

# THE TRADITION OF MUGHAL HAMMAMS IN KASHMIR

ASGAR HASSAN SAMOON <sup>1</sup> AND HAKIM SAMEER HAMDANI <sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup>Department of Higher Education, J&K Government

<sup>2</sup>INTACH, Kashmir chapter

## Abstract

The Mughals conquered Kashmir in 1586 during the reign of Emperor Akbar. Over the centuries during their rule, they introduced various architectural features in the land. Of these, the *hammam* is the most distinct building typology that was introduced to the region under the Mughals. The paper traces the history of *hammams* in Kashmir, its evolution and how it emerged as a major socio-cultural institution in the region.

**Keywords:** *Mughal; hammam; Kashmir; khanqahs; mosques; architecture*

*'Whoever has committed many sins should build a bath (as penance.)'*

Yusuf B. 'Abdalhadi, an early Arab writer

## Introduction

The institution of *hammam* has its origin in the hot bath houses which were widely prevalent in the Roman Empire. In fact along with the *agora*, the baths served as one of the most popular civic institution associated with ancient Rome. From Rome the tradition traveled to various parts of the empire including the Asia Minor.

The institution found a new lease of life within the Islamic world and was popularly referred to as the Turkish bath during most of the medieval times. Within the world of Islam these bath houses were referred to as *hammams*<sup>i</sup>. While the tradition of *hammam* in the Muslim world is generally associated with the Ottoman period, the actual construction of *hammam* can be seen from the early days of the Arabs empire, under the Ummayyads(661-750CE). The Arabs constructed their own versions of the Greek-Roman baths following their conquests of Alexandria. Examples of bath houses have been excavated at Qusayr Amra and Ukhaidar<sup>ii</sup> dating back to the Ummayyads.

As the Islamic faith spread, so did the *hammam*, which accounts for many such buildings still surviving from Iran, Asia Minor, India and across North Africa from Egypt to Morocco. Before the re-conquest of Spain, there were *hammams*<sup>iii</sup> in this region.

The *hammam* survived as the medieval world equivalent of the contemporary sauna and used to house separate chambers for cold and hot baths along with space for masseurs. Within the precinct of royal palaces it developed into a major institution within the *harem* where important political discussions were held and decisions made.

Aside from the royal *hammams* were the bath houses of more public nature. These were commonly built under royal patronage or used to be part of an endowment (*wakf*) surrounding caravanserai, mosques, *khanqahs* etc. Admittance to these public *hammams* was open to all although in some cases a nominal fee used to be charged. In many cases residences of the wealthier members of the society also used to house *hammams*.

### ***Hamamms in Kashmir***

Conflicting accounts exist about the person who was responsible for introducing the concept of *hammam* into the valley of Kashmir. In the period pre dating the advent of Muslim rule in the region, we find no textual or archaeological evidence that would indicate the existence of such an institution<sup>iv</sup>. Yet, given the severity of climate the possibility of a somewhat similar institution serving as a public bath with supply of heating water etc, cannot be ruled out.

While some writers give the credit for this innovation to Sultan Zain-ul-Abideen (r.1420-70CE) others maintain that the Mughal conqueror Mirza Haider Dughlat(d. 959AH/1551CE) was responsible for introducing *hammams* in Kashmir<sup>v</sup>. Zain-ul-Abideen is widely acclaimed on account of his patronage for various arts and crafts in Kashmir. His court included a galaxy of prominent poets, theologians and artists who were encouraged to immigrate to Kashmir from their native lands from places as far as Medina, Persia and Central Asia. The Sultan was also a great patron of architecture. Unproven legends also maintain that as a young prince, Zain-ul-Abideen visited Samarkand which at that time was serving as the capital of t Amir Taimur (Timurlane). The mausoleum that Zain-ul-Abideen built for his mother at Srinagar, "*Budshah Dumath*", is said to be modeled on Taimur's tomb, "*Gur-i-Amir*". This building is in fact a unique departure from traditional Kashmiri architecture and bears a great deal of resemblance with Timurid style of building. Within the valley of Kashmir, this building exist as an isolated experiment with no established prototype. Though the design of this building cannot be accepted as a reason for accepting the notion that Zain-ul-Abideen visited Samarqand, nevertheless it does establish the fact that the Sultan had builders who had firsthand knowledge of architecture as being practiced in the wider Islamic world. Thus the possibility of the introduction of *hammam* into Kashmir during his reign does assume a certain amount of hypothetical possibility.

