

Extents and Restraints of Conjecture in the Historiography of Architecture

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Abstract

This paper tries to comprehend the extent and restraints of conjecture in the historiography of architecture. The conjecture is an expression or formation of a certain theory, proposition or statement without support of sufficient proof from the reliable sources. Under the circumstances, the conjecture appears correct but it can not be proven with the help of available sources.

This paper has been completed while using references from *Tehqīqāt-e Chishtī* (1864 A.D.), an exposition written by Moulvi Noor Ahmed Chishti and *The Raj, Lahore & Bhai Ram Singh* (2006 A.D.) penned by Pervaiz Vandal and Sajida Vandal. Chishti has extensively used conjectures to fulfill the gaps of unrecorded information regarding the sufis, sultans, their lives, teachings, related events, and the hospices constructed in and around Lahore. Pervaiz Vandal and Sajida Vandal have also made use of conjecture as a tool in fulfilling the missing links of the research while restoring and building the lost personality of Bhai Ram Singh (1858-1916) and the contribution he made.¹

This paper further discovers the aftermath and repercussions of the conjectures on the society, built environment of historical/religious edifices and the individuals related to them.

Introduction

The dictionary meaning² 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 not been disproved.³ Karl Popper⁴ (1902-1994) introduced the use of the

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¹ Bhai Ram Singh was a carpenter who studied and taught at Mayo School of Arts now called National College of Arts Lahore (NCA) under tutelage of Kipling.

² <http://dictionary.reference.com/browse/conjecture>.

³ <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Conjecture>.

⁴ 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 20th century.

term ‘conjecture’ in scientific philosophy.⁵ Conjecture is in contrast to the term hypothesis (meaning theory, axiom, principle), which is a testable statement based on acceptable grounds.⁶

Resources for historiography, in general, are the written documents, un-written documents and the traditions.⁷ Written documents are of two types i.e. public documents and private documents. Public documents are produced by civil authorities⁸ and private documents are emanated from private individuals. For case of un-written documents, buildings of architectural value, and tangible cultural assets of every kind may in one way or the other furnish precious information about the people, culture, civilization and their living habits.

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.⁹ 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 and intention 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.

Tehqīqāt-e Chishtī written by Maulvi Noor Ahmed Chishti¹⁰ is among the few preliminary expositions¹¹ about the historical, religious

⁵ <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Conjecture>.

⁶ *Ibid.*

⁷ <http://www.newadvent.org/cathen/04503a.htm>.

⁸ Punjab Government has established Archive Department in the Mausoleum of Anarkali, Punjab Secretariat since 1924 where such documents are available for researchers.

⁹ <http://www.newadvent.org/cathen/04503a.htm>.

¹⁰ Noor Ahmed Chishti after getting education started profession of teaching like his father Ahmed Bukhsh Yakdil 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..

and heritage buildings located in and around the Lahore. It gives historical perspective of Indian subcontinent through dynasties, divulges the conquest and defeat stories of the invaders and occupiers, delineates life sketches and achievements of the sufis and sultans and describes the architectural setting and features of the mosques and the shrines belonging to the Muslim, Sikh and Hindu faiths. From the outset, the Chishti portrays the structure and format¹² of the book, the information collected and his main focuses. Regarding the buildings, the Chishti sets the basis for information of the shrine, mosque whether it is registered in Government Record or not.¹³

Vandals wrote *The Raj, Lahore & Bhai Ram Singh* to address the issue of 'an appropriate architecture for Pakistan'.¹⁴ The work on compilation of book started in year 2000 but four articles under the subjects i.e. (i) Bhai Ram Singh¹⁵ (1985), (ii) Model Town¹⁶ (2001), (iii) Early Colonial Period Development of Lahore¹⁷ (1993) and (iv) Lahore Cantonment¹⁸ (2001) were written and published by the authors.

Rationale for selection of two books

To understand the phenomenon of conjecture in architectural history,

¹¹ The book was written on the direction and desire of Mr. William Cold Stream Assistant Commissioner for the purpose to record the historical details of the shrines, mosques, mausoleum and other buildings.

¹² 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 exists, how and what status they had now, how the income is distributed among descendants.

¹³ The Chishty has set format for attached properties. What is the 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 is celebrated and what are the rituals and ceremonies performed? And other details related to these buildings and their rulers have also been provided.

