

Sikh Bazar at Garhi Habibullah, Mansehra (Pakistan): History Architecture and Tourism Potential

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Abstract

The Sikh era (1799-1849 CE) in the Northern Part of Pakistan, which includes present day Hazara Division of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, is generally known for the multiple past expeditions carried out under the leadership of Ranjeet Singh to suppress the rebellions and overwhelm small independent states. With this short reign full of revolts, it was not possible for the Sikh state to commission monumental construction projects like their predecessors (i.e. the Mughals). Thus, the Sikh period structures in Hazara region are mostly confined to small fortresses, which were constructed at high altitude to keep an eye on their enemies. Besides fortresses, some Hindu temples and a Sikh Guru Dwara, may also be attributed to the Sikhs based on their architectural features. The Sikh Bazaar at Garhi Habibullah region of Mansehra, which is the focus of this paper, is associated with the Sikh community settled in the region even though inscribed slabs assigned the bazaar to the British era (1849-1947 CE). The Sikh Bazaar is one of the rare Sikh monuments in the entire Hazara region having great potential for the promotion of cultural tourism.

But located in the earthquake zone, some of the shops in the Sikh Bazaar at Garhi Habibullah have become severely damaged while the remaining are exposed to the natural disasters and human vandalism such as encroachment and modern construction. The buildings at this valuable heritage site are constantly losing their authenticity. The present research is an attempt to systematically document entire Bazaar before it completely disappears.

Keywords: Sikh Bazaar, British era, Garhi Habibullah, Mansehra

Introduction

The few decades of Sikh reign in Hazara were continuously interrupted by local resistance and revolts. In such a perilous condition, it was not practical for the Sikh state to construct big cities, palaces and other extravagantly remarkable buildings. Rather, the state primarily constructed forts and fortresses to suppress the rebellions and keep an eye on their enemies. Important among these, is the Harkishan Garh Fort located in Haripur city. This fort is made of dressed block of stone in ashlar masonry and lime/mud mortar is used as binding material. The outer walls of the fort are interrupted with semi-circular bastions for further strengthening. The fort is surrounded by a deep ditch which was filled with water in case of emergency to stop the easy access of the enemies.

Other important fortresses include Gial fort in Mor Baffa Kalan and Shamuri fortress in Garhi Habibullah.

Apart from the forts and fortress, religious buildings such as Hindu Temples were also constructed during the Sikh era. These include four Hindu temples in Mansehra city; all in a dilapidated condition, and two Hindu temples at Garhi Habibullah that were hit by the earthquake in 2005 and are now in ruinous condition. However, there are other buildings including Gurudwara Guru Singh Sabha located on the left side of Kashmir Road in Mansehra City and a Bazaar in Garhi Habibullah which are associated with the Sikh community living in these regions during the British era. Of these, the Garhi Habibullah Bazaar (Fig. 1) is the focus of the present study.

Aims and Objectives

The Sikh Bazaar in Garhi Habibullah comprises shops made of dressed stone block of ashlar masonry. The entire Bazaar along with other buildings in the vicinity was hit by the earthquake that has caused irremediable damage to the structures. Some of the shops were completely destroyed and disappeared while the remaining are losing their authenticity due to human vandalism (encroachment). In such a scenario it is vital to study the architecture also in order to document and promote them for cultural tourism. The present research thus aims to:

- Document the existing Shops in the Sikh Bazaar at Garhi Habibullah
- Throw light on the Sikh history of the region with special reference to the Sikh Bazaar
- Highlight the tourism potential of the Sikh Bazaar for the promotion of cultural Tourism

A Brief History of Sikhism in Hazara

The word *Sikh* is derived from Sanskrit word *Shishya* that means learner. The followers of Sikhism believe in the 10 *Gurus* (Teachers) who set the principles of the religion for more than a century (Ashfaq, 2010). Guru Nanak was the first and greatest guru who laid the foundation of Sikhism. Guru Nanak was born in 1469 CE at Talwandi, Punjab located in the northwestern part of the present India. Nanak got his early education in his hometown under the guidance of Qutbudin, Gopal and Burj Nath Shastri. He married Salakhni, daughter of Molchand of Batala at the age of nineteen. She gave birth to Sri Chand and Lakhmi Das in 1494 and 1496 respectively.

Nanak left Sultanpur accompanied by Mardana soon after the birth of his second child and started wearing a unique dress representing every religion. Nanak visited every shrine and met the renowned saints and sadhus. He also regularly interacted with the local population and inspired them with his simple teachings (Ashfaq, 2010).

The religious reform of Nanak was later on carried out by the nine gurus, his followers. Of these, Guru Gobind Singh was the last one who was born in 1723 at Patna during the reign of Emperor Aurangzeb Alamgir (Sonia, 2019).

