

Maryam Zamani Mosque: History and Architecture

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Introduction:

The Maryam Zamani or Begum Shahi Masjid lies to the east of the Masti gate of Lahore fort. This gate way is believed got its name after this Mosque but with the course of time the original name that is Masjidi gate was corrupted now it is called Masti gate. This Mosque was built by Maryam Zamani, Jahangir's mother, it is known after her the Begum Shahi Mosque embellished with exquisite fresco paintings, and it is a unique Mosque not only among Mughal buildings at Lahore but also in India. Further, being this brick structure is known because of two important elements namely Fresco paintings and the double-domes with which the pray chamber is crowned. As one of the earlier Mughal monument in India, its painting model reflects the feminine character of the Mosque. It also represents the transitional phase between Lodhi and Mughal architecture. (Khan 1991:64)

History:

As given in the inscription on the Mosque was built by Maryam Zamani, mother of emperor Jahangir in 1025H 1616, this date is derived from the text Khush Masjidi (خوش مسجدی) inscribed on the eastern gate. According to Ain-Akbari, she was the daughter of Raja Behari Mal and sister of Raja Bhagwan Das. (Latif 1956:131)

Before the building of Wazir Khan Mosque, this Mosque seems to serve as the Jamia Mosque of the city. The royal members are related to say their prayers in this Mosque while they were staying in the Lahore fort. Besides, the Mosque had been used for the purpose by the nobility as well as the common people. (Chaghtai 1934:84) However, during the Sikh period the Mosque was banned for prayers, and it was misused by converting it into a gun-powder magazine. The gun-powder factory had been running here by a full-fledged staff under the supervision of Jawahar Mal Mistri. However, in 1850 the Mosque was vacated by throwing into the river Ravi, the gun-magazine powder stored in it. Afterwards the Mosque was registered as Nazool land by Faqi-ud-din, the Daroga-i-Nazool. But later on, Major McGregor, then Deputy Commissioner of Lahore, returned the Begum Shahi Mosque and rest of the buildings such as shops and houses to the Muslim community of Lahore. (Latif 1956: 131)

At the time of its transfer, the Mosque was in poor condition of preservation. The local Muslim carried out its special repairs with the funds raised by them. In 1962-63, the Mosque was declared protected monument by the Government of Pakistan. This brick structure is renowned for two significant elements: The double domes provided to the ceiling of the prayer chamber and the marvellous fresco painting of the inner surface. (Khan 1971:132)

The Founder

About Maryam al-Zamani¹ at whose order the mosque was constructed, very little is known. She was a Rajput princess of the Kachwahaclan and the eldest daughter of Raja Bahari Mal, ruler of Ambar. Even her real name

¹ There has been a lot of confusion about this title and its attribution. A number of authors, especially European unmistakably misled with the word 'Maryam' (Mary), have concluded that she was a Christian lady. Later researches have, however, proved this assertion baseless. For detailed discussion on the subject, see MacLagan, Sir Edward, *The Jesuits and the Great Mogal* (London, 1932), p. 158 and notes on pp. 160-61; also idem "The gesuit missions to the Emperor Akbar" in *J.A.S.B.* part I, no. I (1896) vol. ii.P. 17; idem, *Akbar's Tomb at Sikandrah*, (Allahabad, 1908) p. 1; Smith, V.A., *Akbar the Great Moghul (1542-1605)* (2nd Indian Ed., Delhi, 1958) p. 42 and n. 3. Meclagan and Smith call 'Maryam al-Zamani' a posthumous title, which is not correct as we find her son Jahangir calling her Maryam Zamani even during her life time. See Rogers, A. and Beveridge, H.,

is not mentioned by any contemporary or later historian.² Abdul Fazl, the principal biographer of Akbar, records the circumstances which led to this matrimonial alliance.³ He writes that Akbar married the daughter of Raja Bahari Mal in 968 A.H./1560 A.D. at the latter's instance at a place named Sanvhar near the modern town of Jaipur in India. He does not record the exact date of the marriage, but says that the ceremony was held on his return from the visit to the celebrated saint Shaikh Salim Chishti in Jamadi al-Awwal 968 A.H.⁴ January 1561 A.D. The event must have, therefore, occurred in the first half of February 1561 A.D. (Chishti 1870:70)

The Rajput Queen gave birth to a child after more than seven years on 17th Rabi al-Awal 977 A.H./30th August 1569 A.D. who was fated to become the successor of Akbar under the title of Jahangir. Abul Fazl gives a detailed account of this auspicious occasion.⁵

