

Received : 10 January 2024, Accepted: 10 February 2024

DOI: <https://doi.org/10.33282/rr.vx9i2.15>

## The State Guest Houses of Colonial Lahore: Unveiling the History, Art and Architectural Mastery of the Time

Dr. Samar Majid\*

Dr. Shumaila Firdos\*\*

Sayed Faizan Abbas\*\*\*

### Abstract

*Lahore, often referred to as the heart of Pakistan, is a city steeped in history, with architectural landmarks that reflect its rich cultural heritage. From ancient structures to colonial-era buildings, Lahore's urban landscape offers a diverse array of monuments that not only beautify the city but also draw countless tourists and researchers. Among the significant contributions of the colonial period are the state guest houses, which were constructed to accommodate high-ranking officials and important government guests. These guest houses, including Chamba House, Kapurthala House, Bahawalpur House, Ponch House, Farid Kot House, and Wajid Ali Shah House, serve as important examples of British colonial architecture in Lahore.*

*This study focuses on the history, art, and architecture of these six state guest houses, examining their design, construction, and the broader political context in which they were built. These guest houses, with their blend of European and local architectural styles, reflect the British government's desire to assert its influence while adapting to the cultural and climatic conditions of the region. The paper explores how these buildings served not only as functional spaces but also as symbols of colonial power and prestige.*

*While there are other guest houses such as Patiala House, Nabha House, and Kashmir House, this research does not focus on them due to political restrictions that limit access. Instead, it provides an in-depth analysis of the six accessible guest houses, offering insights into their unique artistic elements, structural features, and historical significance.*

*In addition to exploring the historical context, this paper assesses the current state of these guest houses. Many of them face neglect and deterioration, raising concerns about their preservation. The article concludes with recommendations for the conservation of these colonial-era structures, suggesting possible adaptive reuse to ensure their survival and continued relevance in the modern urban fabric of Lahore. By highlighting the architectural and historical significance of these guest houses, the study aims to contribute to the broader understanding of Lahore's colonial heritage and the importance of safeguarding its built environment for future generations.*

**Key Words:** Colonial Architecture, State Guest Houses, British Period, Architectural Heritage, Conservation, Art and Architecture, Colonial Legacy, Historic Preservation, Adaptive Reuse

## Introduction

Lahore is one of the ancient cities of Pakistan that is home to various monuments on its land. These monuments belong to different eras that range from pre-Islamic down to the British period that range in their nature, e.g. the sacred and the secular. The sacred monuments include, Hindu temples, Jain temple, Sikh gurudwaras, Christian churches and mosques mausoleums of Muslim period. The secular monuments of various time periods include, palaces, fort, havelis, state guest houses, gardens, etc.

During the British colonial era, among other important historical events, lots of architectural contributions also took place that transformed the architectural traditions of the land Muslim (Mughal) style to a new style that was later on called British, Colonial or English style of architecture.

Lahore is home to numerous such type of monuments scattered all over the city, covering from Mall Road, to the old walled city. For the present research article, the state guest houses of the colonial period were selected for study to highlight the history, art and architecture of these monuments. These include Chamba House, Kapurthala House, Ponch House, Patiala House, Bahawalpur House, Farid Kot House and Wajid Ali Shah House. Although there are other houses also including Nabha House and Kashmir House but access to these houses is almost impossible because of some political constraints. Some of these guest houses now does not exist in their true shape and style as the main structures have undergone many changes so the originality of the structure has lost. In some of the cases, like Patiala House and Kashmir house, the whole monument is lost instead there you can find Bungalows and houses constructed in later periods where now the elite class and the GOR officials live. The Chamba House and Ponch House stand today with the grandeur that was once the landmark of the city among other landmarks.

## The State Guest Houses around the World

Generally, a state guest house is a building retained by the government of a certain country which is considered by that country as a sanctioned residence during the visit of the foreign dignitaries, especially for state visits or for other important events. This statement shows that these buildings are and should be retained or preserved for the state guests for their residential purposes. This can better be explained by the example of some of the state guest houses and their history along with the present condition of these important constructions.