An argument forwarded for Zain-ul-Abideen as being the introducer of *hammam* to Kashmir is his construction of a complex near his capital city of Naushera for a prominent Muslim divine at his court, Sayyid Mohammed Madni. This architectural ensemble (c.848 AH/1444CE) comprises the tomb of the Sayyid, a mosque and a *hammam*. The *hammam* has been recently reconstructed from the plinth and all archaeological remnants of the old *hammam* have been lost. Historically, the shrine of Madin saheb underwent widespread renovation and additions<sup>vi</sup>, especially during the reign of the Mughal Emperor Shah Jehan (r. 1628-58CE). The entrance gateway to the shrine based on the design of an Iranian *pishtaq* as well as the glazed tile work that used to cover it date from the Mughal period. In the absence of any archaeological evidence it is not possible to place the construction of the *hammam* within the period that is associated with Zain-ul Abideen.

Crucially, two significant and somewhat detailed historical accounts exist from the latter part of the Sultanate period about the construction activity that was undertaken at two prominent Kashmiri *khanqahs*. One of these was the reconstruction of *Khanqah-I Maulla* at Srinagar and the other was the construction of *Khanqah-I Noorbakshiya* at Zadibal. During the reign of Kajji Chak, *Khanqah-I Maulla* was reconstructed, the site expanded and ancillary buildings constructed within the precinct<sup>vii</sup>. These include an *ash khaneh* (pottage house) and a *langar* (public kitchen). Significantly, all accounts from the period are silent about the construction of a *hammam* during this reconstruction<sup>viii</sup>. Similarly in *Thafat-ul Ahbab*, we are left with a detailed description of the construction of *Khanqah-I Noorbakshiya* by Mir Shams-ud Din Iraki. While this hagiographic work is replete with a descriptive architectural account of how the *khanqah* was constructed it is again devoid of any reference to the construction of a *hammam*<sup>ix</sup>.

Following the death of Mirza Haider Dughlat and beginning of the Chak ascendancy, we again find brief textual evidences of major architectural activities undertaken, right down till the end of the Sultanate. These include the construction of *khanqahs*, *aastans* (shrines) as well as mosques and *madrassas*. Of these a slightly more detailed account exists of the construction of *Khanqah-I Hassanabad*<sup>x</sup>. Again we find no mention of a *hammam* being constructed at the site. Significantly at *Khanqah-I Sokhta*, Nawa Kadal archeological traces exist of the largest *khanqah* constructed during the Chak rule. The *khanqah* was built for Baba Khalil-ul Lah (d. d.1000AH/1591CE),<sup>xi</sup> and still survives albeit as a ruin. Again like at Hassanabad we find no trace or reference of a *hammam* at the site, which otherwise remains the most visible physical manifestation of architectural developments undertaken at that time.

Given available archaeological evidences as well as historical textual reports from the Sultanate period in Kashmir, the idea that the institution of *hammam* existed in Kashmir before advent of Mughal region cannot be established.

### The Mughal Hammams and Kashmir

“One particular Mughal contribution to architecture was the *hammam*, the bathhouse, which followed the standard near eastern pattern with a room, or perhaps several, for undressing and dressing, the cold room and the bathing room itself..”<sup>xii</sup>

The earliest evidence of a Mughal *hammam* building existing in Kashmir today dates back to the 17<sup>th</sup> century. It comprises of a large single storey building that was part of an ensemble of pavilions and buildings constructed by Emperor Jehangir (r.1605-1628CE) at Shalimar. The *hammam* was recently conserved by INTACH Kashmir, revealing the elaborate mechanism of heating the different spaces.

Another significant *hammam* also associated with Jehangir, is located at Achbal. This *hammam* is a part of the pleasure garden of “*Begumabad*” constructed by Jehangir. Though the garden was laid down by Jehangir, yet it is not clear whether the *hammam* forms a part of his design or is a part of the reconstruction and alterations undertaken by his granddaughter, Jehanara begum in between 1634-1640CE.

The last three surviving examples of a Mughal *hammam* in Kashmir date back to the time of Shah Jehans eldest son, Dara Shikoh(d.1695). These consist of a *hammam* (c. 1059 AH/1649 CE) constructed in the Mulla Shah Mosque complex in the royal Mughal city of Nagar Nagar (Kathi Darwaza) and another constructed in the foothills of Zabarwan Mountain within the Pari Mehal complex. Both these complexes are seen as a joint building venture between Dara Shikoh and his spiritual guide, Akhund Mulla Shah<sup>xiii</sup> (d.1661). Dara Shikoh also constructed a mosque for Mulla Shah at Ganderbal, overlooking the Anchar lake, which houses a small single storey *hammam*. In fact, some recent researchers also accredit Dara Shikohs sister, Jehanara *begum* with collaboration in these projects. Jehanara was a disciple of Mulla Shah and a vivid builder herself.

