintenance. Therefore, now there are only two surviving temples which are in fairly good condition. Out of these two, one is a Jain temple belonging to Bhabra Jains and second is a Hindu temple. Both of these temples contain elongated *shikharas* and impressive architectural style. The Hindu temple also had some paintings that are now faded.

5.1.1 Jain Temple:

Before the partition of subcontinent, there was a small but active Jain community living in Punjab province. The Jains living here were called Bhabhra Jains. The Bhabhras were mostly involved in trading of clothes but some of them also had agricultural lands. Overall they were quite prosperous and built spacious havelis, mansions and temples in various cities of the Punjab. Most of the Bhabhra Jains lived in Pasrur and Sialkot cities, they were also found in urban areas of Lahore (Miraj, 2012).

Citing I Arthur describes that according Denzil Ibbetson nearly 99 percent of the Jains living in the Punjab belongs to the trading classes and almost exclusively to Bania and Bhabra castes. (Rose, 1997)

Although Narowal was not a big town back in those days, still it had a thriving merchant Jain community. In order to facilitate the community, the Jains built a large and conspicuous temple in the heart of the city.

In the old locality of Chaukhandi Muhalla, there is a large Jain temple. (Fig.1) This temple is now converted into a home and is occupied by a Muslim family who migrated from Gurdaspur city of East Punjab at the time of partition. The temple has a huge arched entrance and is decorated with three smaller arches that also serve as windows(Fig.3). The entrance is very ornate and was once decorated with glazed polychromatic tiles, most of which are now chipped and rapidly falling off. There is a small marble plaque etched above the threshold, which is now faded, but whatever is left of the inscription it

describes the 'Pratistapana'ⁱⁱ of the Murti of Munisuvrat Swami in year 1913 i.e. the installation of the icon of Munisuvratⁱⁱⁱ Swami in this temple in 1913^{iv}. (Fig.4)

From the outer side, the temple has an elongated *shikhara* with a square base that gradually tapers upwards culminating into a brass finial.

On entering the building, a narrow staircase leads to the first floor. This floor is divided into two sections, on one side there are large arched sections that are now converted into living space where now there are cots lying in this part of the temple. Further ahead, there is another portion at the center of which is a small room where the main temple deity was placed. It was the *garbagriha* of the temple and has now been converted into kitchen. This room is small and has a central niche at the end where once the icon of Munisuvrat might have been placed. But now this niche is empty and there are some utensils placed over it. (Fig. 5,6,7)

There are there small niches in here as well and these are also used to keep pots, pans and other household items. It is also interesting to note that a kitchen is also considered a sacred place in South Asian region and it is mandatory to keep that space clean where the food is cooked. So converting a sacred inner sanctum of a temple may have obliterated the use of that space but it is still used for a ritually clean purpose.

A spiral staircase leads to the upper portion of the temple where the base of *shikhara* houses a square room that was also used as a worship room formerly. This room is now closed and is used as a store house where junk items are kept.

If one sees the condition of temple as a whole, keeping in view its age i.e. 102 years it is relatively better preserved and no damage seems to have done to the original structure apart from changing the function of the spaces from sacred to domestic. The present inhabitants of this building are aware of its former glory and they have kept it neat and clean.

5.1.2 Hindu Temple:

A hundred meter ahead of the Jain temple, a Hindu temple is located in the neighborhood of Farooq Ganj. Its shape and structure is also somewhat similar to the Jain temple but it is in a decaying stage (Fig.9). This temple is partially ruined and only the *shikhara* and *garbagriha* are left intact. From the remains, one can see that formerly it must have been a large, spacious and beautiful structure and which is now reduced to a single room. Now the temple stands at the northern side of their house and one cannot approach it as there are no stairs. So, in order to reach the *garbagriha*, one has to climb a ladder (Fig. 8).



Figure 8. The frontal view of the temple.

The temple is constructed of small red bricks and still looks beautiful owing to the excellent craftsmanship and masonry of its builders. Seen from front, there are rounded arches supported by pillars that lead to *garbagriha*. There is a wooden door that opens into a very small room that is the *garbagriha*.



Figure 9. Hindu Temple as seen from outside.

There are still faded paintings on walls representing Gods, Goddesses and mythical birds from Hindu pantheon.(Fig.10,11) The *garbagriha* is a very small cloistered room now converted into a store room. This room was also once lavishly painted but now all of these have been totally faded leaving only traces of colors.



Figure 10. Faded image of the Ape-God Hanuman inside the temple.



Figure 11. A painting inside the temple.

The niches and arches that once held the temple deity are now lying desolate and empty.

5.2 Temples and Gurudwaras in Gujranwala:

Gujranwala literally means abode of the Gujars who were nomads or cattle grazers. They were expelled many generations ago by Sansi Jats, immigrants from Amritsar (Lincoln, 1936). Gujranwala (now a divisional headquarter) was initially a district and according to the census held in 1941, the total population of the district was 912,234, the non-Muslims constituted approximately 269,528 (Abid, 1989)

However, now it is one of the most important industrial as well as agricultural towns of the province and its population has soared many folds.