Almost every country in the world today own official state guest houses for their primary purpose which is to entertain official guests including, US, Canada, India, Bangladesh, China, Indonesia, Japan Sri Lanka, North Korea, France, Poland, Germany, UK, Taiwan etc. some of them are mentioned here with their history and latest photos in the plates at the end of this article.

1. According to the National Capital Commission of Canada website, 7 Rideau Gate is the Canadian government's official state guest house for very important dignitaries, such as visiting heads of government or other high-level officials (see Plate 1). The house is located in Ottawa, Ontario, near other official residences such as Rideau Hall and 24 Sussex Drive<sup>1</sup>. The facility was constructed in 1862 and was renovated/expanded time to time.

2. Constructed in 1824, Blair House, also known as The President's Guest House (see plate 2), is an official residence in Washington, D.C., the capital of the United States. The President's Guest House has been called "the world's most exclusive hotel" because it is primarily used as a state guest house to host visiting dignitaries and other guests of the president. Parts of the historic complex have been used for an official residence since the 1940s<sup>ii</sup>.
3. Hyderabad House is an official residence in New Delhi, India, was constructed in 1926 (see plate 3). It is the State Guest House of the Prime Minister of India. It is used by the Government of India for banquets, and as a venue for meetings with visiting foreign dignitaries. It was designed by British architect Edwin Lutyens as a residence for Mir Osman Ali Khan, the last Nizam of Hyderabad<sup>iii</sup>.
4. The State Guest House is a historical monument in Hoàn Hanoi, Vietnam. It is presently used as a state guest house. It was constructed in 1918 and is more than 100 years old<sup>iv</sup> (see plate 4).

### State Guest Houses in Lahore

There are about 9 state guest houses in Lahore, mentioned earlier, however, the history, art and architecture of three of them are mentioned here.

#### 1. Kapurthala House

The Kapurthala House (see plate 5) is located near Old Anarkali bazar, Lahore. It was known as "The Ventura Garden" after Mr. Ventura, a general in the army of Maharaja Ranjit Singh (Aslam: 131). At this very place Sir Sayed Ahmed Khan declared the people of Lahore as "Zinda Dilan" in his speech on February 2<sup>nd</sup>, 1884 (Aslam:131). After 1848, it remained as a state guest house.

Unfortunately, today the gates or the entrances of the main guest house remain in the somewhat original shape, the rest of the building has been occupied by the local people for offices and residential purposes (see plate 6). The entrances are provided on all four directions of the building out of which 2 are maintained on regular basis by white washing and plastering the walls. The rest of the two entrances are usually ignored for the maintenance work (see plate 7).

The entire compound is comprising of \_\_\_ square feet area and the adjoining part of the building which also seems to be once part of the main building is also a huge complex, again occupied by the local businessmen and residents. The railing of the staircase inside the building of the house remains in its original condition today that leads to the first floor of the building (see plate 8 & 8A). The staircase had once a window which now today has been closed by the building owners and converted into a small attic type store to put belongings of everyday use, this was done probably because of the privacy reasons from other buildings at the back (see plate 9 & 9A).

The entrances are made of bricks and plaster which is then adorned by the stucco work all over the entrances (see plate 10 & 10 A). This shows that the remaining building could also have been decorated by the stucco work from inside as well as outside, which was a common practice during the colonial period of India. Even the doors of the entrances are in original shape today that were made of

the Indian Rosewood (*sheesham*) the outer part of which is decorated with iron flowers (now long gone). The side pillars of the doorway are decorated with roundels made of stucco (see plate 11), above which lies a window for the upper staircase from inside. That window is beautifully decorated with side fret work or (*Jaali*) (see plate 11 A), with a stucco frame for the opening of the window. A beautiful pattern of stucco lies just beneath the frame of the window that gives a graceful beauty to the entire structure (see plate 11 B). Above this window there is a 3d structure with small openings on all three sides for ventilator openings also plastered with stucco (see plate 11 C).