The *hammams* that were constructed by the Mughals in Kashmir follow established imperial spatial layout in terms of organizing of spaces. The Mughal *hammams* were based on three functional units, a *rakht kan* (dressing room), a *sard khana* (cold room) and a *garam khana* (hot room).The *rakht kan* is commonly referred to as *jamvar khana* in Kashmir. There was no architectural norm for the shape and arrangement of these individual units, which could be ...anything from a single chamber to a group of interconnecting rooms<sup>xiv</sup>. This basic

arrangement based on three distinct functional units can be seen in all of the surviving Mughal *hammams* in Kashmir.

It was during the reign of Emperor Aurangzeb, that Fazil Khan(1697), the *subedar* of Kashmir constructed a *hammam* at Pather masjid in Srinagar city. This is the first known historical reference that we have from Mughal period recording the construction of a public *hammam* in Kashmir<sup>xv</sup>.

Over a period of time, the *hammam* also became a part of local Kashmiri vernacular architecture. Unlike the Mughal *hammams* with its formal layout, the traditional Kashmiri *hammam* consists of a single room or chamber with associated small cubicle for bath. The floor of the *hammam* is covered with limestones resting on masonry pillars. A hearth with a copper tank is the other main essentials of the *hammam*, which is heated by burning of firewood. A slightly more elaborate system can be found at public *hammams* associated with prominent *khanqahs* and mosques of the region.

In the cold winters of Kashmir, *hammam* served as a major public institution. Though the residences of many of the city elite had their personal *hammams*, it was the major religious places of the time namely mosques and *khanqahs* that served the general masses of the city. These mosques and *khanqahs* were provided with attached *hammams*, for the benefit of the worshippers. An interesting feature of these communal *hammams* is their absence in any Hindu place of worship, though many Kashmiri Pandit residences boasted of this feature. The reason may be the communal form of Muslim worship at fixed times, which insured that certain basic civic features related to ablution; bath etc would remain available to the worshipper. Writing in 1895, Sir Walter Lawrence a keen observer of Kashmiri life, speaks about these public *hammams* being a, ‘...great institution, and there are four public baths in Srinagar.’<sup>xvi</sup>.

Of the principal Muslim religious places in Srinagar, public *hammams* existed at *Khanqah-I Maulla* and *Dargah Hazratbal*. The *hammam* at *Khanqah-I Maulla* was apparently constructed in the Afghan period during the time of *subedar* Mir Hazzar Khan, while repairs were conducted by the Sheikh Ghulam-ud din in the 19<sup>th</sup> century. The *hammam* at Hazratbal was constructed by Nawwab of Decca, who traced his ancestry to Kashmir<sup>xvii</sup>. While the historical *hammam* at Hazratbal was demolished in the 1970’s, the *hammam* at Khanqah survives as the oldest extant public *hammam* in Kashmir. Comprising a domed square chamber with small bathing cubicles on the side, the *hammam* also includes an adjoining low height mosque, used mostly in winter.

The tradition of having a low height prayer hall opening onto the *hammam* was well established by 19<sup>th</sup> century in Srinagar. Examples of similar spatial arrangement exist at the *Dastgeer saheb*<sup>xviii</sup> shrine, *Asar-I Sharief* Narwara and *Masjid Hajji Eidoh* Zadibal, all dating back to the 19<sup>th</sup> century<sup>xix</sup>. It is also from the ending part of 19<sup>th</sup> century that we find evidences of *hammams* within the residential houses associated with the city elite.

By the early 1980's most of the city mosques also comprised *hammams*, as public institutions. This was an urban feature that was also repeated in major towns of Kashmir. These *hammams* were open to the public, free of cost and the maintenance was overseen by the local "mohalla" or community through contributions. These *hammams* aside from being part of a mosque complex also served as a major social institution. In keeping with old traditions many of the newer residences being constructed in Kashmir, especially in the city of Srinagar also continued to incorporate a *hammam*.

