

Prof. Dr. Shaukat Mehmood

*So they destroyed,
Their dwellings by their own
Hands and.....
Take warning, then,
Oye with eyes (to see)!*
— *Sura lix (al-Hashr), 2.*

LAHORE, for the first time, fell into the hands of the Sikhs in 1756. Jassa Singh was the first Sikh ruler of the city. When Ahmad Shah Abdali invaded Lahore for the seventh time in January 1764 Sikhs dispelled and receded in the northern mountains without putting up any confrontation. But no sooner had Ahmad Shah left the city, the Sikhs again emerged on the scene and took control of Lahore. The city of Lahore was then divided into three sectors heralding the triumvirate rule of Sikhs. The rulers of Lahore were Gujjar Singh, Lahna Singh and Sobha Singh. During this infelicitous and ill-started period Islamic monuments of Lahore were ruthlessly destroyed, mutilated and deprived of their elegance. So despicable was their appetite that they demolished many a monument of their respective domains in order to sell their bricks and timber. Sobha Singh died in 1797 and was succeeded by his son Mohar Singh. Lahna was succeeded by Chet Singh. They both were thoroughly profligate in every discipline of their lives. They lacked temperament as well as magnetism. Seizing the opportunity Ranjit Singh took Lahore in 1799. He was a dynamic ruler but with lot of antagonistic qualities. He reduced Amritsar in 1802, Ludhiana in 1806, Qasur in 1809, Kangra in 1813, Attock in 1814, Multan in 1818, Peshawar and Kashmir in 1819-20, Laddakh in 1834. He died in Lahore on the 27th of June 1839 at the age of 57. In spite of his many commendable qualities he was greedy, lusty and vindictive. He converted all mosques of Lahore into powder magazines, workshops and even stables. Numerous Islamic monuments of Lahore were stripped of their precious adjuncts and their material was sent to Amritsar for the building and decoration of Darbar Saheb. He uprooted a number of sarcophagi and cenotaphs of the Muslim mausolea in search of treasures. So unscrupulous and vile his character was that he deprived Prince Shah Shuja of the famous diamond Koh-i-Nur while the exiled ex-prince of Kabul had taken refuge with him on the invitation of Ranjit Singh himself. This was the style of his hospitality.

THE DAMAGE done to the Muslim monuments of the city was repaired to some extent when Ranjit Singh married a Muslim strumpet Moran, and then by the

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British who took Lahore from Ranjit Singh. But ever since the departure of the British in 1947 the memories of the Sikh rulers have been rejuvenated as far as Muslim architectural heritage is concerned. A large number of monuments have disappeared from the very face of the earth while others are being sacrificed, destroyed and transmuted either in the name of restoration and conservation or to make room for urban expansion and agriculture.

THE CONSERVATION, restoration and protection of historic buildings necessitates sapient and cautious manipulation of resources which include administrative, financial and technical aspects. Conservation demands rational insight and a selfless discernment of responsibility towards the monument. Amongst many, one particular case of concern is the mosque of Wazir Khan at Lahore. The condition of this mosque in spite of long term extravagant plans to protect and repair it, has continued to deteriorate. Whatever has been done is superficial. Its minarets remain in a total state of neglect. The chini-work on their exteriors is disintegrating unchecked and unabated. They are also out of bounds for the public. "The methodology of conservation applies to all workers in the field and is based on visual inspections which lead to specific investigations to the justified depth before a diagnosis is made. A conservationist should not hesitate to obtain second opinions when necessary. All practical alternatives should be explored and then evaluated in the light of theory in order to find the 'least bad' solution, which must respect the qualities in the historic buildings".

THE DEGREE and constitution of the historic monument must be determined and its affinity to its surroundings must be defined. A monument cannot be studied in isolation from its environs. Conservation work relies upon making investigations and reports with methodical interludes on all parts of the monument registering all the perceptible deficiencies in order to remedy the causes of decay and recommend a cogent treatment that implicates a minimum intervention only. It must be clearly realised that the best conservation is the minimum intervention. More the intervention more the damage to the monument. We must clearly understand that rebuilding is neither conservation nor protection.