¹⁴ Refer 'Preface' of the book written by Pervaiz Vandal & Sajida Vandal.

¹⁵ 'Bhai Ram Singh, Nayyer Ali Dada and the Future' presented in UIA Region IV Conference in Karachi, dated 2-4 December 1985.

¹⁶ Published in *The Daily News*, 24 June 2001.

¹⁷ 'An Analysis of Urban Development in Lahore During the early British Period 1846-1900 A.D.', *Journal of the Indian Institute of Architecture*, April 1993.

¹⁸ The Establishment of Lahore Cantonment, presented in Annual History Conference held in Lahore on 14 October 2001.

two books, first written by a historian that is mainly based on information collected through oral history and second written by the architectural historian who searched out the data from various sources are taken because in Indian subcontinent, the architectural history is written either by the historians or by the architectural historians.

This *modus operandi* will more successfully juxtapose the problems faced by the architectural history in India & Pakistan. The Chishti was a teacher of language and not a trained historian whereas Vandals are properly educated in architecture and are practicing architects. The Chishti and Vandals have used the tool of conjecture in their books with different approaches. If one is following oral history technique, the other is using his professional skill to prove his conjecture, but both do not keep themselves within the extents and restraints of the conjecture.

The conjectures used by the historians

In the first chapter of *Tehqīqāt-e Chishtī*, the author asserts that his approach is scientific. He explains the methodology he followed, gives the reference of consulted books and elaborates the format for collecting and compiling the available information under strong tradition of oral history but unfortunately the content of the book is devoid of such acclaimed characteristic. While writing about any sufi, the Chishti simply says, ‘Mujāwar of the shrine informs that he (the Sufi) was born, migrated, settled etc...’. and confidently starts glorifying the historical events through his power of imagination. Without any 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. The Chishti believed and largely included the self created and fresh 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 as:¹⁹

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.²⁰

By adapting a casual approach, the Chishti has spread disinformation regarding many historical events and personalities which in fact is not proven. As the years passed, the information given by the Chishti

¹⁹ Latif, S.M. *Lahore-History and Its Architectural Remains* (Lahore: Sang-e Meel Publications, 1992).

²⁰ *Ibid.*, p.V.

established as historical facts. People started accepting it through their hearts. Following are the two examples where one can study and analyze the impact of conjecture in historiography as used by the 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. The 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 of Hazrat Bibi Pak Damana and its attached *waqf* properties not being significant. On 9 September 1967, administrative control of shrine and its attached property was assumed by the Chief Administrator Auqaf being a shrine of Sunni sect (Refer Fig. 01). On July 27, 1971, a conflict rose when names of four caliphs²¹ were written on the walls of the shrine by the Sunni devotees, after completion of its re-construction. At that time, among the seven members of the Religious Purpose's Committee,²² six were from Sunni sect and only one was from Sh'ia sect.

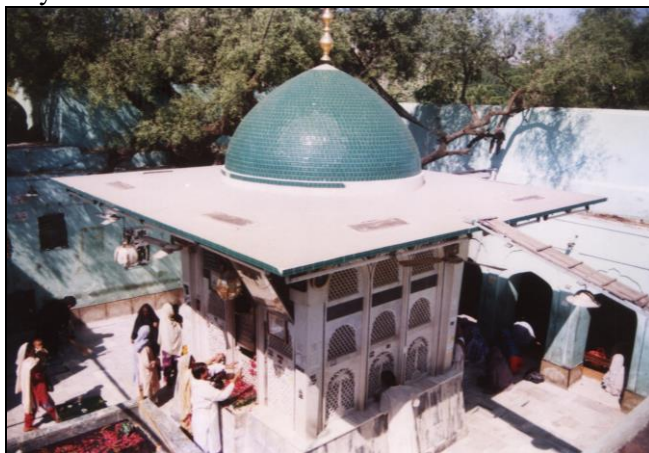


Fig. 01: Shrine of Hazrat Bibi Pak Damanan at Lahore

The shrine became significant in the eyes of devotees belonging to *Sh'ia* sect in 1994 for the first time, when patronized by the Prime

²¹ These include Hazrat Abu Bakr, Hazrat Umar, Hazrat Uthman, Hazrat Ali (R.A).

²² 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.