Initially, the religious teachings of gurus were orally passed down until the teachings of the first five gurus were collected and organized into a book (i.e. *Guru Granth Sahib*) (Ashfaq, 2010). Through the efforts of the gurus, Sikhism started spreading rapidly in the region. However, it wasn't until Ranjeet Singh that the Sikh emerged as a military power. Ranjeet Singh, was the first Maharaja of the Sikh Empire, which ruled the northwest India including the present Hazara Division of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, Pakistan in the early half of the 19th century CE.

The Sikh Governors

Although the Sikh arrived Hazara in 1818, the region was formally incorporated into the Sikh domain fifteen years after Ranjeet Singh declared his sovereignty over Kabul territory (Watson, 2007). After incorporation of Hazara into the Sikh empire, *Hukma Singh Chimni* was appointed as first governor of *Chach* Hazara by Ranjeet Singh. While Makham Singh was assigned the duty to collect the revenue of Hazara, he was unable to accomplish the task and was killed by Turins, one of the local tribes of Hazara.

Hukma Singh Chimni remained the first governor of Hazara from 1914 to 1919. He established his office at Attock where he appointed other officers to look after political matters and suppress the revolt (Gupta, 2008). The territory to the east of Hasan Abdal was assigned to *Lahna Singh Sandhanwalia*, who instituted

peaceful policies. The territory controlled by the Khataks on the right bank of the Indus River, was entrusted to *Mahu Singh*. Lastly, the district Akora to the north of the Khattak territory was given to *Budh Singh Sandhanwalia*, who appointed *Piara Mal* as his deputy (Sonia, 2019).

After the decisive battle with Tanolis and Mishwanis of Sirikot at Mota, Chimni was succeeded by Dewan Dayal son of Dewan Moti Ram and grandson of Dewan Muhkam Chand who served as governor of Hazara from 1819 to 1820. Like his grandfather, he was a courageous general and administrator. Due to his qualities, Ranjeet Singh also wanted to appoint him as Commander-in-Chief of the Sikh army after Diwan Chand.

He had ruled Hazara for only a few months when Yousafzais gathered by the thousand at Chandgarh and created disturbance at Nara, a mountainous region located in the present Haripur District of Hazara Division. Hearing this Ram Dayal in the evening took up an entrenched position. The battle began at sunrise the next day and continued the whole day. At sunset, the Yousafzais returned to their places of rest in small groups. Seeing this, Ram Dayal also allowed his men to go to their trenches, leaving himself with only a small escort. A party of Yusafzais, hidden near the battlefield to loot valuables from dead bodies of both sides, saw that Ram Dayal was separated from the main body of the Sikh. Seizing this opportunity, they fell upon Ram Dayal and killed him along with his escort. Ranjeet Singh was shocked to hear about this irremediable loss as was his father Moti Ram. Moti Ram lost all interest in life, resigned his office of the governorship of Kashmir and returned to Banaras in search of peace of mind (Gupta, 2008).

Succeeding Ram Dayal, Amir Singh Majithia became the next governor from 1820-22. He is known for his bravery and strength, and he inflicted a defeat upon a combined force of Muhammad Khan Tarin, a notable chief, and his allies which including the Dhund, Tarin and Tanawal. His governorship was brought to an end when he was ambushed and killed by a body of Yusafzai while taking bath in a stream.

Hari Singh Nalwa then succeeded Amir Singh Majithia and enjoyed a long lease of governorship from 1822 to 1837. He led many successful expeditions against the local group including Sayyids, Yusafzais, Khattak and Tanolis. But in 1836, Fateh Khan, one of the local chiefs of Nurpur, Tirwana attacked on infantry of Hari Singh. Hari Singh was losing heart and call Ranjeet Singh for help. Ranjeet Singh wrote a letter to Raja Ghulam Singh but he did not take it seriously. On April 3, 1837, Hari Singh was finally killed in the battle of Jamrud by Dost Muhammad Khan (Sonia, 2019).

After the death of Hari Singh, Maha Singh came to Hazara in 1837. He was followed by Tej Singh who held charge over Hazara from 1838-1844. He was then followed by Mulraj who is said to have governed Hazara till 1846.

In early 1847, Captain Abbott noticed that the Sikh Brigade in Hazara specifically at Gandhian in Pakhli, was discontented. He suspected the intents of Chatter Singh, the Governor of Hazara. Abbot was then at Sherwan and noticed Muslim population was primed to revolt.

Thus, after having faced the open rebellion, Jams Abbott nonetheless upheld himself at Sirikot. He earned the sympathies of the Muslims of the district, but the rough guerrilla hands who joined Abbot were unable to drive Sikhs' stronger arms out (*Gazetteer of Hazāra District*, 2003: 34)

From there, things became more difficult. In 1848, the important Fort Attock fell into the hands Amir of Kabul., a Durrani chief, who proceeded towards Kashmir via Hazāra. He sent his son, Ghulam Haidar Khan, with a portion of his force, into the Hazāra plain. Major Abbott retreated back to Sherwān to stop the Daurani troops on their way towards Kashmir. But in this war, the destiny of Durrani was changed. Afghan troops had saved across the Indus at Attock. The Punjab was seized to the British Empire on the March 29, 1848,

and Sikh rule in Hazāra came to end (Singh, 2001:3).