## 2. Chamba House

The Chamba House (see plate 12) is located near GOR-I (Government Officers' Residence), in front of the Jinnah Bagh, on the outskirts of Chief Minister Punjab House, Mall Road Lahore. This British period guest house is now under the federal government control and employees above grade 17 can book a room for stay during their official visits<sup>v</sup>. The authors of this article could not get the permission of the administrator to get some photographs and information about the guest house therefore, the photographs included in this article are taken from Google Images.

According to the writer of Lahore Lahore Aye (in Urdu), Mr. Ejaz Aslam Sheikh, Chamba House has 60 rooms while the whole structure is now called Federal Lodges. Previously it remained the office of the National Accountability Bureau (NAB). It was constructed by Maharaja of the Chamba State and the designer of it was Bhai Raam Singh (Aslam: 131).

“The mansion built standing tall between the lush green fruit gardens over the land of almost above than an acre. It had been a residence to many viceroys and nobles before partition. After partition it had always been a personal interest for the rulers up till President Ayub Khan” (Tahir & Khilat: 61).

The above-mentioned statement comes from an article written by Tahir and Khilat in 2016 on the condition of Chamba House. This article gives a detailed insight on the art work done inside the building.

In 1974, this building housed the official guests who came to participate in the Conference of the Islamic Summit. It was decided in 2018, by the government to convert the guest house into the governor's house (Aslam: 131) however, it remains Federal Lodges even today.

A house designed as the summer palace in the heart of Lahore GOR named as Chamba House was designed by, as stated, Bhai Ram Singh according to the Indo-Saracenic trend. It was designed for the Raja Ram Singh son of Sir Raja Bhuri Singh, a house at eight-acre land for the lord of Chamba state (Tahir & Khilat: 64). Originally the building was surrounded with lush green gardens with tall primeval trees from British Raj, with a horse stable in the garden. Later three lodges were added during different eras which are not of the same caliber, standing beside the heritage monument (Tahir & Khilat: 64). The material used on the flooring is different from what it was in the past and is somewhere neglected. The original flooring which was used in verandas and stair halls is still there and in good condition after the restoration process (see plates 13, 13 A, B & C).

### 3. Ponch House

It is said that District Ponch was once the part of District Lahore, and was later converted as a sovereign state (Aslam: 130). The Ponch house in Lahore is located near Chauburji, Multan Road, Lahore (see plate 14), and was constructed in 1849 for Lord Lawrence<sup>vi</sup> (Baig: 2021). The total area of this building is 199 square feet. According to the records of the revenue department, Ponch House land was a property of Raja Jagat Singh which is located on the plot number 4552 (see plate 14 A). Later on, this building was handed over to the barrister of the chief court Charles Boulnois after which it became under the control of the chief judge Sir Merdieth Plowden.

The trial of the famous Indian freedom fighter Bhagat Singh started here on 5<sup>th</sup> May, 1931 (Aslam: 130). After the partition in 1947, the building was handed over to the Government Industries Department for its offices and remains under its control even today. Currently many offices including, Forestry Department, Mines and Minerals department, department of Mutual Aid, and Punjab Health Foundation have their offices in Ponch House. Among many halls in the building, one of them is currently used a court for Cooperative and Mines and Mineral Departments. In 1950, a museum for Industrial and Commercial department was established here, however later on instead of the museum, a library of the Directorate of Industries was shifted here. In 1962, this building was handed over to the federal government through an official notification and it still remains with it.

As far as the art and architecture of the building is concerned, the architecture is somewhat unique in its style, for it is a blend of Mughal arches, Gothic style as well as Greek columns. The building is made of bricks and plastered with lime plaster in light yellow color (see plate 15).

