

# Evolution and Development of Public Architecture in the Punjab Communication & Works Department

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## Abstract

*Public Architecture identifies and solves practical problems of human interaction in the built environment and acts as a catalyst for public discourse. Pakistan has a significant long architectural history however, public architecture set its pace in the Punjab during British Period with the establishment of Public Works Department (PWD) in 1849. A separate branch of Buildings and Roads was created in April 1899; succeeded by the Communication & Works (C&W) department in 1962. The engineers were considered competent for designing and execution of buildings without the help of an architect. With the increase in the building activity the need of a Consulting Architect was felt. Basil Martin Sullivan from Britain was appointed as Consulting Architect to Govt. of the Punjab in 1914. Since then the public sector architects have professionally designed many important buildings, but there is no documentation available for ready reference. It seemed like the architecture of a lesser value. The time has come to take it seriously and acknowledge the contribution made by this department over the years. The paper is just a humble beginning on the subject and will attempt to delineate the historical perspective in a chronological, albeit overlapping sequence. The first author's long experience in the C & W Department acted as a catalyst in generating the desired information coupled with the Archives of the office of Chief Architect. The research paper will be beneficial in providing a baseline for conducting further research on public architecture in Pakistan and the region.*

## 1. Introduction

*Just as the prosperity of an individual is reflected in the standard of his residence, so public buildings provide an idea of the prosperity of a nation (Hasan, A., 1963) [1].*

Public architecture, in its broadest sense refers to buildings, which are constructed for public purposes in towns and cities by the local development authorities, municipalities etc. On a holistic level all architecture is considered public, as it comprises the built environment, which is exposed to public view and review. At one end of the spectrum it can be aesthetically pleasing and intellectually engaging and at the other end it can offend the visual sensibilities of the people. Though all architecture whether institutional or individual, public or private is equally worthy of attention but, Public architecture as a medium contains information about impacts of power on governmental institutions so it becomes more meaningful. There is a common perception that public architecture in Pakistan is unsustainable and inferior as compared to architecture generated by the private sector, which is considered comparatively more innovative.

Online Etymology Dictionary suggest that the word "public" has been derived from a Latin word *publicus*, altered from Old L. *poplicus* "pertaining to the people"[2]. In one sense, of course, architecture is inescapably public as buildings stand there for all people to see. Archaeologists describe Public Architecture as the material expression of power [3] whereas the American Institute of Architects (AIA) defines it as any work that is funded in part or wholly by public money [4]. Predominantly, public architecture is

the architecture of Government buildings and has the prime responsibility of housing public services and providing utility and amenity to the people they serve. Graham (2006) however states that Government buildings are not public buildings; they are for the most part offices in which the majority of people have no business to be [5]. He characterizes public buildings as those whose function is such that it serves anyone and everyone, and they can properly be called public architecture when their very features make this evident.

Whatever the rhetorical meaning, public buildings stand as a testimony to character of a nation. Globally, they reflect the investment of governmental/public resources and are usually interpreted as the embodiments of political and economic power. The architecture of such buildings is often especially devised to reflect the performance of this power, incorporating a symbolism that serves as a signpost for a particular societal order. For this paper, the term public architecture only encompasses the architecture produced by the Punjab Architecture Department, as it is the largest and oldest public sector department dealing with architectural commissions in the Punjab. This may seem biased, as there are other public sector Departments, which also take up architectural assignments such as Lahore Development Authority, Housing & Physical Planning Department, etc. However, it is not within the scope of this paper, but to leave it as a starting point for the next stage. This paper recognizes achievements of Punjab Architecture Department's architectural works and the architects who, by their skill, professionalism, dedication, and the desire to add value have consistently fostered quality in the public built environment.