As usual with the ladies of the royal harem, only indirect and scanty references are available in the contemporary as well as later authorities which give glimpses into the events connected with the life of Maryam Zamani. The best source of our information in this connection is the biography of her own son, Jahangir, who mentions her more than once. Each time, he writes about her with respect and reverence. A close study of these notes reveals that the Queen Mother had a very high position in the imperial household; almost all the important events of the family used to take place at her palace. Jahangir records that twice he was ceremoniously weighed on his birth day at the house of Maryam Zamani; the marriage feast of Prince Pervaiz was performed at her house. Even his own marriage with the daughter of Raja Man Singh was performed in her house. (Chishti 1870:89) The reverence the Emperor had for his mother, may be estimated from the following note in his memories:

“On Friday the 12th of the month mentioned (Rabi al-Awal), I embarked in a boat and went to a village named Dahr to meet my mother and I had the good fortune to be received by her. After the performance of obeisance and prostration and greeting which is due from the young to the old according to the custom of Chingiz Khan, the rules of Timur and common usage, and after worship of the king of the world (God) and after finishing this business, I obtained leave to return, and re-entered the fort of Lahore”. (Khan 1970-71: 123)

Similar sentiments were expressed by the Emperor when he met her in Kashmir. He says:

“On the same day, Her Majesty the revered Maryam Zamani (his mother) came from Agra, and I acquired eternal good fortune from the blessing of waiting on her. I hope that the shadow of her bringing up and affection may be perennial on the head of this suppliant”. (Khan 1970-71: 123)

Tuzuki-Jahangiri (Eng. Trans.) (London, 1909-14), etc., Blochhman has also confused the difference by saying; “As Akbar's mother had the title of ‘Maryam Zamani so was Jodha Ba’I (this has, however, been corrected later by the author himself c.f. op. cit. additional notes p. 619) called Maryam-uz-Zamani, meaning that as Akbar's mother, Hamida Banu Begum had the posthumous title Maryam Zamani, so had the Rajput lady, Maryam Zamani. The confusion has resulted due to the fact that almost all the Moghul Emperors and their principal consorts were traditionally bestowed such honorific titles posthumously. The case of Jahangir's mother, however, is different. Another interesting point to be mentioned here is that no contemporary or later historians have called her with this title except Jahangir. He mentions her as many as twelve times and always calls her by this title. We, however, do not know when this title was bestowed upon the Queen. It may be presumed that Akbar might have conferred this title on the Queen at the birth of Jahangir but for this we do not have any contemporary source, Garden Sanderson's reference to Blochhman for this assertion is incorrect. See Marshall, Sir John (Ed.) ASIR 1910-11, p. 95. In fact, all his references to various authorities need re-checking.

² C.f. Srivastava, A.L., Akbar the Great (Delhi, 1962) vol.I, p. 63, n. 19, who records that her name was probably Man Mati. He does not, however, quote authority for his assertion.

³ Abul Fazl Allami, Akbar namah, vol. ii. P. 156, For an analytical study, See Srivastava, A.L., op. cit. vol. i. p. 61 sqq.

⁴ Abul Fazl Al'ami, op. cit., vol. ii. P. 156

⁵ Ibid, p. 44

After enjoying the respect of and influence over two great Moghul Emperors for more than sixty years, the Queen Mother died on the 19th Rajab 1032 A.H./9th May 1623 A.D. at Agra. Jahangir records in his memories: (Baqir 1984: 124)

“On this day (19th Rajab 1032 A.H.) news came from Agra that Her Highness (hazrat) Maryam-uz-Zamani, by the decree of God, had died. I trust that Almighty God will envelop her in the ocean of His mercy”.

The Queen mother was buried at Sikandra, Agra, and a splendid tomb was erected over the grave by Jahangir⁶.

During the long period of authority which she enjoyed, Maryam Zamani erected a number of monumental buildings at many places of the Moghul Empire. Some of these buildings still exist which remind us of the glories days they once enjoyed. Her own palace at Fatehpur Sikri, the Mosque at Lahore, and a grand building constructed at a cost of Rs. 20,000.(Latif 1956:135) According to T.W. Beale who recorded in 1873 A.D., the garden had then disappeared but the baoli still existed. It was built in the 7th year of the accession of Jahangir 1022 A.H. / 1613 A.D.) with red stone and had a Persian inscription carved on a marble slab and fixed over the facade.

