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RESEARCH PAPER

Unveiling the Past: Stone Carving Techniques as Visual Art and the Significance of Ancient Graveyards in Sindh - Chaukhandi Tombs

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ABSTRACT

This study is focussed on the conservation and restoration of the stone intricate art and craftsmanship of Chaukhandi Tombs in Sindh, Pakistan which is the blend of Islamic and traditional Sindhi style of architecture (almost vanished now). This hidden treasure in the form of assemblage of monumental structures with heavy stone decoration portrays the glorious funeral architecture of 15th and 18th century. The multidisciplinary methodology was adopted comprising of literature mapping, field and visual surveys, condition assessment for documenting the heritage site. This study highlights the importance of conserving and preservation of such traditional assets since it distinguishes their importance in considerate our collective human history and heritage inheritance. The results clearly shown the rapid deterioration mainly due to neglect, inaccessibility and harsh climatic conditions. The Chaukhandi Tombs needs a serious attention with restoration plan with the involvement of the community for sustainable tourism.

| **KEYWORDS** | Heritage, Art Work, Historic Cemeteries, Conservation Methods, Sindh |

Introduction

The Chaukhandi Tombs, a mysterious affluence trove of history and originality talent, are put away in the dry land of Sindh, Pakistan (Arnold, 2008).These historic cemeteries, which date to the 15th and 18th centuries, are evidence of the region's rich cultural heritage as well as the elaborate stone carving expertise used in those time period (Figure 1). In this research, we set out on a hunt to extract the past, informative the rich graphic craftsmanship that decorates these tombs and discovering the vital meaning of old cemeteries in Sindh. The Chaukhandi Tombs help as a connecting relating us to an earlier time of technique and the cultural talent of this amazing region. The Chaukhandi Tombs in Sindh, Pakistan, give a sign into the past through their beautiful stone carvings and architectural landmark (Kalhoro, 2018). They represent a singular fusion of history, art, and culture. But despite their historical and artistic significance, there are a number of problems and challenges that these old cemeteries face that need to be attention and preserved. The purpose of our study, "Unveiling the Past: Stone Carving Techniques as Visual Art and the Importance of Ancient Graveyards in Sindh - Chaukhandi Tombs," was specified in the problem reported below.

Fig. 1 Location Map of Chaukhandi. with total Area of 4,092,706 sqft

The Chaukhandi Tombs (Figure 2) are the subject of the research because they are important treasure of Sindh's cultural history and stone carving techniques. However, they are in threat of being vanished to time in line for to negligence, decline, and encroachment. In order to preserve and espouse the Chaukhandi Tombs and take into account their importance as historical, artistic, and cultural landmarks, this problem statement aims to talk about these issues.

Fig. 2 Damages and deterioration features

In arrears to their prominence as important causes of Sindh's cultural earlier and stone carving methods, the Chaukhandi Tombs are the to get attention of the study of encroachment, decay and negligence they itinerary the danger of actuality vanished towards phase (Figure 3). This problem statement suggests and determining these alarms in order to sustain and uphold the Chaukhandi Tombs and take into justification their worth historical, creative, and cultural ruins.

Fig. 3 Stone Carving on Grave

This study motivated at dual interrelated subjects that linkage the realms of creative inspiration and cultural heritage in the location of Sindh, Pakistan. It originates by beholding at the approaches working in stone carving as a remarked sample of collective originality and expertise. Stone carving is a traditional talent that has had a deep influence on mutual earliest and contemporary cultures' graphic aesthetics.

The study studies the progress of stone carving skills, their well-defined, and the lasting magnificence they give to representation and buildings. Additionally, this reading emphasizes the serious position of Sindh's ignorant cemeteries, with an attention on the Chaukhandi Tombs in specific direction. These cemeteries, which stand out for their wonderful sandstone carvings, deal a distinctive assessment into the area's amusing past, values, and creative successes. They work for as a witness to the creative capability of oldest craftsmen by illuminating decorative designs, symmetrical patterns, and engravings that appear to the theories and characteristics of the societies who one time existed in this province. The linking in the middle of stone carving methods and the Chaukhandi Tombs is evidence that cultural heritage and ingenious design are narrowly interweaved. By way of assessing the wonderful workmanship of these graves, we can study added around the general public, civilizations, and aesthetics of ancient Sindh.