## **2. Historical Perspective (1849 to 1947)**

Upon annexation of the Punjab by the British in 1849, the Local Govt. appointed Robert Napier, later Lord Napier of Magdala to execute all public works in the Punjab region, the NWFP and adjoining territories, through the Board of Administration. Napier equipped with a Civil Engineering qualification from the Kent School of Military Engineering, United Kingdom, did pioneering work in the design and execution of civil, military and public works in the Indian Sub-Continent. Subsequently this led to the creation of Public Works Department (PWD) with Napier leading it as Chief Engineer. Napier was an enthusiastic advocate of native styles and in a lecture on modern architecture in India he asserted “the Govt. of India might do well to consider whether the *Musalman* forms might not be adopted generally as the official style of architecture” [6]. He considered it far superior with reference to shade, coolness, ventilation, convenience and beauty.

The roots of present day public architecture in the Punjab date back to the days of British period undivided Punjab. During its initial years design & execution of general public utility buildings were understandably pushed down below in the order of priorities. Hasan (1963) describes that schools and hospitals were generally constructed to win over a particular area and enlist the support of local inhabitants. The administration went on putting up stray offices and buildings as and when necessary [7]. When the British government consolidated its position, an appropriate architecture for India as a symbol of power became of a serious concern. To have greater control new cities were developed and Government buildings were erected. Volwahn (2003) points out that the architects of the day were faced with unimaginable challenges. Could a seamless transition be possible from imperial architecture of the recently Muslim Mughal emperors, or were Greece and Rome the only civilizations in human history to have produced a convincing formal language for imperial architecture? [8]. The Public Works Member of the Viceroy’s Council in 1877 wrote:

*“...there can be little doubt that buildings for native purposes, such as the followings should be built in some form of native architecture: temples, mosques, colleges, schools, markets, hospitals, asylums; whilst those specially for the comforts and wants of Europeans such as residences, churches, offices, railway buildings, etc are more appropriate for some European style adapted to the various climates of India”* [9].

In 1889 within the PWD, a dedicated Buildings and Roads (B&R) Branch was carved out by a further modification of administrative arrangements. It was made responsible for design, execution and maintenance of public buildings and roads. Generally the PWD worked as a construction management agency with an attached Design Office with the B&R Branch, staffed with engineers and

draftsmen. As public buildings began to multiply, many debates were generated on the architectural aspects, focusing on design, aesthetics and style considerations. The public buildings of the early British India period were seldom so to speak consultative in style. It was not considered necessary to invite the natives for approval of plans or designs. The Directors of the East India Company thought only in terms of debit and credit, when giving approval for an appropriate budget [10]. Function and aesthetics of public buildings was not their consideration. Consequent to dissolution of the East India Company in 1858 and subsequent proclamation of Queen Victoria as Empress of India, the public buildings required an imperial character. Most of the buildings were adaptations of the buildings designed by leading British architects of that time like Wren, Adam, Nash and others in London and other places [11]. The British also assimilated and adopted the native Indian styles in architecture leading to the development of Indo-Saracenic style towards the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century. The style was Indian on the outside since the facade was built with an Indian touch while the interior was solely Victorian. In fact it was a hybrid architectural style which combined in an intelligent manner diverse architectural elements of Hindu and Mughal with Gothic cusped arches, domes, spires, tracery, minarets, stained glass etc. Though Victorian in essence, it borrowed heavily from the native style of Mughal and Afghan rulers.

## **3. Consulting Architect to Govt. of the Punjab (1914 to 1947)**

A dire need of experts in the field of architecture was felt within the engineering oriented PWD. Initially consulting architects from the United Kingdom were commissioned by the Government for the planning and design of important buildings of institutional or ceremonial character. The routine, mundane buildings were left to the engineers and the draftsmen for design and execution. Once the assignment was completed the architects would return to the country of their origin. In order to establish the power of the British Empire on native soil, the development of public architecture went beyond practical needs and had to mirror the political aims and hopes of the colonial power. As the number of important buildings to be erected increased, the post of a Consulting Architect to Government of the Punjab was constituted in January 1914. With the appointment of Basil Martin Sullivan from Britain as Consulting Architect to Govt. of the Punjab on contract basis, the journey of professionally designed architectural works in the Punjab Government was inception. The Govt. of India Act 1935 prompted the construction of Punjab Legislative Assembly Building, which was commissioned to the Chief Consulting Architect during the same year. Being also the urban designer of the Charring Cross, he had already designed two impressive buildings in neo-classical style on the eastern and western flanks of the square, these being the New Masonic Lodge and Shah Din Buildings both designed as

private commissions, as he was free to take up private commissions. Despite limitations of working in an engineering dominated setup Sullivan left an indelible mark on public architecture in the Punjab. This is amicably reflected in the design for the Punjab Legislative Assembly building (1938), New Mosonic Lodge (Freemasons Hall 1916) and Shahdin Building (1914).

