

Tangible Apects of the Shrine of Sultan Bahu

Muhammad Shamsheer Azam¹, Dr Samar Majid²

¹ PhD Scholar, University of Education, Lahore. Department of History, Arts and Cultural Heritage

² Assistant Professor, University of Education, Lahore.

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Abstract

This research paper examines the shrine of Hazrat Sultan Bahu as a significant site of Sufi spirituality, cultural heritage, and architectural expression in Punjab. The study highlights the spiritual philosophy of Sultan Bahu, centered on divine love, self-purification, and remembrance of God, and explores how these teachings are reflected in the shrine's environment and continued devotional practices. It further provides a detailed analysis of the shrine's geographical setting, spatial organization, and structural features, including the burial chamber, minarets, courtyard, and associated elements. The paper also investigates the artistic and architectural components of the shrine, such as kashigari (tile work), calligraphy, marble carvings, lattice (jali) work, and mirror mosaics, demonstrating strong influences of Mughal and Persian traditions blended with regional craftsmanship. Special attention is given to symbolic features like the chadar, wishing well, and ritual spaces, which contribute to the spiritual experience of visitors. By combining architectural analysis with cultural and religious interpretation, this study presents the shrine not only as a physical structure but as a living center of faith, tradition, and artistic heritage. It emphasizes the shrine's role in preserving Sufi values and fostering a connection between the material and spiritual worlds.

Keywords: Sultan Bahu, Sufi Shrine, Sufism, Islamic Architecture, Kashigari, Mughal Architecture, Cultural Heritage, Spirituality, Calligraphy, Jali Work, Multani Tiles, Devotional Practices, Punjab, Sacred Spaces

Introduction

The shrine of Sultan Bahu stands as a significant center of Sufi spirituality and cultural heritage in Punjab. It reflects the profound teachings of Sultan Bahu, whose emphasis on divine love, self-purification, and remembrance of God continues to influence followers across generations. The shrine not only serves as a place of devotion but also represents the rich tradition of Sufism in the region, attracting pilgrims and scholars alike.

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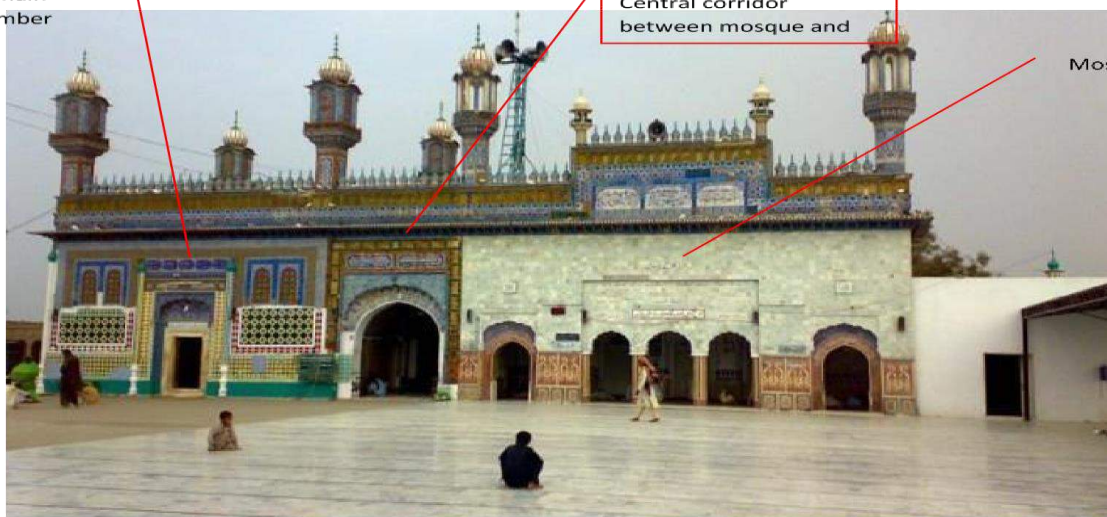
Shrine of Hazrat Sultan Bahu

Picture 01: Basti Samundari: Sultan Bahu's shrine can be seen in distant

Shrine of Sultan Bahu is situated in a populated region. Geographically, it is near Shorekot, the city where he was born. The location coordinates of the shrine from longitude and latitude are 30.87582153081288, 71.84870883357544 respectively. Additionally, the Jhelum and Chenab Rivers are not far away. Its precise position is in the district of Tehsil Shorekot, next to Garh Maharaja. Since Garh Maharaja is only two miles away, both his followers and any tourists or visitors can easily get there.

