

# SETHI HAVELI

A GEM IN THE HEART OF HISTORIC PESHAWAR

*From Wrecked Vestige to Splendour*



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# SETHI HOUSE PESHAWAR

*Documentation, Damage Assessment & Conservation*



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## ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

The journey towards the stabilization and conservation of the famous Sethi Haveli, the Qadri Manzil of yore, was long and arduous. There were many who were instrumental in drawing attention to the plight of this unique national treasure and the abiding concern of each one of them became instrumental in the final conservation project that came to fruition.

I had roamed the streets of Peshawar during the 1980s, when I first visited the *mohallah* with my son, Mihail S. Lari, who was pursuing his studies at Harvard at the time. Our visit became possible due to the generous hospitality of Lt. General Habibullah Khattak, a famous Peshawarite, whose son Raza Khattak and my husband, historian Suhail Zaheer Lari, had studied at Oxford together.

Where the morphology of the *mohallah* was fascinating, the *havelis* stood alert as dignified sentinels, as if daring you to enter. We were privileged to be conducted around the most significant of the mansions, the Nisar Haveli, by Mr. Nisar Sethi himself. The most heartbreaking sight at the time was the pulling down of a wondrous *haveli* in the vicinity, now rebuilt as a non-descript, ‘modern’ structure. Even after a lapse of 30 years I can vividly see in my mind the extraordinary *chini kbana* (ornate mirror encrusted decorative alcove) shining in the debris, which took my breath away.

My fascination with Peshawar and the Sethi houses themselves continued as M.I. Khalil, C.S.P., and his wife Surraya Apa, daughter of a colleague of my father Zafarul Ahsan, I.C.S., took Suhail and myself around the nooks and corners of the amazing historic town that is Peshawar.

It was not until 2002, when that remarkable guardian of culture and women’s rights, Ingeborg Breines asked me to co-author a report for UNESCO Islamabad on cultural tourism in Lahore and Peshawar. As part of the proposal I explored the possibility of setting up a Heritage Centre in a *haveli* (mansion). The Qadri Manzil was one of the houses that were highlighted by Director Archaeology, Dr. Ihsan Ali.

The Sethi House Restoration Project would not have come about, if it had not been for the fortitude and single mindedness of Begum Fareeda Nishtar, a highly committed Peshawarite, her husband Dr. Tariq Nishtar and herself both belonging to distinguished *undroon shahr* (inner city) families. The generous hospitality and warmth that they lavished on my innumerable visits to Peshawar have become my fondest memories of the city. Fareeda Begum relentlessly pursued the case of saving the mansion with Chief Secretary Mr. Ejaz Qureshi, due to whose intervention the government purchased it and saved it from being destroyed.

Those who contributed to the project at various stages included the heritage buff Chief Secretary Mr. Ghulam Dastgir, Additional Chief Secretary Mr. Ataullah Khan and Director of Archaeology (Late) Mr. Saleh Mohammad Khan.

I would also like to acknowledge the Heritage Foundation of Pakistan team, Ar. Mariyam Nizam and Ar. Ijaz Khan who continued with the project until it was inaugurated, as well as the artisans and others from Lahore and Peshawar who executed the work at the site. Thanks are also due to Dr. Shah Nazar, Director Archaeology and Museums (2010-2012), for his scholarly contribution on historical perspective of Peshawar. My warm thanks are due to Nurjahan Mecklai who painstakingly edited the narrative and to Ar. Mariyam Nizam for compiling this document. And, last but not the least, to my husband, history buff Suhail Zaheer Lari, who continues to provide a mine of information about various historic sites that I get involved in.

I hope that this document provides the impetus that is urgently required to save the remarkable cluster of mansions in Peshawar as well as those in other historic towns of Pakistan.

**Ar. Yasmeen Lari**, *Sitara-i-Imtiaz*, *Hilal-i-Imtiaz*  
Chair and C.E.  
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Karachi, January 2015



## PREFACE AND OVERVIEW

The hidden jewel of a highly embellished residence of one of the most powerful mercantile families of the city of Peshawar lay concealed for several decades behind an anonymous façade. The Mohallah Sethian, named after the Sethis – the Wealthy – had been famous for the abundant riches of its owners and their love of architecture. Being among the wealthiest traders, their *kafilabs* (caravans) reaching the farthest regions of Central Asia and beyond to Czarist Russia, they would bring back priceless objects from those far-off lands. More importantly, they were deeply affected by the architecture of Central Asia and transmitted their impressions as they adorned and beautified their residences. The Sethi Houses thus became the epitome of Peshawar's residential architecture.

Once the entire *mohallah*, consisting of almost three dozen houses, boasted the most splendidly endowed and ornamented structures, each one an *object d'art* in itself. During the last few decades, particularly as the state of Russia was dismantled, and Peshawar was bearing the brunt of the influx of Afghan refugees, many of the buildings of this luxurious *mohallah* were dismantled and rebuilt with insensitive concrete structures. The destruction heralded the annihilation and destruction of age-old traditions and lifestyles that were the hallmark of Peshawar's *undroon shahr* (inner city) society.

Today only about one dozen of the original houses are extant. They are fast crumbling due to neglect and lack of maintenance. The Sethis have fallen on hard times, and are no longer able to maintain, what were once palatial mansions. As in other historic cities of Pakistan, many original residents have moved out, the younger generation preferring the new housing estates that have sprung up in all major cities of the country. With no assistance available for maintenance, the dwellings are being bought up by moneyed outsiders, insensitive to the customs or conventions of the historic walled city, interested only in making the houses livable for themselves. Not being aware of the historicity of the *havelis* (houses), or of their architectural significance, the new owners are in the process of pulling them down, driven by the value of the lots on which they stood. It is only a matter of time before almost all of these exquisitely embellished structures in this remarkable cluster are lost.

It stands witness to the sagacity of the government that one of the *havelis*, known as Qadri Manzil, was purchased in 2006 due to the sensitivity and timely intervention of a few who had been gently nudged by Begum Farida Nishtar, armed with recommendations by the CEO, Heritage Foundation of Pakistan, Chief Secretary Ejaz Qureshi, Additional Chief Secretary Ghulam Dastgir and Director of Archaeology Saleh Mohammad Khan. The owner having died, the house had been put up for sale and if immediate action had not been taken it would have been dismantled, and all its valuable decorative features sold for a song.



*Elegant TarseemBandi.*



Aerial Google Image showing relation of Gor Khattree and the Haveli.

The house was the original *zanakbana* (female quarters) of the central Sethi House, now belonging to Mr. Nisar Sethi and is reported to have been built in 1834. Due to multiple tenancy and several additions of bathrooms and kitchens, with little spent on its maintenance, the house was in a highly damaged state, some parts of it nearing collapse. Further, on the north-east side, a poorly designed, recently built addition had affected the original structure, pulling the latter and causing a dangerous lean of over 11°, a highly vulnerable state and one that required skilful and careful shoring before any remedial measures could be undertaken.. The water seepage from rain, as well as from poor plumbing due to multiple tenancy and construction of the aforementioned extra bathrooms and kitchens, had added to the decay of the historic structure's wooden rafters, many of them in an imminent state of collapse and liable to cause even greater damage to the historic structure.

This was the state when Ar. Yasmeen Lari, CEO of Heritage Foundation of Pakistan was notified as Hon. Project Director by the Government of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa in March 2010, to undertake the process of conservation of the building. The office for the documentation centre was set up by the Foundation in May 2010 in collaboration with the Directorate of Archaeology and Museums at the historic Gor Khattree premises. The next six months were devoted to the documentation of the historic structure with a locally appointed workforce, and with Ar. Tahir Khattak appointed as team leader. At the same time various studies by experts were also initiated. The structural study declared the non-historic part as most dangerous, needing to be demolished immediately to relieve the stress on the mid-historic

and early historic portions. They further advised that the mid-historic part was also under extreme stress, and that immediate measures were required to save it. Otherwise it would also have to be pulled down.

The work of conservation was undertaken in January 2011 by a dedicated team of artisans from Lahore, most of whom had been trained in various aspects of historic conservation during the tenure of Ar. Yasmeen Lari as UNESCO's National Advisor from 2003-2005, when the Mughal Shish Mahal ceiling was rescued and stabilized. In addition to the dangerous non-historic portion, other areas of concern were the roof and the first floor terrace area, which had been gravely affected by water seepage.

Among the first steps was to open up the roof in portions, as for fear of rain, it was not advisable to expose the entire roof to the weather. As soon as the layer of brick flooring was removed, it was clear that the action was none too soon. It exposed the highly damaged wooden rafters, some of which were in a state of near collapse.

As the work progressed, from one portion of the roof to another, from one open-to-sky terrace to another, the state of the wooden structure was found to be extremely critical. Due to the timely intervention, by saving all that could be rescued, with replacement only where necessary, the entire roof structure was stabilized. The work had to be handled extremely carefully, since below the rafters was the beautifully ornamented *tarseem bandi*, the wooden fretwork false ceilings which were highly embellished with beautiful fresco that must not be touched at any cost. Any removal of the *tarseem bandi* may have caused irretrievable damage to the ceiling and could not be allowed to happen. Through the skill of master artisans, the work of replacement of joists and rafters was carried out without imposing any damage to these wondrous elements. As mentioned earlier, no risk could be taken by having the roofs exposed because of fear of rain. A single trickle could have inflicted irreversible damage to various decorative features.