#### 4. Early Years Post Independence & Beyond (1950s – 1970s)

Upon partition of British India and independence in 1947, Pakistan inherited a state structure set up by the British and affairs in the PWD were no different. The building codes and regulations from British practice reigned supreme and are still the best documents recorded on the subject. The overall legacy of the British PWD continued where the Executive Engineer tendered the works, selected the contractors, provided the site supervision, verified the contractor's bills and made the payments. By virtue of this arrangement he was a key person in the process and hence most visible and all powerful and supported by the administrative and professional codes and norms. This of course left a restricted role for the architect, which continues to date with some variations.

There were only a handful of local architects, at the most half a dozen and the situation did not improve until mid 1950's when their number increased mainly through immigration from India. At the national level, the prime mover in the stream of public architecture in Pakistan was Mehdi Ali Miza, who stands out among his generation as an architect of exceptional talent and awarded the "Pride of Performance". In 1947 he migrated to Karachi; joined the Public Works Department (PWD), Karachi and designed a number of buildings in different parts of the country. Being acutely aware of the constraints of the PWD, he had been accepting private commissions while officially employed in the PWD. He was commissioned to design the first government building in Islamabad, the new Capital of Pakistan. Mumtaz (1985) comments that:

*"Mirza himself must have been acutely aware of the limitations of the PWD. He fought hard to gain recognition for architecture as a profession distinct from engineering, insisting that he needed trained architects, not engineers...He was conscious of the need to raise public awareness of architecture, giving lectures and writing frequently for the monthly Engineering Forum, which appeared in 1959, and for which he was the chief advisor on architecture"[12].*

Another pioneering architect who played a vital role in the development of architectural profession at the national level is Khawaja Zahir-ud-Deen who moved to Karachi as the Senior Architect in the Pakistan Public Works Department in 1956, later setting up his own architectural practice in 1964. In 1961, he was appointed a member of the Experts Committee advising the Federal Capital

Commission on the selection of a site for the new capital of Pakistan [13]. At the provincial level and with special reference to the Punjab, the charge of post of Consulting Architect went to Habib J.A. Somjee, Town Planner, Minor Improvement Trusts, Punjab. The early years of post independence were spent on rehabilitating the refugees and stabilizing administrative machinery. The B&R Branch of PWD, Punjab was kept busy as the pace of development picked up momentum and by early 1950's the average rate of development was 15 times more than that of undivided Punjab. This meant more works for PWD, but not necessarily of creative nature. However sporadic buildings of professional merit were also designed. Fine functional public architecture designed by Habib J.A. Somjee like the Cadet College at Hassanabdal with its simple detailing made a presence. This was followed by dignified Nishter Medical College and Hospital, at Multan, inspired by Art Deco optics [Figure 1]. The Stadium at Lahore (now Qaddafi Stadium) designed by Consulting Architect Murat Khan with daring structural design for large span R.C.C. cantilevers by Muhammad Ashraf, father of the first author, was the pride of PWD. It is interesting to note that during the extensive renovation of the Stadium for the World Cup the original cantilevers due to their sound design were retained. During 1951-1960 large-scale restoration of the Badshahi Mosque was successfully undertaken by the PWD, with restoration drawings painstakingly prepared by the Consulting Architect's Office. Ironically the entire credit for the project is attributed to the Chief Engineer Buildings as per marble plaque installed inside the Mosque, a clear testimony to the high visibility of the engineer vis-à-vis the non visibility of the architect in the public sector.