Shrine or main burial chamber

Central corridor between mosque and



Picture 02: Front Facade of Sultan Bahu's Shrine

A montage of artworks, many in traditional form, may be seen on the shrine's walls. Kashigari is a type of painting from Pakistan that shows ceramic items. This depicts leaves, branches, and other tree parts, and the wide range of colors reflects the Persian influence that penetrates the works. There is conjecture that this art originated in Kashghar, China, because it was greatly influenced by the Chinese Mongols.

Glazed tiles can be seen on the shrine's exterior. Multani tiles, associated with early Islamic architecture, have been widely used in the region's mosques and shrines. The Talpur tombs in Sindh, the Nawaban mosque, and other well-known structures have also used these tiles. As a component of the shrines of Abdul Latif, Hazrat Haqqani, and Uch Sharif, it has also frequently been connected to shrines.



Picture 3: Inner view of the Burial Chamber of Sultan Bahu's shrine

The dargah building is square in shape, measuring 33 x 33 feet externally and 27 x 27 feet internally.

Apart from the grave of Hazrat Sultan Bahu, there are also the graves of his children and caliphs inside the dargah. There are total 19 graves (including Sultan Bahu grave) in the inner burial chamber. As one enters in burial chamber from eastern side, there are 3 graves on the right side.



Picture 4: Three Graves to the right eastern right side of burial chamber

The names of buried personalities are as follows:

- (1). 10th Sajjada Nasheen Sultan Ghulam Jeelani
- (2). 9th Sajjada Nasheen Muhammad Habib Sultan
- (3). 7th Sajjada Nasheen Sultan Noor Ahmad



Picture 5: Two graves near the western side gate

The names on the two graves to the western side near the exit door are as follows:

- (1). 8th Sajjada Nasheen Muhammad Ameer Sultan
- (2). Manzur Sultan son of Hafiz Faiz Sultan

As we enter from eastern door, with the shrine of Sultan Bahu grave there are six graves. The names are as following

- (1). Sheikh Fateh Muhammad
- (2). Sheikh Ghulam Bahu
- (3). Sheikh Shareef Muhammad
- (4). Sheikh Saleh Muhammad
- (5). Sheikh Noor Muhammad
- (6). Sheikh Noor Muhammad son of Sheikh Muhammad Hussain



Picture 6: Six graves on the other side with the west exit door

The names of six graves personalities are as follows:

- (1). Sheikh Hafiz Muhammad
- (2). Sheikh Mulla Muhammad
- (3). Sheikh Muhammad Hussain
- (4). Sheikh Sultan Muhammad
- (5). Sheikh Ishaq Muhammad
- (6). Sheikh Kher Muhammad



Picture 7: Outer facade of burial chamber

The entrance door of the dargah is 4 feet wide and is made of walnut wood with carved leaves and twigs of various flowers inside the wood and the door frame is made of marble. It is six and a half feet in height and its edges are decorated with carved vines scrolls and on the outer side of both doors is a barrel bolt lock with an antique style brass lock. Above the main entrance of the dargah is a pointed arch in the Mughal style with various floral designs supported by dark blue, sky blue, white and turquoise colored Sindhi Kashi tiles within and decorated with around the triangular top. Above the spandrel are sections of various shapes such as square, rectangular, vertical and horizontal sections, which are decorated with calligraphy, floral patterns and geometrical designs all these designs are made of glazed tiles of blue, white, gold and turquoise colors. In this part, the verses of the Holy Quran, the Persian poems of Hazrat Sultan Bahu and other Sufis are written in the form of calligraphy, one of the most important and special part of Islamic architecture.