The columns are of ionic style, standing in the main verandah of the building, two columns stand side by side and a total of 14 columns adorn the verandah. 12 out of these 14 columns stand in a set of two while two are at each end of the verandah (see plate 16). Inside the verandah there is a hall, the front of which is adorned with beautiful arches made out of stucco. These arches provide the doors and windows for the hall (see plate 16 A). Above the main hall, there is first floor with another hall of the same size and ventilated by the small windows that are decorated with Mughal style of arches from the outside (see plate 16 B). each window is separated by the pilasters in round but smaller than the columns on the ground floor. The architrave of the verandah is decorated with the spindles all over the cornice (see plate 16 B).

The same structure and its design are followed at the back side of the main building with the same style of decorations. The whole compound has other structures also, some of which have been converted into other buildings and the original is lost long ago, however, one more building with in this complex is of importance. This was once the residential part of the complex, which today is used as the office of the Industries Commission of Pakistan (see plate 17). This part was constructed in 1936 as is clear from one of the decorative grills of the verandah of the first floor (see plate 17 A). the building is white washed in pure white color and is out of bound for anyone who tries to approach. The front verandah is supported by the same type of columns as that in the case of the main hall, except that here only 6 columns were added, 4 in the middle and two on each side. At the end of the verandah

there are two rooms extended from two sides making a 3-dimensional shape with windows while the doors are provided at the side of the verandah. The main verandah is approached by the flight of steps now decorated with marble.

#### **4. Patiala House**

Patiala House is located at the Race Course Road, Lahore (see plate 18). Nothing survives today of this state guest house of the British period, for there are now residences and offices of the NAB with in the complex (see plates 18 A, B & C).

#### **5. Bahawalpur House**

The Bahawalpur House is located near Mazang chungli, Lahore. It was constructed in 1890 and Nawab Abbasi was the first resident of this house. Today GOR-III is located over the Bahawalpur House which has made the previous structure completely disappear from the surface.

#### **6. Farid Kot House**

Farid Kot House is located near Mazang Bus stop in Lahore, of which no building survives today. The main construction has long gone while new buildings were constructed later on in the vicinity where offices of the Board of Revenue and some other offices are located here.

#### **7. Wajid Ali Shah House**

Also known as Haveli Wajid Ali Shah is located near Mochi Gate, of the old Lahore. The Haveli was built by the Nawab of Oudh, Wajid Ali Shah who dedicated this building for the guests of East India Company. The building was constructed during the British time in the pure Mughal style of architecture (see plate 19). The Haveli was mainly used by the traders of East India Company as their relaxation spot between their trade ventures. It is today out of access for general public.

#### **8. Nabha House**

The Nabha House, located inside the vicinity of the University of Punjab today, was once under Sir Ganga Ram, who donated this building for the establishment of Hailey College of Commerce in 1927<sup>vii</sup>. Today a road in Lahore is named after Nabha, the famous Nabha Rod where important buildings and offices like Custom House stand.

#### **9. Kashmir House**

The Kashmir House is long lost, as nothing survives of this building. The researchers even looked for any information on the internet, but nothing could be found even there. Only the people of Lahore who

have seen the old times in the early eras of the establishment of Pakistan know that there was a building known as Kashmir house but no one remembers where it was located and how it looked.

### **Conclusion**

The city of Lahore is particularly known for its extraordinary architecture, its prosperous and assorted culture. The monuments which have been built over the years during different eras has shaped the city. Every ruler has left its mark upon the city which has made it a cultural capital of the country. During the British Raj of India, Lahore went through major transition in its architectural style from Mughal to Gothic and English thus emerging a new style now known as Indo-Saracenic architecture. Many of the examples of this period are scattered all over the city, of various nature, out of which the state guest houses were selected for the present study. These guest houses were used as residences for the state guests during their official visits, out of these 9, a few survive today. Many have been lost during the course of time, some have been reconstructed while some still stand today with the original grandeur that shows its splendid beauty. In many of the newspapers the issue of the preservation of these important buildings has been raised from time to time, but those lost cannot be recovered today. Only the need of the day is that whatever remains today, should last for the upcoming generations so that they know what legacy their ancestors have left for them to understand their past and to build their future.