Fig. 1: Nishter Medical College, Multan

The Communication & Works (C&W) is the forerunner of the PWD. It was constituted as an administrative department in 1962, succeeded the Buildings and Roads (B&R) Branch of the PWD. Later in 1973 with placement of the Office of Consulting Architect under the direct administrative control of the Secretary C&W as an attached Department namely the Punjab Architecture Department. The post of Chief Consulting Architect was re designated as Chief Architect Punjab and A.R. Haye was

posted as the first Chief Architect Punjab. The limitations of the set up in which he was working were acute and this compounded with the fact that there was hardly any meaningful role for the architect, which resulted in non-descript architecture, mostly standard designs in the Health, Education, Police and Jails Sectors with the exception of few buildings like Bahawalpur Medical College etc. These were adopted by various Client Departments and Buildings Departments on their own without getting the architect's input regarding their functional or aesthetic feasibility. This obviously was done for convenience, as there was a lack of general awareness about the importance of architecture as well as architects as subject specialists. Besides it was the prevalent policy that public buildings should be austere even at the stake of resultant demeaning structures.

## **5. The Professional Awareness (1980s to 1990s)**

The single most vital event that successfully advocated the importance of the role played by architects in development at national and provincial levels was the First Agha Khan Award giving ceremony held at Shalimar Gardens, Lahore in 1980. This was participated by local as well as international participants. In 1983 the architects were finally recognized as a professional body and given legal status by the creation of a statutory body "Pakistan Council of Architects and Town Planners (PCATP)". These two happenings along with the inception of IAP in 1957 had direct as well as indirect bearings on the awareness about importance of professionally designed architecture.

A marked leap towards progressiveness in the public architecture designed at the Punjab Architecture Department became evident in 1980's when reliance on standard designs was reduced and custom designs were prepared for the Client Departments. These included the Lahore High Court Bench Buildings at Rawalpindi and Multan [Figure 2 & 3]. The Bench at Rawalpindi designed by A.D. Asad Bhutta, Chief Architect Punjab had particularly stylish design inspired by Moorish features. Foreign Student's Hostel at King Edward Medical College designed by Nasim Ullah, Chief Architect Punjab was among the pioneer buildings in public sector to have fair face brick façade with intricate built in brick patterns [Figure 4]. General Hospital and Lady Aitchison Hospitals at Lahore by Rashida Baig later Chief Architect Punjab both in brick facing followed suit [Figure 5 & 6].

During the 1990's numerous buildings were designed for the Health and Education sectors inclusive of District Headquarter Hospitals, Tehsil Headquarter Hospitals, Degree Colleges, Post Graduate Blocks in various Colleges etc. Of these post graduate blocks at Lahore the ones at Kinnared College for Women, Government College and Queens Mary College stood out among the rest due to the fine brickwork [Figure 7 & 8]. In the public sector the 90's decade predominately sported brick facades, which had its

merits as brick displays not only color and presence but also permanence.



**Figure 2: Lahore High Court Bench, Rawalpindi**



**Figure 3: Lahore High Court Bench, Multan**



**Fig.4: Foreign Student's Hostel, King Edward Medical College, Lahore**

## **6. The Transformation (2001 onwards)**

The national and provincial budgets reflect the intentions and policies of the Govt. The Annual Development Program (ADP) for the Punjab by delineating the development works speaks of the seriousness of the Govt. to achieve development goals. Post 9/11 in 2001 an