The timber structural members have now been provided anti-termite treatment, besides filling spaces between the rafters with timber planks or flat brick, layers of polyethylene sheets, and cold bitumen treatment and lime terracing, finished with brick paving in the case of roofs. The effectiveness of the new waterproofing was checked by nature when the Peshawar rain poured in during February and March 2011.

The north-east non-historic part was first removed, which relieved the pressure from the historic structure. The masonry portions with excessive leaning – more



Replacement of Brick Masonry.

than 5” (125mm) – that was categorized as dangerous, have been removed and reconstructed. Thus, although a daunting task, the entire structure has now been made safe.

Similar careful activities were undertaken to remove later additions built within the historic part. Later the non-historic, post-partition front block was also dismantled, which enabled the creation of a piazza in front of the historic *haveli*.

Excessive earth removal was carried out so that almost 14,000 tons of earth were removed from the roofs and floors alone, thus relieving the structure of unnecessary loads.

The work required an immense effort from each and every member of the construction as well as from the supervisory teams. Meticulous daily documentation of the work provides a rare record, showing as and when it was carried out. The forms for recording are based on forms developed by Ar. Lari during her tenure as UNESCO’s national advisor at Lahore Fort.

Once the stabilization of the structure was completed, and all non-historic portions or those that were a threat had been removed including the modern interventions carried out in the basement, the enormous work of flooring of terraces and wall cleaning was initiated. The work proceeded smoothly, although non-release of funds from July 2011 to January 2012 caused a halt in conservation activity.

Although *tarseem bandi* was worked on right from the inception of the project, work on conservation of other decorative features could not be taken up for various reasons, among them the difficulty in finding skilled artisans for stucco and fresco work.

By the time that the opening was set by the Minister for Culture for 1 February 2013, the entire structure had been stabilized and water-proofed, only two rooms could be finished along with treatment of exquisite stucco and fresco. Since due to procedures, the remaining amount of Rs. 11,900,000 remaining from the PC-1 allocation had been surrendered, no further work can be taken up until approval of a new PC-1 and release of funds to finish the remaining work of cleaning, fresco and stucco to bring the entire *haveli* back to its original impressive form.



## HISTORICAL CONTEXT



*BASES AND CAPITALS: The décor here is a combination of acanthus and lotus leaves, stylized and exquisitely carved. Each high line into the petal is executed with a masterly hand. The edges of each petal are delicately cusped. The high lines initiate from the base of leaf, flow towards its edges and curve with a slight rhythm before these end. Raised points as if of dew are carved projecting from the tips of the leaves giving a sensitive border to the composition.*

## HISTORICAL PERSPECTIVE

The recorded history of the region begins in the middle of the sixth century BC, when almost the whole of the Indus region gradually became a part of the Achaemenian Empire of Persia. The Greeks, with Alexander's invasion of the area in 327 BC followed the Achaemenian rule, so although the Macedonian rule was short-lived, the Indus valley absorbed many Hellenistic traditions, which are to be seen in the famous Gandharan Art. Therefore, the other important civilization which emerged in the area is the famous Buddhist Civilization of Gandhara, which lasted for at least seven hundred years and flourished in the lush green valley of Peshawar, the sacred land of the Buddhist called Gandhara, and in the surroundings as well. Evidences that have been unearthed show that the Gandhara region remained an important trade crossroads, with cultural meetings taking place between India, Central Asia, and the Middle East. Peshawar remained one of the chief cities and cultural centres of ancient Gandhara.

Peshawar, the present capital of the Khyber Pakhtunkhwa Province, is situated about 12 km east of the Bab-i-Khyber, and it is also the headquarter of the central district of the Peshawar Division. The city itself is bounded on the east by the river Bara and on the north by the river Budni. To the east is the offshoot of the Kabul River and on its west the Khyber hills, with the Pak-Afghan boarder only 64 km to the west of Peshawar.

Situated on an ancient crossroads, Peshawar has played a key role in the political, cultural and religious exchanges between China, Central Asia and the Indo-Pak subcontinent. The developments on this part of the land formed and transformed the history of South Asia. Unlike the other cities of the region, which for centuries have seen many ups and downs and embraced different civilizations, this ancient city also gave refuge to sundry cultures, the impact of which can be seen even in the present day life of the people of the region.

Besides being a source of power and trade, Peshawar was considered a core of religious importance, particularly in the epoch of the Kushanas (64 AD). Many travellers visited the area and left their imponderable accounts on different aspects of the city. This information, scattered in different annals, is in the forefront and should be considered the earliest references to Peshawar. Another aspect of the information is to unveil how those who visited it, particularly the Chinese and Korean travellers and pilgrims, saw Peshawar, which would help us place the city in its true historical context.

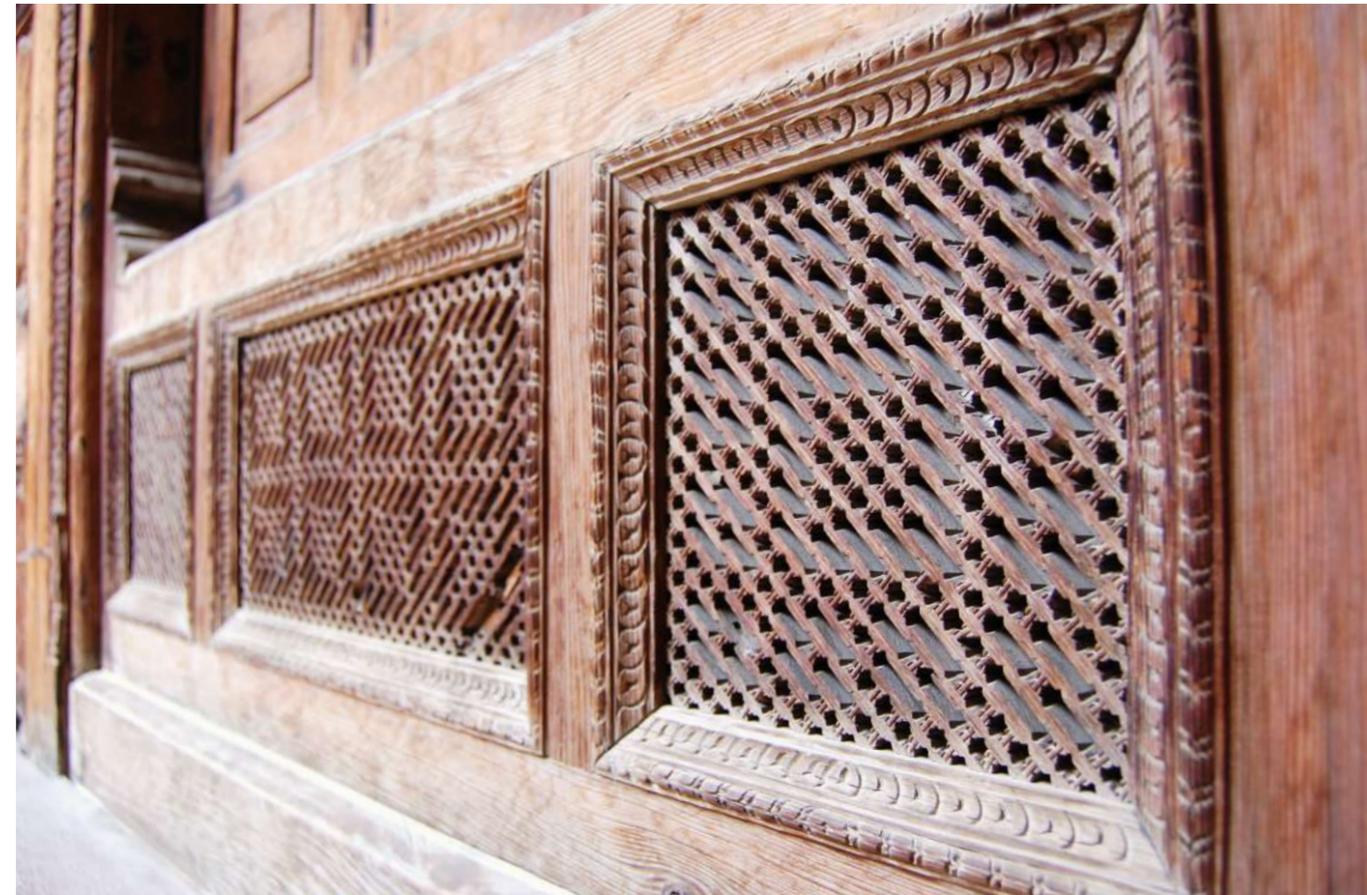
## NOMENCLATURE OF THE CITY

The etymology of the name of Peshawar is as obscure as its foundation, in spite of the fact that it holds the key to the gateway of the subcontinent of Pakistan and India. From the west, Peshawar was the first city that was encountered on the way to India, and hence the name is derivable from the Persian "Pesh awardan."

These Persians (both the Achaemenian and Sassanians) exercised a long sway over here, and adopted the title of "Lord of Parsa," meaning King of the Persians and the name "Pesh-awardan" (Peshawar) is due to them.

