

# Forgotten Blueprints, Enduring Icons: Tracing Malerkotla's Identity Through Art and Architecture

Kashish Garg\*

## Abstract

*Malerkotla is home for a wide range of architectural wonders that exhibit an integration of Mughal and European influences. However, the community's artistic abilities and craftsmanship go beyond just architecture. These artistic traditions not only showcase the creativity and skill of the artisans, but they also add to the city's vibrant cultural fabric. These architectural and cultural treasures serve as tangible reminders of the city's tremendous accomplishments, making their preservation essential. The goal of this study is to increase public awareness about the community whose identity, which has remained unaffected to this day, relies on communal harmony. Malerkotla's distinctive character, which embodies a culture of peaceful cooperation, is evident in both its art and architecture. The primary objectives of this research are to highlight the pressing need for conservation and look into efficient methods for achieving it. By preserving these cultural assets, we can ensure their long-term survival and protect the principles they stand for.*

**Keywords:** Preserving, Tangible Reminders, Peaceful cooperation, communal harmony

## INTRODUCTION

### Background

During the times of communal conflicts the North and East India was devastated by violence and bloodshed whereas Malerkotla, amidst the Partition, remained a land of Peace and tranquility. The town shows how strongly the inhabitants were committed to the principles of mutual respect, Tolerance and understanding, and still are.[1].

### Problem Statement

The historic structures of Malerkotla, with their architectural significance and cultural legacy, are in danger due to neglect and decay. The main causes of their deterioration are a lack of funding, insufficient maintenance, and incompetent management. At the same time, the disappearing crafts associated with the region's legacy are under threat. These crafts are an important aspect of Malerkotla's identity.

To address these issues and conserve historic structures and vanishing crafts, immediate actions are required.

#### \*Author for Correspondence

Kashish Garg

E-mail: [gargkashish2707@gmail.com](mailto:gargkashish2707@gmail.com)

Student, Department of Architecture, Chandigarh College of Architecture, Chandigarh, India

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### Aim

The aim of this research is to spread awareness and to explore the potential of conservation methods to protect the heritage of Malerkotla.

### Objective

The objective of this research paper is to provide a concise overview of the heritage of Malerkotla, which is currently facing the risk of endangerment. The paper aims to identify the various threats

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posed to this heritage and explore potential strategies for its conservation and preservation.

### **Scope and Limitations**

The study focuses on the architecture of the structures in Malerkotla, particularly Mubarak Manzil, Shahi Maqbara, Sheesh Mahal, and Qila Rehmat Garh. The research also focuses on the city's popular art forms, such as Zardozi work and leather work. The research examines the historical and cultural relevance, as well as current conditions and challenges. However,[2] the study does not involve a thorough technical examination. The study also recognises the limits posed by the lack of historical records and resources, as well as potential biases in the data obtained.

## **RESEARCH METHODOLOGY**

### **Research Design**

The research design for this research relied on a qualitative approach to explore and understand the heritage of Malerkotla. Qualitative research enabled a thorough examination of historical significance and cultural context of the architectural structures and art forms under consideration. The data collection methods used included on-site observations, interviews with locals, and analysis of historical records and archival materials.

### **Sample And Data Collection**

This study's target population comprises Malerkotla locals as well as individuals with knowledge and skill in the particular field. The method of purposeful sampling was used, with the goal of selecting individuals who have relevant knowledge and experiences related to the topic under the research.

On-site visits to the selected architectural sites, documentation of observations, and photography were the part of the data gathering procedures. In-depth interviews with chosen participants were done to gain their experiences, viewpoints, and knowledge of Malerkotla's artistic and architectural heritage. In addition to the data gathered during fieldwork, archival materials, historical documents, published and unpublished sources were studied.

### **Data Analysis**

Thematic analysis was done to the material gathered. Thematic analysis is the process of identifying and organizing common themes, patterns, and classifications in data into meaningful data. This method allowed the examination of correlations and connections between various components of Malerkotla's cultural heritage.

## **ART AND ARCHITECTURE OF MALERKOTLA: A CULTURAL TAPESTRY**

### **Architectural Marvels of Malerkotla**

Malerkotla emerges as a jewel, integrating several architectural forms to create an unique urban landscape. The Architectural marvels of the Malerkotla serve as a symbol of its rich past and a constant reminder to the world that communal harmony is the foundation of a fulfilling existence. These marvels not only stand witness to the city's historical legacy, but they are also vital resources for building unity and embracing pluralism in the present.

Malerkotla offers a fabric of architectural [3] marvels that effortlessly merge Mughal and European architecture. Its urban landscape is a remarkable mix of architecture from different historical periods.

Each structure serves as a living narrative, reflecting the cultural, social, and historical significance that has shaped Malerkotla into the vibrant and riveting city it is today.

### **Echoes Of History: The Ruins of Qila Rehmantgarh**

#### ***Walking Through History***

Nawab Rahmat Ali Khan, Nawab of Malerkotla constructed Qila Rehmatgarh roughly around 1850.

(Figure 1) It was strategically placed on a specific location for defense purposes. This land is now owned by the Ministry of Defence. (“Places of Interest | District Malerkotla, Government of Punjab | India”, n.d.). The fort's design reflects Mughal influences.