Architectural Description of the Mosque

1. Plan:

The Mosque is rectangular on plan, and covers an area of land measuring 135ft. 6 in, by 127 ft. 6 and is built of brick masonry. (Fig.1) It appears very impressive enormous construction which is covered with lime plaster. (Khan 1991:64) This Mosque was built on traditional pattern, having prayer chamber on western side and courtyard on eastern side. (Fig.2)

2. Entrance:

This Mosque has two arched-gateways, one on the east. Both the gateways are provided with inscriptions. The Persian inscription within arched panel fixed on the eastern gateway reads:

شاه عالمگیر نورالدین محمد بادشاه
باد یا رب در جهان روشن چو نور مهر و ماه

May the subjugator of the universe, Emperor Noor-ud-Din Muhammad, shine on the earth similar to the Sun and Moon, O Allah! (Latif 1956: 131)

The Persian inscription executed over the central arched-panel fixed on the northern gateway reads:-

الله اکبر
منست ایزد که آخر گشت کار از ابتدائی
حضرت مریم زمانی بانی هذا المكان
از بنی تاریخ ختم ابن بنائی چون بهشت
هم بتوفیق کدا و حکم صاحب مندی
کز عنایت الهی ساخته جای هدی
فکرمی کردم که آخر یا فتم خوش مسجدی
(۱۶۱۳)ھ ۱۰۲۳

⁶Sanderson, Gordon, “Conversion works at Agra and neighborhood” in ASIR 1910-11 pp. 94-96. The article includes an account of the tomb of Maryam Zamani at Sikandra, Agra.

Allah is the Greatest:

1. Allah is to be thanked from whose grace under the auspices of Her dignity this building was finished.
2. The founder of this building, the place of salvation, is the Queen Maryam Zamani.
3. For the time of the completion of this building, which is similar to the heaven, I was pondering when finally I found it in the words what a fine Mosque! (1023 A. H). (Latif 1956: 131)

The inscription records the date of the completion of the edifice in the chronogram. It is derived from the words خوش مسجدی (Khush Masjidi what a fine Mosque) as (1025H/1616 A.D). (Rhamani 2002:244). (Fig.3)

3. Courtyard:

On eastern side there is (sehn) courtyard. Each gateway is provided by four steps which are leaving into the main courtyard, measuring 123 ft. by 83ft. originally the courtyard was surrounded by the rows of small rooms on north and south. As the remaining evidences still suggests its setting. The rooms are roofed with concrete (R.C.C.), along with the support of two rows of round pillars. This roof covers the ablution tank to some extent on its four sides. (Khan 1991: 64)

The pavement of the courtyard seems to have originally been provided with brick tiles purely in a Mughal fashion or style, but later on it was disappeared. Presently the courtyard is paved with modern bricks. The prayer chamber was originally provided with staircases which lead to the roof in the northwest and the southwest corners. The cells/rooms also seem to have originally been provided with staircases. Now only their traces are seen. To the east of gateway a wide platform is situated, which accommodates an enclosure in which octagonal dome chamber of Ghulam Qadir Bhervi is located with some other modern graves. (Baqir 1984:144)

4. Ablution Tank:

An Ablution Tank stands in the centre of the courtyard which is covered by modern roof; however two rows of round pillars are still providing force to its roof. Matter of the fact is that an Ablution Tank is regarded as an essential feature of the courtyard in a Mosque, which is also maintained in the Maryam Zamani Mosque. (Khan 1970-1971)

5. Domes:

The each compartment of the prayer chamber was roofed with dome. This is also a new feature that is each compartment or each bay is roofed by a dome. The central compartment or dome invites special attention because it is double dome in its appearance. (Baqir 1984:145)

The prayer chamber of the under study mosque is divided into five compartments. The central bay is crowned by a double dome, which is appearing for the first time at Lahore. Percy Brown and Ahmad Nabi Khan in their works declared it the earliest example of the double dome architecture in Pakistan. (Brown 1942: 174-6). However, the evidences suggest that the first ever example of double dome in the history of Islamic architecture of Pakistan was provided to the tomb of sultan Ibrahim Khan Tarkhan at Makli Hills in Thatta dated to 1560-65 A.D. (Qazi 2010: 10). Later on this tradition was very successfully was adopted in the tomb of Jani Beg Tarkhan 1600 A.D. at Makli Hills in Thatta (Qazi 2010: 10). In the light of above cited early examples in Pakistan clearly suggest that after its introduction at Makli Hills slowly and gradually it became a fashion during the Mughal domain. However, this device appeared for the first time at Lahore and first of its kind in the history of architecture in Pakistan. The central dome is crowned by an inverted lotus flower. This central dome on either side is flanked by two. Each dome is comparatively smaller in size. (Fig: 6). besides, earliest execution of ninety nine ATTRIBUTES OF ALLAH inscribed in Naskh on the domical ceiling of this mosque at Lahore. Later on this pattern was followed on the cenotaph of Jahangir's tomb at Shahdhara, Lahore. (Waliullah 1962:33) This is generally believed that these two shells were applied to achieve the required height of the dome. Although the