It is also said that the city of Peshawar was founded by a Persian ruler known as Hoshang, grandson of Kaimurs of Shahnama. This suggests 'Parashpur' (the city of the Persians) rather than Sanskrit 'Purushapura'. According to some the Sassanian emperor Shahpur, son of Ardeshir, reconstructed this city and gave it the name of 'Shahpur', but in course of time it became 'Bashapur' (Peshawar).

*PUNJALI The name that the old Gazetteer of 1897 – 1998 uses to describe this particular decorative wood work is Pinjira which is a misnomer. The correct name is Punjali and this is the term used by local artisans. Mr Allah Bukhsb of Shahzad Optico, Khyber Bazar, also maintains that the correct name is 'Punjali'. His uncle Abdal-Aziz created 'Punjali' screens and he knew Abd al-Hakim Jan well. Even as late as the first half of this century, there used to be artisans in Peshawar city who specialized in this form of wood work took pride in their creations. The work was in great demand and could fetch a good price. In 1897/1898 the price of a good Punjali screen was Rs.625 and smaller screen were for about Rs.50 to Rs. 80. This shows that this art was highly valued. Today there is not a single 'Punjali' expert found in the Peshawar city.*



The earliest written record is a Kharoshthi rock inscription at Ara near Attock, dated 119 AD and referring to it as 'Posha-pura', meaning "the City of Flowers." A Chinese pilgrim Fa-hian in 400 AD records it as 'Fo-lu-sha', while in the 7th century AD. Hiuen Tsang mentions it as 'Po-lu-sha-pu-lo', and Masudi in 10th century AD spells it as 'Pershadwar'. Then Alberuni in 1030 AD recorded it as 'Purshawar' and 'Purushavar', though Babar, the founder king of the Mughal Empire, referred to it as 'Parashawar', also using 'Baghrum' for Peshawar. The Mughal king Akbar's minister Abul Fazal takes four different forms of the name: 'Parshapur', 'Pashawar', 'Peshawar' and 'Pishawar'. Wilson was probably the first who identified Peshawar with these names, like the 'Polu-sha-pu-lo' of Hiuen Tsang, the 'Purushavar' of Alberuni, the 'Pashawar' of Abul Fazal or the Peshawar of the present day. The "Gazetteer of Peshawar" records that the name is derived from the name of a king who was known as 'Purrus' or 'Purrush', and it is also recorded that this city was founded by Bagram, a ruler of the time who had three brothers, one who was the ruler of Jamrud, the second of Hashtnagar and the third of Swat. About Bagram, Gopal Das says, "It was the name of a Hindu Raja Vikrama who built this city and gave it its name," but with this Dani disagrees, as king Vikrama is purely imaginary.

In old Pushto literature the name of Peshawar is mentioned as Bagram by Rehman Baba, Khushal Khan Khattak, Kazim Khan Shieda and Ali Khan Baba. To Cunningham the word Peshawar means 'the city par excellence'

Wood work is of the following types:

- Naqqashi;
- Punjali;
- Carving;
- Tarseem bandi (shown below).

Abd al-Hakim Jan is known to be the master wood carver of Peshawar who is reputed to have carried out on panels carrying magnificent carving in Haji Ahmad Gul's and Karim Bakhsb Setbi's house - a forgotten genius of an artisan whose lifetime achievements should be recorded. Abd al-Hakim Jan was Awan by virtue of tribe. His ancestors came from Afghanistan to Peshawar with the army of Sultan Mahmud Ghaznavi. In olden times, when armies travelled to distant land, not knowing what lay ahead, all workmen were brought along. The old Gazetteer of 1897-98 records Awan as excellent boat builders. Sultan Mahmud Ghaznavi was planning to cross Indus. It is quite possible that he brought the Awans along. [Source: Mrs. Mubarik Jan, wife of Major Abd al-Rahma Butt, herself a family member of Abd al-Hakim Jan.

The colours noted in naqqashi (fresco) shown below are: Blue in shades of Lapislazuli, light and dark blue; red, pink, vermilion, white, green and light green, yellow and yellow ochre, brown and gold.



TARSEEM BANDI MOTIFS A beautiful sunflower is executed in the centre of the motif here. Sun flower as a decorative motif is not a common feature in Pakistan and India's décor and especially of the décor of Peshawar. It appears that the artist has taken inspiration from lotus, daisies, marigold and merged their form into creating his own special sun flower for Ahmad Gul's house. The flower is stylized artistic and its execution is masterly. It resembles the small flowers executed on Abd al-Hakim Jan's own wooden box.

Types of wood identified by Mr. Ghulam Mustafa Assistant Wood Technologist Pakistan Forest Institute:

- Deodar (Cedrus deodara);
- Kail (Pinus nallichiana);
- Chir (Pinus roxburghii);
- Peral or Spruce (Picea smithianan);
- Shishum (Dalbergia sisso).

and, he traces it from the Sanskrit *Vi and Grama*." Charles Masson derives the word from the Turkic language 'Bi' or 'Be' which means 'the chief place'. Caroe recorded that at least three of the Mughal kings mention 'Bagram' which means Peshawar, and he says that after forcing the Khyber, Babar arrived at Peshawar and called it 'Bagram', adding that King Humayun wanted to take control of Bagram (Peshawar). In Bagram Fort a Kazak General, Sikandar, was left with strong force. Humayun adopted Bangash route in 1552 and was only able to save Bagram from the tribal attack in the nick of time. About Akbar, he says: "Once Akbar was in Kabul the tribals staged an attack on the citadel at Bagram and killed the commandant, Sayyed Hamid." It is also interesting to note that close to Peshawar (8 km to the east of it), there is a village named Peshungru, a name which might have been derived from the word Peshawar. Or perhaps old Peshawar was located there, as Babar mentioned Parashawar near Nelab which is the river Kabul, while in my opinion it is the Indus, because Kabul is always muddy yellowish in colour."

Kamal says, "Of the three areas or localities mentioned above, in brief one was the ancient seat of government and centred upon the present



WOODEN CARVINGS - There are motifs carved in high relief on the wood paneled wall of the courtyard. Each motif is bound by a frame. The frame is of stylized lotus leaves carved in running border. Similar motifs are found on Persian carpets. The unique aspects of Islamic motifs are that these can be used for a variety of purpose. It is well suited as an ornament of architecture jewellery, design in a carpet, or woven inside a shawl, or as an embroidery adorning a table cloth.

Bala Hisar. This was probably the Bigram – the Bagram of the Mughal times. The area of Jahangirpura marks later additions as shown above. The most ancient part of the city is thus represented by Gor Khattree and adjoining areas. The Bala Hisar locality was known as Bigram / Bagram, and the area between the Kohati Darwaza channel and the Qissa Khwani channel was called Jahangirpura at least from the time of the Emperor Jahangir. So we are left with no alternative but to believe that the remaining locality (i.e. Gor Khattree) was known under the name of ‘Porushpur’ or ‘Porushwar’. As the governments changed frequently and the name Bigram was lost, the name of the actual town, i.e. Peshawar persisted and was later applied to the whole town.

### THE SETHIS

The word Sethi is derived from the Sanskrit word ‘Sresthin’ which means, ‘head of a business class’. This was a name the people of Peshawar gave them while they resided there and had become prosperous businessmen. Their original clan name is ‘Rorr’. In the old gazetteer ‘Arora’ is listed as a Hindu clan and though they are described as successful businessmen of Peshawar city. It seems that the word ‘Rorr’ originally stood for ‘Arora,’ of which the initial ‘a’ was dropped in the course of time. The ‘Rorr’ Sethis therefore could have been the ‘Arora’ Sethis before embracing Islam. In the early 18th century Sethis lived in Bhera, a town situated on the right bank of the river Jhelum near Sargodha in Punjab. There they lived in the Mohallah Hakimian, where the family enjoyed social eminence and was regarded with respect as Muslim *ulemas*. Roughly, towards the middle of the 18th century, their fortunes in Bhera changed, and the story of their family is interlinked with the rise and dominance of the Sikhs in the region, after Attock fell to Ranjit Singh in 1814. In 1818, a Sikh army advancing on Peshawar overran the country as far as the foothills. The Sethis had left Bhera to save themselves from this very menace, but fate had it following them here too, and the only positive factor was that in 1818 they were safer inside Peshawar city. Had they been out at Chamkani, they might not have lived to build this superb house!

An Italian, a general of the Sikh army named Avitabile, whom Pathans called ‘Abutabela’, became the governor of Peshawar from 1838 to 1842. He constructed a pavilion on top of Gor Khattree. The governor’s residence of that time was a few yards’ walk from Haji Ahmad Gul’s house, and he ruled Peshawar from there. He was a ruthless administrator who punished savagely. Under the Sikh regime, the maintenance of internal order was scarcely attempted. Blood feuds between the villages and fami-

lies led to pitched battles in broad daylight, but the government only interfered to inflict a fine. Raids from across the border would occur frequently, but the Sikhs refused to consider disturbances not directed against themselves as casting any discredit on their rule. Government troops were mostly held in reserve at Peshawar with a few outposts at Shabqadar and Bara post. Ranjit Singh died in June 1839, and with his death, the idea of a strong Sikh state began to dissolve.

