

## **Descriptive Study of Chaqchan Mosque Khaplu, Gilgit Baltistan, Pakistan**

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### **Abstract**

*This paper is an attempt to properly describe and document the unique wooden architecture and decorative motifs of Chaqchan mosque Khaplu, the oldest mosque in the region. The architecture of the mosque exhibits the distinctive feature of cultural and religious contexts. The harmonic structure with intricately adorned themes reflects creativity and imagination. The art and architecture of the mosque is a synthesis of the amalgamation of various elements. The richly embellished wooden mosque demonstrates the rich cultural heritage. The built heritage of Gilgit Baltistan has been decorated with floral, geometric, calligraphy, arabesque and religious motifs curved and arranged in pattern. The types and flowers vary and provide a highly aesthetic sense. Beautification and harmonic arrangement in the construction of Islamic architecture have deep meaning, inspiring and influencing people's perception with symbolic language creating harmony amongst followers. In the Islamic architecture, the greatest extent of ornamentation and embellishment probably describe aesthetic value and engaged people with spiritual aesthetic which satisfy one of psychologically need: to be in a beautiful environment. This paper explores the various elements and sheds light on each component of the mosque.*

**Keywords:** Wooden Mosque, Art and Architecture, Built Heritage, Verandah, Khatam-band, Swastika

## Introduction

The word Masjid is an Arabic term portraying “place of prostration” and deemed extremely venerated place where religious obligations are fulfilled. Masjid is a place to comfort the soul with divine connection. Therefore, Muslims provide embellishment and beautification of their places of worship. Beauty is considered to be a divine quality and is articulated as such in Islamic art and architecture. Architecture refers to “design and construction” process (Khan, 2016). The mosque has a central position in Islam and Islamic community. The first congregational mosque was erected by the Holy prophet adjacent to his house in Madina-Al-Munawara (Gulzar and Majid, 2014). Like other religious buildings, mosque is also lavishly adorned both internally and externally. However, figurative art is prohibited, so usually the mosques are lavishly decorated with floral art. Slowly and gradually, there evolved three important and different methodologies for representation of artistic views, calligraphy, arabesque and geometry (Khan, 2016). Islamic art and architecture represent the great influence of Islamic civilization having its own methodologies and it differs with other civilization. Aesthetical elements as a form of expression, find a dominant place in Islamic building.

In Baltistan, Islam was brought via Kashmir and Central Asia by Islamic preachers. One of these prominent preachers was Mir Syed Ali Hamdani generally known as Shah-Hamdani. He was the pioneering figure to introduce Islam in this mountainous region. Before the arrival of Shah Hamdani, the entire population was Buddhist and strongly followed of the Dhama (Yousuf, 2009). However, it was supplanted by Islam and the indigenous people embraced Islam at the hand of the saint. Wherever, he went to preach Islam, he built mosque and introduced a new style of architecture. Thus, the amalgamation of various architectural designs chequered the vernacular Tibetan architecture and revolutionized the construction traditions. When Islamization was started in this remote region, the ancient traditions were also affected and created new forms and functions (Hasrat, 2007). All cultures were molded according to the teachings of Islam; so that the true spirit of Islamic tradition reflect in there functioning. The designs and construction of the edifice are in the conformity to the principles and values of Islam. Soon after the Islamization, Shah Hamdani commenced constructing mosques in the region to practice religious rituals and more importantly to educate local people about this new religion (Raza, 1994). One of these mosques is located in the Khaplu Valley in District Ghanche, situated on the left banks of Shyuk River, in the laps of Karakoram and Himalaya surrounded by lofty and snow-clad mountains. The mosque is occupying a high flat ground and can be seen from far sight. The mosque deemed very sacred and great significance for its appealing and rich architectural perspective. According to the local narratives, the place standing the current edifice, was a Buddhist monastic complex. When the indigenous people embraced Islam, the preacher did not demolish the Buddhist complex, rather they leveled it and erected the mosque upon the rubbles (Raza, 1994). This mosque consists of double-storey building standing at the right site of Chaqchan road. Approaches are provided by steps in both sites north and south leading to the upper floor of the mosque. As we reached the first floor, a carved doorway was provided that led to the small hall for winter prayer. The main mosque is square in plan and is surrounded by verandahs. In the construction of the edifice, Kashmiri influence is vividly reflecting. One of the typical examples is the octagonal drum consisting of pyramidal spire on the top roof of the mosque which appeared Khanqah-e-Shah Hamdani Sri