Picture 8: Lattice work on the south of the main chamber

There is no door on the south wall of the dargah, instead a stone latticework is installed above the latticework is a Mughal style pointed arch, between the latticework and the arch is a relief decorated with traditional Indus tiles. Domes and small minarets are built, which are built with great artistry and skill in the Mughal style of art.



Picture 9: Blue tile work and lattice work on the parapets and frieze

Tiles carved into the shape of a lotus flower leaf adorn the bottom portion of the Shrine ceiling curtain wall, while a latticework with hexagonal patterns forms an arch above it, and the mesh is put in this arc. The outside is also where the best work is done. Sultan Bahu's poetry has been penned in his honor by Multani artists (whose influence can be seen in the paintings), allowing supplicants to see and feel. This is followed by small dome shaped minarets decorated with Sindh Kashi tiles usually there is not much carving on the curtain wall, but here the curtain wall is so intricately designed. A masterpiece has been created with the help of Karkar Sindhi tiles which can only be found in Sufi shrines as they are ideal places where different cultures come together.



Picture 10: Outer view of the main gate to the complex

The shrine's straightforward entryway is adorned with white marble passages from the Quran. There is some cheap work visible on the sidewalls, much like in other areas of the mosques. The dargah courtyard's entrance is separated by two gates, each with pillars in the center. Each gate has an oval arch and a straight beam, with a pointed arch built over it. The names of Allah, Muhammad (PBUH), Hazrat Sultan Bahu, and his words in beautiful calligraphic style are written in the center sections between the arches, and both doors.

The minarets are also constructed with crowns decorated with ceramic tiles which enhance the aesthetic beauty of the entire gate and reflect Mughal architecture.



Picture 11: Main entrance

As one approaches the main entrance of the shrine of Sultan Bahu, a quiet sense of reverence naturally takes hold. Above the doorway, the name of Sultan Bahu appears with dignity, alongside carefully chosen verses from the Holy Quran that praise the greatness of Allah and call the believer towards faith, purity, and devotion. The absence of excessive decoration speaks to the soul more profoundly than words could, aligning with Sultan Bahu's own message that true beauty lies not in outward display but in the purity of the heart. Crossing this threshold feels less like entering a building and more like stepping quietly into a sacred space where worldly noise falls away, and only the longing for the Divine remains. The entrance stands not as a monument to grandeur, but as a silent guardian of the spiritual legacy Sultan Bahu left behind. Every stone and every word carved into its surface seems to whisper a call towards humility, devotion, and remembrance of the Divine.



Picture 12: Carved marble stone at the entrance door

There are etched marble footstones at the entrance to the burial room. Over time, the hues that previously inhabited them have entirely faded. The entrance of the shrine is framed by intricately carved marble stones, whose delicate craftsmanship enhances the sense of reverence and sacredness. These marble carvings, with their fine details, reflect the artistic heritage of the time, blending both simplicity and elegance. The smooth surface of the stone, marked by spiritual symbols and geometric patterns, invites the visitor to pause, contemplating the intersection of divine beauty and human craftsmanship. The architecture itself becomes a reflection of the purity and humility emphasized by Sultan Bahu's teachings, where the understated beauty of the marble serves as a reminder that spiritual depth lies not in excess but in thoughtful simplicity.



Picture 13: Name of the *Kashigar* painted along with the floral patterns on the central arch
The arch is also engraved with the names of the Kashigar artists and secrets. Muhammad Hussain Punjabi is described as a Mystery, and Faqir Abdul Razzaq is mentioned as a Kashigar.



Picture 14: close up of the arch



Picture 15: Veranda floor

The courtyard, which serves as the heart of the complex, features a cheap design adorned with floral motifs in gold and white.



Picture 16: Minarets of the burial chamber

A minaret has been installed on the four corners of the roof of the dargah. The structure of the minarets of this building is very unique with the color of Mughal architecture and the exterior of the minar is decorated with Sindhi tiles. Each minaret has three parts: base, pillars and canopy (kiosk). The base of the minaret starts from the roof of the mosque, followed by a square shaped pillar built of fine bricks and to beautify it the outer surface is decorated with colored Kashi tiles.