The fort was built with locally manufactured bricks produced in a kiln in Malerkotla under the Nawab's supervision. Aside from its purpose as a private residence, the fort included places that facilitated interactions between the common people and the Nawab, as well as an area for justice and grievance redressal. Notably, the Mahal within the fort complex held both the Supreme Court, known as the Diwan-e-Aam, and the High Court, known as the Diwan-e-Khas.



**Figure 1.** Old photo of Qila Rehmat Garh.  
(Source: <https://malerkotla.nic.in/gallery/photo-gallery/>)



**Figure 2.** Diwan-e-Aam of Qila Rehmatgarh.  
(Source: [https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Qila,\\_Malerkotla\\_07.jpg](https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Qila,_Malerkotla_07.jpg))

Its legacy remains eternally as a reminder of the Nawab's military power and cultural patronage.

### ***The Need for Conservation***

- *Preserve historical and commemorative significance:* It is crucial to safeguard Qila Rehmat Garh in order to (Figure 2) safeguard its historical value as a symbol of communal harmony and unity in Malerkotla. It has great social and historical significance since it embodies the Nawab's decisions and demonstrates his wisdom in promoting peaceful cohabitation. Inspiring future generations to uphold the principles of tolerance, respect for others, and peaceful coexistence, it is

a tribute to legacy.

- *Educational and cultural significance:* Both educationally and culturally, Qila Rehmantgarh is extremely important. It offers an overview of Malerkotla's rich heritage and history. By preserving its architectural elements, one can draw in researchers, educators interested in culture and aid the community in developing a sense of pride and identity.
- *Enhance tourism potential:* Due to its historical significance, Qila Rehmantgarh has the potential to become a tourist destination. The structure's preservation and promotion of its historical [4] narrative can help Malerkotla improve its tourism industry by drawing tourists interested in learning more about the town's distinctive heritage and supporting local economic development.

### ***Whispers Of Ruin: The Present-Day State of the Fort***

Fort Rehmata Garh, (Figure 3) once an incredible icon, is now in decay and desolation. The lack of a dedicated owner or custodian to monitor its upkeep has played a crucial part in its constant deterioration.

Nature has reclaimed the fort's grounds, with unmanaged vegetation sweeping across the land and further obscuring the fort's magnificence. This architectural gem's severe decay resulted from a lack of adequate care and attention, weakening its once awe-inspiring beauty and degrading its historical significance.

Regrettably, without an individual or organization charged with the responsibility of preservation the fort remains in a state of neglect and unable to reclaim its former splendor and its historical importance.



**Figure 3.** Ruins of Qila Rehmantgarh.

(Source: [https://commons.m.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Qila,\\_Malerkotla\\_03.jpg](https://commons.m.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Qila,_Malerkotla_03.jpg))

### **Approach for Conservation**

To conserve Qila Rehmata Garh and its historical significance different degrees of interventions can be followed. Below is the discussion on what could be the impact of particular degree of intervention.

- *Indirect conservation:* Indirect conservation is a technique for preventing hazardous elements from further damage or degradation. Using this method, we can keep a fort in its existing state. Removing overgrown vegetation, for example, may effectively prevent the formation of cracks or other structural issues. This step protects the fort from further damage caused by both human activity and natural elements.
- *Preservation:* Preservation measures for Qila Rehmata Garh would involve regular inspections and maintenance. [5] This means conducting routine checks to identify any issues and performing

necessary repairs to ensure the structure's integrity. By consistently inspecting and maintaining the fort, we can ensure that its existing remains are well-preserved. This includes safeguarding important features such as stairs, free-standing arches, and damaged walls, as they exhibit the character of the fort and its planning.

- *Consolidation:* The structure of Qila Rahatgarh has suffered damage, and many walls have collapsed, leaving only ruins behind. To preserve the remaining intact walls, the process of consolidation can be undertaken. As observed Qila rehmnatgarh is not structurally strong now so efforts can be made to conserve what is existing and that the structure is at least capable of keeping up its own dead weight. This can be achieved by filling the gaps and cracks in the remaining walls using a technique called grouting. The grouting process will help strengthen and stabilize the walls, ensuring the structure's stability and longevity.

## **Unveiling The Sheesh Mahal: A Declining Royal Residence**

### ***The Origin***

Sheesh Mahal, (Figure 4) situated in the heart of Malerkotla, served as the royal residence of the Nawab's Family and is famous for its pleasing appearance. Nawab Sikandar Ali Khan and Nawab Ahmed Ali Khan built the palace, known as Diwankhana Sheesh Mahal. The magnificent glasswork on the right side of Sheesh Mahal was completed after 1857 AD during the reign of Nawab Sikandar Ali Khan, while the stunning glasswork on the left side was completed about 1909 AD under the reign of Nawab Ahmed Ali Khan. The palace is a testimony to the outstanding craftsmanship and architectural brilliance of the era. ("Places of Interest | District Malerkotla, Government of Punjab | India", n.d.)