high domes were already built in Tughlaq period, but their height were achieved by applying more squinches as we have seen in shah Rukn-e-Alam tomb. Both shells had their independent support that is squinches. If we see internally the height of the dome seems low whereas when we see externally the height of the dome seems higher. So, it is also believed that technically this device provided more durability and beauty to the dome architecture. (Nath 1986:115)

Each compartment is interlinked by lateral arches, which occupies the western half of the original plan of the mosque. The central double dome is the highest, placed on a high and round neck (11 ft. 1 in), while side ones had low dome. The double dome consists of two shells, the outer (3 ft. 6 in thick) and the inner shell is of stucco. A wooden framing connects the two shells for reinforcement. (Fig.4) The outer shell has a small arched opening on the west.(Khan 1970-71:125)

6. Prayer Chamber or Sanctuary:

The most important architectural element of the Mosque both from the religious as well as architectural points of view is the Zullah or the Ivan (prayer chamber). Starting with the simple but elegant hypostyle, it reached its climax in the imposing arcaded Ivan crowned with domes and augmented with minarets and crenellations. It has been argued that the hypostyle Zullah has been originally inspired from the Apadana of the Persepolis and the hypostyle chambers of Egypt.(Nath 1986:120) Whatever the origin and influence, the hypostyle Zullahs in the shape of flat-roofed porticos have been very much favoured not only in its initial stage but at later times as well. It has been adopted as a matter of preference in several instances at many places in Pakistan, leaving aside the examples which were mainly adaptations of the earlier buildings – the Hindu temples.(Brown 1942:180) The hypostyle Zullahs are frequently met with, for instance, at the historic ancient cities of Multan and Uchchh, especially during the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries. The mosques attached to the hypostyle tombs of Jalal u'd-Din Bukhari and Jahanian Jahangasht have the Zullahs with flat roof. Here the flat roof has been supported by a series of wooden posts arranged in several regular rows. The wooden posts, in effect, take the shape of a formal column consisting of the base, the shaft and the capital, on which the entablatures are placed to hold the wooden frames of the roof which itself is composed of wooden planks and brick tiles. These wooden elements are tastefully painted with a variety of floral designs in red and yellow colours. (Khan 1991:65)

The most interesting feature of Maryam Zamani Mosque is its prayer chamber which measures 130 ft. 6 inches from south to north and 34 ft. from east to west. Thus architecturally, it forms an oblong prayer chamber or sanctuary with domical roof. (Khan 1970-71:125)

It is rectangular single aisled prayer chamber which occupies the western half of the original plan of the mosque. It is divided into five bays, the roof of which is supported by engaged arches, as it is crowned or surmounted by five domes.

(Baqir 1984:187)

7. Mehrab

As mentioned above the whole sanctuary is divided into five bays and the central bay or compartment of the prayer chamber is marked internally of the western side by an arched recess or Mehrab. However on either sides of the Mehrab each bay on the western side is provided with arched niches. The niche constitutes half domed vault, built with stalactite technique. While the remaining arched niches are lavishly decorated. Among the Quranic inscriptions, the most prominent is on the Mehrab of the Mosque. The Tughra gives the usual Ayat-al-Kursi, while at the crown of the arched-niche is the Kalima. Similarly, all the facades of the niches in other compartments have been decorated with inscriptions of verses from the Quran. There is only one saying of the prophet painted on the façade of the second left arch. (Fig.5)

(Qazi 1995:115)

This inscription at the top of the facade of the sanctuary is also carved out in stucco which marked by bold relief and coloured in red. It records Quranic verse and the name of the emperor Jahangir. (Khan 1970-71:130)

8. Facade of the Prayer Chamber:

As far as the Ivan of Maryam Zamani Mosque is concerned it is approached by five arched openings it leads into a bay of the prayer hall. (Fig.6) The central arch is higher than the flanks and appears as four centred arches which is decorated with floral motifs. (Fig.7) Each arch opening is marked out by a projected frame. However the central one is higher than the side ones. This whole composition of the facade is marked on its front by a parapet. The surface of the frames of the arch opening is treated with decorative arch blind/recessed panels in which cypress tree is more prominent decoration. (Khan 1991:67) (Fig.8)

