

The oldest Jamia Masjid

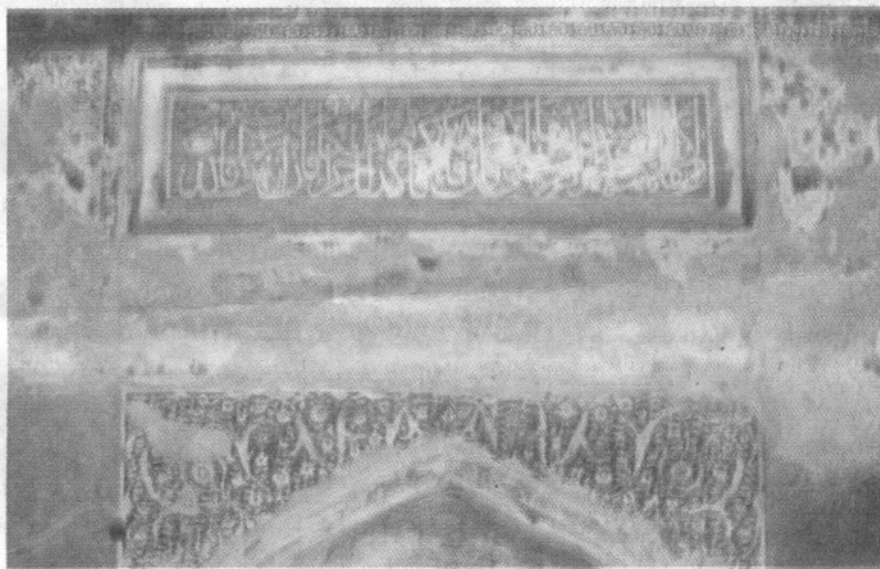
Lahore
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The *Badshahi Masjid* of Lahore, in the north-western corner of the Old City, was the largest congregational mosque in the world till some years ago, when its position was overtaken by the ones built in Morocco and Malaysia. Being greater in area, the latter ones now hold this distinction. The presence of a large place, where people can gather for formal congregational worship, is one of the signs of difference between a City and a Town howsoever large the latter may be.

For a little over three hundred years the *Badshahi Masjid* held the distinction of being the largest mosque of the world. Built in 1673 during the reign of Aurangzeb Alamgir, it had superceded the then *jaamey masjid* of Lahore, the *Masjid Wazeer Khan*. The latter seems to have fallen short of space to accommodate the increasing number of worshipers. Readers will recollect that those were the days when Lahore was at the peak of its glory. The population of Lahore was naturally increasing day by day in step with the burgeoning activity of its residents. It had taken *Masjid Wazeer Khan* built in 1634, just thirty-nine to fall short of space. The *Masjid Wazeer Khan* too had, in turn, been built when it was felt that the then *jaamey masjid*, the mosque of Marium Zamaani, could no longer accommodate the swelling mass of *namaazees* on Fridays.

One is not familiar of a *Jaamey Masjid* of the pre-Moghul days. The *Neeween Masjid*, of the *Chowk Mattee* area is of the pre-Moghul days, but it does not seem to be a *Jaamey* or Congregational Mosque. The *Masjid Marium Zamaanee* or the *Masjid Begum Shahee* happens to be, perhaps, the oldest surviving *Jaamey Masjid* of Lahore. It was built in 1614 in the *Mastee Darwaaza* precinct, close to the Fort, during the times of Jehangir, by his mother, Jodha Bai alias Marium Zamaanee, Akbar's queen and a rajput

SAJID ABBAS visits an old mosque in the *Mastee Darwaaza* precincts, which happens to be the oldest surviving *Jamia Masjid* of Lahore



Inscriptions of the Mosque in danger

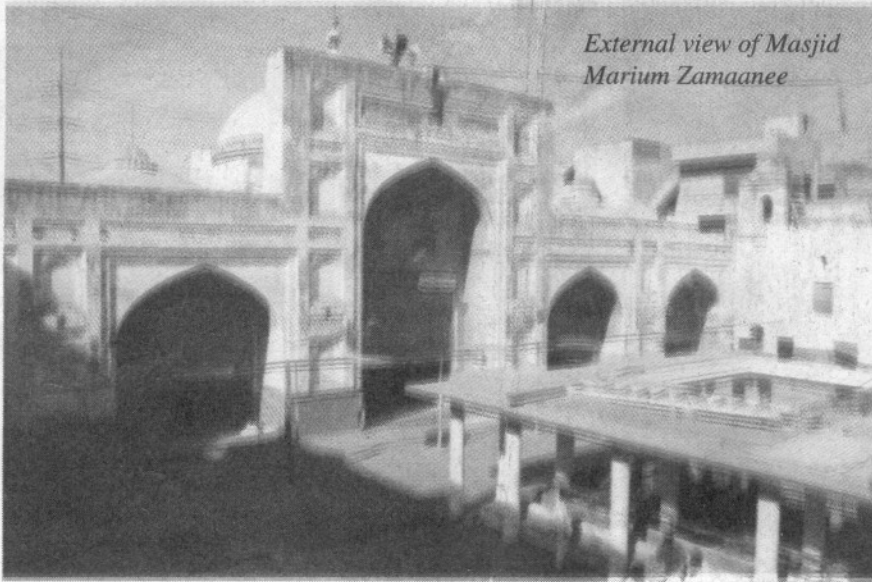
princess of the Royal House of Jodhpur. Jodha Bai was the daughter of Raja Behari Mal of Jodhpur and the sister of Raja Bhagwan Das, both nobles at the Court of Akbar. The mosque is approachable by its northern gate situated on the street leading from the Akbaree Darwaaza of the Citadel, in its eastern wall to the Motee Baazaar of the *Mastee Darwaaza* precinct. One is not sure where the *Jaamey Masjid* of Lahore, prior to building this mosque, was situated. Perhaps, it was right here that the earlier *Jaamey Masjid*, stood.

