

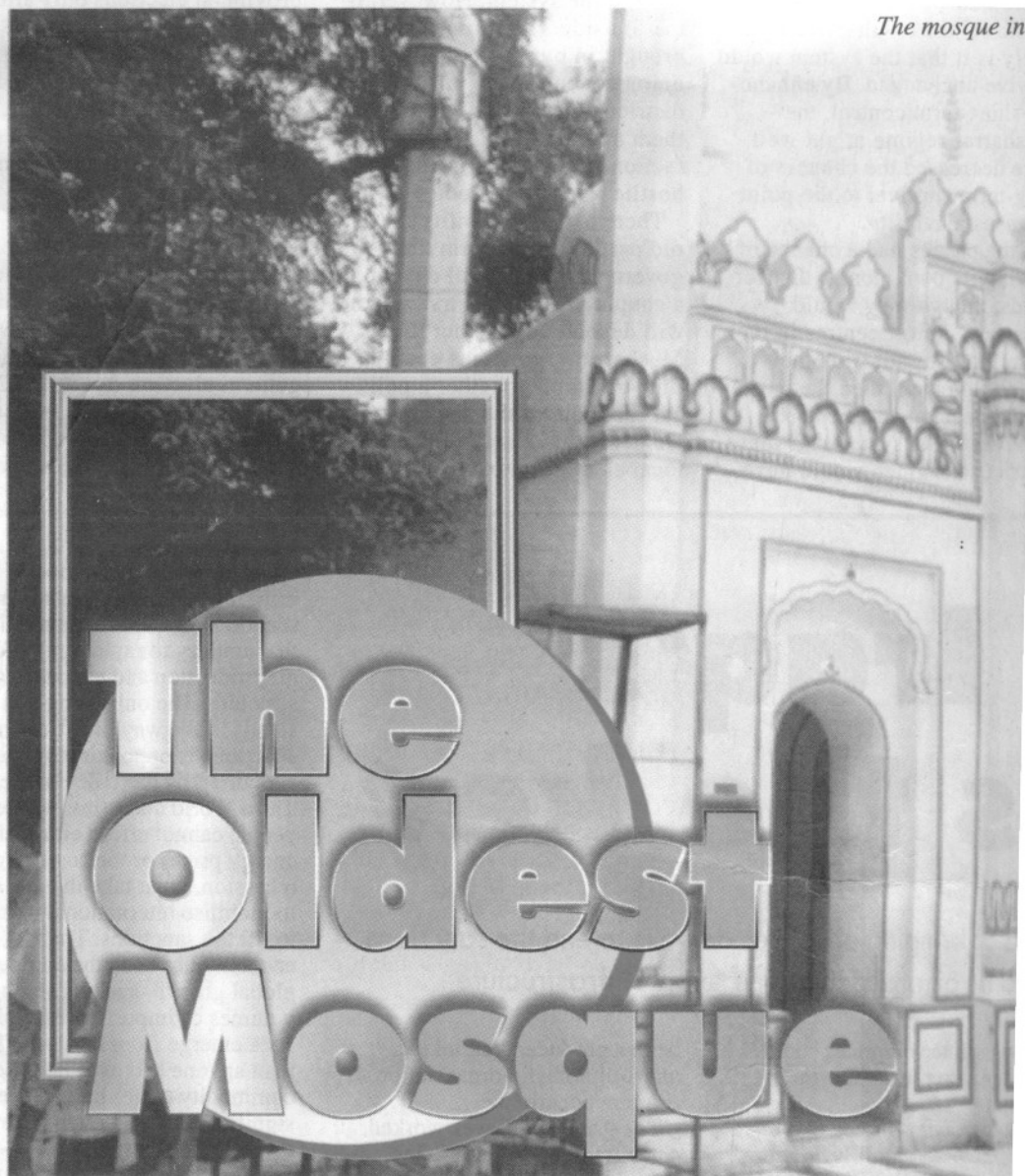
As a young man, this scribe tried to find out the location of the oldest mosque of Lahore. To many it seemed to be a difficult question to answer. None of the mullahs from whom the enquiry was made could give a reply or even make a guess, since, none of them seemed to have been aware of the history of this part of the world.

Though, it is claimed that Lahore was founded in antiquity, its recorded history that is available at the moment dates back to just about a millennium. Those were the days when Mahmood of Gazni appeared here and the local population came in contact with a new and health ideology, the ideology that of Islam.

One of the records of that period is the 'Tuhfatul Waaseleen' of Sheikh Zinjani, written some time in 1043, in Lahore. Around the same time one finds that a number of religious figures made their appearance in Lahore. One of the earliest, happens to be Syed Ismail Ghaznavi, who arrived here from Bukhara, in 1004, lived, and preached in this city for the next fifty-two year. Syed Ismail Ghaznavi passed away in 1056 and is resting next to the gate of the Cathedral School on Hall Road. Nevertheless, the location of the spot where he preached is not certain. Whether it was in the city or the place where he is buried, is not known. Neither is it certain if there was a mosque where he preached or near his tomb, which is a good two thousand meters from Lohari Darwaaza, the area first to be rebuilt after the conquest of the City by Mahmood.