In the Sethi House, the woodwork and other crafts are unique as they present an extraordinary synthesis of many cultures. Through its galaxy of motifs, the glimpse of a long trail of interesting history can be seen and thus a remarkable cultural fusion is achieved which is distinct and can only happen in a city like Peshawar.

*The acanthus here represents Mughal tradition in décor. In Mughal architectural decorations, a curiously hybrid type of floral design emerged out of combination of European botanical drawings, acanthus leaves and local and Persian traditional flora. These designs were applied with supreme taste. The acanthus here, though imported from Europe (Rome) has been thoroughly Indianized.*

**Dr. Shah Nazar**  
Director

Directorate of Archaeology and Museums,  
Government of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa





EXECUTIVE SUMMARY



Stucco tracery in ChinniKhanna 2/04.

## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The Sethi Haveli or House, earlier known as Qadri Haveli, is among the most remarkable domestic architectural *tours de force* to be found anywhere in Pakistan. It is among the rare examples of 18th century merchants' or traders' houses that were built with loving care and with money being no object. The Sethis (derived from *Setb* or Wealthy Trader) had extensive trade which stretched from Central Asia to Russia and beyond.

The Sethi Haveli is under the custodianship of the Directorate of Archaeology and Museums, Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, under the overall charge of the Director of Archaeology and Museums. The implementation agency and oversight for conservation/restoration of the Sethi Haveli was carried out by Heritage Foundation of Pakistan, its CEO, Ar. Yasmeen Lari, being notified as Hon. Project Director by the Government of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa.

The duty of care requires that protection is provided to a heritage site in as efficient a manner as possible and to prolong its life, while at the same time retaining its authenticity for the enjoyment and education of future generations. The responsibility of care continues after the conservation process has been completed in the form of preventive maintenance, which would ensure that the building continued to be in a state of well being. Therefore, particular attention would be needed to carry out regular repair and maintenance, with special focus on inhibiting causes of dampness and water ingress.

### AIMS

This publication has been prepared in order to provide an authentic and comprehensive record of the process of conservation undertaken at the famous Sethi Haveli. As the Foundation is engaged in safeguarding heritage all across Pakistan, it believes the Sethi House conservation to be a milestone in the history of heritage protection in the province.

- This is the first private house bought for public use by the government in the province.
- This is the first collaborative project between a civil society organization i.e. the Heritage Foundation of Pakistan and a public agency i.e. the Department of Archaeology and Museums, to save a priceless treasure of Peshawar.
- Under the guidance of the honorary project director, the work has been undertaken systematically and methodically using the Foundation's templates and formats.



Internal Courtyard on Level 3 and restored Purdah Wall on Level 4.

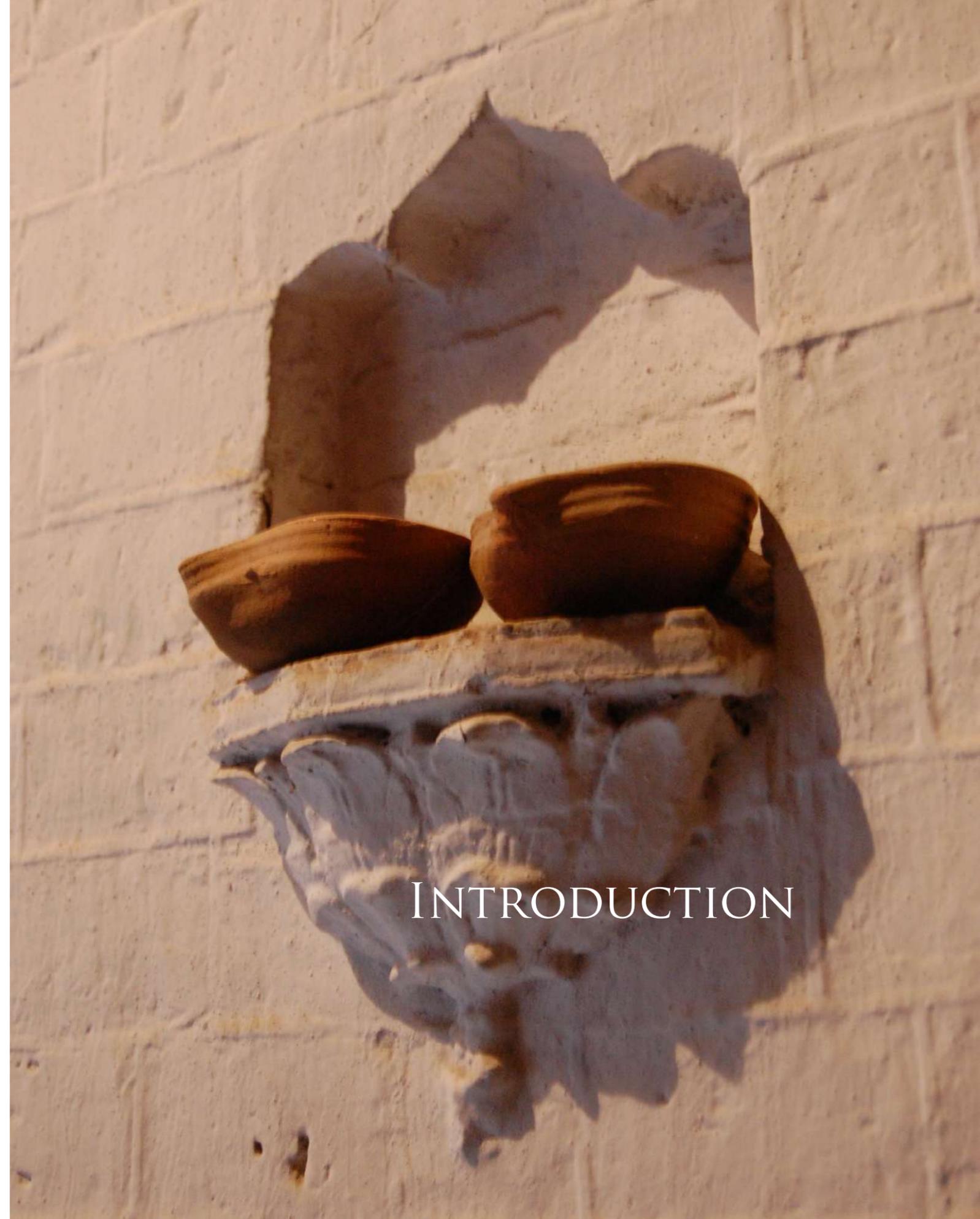
- The work has been carried out after completing essential studies, i.e. graphic and photographic documentation, condition survey, structural and geo-technical investigations etc.
- The site work has been recorded on a daily basis, along with the preparation of drawings of the interventions. Thus, a comprehensive pictorial and written record has been compiled for use by future conservators or historians.
- For the first time women have been trained to carry out the removal of dirt and layers of paint from fragile surfaces.

This publication has been prepared to present the process of conservation of highly endangered heritage properties such as the Sethi Haveli, and thus provides guidelines for undertaking similar projects.

At the same time, effort has been expended by the Foundation to train architects and others in various aspects of heritage work – from documentation procedures to recording and conservation. Additionally, the publication will provide a basis for future conservation projects, and in the methodologies that can be used to carry out conservation according to applicable international charters and guidelines.

## TIME LINE

- 17th c.** A Mughal Haveli.  
**1805** Peshawar is conquered by Ranjit Singh and his forces..  
**Circa. 1834** Avitabile, a tyrannical ruler, is appointed Governor.  
**19th c** The Sethis develop extensive trade linkages into Central Asia and Czarist Russia.  
**Circa. 1830** The establishment of the Sethi Mohallah.  
**1832** The Mughal Haveli was either demolished or was no longer extant. Construction of the house was undertaken on existing foundations.  
**1847** The Second Anglo-Sikh War and the annexation of the Punjab, which included Peshawar. The British build their first residency in the present Corps Headquarters site.  
**1882** The date of completion established by the Directorate of Archaeology & Museums.  
**Early 20th c.** Addition is made consisting of a couple of rooms on the east side, which is accessible from a narrow street located in the north.  
**1917** The Russian Revolution. The Sethis lose their trade linkages and much of their wealth.  
**1947** Independence of Pakistan.  
**1960s** A new block is constructed at the entrance, camouflaging the original entrance.  
**1980s** The house is subleased, and a school established in one part of the building.  
**2000s** The house undergoes rough treatment due to multiple renters and damage from new bathrooms and kitchens.  
**2003** Due to interest of UNESCO Country Director Ingeborg Breines, UNESCO report co-authored by Ar. Yasmeen Lari, recommends establishment of a Heritage Centre in the Sethi Mohallah.  
**2006** News of imminent destruction brought to the notice of Chief Secretary by Begum Fareeda Nishtar and Ar. Yasmeen Lari. The house is bought by the Government of NWFP, now Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, and placed in the custody of the Directorate of Archaeology and Museums.  
**2010** Ar. Yasmeen Lari, CEO, Heritage Foundation of Pakistan is notified Hon.Project Director for Sethi House Project.  
**2010** Documentation Centre established in Gor Khattree jointly by the Foundation and DoAM, for training and documentation.  
**2011-2012** Conservation work undertaken under the direction of Hon. Project Director Ar. Yasmeen Lari.