**Figure 4.** Sheesh Mahal.

(Source: Google Images)

### ***Need And Purpose to Conserve***

- *Aesthetic Value:* The Sheesh Mahal is known for its wonderful glass work that is both aesthetically beautiful and visually dazzling. [6] By preserving this structure, future generations will be able to take pleasure and admire the structure's splendor and craftsmanship. It would also allow the community to regain knowledge about the glass work, which is now not in practice or has vanished away.
- *Historic Identity:* Conserving the Sheesh Mahal will assist in maintaining its historic integrity and keeping its tangible connection to the past. It represents a particular time in history and acts as a reminder of the architectural brilliance and cultural legacy of that era.
- *Educational and Touristic Value:* The Sheesh Mahal's conservation will provide an opportunity for historians to learn about the structure's historical and cultural significance. It will additionally

promote tourism by attracting visitors from all over the world who want to see the unique glasswork and architectural grandeur.

### ***Walls of Neglect***

The current condition of the (Figure 5) Mahal is disheartening, with significant parts of the palace being destroyed and showing signs of neglect. The lime plaster on the walls has deteriorated, and windows and doors are broken, leaving the palace vulnerable. Unwanted vegetation has taken over, aggravating the degradation. Roofs have collapsed in some areas, increasing structural damage.



**Figure 5.** Interior of Sheesh Mahal.

(Source: Author)

Mr. Manoj, the badge maker, during an interview recounted his memories from his childhood when the palace was under the care of a caretaker. Despite the prohibition, Mr. Manoj and his friends would pay the caretaker ten rupees to get unauthorized entry to the palace and steal whatever they wanted. [7] Unfortunately, because the palace was not effectively safeguarded, the citizens looted it.

One of the reasons for the neglect is an ongoing legal conflict between the descendants of the nawabs and the Punjab government on the ownership of the palace. This battle has contributed to the Palace's neglect and uncertainty in terms of preservation and maintenance. (| Sheesh Mahal | Malerkotla

### ***Conserving A Timeless Beauty***

To conserve Sheesh Mahal different degrees of interventions can be followed.

- *Indirect conservation:* To conserve Sheesh Mahal effectively, we need to prevent further deterioration by taking certain measures. Regular maintenance and monitoring is required to address any signs of decay and repair any damages. This will aid in the preservation of the building's structural integrity.
- *Preservation:* Preservation is crucial, especially for delicate elements like the glasswork in the palace. By preserving these intricate elements, we can ensure that any alterations made for

conservation can be reversed if necessary. It will also allow researchers, historians, craftsmen, and future generations to understand the original craftsmanship and historical significance of the palace.

- *Consolidation*: Consolidation involves reinforcing specific parts of the mahal, such a method can be applied on the layer of lime plaster on walls or repairing broken glass work. This will help in maintaining the integrity of the original materials and showcase the palace's original beauty and artistry.
- *Restoration*: Restoration involves bringing back certain elements of the mahal to their original condition. This can be done to repair partially damaged doors, windows, and other architectural features. The restoration of these elements would ensure the preservation of the historical and artistic significance of the palace.
- *Adaptive reuse*: Adaptive reuse is a strategy where Sheesh Mahal can be adaptively reused, such as transforming it into a heritage hotel. However, it is crucial to document every aspect of the palace before making any changes. The palace was previously turned into a primary school, but a tragic event happened because of the collapse of a weak roof, resulting in the loss of lives. This emphasizes the importance of regular inspections and a well-planned approach to adaptive reuse.
- *Reproduction*: Reproduction of the glasswork in Sheesh Mahal can help recreate the original essence of the palace and promote the growth of the craft. By reproducing these intricate glasswork, we can ensure the preservation of the palace's unique beauty.

### **The Erosion of Elegance: The Story of Mubarak Manzil *Tracing The Legacy***

Mubarak Manzil, (Figure 6) built in 1901 during the reign of Nawab Ahmad Ali Khan, is a historical landmark in Malerkotla. (“GOLD RUSH OVER ROYAL RUINS” 2012). The palace had intricate detailing, well-maintained gardens, elegant corridors, and historical artifacts, serving as a testament to the opulence and cultural heritage of the nawabs.



**Figure 6.** Old photo of Mubarak Majid.

(Source: <https://malerkotla.nic.in/gallery/photo-gallery/>)

The palace showcases the adoption of 19th-century European architectural forms in India, demonstrating the impact of British imperial rulers on the Malerkotla. Similar architecture can be found in other Princely States, as well as in Pakistan, Bangladesh, and other regions of South Asia, indicating historical and cultural connections across various parts of the world, including former European colonies.

Beyond its architectural beauty, the Mubarak Manzil Palace holds significance historically and culturally for both the Muslim and Sikh communities. The Nawab of Malerkotla, Sher Mohammad Khan, played a significant role in Sikh history by opposing the stoning of Guru Gobind Singh's young sons in 1705. [8] This event is popularly known as "ha da narah" or cry for justice. Within the palace there is a kirpan (sword) presented by Guru Gobind Singh symbolizing the long-standing relationship between the nawabs and the Sikhs.

Mubarak Manzil Palace is the last surviving royal residence of the Nawabs of Malerkotla and is currently occupied by the last Begum. As the largest historic structure in Malerkotla, it represents the sole Muslim Princely State in Indian Punjab.

