

Smadhi of Ranjit Singh's guru may dis

LAHORE, May 25: Vasti Ram Samadh near the historic Lahore Fort may disappear soon if the authorities concerned do not adopt measures to protect it.

Vasti Ram Samadh is among those Samadhs and temples in the provincial metropolis that were damaged by people in reaction to the demolition of Babri Mosque in India in 1992.

Vasti Ram was a Guru of Raja Ranjeet Singh.

The Punjab Evacuee Trust

Board, whose duty is to look after shrines and other religious places of Hindu and Sikhs across the province, has no record of temples and Samadhs located in the province, according a senior board official.

When contacted, Hindu Auqaf administrator Chaudhry Riaz expressed his ignorance about the location of Vasti Ram Samadh and said that the department had never prepared any list of temples and samadhs located in the province. "None of

us has ever worked on it," he admitted.

Another official of the Hindu auqaf, Mohammad Aslam, said that the monument was located on the premises of the fort, therefore, the department had no concern with it.

When contacted, the deputy director of archaeology department (north wing), Dr Mohammad Arif, said that the department had nothing to do with its upkeep as it belonged to the ETB.

The rundown Samadh is in need of renovation. Pieces of the marble used to build the structure, can now be seen lying around the monument.

The Samadh is located adjacent to the north wall of the Fort and is visible from the Haider Sain shrine outside the Iqbal Park.

A visit to the Samadh revealed that neither the people nor a Chowkidar present on the premises had any knowledge about the place. Most of them considered it part of the fort. There is also no epitaph displayed outside the Samadh.

The area around the Samadh now has none of the beautiful fountains it once had. On the inside, the house is built on the

pattern of Darbar Amritsar. Besides the Vasti Ram Samadh, there are two more Samadhs in the house, one of which is of his mother.

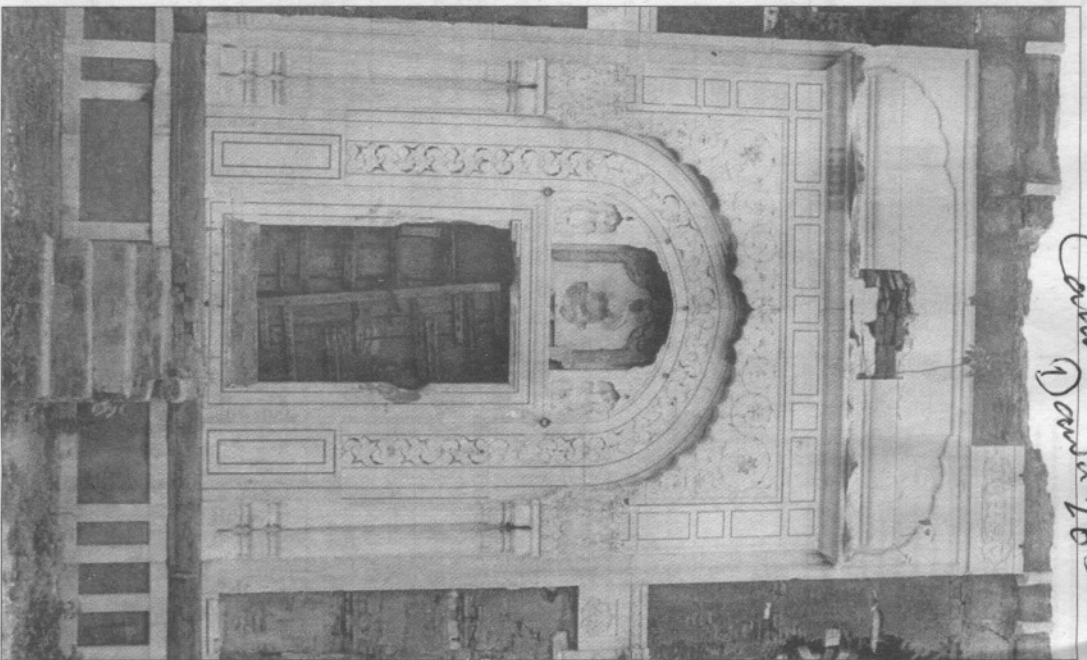
According to Kanya Lal's *Tareekh-i-Lahore*, Vasti Ram was a pious man and had a reputation for his frequent recitations from Granth. Ranjit Singh called him his Guru and conferred on him property worth hundreds of thousands of rupees.

Ranjit Singh elevated him to a status above that of the rest of his Wazirs, Mushirs and courtiers and sought his counselling in important matters. Vasti Ram's family was known as Khandan Bhai Sahiban. — **ZULQERNAIN TAHIR**



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