In Summary, this Sikh rule over Hazara and Mansehra did not last long and was interrupted by revolts attacks of the various tribes. Thus, the Sikh state did not have sufficient time to start major constructions. The buildings attributed to them include small fortresses, temples, shops and a gurudwara. These rare heritage sites are also at the verge of collapses due to natural and human threats. However, some of the heritage sites are still in better state of preservation. Of these, an old Bazaar in Gari Habibullah located on the left bank of River Kunhar is worthy to mention.

The Sikh Bazaar at Garhi Habibullah

As mentioned earlier, this old Bazaar is thought to belong to the colonial era based on inscribed slabs with Gurmukhi scripts (Fig. 2) installed on the façade of some of the shops. But it is associated with the Sikh and locally known as Sikh Bazaar. The Gurmukhi script itself confirms its association with the Sikh. The inscription says'

“Sat Sri Aakal (He is the truth). Aakal Ji Sahaye (Show your devotion to Him Who has no end). Aey ae ji Aya Nun (Please come, Welcome) Jhaid 02, 1983 (1925 CE)”.

This Bazaar was recorded for the first time during the archaeological exploration of the Department of Archaeology, Hazara University, Mansehra under the supervision of the senior author (Ali et al. 2010). Sonia Anjum describes the architectural features of the shops (Sonia, 2019), But more detailed documentation of the shops and mapping of the entire Bazaar was essential to devise a comprehensive plan for its conservation and promotion. The present research was thus carried out by a diverse team of experts including an archaeologist, architect, tourism professional and heritage manager.

Location of the Bazaar

A roadway in the Bazaar main Bazaar Garhi Habibullah leads to the Old Bazaar Garhi of Habibullah (Fig. 3) (District Mansehra). It's a 0.5-kilometer-long strip in the heart of Bagh Bazaar, commonly known as Garhi Habibullah. The Bazaar provides an outstanding view of old shops on either side of the street, associated with Sikhs. A total of 23 shops were found intact and documented during the present survey.

Architectural descriptions and elements of a few selected buildings that are still intact and in their original form up to 90% of the time are covered in this study. The structures are referred to as Case A, B, and C, respectively.

Case A

The building under consideration (Fig. 4-7) is 130.94 m² in size, with measurements of (12.8m x 10.23m), with 12.8m length along the road and 10.23m width of the site. The structure is currently being used as an oven for Kulcha, a local traditional food item. Due to the enormous heat and smoke, the structure and surfaces of the building are being damaged.

As seen on the plan, the building was originally designed as three double shops, each with two compartments (named compartment A, B, C, and D). A pointed arched doorway, 1.14m wide and 2.23m tall in the middle, connects the two compartments. A pointed arch niche (2.23m tall, 1.49m wide) was found within the building was probably used for storage purpose The whole building is covered with a vaulted roof, giving a clearance height of 4.26m at center and 3.04m at corners.

When viewed from the front (outside), the building features three 2.43m high round arches as shop

entrances, as well as a 1.54m wide veranda on the front of the building, which was originally reinforced with wood and covered with non-corrugated galvanized iron (GI) sheets. Concrete columns and beams eventually replaced the timber reinforcing. The structure contains a staircase on the left corner that is only 0.6m wide, with a 0.30m riser, and a 0.20m thread, and was found to be extremely difficult to use.

Other Architectural elements found within the building include Cavetto roof moldings and iron doors (with rounded top) to cover the arched entries. chiseled dressed stone (granite) measuring 30 cm mortared together with lime is the main construction material, and the doors are made of seasoned wood.

Case B

This building under consideration as Case B (Fig. 8-10) is 136.05 m² in size, with dimensions of (18.74m x 7.26m), with 18.74m length along the road and 7.26m width of the site. The five structures are currently being used as general stores. Because the street is slanted, the buildings are built on distinct levels, with 122cm difference in level between the two sides.

As seen in the plan, building was originally designed as five double shops, each with two compartments (named here as compartment A and B). A pointed arched doorway, 1.14m wide and 2.23m tall in the middle, connects the two compartments. Within the structure, there is a pointed arch niche that is 1.49m wide and equals the height of the arch, i.e., 2.23m tall in all the shops, most likely for storage. A vaulted ceiling covers the entire structure, giving it a clear height of 4.26m in the middle and 3.04m at the corners. When sighted from the front (outside) the building is divided into three parts as below:

Part 1, which contains Shop 01 only

Part 2, which contains Shop 02 and 03

Part 3, which contains Shop 04 and 05.

