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**Atiq Rahman Siddiqui. Cultural Significance of Bakhchisarai monuments  
Constructed during Crimean Khan Ruler's age**

During medieval period, after emerging the Islamic wave in Central Asian region including Turkey and other European belt especially in 15th-16th century, a number of architecture came in to vogue under the powerful reign of Ottoman Turkish Empire. During this period a town Bakhchisarai in Crimean peninsula at the south-eastern part of Ukraine emerged as an Islamic cultural centre and produced some outstanding specimens of Calligraphic art and architecture. The Bakhchisarai palace of Ukraine has its individual characteristic as this is the earliest Islamic structure erected in entire eastern European continent.

**Keywords:** medieval period, Ottoman Empire, architecture, the Bakhchisarai palace.

Ukraine has played a tremendous role in the formation of its society, art, culture, architecture and fine art since the early period of human civilization. The history of Ukrainian civilization goes back to as early as the civilizations of Indus-valley culture of Indian sub continent, Egyptian and Mesopotamian civilizations. The archaeological evidences prove that the human settlement in Ukraine and its neighborhood goes back to circa thirty-thousand BC with the establishment of Gravittean Culture in and round Crimean Mountain. Gradually the cultures like Scythian, Sarmatian, Tyras, and Olbia were established here during pre-Christian eras.

The traces were also found that the great Silk Road connected China, India, Iran, Central Asia, Turkmenistan, with European countries including Ukraine. As such a kind of Eurasian trade Culture developed in Ukraine. This cultural sequence reflected the Asian as well the entire eastern European countries.

During medieval period, after emerging the Islamic wave in Central Asian region including Turkey and other European belt especially in 15<sup>th</sup>-16<sup>th</sup> century, a number of architecture came in to vogue under the powerful reign of Ottoman Turkish Empire. This period introduced an individual kind of ideological temperament almost in every field of art, culture and architecture. As a result, beautiful calligraphic specimens in Quranic script, arches, domes, minarets, gardens and gorgeous structure laid the foundation almost at every Asian and even European region.

Meanwhile some parts of Ukraine got occupied by the Ottoman Turkish rulers during early 16<sup>th</sup> century and erected few beautiful Islamic buildings in the shape of tomb,

minaret, mosque and palaces as the eastern Ukrainian parts were the territory of great Bulgaria during medieval epoch. Ottoman Empire was a state, founded by Turkish/Tatar tribe in about late 13<sup>th</sup> century in Anatolia. Accordingly it has been expanded when they captured the Byzantine Empire's Capital, «Constantinople, now Istanbul» in 1453. As such the maximum part of Eastern Europe has been occupied by Ottoman Muslim rulers.

The conquest of the city of Constantinople by the Ottoman rulers was a good omen in terms of flourishing Islamic culture and at the crossroads of trade in to Europe. They made major developments in the field of Calligraphic art, law, illustrated manuscripts, military Science and architecture. This cultural development had reflected the day to day life of the habitants of Istanbul and some part of Ukraine during 15<sup>th</sup> -16<sup>th</sup> century.

### **Bakhchisarai.**

During this period a town Bakhchisarai in Crimean peninsula at the south-eastern part of Ukraine emerged as an Islamic cultural centre and produced some outstanding specimens of Calligraphic art and architecture. One of them is Bakhchisarai Palace, constructed by the Ottoman Khan rulers in 1525-32 AD. This 16<sup>th</sup> century Islamic structure has become the home to a succession of Crimean Khanate (Khan or Han) Ottoman rulers. The Bakhchisarai palace of Ukraine has its individual characteristic as this is the earliest Islamic structure erected in entire eastern European continent.

Although there are few other contemporary monuments, like Topkapi palace, Yildiz palace, Edirne palace, Ciragan palace etc built during the same period but either they are located in Turkey or Spain or else where and situated at the places other than Eastern Europe.

But this monument is located in the main town of Bakhchisarai, Crimea with an easy approach. The entire structure has a specious walled enclosure which contains a huge palace, a big mosque and a small mosque, harem, hammam, graveyard, living houses and a grand garden. The interior of the palace is well decorated with the displayed objects of day to day life. Such as utensils, textile, carpets, wooden objects, arms and armor, paintings, furniture etc. These art objects reflect the traditional royal life style they enjoyed during their tenure. This palace may also be considered as a museum due to the displayed

objects in it. So a tourist can enjoy the taste of a historical monument and at the same time the importance of the art pieces preserved in it.