AMONGST the many causes of decay one particular category is that of man-made causes. Man-



The Wazir Khan mosque was built by Shaikh Imal-Din.

made causes of declension and caducity are intricate and have wide-ranging implications. Little has been done in Pakistan to forestall such agents of decay. I wish to refer candidly to the self-styled conservationists. They have doubtlessly done more damage to our architectural heritage than any other cause of decay. Besides the monuments of Multan, Thatta and Makdi, Badshahi Mosque, Tomb of Jehangir, Tomb of Nurjahan, Tomb of Asif Khan and the mosque of Wazir Khan in Lahore are some of the typical examples of such misadventurism in the field of conservation.

THE MOSQUE of Wazir Khan, Lahore, was built by Shaikh Imal-Din of Chiniot who rose from obscurity and achieved the portfolio of a Wazir during the reign of Emperor Shahjahan. According to Nur Ahmad Chishty, he earned prominence during the sovereignty of Jehangir. But according to Kipling he cured one of the concubines of Shahjahan and thus attained prominence. Neither of these writers substantiates his view from any historical source or reference. His full name as given by contemporaneous historians was Shaikh Imal-Din Ibn Shaikh Abd al-latif Ibn Shaikh Hisam al-Din. Mulla Abdal-Hamid Lahuri in his 'Badshahnama' writes that

after entering the service of Shahjahan, he was first made superintendent of the house-hold (Diwan-i-bayutat) and then the superintendent of the royal itchen (Mir-i-Saman). He was later promoted to Diwan, and deputized as subaidar (Governor) of Lahore. According to Latif many buildings in the Lahore Fort were fashioned by him or superstructured under his direct supervision. M'athir al-umara' narrates that it was this Wazir Khan who laid the foundation of the city known as Wazirabad. This city is situated at the left bank of mighty Chinab in Pakistan. Wazir Khan is said to have laid a garden also after the completion of his mosque in Lahore. This garden was situated between the present General Post Office (GPO) and the central museum. Within this garden was an elegant 'bara-darri' which survives but only as a ruined memento of the past. The government of the Punjab has recently taken up the task of restoration. This project, as usual, is in the hands of inexperienced and self-styled restorers. Therefore there is little hope that the past grandeur of the monument will ever be revived.

THE MOSQUE of Wazir Khan was built at the site of the tomb of Sayyid Muhammad Is-haq, commonly known as Miran Badshah,

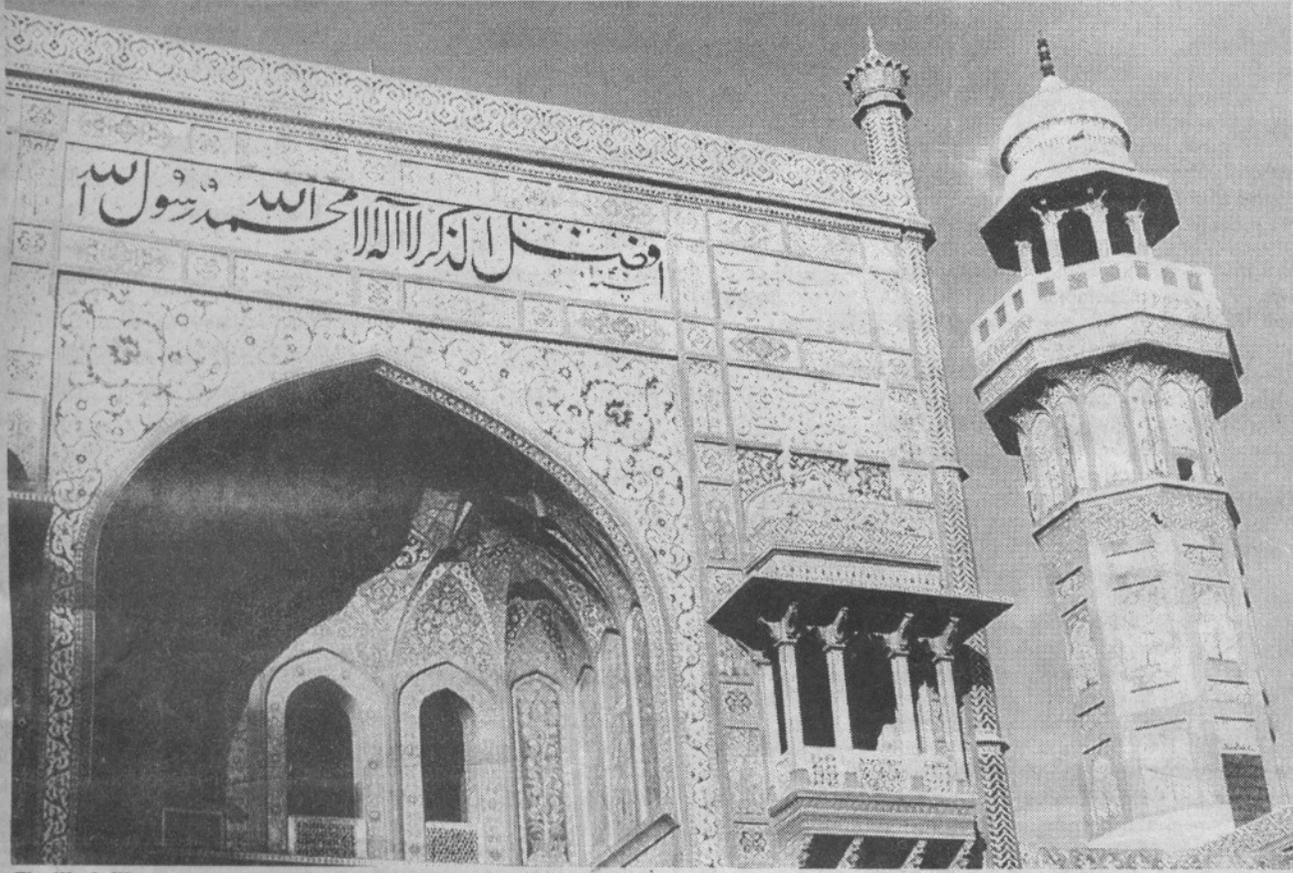
who hailed from Gazir. His tomb still stands to south-west of the courtyard of the mosque. The saint is said to have died in Lahore during the period of Tughlaqs.