### **Need And Purpose to Conserve**

- *Association with an event and Person:* Mubarak Manjil stands as a witness to the event of "ha da nara" and the actions of Nawab Sher Mohammad Khan. By conserving this structure, we can ensure that future generations learn about and appreciate this important historical event and the individuals involved. It will allow us to maintain a tangible link to the past and understand the significance of their contributions.
- *Cultural Heritage:* Mubarak Manjil holds cultural value as it represents the period of British colonial rule and its architectural influences. Its architecture and style reflects the cultural fusion and exchange that occurred during that era. Conserving Mubarak Manjil would help us preserve and celebrate this cultural heritage, fostering a sense of identity and pride in the local community.
- *Educational Value:* Preserving Mubarak Manjil provides educational opportunities. It will allow researchers, historians, and scholars to study and gain insights into the historical context, architectural styles, and cultural exchanges of the era. It can become a valuable resource for educational institutions and help in fostering a deeper understanding of local history and heritage.
- *Tourism and Economic Impact:* Mubarak Manjil, with its historical and cultural significance, has the potential to attract tourists and visitors. The conservation of this structure can contribute to the development of cultural tourism, generating economic benefits for the local community and supporting the growth of the region's tourism sector.

### ***From Magnificence to Decay***

Due to years of neglect and insufficient financial resources, (Figure 7) Mubarak Manzil now faces severe deterioration and potential hazards. The negligence extends not only to the structure but also to the surrounding grounds, which are affected by inadequate care, unregulated plant growth, stagnant water, and piled-up waste. Furthermore, the absence of active management and the senior age of the surviving Begum, the palace is exposed to vandalism.

Over time, most of the palace's original grandeur has been lost, due to the disposal of surrounding land and the haphazard development of nearby areas. Palace's original furnishings, including furniture, chandeliers, carpets, and other fixtures common in royal houses of the time, may have met the same end.

Despite these obstacles, a visual assessment showed that the structure of the building does not have any severe or irreversible structural damage. [9] While government funding for its conservation may be lacking, there is a pressing need to raise awareness about the palace's existence and highlight its cultural and economic value as a potential structure for sensitive adaptive re-use.

Never the less, a ray of faith shines through the ruins. An agreement has been made with the Punjab government to purchase the property, with plans to rehabilitate it for tourism purposes. This development gives the people of Malerkotla a hope, as the palace carries great cultural and symbolic significance for them, reflecting the union of the Muslim and Sikh communities. (Times of India)





**Figure 7.** Mubarak Manjil.

(Source: <https://thewire.in/society/malerkotla-punjab-newest-district-has-no-room-for-religious-bigotry> )

#### ***Ways to Conserve***

- *Indirect conservation:* To ensure the preservation of Mubarak Manjil, it is crucial to prevent its deterioration because the structure still possesses its original capabilities. This can be done through regular maintenance, carefully monitoring and addressing any growth of decay agents, and promptly repairing any damages that occur.
- *Preservation:* Preserving certain elements of the mahal will allow future generations to experience and appreciate its historical journey. These elements could include walls or areas like washrooms that still showcase the intricate tile work in its original form.
- *Consolidation:* Consolidation can be applied to the lime plaster layers of Mubarak Manjil. Through this procedure, present and future generations will be able to see the struggles the Mahal has faced. It is important to consider this option to preserve the original materials and maintain the mahal's authenticity.
- *Restoration:* Restoration plays a vital role in maintaining the essence of Mubarak Manjil. It would involve restoring specific elements which have partially decayed such as walls, joinery (such as broken windows, doors), and ceiling designs to their original condition. This approach would ensure that the mahal remains true to its original form.
- *Adaptive reuse:* Adaptive reuse would be an effective strategy for conserving Mubarak Manjil. Currently, only a small part of the mahal is used as a residence for Begum, while the rest remains abandoned. By repurposing and making those areas functionally usable, the mahal can be conserved both as a historic structure and as a source of financial support for Begum. Mahal could be sensitively converted into a living museum which would represent the rich history of Malerkotla. Also, certain parts of mahal can be wisely converted into heritage hotel as this would require minimum interventions in the structure of mahal as the use of those spaces would remain residential.
- *Reproduction:* Reproduction of beautifully painted false ceilings, (Figure 8) roof which has fallen, some fireplaces which have gone missing would enable to rejuvenate the original aesthetic and spatial essence of the palace.



**Figure 8.** The Fallen Roof of Mubarak Manjil.  
(Source: Author)

### **Graves of The Glory: Shahi Maqbaras, The Royal Mausoleum Complex** *Re-Tracing the History*

The Malerkotla's Shahi Maqbaras (Figure 9) are a unique cluster of 11 tombs and over 140 open graves associated with the royal family. This living heritage stretches back to the early 18th century, with the latest tomb being built after 1948.

Each structure within the complex has a unique story. Some narratives are known only to a few, while others have gained widespread recognition. The complex constitutes the graves of rulers and their families, [10] both renowned and anonymous, saints and soldiers. It is an outstanding collection of historical tombs in eastern Punjab.

The significance of this burial ground extends beyond individuals' last resting place. These monuments act as links to the past, transcending their occupants' physical mortality. They allow people to keep connection with the deceased, serving as a means of remembrance and commemoration. These memorials, built by children, spouses, parents, communities, and states, represent the deceased's significant influence on those whose lives they touched.