Nagar Kashmir. There are several other Mosques in the region which were also associated with him including Braqchan Mosque, Amburak Mosque and their architectural designs are much similar with Chaqchan mosque. The first storey of Chaqchan mosque is said to have been commissioned under the supervision of Shah Hamdan (Dani, 1989). Locally available materials were used in the construction of the mosque that are well-suited with the local ecology and could withstand harsh environmental conditions such as enumerating rubble, dress stone, soil and timber. The windows and walls are decorated with different floral and geometrical motifs. Similar to Chaqchan Mosque, there is another Mosque in Kashmir with the same pattern. Chaqchan mosque is still in better state of preservation as the renovation works were carried out using the original materials and techniques. The mosque serves as the prime model for all designed wooden mosque in Baltistan. It serves as a congregational mosque and a retreat center for mystic, Sufi observing the Chila or Aitikaf -the annual forty-day retreat for Noorbakhshi Sufi order. It is also used to commemorate the sacrifices of Hazrat Imam Hussain (A.S) in the month of Muharram.

### **Etymology**

Chaqchan or Shakhchan is the name of this historic mosque as well as the name of a village in which the mosque is situated. The mosque has its peculiar place, sacredness and identity in the whole region. The indigenous people of Khaplu swear in the name of the mosque. People of the area from past to even these days trust the sacred mosque for speedy justice and decision of their disputes. Both sides go to the mosque to hold the chain hinging at the main entrance of interior hall of the mosque and then swear in order to settle their disputes. The local people are of the view that the mosque gives justification of the decisions either right or wrong, therefore it was named as Shakchan Mosque meaning a “well- balanced justice giver mosque” (Raza, 1994). With the passage of time, the word Shakhchan converted into Chaqchan. Now most of the disputes are being settled in courts.

### **Local Narrative about the Mosque**

Chaqchan mosque is the most impressive among the old mosques existing in the whole region. According to local traditions, this mosque was built on a site of Buddhist temple. The Buddhist monks and pilgrims used to reside at the place where the present mosque is standing. The Buddhist monk was very reputable for spirituality and acrobatic feats. When Syed Ali Hamdani arrived to preach Islam, Raja Muqem Khan, the local ruler of Khaplu accepted Islam at the hand of Syed Ali Hamdani. As the monks were very famous for their acrobatic feats, they manifested to show miracles to him. Shah Hamdan was conditioned that they would embrace Islam only if the preacher shows some miracle to them. He accepted the condition. An iron-made horse was brought before him, and it was red-hot. Then, he was asked to ride on it. Before riding on it, he recited “Bismillah hir Rehmanir Rahem”. (In the name of Allah, the compassionate and merciful) and rode on the horse and rounded the whole Khaplu valley thrice. As Shah Hamdan was successfully landed down, the local ruler along with the masses were highly impressed and accepted Islam at the hand of Shah Hamdan. The local people believe that bronze horse statue is said to be buried in the foundation of the mosque and upon which the foundation of the mosque was led down.

## Literature Review

There are a few scholarships pertaining to the traditional art and architecture of Baltistan. Researchers tried to document the history of Chaqchan Mosque and architecture, producing worth-reading materials. Here the current researcher would review most relevant literature in the following:

Ahmad Hassan Dani (1989): In the second chapter, he broached the monuments of Baltistan. The region is famous for its serene beauty and tranquility astir for tourists, encapsulating rich architectural heritage. The earliest Muslim structural remains could go back to the early 14<sup>th</sup> century. Mir Syed Ali Hamdani, the pioneering preacher escorted by artist and craftsmen from Kashmir, which probably influenced the vernacular architecture. Saints and Preachers from central Asia and Kashmir came to Baltistan from time to time. They permanently settled and erected buildings for religious purposes and tombs which are scattered in the region. The author discussed very briefly religious and secular monuments of Baltistan. He also elaborated Persian inscriptions inscribed on the wall and windows of various structures. The author explored the art and architecture of the Northern Area. After reading this book the current researcher gained a theoretical and conceptual understanding regarding the art and architecture of Baltistan.

Muhammad Raza (1994) He discussed the arrival of Shahmadan in the mountainous region. In the third chapter, the author has broached the cultural and historical remains of Shahamdan. Baltistan was greatly influenced by the Islamization process brought by Central Asian preachers and were assumed immensely significant. These influences embedded in culture, architecture, rituals language. Many monuments associated with Shahamdan are peppering in Baltistan with distinctive features. The author discussed some mosque that associated with Shahamdan. In this regard, he also mentioned a brief history of Chaqchan Mosque and shed light on its architecture.

