

Book Review

***Uchch: History and Architecture*
by Dr. Ahmad Nabi Khan
(Islamabad: National Institute of Historical
& Cultural Research, 2001)
2nd Edition, pp.148; Price: 300/-**

The book under review deal with the politico-religious and socio-cultural history of Uchch, which is one of the several ancient cites of Pakistan. Located near the confluence of the rivers Ravi and Sutlej in Southern Punjab, it at once makes its visitors curious about knowing its origin and growth in history. The present study will surely be greatly helpful in this regard.

According to learned author's findings, the signs of the existence of Uchch were found ever during the Vedic period. It did exist in a definite shape on the even of Alexander's invasion. Alexander's marching armies passed through Uchch area. He is said to have built a new township, Alexandria, around here in name of his beloved queen. Since Alexander's visitation, Uchch onward continued to flourish politically and culturally. It rose to the heights of glory during the Muslim period particularly during Sultan Nasiruddin Qabacha's reign, when it became a seat of government, abode of love and learning and centre of Islamic culture and civilization. Speaking more exactly in terms of learned author during that period of its glory, the Muslim saints and religious luminaries made Uchch a centre of spiritual excellence. More particularly, the most distinguished sufi and scholar, Jahaniyan Jahangasht rendered meritorious services in enhancing the spiritual atmosphere of Uchch. He trained and sent from here his devoted disciples to every nook and corner of the Indo-Pakistan

subcontinent to propagate Islamic teachings. These efforts had succeeded in bringing hundreds and thousands to the fold of Islam. While Sultan Qabacha and the elite of his court built numerous religious and secular edifices to adorn the city, the saints and their admirers constructed also numerous mosques, khanqahs, madrassas and tombs, most of which still exist today, exhibiting with a very attractive and unique art of architecture, which has been deeply studied and scrutinized by our learned author Dr. Ahmad Nabi Khan, who himself is a renowned archaeologist.

According to him, the old buildings at Uchch which make our proud national heritage were significant examples of brick-cum-wood architecture clad with colourful tiling, exercising all-abiding influence of Central Asian art, but possessing their own characteristic. While commenting on this study, Prof. A.H. Dani, an archaeologist and historian of international repute enlightens us much more in this regard by remarking, "It is no wonder that the last dwelling places of the saints and the associated houses of prayer today occupy a prominent place among the surviving buildings." Dr. Khan has devoted a great part of the book to the elaboration of the architectural style of these buildings and the place they occupy in the general pattern of the monumental developments of the area. The architecture, which is part of the so-called "Multan school is refreshing and attractive. It speaks of the influences received from Central Asia. More particularly, the study brings into focus a local style that could be created out of mud and wood available in the region. The brick style is the hall mark of this architecture and wooden framework its backbone, but it is the glittering glazed tiles that have a far-reaching attraction for the devoted as well as the forsaken people around. As long as that glamour attaches to these buildings, the people will gather around them and seek solace from the saints for their external life, Uchch will go down in history as an embodiment of this external message of Islam".

Nevertheless, the book is not free from some shortcomings and mistakes. Minhaj Siraj, the well known chronicler of the early period of Islam in indo-Pak subcontinent, was the principal of Madrasa Nasirya and not of Madrasa Firuzia as has been recorded by our learned author. The location of old cities of Depalpur and

Pakpan is not such as has been indicted in the sketch map given in the book under review. The name of I.H. Qureshi's book is "Muslim Community in the Indo Pak Subcontinent" and not "Muslim Communities" as has been wrongly cited under footnote No.4. Similarly, the couplet given on the front page has also been wrongly cited. The phrase "Ummam Ra" must be read as "Ujam Ra".

Anyway taken as a whole, the book under review makes a very analytical, scientific, comprehensive, and valuable study. It is well researched, well documented and well-written. Its study will be advantageous both for a general reader and researcher alike.

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