**Figure 9.** Aerial View of Shahi Maqbara.  
(Source: Author)

The graves of Malerkotla's royals represent the richness and diversity of the state's history and culture. This burial ground exhibits the values of individuals, communities, and the historical eras in which they were constructed. The architectural forms of these memorials are influenced by the cultural, artistic, and religious sensibilities of their creators. The Shahi Maqbara in Malerkotla has a distinct Mughal influence, as seen by its minarets and domes, which are indicative of Humayun's

mausoleum and the exquisite beauty of the Taj Mahal. Although the monarchs of Malerkotla had ancestors from the Lodhi dynasty, they decided to be buried in a style similar to Babur's more grandiose construction.

Furthermore, the presence of shops along the strip of land between the Maqbaras and the approach road has obscured the view of the historic complex, making it challenging for passersby to locate and appreciate its significance. The visual clutter caused by these buildings and their signboards has compromised the original setting of the Shahi Maqbaras, resulting in a loss of the complex's visual impact.

### **Need And Purpose to Conserve**

- *Preservation of Documentary Value:* Shahi Maqbara holds significant historical information about the royal family of Malerkotla. Conserving this complex would ensure the preservation of valuable documentary evidence, such as inscriptions, architectural details, and art forms, which can contribute to a deeper understanding of the region's history.
- *Architectural Value:* Shahi Maqbara's architecture and construction demonstrate the evolution of maqbaras over time. The cluster of maqbaras and tombs showcases a variety of architectural styles, reflecting the artistic and aesthetic inclinations of the period in which they were built. The preservation of this architectural value would assist in understanding the evolution and effects of numerous architectural periods.
- *Cultural Identity and Sense of Belonging:* The royal burials in Malerkotla have great cultural and emotional significance for the local community. Conserving Shahi Maqbara would help in the preservation of the people's cultural identity that represents their legacy, traditions, and customs.
- *Education and Research Opportunities:* The conservation of Shahi Maqbara would create opportunities for educational institutions, researchers, and scholars to study and analyze the historical and architectural aspects of the complex. It can become a valuable resource for academic research, archaeological investigations, and the knowledge about the region's past.

### **Battle Against Decay**

The Shahi Maqbaras today face a number of challenges that threaten their continued existence and relevance. The tombs' physical deterioration is the result of years of neglect and a lack of technical and financial resources. While the caretakers strive to keep the area clean, the available resources are insufficient to give the essential care to keep the historic fabric in good condition. [11] Layers of dust, bird droppings, germs, algae, and other decay agents have caused damage to the external and internal surfaces of the tombs, including domes, walls, columns, minarets, and decorative panels, to varied degrees. Grass and plant material have grown on the roofs which have resulted in cracks, allowing water to seep into the interiors and causing moisture, plaster loss, and damage to surface decoration. Rising damp is prevalent, and as a result, lower areas of walls, columns, and pilasters have lost their plaster and surface ornamentation. The failure to take action at the right time has also resulted in the deterioration of mortar between brick courses and, in some cases, the bricks themselves are posing a severe threat to the structural integrity of the buildings. While the majority of the damage is non-structural and limited to surfaces and ornamentation, the substantial extent of the deterioration threatens the structural integrity of the complex.

### **Ways To Conserve**

- *Indirect conservation:* Protecting the structures in the Shahi Maqbara complex from further decay is crucial. Regular cleaning can help prevent additional damage. It is also important to take necessary measures to prevent vandalism since the complex is located near the main road of the market, making it more vulnerable to such acts.
- *Preservation:* Preservation is an effective approach to conserve the Shahi Maqbara complex. It can help slow down the deterioration process. It is essential to address damages caused by water, chemicals, and microorganisms by conducting regular inspections and cleaning the spaces.

- *Consolidation*: Consolidation is a method that can be used to conserve certain maqbaras in the complex. These maqbaras have surface cracks, meaning only the outer layer of plaster is affected. By applying grouting, the original material can be preserved to a maximum extent.
- *Restoration*: Restoration plays a vital role in preserving specific elements of the complex. This includes restoring staircases, walls that are at risk of collapsing, and the Fresco work on the ceiling.

## THE ARTISTIC LEGACY OF MALERKOTLA

India, a nation rich in art, culture, and deep-rooted traditions, has a multicolored tapestry. (Figure 10) Amongst its vibrant elements, handicrafts and the skilled artisans who master various crafts hold a prominent place, their expertise has been shaped by the unique topography and resource availability of different regions.

An abundance of ancient crafts exist in Punjab. Significant contributions include phulkari work, dasuti embroidery, tilla and zaradozi work, and Punjabi juttis. [12] Tilla and zaradozi work, which appears on badges, Punjabi juttis, and finely embroidered clothes, is particularly renowned.

The city of Malerkotla, a seemingly remarkable city (now a district), reveals its true essence through its exquisite Handicrafts.

### From Thread to Treasure: The Exquisite Zardozi Work

#### *The Stories Behind Zardozi Work in Malerkotla*

Within this city, a unique Muslim group comprising 500 families mastered the art of brocade embroidery. Originally committed to manufacturing clothing for Mughal emperors and other Indian royalty, they have evolved to specialize ceremonial dress for the military forces and suit embroidery.

Malerkotla, unlike many other places, was untouched by the turbulent times of the 1947 migration. It began to attract modest jobs from the Indian Army, but it wasn't until 1978 that a substantial breakthrough happened. The Iraqi Army ordered 150,000 crests, leading Malerkotla's work into the international spotlight. Today, these families earn roughly Rs 6 crore per year by selling approximately 600,000 pieces of brocade work, largely to the Indian military forces.