2.43m high rounded arches act as the entryway to the shops from a 0.91m wide projection on the front of the building, which was initially reinforced with wood and clad with non-corrugated galvanized iron (GI) sheets that can be found in all of the shops. There was no staircase within or adjacent to the structure. Other Architectural elements found within the building are similar as building at Case 01.

The original roof in Shop 01 has been removed, and a flat RCC (Reinforced cement concrete) roof has been installed in its place, with the addition of two columns on the front of the shop, as indicated in the drawing.

Case C

The structure (Fig. 13-14) is 68.46 m² in size and has measurements of 8.38m x 8.17m. It stands out from the other buildings in the Bazaar since it is on a street corner with access from two sides and is placed at a very steep turn in the Bazaar. The entire structure consists of three shops. One shop has two identical compartments joined by an archway, and but the other two shops are small stores with single compartments. The little shops are now utilized as general merchandise stores, while the double compartment shop serves as an oven (Tandoor).

This building, unlike all the others in the Bazaar, has a tiny staircase at a corner with an irregular landing, but it is designed in such a way that it is accessible from both sides of the road which wraps around the two elevations of the building. The building's total height is 6.09m, which is 1.82m higher than the typical height of shops on the street, however, it is designed in such a way that the heights of individual shops are limited to a maximum, i.e. 4.26m.

This structure has a vaulted ceiling as well, but the situation is unique in that two distinct vaults are installed, having 1.82m difference in height. The remaining architectural components are comparable to those in Cases A and B.

Modifications Made

The roof has been rebuilt with a flat RCC (Reinforced cement concrete) for shops 02 and 03 in the drawing above.

Tourism Potential

District Mansehra is famous for its tourism potential. Kaghan valley, located in the district is one of the top most tourist destinations in Pakistan. Every year millions of tourists visit this valley to satisfy their varying needs of enjoying pleasant weather in summers, natural landscape, and unique cultures. Unfortunately, the tourism potential of district Mansehra in which the Sikh Heritage Bazar is located, has not yet been realized and mostly the area and its tourism potential are still unexplored. Majority of the local community is unaware from tourism and the visitors do not know about the historical/ heritage tourism resources of the area thus cannot take maximum benefits from these resources (Arif, 2019).

District Mansehra in general and Kaghan valley (where this Bazaar is located) specially has a great potential of heritage tourism. Millions of tourists who mark their way to Kaghan valley, Northern Areas of Pakistan and Azad Jammu and Kashmir, to enjoy the weather and natural beauty of the region, can be attracted by such heritage sites. A current tourism survey of the Kaghan Valley (Arif, 2019) shows that the tourists do not find proper activities in the valley, and they cut short their visit and return back to their homes. Sikh Bazaar of Garhi Habibullah, if properly managed from tourism point of view can attract thousands of visitors and educate them about the history of the region. Some of the key steps to manage this historic Bazaar as tourist destination are as follows:

Firstly, Khyber Pakhtunkhwa Culture and Tourism Authority, Directorate of Archaeology and Museums and local government may declare it as heritage Bazaar. Secondly, these departments need to focus on the conservation and preservation of this heritage Bazaar. Awareness among the locals and the shopkeepers should be created about the importance of this Bazaar and the history associated with this. Locals and the shopkeepers may also be trained as heritage guides to guide the visitors of this Bazaar. Thirdly, proper signboards and information boards need to be installed. Fourthly, the traditional Sikh heritage of the past should be depicted through this Bazaar like some of the shops may be dedicated for the placement of food items and display etc. of that time. This not only will highlight the life of that era but also educate the people about some of the Sikh business traditions. Lastly, proper marketing and promotion is needed to attract the national and international tourists. The Sikh community not only from the Pakistan but outside the country may be attracted towards such heritage sites if, properly promoted. Thousands of Sikh community who visit Guru Duwara Panja Sahib in Hassan Abdal every year may be attracted to Mansehra to see their heritage in this region. Millions of tourists who visit Northern Areas of Pakistan, Azad Jammu and Kashmir and Kaghan valley may also be attracted through effective promotion of this historic heritage Bazaar. This not only will provide an opportunity to visit unique heritage site but also contribute in the socio-economic development of the local community.

Conclusion

Due to their short reign interrupted by continuous revolts, it was not possible for the Sikh ruler to commission mega construction projects. Thus, the Sikh heritage sites in Hazara region are very rare and are mostly

comprised of military structures. Apart from the forts and fortresses there are very few sites and monuments, which are either built during the Sikh era or associated with the Sikh population living in the region during the colonial era.

Due to negligence, these rare sites and monuments too are losing their authenticity. One of these endangered heritage sites, is the Sikh Bazaar, Garhi Habibullah located in the Balakot Tehsil of District Mansehra. The present research was carried out to systematically document and highlight tourism potential of the Sikh Bazaar before it completely disappears. For this purpose, a survey was carried out by the authors to map the intact shops in the said Bazaar. The intact shops were thus classified into three major groups, which are referred above as Case A, B and C.