Ghulam Hassan Hassanu (2018) In this book the writer discussed the ancient religions of Baltistan. Historians are of the view that aboriginal people of Baltistan practiced Bon religion before Buddhism. Later, Buddhism was introduced from Kashmir and Gandhara. Till the arrival of Islam, Buddhism was the dominant religion in the region, and which was supplanted by Islam. It is said the place of Chaqchan mosque was a Buddhist monastic complex and deemed venerated. However, when the indigenous people embraced Islam, it was converted to mosque. The author has discussed the history and local narrative along with the etymology of the mosque. He somehow described the art and architecture of the Mosque.

Max Kalmburd (2005) the seven chapter of the book deals with the traditional art and architecture of Baltistan, published by Agha Khan Trust for culture. They had contributed to reconstructing the vandalized Mosque, Astana (Tomb) and a fort in the region, combining cultural and economic goals to preserve and maintain operations, whilst bringing about economic development in the region. Furthermore, their efforts towards restoring mosques and rehabilitating settlements; upgrading water and sanitation systems have seen, traditional building techniques, crafts like carpentry and wood carving revived, as well as community-built projects using either old or new techniques recognized by UNESCO for their cultural heritage conservation.

Arif Muhammad (1988) he discussed around the wooden architecture of Baltistan. The region encapsulates a rich built heritage. These heritages are the result of amalgamation of various elements. Intricately decorated ornamentations are incised on ceiling, pillar capitals, cornice, door and windows. He listed numerous wooden mosque and tombs of various Sufi saints found in Baltistan.

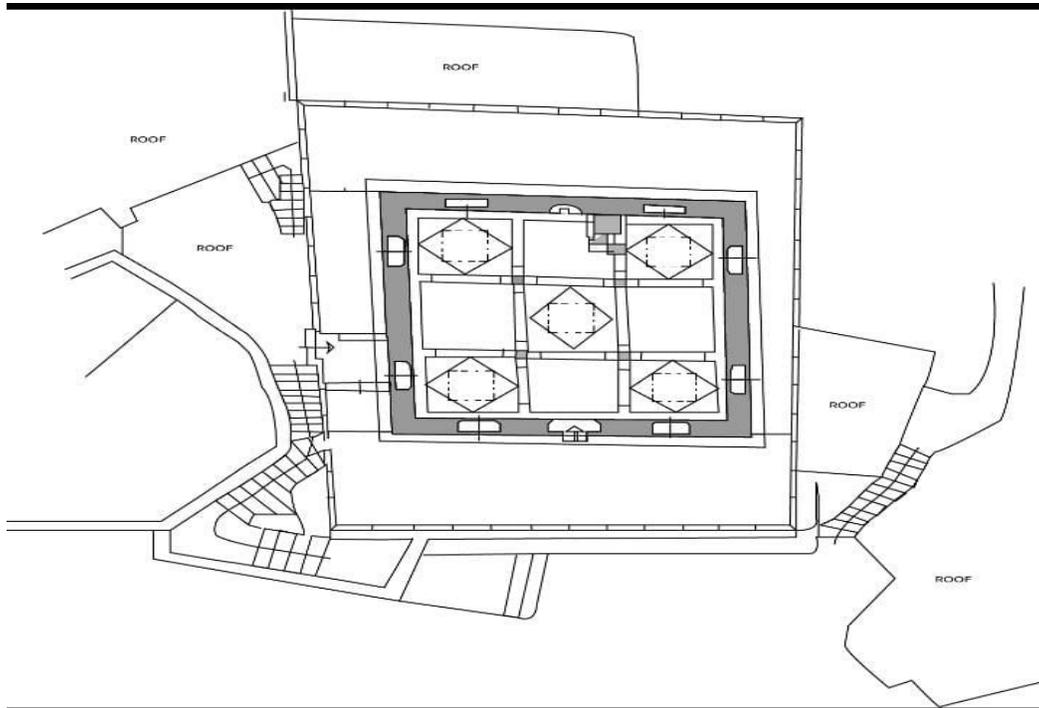
Having different influence of various cultures, the Chaqchan Mosque is the most important Mosque in the region. The wooden Mosque is very unique in its construction and the art decoration it reflects. Earlier studies by scholars never focused to thoroughly shed light on each component of the edifice. Thus, remained unexplored the architecture leaving a significant gap in the literature which may be filled through the current research. This study will reveal the symbolical representations appear in the construction of the mosque. In the whole region, Chaqchan mosque is deemed the pioneering mosque and inspiration for constructing new building particularly religious. Therefore, to have a better understanding about the art and architecture of this mosque is extremely significant. The current research will contribute to study further Islamic architecture in the region as the various symbolical representation and designs repeated in the subsequently constructed mosque in the region. Additionally, it will also ease to understand the conceptual framework of Islamic architecture that evolved in the region.