The final subjugation of Lahore by Mahmood is said to have taken place in 1021. After the occupation of Lahore and the Punjab by him he left Ayyaz in charge of the affairs of this place. Ayyaz died in 1057 and is buried in the Rangmahal area at the northern end of the Shahaalami Bazaar, close to the Sua Bazaar or the Bazaar of the Goldsmiths. There is a small mosque at the foot of his tomb; both of them rebuilt recently. It is surmised that the original mosque was built around the time of Ayyaz's death.

Then comes the time when Syed Ali Hajvery, popularly known as Data Gunj



SAJID ABBAS visits various spots of Lahore to find the oldest mosque of the c

Bakhsh, makes Lahore, his abode and settles here to preach. That was some time in 1042. Syed Ali Hajvery passed away in 1075 and is buried west of the Bhaati Darwaaza. West of his mausoleum stands a grand mosque of modern design, but during the days of the Saint there used to be a small mosque which is said to have been built by the saint himself. The mosque was rebuilt a number of times, the last being in 1921, before it was finally demolished to make room for the grand affair that we see today.

There were other small mosques, next to the tombs of other God-fearing and religious figures but all of these were built at a date much later than the mosque built by Syed Ali Hajveri.

There is a graveyard, off the Empress Road, (now renamed Sharey Abdul Hameed bin Badees), which is reputed to be the oldest in Lahore. This is, perhaps, the only place in Lahore that happens to be held in reverence by followers of both the major divisions of Islam, the Sunnis and the Shias. It is frequented much people of all convictions. Six ladies and their followers and attendants are resting there. By one version the tombs of these ladies predate any other in Lahore, but by another the date of passing away of at least two of the ladies happens to be a century later than the passing away of Syed Ali Hajvery.

According to the account, one of the six pious ladies was the daughter of Hazrat Ali, the cousin and son-in-law of the Holy Prophet(PBUH) and the other five

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Chaos

The mosque in the Bibian Sahib – the oldest one of Lahore

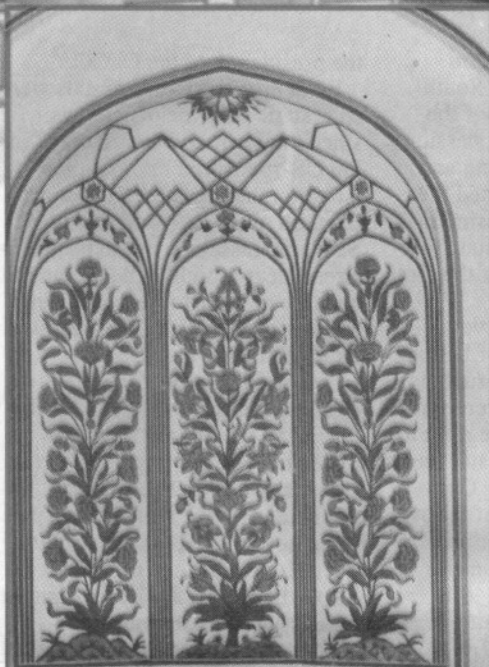
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*Decoration in the mosque
in Bibian Sahib*

different chroni-
clers. Neverthe-
less, after the
passing away of
the ladies, one
finds that Baba
Abdullah Khaki
became the
caretaker of the
place.

There is a
small mosque in
the compound
around the
mausoleum of
the ladies, which
is reputed to
have been built
by Baba
Abdullah Khaki,
the caretaker.

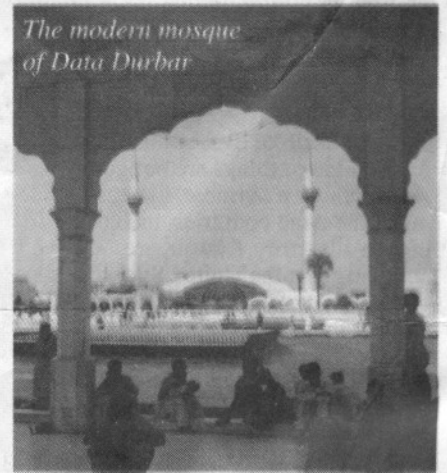
Incidentally he, himself, is resting just in front of the mosque.

In the compound there is a spot bearing a marble plaque, saying, that Syed Ali Hajvery sat at this spot and meditated. However another chronicler mentions the name of Mian Mir. In either case the sanctity of the place is not affected.

If one takes the building of the mosque as the work of Baba Abdullah Khaki, then the mosque seems to be the oldest mosque of Lahore. If not the construction, at least the site, for, it is obvious that the mosque has been reconstructed in its lifetime, as has been the Mausoleum.

This scribe gathered from the people there, one of them the President of the Bibian Sahib Welfare Association, that the mosque is now in the care of the Department of Archaeology, who have

*The modern mosque
of Data Durbar*



repaired and replastered it and made it safe for the use of the 'nimazis' by spending a sum of well over a million and a quarter rupees.

This scribe has been seeing the mosque since more than half a century. It used to be placed on a plinth a little less than a metre high. It remained so till some years ago when the place around, along with the graveyard, was filled by earth and a marble floor laid. Now it looks as if it is at ground level.

Before the adjacent mausoleum was veneered with marble and the place modernised, the construction of both the mosque and the mausoleum were visible. It seemed that the work belonged to the period of Dara Shikoh. Perhaps, it was then that major repairs were carried out to the complex. One wonders, if somebody makes an effort to confirm that this small mosque is at the site of the first one in Lahore. ■