Detailed analysis of the shops shows that having maintained their original shapes and features, many of the shops in the Sikh Bazaar have a great potential to attract tourists if they are properly promoted by the concerned authority.

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Figures



Figure 1. Intersection Coordinate Latitude: 34°24'4.88"N; Longitude: 73°22'43.56"E



Figure 2. Gurmukhi Inscription mention the date of Construction as 1983 (Vikrama Era)



Figure 3. Map showing the old Bazaar of Garhi Habibullah

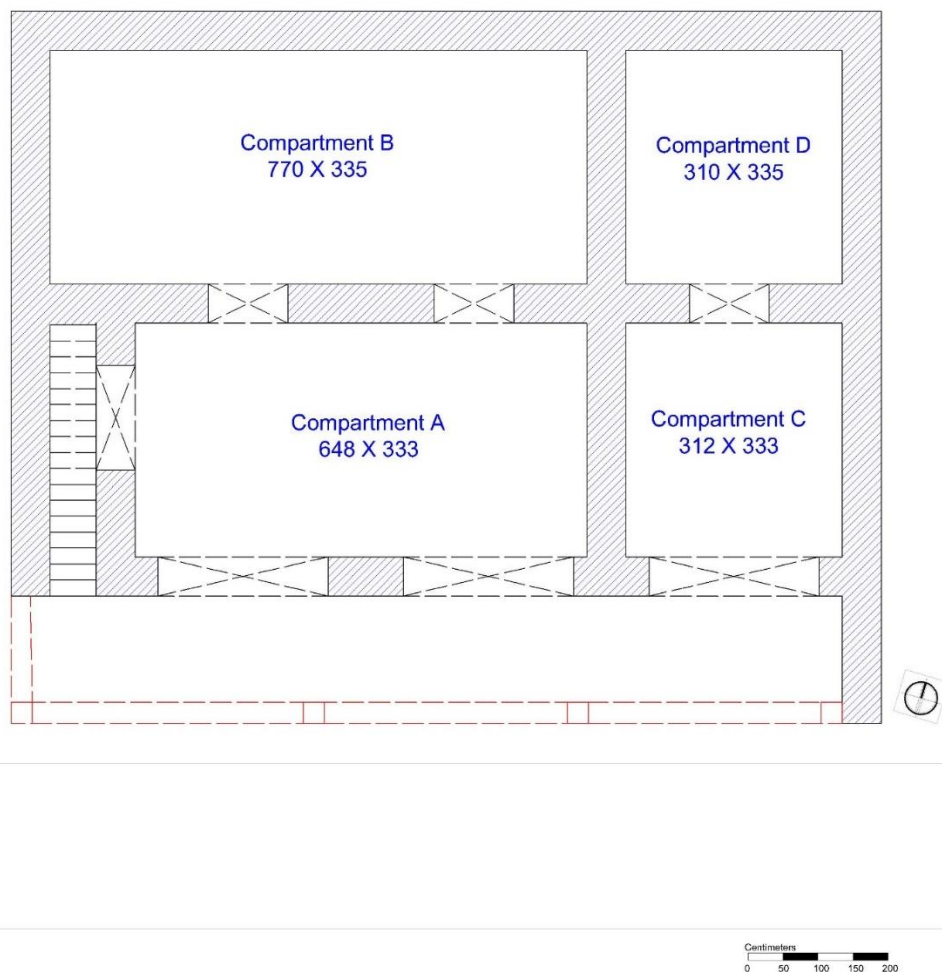


Figure 4. Ground Floor Plan (Building Case A)