Testimonials from traders, inspectors, and soldiers [13] have shown how Malerkotla's craftsmanship lends a touch of refinement to the uniforms, with the military playing an important role in ensuring livelihood of locals.

Brocade artisans relies on “khaddi”, a handmade frames specifically designed to secure and stabilize the fabric during the intricate process of brocade work. This frame plays a vital role in the creation of exquisite designs with precision and finesse.



**Figure 10.** The craftsmen at work.

(Source: <https://www.theweek.in/theweek/leisure/badge-of-honour.html>)

### ***The Struggles of Zardozi Artists***

Mr. Manoj, (Figure 11) the owner of Gopal Chand Badge Army Store in Malerkotla and a well-known badgemaker with a family tradition spanning more than 50 years, provided important insights in an interview. They create a wide range of products for prestigious organizations such as the Army and schools, such as flags, blazers, banners, dress sashes, and badges. The findings from the interview were supported by Ms. Pooja Chatley's incisive research on "Problems of Skilled Artisans - A Study of Malerkotla City."

Mr. Manoj expressed his concern that this art form is gradually fading away, largely due to technology, which offers cost-effective and quick production. However, he emphasized that the splendor of a handmade badge can never be replicated by machines. Each piece is graced with a unique charm and artistry that cannot be duplicated.

Mr. Manoj highlighted that talented artisans are quitting the art and choosing other careers since the delicate intricacy of the craft requires a significant amount of time and effort.

When it comes to prices, Mr. Manoj highlighted the difference between handcrafted and machine-made badges. He emphasized that, whereas a handcrafted emblem would cost around 2000 rupees, its machined equivalent can be created for a fraction of the cost, ranging between 500 and 600 rupees. The discrepancy in pricing contributes to the decline of traditional handicraft and promotes the transition to mechanization.



**Figure 11.** Master Ji at Mr. Manoj's Shop at work.  
(Source: Author)

Mr. Manoj criticized the city's failure to recognise and cherish this remarkable craftsmanship, while other communities admire it with well-deserved recognition.

Despite the current challenges, Mr. Manoj radiated pride as he identified Malerkotla's renowned place for its exceptional craftsmanship, which is well-known not only in Delhi's thriving markets but also among esteemed Army organizations. Furthermore, he illustrated the spirit of communal harmony by hiring Muslim artisans, one of whom is Master Ji, who exemplified his attention and concentration throughout the conversation.

### **Malerkotla's Leather Artistry**

#### ***The Origin: Tracing Its Artistic Roots***

The city has established itself as a prominent center for leather work, particularly in the production of sports shoes and other leather articles. Star Impact Pvt. Ltd., established in 1997 by Mr. Mohammad Owais, played a significant role in the establishment of industry.

Star Impact Pvt. Ltd. began as a small company and gradually grew into a full-fledged factory, contributing to the growth of the Malerkotla leather market. Individuals linked with the company eventually opened their own stores, increasing the availability of pure leather shoes and other leather things in the area.

Malerkotla's leather (Figure 12) work industry owes much of its growth and reputation to the contributions of Star Impact Pvt. Ltd. The availability of high-quality leather products has resulted in an expanding marketplace that attracts buyers from both within and beyond the city. Malerkotla's artisans and manufacturers have gained significant prominence in the footwear sector, making the city a hub for leather work.



**Figure 12.** Leather Shoes.

(Source: Author)

#### ***A Time-Honored Craft at Risk***

Tanveer, a proud torchbearer of his family's three-generation leatherworking legacy, (Figure 13) stated that their shop, which has been in existence since 1954, has been working exclusively with pure leather for the past 15-20 years. Their raw materials come from Delhi, Agra, and Chennai, which serves as a vital base for the international market. They receive cheaper materials from Kolkata. The government's recent restrictions on raw leather had a substantial impact on their business, making raw materials both difficult to get and expensive.



**Figure 13.** Craftsman at work.  
(Source: Author)

A concerning issue highlighted by Tanveer was the losing interest of younger generations in learning the craft of leatherworks. The complexities of the art, as well as the substantial time investment required to manufacture a leather shoe, have discouraged many craftsmen from pursuing it as a career. As a result, the knowledge and abilities required for this traditional craft are at risk of extinction. Furthermore, while technology in the field of leatherworking has evolved, its implementation is a difficulty for local artisans due to its high cost.

Tanveer took pride in working with pure leather, emphasizing its natural properties such as keeping one's feet cool in the summer and warm in the winter. This natural resource, combined with their devotion to providing high-quality products at reasonable prices, is their unique selling point.

### **Need And Purpose to Conserve**

- *Cultural preservation:* Conserving the art of Zardozi work would ensure the continuation of a unique cultural practice that has been passed down through generations. It would help to preserve the cultural identity and heritage of the community in Malerkotla.
- *Economic significance:* The traditional badge making industry has been a significant source of income for skilled artisans and their families in Malerkotla. By conserving this heritage, we can support the livelihoods of these artisans and contribute to the local economy.
- *Artistic excellence:* Handcrafted badges are imbued with exceptional artistry and attention to detail, representing the mastery and skill of the artisans. By preserving this heritage, we can maintain and promote the highest standards of artistic excellence in the craft.
- *Cultural diversity and intergenerational transmission:* The preservation of this art form encourages the intergenerational transmission of knowledge and skills within the community. It would foster a sense of pride and identity among younger generations and helps to maintain the

diversity of cultural practices in the region.