### **Research Methodology**

This research would be conducted primarily based on descriptive research method and field survey. The researcher categorized each component of the mosque and thoroughly described each component of the mosque's architecture. It is based on primary and secondary data. For the primary data collection, the researcher visited the Mosque and deeply observed and reflected sufficiently on the various elements and its art depiction. Furthermore, the researcher took photos and complete measurements of the mosque and noted in the dairy and subsequently analyzed following the descriptive approaches. Along with the primary data, the researcher consulted the archival data including books, journals and articles pertaining to wooden architecture found in the region. Additionally, the plane map was prepared with the help of software application.

### **Layout of the Mosque**

The mosque has only one main gateway towards the eastern site. There are three steps leading to the main gateway. The mosque has richly decorated façade. There is only one entrance to the prayer chamber. At the center of the mosque roof, there is one minaret. The parapet wall concealed with timber and stone with various motifs. The ablution tank is situated in the northwestern side of the mosque. In the western side of the mosque, there is a meeting hall, and the roof of the hall is also used for prayer purpose during Friday congregation and Eid prayers.



Plane map of Chaqchan Mosque prepared by the researcher

### Construction Material and Technique

In Baltistan, the wooden architecture emerged with prominence since the arrival of Islam in this region. In the construction of religious buildings, three components are commonly used i.e, stone, wood and soil. These components are used in simple ways and most appropriate to cope with climatic conditions in this area. Timbers are cut into pieces and interlocked like a box. In Baltistan most structural elements are obtained from the wood of walnut, white tree and mulberry. Walnut is mostly used in the construction of religious buildings and tombs. This timber is considered very appropriate for the Cator beams and cribbage columns as well as pillars. The construction technique in Baltistan is the most sophisticated and unique feature. This is the reflection of their engineering skill without modern technology and knowledge. The style locally called “Thather”, is strongly conditioned by the cator and cribbage building technique; Stone and wooden walls are strengthened with vertical layers of parallel beams which lead at some distance above each other. To support the corner, there are vertical cages or boxes composed of pairs of pieces of timber. The timber is generally prepared into a five to ten centimeters square section and kept as long as possible. The horizontal beams are placed inside and outside of the wall. The timbers are tied together through the wall thickness with cross pieces at one to three meters interval. The combination of cator and cribbage is the most sophisticated earthquake resistant construction technique. The space between the beams is filled with mud and stone and the surface was plastered and painting. Thus, the wall became heavy and sturdy. This type of method is also applied in the construction of fort and tomb all over Baltistan. The advantages of constructing with horizontal timbers are modified; this technique makes it easy to build straight side walls and dispense with over designed foundation.

It creates a strong corner joint due to long timber providing bending resistance to out of plane wall moment. (See figure no 1)

### **Stage of Construction**

The present structure of the mosque was completed gradually. The foundation stone was laid down by Syed Ali Hamdani himself and the first floor was constructed under his supervision (Raza, 1994). According to the author of Tarikh Jammu, the second floor was constructed by Mir Syed Muhammad Noorbaksh. However, it has proved that Syed Muhammad Noorbakshia never visited Baltistan. After one and a half century later, another Sufi saint and successor and vicegerent of Shahamdan, named Mir Shams Din Muhammad Iraqi arrived in Baltistan for missionary purpose. Thus, he started to complete the second story of the mosque circa 911 Century CE. Approximately 90 years back, the northern verandah was erected which did not exist before. It was constructed right from the foundation up to the roof in such a way that it really seems to be its original part (Raza, 1994). Nobody can detect this addition without a caution, curious, critical and close look into it. Circa 90 years back, the western verandah was constructed as an extension of the mosque. Construction and preservation works of Chaqchan mosque is reported to have persistently remained continued. According to an unpublished manuscript of Mulve Muhammad Ibrahim, large scale renovation works was carried out in 1923 CE and the northern wall and the roof of the mosque were plastered with a unique, local-made strong mortar so that the wall and the roof could be protected from rain and snow. During 1926, once again renovation work was initiated. At this time well-embroidered decorative planks (Khatam band) were fixed in the ceiling externally. A series of systematic repair works was initiated about 1984-85 and waste scale renovation works were accomplished (Hassnu, 2018). Prior to this work, only the western verandah was in arched shape whereas the remaining verandahs of other sides were simple. At this time, the verandahs on all sides were made in arched shape. The windows of the central hall were repaired and pulpit (member) was also replaced made of walnut timbers. During this time latticework (Jalli wood/mesh work) was also fixed into the eastern verandah (Hassnu, 2018).

