

SYNCRETIC ARCHITECTURE OF THE HISTORIC RESIDENCES (MANZILS/KOTHIS/HAVELIS) OF ALIGARH (1875-1947)

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Abstract: Aligarh city well known for Aligarh Muslim University has a rich architectural past. Being near to Delhi, Braj and Agra, it has been under great influence of the nearby settlements. The establishment of Aligarh Muslim University made a significant contribution in shaping of the city particularly the Civil Lines area. Many of the elites, Nawabs, professors, businessmen shifted to Aligarh for better opportunities. They made their houses in Aligarh and their houses reflected the architecture of the native places which they belonged to. With the increasing pressure of urbanization, these residences are being demolished. So in order to conserve the rich past of the Aligarh city, it is necessary to conserve these residences.

IndexTerms – Aligarh, Aligarh Muslim University, Historic Residences, Manzils

I. INTRODUCTION

ALIGARH, well-known as the home of Aligarh Muslim University is a historic city near to Delhi and Agra situated along the GT Road. The city is majorly divided into two parts with an old railway bridge namely Kathpula. One part of the city is the older city which is situated along the Dor Fort and its precincts while the other part consists of Civil Lines and the Aligarh Muslim University Area.

It was the establishment of the Aligarh Muslim University that changed the character of the city. Before the University, it was an ordinary town habited mainly around the Dor Fort and the present day University area was under Britishers, Nawabs and elites mainly consisting of Military Grounds, British Bungalows and gardens. The university was constructed by the rigorous donations from these Nawabs, Zamindars and elites. These donations included cash, lands, jewelry and buildings.¹

The city in western Uttar Pradesh saw many Indian Muslims migrate there in the early 1900s from different parts of the erstwhile United Provinces. This included the elites who came from neighboring principalities as well as working-class and middle-class families from eastern Uttar Pradesh. Many wanted to give their children the chance of a good education at the university. These people brought their cultures and histories with them, blending with the Islamic yet liberal intellectual philosophy propagated by AMU and spearheaded by its founder, Sir Syed Ahmed Khan. The homes of these people are evidence of this syncretic tradition which were majorly constructed in early 1900's till the partition of India and Pakistan. Many of the elites shifted to Pakistan and the University which mainly served elite students before the partition shifted its focus imparting education to poor and middle class family students.²

The residences grew majorly along the University areas such as Marris Road, Badar Bagh, Dodhpur etc. These historic residences were majorly called as Manzils, Havelis and Kothis. These residences were based on typical bungalow typology having an arcaded porch in the front. The planning of these residences was distinctive in nature having lawns all around the building or mainly in

¹ Mahrervi Ifthekhar Alam ; Mohammaden College History, 1901, Reprinted by Sir Syed Academy, Aligarh Muslim University, 2013.

² Ahmad Aijaz ; Aligarh Muslim University : An educational and political history 1920-1947 , 2002 , pg 2-5

front of the building. A pathway connected the main gate and the building with lawns either side. This pathway led to the double heighted porch leading towards a gallery. The bathrooms were mostly attached to the rooms. There was a separate block for servant quarter usually at the rear side of the residential plot. In some of the residences, the front façade was highly decorated with porch on either sides of the building. Major of these houses were built by Ford N Macdonald Construction Company. This company was already associated with the construction of many other buildings of Aligarh Muslim University.³ Initially, lakhori brick as well as standard brick were used along with lime as a binding material. But later around 1925, cement was replaced as the binding material.

Today, around 40 of these residences exists. The important residences which could be identified are Aaftab Manzil, Habib Manzil, Salaam Manzil, Chhatari Compound, Falak Compound, Hasan Manzil, Abid Manzil, Anona House, Rahat Manzil, Saman Zar, Amir Nisha Kothi, Sultan Jahan Manzil, Allah Wali Kothi, Yousuf Manzil, Muzammil Manzil etc.

Some of the residences have been already demolished in the past, some have been partially demolished and some are on the verge of collapse due to negligence. Some of the lawns of these residences have been converted into 4-5 storied apartments as in case of Aaftab Manzil, Hasan Manzil etc., some lawns been converted into marriage halls as in case of Habib Manzil and Dharampur Haveli.

Some of the residences were donated to Aligarh Muslim University after their owners shifted to different towns or abroad or they did not had any heirs. These structures are intact and are well maintained by Aligarh Muslim University such as Wilayat Manzil (Presently Theology Dept.), Peeli Kothi (Centre of Continuing and Adult Education & Extention), Sarfaraz Manzil (Dept. of Mass Communiacion), Abdullah Lodge(Presently Abdullah Nursery School).

