

# Mughal Palaces in Kashmir: A Case Study of Pari Mahal

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## Abstract

Palaces are the royal adobes of the emperors, kings and chieftains since the establishment of the political system on the earth. The construction of these architectural specimens provided with highly artistic values. Pari Mahal is one of the most popular tourist destinations in Srinagar which is sited on top of the Zabarwan Hill which runs close to Dal Lake. Pari Mahal stands on outstanding example for the architectural excellence of the Mughal period. In this paper an attempt is made to elaborate the rare but this attractive palace of the Mughal period.

**Key words:** *Palace, Adobes, Architectural, Attractive, Artistic.*

**Pari Mahal:** The palace of fairies is the only palace of Mughal period which has survived till date. It has been built in the glorious hills of Zabarwan. Prince Dara shikoh is learnt to have actually built this palace for his beloved wife Naidera Begum and named pari, which means the palace of fairies. Dara shikoh like his great grandfathers' Akbar and Jahangir was a tolerant ruler. A disciple of Mulla Akhun

shah, the Mughal monarch had a great regard for his teacher, who is said was also a reputed astrologer of the day. The tradition goes on the Mulla Akhun shah for his research work needed an observatory to watch the astrological movements of the nature, when it came into the notice of Dara shikoh. He ordered for the transfer of pari Mahal to his master Mullah Akhun. The complex was handed over to Mulla Akhun to carry on his astrological research work. Dara shikoh also ordered for the construction of a Mosque and Hamam after his teacher's name. Mulla Akhun had a soft corner for Dara shikoh for his liberal and tolerant attitude towards his non-Muslim subjects, Mullah is also said, was a great Sufi of the day. G M D Sufi is identifying 'pari Mahal' as a residential school of Sufism, but basically it was built as a palace. Its structure remains and the terraced garden provides a perfect fashion of building and gardening skill.

The pari Mahal bagh is the one which remained neglected for a long time. Even during the mughal time it was not looked after properly. During the Afghan and Dogra rule it virtually went in oblivion and its major structural parts, tanks, terrace walls were repaired and conserved by the Archaeological survey of India after 1960.

In 1960 no one knew how many terraces were built by Dara Shukoh here and in what fashion. Arches had fallen down and the plaster from the walls had almost disappeared. Step by step and one by one, from top to bottom, six terraces were repaired and remains of the seventh terrace were to be taken for repairs and exposition, when the current unrest in Kashmir started.

Originally the garden was conceived by Dara Shukoh in a terraced fashion and each terrace was provided either with a baradari or tank in the Centre of the terrace with a provision of terracotta pipes for free flow of water from one tank to the other. The terraces having baradari were utilized by the members of the royal family.

Astronomy and Astrology had an important place in the life of the Mughals. Babar liked the observatories of Samarkand, while Humayun was deeply influenced by it. Akbar and Jahangir often consulted their astrologers. And in the same tradition, like a true grandson, he developed predilection for astrology. Here Dara Shukoh and his sister Jahan Ara, two religious-minded royal children, learnt the philosophical aspects of Islam.

The topmost terrace of the garden was made by leveling the slope of the hill and erecting

a pavilion. Here the water spring was channelled and through terracotta pipes water was taken down to lower terraces. In the side walls steps were provided.

The 2<sup>nd</sup> terrace was provided with a tank and the façade of the retaining wall over which the pavilion of the first terrace was raised was relieved by a series of ten arches on either side of the central arch. The architectural pattern of recessed arches in the wall provided a pleasing look to the building.

The 3<sup>rd</sup> terrace of this bagh is the most distinctive. In this terrace on the east side a brick built arched gateway is built. Probably, the access to the terraced garden was obtained only through this gateway. On either side of the entrances two apartments were also built for use by the royal personages. In the Centre of the terrace a pavilion is built with vaulted ceiling having a slopy roof. From the pavilion one could view the Dal Lake far and wide. On either side of it are a few large rooms, one of which appears to have been a hammam. Its interior is most decorated.

On the 4<sup>th</sup> terrace a water tank is built for maintaining the fountain. The walls of this were also built like that of second and third but smaller in dimension. On either side of

the terrace octagonal bastions were provided.

The 5<sup>th</sup> terrace was conceived in a different manner. Here a tank with a pavilion was built. The upper half of the pavilion is provided with perforated square holes, probably meant for pigeons. Some feel that the holes are meant for placing lamps for illuminating the terrace during certain occasions and others believe that it was the expression of Dara shukoh's love for birds and meant for pigeons

The 6<sup>th</sup> terrace has a tank and is simple in its construction. The terraces of 7<sup>th</sup> terrace indicated that from here water was allowed to flow to Dal through forest. The govt. of Kashmir undertook a project of renovation of Pari Mahal. Under this project of conservation which started in 1970s ruined stone masonry of arches of baradari, retaining wall of terraces, bastion steps, tanks roofs gate parts and rooms of the royal residential apartments and some other buildings were restored to their original shape.

### **Conclusion**

In conclusion we can say that Kashmir is a heaven for the artist with a romantic temperament. Pari Mahal not holds

historical significance but also stands as a symbol of the regions rich cultural heritage. The architectural composition of pari Mahal integrates elements from both Mughal and Islamic styles, featuring exquisite arched doorways, terraced gardens and intricate water channels. This fusion of design styles adds to the aesthetic appeal of the site. The splendid monument reveals the grandeur of the taste of the Mughal emperors.



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