ان اول بيت وضع للناس بكة مباركا وهدى للعالمين نور الدين محمد جهانگیر بادشہ غازی۔

9. Four-centred Arch:

The most important thing which first time appear in Muslim architecture of Pakistan on the whole and particularly in Maryam Zamani Mosuqe / Begum Shahi Mosque (Fig.9) is the four centred arch in its full-fledged form /shape. We may say that this is first appearance of four centred arch in Pakistan. (Brown 1942:88) (Fig.10)

10. Pavilions:

Each corner of the sanctuary is marked above by pavilions, measuring (6ft. 10 inches) on all sides. The square shaped structures are provided by four arch openings and are crowned or roofed with cupolas. Each cupola is placed on an octagonal drum and also crowned with finials on the patter of the domes of sanctuary. These have now considerably decayed. (Khan 1970-71:125) This feature (Pavilion) first time appeared in the mosque history of Pakistan in Maryam Zamani Mosque. It is typically Hindu feature. But so far as we know about the mosque architecture of Pakistan it does not appear before the Begum Shahi Mosque. If any there, it did not survive to us.

Conclusion:

Maryam Zamani mosque was the first mosque of its kind in Lahore, which has great impact on the subsequent period. Maryam Zamani mosque can be defined as a wonderful piece of art and architecture. Although this mosque follows the traditional pattern of Islamic mosque but technically as well as architecturally it shows great turbulent in the art of architecture as well as in the form of mosque. When we talk about the source of inspiration of Maryam Zamani mosque than it can be said that this is the mixture of Islamic and native architecture. Many features like pavilion was first time introduced in Maryam Zamani mosque. It can be said that it was the origin of minaret in the mosques of Lahore, which appear in its full form in Wazir Khan mosque. Wazir Khan mosque was the mosque where minarets were built with unique architectural techniques which show its glory. The concept and idea of double dome was also provided by Maryam Zamani mosque which was also followed by the later period and its evidence is Wazir Khan mosque. The extensive use of fresco paintings in the interior of the prayer chamber of Maryam Zamani mosque is remarkable. This happened first time that fresco painting was used in a mosque in Lahore. The history of the use of the fresco paintings in Punjab is not quite clear but a few examples are found particularly in the Indus valley civilization, particularly at harrapa murals are found possibly in fresco. The use of fresco painting in the vaishnava temples of the Punjab hills in India is recorded in the history of the Indian arts. This shows that fresco is also a native tradition which was applied in the mosque

architecture of Pakistan specially Lahore in the reign of Jahangir. We can divide the mughal architecture into two phases. 1st phase in which the red sand stone was used in building the mughal monuments from Humayun to Akbar's reign and the second phase is the use of marble on a large extent in building for the purpose of decoration. As far as the decoration on mughal monuments in Lahore is concerned we see the tile mosaic work in Lahore fort on a large extent and fresco paintings in Maryam Zamani mosque. Maryam Zamani mosque became the trend setter for the mosques in alter period. We can say that Maryam Zamani mosque was in an experimental stage and Wazir Khan mosque is its developed and advance form. In the end it can be concluded that Maryam Zamani mosque was the 1st mosque of its tradition and has great influence of the mosque architecture of the subsequent period.