## INTRODUCTION

## INTRODUCTION

### SCOPE OF THE PROJECT

In order to undertake conservation work, it was determined that as much base line information as possible would be developed in the form of recording the entire structure, and even the environs. For this purpose a documentation centre was set up, which worked for six months with the sole task of making full records. Due to lack of sufficient experience, the documentation fell short of the required standards; however, basic drawings for ‘as built record’ were prepared.

### CURRENT OWNERSHIP AND STAKEHOLDERS

The Government of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa owns the Sethi House and the entire plot on which it stands. The house, which was the *zenanakhana* of the adjacent house owned by Mr. Nisar Sethi, was bought by the Government in 2006, and the Directorate of Archaeology and Museums, Khyber Pakhtunkhwa was appointed the custodian of the building.

The *haveli* has been included on the list of significant houses of Peshawar by the directorate. For the last several decades the Sethi houses have caught the imagination of people from Pakistan and abroad, because of the ornate and embellished interiors and their remarkable architectural character.

### SURVEYS AND STUDIES

The Documentation Centre in the historic Gor Khattree carried out a physical survey of the structure along with a preliminary photographic record. The personnel for the centre were appointed after advertisement in newspapers.

Through surveys, most of the building was documented. All rooms, primary and secondary elements were numbered according to the numbering system provided by the Foundation, which allocates a unique number to each element.

Although a sufficient time of 6 months and adequate funding had been provided, the expected results could not be attained. However, this provided sufficient data which could be used to initiate the work of conservation. Whatever oversights or drawbacks were found, they were all made

up for during the conservation process by the Foundation. Architects Wajiha Siddiqui and Mariyam Nizam from the Foundation’s Karachi office ensured that all missing data and information were compiled to make the record as comprehensive as possible.

All drawings after corrections were treated for presentation purposes, some of which are included in the publication. Similarly, display panels showing various drawings and stages of conservation were also prepared in order to present the conservation work at a glance.

During this period, experts for the condition survey report, and for structural studies and stabilization methodologies, as well as geo-technical studies were appointed, and finalized their reports.

The salient features of the reports form part of the narrative that is discussed below.

### PLANNING CONSERVATION ACTION

Internationally accepted procedures and principles of conservation work on heritage places were followed by the Foundation.

### INVESTIGATE HISTORICAL EVIDENCE

For this purpose, measured architectural drawings and a photographic survey were carried out. The drawings prepared consisted of all plans, elevations, sections, interior and exterior details. Full photography of all aspects along with damage assessment was carried out. The Foundation’s numbering system, that provides a unique number to each element, ensured that the condition of each and every element was compiled by the Foundation, and used extensively to assess historic evidence before taking action.

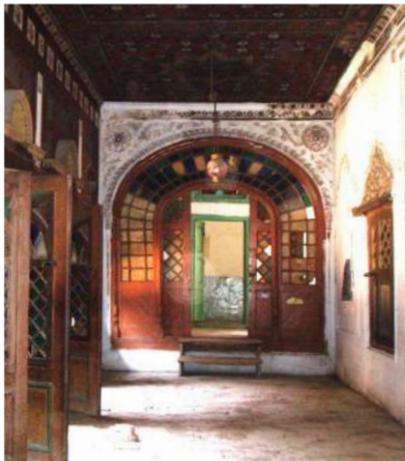
In addition a structural evaluation report was prepared by conservation engineering expert, Engr. Amin Tariq, and a report of geo-technical studies by geo-technical expert Engr. Ejaz Shahid was finalized after extensive investigation through boreholes. These were compiled in order to work out a comprehensive conservation strategy based on the findings and recommendations of all experts.



*Chini Khana in Room 2/09.*



*Wooden bastas in Room 3/16.*



View of Room 2/01.



Wooden tarseembandi roof in Room 2/01.



View of Mung and Purdab Wall from Internal Courtyard Level 1.

## EVALUATE HERITAGE SIGNIFICANCE

Heritage Specialist Ar. Yasmeen Lari, carried out the evaluation of heritage significance. This involved identifying all significant elements, later additions, and various areas as well as non-historic parts.

Thus a study was prepared to assess its aesthetic, historic, research and social value to protect and conserve it for future generations.

The analysis has been carried out on tangible evidence and is therefore not based on conjecture. While looking for clues, a study was also carried out in the surrounding area, particularly among surviving buildings in the *Mohallab Sethian*.

## ASSESSMENT OF EXTENT OF HERITAGE SIGNIFICANCE

A hierarchy of significance has been established based on studies carried out by experts. This was important, as it ensured that significance criteria were established for those areas that were highly dangerous and had a de-stabilizing effect on the historic structure.

Based on the studies, the areas of high significance were identified in order to ensure that these were maintained and conserved at all cost. The evaluation helped in determining that the mid-historic part that was in a highly dangerous state should also be saved. Thus, the non-historic portions, which were a cause of de-stabilizing the mid-historic or historic parts, had to be pulled down. This sacrifice of non-historic portions was necessary on the following counts:

- a. The non-historic portions were poorly built and had no architectural or historic significance.
- b. These were not only themselves in a dangerous state, but at the same time because of their abutment and proximity, they posed a grave danger to the historic and mid-historic portions which were areas of high significance.

## CONSERVATION MANAGEMENT PLAN

The present document has been prepared as a record of conservation. It provides information regarding the strategy utilized for implementation, along with the methodology of work, the sequence of various activities, time scheduling and the guiding principles while undertaking conservation.

## SCHEDULE OF WORKS

The work schedule was finalized, and relied on the following:

- a. Making the roofs waterproof.
- b. Removal of all extra loading from the roof found in the form of earth filling etc.
- c. Removal of dangerous parts.
- d. Stabilization of entire structure.
- e. Making the structure safe for use by visitors.
- f. Removal of all parts that had deteriorated or were damaged.
- g. Repair and conservation of all original elements unless severely damaged.
- h. Restoration and conservation of all decorative elements, retaining as much as possible the original parts.

## RECORD OF WORK CARRIED OUT

Special systems were put in place to ensure that recording was carried out as meticulously as possible. A record of progress photographs was maintained regularly.

Formats for reporting and recording conservation data were developed at the Foundation's office in Karachi. Thus, templates were prepared for work plans and site instructions in order that all work to be conducted on site was recorded and conveyed to all concerned in the most efficient manner. Approximate duration of work along with the materials and labour that would be used were also recorded. The work plan also recorded any delays and other issues that were encountered during the execution of the work.

A comprehensive conservation record was maintained, which ensured that work was being carried out in conformity with the work plan and site instructions. The forms listed the work that was being conducted along with challenges faced by the conservation team. It included drawings of existing building conditions as well as changes that were being incorporated. The conservation record will prove to be invaluable in developing an understanding of the various stages of conservation that have been illustrated in the drawings, images and text.

The regular progress record, developed for on-site work, can be considered the most important outcome of the conservation process. The form



View of cast iron and wood railing around Mung on Level 3.



Entrance doors of Room 3/13 during paint removal.



Re-erected and restored wooden Purdab wall on Level 4 Roof.



View showing restored tarseem bandi on the soffit of sun projection at Level 3.



Level 3 Courtyard.

includes images and drawing thumbnails that record the various activities that took place on any given day. Since the work on site was of varying kinds, from woodwork to structural stabilization to restoring building crafts, it was important to note down the development in the conservation work on a daily basis. This helped record any delays or challenges in the process.

### GUIDING PRINCIPLES

CEO, Heritage Foundation of Pakistan, as Hon. Project Director, when embarking on conservation activity laid down the following basic principles drawn from the ICOMOS Burra Charter:

- Do as much as necessary to care for the place and make it usable; but otherwise
- Change as little as possible so that its cultural significance is retained.



Inter-floor storage room with low head room on Level 3.

Several other guiding principles drawn from various heritage management sources were adopted in order to bring clarity to conservation activity:

### RESPECT FOR DOCUMENTARY EVIDENCE

*Do not base restoration on conjecture.*

Unfortunately, no archival photographs could be located. However in all cases physical evidence was used to form the basis of interventions.

### RESPECT FOR ORIGINAL LOCATION AND CONTEXT

*Respect must be shown to maintaining the original character of the street.*

The building is clearly rooted in its setting. The Mohallah Sethian has its own particular characteristics, and all surviving historic buildings in the precinct are invaluable for the character of the *mohallah* itself. The non-historic parts that were incongruous with the historic structures have been pulled down, thus revealing the mid-historic part of Qadri Haveli, and also provide spatial relief through creation of entry courts to the house.

### RESPECT FOR HISTORIC MATERIAL

*Minimal intervention maintains the heritage content of the built resource.*

The conservation strategy relied on maintaining and saving as much of the original material as possible. Only those portions that had become highly damaged and posed danger were replaced or joined together with new material. For example, although many wooden rafters were in a highly damaged state, each one was checked to determine the portion that was still serviceable. The damaged portion was carefully removed and new pieces added to ensure their structural integrity.



Cleaning and repair of Chini Khana in Room 2/04.