The part above it is called Chhetri or Kiosk which has a balcony and is surrounded by netting. On top of the same canopy, a dome has been built according to the height of the minar and its volume, this dome has also been molded with beautiful colored tiles, if we are built on the four corners of the roof of the Dargah of Hazrat Sultan Bahu. If we talk about the four minarets, we get the connection with the Mughal architecture. Whether those buildings are in present day Pakistan or in India, each minaret on the four corners of the tomb reflects the Mughal architecture, like the tomb of Mughal emperor Jahangir, and four minarets have also been built on the tombs of Ishmael-ud-Daula in India.



Plate 17: Minarets of the Mosque

At the base of the minarets of the mosque are octagonal pillars similar to the minarets of the dargah - the pillars of the minarets are decorated with white, sky blue and dark blue glazed tiles, with floral motifs. Just above the pillar is a kiosk with a latticed balcony railing, and the interior of the balcony is decorated with semi-circular arches decorated with glazed tiles, just above the balcony is a white glazed cupola in the Mughal style, which is decorated with tiles.

It is very important that no central dome has been built in the building of this monastery, if we see the dargah of Hazrat Sultan Bahu's caliphs or most of the elders from his line, instead

of a dome, the roof is completely straight except for your dargah. The dargah of Pir Bahadur Ali Shah and then the dargah of Sultan Muhammad Abdul Aziz were also built without a dome.



Plate 18: Front facade (darbar entrance)

The entrance to the dargah courtyard is divided into two gates, the middle of which is decorated with pillars. Both gates have a straight beam and an oval arch on top of which a pointed mihrab has been constructed in the central sections between the mihrabs are the names of Allah, the name of Muhammad (pbuh), the biography of Hazrat Sultan Bahu, and his written words in beautiful calligraphic style.

Three minarets on both the gates are elegantly constructed in traditional style, between the minarets there are crowns decorated with ceramic tiles which enhance the aesthetic beauty of the entire gate and reflect the Mughal architecture



Picture 19: Green and Yellow checked pattern on Facade

We observe additional indications of the elaborate decorations, featuring glazed yellow and green tiles arranged in a pattern that resembles a chessboard. The checked pattern, likely inspired by traditional motifs, carries both aesthetic and symbolic significance, perhaps representing the balance between spiritual harmony and earthly existence. The lively colors of green and yellow evoke a sense of vitality and renewal, complementing the serene purity of the marble carvings. Together, these elements create a dynamic and welcoming gateway, symbolizing the unity of the material and spiritual worlds as one enters a sacred space.



Picture 20: Central Arch

The central archway at the shrine of Sultan Bahu is adorned with the names of revered Plateures from Islamic history, highlighting the deep spiritual connections that link Sultan Bahu to the broader Islamic tradition. On one side of the arch, the names of Imam Ali and Imam Baqar etc are inscribed, symbolizing the spiritual authority and knowledge passed down through the generations of Imams. On the opposite side, the names of Imam Taqi and Imam Mahdi etc serve as a reminder of the ongoing spiritual guidance and the awaited return of the Mahdi, a key Plateure in Shia Islam.



Picture 21: Floral patterned tile work on the shrine of Sultan Bahu



Picture 22: Geometric latticework and the colorful tile decoeration



Plate 23: Arch and Path-way between Mosque and Burial Chamber

The outer section of the main arch showcases kashigari. The triangular areas, or spandrels, that remain are adorned with floral designs accompanied by inscribed Quranic verses as well. The sides feature the previously mentioned glazed tiles in both earthy terracotta and olive green hues. Due to deterioration and insufficient upkeep by the central authorities, some tiles have been substituted with English tiles that seem incongruous.



Plate 24: Arched gate at the entrance to the surrounding houses near the shrine



Plate 25: Tile work (Photo by researcher)

The outer facade is covered in Italian tiles, representing the diversity of building material used in the shrine's construction.