The locality of Sialkot railway crossing near Shahi Bazar in Gujranwala is an old neighborhood that once used to dot with temples and *gurudwaras*. Although, some of them still exist but they have been converted into houses for people coming from the other side of border. As opposed to religious structures in Narowal, where a temple is

housed by a single family, in Gujranwala the temples and *gurudwaras* are inhabited by a number of different and sometimes three generations of the same family. Resultantly, these structures are divided and sectioned in so many parts that it is difficult to imagine how they originally looked like.



Figure 12. Shikhara of Devi TalabMandir.



Figure 13. Door of the inner Sanctum

5.2.1. Devi Talab Mandir:

Inside the labyrinth of streets of a small market that mainly deals in used items is situated Devi Talabmandir (temple) which was once famous for its large pond. This temple is now occupied by a large family that migrated from Patiala state of Indian Punjab. This temple was formerly very spacious. It has a large arched entrance leading to the inner section. But the shape of this temple has been totally altered and it is difficult to identify any original structures except its towering *shikhara*. In order to reach *shikhara* one has to climb a staircase and then one can see an elegant conical *shikhara* that soars towards the sky. It is ornamented with brackets, blind arches and floral motifs (Fig.12).

Because the *shikhara* is relatively untouched and unaltered, it is in a good shape. The *shikhara* culminates into a small lotus shaped finial and there is a single iron rod surmounted on it that might once have a *trishula* (trident). The base of *shikhara* is an inner sanctum that is now a storeroom and the central niche that is generally reserved for temple deity is now lying empty.

According to a female member of the household, “there used to be a ditch in the center of this temple, but we filled it with mud and then plastered with cement. Then we constructed rooms over it”. (Fig.13).

However, these people are very cooperative and whoever wants to visit the temple they fully help and guide towards the sanctum sanctorum. They also told that Evacuee Trust Board has forbidden altering the shape of *Shikhara* and the inner sanctum while they are free to use other spaces according to their wishes.

5.2.2 Gurudwara Damdama Sahib:

About hundred and fifty meters away from the above mentioned temple is located Gurudwara Damdama Sahib Singhji Bedi. This *gurudwara* holds a prominent position in the Sikh religion owing to its relationship with one of the important Sikh saints Baba Sahib Singhji Bedi. The story of this place goes like this 'Baba Sahib Singhji Bedi was born in the family of Ajit Singhji in the year 1813. He was a selfless and dedicated preacher of the teachings of Guru. His langar (free food) remained running round the clock. He died in 1891. The construction of the shrine was started and completed by Sardar Bahadur Sukha Singh in 1928 AD. (Iqbal)

This *gurudwara* is a small one room structure located in a large enclosure inhabited by a number of refugee families. The small lotus shaped dome and interior of this structure is in extremely dilapidated conditions. It is situated in a very narrow street but the building looks magnificent from outside. The walls are adorned with plaques containing the names of donors who contributed to build this *gurudwara* and adjacent buildings. In fact, this building once served as a community center where apart from religious worship, people came to meet each other and discuss matters of mutual importance.



Figure 14. Gurudawara Damdama Sahib seen from the road.



Figure 15. Side view of the Gurudawara.

The floor is adorned with multicolored tiles representing beautiful floral and geometric motifs. Inside the main hall, there used to be a big chandelier but now only the iron hooks are in place. (Figs 14 & 15).

During fieldwork, there wasn't any family member who knew anything about this structure. Although rest of the rooms is divided among families, the *gurudwara* is shared by all. The structure is now so fragile that it can collapse any time and cause great damage to the lives and property of the people living there.



Figure 16. The inner sanctum of the gurudawara.



Figure 17. Gurudawara and temple seen from rooftop.

5.2.3. A Gurudwara in Shahi Bazar:

Located on an important intersection in the middle of main market of Gujranwala city is a small *gurudwara* that is very difficult to locate because of the covered shops that now surround it. The shopkeepers have no recollection of when it was built or what it was called. Now the intersection is called Chashmachowk and the *gurudwara* is also named after it. The shape and structure of this *gurudwara* is identical to Damdama Sahib i.e. an inverted lotus shaped dome and a single room for prayer.

The shops surrounding it have so diminished it, that it is very difficult to observe that there is any other thing located in this intersection. Only on close inspection, one can see the blackened dome over the multicolored panels, pana flexes and old fabrics. (Fig.18)



Figure 18. Gurudawara inside the market; its black lotus shaped Dome is barely visible crowded among covered shops.

In this case, although there is no domestic space around the gurudwara but the commercial environment has taken its place. This structure is now in a very dilapidated and decaying condition.

Conclusion:

The region has a treasure trove of pre-partition structures that immediately need to be documented owing to their fragile state. All forms of religious structures are part of our material heritage and should be preserved for the future generations. Because, once these old structures get destroyed, it would be an irreversible loss to the heritage of Pakistan.

There is an urgent need to preserve these religious structures, and the concerned authorities can make a plan to renovate and preserve them. It can also be a source of revenue for the local people by developing tourism centering round the pre-Partition heritage sites. In some instances, the inhabitants showed keen interest and also knew about the origin of the spaces in which they are living. They can be directly involved in tourism business after proper training.

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Notes

- i. Large mansions , used as homes by wealthy people.

- ii. Installation of an icon inside a temple.
- iii. Munisuvrat was the twentieth Jain Tirthankara or a liberated soul.
- iv. Translation by Sachin V. Deodhar

Images

All the images have been taken by the author.

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