## RESPECT FOR ORIGINAL FABRIC

*Repair with like materials.*

As far as possible, after carrying out tests of the composition of materials, interventions were carried out with similar materials. This not only maintained the original fabric but also ensured compatibility. In order to distinguish between old and new work, full documentation of differences in texture or colour was maintained. For example, in the case of *tarseem bandi* or wooden fretwork, where extensive repairs were required, although the exact pattern and size of the smallest patterns were maintained, the difference in colour distinguishes the old from the new.

## RESPECT FOR THE BUILDING'S HISTORY

*Do not restore to one period at the expense of another.*

After a great deal of study and analysis, various phases of construction were identified. Different portions belonging to different periods were determined:

**Early-Historic Portion:** This consists of the original construction dating to the 19th century, part of which has been built on Mughal foundations.

**Mid-Historic Portion:** This consists of a portion that was identified as being built later than the original construction, probably at the end of 19th century. It seems to have been built a few decades after the original structure and incorporates similar imagery, construction methods and decorative items. As such it is of great value, and although it was found in a highly damaged state, complex methodology was utilized to save it.

**Later-Historic Portion:** This is a small portion located in the front and was clearly disparate in its construction and in other elements compared to the original structure. It is likely to have been built in the 1930s. It was decided that this portion should be stabilized to maintain the architectural history of the Sethi House.

**Non-Historic Portions:** These portions were identified as those that were built during the 1950s and 1970s. These were in a highly damaged state, and because they were poorly built, posed a grave threat to the original historic portions. Although their removal was also likely to be dangerous, they were removed with a great deal of care. Complex restraining systems were put in place before the demolition process was taken up.

## REVERSIBILITY

*Alterations should be able to be returned to original conditions.*

All possible precautions were taken to avoid making any new additions such as structures or openings that were not based on evidence of their past existence. For example, the *purdah* wall constructed on Level 3 was modelled to follow the original evidence of design and location. Similarly, when an opening was restored in the upper part of a basement, this was done after determining that it had been blocked up at a later stage, since the original arch was still extant.

## LEGIBILITY

*New work should be distinguished from old.*

All new work is distinguishable from the old. Care has been taken not only to provide distinction in its treatment, but also through comprehensive photographic and graphic documentation of new work.

## MAINTENANCE

*With continuous care, future restoration will not be necessary.*

Maintenance is among the most important aspects for the protection of historic structures. It was due to lack of maintenance and care that the historic Sethi Haveli progressed to a highly deteriorated state, bordering on collapse. A maintenance methodology will be put in place in order that the structure continues to receive in future the degree of care and maintenance that is necessary to prolong its life.

Further, being a structure that is now over 150 years old, care must be taken to examine the development of cracks if they begin appearing. Steps will need to be taken in order to arrest any cracks or movement in the structure. Similarly, all water sources must be carefully managed in order that further degradation due to water seepage is always controlled.



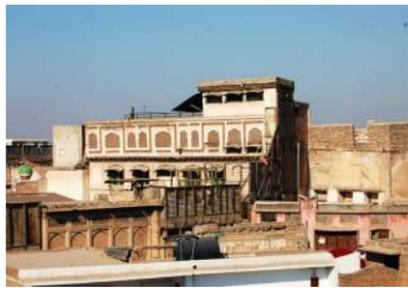
Tarseembandi ceiling after restoration in Room 3/16.



SETHI HOUSE & ITS  
SIGNIFICANCE



View from Saad Sethi house, Peshawar.



View of Moballah Sethian from Qadri Manzil Sethi House.



Intricate carving on doors in Nisar Sethi House in Moballah Sethian.

## SETHI HOUSE & ITS SIGNIFICANCE

### UNDERSTANDING THE SITE

#### Mohallah Sethian

As the name indicates the entire precinct was named after the Sethis – *the Wealthy* – who dominated trade in the city during almost the entire 19th century. It was clear that all those who occupied the beautifully ornamented houses with exquisite facades belonged to the same family, and were thus similarly blessed not only with wealth, but also with artistic sensibility. So much so that each strove for architectural splendour equally in the treatment of internal spaces as also with outward magnificence, creating an urban environment par excellence that harked back to tradition and artisan skill, perhaps never seen before or since.

Although old maps of the area are not available, the existence of important Mughal structures in the Gor Khattree point towards its Mughal ancestry. The Gor Khattree, although of a more ancient lineage than the Mughals, today carries Mughal gates. The *serai*, that has been restored in the last few years, is known to have been built by the Mughal princess Jahan Ara, the celebrated daughter of Emperor Shah Jahan, and provides the 17th century evidence. The existence of Akbari brick within the basement of Sethi House, as well as in the surrounding area, shows that Mughal interest may have preceded the Shah Jahan period. It is likely that the Mughal quarter extended well beyond the Sethi Mohallah and may have extended up to the *Ghanta Ghar* (Clock Tower) or even to the Qissa Khawani Bazaar, which are historic quarters of the inner city.

During their heyday the Sethis were able to employ the best artisans brought from far-off lands, and bedecked every nook and corner of these legendary houses. According to available records, the houses that were begun in 1832 would not have been completed until 1882. During the several decades of construction activity, the Qadri Haveli reflects various periods. As mentioned earlier, from available evidence it seems that the foundations of the subterranean chambers belong to the Mughal Period, while the preliminary research shows the existence of bricks belonging to the Akbar Period. There are also walls that show Sikh Period construction, clearly built when Ranjeet Singh's rule held sway in Peshawar, and many walls in which British period bricks are also used. Thus, at least 3 distinct periods can be identified through the study of bricks alone.

There was an encircling wall around the historic city, but most of this is now gone and even the gates that led to the inner city can hardly be found. There is the Lahori Gate that leads to the Gor Khattree area which was built by the British, in the same manner that they built gates in the fortification wall of the Lahore inner city.

The remarkable interiors are clear evidence of the opulent lifestyle of the Sethi families. The walls and ceilings of all rooms are highly embellished, utilizing rare crafts and artisanship of high quality. The walls were encrusted with fine lime stucco work, treated mostly with floral fresco, and traditional *chini khana* (decorative alcoves) beautified with filigree stucco. The ceilings show a high degree of creativity with designs composed of geometric arabesque patterns and varied treatments made up of wooden fretwork mouldings (*tarseem bandi*), which were also painted with fine fresco on moulded wooden surfaces.

With such a high level of finesse and artisan skill creating extraordinary interiors, the furnishing would also have been extremely sumptuous, with rich Persian or Tajik carpets covering the original lime terraced flooring drawn from the Mughal Period flooring tradition. The décor would reflect the lifestyle of traditional Peshawar families, graceful candelabras assembled with hand drawn, delicate blown glass, all overlooking the inner court sanctum, viewed through wonderfully decorative glass panes set in exquisitely crafted wooden windows.

It is true that the spatial characteristics showed the traditional division between women's and men's quarters. However, the building was designed entirely as women's living area and accordingly the original entrance was set back from the street, giving space for the *buggies* (horse-drawn carriages) to stand there. Meanwhile the disposition of rooms ensured that there was screening for the entrance courtyard or *mungb* (central open-to-sky courtyard), which was itself slightly raised from the entrance level.

#### The Haveli

The entire building is designed on several levels. The *teb-khana* or basement, a part of which is on two levels, is the most private and the coolest place in the entire building. The brick masonry is of high quality, and is mostly left exposed. Other than the fine brick cut-work medallions that catch the filtered light from the ventilators, there is no ornamentation in the basements, which are divided into three unconnected sections. Hence each basement could have been used for different functions, i.e.



Saad Sethi house, Peshawar.



Abdul Wadood Sethi house, Peshawar.



Saad Sethi house, Peshawar.



View from Qadri Manzil of neighbouring hospital Khair-Un-Nas, housed inside a Sethi Haveli.



Double height basements at Qadri Manzil Sethi house.

living quarters for the family during summers; storage space for important goods, and accommodation for the family's servants, etc. Since the Sethis were eminent traders, there are storage rooms inter-spaced between the spilt levels of the house. These spaces vary from small hidden closets in recesses behind doors, to low-ceilinged spaces underneath rooms and staircases. The ground level, or Level 1, consists of the courtyard, while the rooms disposed around the courtyard at Level 2 are located on a slightly higher level. In Level 3, the rooms are set back a little, creating a terrace around the *mungh*. The roof is Level 4 which is also available as an open terrace, thus, terraces and roofs create living spaces at many different levels and also for night use to catch cool breezes.

The original structural design followed the traditional system of construction widely adopted in old houses found in Peshawar. The framed wood and brick infill construction provides a sturdy structure, along with resilience in case of earthquakes. The well-crafted wood makes a frame of verticals and horizontals, which is filled with finely laid brick masonry.

The roofs and floors are made up of timber joists, which many a time are fashioned from logs. While removing the filling in the roofs, evidence of *khajoor* or date palm leaves has also been found. The external facades carry exposed wooden frame and brick infill, while all internal surfaces are treated with lime plaster, over which are renderings of lime stucco tracery or mouldings, mostly finished with fine fresco work.