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Figures

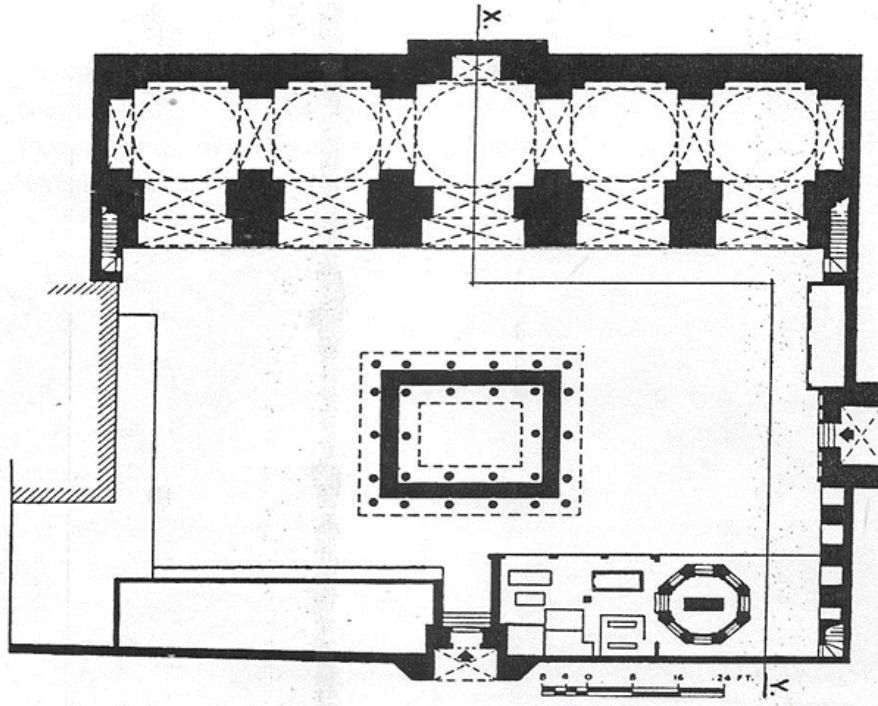


Fig. 1: Maryam Zamani Mosque: Plan (courtesy Khan 1991)

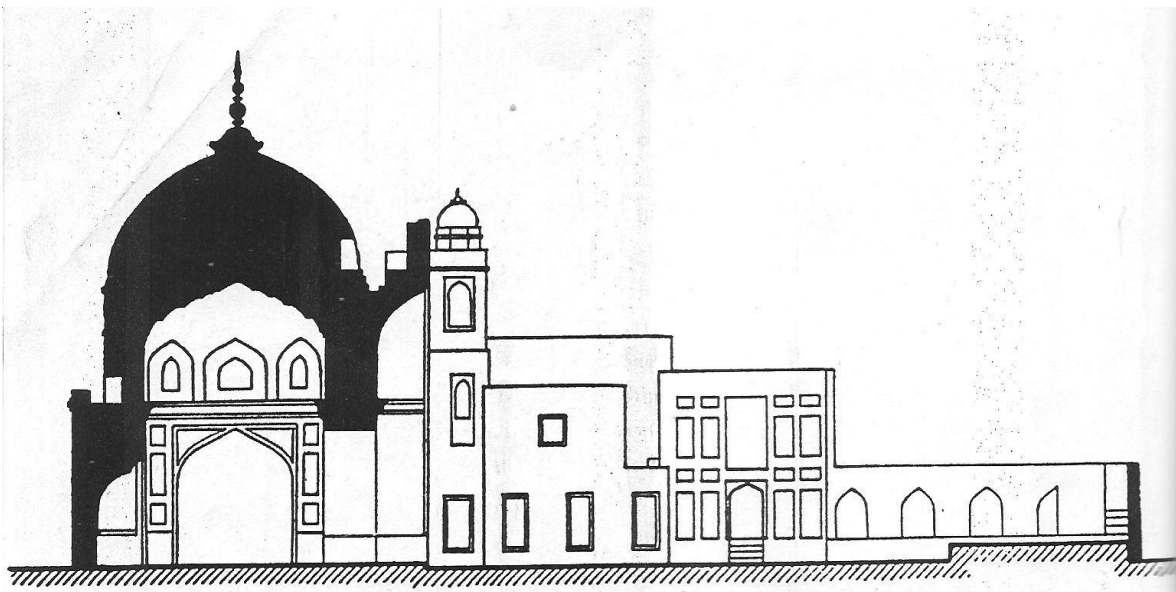


Fig. 2: Sectional elevation (Khan 1991)