### **Art Depiction**

Decoration and the concept of ornaments have always been used by the generation reflecting their implicit and explicit connotation of culture, tradition and religion. These designs and decorations have specific patterns depending on the regional context. Cultural norms and values are represented through these decorative motifs, giving a glimpse into ideas and practices through centuries. Decoration and embellishment are based their creativity on invoking interior beliefs via abstract shapes. The art of Chaqchan mosque is a result of the amalgamation of various arts. The Islamization process in Baltistan was started by Irani and Kashmiri preachers in the mid 15<sup>th</sup> and 16<sup>th</sup> century CE. The missionaries came here accompanied by hundreds of highly skilled craftsmen and artist. Thus, the indigenous art and architecture were influenced by the foreign elements. The range of motifs includes a variety of stylized floral ornaments and abundant of geometric forms. The floral pattern and motif become clear from the study of cardboard stencil which clearly shows the influence the Kashmiri art. Within the design of the chaqchan mosque, geometric pattern plays a dominant role in comparison to other ornaments. On the large surfaces of the wall and ceiling we find composition of interesting octagons and

circles, cross in deep undercutting, tiny stars, configuration consisting of square and triangle. As Baltistan remained a part of Tibet for a long time. Therefore, the Tibetan influence is also depicting in the art of the mosque. One typical example is the visible of Swastika in the ceiling of the mosque.

### **Façade of the Mosque**

The facade of the mosque invokes the typical vernacular architectures and richly decorated with frieze, arches, floral and louts' flowers. The façade is decorated with green and white color. This Architectural style of the façade is applied in the façade of Jumma mosque situated in Braqchan Valley in the west of Chaqchan mosque. The façade is decorated with frieze, floral motif and geometrical pattern. The chamber hall is surrounded by verandah on the four sides. It has only one main entrance leading to the prayer chamber with carving and bearing an inscription. In the middle of the wall of first floor, there exist four windows facing to east are richly decorated. The wall of white color of the lower part invokes the Buddhist temple which was filled by rubber not destroyed and upon the present mosque is standing. The height of the mosque from the ground level up to spire is 26.21 m. Height from the ground level to the sermon- chair is 1.82 m and the height from the ground level to top of the first floor is measuring 10.97 m. Height from ground level to the second floor is 12.49 m. To reach the upper parts of the mosque, approach is provided by ladders comprising 35 steps in the south from the main gate of the mosque. Approach is provided by three steps of stair to reach the main entrance from the ground level. These steps of stairs are made up of stone slabs. (See figure 2)

### **Main Entrance of the Mosque**

There is only one gate leading to the mosque. It is installed on the eastern side of the mosque and the fortification of the gate is constructed with cut stone. On the top of the main gate, there is a round arch. The frame of the gate is made of wood and consists of two leaves. There are four panels on both leaves of the door. Three hinges are installed on both sides to support the door and allow it to swing. At the top of the door, there is inscribed "Kalmah-e-Tayyeba". The name of the mosque is also written. The name of Mir Syed Muhammad Noorbakhsh, the founder of the Noorbakhshia Sufi order is also inscribed. Below this, written the union name of the mosque, Anjuman Muhmmadia Noorbakshia whose responsibilities are to take care of the mosque and monitor financial matters. (See figure no 3)

### **Stone Pillar**

Not far from the main gate of the mosque, there is a long stone slab supporting the wooden beams of the first floor. The length of the stone slab is 2.74 m and 0.91 m width. This stone slab was brought here by the young and strong men of Khaplu on their backs from away place and was installed here as a supporting pillar of the mosque. (See figure no 4)

### **Verandah of the Mosque**

The prayer chamber is surrounded by verandah on all the four sides. The verandah of the mosque is rectangular in shape. The eastern verandah is measuring 13.71 m 2.43 m long and 2.43 m wide. There are 10 arched wooden pillars on the verandah. The northern verandah is

measuring 13.71 m long and 1.52 m wide and has 13 arched pillars which support the roof. The western verandah is measuring 13.71 m long and 1.52 m wide and has 10 pillars. The southern verandah is 13.71 m long and 1.52 m wide and has 13 arched pillars in it. The height of the four-side verandah is measuring 3.35 m. The ceiling of the verandah is decorated with geometrical and floral motifs. There are depictions of swastika on the ceiling. Swastika (Yung Drong in local language) is the local design – the symbol of fire or sun. It was considered the sacred symbol of Bon religion (Yousuf, 2009). Swastika was known from the Indus valley civilization, and it is widespread in this region from rock carving antiquity to the contemporary folk art. (See figure no 5)