Literature Review

Heritage preservation is a resource intensive activity in the countries like Pakistan where the economic stability is the major crisis. The heritage preservation is the newly developing field in the Pakistan majorly due to the public private partnerships. The heritage treasures are mostly hidden and neglected but intact in various parts of Pakistan. Chaukhandi Tombs in the Sindh is also one of the examples of stone art. These marvelous tombs are the result of intricate and artistic craftsmanship which is rarely found nowadays. This extremely alluring master piece dating back to the 15th and 18th centuries needs to be preserved to exhibit the rich history of the region.

This site represents the mysterious treasures with the hidden history exhibiting the elaborated stone carvings of that time. This site intricate stone carvings with elaborated designs provides insights into the past comprising of the unique blend of history, art and culture.

The material evidence of the past in the shape of this heritage site is also rich with the embedded oral traditional stories. The preservation and restoration in this modern times not only based on the conservation of the material evidence or the physical fabric rather the intangible heritage (rich historical backgrounds, folklore, cultural expression, communities, traditions, customs etc.) is the main focus of such activities. The shift is to explore the whole historic environment of that time to fully understand the architectural expression.

The Chaukhandi Tombs were built by the Sindhi rulers, who were famous for their alluring artistic palate and rich architectural expressions. The tombs were constructed for the rulers and their family and were created of monumental scale to exhibit the grandeur of their rule. The monumental structures still stand for centuries to represent the excellence of craftsmanship and intricate designs conception of that time. These monuments still tell the stories of the glorious era through their irreplicable architectural expression.

This artistic exhibit is a blend of Islamic and Sindhi indigenous architectural style with the variety of motifs designs, geometric patterns, floral designs and calligraphic art. The stone carvings are so intricately amalgamated to create a story of that era which was rich in elaborated decorative patterns.

The Chaukhandi tombs despite being the historically and artistically a master piece is facing the numerous threats from soil erosion, neglect and vandalism. The geographical location of the tombs is also one of the critical issues. As its location in the desert harsh climatic zone is also deteriorating the physical fabric through wear and tear process. In addition to that the neglection is also on the part of the authorities which due to the limited resources are unable to protect these sites. The failure of the authorities is also one of the reasons for promoting the vandalism in the site. The remote location and inaccessibility are facilitating the looting at the site. Most of the intricate artefacts were stole in the past and there are no records of the same. The site needs a serious attention and conservation plan to stop the further deterioration following the protocols of the conservation.

A detailed investigation of the literature, academic writings, historical documents, and archival sources on the Chaukhandi Tombs, stone carving methods, and Sindh's cultural heritage. This step gives the research the appropriate context and backdrop (Figure 4).

Fig. 4 Graveyard View

The restoration and conservation of these monuments will preserve the Sindh architectural style for the upcoming generations and would be the addition to the rich cultural history of the area.

Material and Methods

The methodology adopted for the research on Worth of Antique Necropolises in Sindh - Chaukhandi Tombs, is planned to deliver a complete and logical methodology to accomplish the research objectives (Qasim, 2014). The methodology comprehends the following major workings:

Field Research: On-site visits to the Chaukhandi Tombs to the Chaukhandi Tombs for data collecting and on-site observation. This entails preserving the historical and cultural relevance of the architectural details, stone carvings, and inscriptions.

Interviews and Surveys: Interviewing local specialists, historians, archaeologists, and other community people who are knowledgeable about the graves and their historical context. Surveys may also be conducted to obtain information about how visitors and locals perceive and are aware of the Chaukhandi Tombs.

Photographic Documentation: Taking detailed pictures of the Chaukhandi Tombs' stone carvings and architectural details so that they can be used as visual proof in the study.

Analysis of Stone Carving Techniques: Detailed examination of the motifs, styles, and craftsmanship used in the Chaukhandi Tombs' stone carving techniques. Collaboration with experts in both art and archaeology may be required for this analysis.

Preservation and Conservation Assessment: An assessment of the current state of preservation and conservation efforts for the Chaukhandi Tombs, including an evaluation of ongoing restoration projects and their impact on the site's integrity.

Data Compilation and Analysis: Arranging, cataloguing, and evaluating the information gathered—textual, photographic, and interview-based data—to reach significant conclusions about the Chaukhandi Tombs' historical and artistic value.

Recommendations and Proposals: Providing suggestions for the protection, restoration, and promotion of the Chaukhandi Tombs based on the research findings. Putting forth plans to promote community involvement and tourism growth to increase their significance.

Report and Documentation: Putting together a thorough research report that includes findings, analysis, and suggestions. To ensure transparency and authenticity, this report will be backed by images, photos, and references.

The chosen methodology combines historical analysis, fieldwork, expert opinions, and visual recording to provide a comprehensive knowledge of the historical and cultural significance of the Chaukhandi Tombs as well as the difficulties associated with their preservation and promotion. This strategy intends to support the celebration and preservation of Sindh's distinctive cultural heritage.