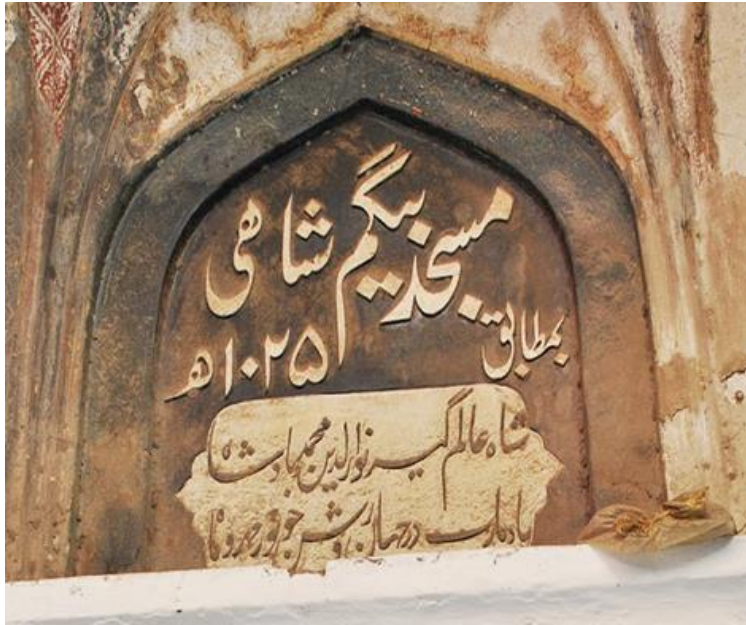


Fig. 3: Persian Inscription on the eastern entrance

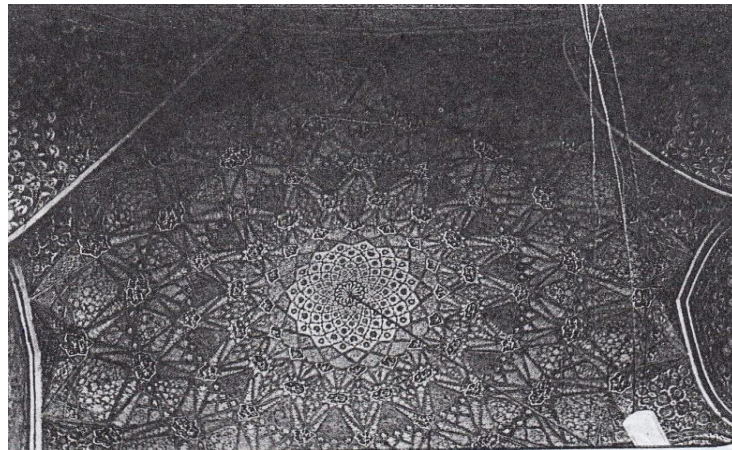


Fig. 4: Interior of the dome details of decoration (Mahmud 1981)

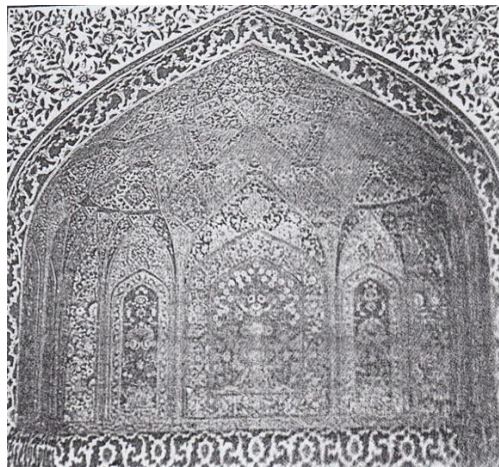


Fig. 5: Floral, Geometric, calligraphic of the arch

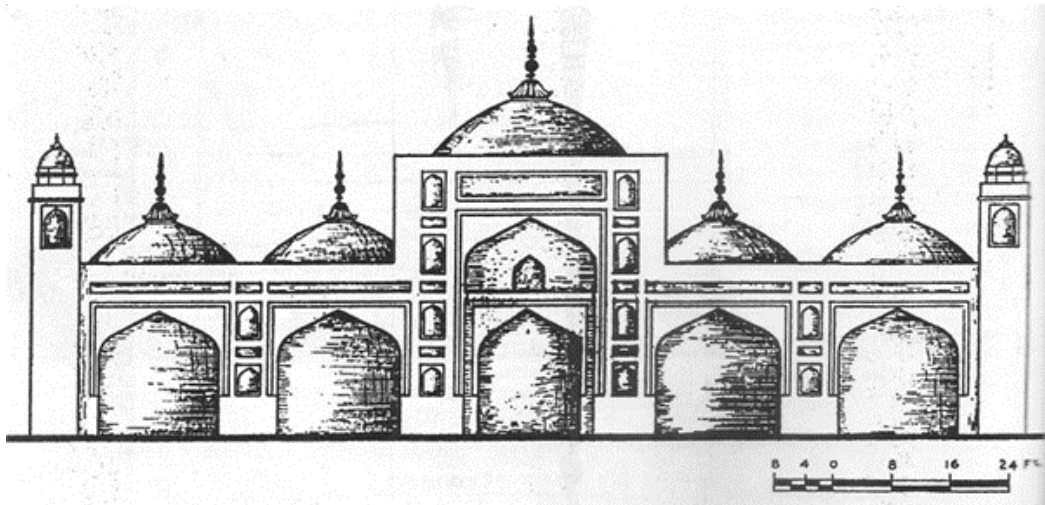


Fig. 6: Elevation in drawing (Khan 1991)