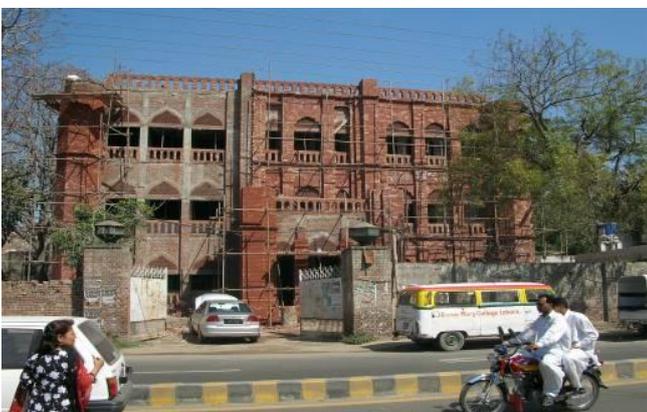
**Fig. 5: General Hospital, Lahore**



**Fig. 6: Lady Aitchison Hospital, Lahore**



**Fig.7: Post Graduate Block, G. C., Lahore**



**Fig. 8: Post Graduate Block, Queens Mary College, Lahore**

economic boom was experienced by the country and the Punjab was no exception. The most powerful departments critically regulating the development activities in the Punjab are the Finance and the Planning and Development Departments. Their policies play a definite role in shaping the built environment. With the economic boom more funding for the public sector projects was made available by the Finance Department and the P&D Department gave concurrence for better space standards and superior specifications. It was realized that the initial higher costs of better specifications is invariably offset by subsequent lower maintenance costs. Consequently, the public sector clients exercised more discernability regarding their choices leading to comfortable and aesthetically satisfying buildings with superior specifications. Here was a golden chance for the Punjab Architecture Department for transformation by rising above the general mediocrity. This coupled with the IT revolution provided tremendous possibilities. The application of computer technology was initially resisted at the overall governmental level, simply because of a deterring will to change and adapt. With pioneering initiative taken in 2000 by Saadat Ullah Mian, then Chief Architect Punjab to introduce computer technology in the drafting studios of the Department, gradually the barriers were crossed. Presently it is seen as an effective tool for high quality presentations, design development, generation of working drawings etc. The impact of computer technology on design and form development of Architecture is very powerful and cannot be mitigated by academic discussions. It has undoubtedly crystallized endless possibilities onto the computer screen, though professional ethics sometimes tend to take the back seat with this freedom to create / experiment for the architect and to choose for the client.

With the economic boom, mega projects costing Rs.200 million and above were referred to the Punjab Architecture Department. The Department needed to gear up for the onerous responsibility and a major transformation in terms of work culture and ethics was required. On the initiative of Shadab Ali Khan Secretary C&W (Oct. 1998 to Feb. 2003) Quality Management Systems were installed and the Punjab Architecture Department was the first ever public sector Department to qualify for the coveted ISO 9001: 2000 Quality Certification in 2002. As the cost of the mega projects escalated so did the responsibility for a socially and aesthetically responsive product. The initial projects were taken up as a challenge and handled with maturity and a sense of pride. This led to more projects being referred, which were handled with equal commitment and care if not more. More than any thing else this singular step had far reaching bearings on the public architecture within the ambit of Government of the Punjab. The projects under taken include the Punjab Assembly Extension [Figure 9], the University of Gujrat [Figure 10], Seerat Academy and Quran Complex Lahore [Figure 11], Emergency Block for Sir Ganga Ram and General Hospitals [Figure 12], Minister's Suites Lahore, Burn Units at Multan and

Faisalabad [Figure 13], Judicial Complex Rawalpindi and Kidney Center Bahawalpur etc. conform to the dictates of function and optics. All these projects show a diversity of architectural style and philosophy and conform to the dictates of function and optics. This was accomplished due to the varied nature of the projects, each demanding detailed study and personalized attention. It is worth observing that the Punjab Architecture Department delivered the architectural works worth billions of rupees annually [Table 1].

**Table 1: Cost of Civil Works Components of the Schemes of Various Sectors handled by Punjab Architecture Department**

Year	No. of Schemes	Cost in Billion
2005-06	802	6.4
2006-07	902	8.2
2007-08	1017	9.8

## 7. Conclusions and Recommendations

The role which architecture has played in our public life throughout history, whether in homage to an individual or as a monument to an institution or ideology, has always been a potent.



