

Artisans, Sufis, Shrines

COLONIAL ARCHITECTURE IN
NINETEENTH-CENTURY PUNJAB

Hussain Ahmad Khan



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Punjab

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For Tabir Kamran

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A NOTE ON TRANSLITERATION

For the terms and names in Urdu, Punjabi and Siraiki, I have followed the *Oxford University Press Style Guide* and popular usage of spellings in contemporary English publications. For easier reading, I have omitted diacritics.

LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

ASI	Archaeological Survey of India
CIE	Calcutta International Exhibition (1883–4)
DPI	Director, Public Instruction (Punjab)
DSA	Department of Science and Art
EIC	East India Company
FPE	First Punjab Exhibition (1864)
MSA	Mayo School of Arts (Lahore)
NCAA	National College of Arts Archives (Lahore)
PWD	Public Works Department
SKSS	South Kensington School System
SPE	Second Punjab Exhibition (1881–2)

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INTRODUCTION

Political control does not necessarily entail control over culture. In nineteenth-century Punjab, the Sufis and the British espoused different ideologies.¹ The Sufis' ideology was centred on the establishment of an Islamic state and the revival of Islamic culture. The colonial officials' ideology was to realize a liberal empire based on Positivist knowledge.² Both Sufis and colonial officials viewed local artisanal practices as a means to propagate their respective ideologies. Due to their historically developed relationship with Punjabi artisans, the Sufis were effectively able to engage the former in disseminating mystic ideas and promote a sense of 'Muslim identity' through *khanqah* (hospices), shrine architecture and *mela* (festivals).³ Colonial art institutions (such as art schools, exhibitions and museums), in contrast, struggled to attract the local artisans, and this failure significantly impaired the objectives of British administrators to localize new approaches to art and architecture based on ideas largely borrowed from England.

In the nineteenth century, several Sufis regarded themselves as *imam* (leaders of Muslims) who could succeed the Mughals. They fought against the Sikhs and the British to establish an Islamic state in northern India or supported the local Muslim rulers. The Sufis also resisted colonial trade, criticized the activities of Christian missionaries, opposed Positivist knowledge, and stressed the importance of the Qur'an, prophetic traditions (*hadith*), and Arabic and Persian Sufi texts.

Those Sufis who did not participate in political alliances and militant activities promoted the revival of Islamic practices in all aspects of life. In nineteenth-century Punjab, most of the Sufis belonged to the Chishtiyya *silsila* (order),⁴ which remains focus of this book, but I will also highlight the role of other Sufi *silsila*.

The British also presented themselves as alternative leaders to the Mughals. Sometimes, they supported the Christian missionaries, but in most cases they advocated Utilitarian ideas, and sought to establish a 'liberal' empire in India. They strove to integrate the local artisans into the global economy to pursue the economic interests of the Empire, and laid emphasis on the learning of Western knowledge, especially science, as a way to remove the superstitions that were rooted in the local religions and traditions. Like several Sufis, the colonial administrators also adopted various, sometimes contradictory, strategies to 'reform' the local culture. For both Sufis and British officials the objective of reforming Punjab's culture through artisanal practices was an important way of disseminating their respective ideologies.

Despite having different ideologies, the Sufis and the British also collaborated with each other to pursue their respective interests: a few Sufis, such as Mukhdoom Shah Muhmud in Multan, along with their followers, helped the British against the Sikhs in 1849; several staunch followers of Sufism, such as Nur Ahmad Chishti in Lahore, tutored colonial officers and praised the colonial state for returning the possession of shrines to their custodians; and early in the twentieth century, the colonial state allotted lands to many *sajjada nashin* (custodians of shrines) in return for political support.⁵ Yet the collaboration of Sufi communities with the British should not be taken in a literal sense because neither did the colonial officials understand or agree with Sufi ideas (despite appreciating Sufis for their tolerance), nor did the Sufis endorse Positivist knowledge and traditions derived from British culture (such as language, food, dress and architecture).