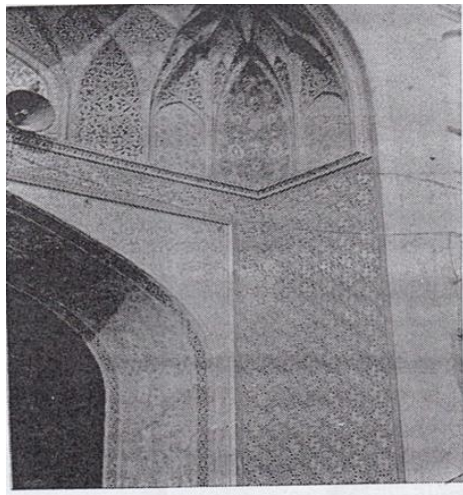


Fig. 7: Floral and geometric design on the main recessed arch

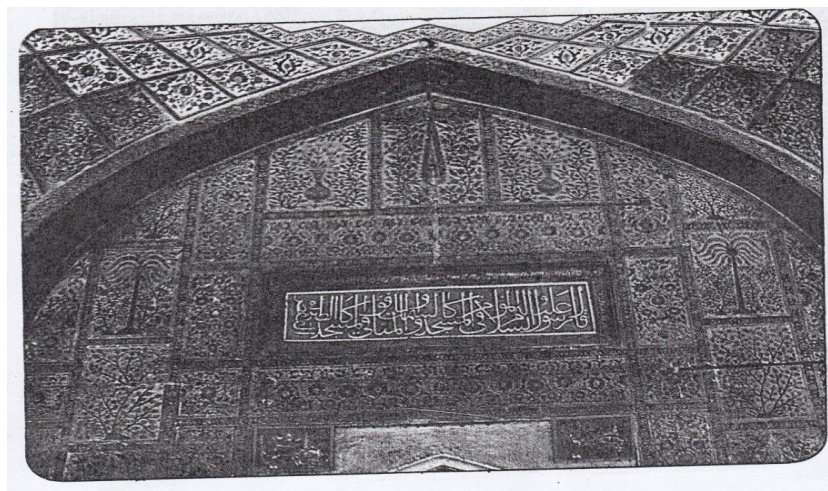


Fig. 8: Cypress tree and other decoration



Fig. 9: The façade and the north-western portion of the prayer chamber

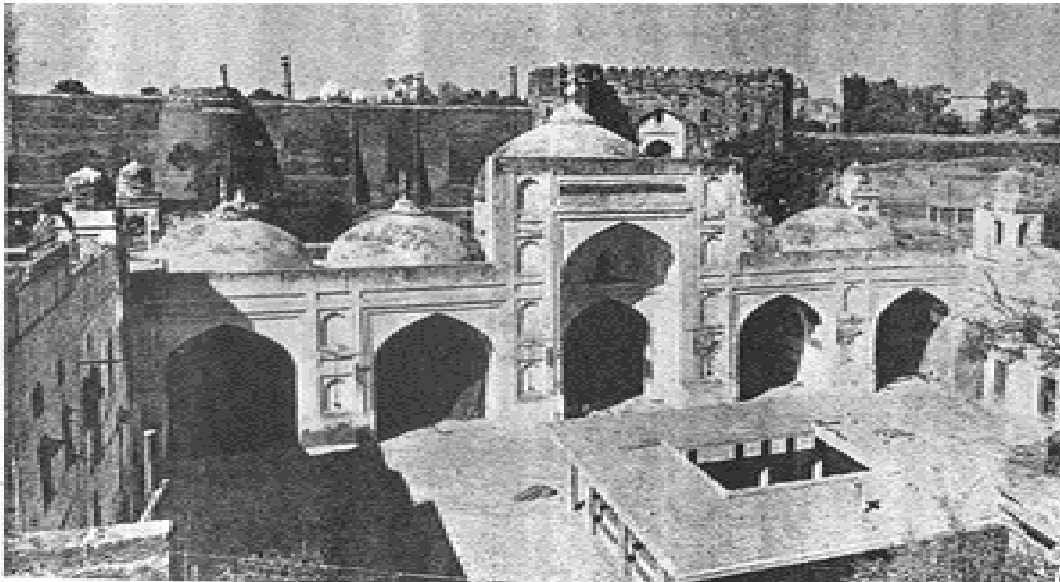


Fig. 10: General view of the prayer chamber.