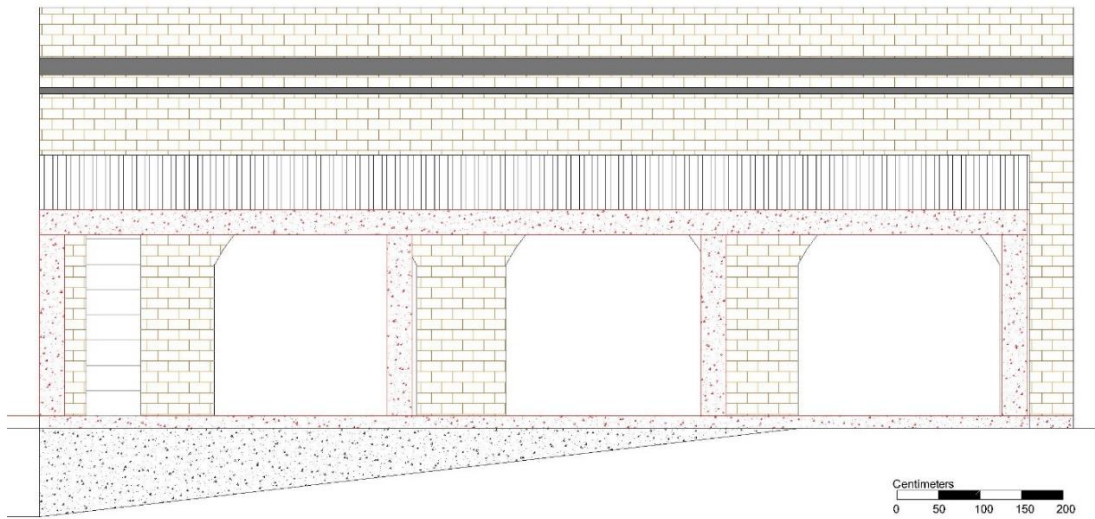


Figure 5. Front Elevation (South-Side Elevation)



Figure 6. Left Elevation (West-Side Elevation)