Minister of Pakistan.²³ On her direction, extension and master planning of shrine was conceived and developed. The pedestrian flow of the devotees belonging to the two sects and layout of spaces was kept in view while zoning its sections (Ref. Fig. 02). After entering the hall, two separate entrances were provided for Sh'ia and Sunni sects separately, leading to a courtyard, further divided into two compartments with the central placement of a small historical mosque of Akbar period. In the one courtyard *majālis* are arranged by the Sh'ia sect and in the other courtyard *melāds* are celebrated regularly by the people of Sunni sect. These two courtyards end up into a single small courtyard, low in level with 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 the Chishti in year 1864 A.D. Previously, no historian has mentioned that Hazrat Bibi Pak Damana was daughter of Hazrat Ali (R.A.). The Chishti was the first who informed that real name of Bibi Pak Damana was Ruqayya Bibi and she was daughter of Hazrat Ali (R.A.). The Chishti further elaborated the story of her migration in year 680 A.D. from Karbala to Lahore along with other five pious ladies²⁴ who were daughters of Hazrat Aqeel, brother of Hazrat Ali (R.A.). The Chishti simply says 'as it is said...' and then starts building stories of migration of these pious ladies, without giving any historical reference, in a very impressive way with the details as if he was eye-witness to all the happenings from Karbala to Lahore. He also attached many miracles to Hazrat Bibi Pak Damana to catch the attention of the readers.²⁵ This assumption has established a new acceptance level of the shrine in the perception of Sh'ia devotees who believed that it is the grave of the daughter of Hazrat 'Ali (R.A.). This perception and acceptance has enhanced the sacredness of the grave in the eyes of people belonging to Sh'ia as well as Sunni faith. After 150 years, the shrine has established its new identity.

According to second opinion that is widely accepted by the known historians,²⁶ these pious ladies were daughters of a sufi named Syed Ahmed Tokhtah who migrated from Kirmān and settled inside the

²³ On 2 May 1994, Benazir Bhutto, 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.

²⁴ Noor Ahmed Chishti, *Tehqiqat-e Chishti*, 1864; re-printed, Lahore, Al-Faisal, pp.159-61.

²⁵ When *Bibiyan* 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.

²⁶ These includes Kanhayya La'l Hindi, Syed Mateen Hashmi, Professor Muhammad Aslam, Dr. Muhammad Baqir, etc.

walled city of Lahore.²⁷ His shrine still exists inside the walled city. After his death, when the city came under the attack of invaders, these pious ladies shifted from the walled city of Lahore to its suburb area for security reasons.²⁸

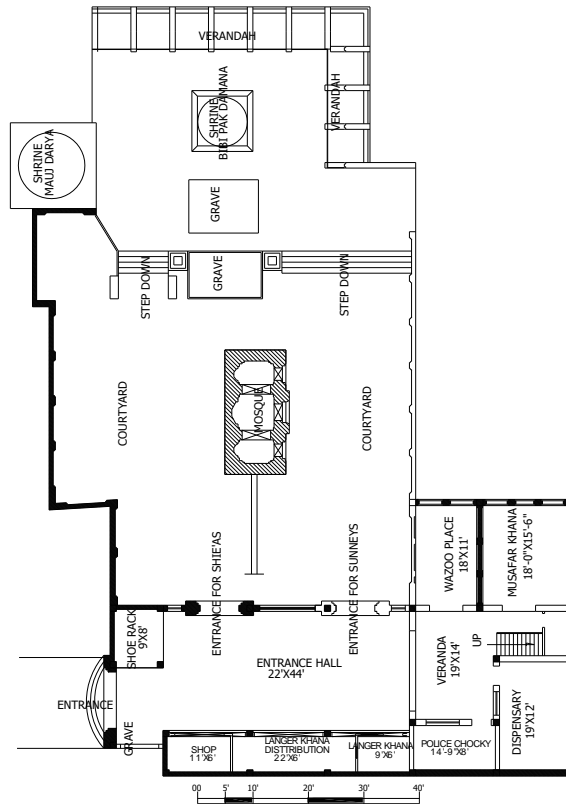


Fig. 02: Layout Plan of Shrine Hazrat Bibi Pak Damanan at Lahore

Now, the devotees belonging to both Sunni and Sh'ia sects are not ready to step out from their portals. The situation has become very critical and alarming. Sometime, the situation of law and order goes out of control of local district administration. Present Prime Minister of

²⁷ Kanhiyya Lal Hindi, *Tarikh-e Lahore* (Lahore: Majlis-e Taraqqi-e Adab 1884).