Plate 26: Decorative Jali: perforated stone slabs



Picture 27: Jali design two

The architecture features various motifs within a lattice framework that contributes to the shrine's aesthetic appeal. An exception to this is the jali work, which, while not particularly intricate or refined, showcases two distinct design patterns. One pattern includes a dome, a minaret, and a bird, while the other features a motif of grapes accompanied by a tulip flower. Despite the differences in design, both patterns are crafted from the same material: concrete or cemented jali.



Picture 28: Marble Jali Window facing the grave

The marble window jali facing the grave at the shrine of Sultan Bahu is an important architectural element. These jalis are typically intricately carved lattices that allow light and air to pass through while maintaining privacy and offering a sense of spiritual seclusion. In the context of the shrine,

this feature may also symbolize a connection between the physical and spiritual realms, offering a view of the grave while subtly limiting direct visibility, in keeping with Islamic architectural traditions.



Picture 29: Floral Carvings on Spandrel

The floral carvings on the spandrel of the shrine of Sultan Bahu add to the aesthetic and symbolic richness of the space. Spandrels are the triangular areas between the arches and can be decorative focal points in Islamic architecture. Floral motifs, particularly those seen in Islamic art, often carry symbolic meanings related to paradise, growth, and the natural world.



Picture 30: Engravings on the Inner Cornice

The engraving on the inner cornice of the shrine of Sultan Bahu is another distinctive architectural feature. Cornices, which are often located at the top of walls or arches, provide both structural support and aesthetic value. Engravings on the cornice typically feature intricate designs or inscriptions that may carry symbolic or religious significance.

In Islamic architecture, cornices often feature geometric patterns, arabesques, or calligraphic elements, sometimes including verses from the Quran or religious sayings



Picture 31: Main entrance

The main entrance minarets of the shrine of Sultan Bahu are simple in design, reflecting the broader architectural ethos of humility and spiritual focus. Unlike some shrines or mosques where minarets are grand, intricately designed to symbolize power or religious prominence, the simplicity of these minarets directs attention away from visual extravagance and towards the spiritual essence of the shrine itself. This minimalist approach in the architecture of the minarets may echo the teachings of Sultan Bahu, who emphasized spiritual purity, humility, and detachment from material excess. The simplicity ensures that the shrine's architectural elements don't overshadow the central focus: the tomb and the spiritual experience associated with it.



Picture 32: Another small burial chamber of Peer Laal Shah



Picture 33: Inner view of burial chamber



Picture 34: Chadar Above Sultan Bahu's Shrine

Suspended above the grave of Sultan Bahu, there is a richly decorated chadar that adds to the sanctity and beauty of the shrine. This chadar is not placed directly on the grave, but rather hangs overhead like a canopy, symbolizing honor and spiritual protection.

The chadar is made from fine, embroidered fabric, often velvet or silk, and is beautifully adorned with intricate patterns. It is usually embroidered with floral motifs, Quranic verses, or Sufi poetry in vibrant threadwork, often featuring colors like gold, silver, green, and red. The hanging chadar is also sometimes decorated with tassels, beads, and small ornaments, enhancing its festive and sacred appearance.

The decorative chadar above the grave serves multiple symbolic purposes. It acts as a spiritual covering, showing deep respect and reverence for the saint. It symbolizes the elevated spiritual status of Sultan Bahu and the blessings believed to descend from his presence. In Sufi tradition, such coverings represent the sacredness of the space and the divine mercy surrounding the resting place of a beloved saint.