During the Sikh Rule, the mosque suffered desecration and was converted to an Ordnance Factory to make guns,

ordnance peices and gunpowder, it took the name of Baarood-khana, a name which has stuck to the neighbourhood till today.

After Daleep Singh was deposed and the East India Company took over, the *Masjid Marium Zamaanee* was cleared of the tools and implements used for making ordnance and the powder either captured or thrown in the Ravi. A year later, in 1850, Major. McGregor, Deputy Commissioner of Lahore, handed over the mosque along with its properties to the Muslims of the City who joined hands to repair the edifice.

The mosque is made of brick and lime mortar, it is one of those few edifices



External view of Masjid Marium Zamaanee

pre-Moghul Lodhi style, But the tall facade, the multiple number of domes, five of them, a large one in the middle and the smaller four, two each on the sides, the chambers below these, are more in line with Moghul principles of construction than of earlier periods. The facade is peculiarly Central Asian, from Samarkand, close to the place from where Babar came. The form of the facade and entrance to the central prayer chamber has been repeated in the *Masjid Wazeer Khan* and the *Badshahi Masjid* of Aurangzeb.

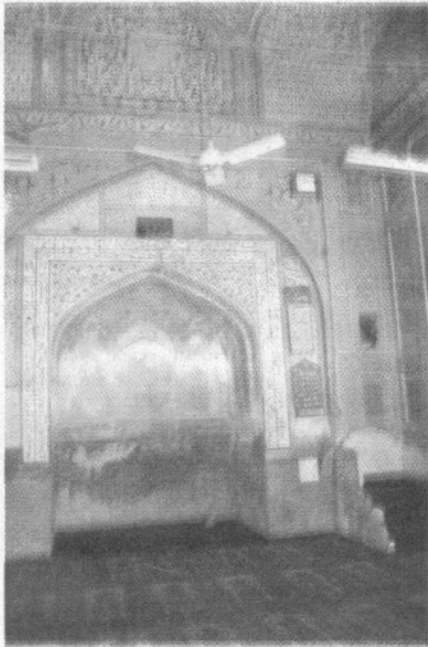
The main entrance, in the eastern wall seems to remain blocked most of the time, the inscription there looks to be dirty and difficult to read. The *Kalima*, or the Muslim's Creed and the *Ayat-ul-kursi* or the Verse of the Throne, a passage of the Quran on the entrance of the central prayer chamber is unreadable as the

plaster seems to have worn out and peeled off or discoloured. Though the *Ayat-ul-kursi*, has been inscribed on the *mehraab* or the niche, the *mehraab* itself requires attention.

There is a stone tablet, inside the mosque, on the left side of the entrance to the main chamber, apparently placed there almost a century ago by the then zealous keeper of the Mosque, prohibiting persons subscribing to certain sects, denominations, religious orders or faith to take part in the affairs of the Mosque.

The idea seems to be quite alien to harmonious living, the notion seems to be all the more strange when one finds that the edifice was the gift of a lady belonging once to a different faith and the place was once a focal point of the people of the City, whether pious or wicked, Godfearing or sinful, who came to listen to the

enlightened and the learned. If the wayward are not invited to listen to Allah's Message how can one expect him or her to join the fold of Islam or return to the true path? It's about time that people are encouraged to listen to the Message of the Almighty, instead. ■



The Mehraab of Masjid Zamaanee

which has no veneer of stone or *Kasheekaree*. Due to its massive size it appears to have successfully withstood the vagaries of Nature during the last four centuries or so and the mis-use it has been subjected to by Man in this period. In the meanwhile many changes have taken place, for instance the fountain in the courtyard of the mosque for ablution by the *nimaazees* talked about in earlier chronicals seems to have given way to a large pool now (mis)used for washing clothes, too.

The architecture of the *Masjid Marium*



Enchroachment in the Mosque

Zamaanee is unusual and is claimed to be a transition between the earlier Lahoree Lodhi and the later true Moghul architecture. Its low almost chubby domes and massive walls gives the impression of Lodhi construction and gives the feeling that the building is in