The *mungh* or courtyard or *sehan* is among the most important features of the Sethi Houses. The disposition of rooms around the courtyard facilitates light ingress and air movement, and at the same time provides screening from the sun. Since the exterior of the house mostly presents a solid blank, with hardly any openings towards the streets, most of the light and air is actually received from the *mungh*, which also helps in regulating its own micro-climate within the house. A small fountain in the midst of the courtyard helps in cooling the entire structure during the intensely hot months in Peshawar.

The secondary elements consist of well carved doors and windows, along with the special *basta* louvered windows, that provide complete privacy when closed and air movement when open. Most of them are highly decorative, showing meticulous care to detailing. The interiors carry ornate fireplaces and the ubiquitous *Chini Khana*, the hall mark of historic houses of Peshawar.



Exposed wooden logs in Roof 4/02 before termite treatment and application of waterproofing and finishing.

The *mungh* carried a wooden *pardah* wall in order to conceal the activities on the roof or *dalan* from males using the courtyard. Clearly, terraces and roofs played an important role in the everyday life of the female inhabitants. Although several rooms were placed at the periphery, a substantial part of the first floor remained as an open-to-sky terrace for outdoor living. These roofs carried bathrooms and storage rooms and were protected by *pardah* walls. Those overlooking the *mungh* consisted of wooden screen walls to provide partial visibility without being seen by the occupants at the lower level. The solid brick masonry walls outlined the periphery to screen the roof terraces from the neighbours' prying eyes, no doubt because the roofs were the exclusive domain of female members of the household.

Considering that the Sethis were rich traders who brought goods from far-off lands, and no doubt exported other goods from Peshawar to Central Asia and Russia, they are likely to have required extensive spaces for storage. They probably owned *godowns* in the city, but in addition there would have been valuable items that needed to be stored under their own watchful eyes. Thus, we find several basements that are accessed independently, one consisting of two levels. In the basement, at least one tall, large room could be securely locked for keeping the goods safe. There were also inter-floors, i.e. narrow, gallery-like spaces that were inserted and hidden between floors and accessible through only one door. These probably contained other valuable items. Also found are safes with steel doors, which were clearly utilized for storing currency. It is reputed that after the Russian Revolution, the safes were chock-a-block with stacks of roubles that became worthless after the revolution of 1917. Besides these were long rooms underneath stairs, and changing levels that remained below 4 feet in height, pointing towards their being used for storage of goods that were for household use.

Further research is needed to determine the stages of work in the house. Was the entire historic structure built in one go or was it taken as one storey at a time? We know that the house was under construction for several decades, but was the structure finished, and was it the decorative features that took so long to complete? It is obvious that the work was undertaken with a great deal of care, and that the artisan skill employed was clearly the best possible, either garnered from the city or brought from far-off lands.

Two entrances to the house can be identified, one from the main street, which was clearly the main entrance. A rear entrance led from a small



Wood Frame with brick infill walls provide resilience in case of earthquake.



Double height basements Room -1/03.



Front courtyard after demolition of Non-historic portion.



View of street from inside Sethi house showing insensitive new construction.

street. Subsequently additions were made, particularly after 1947, and mainly due to poor quality of construction, these were among the principal reasons for the structural de-stabilization of the historic house.

The house itself is built on several levels. The drawings, prepared for the first time, show its various floors. Clear delineation has been made in the records developed by the Foundation to identify later additions built within the fabric of the historic edifice, and are marked in a different colour to distinguish between the original outline and the one that was found at the time of initiating conservation work. It is clear that there had been several tenants occupying the house. The owners had fallen on hard times, and the only way they could survive was to rent out various portions of the house. Thus, there was as a school on the ground floor, while the upper levels were utilized by multiple tenants for whose use new kitchens and bathrooms were built. Such additions, which required water supply and sewerage outlets, were found among the sources of excessive water leakage that had caused extensive damage to wooden structural members.

### Assessment of Significance

According to the Burra Charter, significance is defined as ‘the aesthetic, historic, scientific or social values for past, present or future generations.’ The English Heritage criteria involve the special historic or architectural interest a particular monument or site holds, and its importance “by reason of its historic, architectural, artistic, traditional or archaeological interest.”

### Urban Setting Context

The importance of the Sethi House is, among other factors, also due to its place in the context of the Sethi Mohallah and the traditional walled city.

The present setting of the house is clearly of national significance. The *mohallah* shows the original features of a traditional town and its organic morphology. There seem to have been no major changes since the 17th century and the network of streets continues to be the same, thus showing the high density, low rise configuration found in many historic towns of Pakistan. The setting provides an understanding of various periods of a segment of ancient lineage of Peshawar – from Mughal to Sikh to British and Independent Pakistan.



View of Saad Sethi House from the street.

It is interesting that the houses were built by wealthiest of Peshawar’s trading families, whose outreach went well beyond the country’s borders at that time. Nowhere could it be more apparent that Peshawar stood on the cross roads of civilizations as when viewing the Sethi Haveli in this context.

The fact that the dwelling is part of a number of houses joined together, particularly as the *zenankhana* (the women’s quarters) of the main house next door, demonstrates the construction methodologies according to social norms.

That the *zenanakhana* was given equal importance also shows the care that was bestowed on all structures built by the family, who took pride in the artisanship that they were able to gather for the construction of their abodes.

Although it did not remain unchanged, through study of various features, the original portions have been identified. Those that are compatible and were built before 1947 are being retained, but, those portions that were poorly built and are a danger to the historic building have been removed.

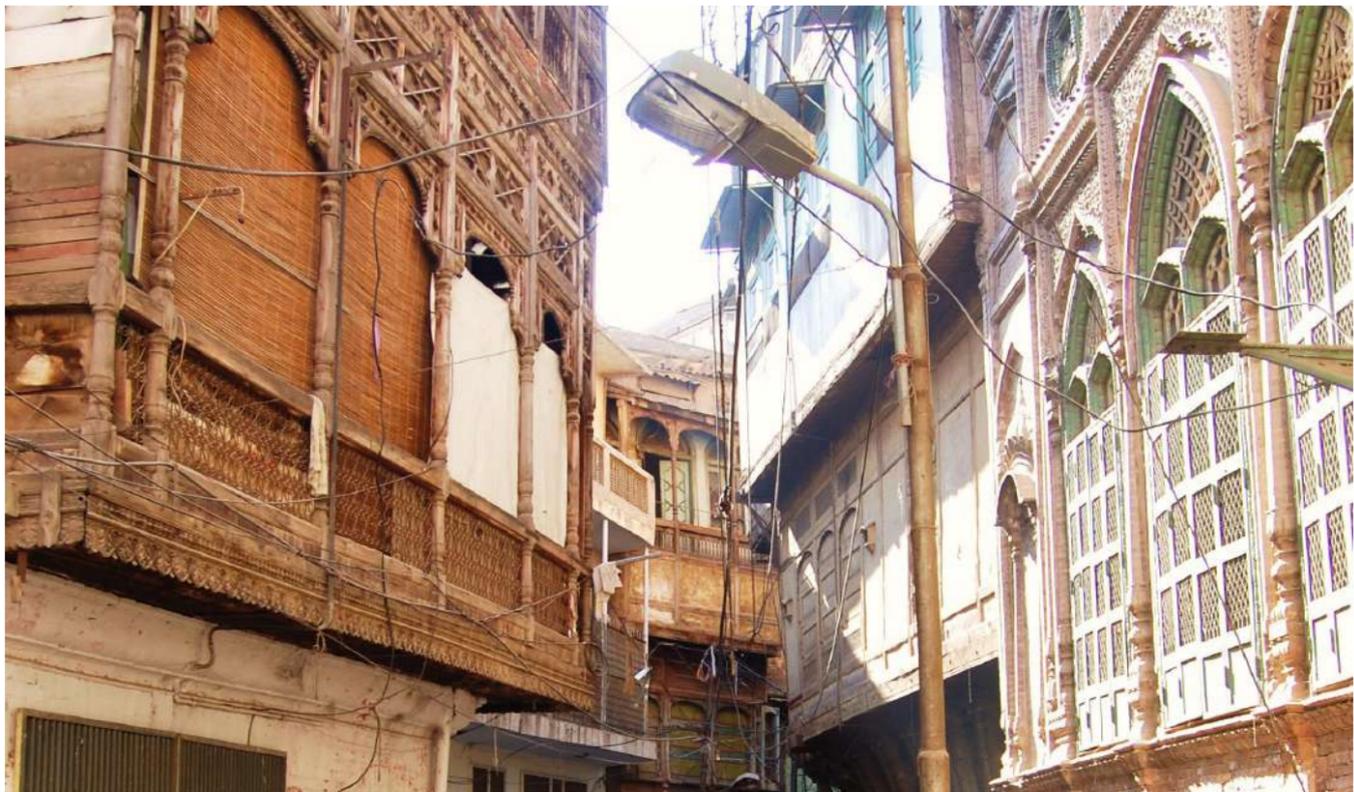


Artisan finishes matching purdah wall with stucco.



Night Lamps were an important feature in the Sethi Havelis.

Below: View of the Sethi Street with few remaining houses.