### Inscriptions

On the door of the first floor of the mosque inscribes the following verses of the holy book-Qur'an:

وَإِذْ يَرْفَعُ إِبْرَاهِيمُ الْقَوَاعِدَ مِنَ الْبَيْتِ وَإِسْمَاعِيلُ رَبَّنَا تَقَبَّلْ مِنَّا إِنَّكَ أَنْتَ السَّمِيعُ الْعَلِيمُ

On the southern window of the same floor, bearing the following verses of the holy Qur'an:

إِنَّمَا وَلِيُّكُمُ اللَّهُ وَرَسُولُهُ وَالَّذِينَ آمَنُوا الَّذِينَ يُقِيمُونَ الصَّلَاةَ وَيُؤْتُونَ الزَّكَاةَ وَهُمْ رَاكِعُونَ

On the eastern window of the same floor, the following verse of the holy Quran is written:

لا اله الا الله محمد رسول الله على ولي الله

On the decorative interior planks fixed in the ceiling of the eastern verandah, the renovation date is inscribed by Mulve Muhammad Ibrahim as follows: (Composed by Muhammad Ibrahim and Inscribed by Muhammad Bashir)

نصر من الله \_\_\_\_\_ 786 \_\_\_\_\_ و فتح قريب

بي تكوين جهان حکم چو شد «کن فيكون»

همچنان ساخته شد به دست محمد علی ولد عبد الرحيم(?) ختم بان شد

چونکه او هست سرور اقران فن در قرن قريب(?)

چنانچه پدرش نیز سردار فن بود در شهر

هر گاه رفت ز دنیا در جنت عبد الرحيم(?)

شد قائم مقام پدر پسرش محمد علی

جزا هما الله فی الحسن جزا

نعیما مکرما حسن المآب

هزار شکر که شکفته شد گل چوب به بوستان آنگون

ای ابراهیم! گفت هاتف: «کانهن الياقوت و المرجان»

هر گل ختم بان، گل باغ جنان بر رخ رنگین گل خنده زنان

اگر جنت الفردوس [فردوس] بروی زمین است  
 همین است و همین است و همین است  
 {ماشاء الله لا حول و لا قوة الا بالله العلی العظيم}  
 ای ابراهیم! گفت هاتف: مصرع تاریخ سال  
 ساخته شد از طرز نو، نورانی ختم بان چون لب حور  
 1355 هجری مطابق 1994 بکرمی  
 احقر العباد بقلم محمد ابراهیم غفر الله ذنوبه  
 احقر الناس محمد بشیر غفر الله ذنوبه  
 کاتب الحروف (!)  
 (See figure no 6)

### Minaret of the Mosque

The top of the mosque carries the octagonal drum which consists of a slim pyramidal spire having four small crosswise projecting beams presenting a feature of two roofs like brackets. From the projecting beams, wooden vase-like objects are attached. This structure rise about ten feet from the roof. This finial ensemble is the qubbah, consisting of a small metal umbrella having metal chain hanging below the umbrella at the crosswise projecting beams. The crosswise beams consist of small bells in the middle. At the top of the minaret, holds a small metal finial three- pronged Panjtan. The holding component of the Alam is consists of bronze bowls. The fortified of the spire is cage construction of two subsequent layers of outer walls being stripped of defective stone and mud infill to be restored in the traditional manner. These are the strong indication of Kashmiri influence (Hasrat, 2007). (See figure no 7)

### Main Entrance of the Mosque

The prayer chamber has only one carved doorway leading from the eastern verandah into the prayer cell. It is flanked by two windows north and south with grilled design towards the eastern verandah of the mosque. The main entrance of the mosque has two leaves within the frame. From the middle of the frame of the door, there are two metal chains hanging down the two leaves of the doorway. The door frame has highly carved with series of design on the jambs and lintels. The frame has five series of carving including scroll work, lotus flowers, half rectangle and crosses. In the center of the two leaves, there are two stars. At the top of the door is the floral vase above which a line of inscription which illustrate the name of the mosque. (See figure no 8)

## **Interior Portion of the Mosque**

### **Prayer Chamber**

The prayer chamber of the mosque is square in plane illustrating a very unique feature. The length of the hall measuring 8.83 m east to west and 8.83 m width north to south. The height of the hall is measuring 6.40 m. There are four pillars standing in the hall. There is only one doorway leading to the prayer hall and that are equal distances and at both two doors hanging two chains. Two windows facing to east, two are in the north and south. The prayer hall is decorated with various paintings. There is depiction of various motifs on the wall and ceiling of the mosque. The richly carved wood work is usually found on the pillar capitals, cornices, and doors etc. The inner side of the walls of the prayer chamber is varied by horizontal rows of carving. Below the beams, the walls are bearing ornamental frieze. (See figure no 9)