The contemporary records mention that during the third decade of the 16<sup>th</sup> century the Crimean Khan Muslim rulers of Tatar nomad tribe invaded the extreme south-eastern part of Ukraine and laid the foundation of a city, called, «Bakhchisarai». At the same time they erected few buildings on Euro-Islamic pattern. As such a new and individual structure came up for the first time on the soil of Ukraine for which they were ignorant so far.

Earlier the architectural identity of Ukraine was with gorgeous Churches, Basilicas and little secular or vernacular architecture. It is believed that the earliest examples of the intact structure found in Ukraine are the great Churches built after the adaptation of Christianity in late 10<sup>th</sup> century. These monuments are still available in the east Slavic land in the country mainly constructed with rubble masonry, stone and partly wooden material. But the architectural style of Kievan region which has been quickly adapted by Ukrainians was the Byzantine style of Church, mainly made of wood on eastern orthodox pattern, Known as «Cell Church». The majority of such cathedrals have small domes just similar to pre-Christian Pagan Slavic temples or a slight resemblance with the Buddhist temples like pagoda style roof of Japanese origin. However, little architecture of this shape is survived even today in Ukraine.

But during 12<sup>th</sup> century and onward the Ukrainian developed their style for the construction of Christian architecture in the shape of Ukrainian-Baroque style with highly decoration and ornamentation. Need less to mention that an impact of the Russian Church architecture can also be seen on such buildings built during early phase of medieval era. St. Sofia of Kiev, Church of the Saviour at Berestove, and St Cyril's Church etc are the living specimens of Ukrainian Christian architecture of the past.

On contrary to the above, with the beginning of 16<sup>th</sup> century, a new and quite different style of architecture has been introduced on the south-eastern part of Ukraine. This brought drastic change not only in the field of architecture but also laid the foundation of a different kind of cultural diversity in day to day life of the habitant of that region. The Crimean peninsula has been occupied by the Crimean rulers of Islamic faith who brought with them a large number of Iranian, Turkish, and Italian nationals.

Some of them had the wide idea of Islamic architecture and knowledge for construction of minaret, bulbous dome, true arch and of course the idea for the building of palaces lavished with art of beautiful Calligraphy and arabesque motifs. They invaded this Crimean region of Ukraine and after they captured it, they named it as **Bakhchisarai**. The Ottoman rulers established their capital here and erected few buildings in the shape of palace, minaret, arched shape entrance, onion shaped dome, well decorated gates illuminated with Calligraphic motifs in Arabic and Persian scripts and of course mosques to fulfill the needs for performing prayer as an essential part of their worship. Now these monuments are the property of Ukraine and can be valued as an outstanding Cultural heritage of the country which is expected to be declared as one of the World heritage monument.

These monuments are situated in the city of Bakhchisarai, built in the third decades of the 16<sup>th</sup> century. All the buildings are well preserved in a walled enclosure contains a garden, a beautiful palace, fountain, minaret, mosque, hammam etc. The palace is well displayed with the day to day items like decorative art objects, arm and armor, dresses, carpets, furniture, paintings, jewelry and objects made of wood and other materials. In general term it is called the «Ottoman Turkish architecture» but in fact it leads to identify as Islamic architecture. Since it is a growth on European soil and somehow has the architectural feature of Christian artistic talent of that region so it should be called as «Eurasian Cultural heritage» of Ukraine.

The city of Bakhchisarai is well habituated for the past about five hundred years enriched with a number of man made cultural heritage since its establishment. The contemporary records mention that these monuments got a set back and they have to face a serious damage during 18<sup>th</sup> century. Accordingly a suitable action has been taken and the destroyed palace (Aurang-i- Sufed), the snatched minaret, the fountain (Abshaar), mosque and other historical buildings got partially reconstructed. However, a good conservation work has been done so nicely by the Ukrainian-Russian conservators that these turned out in to their original shape and are now in a good state of preservation.

### **The Palace (Aurang-i-Sufed).**

Generally palaces and castles have always been of enormous fascination and a place of interest for all categories of people all around the world. The Bakhchisarai palace of

Ukraine is also one of the most charming having unique kind of architectural beauty in the world. It is a major historical monument of its time. This palace can be easily considered as one of the three rare architectural structures representing the Middle East and European architecture. The other two are of the same period, Al Hambra (Spain) and Topkapi palace (Turkey). The architectural specialty of the palace is that it is made of brick structure with wooden windows, balconies, staircases, even wooden perforated partition walls consisting of double storey structure. The ceiling of the building as well as the roof is made of with terracotta tile work which is not original and seems to be the later addition like other buildings of Eastern European design. Originally it was furnished with white color plaster as such it was named as «Aurang-i- Sufed». In Persian Aurang is palace or castle and sufed means white. The external wall surface is decorated with colorful paintings and art of calligraphy. It's a huge structure and furnished with other buildings to up grade and enhance the beauty of the Bakhchisarai palace. These are garden in its surrounding, mosque, fountain and minaret which were the basic elements of Islamic Ottoman architecture in the early 16<sup>th</sup> century.