### Conclusion

The *hammams* of Kashmir were introduced as royal institutions by Mughals on their conquest of Kashmir in the 16<sup>th</sup> century. Initially, reserved for the nobility, they soon became a part of the social-cultural landscape of the land when major mosques, *khanqahs* and *aastans* were endowed with *hammams*. Gradually, during the later part of the 19<sup>th</sup> century these *hammams* were also linked with the residential architecture of the region, when many wealthy merchants and *jagirdars* constructed *hammams* within their residences. The phenomenon of *hammams* became more widespread in the post-independence period as local Mohall mosques that were being reconstructed also adopted this unique feature linked with social comfort, physical hygiene as well as religious tenants of ablutions. Simultaneously, while the residential architecture of the region became increasingly delinked from the historical vernacular architecture of the region, *hammams* continued to be built, thus marking a cultural continuation of an architectural tradition that became widespread in the 19<sup>th</sup> century.



Fig.i: Post-conservation, hammam at Shalimar bagh, 17<sup>th</sup> century



Fig ii: Conserved hammam at Shalimar bagh, interiors of the main jamwar khana, 17<sup>th</sup> century





Fig.iii: Mughal hammam built by Dara Shikouh at Nagar nagar, 17th century



Fig.iv: Hammam at Khanqah-i- Maulla, Afghan rule

### References:

1. The origin of the term *hammam* is said to be from the Arabic word, *hamma*, meaning to 'heat up'.
2. Petersen, A. (1996). *Dictionary of Islamic Architecture* (London: Routledge), 107. Similarly, *hammam* from Fatimid period have been excavated at Fustat in Egypt, see Robert Hillenbrand, *Islamic Art and Architecture* (London, Thames & Hudson, 1999), 72.
3. On the *hammams* of Spain, see Ana Ruiz, *Vibrant Andalusia*, (2007). *The Spice of Life in Southern Spain* (New York: Algora Publishing).
4. Kalhana, (2007). *Rajatarangini/A Chronicle of Kings of Kashmir*, transl. MA stein (Srinagar: Gulshan books),
5. Dutt, J.C. (2009). *Kings of Kashmira* (Srinagar: Gulshan books).
6. On Kashmir, Mirza Haider Dughlat writes, 'In the town there are many lofty buildings constructed of fresh cut pine. Most of these are at least five stories high and each story contains apartments, halls, galleries and towers.' Mirza Haider Dughlat, *Tarikh-I Rashidi/History of Rashid*, ed. N.Elias (London: S.Low, Martson and Company, 1895). The 18<sup>th</sup> century Kashmiri historian Khawja Azam is the first writer to ascribe the introduction of *hammams* in Kashmir to Mirza Haider, Khajwa Azam Deedhmari, *Waqat-i-Kashmir/Events of Kashmir*, transl. Zahoor Shahdad Azhar (Srinagar: Gulshan Publishers &Exporters, 2003),187.
7. Deedhmari, *Waqat-I Kashmir*, 110.
8. This happened during the reign of Sultan Mohammed Shah under the *wazarat* of Malik Kaji Chak.
9. For a detailed description see, *Baharistan-I Shahi*, trans. Kashi Nath Pandita
10. Ali, M.M. (2006). *Thufat-ul Ahbab/Gift for Friends*, transl. Dr GR Jan(Srinagar: Jan publications,).
11. *Baharistan-I Shahi*

12. Haider, Tarikh-I Kashmir.
13. Annemarie Schimmel, (2004). *The Empire of the Great Mughals: History, Art & Culture* (London: Reaktion Books).
14. Akhund Mulla Shah Badakshi was a Qadri Sufi saint who was the principal *khalifa* of the saint Miyan Mir of Lahore. During the reign of Shah Jehan he settled down in Kashmir and became the spiritual *pir* of both Dara and his sister Jehanra. Following the execution of Dara, he was recalled to Lahore by Aurnagzeb Alamgir(r.1658-1707), were he lies buried.
15. Koch, E. (2002). *Mughal Architecture* (New Delhi: Oxford University Press).
16. The *hammam* was repaired by Sardar Mir Hazzar Khan in 1208AH/1793CE during Afghan rule.
17. Lawrence, W. (1996). *The Valley of Kashmir* (Jammu: Kitab Gahr,) 281-291.
18. Sufi, G.M.D. (2008). *Kashir, vol.ii* (Srinagar:Ali Mohammed & Sons), 520.
19. While the *khanqah* at Dastgeer saheb was constructed in 121AH/1806CE, the *hammam* mosque (also known as *wandi masjid* or winter mosque) dates to the reconstruction carried by Khawja Sana-ullah Shawl in 1294AH/1877CE.
20. Shehar-I Kashmir, (2010). 2vols. (New Delhi: Skyline Publications).