### **Interior wall of the Chamber**

The interior wall of the mosque is made of wood and soil. The thickness of wall of the chamber hall is measuring 1.31 m and it extends up to the exterior and interior end with a height of 2.43 m and touches the roof thereby its width extends to 2.43 m. Long wooden posts, stone slabs and mortars had been used to create these walls. In the construction of the wall, wooden nails had been used to keep them firmly joined. (See figure no 10)

### **Mihrab of the Mosque**

Muslims are required to face towards Kaaba shrine in Makkah during their Salah. Mihrab is a holiest place in any mosque. It is in the middle of the hall and constructed in the western wall. The mihrab is highly decorated with geometrical motif and painting. The mihrab is decorated with three-pointed arch. It is closely projecting with small timbers. It is refined ornamental carving on the surface of the frame. (See figure no 11)

### **Pillars**

Inside the prayer chamber, there are four well carved tapering pillars depicting angular and concave flutes. Height of These pillars measuring 5.66 m and thickness of pillars 0.64 m. These pillars are standing at the four corners of the square solid room below. These pillars are on the square base and have cross bracket capitals above the abacus. The bases have cusped arched panels in high relief. These pillars are supporting the upper portion of the roof meant for central ventilation.

### **Windows**

There are six windows with grilled design. Two windows facing towards the eastern verandah of the mosque flanked by the main entrance of the prayer hall. Two are in the northern and two are facing towards the southern verandah of the mosque. (See figure no 12)

### **Ceiling of the Mosque**

The central roof rests on four interior columns and forty-six columns of the verandah in addition to the walls from all sides. The ceiling of the roof is subdivided into smaller square by pillars and each square is covered by wooden planks arranged in triangles and square. The

ceiling of the prayer chamber is divided into nine segments five of them lantern roof, are decorated with exquisite Khatam band. Each segment decorated with varied designs. The five segments of the ceiling are painted and the outside of the roof is covered with metal sheet. Several superimposed, richly carved corbelled corner from the transition to the ceiling. At the middle segment of the first row of the ceiling hang two chandeliers. The outside roof is built in conical shape that is a peculiar model of Kashmiri construction. Such a roof is highly accommodative for run off of rain water and snow water after melting. The Khanqah e Shah Hamdan Srinagar was constructed by Mir Syed Muhammad Hamdani, the son of Syed Ali Hamdani (Raza, 1994). It seems that the framework and superstructures of the aforementioned mosque and that of the Chaqchan mosque are similar and especially their roofs are strikingly similar. (See figure no 13)

### **Conclusion**

The Chaqchan mosque, located in the shadow of lofty mountains, is very impressive and locally famous as miracle mosque. This mosque has special importance from various perspectives. The place of present mosque remained sacred for both Bon religion and Buddhism as well. The present mosque was built on a Buddhist monastic complex. When the indigenous people embraced Islam about 1381/82 Century CE at the hand of Mir Syed Ali Hamdani, a Sufi saint from Hamdan in Iran. He came here accompanied by several craftsmen and artists from Kashmir, Iran and Central Asia and they introduced a new style of architecture with the amalgamation of Tibetan style. Thus, the construction of the mosque is the result of the combination of all these architectures. The art and architecture of the mosque presenting very impressive depiction. Inscription of Arabic and Persians are inscribed on planks, door and windows. There are various kinds of designs of floral, geometric patterns and embroidery-models have been noticed in the mosque. In addition, twelve well decorated Khatam-band of various designs have been noticed. Being the first-ever mosque in the region, it has been an inspiring for the construction of new religious building. Although the mosque is seven hundreds old, but the condition of the mosque is good and with the passage of time, preservation and conservation works were initiated and repaired whenever get any cause due to natural or weather condition. Due to its sacredness and historical importance, every year domestic and foreign tourists preferred to visit the mosque. From religious tourism perspective, mosque has potential to Due to its historical importance, the government of Pakistan has listed the Chaqchan mosque as a Pakistan Heritage site. The mosque is now used after extensive conservation and preservation works.