**Fig. 9: Punjab Assembly Extension, Lahore**



**Fig. 10: University of Gujrat symbol of status, power and wealth.**

The design, optics, building materials and construction techniques of public buildings reflect the measure of advancement of a society or a nation. There is a need to recognize that public buildings influence broad cross-section of a community structure and make lasting contribution to our enhanced quality of life. Differences in the meanings of public architecture exist between architects, academicians and the public. However, author's goal is to illustrate architecture developed by the Punjab Architecture Department, which has come a long way from the utilitarian barrack like structures housing public amenities. With the early British rulers, public utility buildings were understandably pushed down below in the order of priorities and could not be taken in hand if they did not meet political ends. Schools and hospitals were generally constructed to win over a particular area and enlist the support of local inhabitants. The buildings constructed generally lacked architectural design and from a distance would stand out due to their poor aesthetics, inferior specifications and compromised planning as architecture of a lesser god. The development and growth of public architecture took place in form of four overlapping phases as under:

- Awareness about the importance of the role of architects in development,
- Formation of a statutory body and the legal cover
- Repercussions of the economic boom, and concomitantly
- The will to transform and rise above mediocrity.



**Fig. 11: Seerat Academy & Quran Complex, Lahore**

Previously, public architecture suffered because we have become a society where a public servant's responsibility is perceived as one of obedience. It is pertinent to mention that the magnitude of public/private remuneration differentials in Pakistan tend to lead to much lower average pay for the public architects as compared to their private sector counterparts. This acts as a major driving force for majority of the architects to join the private sector or be self-employed. Moreover, lengthy selection procedures, codal formalities and rigid organizational structure propel architects to join private firms. Recently, large-scale brain drain from the public to private sector and from national to Gulf States has further repercussions on the scenario.



**Fig. 12: Emergency Block, Sir Ganga Ram Hospital, Lahore.**



**Fig. 13: Burn Unit, Multan**

Over the years a rich repository of plans, designs and styles has built up at the Punjab Architecture Department encompassing a wide domain of sectors like health, education, judiciary, police, jails, tourism, Government offices and residences, social welfare, livestock and dairy development, etc. Under one roof, the architects work with different viewpoints and design approach, thereby giving richness to the vast canvas of the domain of public architecture. And this in essence is the forte of the Punjab Architecture Department. As the society's aesthetic taste developed over recent times every one likes to see buildings of architectural value. Thus, the modern day challenges of maintaining a fine balance between function, form, optics, technology and available funding are being amicably addressed. Despite the Department's limited role where it has meager or no control over site selection, construction issues and quality control it has emerged as a highly competitive entity. Change is happening, but there is still much to do before it gets recognition at the broader level.

A comparison of Departmental Budget Allocation of last 5 years & cost of civil works component of schemes handled by Punjab Architecture Department indicates that the establishment charges of the Department are less than 0.5% of the total cost of the projects for which architectural

services are rendered. This percentage is very meager in comparison to the 3 to 6 % fee charged for architectural services of comparable standards by the Consultants/Private Sector. (The 6% charges for Architectural services is also categorically recommended by the Pakistan Council of Architects and Town Planners, formulated under a Govt. Ordinance in 1983).

If we care about the quality of our public buildings, foremost it must be realized that the coordinating role of the public sector architect, which is presently being denied is of prime importance and usefulness to the projects. The architect should be facilitated to exercise this role. An enlightened outlook towards the public sector architect's professional domain will lead to if not ensure meaningful architecture capable of transformation of built environment in particular and quality of life in general. The public sector buildings can be executed with greater finesse if architect is entrusted with top supervision. The change of focus from all visible Executive Engineers to the Project Architect will rationalize the planning and design client coordination and site supervision Standard Operating Procedures (SOPS). Lastly, authors recommend that there is a need to influence the Government's proposals for a new architectural policy. The objective of the policy should be to create visually pleasing, intellectually engaging, safe and sustainable buildings and infrastructure which people could relate to both in present times and in the future. Public consultation should be an essential part of the development of policy so they may be invited to express their views on the policy objectives and proposed framework for action. For value addition in architectural creativity and quality of public construction, the authors favor assigning due weightage to inputs from various stakeholders and subsequently their implementation.

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