

Summary of the Minor Project

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TITLED

A CRITICAL STUDY OF MOTIFS ON THE WESTERN GATEWAY OF NUR MAHAL SERAI (Phillaur)

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NurMahal Serai is one of the brilliant specimens of the Mughal architecture in Punjab. It is situated on the Phillaur-Sultanpur road 33 Km away from Jallandar. Nurmahal Serai was built during 1618 to 1620 during the reign of Jahangir under the directions of Nur jahan to provide a halting place for the Emperor and other travellers on then the busiest Delhi-Lahore Highway. We get references about this serai in historical texts like Tuzuk-i-Jahangir.

In Punjab, serais and other Mughal monuments were generally built entirely of bricks due to the easy availability of the material. But, Nur mahal Serai was unique among other serais in present Punjab in its use of red sandstone 'sang surkh' on the exterior of the western gateway of the serai. The 'gateway' as an architectural feature was an essential constituent of the plan of this serai. The element of jharokhas on the western gateway added beauty as it broke the monotony of the flatness of the wall. As usual, paneling for the depiction of ornamental compositions for the treatment of all exterior wall surfaces is found on the western gateway of the Nur Mahal Serai. But it is the decoration of its western gateway which sets the serai apart from its other counterpart examples. It is a brilliant example of Mughal architecture where there is transformation of human and animal motifs through the medium of stone into an unconventional Islamic decorative device. Here, we can see variety of flora and fauna motifs. We can see the pictures of elephants, cocks, swans, parrots, peacocks, lion, rhinoceros, ducks, sparrows, fish, game of polo, fairies and human beings. This free depiction of animate motifs on such a large scale on the gateway of a serai in the Punjab, against the traditions of orthodox Islamic abstract motifs can certainly reflect the evolution of the Mughal art. This growth as well as development can be ascribed to Jahangir's liberal approach and love for nature as well as for Nur Jahan's aesthetics and intellect. The reliefs of Nur Mahal serai supports that Jahangir's age was the age of flora and fauna not just in miniatures but also in architectural decoration.

Also this depiction indicates that there is the influence of Mughal miniature painting which were at its highest peak, on the ornamentation of architecture of that times. The subjects as well

as the compositional styles are directly derived from Mughal miniatures. The artisans have even tried to create a futile effort of creating perspective in the stone work of this gateway. Like other monuments of Jahangir's time, the gateway exemplifies for the love of surface ornamentation on the buildings. This gateway suggests that Mughal art at Jahangir time developed syntax of ornamentation that threw light on the subtle meanings of its morphological component.

Interestingly, all the panels on the upper part of the arch formed – are the depictions of modes of entertainment of Mughal period like polo, camel fight, animal fight and elephant fight. Many literary sources have described about these sports and these panels give visual evidence to them. The study of NurMahal Serai is useful in making up the picture of the culture of Jahangir period.

The Indian character and complexion is maintained in the building as we see in the brackets of elephants and peacocks, use of swastika and lotus motifs as decorative elements. The Indian spirit is also reflected in the figurative decorative panels on the gateway where the lady and male figures are dressed in Hindu attire. Also, the impact of Persian culture can be seen particularly in the angel motif where she is attired in the Persian clothes and cap. This reflects the taste of Nur Jahan or even suggests the employment of Persian artists for the drawing of compositions.

It is noteworthy that swans, peacocks, parrots, elephants, camels, etc. are the favourite animate motifs of Jahangir artists and used these motifs liberally for the embellishment of buildings of this age. There is rare depiction of rhinoceros in stone carving. Composite animal 'gajavysala' also finds place in stone relief on the western gateway of NurMahal serai.

On comparing the ornamental styles in other Mughal buildings of Jahangiri period, we find that Nurmahal serai is quite similar to 'Picture Wall' of Lahore Fort in respect of subject matter.



A view of Western Gateway Of Nurmahal Serai.