It seems obvious that Wazir Khan, as a mark of respect for those to build his mosque at the site of saint's tomb. The mosque was completed in 1044H/1634 C. as is evident from its chronograms.

The Mosque is a short flight of six steps leading to a pointed arch placed over a rectangular portal. Behind the arch is a vestibule leading on the south side into courtyard over 5 metres in width. On the western side are four minarets. All these are double domed. The mosque measures 39.6 metres to south and a little more to north. On the other side is a square courtyard about 10 metres on each side. The distance of 39.6 metres to the west door to the west courtyard rises by a little. Thus the sunken courtyard forms an eastern, northern and southern sides of the sahn.

Master in the making

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who hailed from Gazirun in Iran. His tomb still stands towards the south-west of the orthogonal courtyard of the mosque. This saint is said to have domiciled in Lahore during the period of the Tughlaqs.

It seems obvious that Wazir Khan, as a mark of reverence, chose to build his mosque at the site of saint's tomb. The mosque was completed in the year 1044H/1634 C. as is evident from its chronograms.

The Mosque is entered by a short flight of six steps by way of pointed arch placed in a massive rectangular portal complex. Behind the arch is an octagonal vestibule leading on the north and south side into corridors a little over 5 metres in width. These corridors have four repositories on the western side and five on eastern side. All these repositories are double domed. The courtyard measures 39.6 metres from north to south and a little less than 51 metres on the other axis. In the middle is a square water pool of about 10 metres each side. At a distance of 39.6 metres from the door to the west the level of the courtyard rises by 15 centimeters. Thus the sunken portion of the courtyard forms a square. The eastern, northern and southern sides of the sahn have hujras. The

sanctuary is as wide as the courtyard (Sahn) and has the maximum depth of 14 metres. The sanctuary has 5 domes, the one in the centre being the largest, rising to an altitude of 17.6 metres. The smaller domes above the side chamber are 14.3 metres high. All these domes are double shelled. The mosque also has four minarets which were exquisitely adorned with chiniwork. Alas their grace and grandeur is rapidly diminishing. The minarets stand at the four quoins of the courtyard. Their height upto the top of their pinnacles is 29 metres. These minarets unlike most of the Mughal minarets have no intermediary balconies. There is just one balcony at the top surrounding the pavilion.