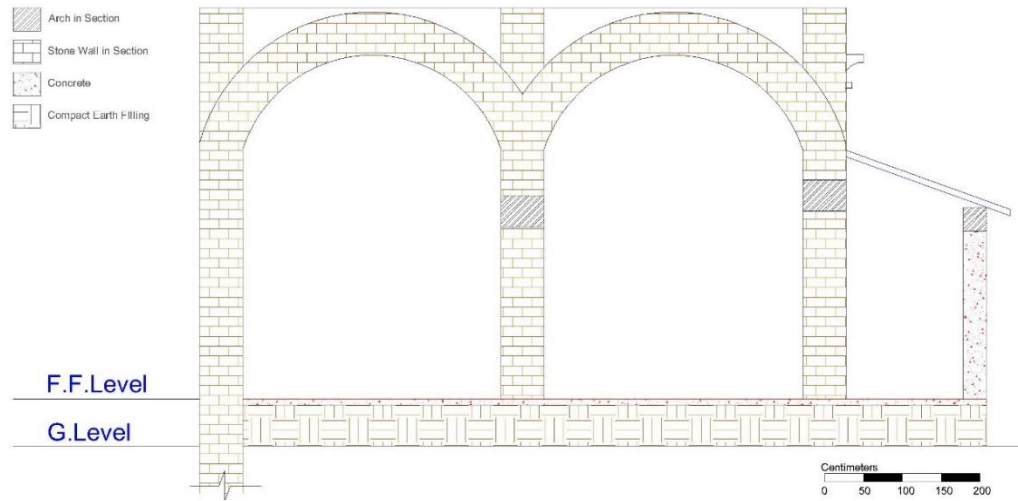


Figure 7. Sectional View of Building Case A

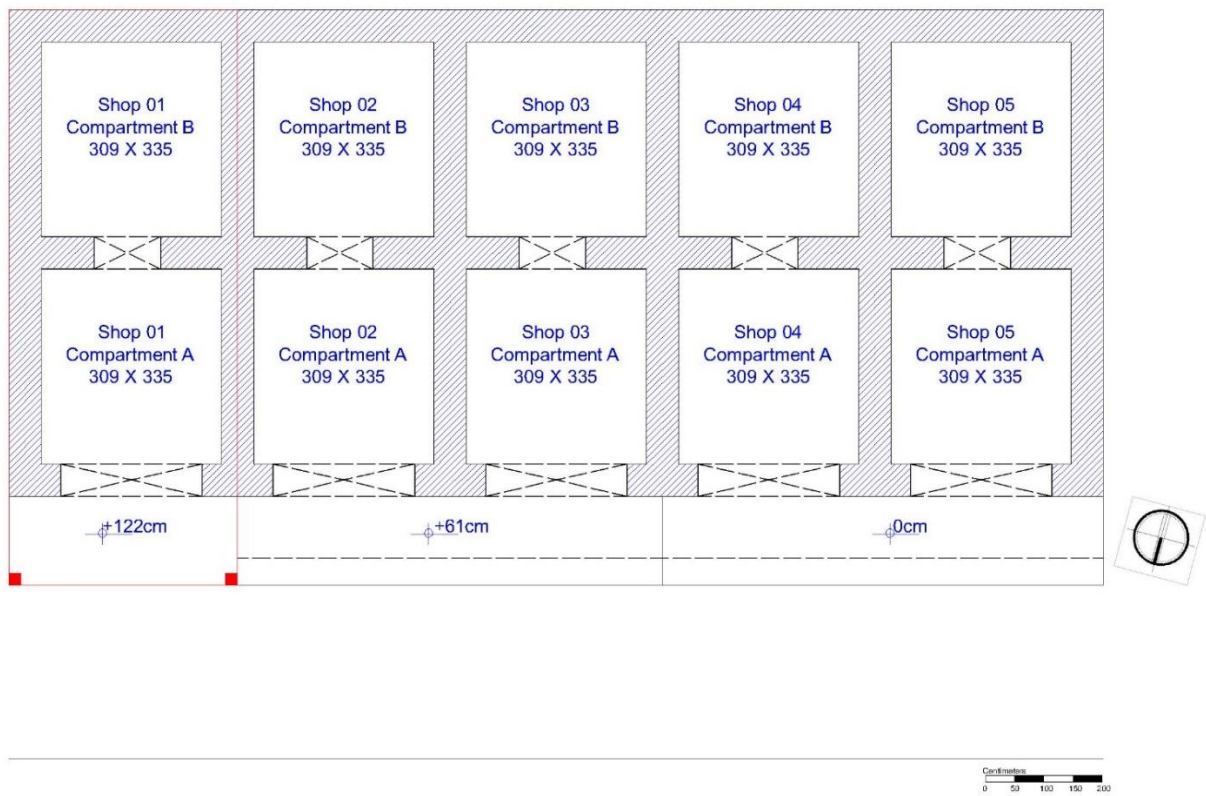


Figure 8. Ground Floor Plan (Building Case B)

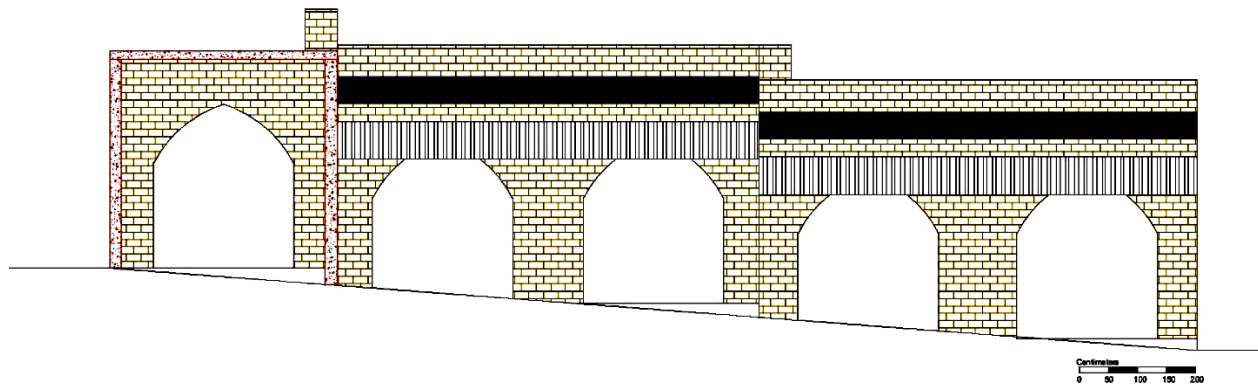


Figure 9. Front Elevation (North-Side Elevation)