## Plates

(Note: All the photos are taken by the researchers, or otherwise elsewhere mentioned.)





Plate 2: Blair House, USA



Plate 3: Hyderabad House, India



Plate 4: State Guest House, Vietnam



Plate 5: Kapurthala House, Lahore



Plate 5 (A): The sign board showing name of Kapurthala House



Plate 6: Entrance of Kapurthala House



Plate 7: Northern side of Kapurthala House (second entrance doorway)

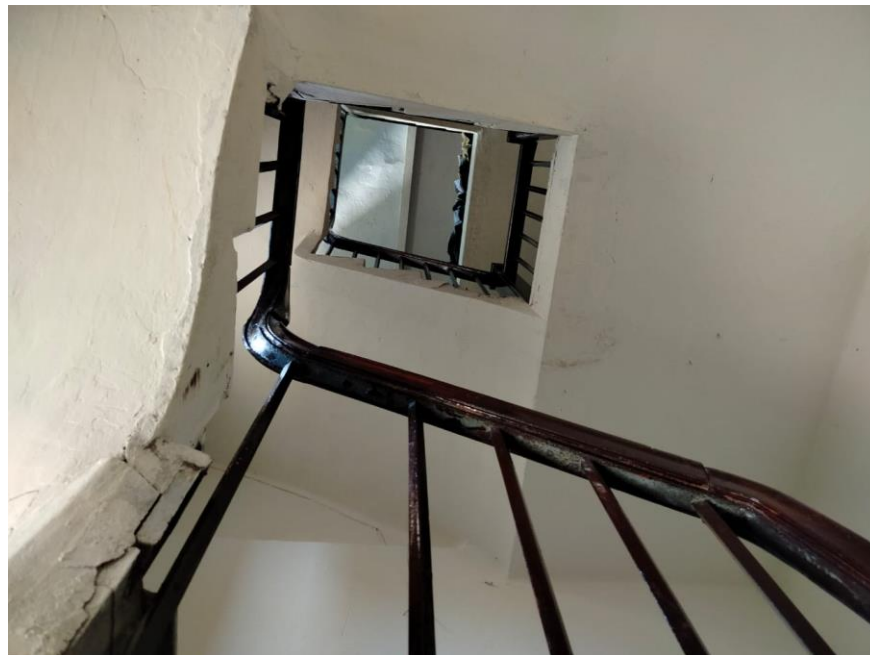


Plate 8: Staircase of Kapurthala House



Plate 8 A: Staircase railing in its original form



Plate 9: the author showing blocked window beneath the small attic type store



Plate 9 A



Plate 10: Brick and plaster along with stucco work



Plate 10 A: Entrance from the road made of bricks



Plate 11: Stucco roundels on three sides of the door





Plate 11 A: Showing the fret work or *Jaali* work



Plate 11 B: Stucco Decoration beneath the window



Plate 11 C: Small three directional ventilators



Plate 12: Chamba House Lahore (courtesy: Google Images)



Plate 13: Floor tiles of Chamba House  
(courtesy: Tahir & Khilat)



Plate 13 A: The stairs

(courtesy: Tahir & Khilat)



Plate 13 B: The stairs

(courtesy: Tahir & Khilat)



Plate 13 C: Original flooring in the stair hall

(courtesy: Tahir & Khilat)