Results and Discussion

Techniques for carving stones and their artistic significance: The Chaukhandi Tombs' stone carving techniques were examined, and the results showed a unique fusion of geometric and floral patterns, featuring intricate latticework and motifs like peacocks and lotus blossoms (Giovani et. al, 2016; Junejo, 2012). These methods demonstrated an exceptionally high level of workmanship and artistic skill. According to research, the stone carvings in the tombs are a reflection of the diverse cultural influences that have shaped Sindh's past and include aspects from Islamic, Persian, and Indian creative traditions. These discoveries highlight the Chaukhandi Tombs as a striking illustration of the rich legacy of the area. The stone carvings held cultural and religious symbolism in addition to serving as ornamental features. For instance, the lotus design symbolizes innocence and rebirth, and peacocks stood for immortality.

Cultural and Historical Significance: The Chaukhandi Tombs were found to have historical origins that span the 15th to the 18th centuries, and many of them served as the final resting places of notable locals like tribal leaders and academics (Figure 5). Their significance as a reservoir of the area's history and cultural identity was highlighted by this historical setting. The tombs are regarded as a crucial component of Sindh's architectural history and are representative of the area's syncretic culture, which is influenced by Hindu, Islamic, and native traditions.

Fig. 5 The elaborate stone carving and patterns in the Chaukhandi Tombs

Challenges and Opportunities

Preservation Challenges:

According to the report, grave preservation issues include vandalism, encroachment by urban development, and weathering and degradation of the sandstone caused by exposure to the elements. The Chaukhandi Tombs are in serious risk of being lost to time due to neglect and a lack of funding for upkeep and preservation (Figure 6). The difficulties with preservation are made even more difficult by local authorities' and communities' ignorance of their importance.

Fig. 6 Preservation Challenges at the Chaukhandi Tombs

Community Engagement and Tourism Development: It became clear that encouraging community involvement and increasing knowledge of the Chaukhandi Tombs are essential to their preservation. It is vital to promote community involvement in preservation efforts and educational programs.

It has been acknowledged that the Chaukhandi Tombs' proximity to cultural and heritage tourism has the ability to both promote these landmarks and benefit the local economy. The creation of sustainable tourism strategies was covered. The Chaukhandi Tombs exhibit a distinctive fusion of methods used in stone carving, historical importance, and cultural diversity. The study underlines the significance of preserving and honoring these historical and aesthetic riches despite the significant preservation problems they face. We can make sure the Chaukhandi Tombs continue to be a bridge connecting us to the rich heritage of Sindh, giving a concrete link to our shared past and the cultural fabric of the area, by working together as a team and incorporating a variety of stakeholders.

Conclusions

Finally, our investigation of the Chaukhandi Tombs in Sindh, Pakistan, has shown the fascinating fusion of historical, artistic, and cultural heritage within these antiquated cemeteries. The elaborate stone carving methods displayed in the tombs have been crucial in expressing the region's rich cultural heritage in addition to being works of visual art. However, it is crucial to note the serious issues these historical places are facing, which call for prompt attention and coordinated preservation measures. Despite their importance, the Chaukhandi Tombs are vulnerable to invasion, degradation, and neglect, which jeopardizes their long-term existence. It is essential for relevant authorities and stakeholders to take proactive measures in their preservation and restoration in order to guarantee the ongoing protection of these priceless artifacts from the past. We can respect the historical past they stand for and keep a strong link to our common cultural history by doing this. Additionally, this study highlights the necessity for increased public involvement and understanding in order to appreciate the Chaukhandi Tombs. These locations can be revitalized through educational activities, tourism promotion, and cultural initiatives, boosting their significance and helping the local cultural

tourism business. In essence, the Chaukhandi Tombs serve as a somber testimony to human creativity, a reminder of the past, and an illustration of the multiplicity of cultures that have influenced Sindh. We must realize our obligation to preserve and cherish these historical and aesthetic treasures for future generations as we reveal the past through this research.

Recommendations:
- The study suggests a multifaceted strategy to deal with the difficulties in preservation. This covers rapid restoration initiatives, anti-vandalism safeguards, and long-term conservation strategies.

- It is advised to promote the Chaukhandi Tombs through historical tourism and educational initiatives. Creating visitor centers, educational signage, and guided tours fall under this category.

- For the Chaukhandi Tombs to be successfully preserved and promoted, cooperation between government officials, archaeologists, local populations, and heritage organizations is essential.

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