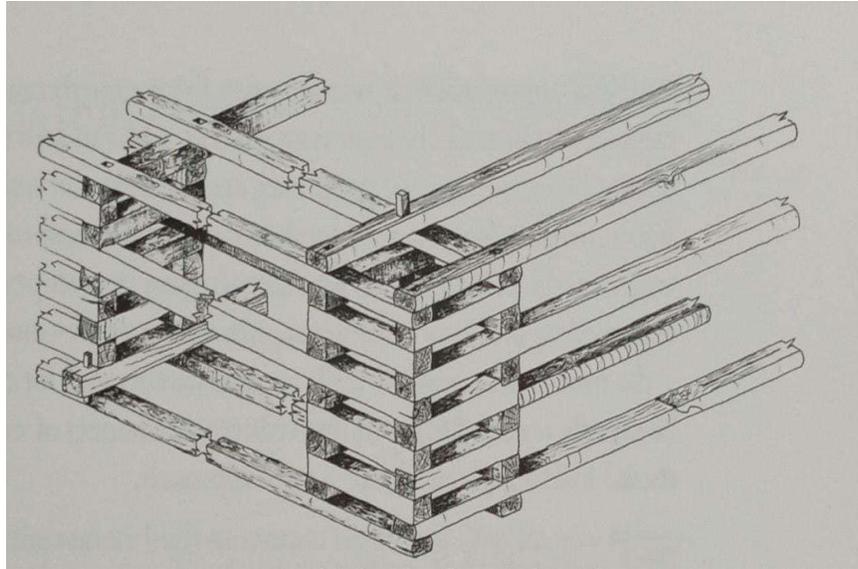


Figure 2. Schematic drawing of the cribbage cage locally called Thather in the corner as well as the horizontal cators.



Figure 2: façade of Chaqchan Mosque



Figure 3: Main gate with inscriptions.



Figure 4: A tall Stone pillar standing near the main gate.

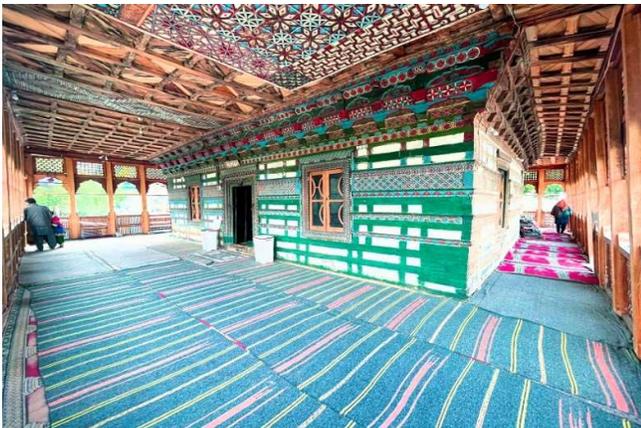


Figure 5: Intricately embellished Veranda of the mosque.



Figure 6-a: Inscriptions on the ceiling of veranda



Figure 6-b: Inscriptions on the door and charity box of the cell winter prayer.



Figure 7: entrance of the prayer chamber.



Figure 8: Inner hall of Chaqchan mosque standing wooden pillars supporting the ceiling.



Figure 9: interior wall with floral and geometric designs.



Figure 10: Mihrab of Chaqchan mosque with decoration.



Figure 11: window with two leaves within the richly decorated frame.



Figure 12-a: Khatam band in the ceiling of Chaqchan mosque.



Figure 12-b: Khatam band



Figure 12-c: Ceiling of the mosque richly decorated.



Figure 12-d: Ceiling richly decorated with floral and geometric designs.

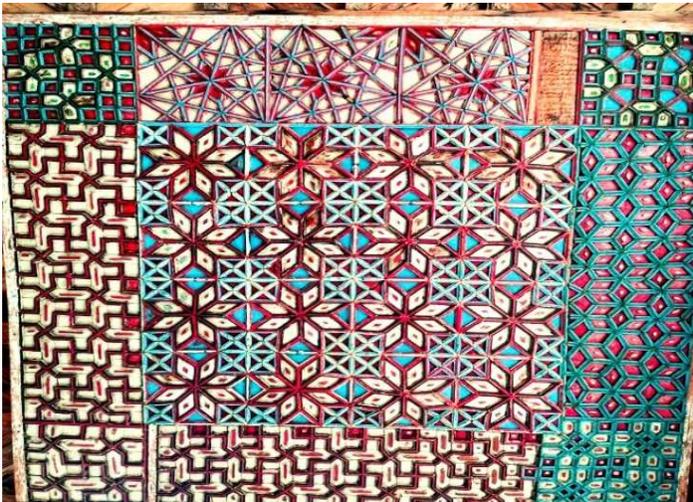


Figure 12-e: Ceiling decorated with Swastika, floral and geometric motifs.

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