²⁸ 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 Sh'ia devotees were not allowed to celebrate the ceremonies and rituals.

Pakistan being a Gilani Syed, has allocated Rs270.00 million for its re-construction and expansion. Now 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 Sh'ia shrine in 21st century.

Chillah Gah – another conjecture

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 Hujwiri²⁹ (Ref. Fig 03). He writes,³⁰

...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, the Chishti made this conjecture simply based on the oral history as told by the *mutawalli* of Hazrat 'Ali Hujwiri. The earlier writers like Dara Shikoh, Khwajah Nizam al-Din Awliya, and other Chishti sufis have not mentioned about any performance of *chillah* of Khwajah Mu'een al-Din Chishti at the shrine of Hazrat 'Ali Hujwiri.

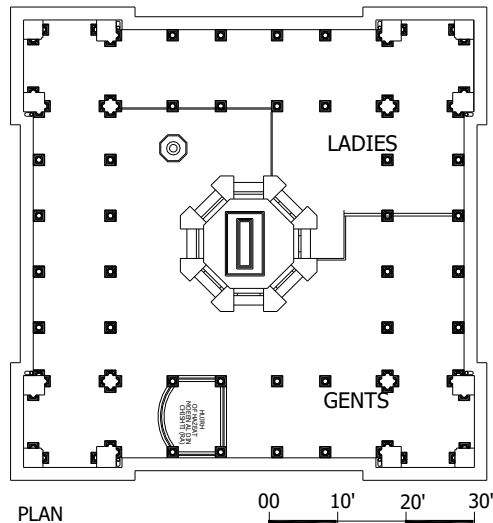


Fig.03: Chillah Gāh of Mueen al-Din Chishti at shrine Hazrat Ali Hujwiri

²⁹ Hazrat Ali Hujwiri came Lahore in early years of 11th century along with troops of Mahmood Ghaznavi. He died in year 1072 A.D. and buried at Lahore.

³⁰ Noor Ahmed Chishti, *Tehqīqāt-e Chishtī*, 1864; re-printed, Lahore, Al-Faisal, p.817.

The mention of visit of Khwajah Mu'een al-Din Chishti at shrine of Hazrat 'Ali Hujwiri is present in the old books but not of his conducting of any *chillah*. This *chilla gah* has been constructed properly and on 6th Rajab of every Islamic year, parallel to the shrine of Khwajah Mueen al-Din Chishti in Ajmer, 'urs ceremonies and rituals are performed here regularly. Devotees from all over the Pakistan, who can not go to Ajmer due to reasons, visit on the eve to participate in the 'urs ceremonies. This conjecture, made in 1864 A.D. as narrated by the *mutawalli* of Hazrat 'Ali Hujwiri, had established a sacred place related to a sufi. This intervention has significantly influenced the built environment of the shrine of Hujwiri.

Orientation of *qiblah* – A true conjecture

The Chishti with reference to Dara Shikoh's treatise *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 when Hujwiri constructed the mosque its *qiblah* direction was some degrees towards south instead of exactly towards west.³¹ People raised objection. Hujwiri, after completion of the mosque invited them for prayer. When they were saying their prayer, Hujwiri asked them to glance at the true *qiblah* direction. Everybody saw the *qiblah* in person, just in front.

In year 1984-85, when work of reconstruction of new mosque Hazrat Ali Hujwiri commenced, Survey of Pakistan and Pakistan Air Force Authorities were requested officially to find out the true *qiblah* direction. When it was compared with the *qiblah* direction of the old mosque, very minute difference appeared³² 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-Aulyia* 600 years after the death of Hazrat Ali Hujwiri (1072 A.D.). Having no documentary evidence, he wrote the story of *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.

³¹ *Ibid.*, p.166.

³² *Qiblah* direction by Survey of Pakistan (9d-47m), Pakistan Air Force (10d-19m), grave of Hazrat Ali Hujwiri (9d-13m). Source: Official record of Auqaf Department.