The architecture of these residences was distinct to each other as they reflected the local architecture of the united province to which owner belonged to. Also there was great influence of British and European style of architecture due to their associations and foreign relations in abroad. There were residences of heirs from different riyasats and provinces such as Bhopal, Rampur, Mahmudabad, Asgharabad, Danpur, Dharampur, Bhikampur, Chhatari etc.⁴

Habib Manzil, owned by Madi-ur- Rehman Sherwani Sb., it was constructed by his great grandfather in the year 1919. In light cream colour, and probably the best maintained of all, stands tall, on doubly colonnaded Verandah in Doric columns under the Gothic Arches. The porch features a semi elliptical arch entrance and Grilles on the Ventilators that are protected from Earth elements by an extended cornice, which also acts as the base for the balustrade railings of the upper storeys. Habib Manzil have big lawns around it which have been converted to marriage lawns, namely Habib Gardens, a prominent destination for marraiges in the city.



Chhattari Compound as the name suggests, was built by Nawab Ahmed Said of Chhatari in 1922.⁵ It is built next to Habib Manzil and stands apart from its neighbours because of its distinctive style of arches and construction typology used. A plain and simple cornice, marked by Finials on the toe wall stands above the porch, painted in red and white Pilasters. The Venetian arch used in the Verandah and Porch is unconventional of the time when most of the surrounding buildings had Gothic arches. The Frieze is highly ornamental in exposed brickwork, with brick balustrades marking the parapet line itself.



³ Alam Iqtedar ; Muslim University ki Kahani Imaarton ki Zubaani ; 2002

⁴ Interview with Prof. Irfan Habib

⁵ Interview with Nawab Javed Saeed of Chhatari

Allah Wali Kothi was constructed by Ford N Macdonnel Company and owned by Qazi Azizuddin Bilgrami in the year 1927. He

was a formal judge and a professor in MAO College. ⁶The doubly colonnaded Doric style columns support a porch that has a raised plinth access. The word “Allah” is christened in an iron welding on top of the building, adorned between Roof Finials, signifying the position of God, in here, the highest point of the Allah Wali Kothi. Balustrade Parapets serve as the façade of the balconies and as segregators on the ground floor. The balconies, supported on Brackets, are given an enclosure using Grilles on the soffit of their roofs. Major infrastructure reflects an influence of British Architecture in the Building with Gothic Arches marking the support in the little places they have been used.



Sultan Jahan Manzil was made under the orders of Begum Sultan Jahan for his son Hafiz Hamidullah Khan in the year 1915. Later, this building was dedicated to All India Muslim Educational Conference. Sultan Jahan Manzil in its first glance can be passed off as an extension of the University Campus itself with its distinct red coloured Ford and MacDonald brick. The residence has a feature usually found in defensive architecture: The Crenellation or the Battlement in place of regular parapet walls. Blind Doors in verandah towers and a porch with plain Doric columns whose entablature is the Gothic arch itself in no way resembles a usual Indo-Saracenic building had there not been symmetrically placed Cupolas and Finials.⁷



Habib Manzil, residence of eminent historian Prof. Irfan Habib, simplistic residence built by Ford N Macdonnel Company in 1927 is one of the earliest structures of cement in Aligarh.⁸ It features straighter lines, sharp edges and features that are common to most residences and yet make it stand apart. The recessed ventilation grille makes way for depth, while the raised parapet walls have balusters that provides a sense of height. Baluster Balconies in RCC connected via a spiral staircase and simple Doric Columns gives it an air of a common British Residence built during that time.



Salaam Manzil, in dire need of a conservation, also known as Chandaniya House looks part colonial, and mostly dilapidated. The porch combines the Gothic arch, and the semi-circular arch, flanked over plain Doric columns in brick with Finials on the top. The European style of Architecture could easily be identified on the



⁶ Interview with Prof. S K Ayyubi

⁷ *Hasan Tariq*; The Aligarh movement and the making of the Indian Muslim mind, 1857-2002 ; 2006

⁸ Interview with Prof. Irfan Habib

building. The toe wall is mostly only functionary, and the blind door, housing a small ventilator on top is fashioned to let not visibility, but only light in.

But it is really appalling to know that these pre-Partition houses are gradually disappearing. These residences are been sold to the commercial builders in lieu of hefty amounts. On talking to the remnant families about the rich history of their homes, the culture and ways of life they embodied and the demolition of these houses and selling them to the builders, they expressed that these are the measures they were currently taking to secure a future for their homes and themselves. Many of the families have shifted to abroad or different cities after selling their properties as there was no one to take care of their ancestral heritage.

Over the years, the landscape of Aligarh has undergone dramatic changes. Where there were once independent bungalows and havelis surrounded by orchards, now stand three or four storey apartment buildings. Many more people have migrated to Aligarh in search of education or employment. This changed landscape, although inevitable and positive in some ways, has imposed stress upon those who live in old homes in Aligarh. Some are uncertain about what will happen to their homes after they are gone. Will their children come back and take charge of things or will their homes, like many others, be broken down and apartment buildings erected in their place.

One of the major the reasons of losing these heritage assets is the awareness among the owners and the locals near them. They does not realize these ancestral houses are the roots of their culture and their inherited identity. Whenever we talk about architecture of Aligarh city, we majorly talk about the institutional buildings of Aligarh Muslim University but these residences were equally important for framing the architecture of the city.

So it is important to retrieve these residences of Aligarh in order to conserve the heritage character of the city.

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