

[Lore & Legends] An edifice w



shore is the home of many an elegant edifice. These tasteful works of the highest quality belong, without doubt, to the Moghul Period especially to the days of Shahjehan. Lavish use of extraordinary decoration, such as, pietra dura, inlay of semi-precious stones, extensive use of Kashikari or glazed tile work as veneer covering of buildings formed a characteristic of the architecture of that period.

There is one edifice in Lahore, which is well known for its beauty and elegance in the world and has no match. This is the old Jamey Masjid or the Mosque of Congregation of the City, which is known after the person who supervised its construction. The mosque, Masjid Wazeer Khan, was built in 1634 in the first half of the seventeenth century in the days of Shahjehan and on his orders.

The Masjid is unrivalled in elegance. Covered by attractive floral design, portraying and representing a corner of the Paradise, it has been a centre of attraction of both the Lahorite and the visitor alike. It does not seem to have lost its charm ever since it was constructed; though it had to see turbulent times, too. Since the last one hundred and twenty-five years, the structure has been drawn, painted (and now photographed) by all the Art students of Lahore, young or old, as part of their studies. The edifice has no duplicate in the world, albeit, some construction resembling its facade can be seen in Samarqand, confirming our old and historical links with Central Asia.

Its constructor, Ilm-ud-Deen Ansari, a physician in early life, was born and bred in Chiniot where he was educated and read medicine to adopt that profession. He started life as a hakeem in his hometown but moved to greener pastures of Lahore, Delhi and Agra where he entered the service of Prince Khurram, the future emperor Shahjehan.

Ilm-ud-Deen Ansari started his career in the service of the prince as a Superintendent of Household. Nevertheless, his reputation as a hakeem or physician spread as well. Fate had ordained that he was to rise to the rank of Physician Royal and ultimately the Subedar of Lahore. The incident

that brought him to that position was the successful curing of a sore on the sole of Noorjehan, the most favourite consort of Jehangir, the emperor of the times.

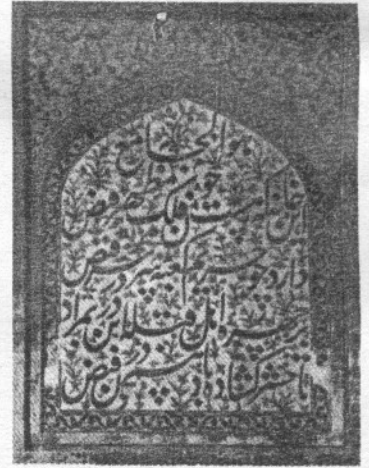
It so happened that a pimple grew into a boil on the sole of Noorjehan's foot. All the physicians and surgeons of the court failed to relieve her of her agony, for, she refused to subject herself to any incision by a scalpel which the surgeons said was the only cure that they knew of. So, Ilm-ud-Deen Ansari, the hakeem in the service of her stepson was sent for to suggest an alternative.

Ilm-ud-Deen Ansari had a bed of moist sand spread in the

SAJID ABBAS visits the most beautiful edifice of the world

followed the hakeem's instructions but when she was traversing a certain portion she felt that the boil had punctured, forcing all the puss out and relieving her immediately of her agony.

What Hakeem Ilm-ud-Deen Ansari had done while examining the royal footprints, was that he placed, very calmly, a small pin, something resembling a drawing pin of present times, in one of the impressions. This stratagem did the work of a scalpel without scaring the queen into a swoon. The immediate result was that Ilm-ud-Deen Ansari was appointed the Physician Royal

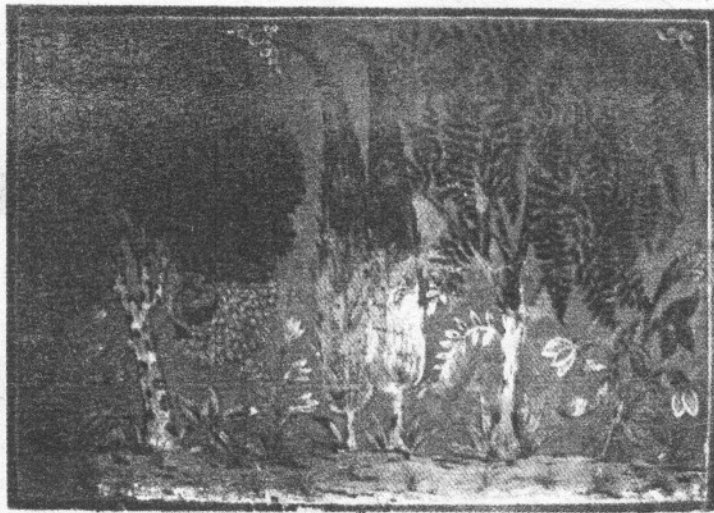
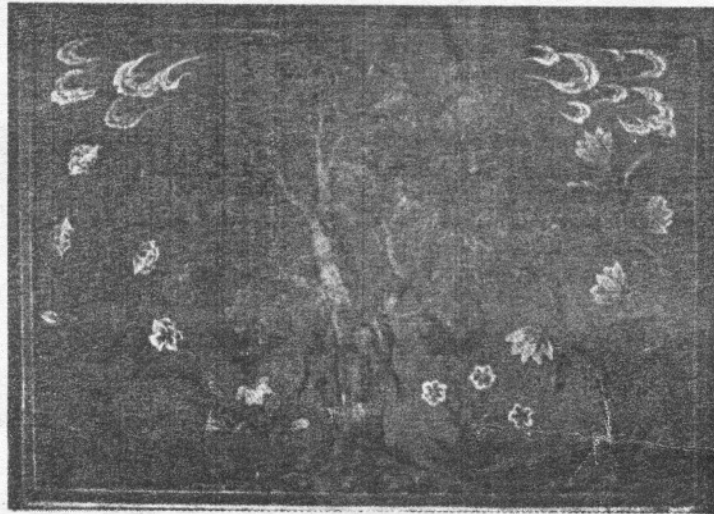


