

**RESEARCH PAPER****Town Hall: An Architectural Appraisal****<sup>1</sup>Samia Tahir \*, <sup>2</sup>Prof. Dr. Abdur Rahman and <sup>3</sup>Dr. Shakir Ullah**

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**ABSTRACT**

The present research aims to evaluate the architectural features of the Town Hall, a very distinguished Colonial monument. Lahore has always been a significant centre of different architectural and artistic activities. However, it served as modern capital of the Punjab during British rule that mainly reflected the imperial policies and ideologies. The Crown rulers introduced a new kind of building art to symbolize their power and characterized as Colonial architecture. It evolved in the course of almost hundred years and marks a contrast from the already existing structures. Each Colonial building exhibits distinctive architectural and decorative identity and contribute an important chapter in the heritage of Lahore. The study is practical and descriptive involving the qualitative research methods. The analysis of the Town Hall revealed that it manifests the blend of foreign and local architectural traditions. Since the nature of the building is administrative and it is strongly recommended to take measures regarding its conservation and preservation to protect our heritage.

**Keywords:** Colonialism, Colonial Architecture, Heritage, Monuments, Architectural Elements, Arched Entrance Towers, Town Hall, Turrets, Victorian Era

**Introduction**

Colonial Lahore is known to inherit a diverse heritage that visibly shows a great contrast with the previous architectural traditions. The Britishers considerably transformed Lahore into a modern urban centre, mainly recognized by the utilitarian structures. They erected many public edifices following a distinctive pattern, dominated by red bricks, verandahs, arched windows, high roofs and columns, to serve religious, administrative and educational purposes (Vandal & Vandal, 2006: 30). Therefore, the colonial architecture of Lahore added a new dimension and versatility to the building art of Lahore, manifesting a combination of western and local traditions. It reflects the ideology, culture, aesthetics and mindset of the colonials (Glover, 2007: 30). The vision and policies of the British rule not only intended to convert Lahore 'a modern and advance city', infact, they added a valuable asset to the heritage that embodied integrity, adaptability and unprecedented architectural and decorative traditions (Talbot & Kamran, 2017: 89). It ultimately led to the development, growth and extension of Lahore beyond the walled city (Chaudhry, 2000: 10).

Among many notable monuments of Colonial Lahore, the Town Hall occupies a renowned position. It is located on the Mall Road, more precisely in the environs of National College of Arts (NCA) and Post Master's General office. It was established in 1887 by the Charles Aitchison (Lieut. Governor of the Punjab) in order to celebrate the golden jubilee of Queen Victoria. Thus, sometimes also regarded as Victoria Jubilee Town Hall. However, it was inaugurated for the public in 1890 by Prince Albert Victor (Walker, 1894: 300).

The marvelous design of the Town Hall was designed by Mr. Pogson, (a Madras architect). He won the price of 500 rupees as his design was declared most appropriate and suitable out of many others. Moreover, the construction of the building was supervised by

Mr. Bull, covering the total cost of 60,000/- Rupees (Latif, 1892: 274). The erection of the Town Hall is completely purpose based and it served as the center of the Lahore Municipality. The main objective revolved around the idea of constructing such a building that could house the offices for the revenue collection and administration of the city. In other words, it mainly intended to function as local fund office to assist the Government and community. Since the inception then, it has been functioning as an office building for the civic administration of Lahore (Aijazuddin, 2004: 101).

### **Literature Review**

Colonial history of Lahore is a very promising field and possess a great potential. Yet, a very little literature has been produced regarding the heritage and architectural aspect of Colonial Lahore. As far as the building of Town Hall is concerned, it also shows scarcity of literature particularly on its architecture.

Latif (1892) has explained the general information of different monuments of Lahore, covering our heritage of Mughal, Sikh and Colonial period. He discussed an overview of Town Hall including the objective of the building, budget, and architect and provided a brief insight on general characteristics features. Walker (1894) has highlighted the historical, cultural, social, and political life of Lahore during British rule along with a brief discussion on their administrative and educational buildings including Town Hall. He discussed the about the origin of Town Hall and the features of its ground Plan.

Aijazuddin (2001) mentioned Town Hall as the main Hub of Lahore's Municipality. He has forthrightly elaborated its purpose and functioning, highlighting the need of such building for the civic administration. Kabir (2018) has emphasized on the contributions of different British architects. In this regard, she discussed the building of Town Hall in an impressive manner. She focused on the layout of the building as well as the composition of different architectural features. Moreover, she briefly explained the interior design requirement along with the current use of the building.