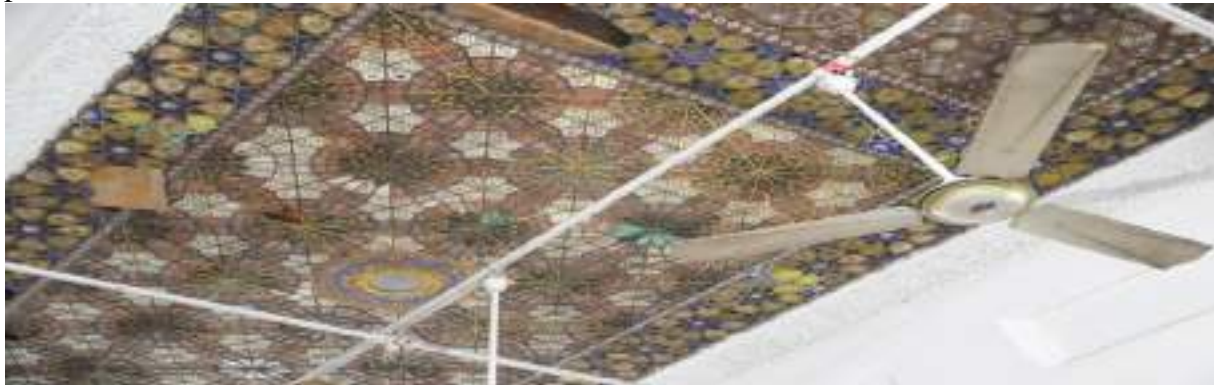


Plate 35: Mirror mosaic on the ceiling of the mosque

The mirror mosaic on the ceiling of the mosque at the Shrine of Sultan Bahu is a significant element of both artistic beauty and spiritual symbolism. This intricate decorative work, known locally as sheesha kari, involves embedding small, cut pieces of mirror into plaster to create dazzling patterns. When light strikes the surface, the mirrors reflect it in multiple directions, creating a shimmering effect that adds to the sacred and ethereal atmosphere of the mosque. This technique has roots in Persian and Mughal architectural traditions and has been widely used in religious and royal structures across South Asia.



Picture 36: A close up of the mirror work on the ceiling of the Shrine of Sultan Bahu Shrine



Picture 37: A close up view of inner burial chamber of Sultan Bahu Shrine

The tomb of Sultan Bahu grave is about 5 feet above the floor, on which are spread embroidered sheets of different colors and around the grave is a wall-like structure made of shesham wood (locally called 'Pling') is kept, which is decorated with traditional Multan craftsmanship, as this platform is changed from time to time, earlier this platform was made and sent from different parts of the country, but now is made and installed by the craftsmen of Rahim Yar Khan

The sides of the bed are decorated with thick wood carvings and are decorated with floral patterns in red, black, yellow and green which reflect the regional art, the bed is raised in the middle towards the head of the dargah. has been placed, on which a crown made of talakadhai has been placed. Quranic verses, Kalma Tayyaba, Ismullah Zaat and some lines of Persian words of Hazrat Sultan Bahu have been written on the platform. To keep the bed strong and durable, stainless steel pipes have been installed to connect its wooden legs together. Sometimes that structure is made of glass, gold, silver wood.



Picture 38: Courtyard containing a covered pond and a trees

The courtyard setting provides a serene space for contemplation, allowing visitors to engage with both the physical environment and the spiritual essence of the shrine. The quiet, shaded space around the pond can be a place for reflection, meditation, and spiritual renewal, reinforcing the shrine's role as a sacred and contemplative site.



Picture 39: Inner view of the mosque



Picture 40: The ceiling of the mosque at the Shrine of Sultan Bahu



Picture 41: Wishing well or Talab

Within the shrine lies a well-known pond, which is barely one and half feet deep. Many people regard this water as sacred, believing that tossing money into it can help fulfill their wishes. Parents may choose to throw in a doll or a similar item for their child. The pond is considered miraculous, as there have been instances where banknotes were recovered weeks later, appearing completely unharmed despite being submerged.



Picture 42: Wishing Chain (Photo by researcher)

The wishing chain at the shrine of Sultan Bahu is a significant and symbolic feature tied to the spiritual traditions of the Sufi saint. It is often seen as a way for devotees to seek blessings, fulfill desires, or express their heartfelt prayers. The chain holds both tangible and intangible meanings, deeply rooted in the practices of Sufi mysticism.



Picture 43: Wazu Khana

This place of ablution was in the form of a pond which was built inspired by the Mughal style of architecture and there was no shade on it. A building was constructed in the shape of a baradari pointed arches and round pillars were built all around the building and decorated with glasswork. Later on verandas were built around the baradari and water pipes were installed.



Picture 44: Other graves at the Shrine



Picture 45: Name of Current Shrine Superior on white marble plate of Muneeb Sultan



Picture 46: Restoration and renovation work at the shrine

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