Plate 14: Sign Board showing the location of Ponch House

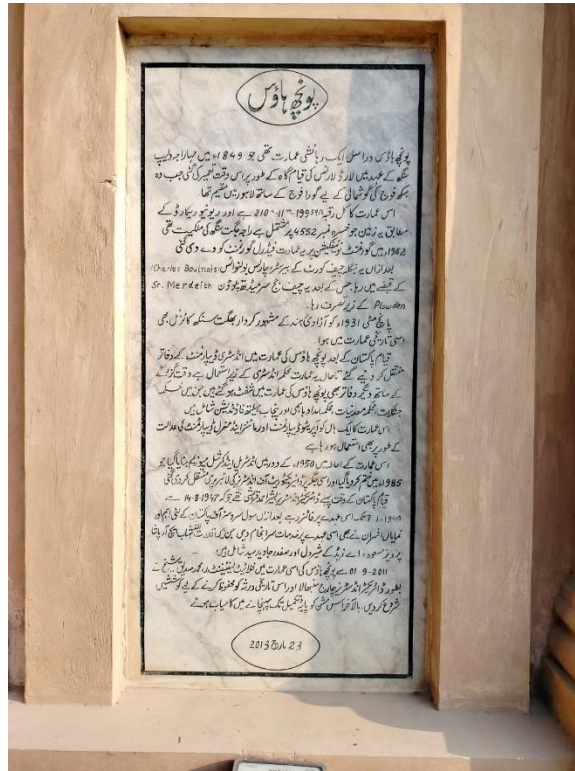


Plate 14 A: The information board showing the total area of Ponch House



Plate 15: Ponch House, Lahore



Plate 16: Ionic style of columns at Ponch House



Plate 16 A: Arches of Gothic style



Plate 16 B: Mughal style of arches on the first floor





Plate 17: Residential part at Ponch house



Plate 17 B: Grill showing date of the construction, 1936



Plate 18: Road sign showing way to Patiala House on Race Course Road, Lahore



Plate 18 A: Pillar of a house showing name of Patiala House



Plate 18 B: Houses constructed inside the vicinity of Patiala House



Plate 19: Wajid Ali Shah House, Lahore

(courtesy: Shiraz Hassan Via Facebook)

## Bibliography

Aslam, E., (2020); *Lahore Lahore Aye* (in Urdu); Combined Publishers, Lahore

Gudur, (2018); “A Study On Indo-Saracenic Architectural Heritage.” *International Journal of Pure and Applied Mathematics*.

Kabir, Najma, Abbas, G. & Hayat, K.; (2017): “A Historic Journey of the Lahore City, to Attain Its Identity through Architecture.” *European Journal of Interdisciplinary Studies*, no. 8. Pp. 87-97.  
<https://doi.org/10.26417/ejis.v8i1.p87-97>.

Lateef, S.M.; (1892); *Lahore: Its History, Architecture Remains and Antiquities*. Edited by Khan Bahadur, Sang-e-Meel publications, Lahore.

Naeem U. Din n.d. “Shadows of Empire: *The Mughal and British Colonial Heritage of Shadows of Empire: The Mughal and British Colonial Heritage of Lahore*.” City University of New York.

Peck, L.; (2015); *Lahore The Architectural Heritage*; Ferozsons (Pvt), Ltd. Lahore.

Tahir, S. & Khilat, F. (2016); Condition Assessment of Historic Chamba House, Lahore before and after Conservation; *Journal of the Pakistan Historic Society*; Vol LXIV, No. 2; Hamdard Foundation, Pakistan.

---

<sup>i</sup> <https://ncc-ccn.gc.ca/search?=&q=7+Rideau+Gate#gsc.tab=0&gsc.q=7%20Rideau%20Gate&gsc.page=1>

<sup>ii</sup> <https://www.state.gov/bureaus-offices/secretary-of-state/office-of-the-chief-of-protocol/blair-house-division/>

<sup>iii</sup> <https://itdc.co.in/hyderabad-house/>

<sup>iv</sup> Interview of the official at Chamba House

<sup>v</sup> <https://aliusmanbaig.blogspot.com/2021/04/poonch-house-lahore.html>

<sup>vi</sup> <https://web.archive.org/web/20070102181919/http://www.pu.edu.pk/departments/default.asp?deptid=22>