The Sufis, who preferred 'seclusion', focused on the cultural revivalism of Islamic practices and engaged Punjabi artisans to reinforce their mysticism. This activity involved inscribing crafts with mystical verses or portraits of Sufis, and erecting religious

buildings, especially shrines. In Punjab, most of the Chishti Sufis were not practising craftsmen, so they sought to associate mystic meanings to the existing craft practices. These mystical meanings were highly political, because these were related to popular slogans in the *jibadi* movements against the Sikhs and the British, and were frequently articulated among Indian Muslims, especially shrine-based communities and soldiers, to present a distinguished Islamic identity.⁶ Renowned Sufis in the nineteenth century did not alter their traditional knowledge to accommodate colonial knowledge. In fact, they continued to vouch for the Arabic and Persian cultural traditions in order to assert their distinctive identity. This Arabicization and Persianization of Sufism was represented in shrine architecture in nineteenth-century Punjab.

Several scholars who have written on the partition of India in 1947 suggest that the religious slogans in the All-India Muslim League's struggle were popularized by the shrine-based communities in Punjab and Sind.⁷ These devotional communities pleaded the case for a separate state, where they could practice their religion. They used Sufi shrines as their main hub of activities to convince the people to support the cause of 'Islam'. Prominent Sufis collaborated with Muslim professional groups (teachers, lawyers, bureaucrats), feudal lords, *nawabs* and others in the politics of the 1930s and the 1940s. The mystical powers of the Sufis and the idea of an Islamic state became part of the electoral campaigns during this period.⁸

The use of Muslim identity in the politics of the 1930s and 1940s can be traced back to the nineteenth century, when shrine-based communities in Punjab used architecture and the Sufi *mela* to assert a religious identity. Followers of Sufis took part in anti-Sikh and anti-colonial *jibadi* activities, and in retaliation the Sikhs and the British plundered and destroyed many shrines. It was in the post-1857 context that the destruction of shrines and the loss of Mughal's political authority became synonymous. Unlike the Sufi-artisan relationship, which involved the dissemination of mystical ideas through artisanal practices, the colonial officials' attempts to engage Punjabi artisans through architectural projects and art institutions were ineffective, despite their claims over scientific and historical

knowledge. British political domination did not ensure control over the local cultural traditions. This is not to suggest that the locals remained detached from colonial knowledge; in many cases, the locals used colonial knowledge to resist the imperial authority. The tools of control (knowledge, institutions and buildings) in turn became the tools for resistance.

In this book, I consider the geographical boundaries of Punjab as they were defined in the second half of the nineteenth century. The boundaries of the region were different in the pre-colonial period. 'Punjab' is a Persian word meaning five rivers, but it was wrongly associated with 'the land of five rivers' in the colonial documents. In fact, the Lahore province was renamed Punjab when five *doabs* (interfluves) were added to it during the rule of Mughal emperor, Jalaluddin Muhammad Akbar (r.1556–1605). By then, there were six rivers in Punjab. In the mediaeval period, Lahore and Multan formed different provinces but were joined together in Ranjeet Singh's kingdom during the first half of the nineteenth century. The Sikh Maharaja later included Kashmir and Kabul in Punjab and adopted the title of the 'master of Punjab, Kashmir, Mankera and Multan, Attock and Peshawar'. This title shows how nineteenth-century rulers in Punjab viewed their territories in different geographical units.⁹

The British occupied Punjab in 1849. In 1858, soon after the mutiny (1857), Delhi and Hissar were included in the province. It comprised ten divisions, each administered by a British commissioner.¹⁰ In 1884, the divisions were reduced to six: Delhi, Jalandhar, Lahore, Rawalpindi, Derajat and Peshawar.¹¹ In 1904, the North-West Frontier Province was carved out by separating the Peshawar division from Punjab. My main geographical focus is on western Punjab along with the Delhi division. The main cities include Delhi, Lahore and Multan. I will also deal with the state of Bahawalpur (which is now in Pakistan's part of Punjab) because it shared the tradition of Sufism with the adjoining Multan and Derajat areas of Punjab. The Sufis of Punjab not only enjoyed great reverence among the peoples of Bahawalpur, but Punjabi artisans frequently visited the state and undertook major construction projects patronized by the Nawabs of Bahawalpur.¹²