Almost every conspicuous surface of the mosque is decorated. All this ornamentation is carried out mainly in two media, painted work on chunam surface and enameled timework. The technique of enameled timework is also known as chinikari kashikari or kashiwork. The terms kashikari or Kashiwork have a reference to the city of Kashan in Iran where this technique originated. Chinikari refers to the designs prepared with porcelain pieces prepared with China (Chini or sini) clay. Glazed timework had in-

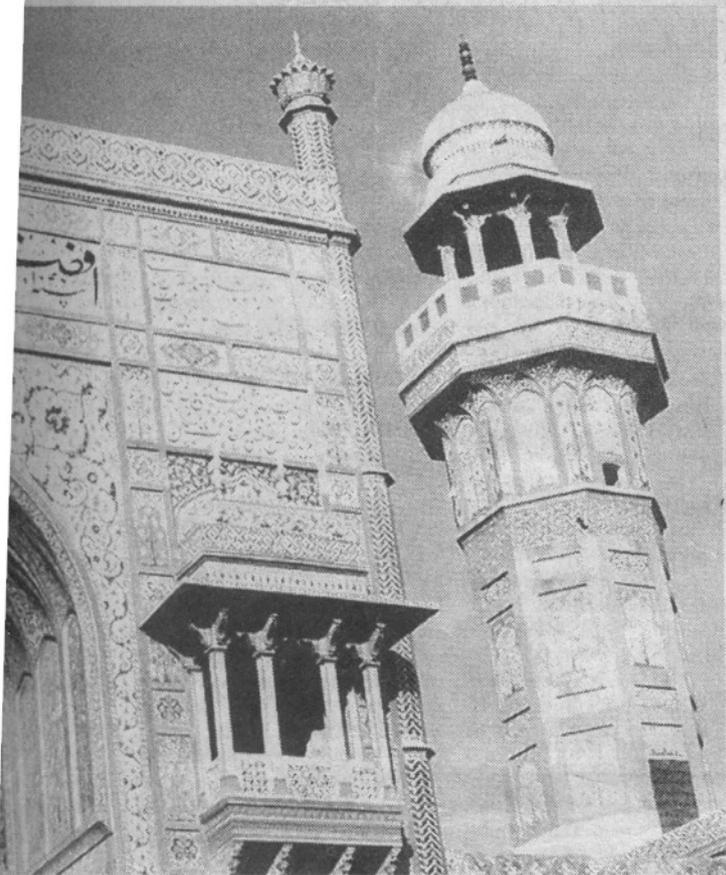
fact been known in northern India in early Sayyid and Lodhi times in the 15th century AD. The technique was also known in Thatta and Thatta in Pakistan.

Inside the mosque the central arch is particularly notable. There are horizontal panels along the upper portion of the lower walls to the right and the central arch. The spandrels are floriated with both delicately and meticulously equilibrated. The precision and sense of balance can be seen in the spandrels of the arch of the portal. The decoration in the sanctuary is sedately rich and elaborate. This mostly comprises painted floret and epergones in lime mortar surface.

Inscription performs a major role in the decoration of the mosque. Leaving aside the inscriptions to the north and south of the courtyard, inscriptions exist almost every visible part of the mosque. The long horizontal panel above the main archway the Muslim confession of faith (the Qalima yi Tayyibah) is inscribed by the words *afdal al dhikr*. The noblest of all recitals is that of God but Allah and Muhammad (peace and blessings of Allah upon him) is the message of Allah. The angles of the central gateway have impressed the masons with chevron ornaments. At the top they hold turrets. The face of the facade between the two pilasters is divided into numerous square and oblong panels. With the exception of the rectangular panels on the left and the steps, all the long panels are horizontal. These in turn bear Persian inscriptions rendered in beautiful chiniwork. On the other side of this magnificent gateway opening the courtyard just above the opening there is a Persian inscription. It is on a yellow ochre ground and written in blue letters. The ground is interspersed with a liage of varicolored foliage, red boughs and twigs and red floscules. The border is two thin deep blue bands with mihrabi motifs in between.

From the point of view of the most sumptuous of the mosque is its facade. Its facade as well as its over-whelmingly bedazzled Qur'anic and non-Qur'anic inscriptions. Non Qur'anic inscriptions are mostly executed in calligraphic hand. Not much is known of the calligraphers who wrote these inscriptions in this mosque provides to the connoisseur some very fine specimens of calligraphy. One inscription has been attributed to one Muhammad Ali. The nature of the southern inscription of the gateway. It can be seen on stylistic antecedents of the inscriptions that all the

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fact been known in northern India in early Sayyid and Lodhi tombs in the 15th century AD. The technique was also known in Multan, Halla and Thatta in Pakistan.