- *Promotion of communal harmony*: The traditional badge making industry in Malerkotla has shown an admirable spirit of communal harmony by employing artisans from different religious backgrounds. Conserving this heritage highlights the positive aspects of multicultural collaboration and serves as a symbol of unity and respect.
- *Tourism and promotion*: Preserving this intangible heritage can attract tourists and visitors interested in experiencing the local culture and traditions. It contributes to the promotion of Malerkotla as a cultural destination and helps to create awareness and appreciation for the art form on a broader scale.

### Ways To Conserve

To safeguard the fading tradition of Malerkotla's crafts, it is crucial to take necessary measures for its preservation. Some of the steps could be:

- *Creating awareness*: Launching campaigns and programs to raise awareness about the dying craft of Malerkotla and its cultural significance. Educating the public about the historical and artistic value of the craft.
- *Preservation and documentation*: Encouraging artists and experts to document the techniques, tools, and processes involved in the craft. Preserve samples of traditional artwork and artifacts for future reference and study.
- *Skill development and training*: Establishing training programs and workshops to train artists and provide them with necessary skills to continue the craft. Collaborate with experienced artists to mentor and pass down traditional knowledge to the younger generation.
- *Financial support*: Providing financial assistance through grants, scholarships, and subsidies to artists, enabling them to sustain their livelihoods and invest in materials and equipment.
- *Infrastructure development*: Creating dedicated spaces, such as cultural centers or studios, where artists can work, exhibit, and sell their creations. These spaces should be equipped with necessary tools and materials to facilitate the craft.
- *Promote tourism*: Highlighting Malerkotla as a hub for traditional crafts and attracting tourists interested in experiencing and supporting the craft.
- *Collaboration and networking*: Fostering collaborations between Malerkotla artists and other artists, designers, and organizations in the field. Encourage exchange programs and residencies to promote cross-cultural learning and innovation.

### CONCLUSIONS

The artistic and architectural legacy of Malerkotla must be conserved and promoted in order to preserve the city's rich history and promote communal peace. Malerkotla's urban landscape is a tribute to its cultural richness and evolution over time, with a unique blend of Mughal, European, and indigenous architecture. These architectural treasures' current state of neglect and degradation, on the other hand, poses a major threat to their existence in the future.

The significance of Malerkotla's architectural and cultural heritage extends beyond its intrinsic value. It symbolizes the city's commitment to communal peace and serves as a unifying factor. By preserving these art forms and structures, Malerkotla can continue to inspire unity and foster an environment that accepts pluralism and understanding.

Extensive restoration and preservation operations that increase awareness of these sites' and crafts must be prioritized. Malerkotla can maintain its unique heritage and give future generations a precious opportunity to appreciate and learn from the past by investing in their conservation. Additionally, revitalizing these landmarks will not only serve as a memorial to the city's rich past, but will also contribute to the city's cultural and economic growth.

In a nutshell, preserving and promoting Malerkotla's architectural and artistic treasures is essential



for the city's cultural heritage and future progress. Working together to raise awareness, engaging in significant conservation initiatives, and ensuring the long-term survival of these architectural masterpieces is important. Through these efforts, Malerkotla can commemorate its rich history, inspire future generations, and maintain its status as a cultural heritage hub in Punjab.

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## Appendix A

### RULERS OF MALERKOTLA

#### Hazrat Sheikh

After being granted the land for Malerkotla by Balhul Lodhi, Hazrat Sheikh established his dominion in Maler after marrying Lodhi's daughter Taj Murassa Begum. His descendants were divided into two groups, with one ruling the state and the other living off pilgrim revenues.

#### Bayazid

Nawab Hazrat Sheikh, born in 1593 in Maler, became an independent ruler after saving Emperor Aurangzeb's life in 1657. As a result of being awarded the right to construct a fort, he established a fort and the settlement of Kotla, resulting in Malerkotla in May 1857. According to their traditions, and for the social harmony and religious tolerance that characterized the town then and now, a sufi saint and a hindu sadhu were asked to lay the foundation stone.

#### Sher Mohammad Khan

Born in 1640, this preacher of humanity and peace, grandson of Bayazid, pleaded to Aurangzeb against the assassination of Guru Gobind Singh's two younger sons, claiming that it was inhuman and violated Islamic ideals as well as the Prophet's principles. Despite the fact that his own brother and nephews were slaughtered in a battle by sikhs, the nawab stood for sikh cooperation, which eventually resulted to Malerkotla being blessed by Guru Gobind Singh with peace even in the face of hardship.

#### Khizar

Sher Mohammad Khan's brother, along with his two kids, was killed in a battle against Sikhs at Ropar.

#### Wazir

Wazir, the great grandson of Sher Mohammad Khan, was supposed to take the throne soon after his father died in 1764. Due to property conflicts among his uncles, he was able to succeed to the throne after the death of Ataullah Khan in 1809, but only after defeating his brother Rehmat in the succession contest, which he won with the assistance of British forces. His bloodline ruled Malerkotla until his great grandson Sikanadar, when the throne passed to his adopted heir Ibrahim.