The interior of the palace is worth seeing from various angles. It is divided in many sections. The living hall, guest hall or Sarai, harem,( the living apartment for royal ladies) hall for audience, private hall for enjoyment, prayer hall and a series of galleries furnished with precious items and decorative materials. The royal robe of honor and other day to day use item of the royal nobilities are still displayed there to the visitors. After visiting this palace a visitor can truly guess the amazing and glimmering life of that era. There much to see and learn about the life and culture of the people and nobles who ones lived here as well as the ancient artistic and architectural designs and fashion that once dominated the region.

### **The mosque.**

Another more interesting and worth seeing structure at Bakhchisarai is the great big mosque of Ottoman period. Although it is located within the premises of the palace, at the east of the northern gate, but due to its special and individual architectural character it need special attention. In fact mosque is a place of worship and performing five time daily prayer of the Muslims. The Islamic form of worship with its emphasis on congregational prayer requires a specious courtyard with a large prayer-hall. The centre is

occupied by a recess or alcove, called «mihrab» and indicates the direction of prayers. A pulpit to its right is meant for «Imam» who leads the prayers. A tower or minaret originally intended for the «mu'azzin» to call the faithful to the prayer. A gallery or compartment is some time screened off in corner of the prayer hall or in some other part to accommodate the ladies who observed prayer. A tank is provided for ablution usually in the courtyard of the mosque or any suitable place. Basically a mosque is consisted on the following elements. (1) Liwan (prayer hall) (2) Riwaq (cloister) (3) Sahn (courtyard) (4) Hauz (tank) (5) Mihrab (prayer-niche) (6) Member (pulpit) (7) Minar (minaret) (8) Gumbud(dome).

In view of the above description of the mosque, the Bakhchisarai big mosque is located with in the enclosure wall and nearer to palace area at the northern gate. It is one of the greatest mosques in the entire Crimean peninsula constructed in 1528 by the then Governor, of Bakhchisarai Sahebzade Giray.

Another mosque, comparatively in smaller size is also located within the palace compound. It is believed that this mosque was for special use of Royal families or high dignitaries for their prayer. The small mosque is rather more important with a view that it has the name of its builder as «Suleiman» in Arabic calligraphy and paintings of horses, boats. Sails etc. At the upper portion on the mihrab of the south wall there are 7 cuts of the ornamented belt, symbolizing the seven levels of heaven.

### **Fountain of tears.**

In one of the court yard of the Bakhchisarai palace stands a small fountain made of marble. It is a late addition of 18<sup>th</sup> century. There is a mountain filled with thick vegetation and greenery in the back drop of the stone structure. During winter season melted snow water falls through the porch of this fountain and creates an eye-catching scene. Although this has no any important architectural beauty but there is an interesting story behind it which gave it the name, as «fountain of tears».

The fountain is known as the personification of sincere love related to one of the last Crimean Khan ruler, Karim Giray and his young wife who has to face death in a very early young age. It is believed that the King fallen in love with the girl immediately as soon as he saw her in the harem. She was so beautiful in her time that no Polish girl can be

compared with her matchless attraction and beauty. The King got married with that beautiful girl, but soon she died after an illness.

The King became so sad and grievous that he did not take even a piece of bread to eat neither he slept for a long time. At least he decided to construct a monument of love in honor of his beloved wife and named it «Fountain of tears», as the Mughal emperor, Shahjehan built the monument of love, «Tajmahal» in Agra, India, in sweet memory of his wife. However, this fountain is an arched shaped architecture made of marble, 6x5x4 mtrs in size having four line Persian couplets in memory of her loving wife.

There are few more monuments and other cultural heritage in and around the city of Bakhchisarai which enhanced the beauty and attraction of the site. As such after the independence of Ukraine, in 1991 as a republic unitary State, this city has been declared as a heritage area. Accordingly Bakhchisarai palace including adjacent structure has been proposed to inscribe in to the UNESCO World Heritage list due to its outstanding universal and cultural value.