**Historical and Archaeological Aspects**

The *haveli* is one of the most significant examples of the period. It provides an understanding of the past and the lifestyle that was prevalent in the city. Its significance is also related to the following:

- Group value, as part of a cluster of historic buildings.
- Diversity of artisanship, as it provides enjoyment of a number of crafts, heightening the experience of Peshawar, once known as the City of Artisans.
- Potential for research/interpretation, as it provides an example of construction techniques, particular spatial characteristics, the design showing traditional concern for female seclusion, and lifestyles over the last several centuries.
- The spatial characteristics of the house, the disposition of rooms and the open-to-sky terraces point towards sensitivity and responsiveness to harsh climatic conditions, and the need for regulation of microclimate, as well as requirements of privacy for the womenfolk.

The archaeological significance is clear from the foundations found during geo-technical studies that go deep, and clearly belong to the Mughal

period due to the presence of Mughal period bricks. This factor is given credence in view of the proximity to Mughal structures in the form of the Gor Khattree gateways and the Mughal Serai. While carrying out demolition of the non-historic portion, a length of Mughal plinth has been revealed, which shows that there were other Mughal foundations adjacent to this building.

The Sethis were a large family and it seems that the original *Mohallah Sethian* consisted of over 30 residences, which stood in close proximity to one another. According to a recent survey carried out by the Foundation, only 13 original houses are now extant. Where they would have created spectacular facades when they were all surviving, even now parts of the streets are remarkable in view of the unusual street frontages and porticoes, which have different characteristics depending upon whether they open up on a public or a *mohallah* street. Together with the organic morphology of the *mohallah*, the extant original houses have significant group value, and thus in view of the rarity of the urban spatial characteristics and unique architectural vocabulary should be considered a national treasure.



Neighbouring Nisar Sethi House.

Below: View from the internal courtyard of Saad Sethi house showing mung and higher levels.





View of Sethi Mohallah from Qadri Manzil.

There is hardly a set of buildings which is so rich in the diversity of its treatment of interior spaces through a range of motifs, designs and variety of artisan skills. Whether the artisans belonged to Peshawar or were brought from far off places, they all excelled in the execution of their crafts. Altogether 15 craft treatments have been identified, while 13 different kind of wooden fretwork ceiling designs have been noted.

Where there is richness in its internal spaces, the plan form is also a unique feature, celebrating internal courtyard in the form of a *mungh*, which allows ventilation, and sunlight considerably reduced in intensity as it enters the rooms that are placed around the *mungh*. What was the internal spatial organization, and how was the physical fabric designed, which for all purposes, fulfilled the privacy requirements of the womenfolk, along with the use of outdoor spaces on upper floors and roofs, are topics of important studies. The *haveli* provides a mine of information about the traditional living style of the families, the mode of construction to resist seismic activity, the use of subterranean chambers to provide cool, comfortable interior spaces to counteract the hot sun of Peshawar, while at the same time the ornamented living areas as sumptuous interior spaces enabled family members to live in luxurious splendour. The building is of such value that many years of research may be required, as its different

facets are studied from diverse sources, to develop an understanding of the significance of the city of Peshawar and its inhabitants prior to the arrival of the British.

**Architectural Significance**

The house is an example of structural and architectural accomplishment, as it employs the unique construction technique of a combination of wood frame and brick panels. It provides an authentic process of construction along with the use of the *mungh* or courtyard.

- Rarity – Only a few of such examples are now extant.
- Survival /authenticity – The surviving fabric of the house more or less in its original form

The architectural characteristics hark back to traditional structural and architectural styles. The 19th century mansion uses many features that are found elsewhere in the city of Peshawar as well, along with some which are exclusive to the Sethi Mohallah houses. The wood frame with brick panel infill provides a style peculiar to Peshawar. The use of *teb-khana* or subterranean chambers, and the central open-to-sky *sehan* or *mungh* is also peculiar to this part of the world.



Traditional mirrors inside Saad Sethi House.

The *haveli* did not remain unchanged over the years. However, it is one of such structures that is complete in its original parts, even though there were several later additions and also interventions within the original historic fabric. Although a preliminary study of Sethi Mohallah has been carried out where many similarities have been studied, a larger study encompassing houses in the Peshawar walled city is essential to compare various architectural characteristics. A comparative study of various elements, for example fire places, plus study of openings such as doors and windows, wall treatments, spatial organization etc., along with structural systems employed for construction is expected to yield a wealth of information about traditional Peshawar. With the details that have become available regarding the Sethi Haveli, similar studies need to be carried out on other houses found in other *mohallahs*.

The *haveli* represents the wealthy trading class of Peshawar throughout the 19th century, and the influences from Central Asia, the Late Mughal and Sikh treatment of arched openings and the decorative features ranging from stucco work, fresco, *chini khana*, *tarseem bandi*, wooden trellis, are remarkable features that point towards its unique and noteworthy position among other house typologies of the country.



Entrance to a neighbouring Sethi Haveli

### Archive Collection

The house provides the opportunity to place all artefacts, shards and other items found there, to be displayed in order to provide another dimension for its understanding by visitors. The entire process of conservation and data developed regarding the site is also required to be displayed. Altogether the historic mansion lends itself well as a showcase for the traditional way of living in the inner city.

- Intrinsic importance – the survival of the historic house will ensure that its intrinsic importance is conveyed.
- Link to the Sethi family – it will keep the name of an important family of Peshawar alive.

All possible effort has been made to retrieve items that were found on the site. Many documents, comprising ledgers etc. had been saved by the Directorate of Archaeology & Museums at the time of taking over the site. However, when the documentation was started many items were found in cupboards and some in the inter-floor store. Similarly, once the restoration work was taken in hand, the conservation team found several pottery shards and small items buried in the earth filling in roofs. As the earth filling (*malba*) was removed, these were carefully taken out and retrieved by placing them in separate bags. The location of each item, and where it was found was carefully recorded.

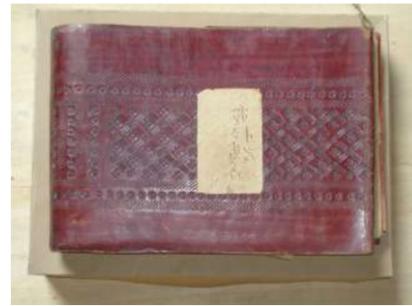
Since the Sethis have gifted heritage of immense value to the city of Peshawar, and because of their prominence, particularly in 19th c. Peshawar society, it is but fitting that all records related to that family, both past and present, must be maintained in the Sethi Mohallah. These must be carefully archived and made available for researchers and scholars.

All data developed as part of the documentation and conservation process needs also to be maintained in order to develop an understanding of the traditional structure and the intrinsic value of the traditional fabric.

### Tourism, Education, Presentation

The historic residence will augment our understanding of traditional Peshawar and can be used as an effective destination for tourism, as well as for educational purposes.

Clearly, the site provides a rare and comprehensive insight into traditional Peshawar. As the conservation is accomplished and the building has been



Ledger found inside Qadri Manzil.



Pottery shards found embedded in extra earth filling on roof.



A Ghardana (teapot) found at the Qadri Manzil.



Terracotta toys found in the extra layers of earth in Qadri Manzil roof.



Original grandeur of Sethi House Chinni Khana's found in neighbouring havelis

stabilized for public use, it will become an extremely important tourist destination. Depending upon how the site will be utilized, the display of the finds, panel displays of the conservation process, and the restored house itself, form a rare specimen of the process of the undertaking. The position of the *haveli* and its surroundings, along with the display material will form the basis of training and instructions regarding the value and importance of heritage assets, and the careful methodologies that were employed to provide protection and restoration. The data that has been developed can now be used to make effective presentations regarding the entire process of conservation.

**Peshawar Walled City/Social Value**

The house will foster a sense of pride and identity. It will provide a means for understanding the past and a means for interpretation for the future.

The restoration/conservation of the Sethi Haveli marks a milestone in the history of Peshawar heritage. The fact that the government has supported the restoration of the historic structure is something that is a matter of



Exquisite ornamentation inside the Ismail Sethi House.

pride for the province. The careful and diligent manner in which all teams worked under the direction of the Hon. Project Director, and particularly the dedication with which the master artisans and their workers lovingly executed the work, provides a considerable measure of satisfaction and pride.

The *haveli*, as a public space and a tourist destination, will contribute towards developing an understanding of the value of heritage structures in the context of cities, while the importance of their safeguarding and restoration to retain them for future generations is a lesson that will have positive implications, not only in the province but at the national level.

The understanding gained through the restored *haveli* will bring about a more profound understanding of the traditional urban habitat, and the factors that made it meaningful to generations of those living here. All this conveys a message which transcends the present violent environment, to point towards a culture of peace for the region.



Double Basements in a neighbouring Sethi haveli.

**Sethi House Conservation**  
Stabilization:  
Non-Historic and Mid Historic Portion

Collaboration:  
Directorate of Archaeology and Museums, Khyber Pakhtunkhwa  
Heritage Foundation, Pakistan

**Sethi House Conservation**  
Structural Stabilization Level 4

Collaboration:  
Directorate of Archaeology and Museums, Khyber Pakhtunkhwa  
Heritage Foundation, Pakistan

**Sethi House Conservation**  
Structural Stabilization Level 3

Collaboration:  
Directorate of Archaeology and Museums, Khyber Pakhtunkhwa  
Heritage Foundation, Pakistan

Panels displayed at the Sethi house showing works undertaken from structural stabilization