#### Ibrahim

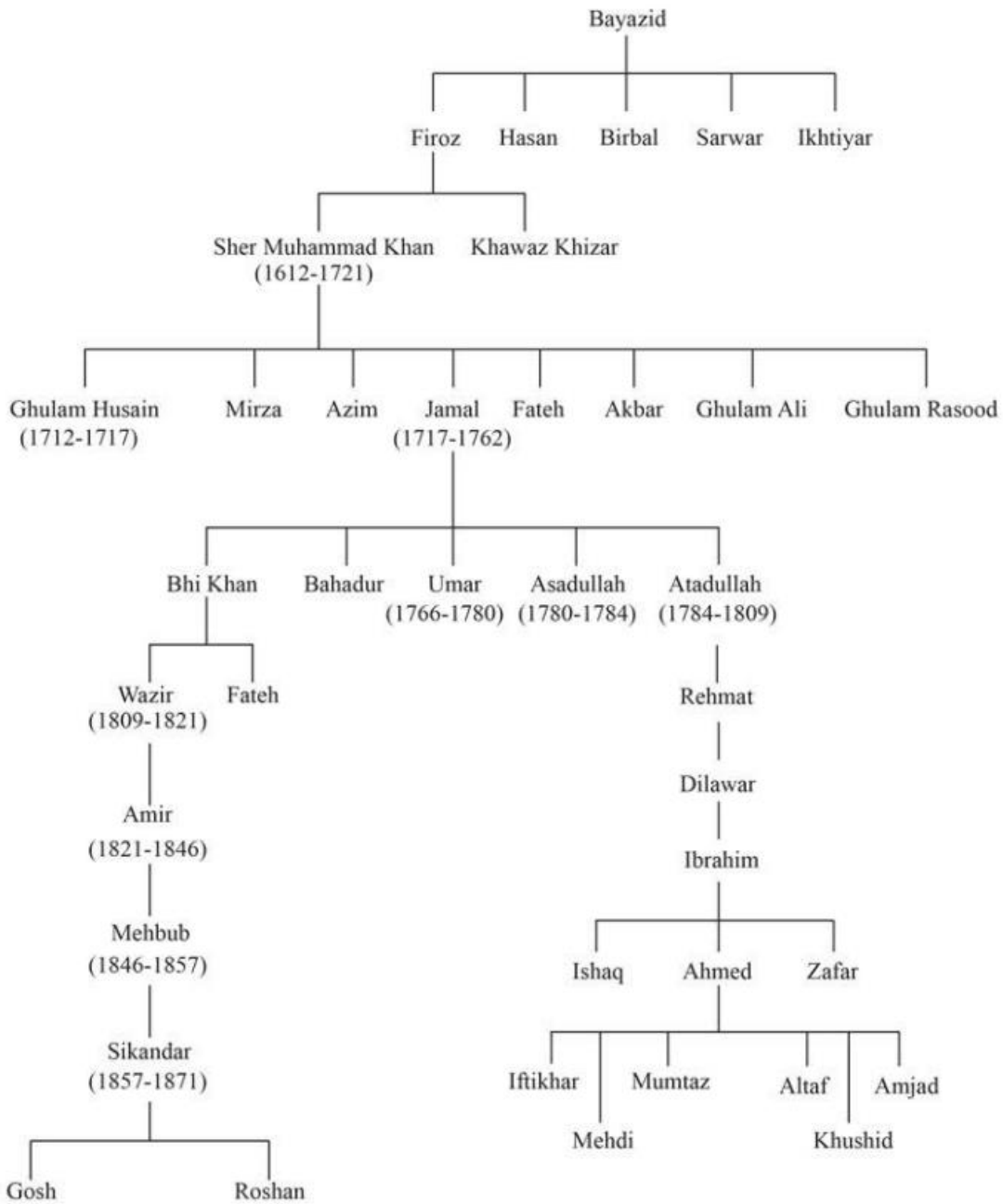
Ibrahim, son of Dilawar Ali Khan and great-great-grandson of Sher Mohammad Khan, was adopted and named heir by Sikandar Ali Khan.

#### Ahmad

On the death of his father, Ahmad succeeded to the throne as Dilawar Ali Khan's son. During his rule, he worked to modernize the town by constructing schools, hospitals, and other facilities. This resulted in significant debt. Even in this financial state, Ahmad provided troops and financial support to the British during World Wars I and II, making him prone to influence and financially irresponsible. He even had his own name put on the coins, breaking with the centuries-old practise of minting the name of Ahmad Shah Durrani, who awarded Malerkotla the power to mint money. As a result, he was regarded as an ineffectual and unpopular ruler throughout his reign, but his policies were eventually credited following his death, during partition.

#### Iftikhar

The nawab who reigned Malerkotla during partition succeeded to the throne after the death of his father in 1947. This town was a lonely island of tranquilly because of Guru Gobind Singh's blessings, even when the rest of Punjab was in flames. The Nawab had even announced that for every sikh or Hindu who died, four Muslims would die in atonement, thus encouraging religious peace in its own way.



(Book: Malertokla, Itehas ke darpan mein)