### **Material and Methods**

This study is qualitative and a proper method was followed to cover practical and descriptive aspect. The data was collected mainly through the books, research papers, published an unpublished research dissertations as well as gazetteers, travelogues and reports. Beside this, administrative reports of Public Works Department (PWD) were consulted which are currently available in Punjab Archives. A detailed survey of Town Hall Archives was also conducted in order to access the original maps and plans of the Town Hall. Last but not the least, an elaborated field work was carried out by the researcher to document the building of Town Hall, including plan and photographs.

### **Ground Plan**

The ground plan of the Town Hall is well balanced and appears rectangular in shape. It rises to the height of a double storey structure and approached from the north. The total area of the Town Hall measures 15,540 square feet, each floor covers almost 7,770 square feet (Kabir, 2018: 124). The composition of the ground floor is emphasized with a rectangular hall in the centre that measures 80' × 40'. It is named as Jinnah Hall and flanked by the covered spaces on all four sides. The front of the hall on the north side is comprised of exchange room, verandah, staff offices as well as stair cases and bath area. The western and eastern side of the main Hall is abutted by the parallel verandahs, accommodating square lobby. Whereas, the rear end of the hall is marked with a verandah in the centre and two rooms on the corners serving as office and CSO office (Fig.1).

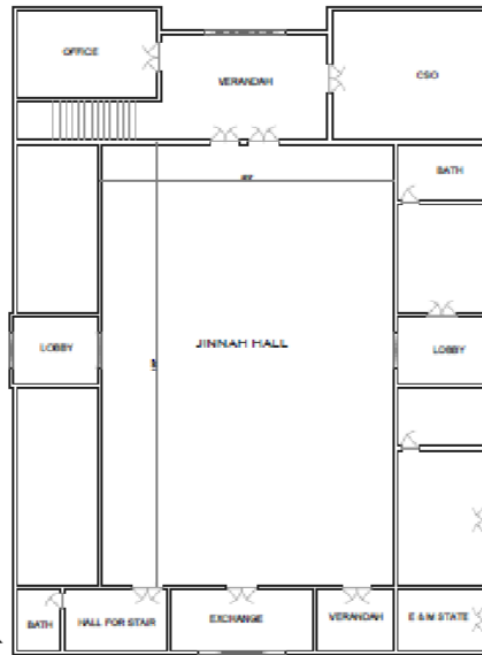


Figure 1: Ground Plan of the Town Hall

### Architectural Description

The building of the Town Hall exhibits a distinct form of architecture, manifesting grace and proportion. The fronton or the facade is predominantly marked by a high arched entrance, set within a slightly rectangular frame that is rising to the height of two storeys. Both storeys are separated with the help of a projected eave. The lower storey is marked by a segmental arch that further leads towards the main Hall. However, the upper storey skilfully comprises a two centred pointed arch. The border of the arch is decorated with a continuous band of interconnected circular design, holding a lotus flower in the centre. The frame of main arched entrance is sophisticatedly surmounted by a series of merlons at parapet level that greatly resemble to the arch shape in appearance. Besides this, the centre of the parapet is marked with a blind pointed arch, accommodating a clock. The addition of the cock provides a requisite finish to the composition of arched frame (Fig.2).



Figure 2: Front Elevation of Town Hall Showing Main Arched Entrance

The other notable feature that is equally supplementing the architectural worth of the façade includes slightly projected square towers. These towers are rising above the height of parapet level and competently strengthening the main arched entrance of the Town Hall. The composition of each tower is defined into three portions with the help of double projected cornices (Fig.3). The first or lower portion is marked by two cinquefoil pointed arched windows which are set within slightly rectangular frames. The spandrel of each arched frame is ornamented with two lotus flowers placed inside a circle (Fig.4).



Figure 3: Square Towers on the Corners of Main Arched Entrance



Figure 4: Lower Portion of the Square Tower

The middle one is quite different regarding the shape and composition of the arches. It accommodates a balcony, manifesting two horse shoe arched openings. The opening of the arches is covered with a terracotta railing, embellished with geometrical designs. The area above the arched composition is marked with a two cornices, incorporating three recessed square blocks inside. Each block delicately embodies the geometric decorative patterns (Fig.5).



