

Revisiting the history

Lahore, since its first encounter with Islam, has not been lagging behind any other place in respect of the construction of the holy places. Romana Bukhari pens down the details about mosques in the culturally rich city of Lahore

The thing common among all the great religions is establishment of the proper worship places and still most of them erect special buildings for this purpose. The Christianity is in synonym with churches, Jews with synagogues and Buddhists with temples. Adherents of Islam, Muslims, developed their own unit, the mosques which are unique in architecture and distinguished in their way of calling the followers.

In the early centuries of Islam, each Muslim population unit have its own mosque, while there was a collective mosque for the Juma Congregation. However, the Eidgah (place for the festival prayer) used to be outside the inhabited areas of the village or town, mostly an open ground or at the most an enclosure with a 'mihrab' (niche) denoting Qibla.

Lahore, since its first encounter with Islam, did not lag behind any other place in respect of the construction of the Holy places. Since centuries the mosques have been built in Lahore reaching the number which is hard to count except for the outstanding mosques constructed under royal patronage or religious zeal of the nobility.

The oldest mosque in the city, which does not exist now, is said to have been built to commemorate Mahmood Ghaznavi's victory over Lahore in 1021 AD. This was built with bricks and was known as 'Khishti Mosque' or brick-built mosque. Another small mosque which forms part of Ayaz Malik's grave, Mahmood Ghaznavi's slave and the governor of Lahore, can still be seen in Chowk Rang Mehal inside Shah Aalami Gate.

During the Ghaznavid reign, many a preacher of Islam came to Lahore and settled there. The most prominent among them is Data Ganj Bakhsh. He had built a small mosque outside Bhatti Gate, which became the model to look at for fixing Qibla of all the mosques in the following centuries. The original mosque had been destroyed by the great floods in Aurangzaib's period. However, a new building of the mosque came up on the old

foundations.

A mosque related to another preacher of Islam, Syed Ismail Bukhari, who also came to Lahore during Ghaznavid period. The remnant of the mosque were traced in the vicinity of Hall Road, where now lies the church and Christian Missionary School.

To the east of Lahore, lies the quarters covering vast area known after the name of Hazrat Mian Mir Sahib. He was a direct descendant of Hazrat Umar. The construction of a sizeable mosque along with mizar was started by Prince Dara Shikoh, the saint's disciple.

'Nila Gumbad' (blue dome) stands out prominently amongst the early mughal period buildings in Lahore. It is a tomb where the saint Syed Abdul Razzque Makki was buried. His followers built a mausoleum over his grave and also added a mosque to the complex. Both tomb and the mosque were used to store gun powder during the Sikh period. However, in British Era they served as a hostel for the soldiers living in the Anarkali cantonment.

While entering the walled city through the Dehli Gate, one finds a narrow bazaar flanked by an assortment of shops and houses. A few more minutes walk would find you standing face to face with the past typified in the shape of a beautiful edifice known as Wazir Khan's Masjid. From the inscription in the colourful 'Kashikari' on the entrance gate of the mosque, one learn that it was built by Hakim Iltam-ud-Din Ansari who was given the title of Nawab Wazir Khan, governor of Lahore during the reign of Shahjahan.

The grace and the elegance in architectural style and the surpassing beauty in decoration make Wazir Khan's mosque stand out prominently amongst the prized buildings of the Mughal period.

Emperor Akbar had built a mosque inside the Fort opposite Deewan-e-Aam in 1598 AD. Some alterations were done by Jehangir and the marble covering was done during the reign of Shahjahan. It is a beautiful three-domed white marble mosque known as Moti or Pearl Mosque.

Begum Shahi Mosque is an old royal mosque built by Emperor Jehangir for his mother Myram Zamani in 1614 AD. It is also known as Masjid Barood Khana as it was used to store gun powder during Sikh era.

Two of the existing historical

mosques built by the royal wet-nurses of Jehangir and Shahjahan respectively are Masjid Dai Lado and Masjid Dai Anga. Masjid of Dai Lado is located near Mayo Hospital. It is said that there also used to be a garden named as Bagh Rattan Chand where a mohalla came up afterwards. The mosque is now inside it. The other one exists besides the Railway station. It is elaborately embellished with tile mosaic and paintings at the interior as well as exterior of the building. It is named after Dai Anga (Zaib-un-Nissa).

Another mosque thought to destroy the character of the city planning at the time of its construction is a focus of attraction for many because of its sonchri (golden) domes. This Golden Mosque was constructed by Nawab Bhikari Khan in 1749 AD. It has three gold plated domes and two minarets also gold plated on top.

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Besides these prominent mosques, the most renowned one which has become a symbol of Lahore is no other than the Badshahi Mosque or the Regal Mosque, the last of the sumptuous accomplishments of the Mughals. Its lofty minarets can be seen from quite a distance around. Predominantly a red sand stone monument indeed a pleasant blend of strength, harmony and grace at their best.

There are still a large number of mosques which require a life time to bring them in light. The promise of reward in life hereafter for building a mosque made the kings, gentry and even the common people to fulfil this undertaking with zeal, enthusiasm and religious fervour. The high and mighty have been putting in all their resources in building that would overawe the spectator with their grandeur and boldness.