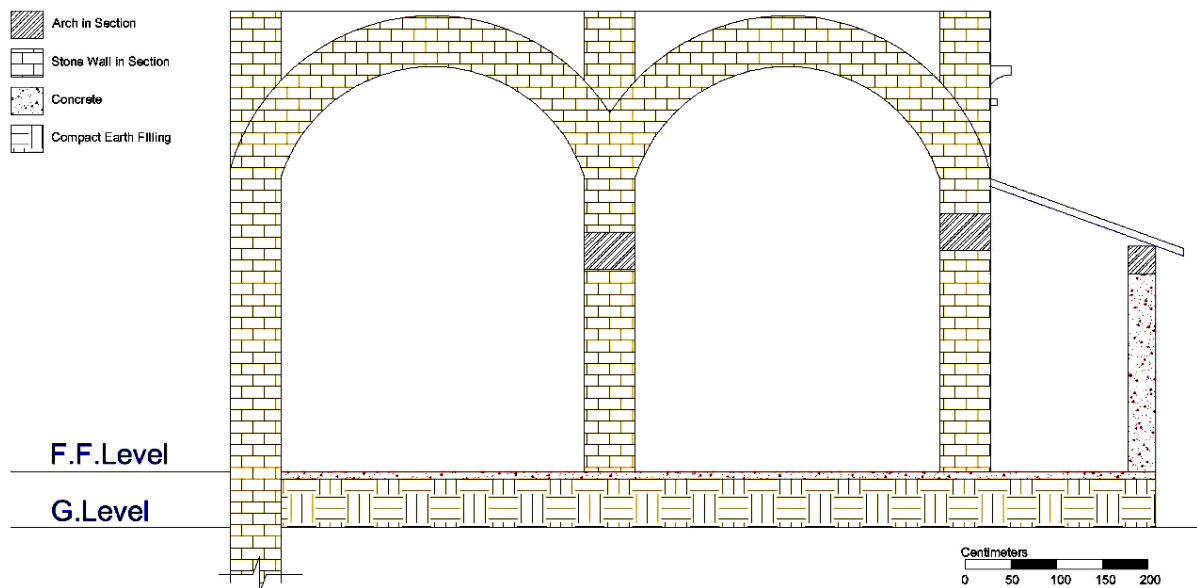


Figure 10. Sectional View of Building Case B
Dimensions Unit Centimetres



Figure 11.. Modifications Made

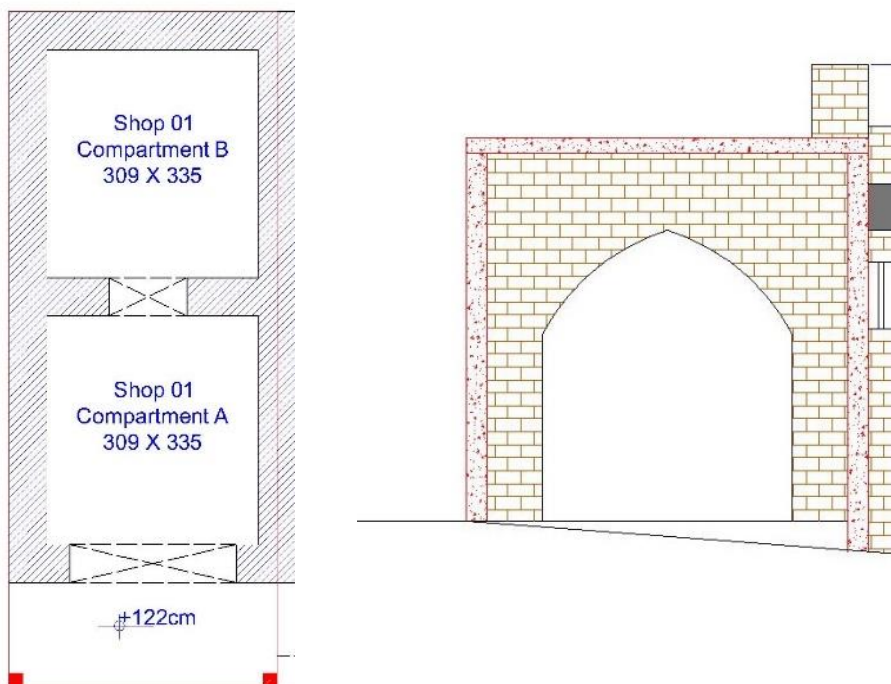


Figure 12. Highlighted Modifications in the Building



Figure 13. Ground Floor Plan (Building Case C)

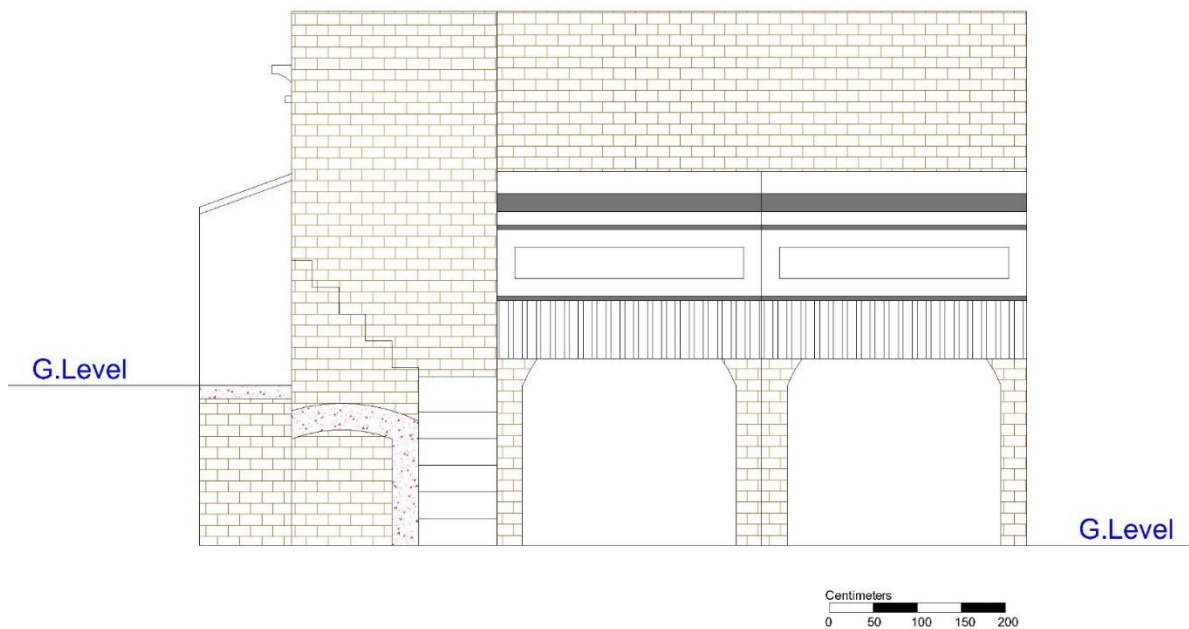


Figure 14.. Front Elevation (West-Side Elevation)
Dimensions Unit Centimetres