Inside the mosque the media arch is particularly note worthy. There are horizontal panels all along the upper portions of the lower walls to the right and left of the central arch. The spandrels are floriated with both sides meticulously equilibrated. A similar precision of design and exactness of balance can be seen in the spandrels of the arch of the main portal. The decoration inside the sanctuary is sedately rich and elaborate. This mostly consists of painted floret and epergne on a lime mortar surface.

Inscription perform a major role in the decoration of this mosque, Leaving aside the hujras to the north and south of the courtyard, inscriptions exist on almost every visible part of the mosque. The long horizontal panel above the main arch bears the Muslim confession of faith or the Qalima yi Tayyibah prefixed by the words *afdal al dhikr'i e*. the noblest of all recitals is there is no god but Allah and Muhammad (peace and blessings of Allah be upon him) is the messenger of Allah. The angles o' the magnificent gateway have impressive pilasters with chevron ornament, at the top they hold turrets. The surface of the facade between these two pilasters is divided into numerous square and oblong panels. With the exception of two large rectangular panels on the right and left of the steps, all other oblong panels are horizontally laid. These in turn bear Persian quartets rendered in beautiful nastaliq in chiniwork. On the other side of this magnificent gateway i.e. facing the courtyard just above the opening there is a Persian Couplet. It is on a yellowochre ground and written in blue letters. The ground is interspersed with foliage of varicolored foliole, Indian red boughs and twigs and orange floscules. The border is made of two thin deep blue banks with mihrahi motifs inbetwixt.

From the point of view of epigraphy the most sumptuous section of the mosque is its sanctuary. Its facade as well as its interior over whelmighly bedizened with Qur'anic and non-Qur'anic inscriptions. Non Qur'anic inscription are mostly excerpts from hadith. Not much is known about the calligraphers who worked the inscriptions in this mosque. The mosque provides to the connoisseur some very fine and excellent specimens of calligraphy. One inscription has been signed by one Muhammad Ali. His signatures appear under the lowest northern inscription on the front of the gateway. It can be assumed on stylistic antecedents that all inscriptions that all the inscription

on the gateway including the one facing the sahn were done by him. Unquestionably Ali had an excellent and transcendent hand in nastaliq.

Unfortunately no serious attempt has been made to protect this mosque from the cruel hands of the inexpert and self styled conservationists. The international rules of conservation have been blatantly violated and monument after monument, In Pakistan has been ruined. The dogmas of conservation devised by the International Congress organized by the International Council on Monuments and Sites (ICOMOS) in Venice in 1965, were appraised internationally. The charter of Venice has been hailed by all those concerned with the protection of the architectural heritage. Amongst many of its articles it clearly laid out two specific clauses for the circumspection and documentation of monuments of historical and artistic value. The first of the two articles says:

The process of restoration is a highly specialised operation. Its aim is to preserve and reveal the aesthetic and historic value of the monument and is based on respect for original material and authentic documents. The restoration in any case must be proceeded and followed by an archeological and the scandalous and flagitious activities of these ultra enthusiastic self styled conservationists. It is difficult to understand how does the Auqaf people qualify to be the custodians of these jewels of the past. Why these monuments are in the control of Archeology Department. Do these buildings belong to the same category as the remains of Harappa and Mohenjodaro. It is a pity that we have not been able to draw a dividing lien between archaeology and architecture, between the dead and the living between the buried and the unburied when the contumacy of the Auqaf and Archaeology department will end.

The mosque of Wazir Khan, Lahore was measured and drawn by Amir Bakhsh and Sher Muhammad of the Mayo School of Arts, Lahore in 1975. Later some measured drawings of the same mosque were produced by Fred H. Andrews. the principal of the same school in 1903. Ever since then no salubrious endeavour has been made to measure and draw remaining sections of the mosque to record and publish its salient features and characteristics. Probably no historic monument in Pakistan has been measured drawn or documented ever since the creation of Pakistan, though not one but two full fledged department, with immense funds on their disposal, exist to look after the architectural heritage of this country.

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