Figure 5: Middle Portion of the Square Tower

So far as the third or top most part is concerned, it stands above the roof level. It includes an arched pavilion having three horse shoe arched opening on all cardinal points. Moreover, the turrets are added on the four corners of the square towers to retain their thrust. The surface of each turret is delineated with recessed rectangular panels. At the top, the turrets skillfully terminates into onion shape cupolas, resting on the square base. The top of the cupolas is marked with a pointed finial. Beside this, an onion shape dome is gracefully crowning the whole composition of the towers. The dome is further surmounted by a domelet and a finial, enhancing the beauty of the structure (Fig.6).



Figure 6: Upper Portion of the Square Tower

#### **Eastern and Western Elevation**

The western and eastern side elevations of the Town Hall are similar in architectural arrangement and appearance. Each side is primarily accentuated with a high two centered pointed arch set within a recessed rectangular frame quite similar to the main arched entrance on the front. The lower storey of the high arch accommodates a segmental arch to provide access to the lobby or serves as secondary entrance to the building. Moreover, square turrets are added on the flanking sides of the main arch in order to provide a unified effect to the structure. The turrets are marked with the recessed rectangular panel and crowned by the onion shaped cupolas (Fig.7).



Figure 7: High Arched Frame on the Western Side Elevation

The high arched panel is connected to the wings on either side, exhibiting different architectural features. The right wing is little bit smaller in size as it is connected to the fronton square towers on one side. It is divided into two storeys with the help of double projected lines of brick masonry or cornice. The lower one is marked by two pointed cinquefoil arched windows and one horse shoe arch opening. All of these arches are set within the recessed rectangular frames.

Whereas, the upper one is comprised of three horse shoe arched windows, separated with each other through attached pilasters. The left wing is again articulated into two storeys, however, manifesting different composition. The lower storey accommodates two pointed cinquefoil arched windows in the centre, flanked by horse arched opening and a blind horse arched panel. The upper one is marked with the four blind horse shoe arches frames. Beside this, both wings marked with two eave like projected cornices at parapet level. Right above the cornice, the series of arched shaped merlons is placed to enhance the grace (Fig.8).



Figure 8: Wings Flanking the Arched Entrance of Western Side Elevation

### **Rear End Elevation**

The back end of the Town hall is relatively simple yet well balanced. The lower store is accentuated with the five horse shoe arched openings in the centre that lead towards the rear end verandah of the building. These arched openings are flanked by two blind horse shoe arched panels on both sides. As far as upper one is concerned, it comprises of six pointed cinquefoil arched windows, placed with rectangular frames. The whole composition of the back end is encircled by a regular series of merlon just like the rest of the building (Fig.9).



Figure 9: Rear End Elevation of the Town Hall

### **Conclusion**

The building of Town Hall constructed mainly by fair-face bricks laid in lime-mortar, is the marvelous expression of British ideals, mindset and culture. Its layout and the building art exhibits a striking sense of order and stability that remained the characteristic feature of the Colonial buildings in Lahore. The architect has tried the best to achieve the purpose of utility considering the budget and climatic suitability of Lahore. The evaluation of the architectural elements of the Town Hall reveals the amalgamation of foreign (Victorian) and indigenous (Mughal) influences. Thus, the building style maybe the referred as Indo Saracenic. Moreover, the architectural composition of Town Hall manifests a distinct and diverse approach as compared to the other colonial monuments of Lahore, particularly constructed during the Victorian reign. For instance, frequent use of horse shoe arch and pointed cinquefoil arch has been executed on the exterior of the building along with segmental and pointed arch. Such a versatile range of arches can't not be observed on any other colonial building. Beside this, the clock is placed inside a blind arch, rather than adding a proper clock tower to the structure. Overall, the Town Hall truly served the British requirement of a civic building, symbolizing their authority, supremacy and intention of making Lahore a modern city. It is not only known for the aesthetic and architectural value, as well as for the functionality.

### **Recommendations**

This study focused entirely on the architectural analysis of the Town Hall, however, further researches are suggested to explore the other aspects of the building as well, including decoration, conservation and preservation. Being a public administrative building, it has been tend to change in term of alteration, repair, restoration and expansion, consequently, involving the process of conversation. But it is recommended that originality, architectural significance and historic value of the structure must not be suffered or compromised in the name of renovation.



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