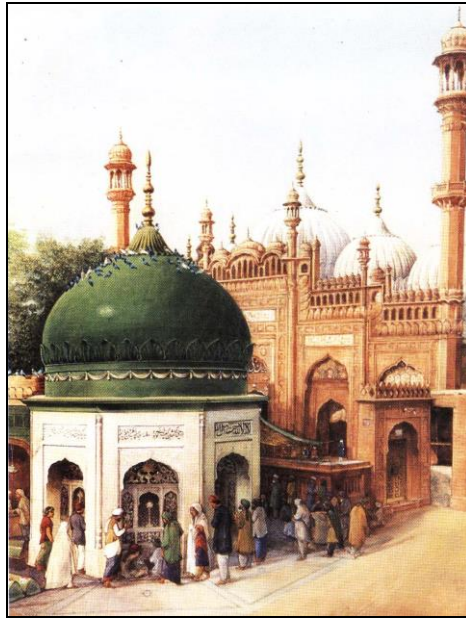


Fig.04: Old Shrine & Mosque Hazrat Ali Hujwiri at Lahore

Conjectures used by the architect-historians

Pervaiz Vandal and Sajida Vandal both are architects by profession and had bestowed prime time of their lives upon teaching and practicing of architecture while residing at Lahore since last forty years. Vandals have daringly used this tool of conjecture in their book³³ 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 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 basis for conjecture. This requires a responsible and careful judgment before putting it on the papers. Otherwise, there are equal chances that the credit of some architectural work may be given to someone else.

While analyzing the designed and constructed work of the Bhai Ram Singh, Vandals use tool of conjecture to find out the various unidentified buildings whose architects are un-known. In some cases they don't make basis for their conjecture and bring into use their predictions confidently. Regarding the Boarding House, Vandals have used the

³³ Pervaiz Vandal and Sajida Vandal, *The Raj, Lahore & Bhai Ram Singh* (Lahore: National College of Arts 2006).

words like ‘appears to be designed by Bhai Ram Singh’³⁴ and then gave the justification as ‘it has the typical articulation and careful brick detailing that mark his design’.³⁵ Only an architect that has a keen eye on architectural work of someone can pass such declaration with confidence.

At another place, Vandals put their claim;³⁶

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 the words:³⁷

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 assumptions, Vandals present another strong logic that Ganga Ram frequently associated Bhai Ram Singh to design the buildings that were constructed under his supervision hence the other buildings of Mayo Hospital and attached K. E. Medical College may be designed by Bhai Ram Singh. Ganga Ram was Executive Engineer, who was working for government. This argument may not be convincing for general readers, but until proved otherwise, there is no harm in believing. Giving credit to Bhai Ram Singh for architectural design of Faridkot Block, Vandals use the words like ‘possibly involved in the design of superstructure’.

The block named the Faridkot Block... 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

³⁴ *Ibid.*, p.217.

³⁵ *Ibid.*

³⁶ *Ibid.*, p.216.

³⁷ *Ibid.*, p.191.

Singh. His grasp of wood carving is echoed in the textured brickwork facades of the Faridkot Block of the Medical College.

Regarding the designing of building of Islāmiah College Peshawar (1912-13), Vandals sophisticatedly use the words as ‘he is reputed to have designed’.³⁸

Regarding the buildings having 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 evidence prove it. Regarding the Bahawalgarh Palace and Club House, which were constructed under direction of Nawab of Bahawalpur, Vandals are not inclined to accept being designed by Bhai Ram Singh, and use the same logics 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.³⁹

It is not entirely clear whether Bhai Ram Singh actually designed any of the palaces which comprise 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.⁴⁰

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.⁴¹

Conclusion

In the conjectures used in historiography by general historians and the architect-historians, there is a difference. General historians get support

³⁸ *Ibid.*, p.209.

³⁹ *Ibid.*, p.224.

⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, p.225.

⁴¹ *Ibid.*, p.229.

from the oral history and without any critical appraisal and authenticity, they write down whatever is stated by the people. Similarly, the architect-historians use their aesthetically and professionally trained-mind and confidence and give credit of even those buildings which have no proof of being designed by the Bhai Ram Singh.

It is also the responsibility of historians to find out the social, religious or economic reasons lying beneath *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 shrine of 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 towards archaeologists for help who after careful excavations can trace out the presence or absence of old foundations of this room in the premises.

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 evidence and proof of the 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 the Vandals. This can not be an objective of a historical writing. We can not use the words like ‘appears to be designed by’, or ‘may also have been involved in the design’, or ‘he is reputed to have designed’ etc.