A panel in glazed tiles in the entrance of Masjid Wazeer Khan

one hundred thousand rupees and a purse of seven hundred thousand rupees. Noorjehan took all the jewels and ornaments off herself which she was wearing at that moment and presented them to Ilm-ud-Deen Ansari. At that moment, Noorjehan was being attended by one hundred and ten ladies in waiting and attendants all of whom followed suit and presented the hakeem with their ornaments. By the time the ceremony was over Hakeem Ilm-ud-Deen Ansari was richer by more than two and a quarter million rupees. He was doubly fortunate for the royal patient did not suffer any attack of lockjaw and lived long to carry out her successful or unsuccessful schemes.

The Masjid Wazeer Khan was not the only mosque which Ilm-ud-Deen Ansari alias Nawab Wazeer Khan built, he built others too, though at not grand a scale. At least two more exist in Lahore. One of them was attached to the private quarters of his residence for use as a private place of worship by the ladies of the family and female members of his household. The prayer chamber is approximately fourteen by five metres and had no pulpit, originally, since it was not a congregational place of worship. The place is in Bazaar Samian about two hundred metres to the south of the Taxalee Darwaaza.

Only a very small portion of the residence of Nawab Wazeer Khan is standing today, for, after Lahore was occupied by the English, one of the first matters that they attended too was



A beautiful panel in Masjid Wazeer Khan

quarters of the queen and asked her to traverse a certain length of the sand bed before resting to have some potions. The hakeem examined the footprints left by the royal patient and then asked her to re-trace her steps once more but carefully placing her feet in exactly in the previous impressions. The royal patient

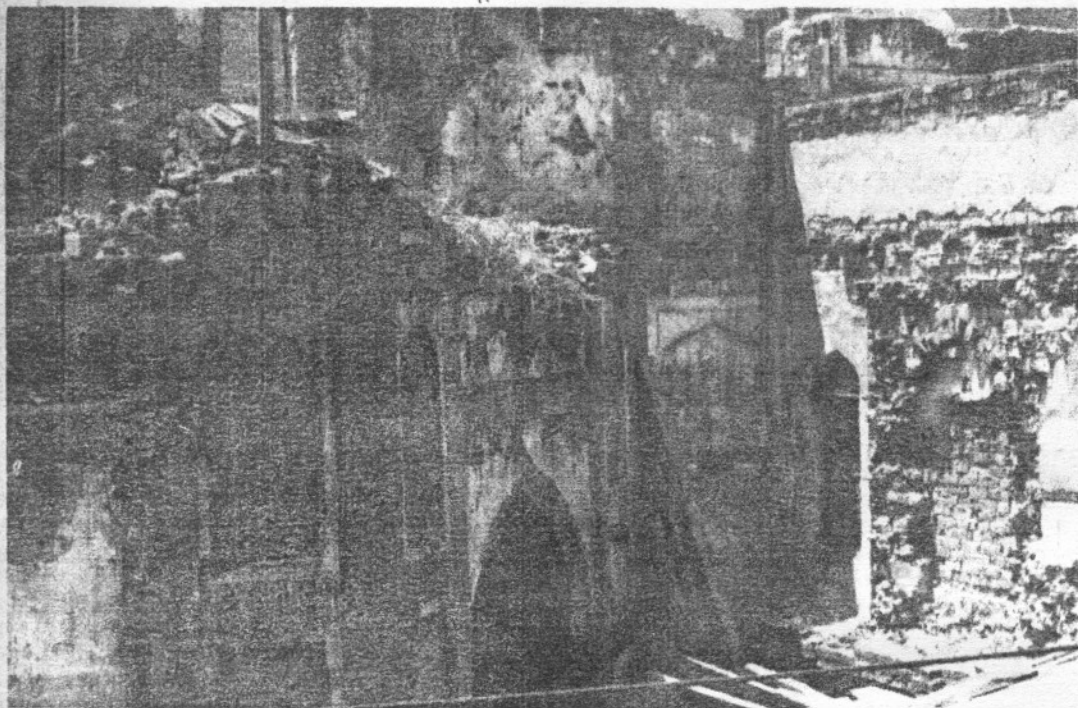
incharge of all the royal clinics.

But Ilm-ud-Deen Ansari was formally rewarded and honoured later when Noorjehan had her Ghusl-e-Sehat or ablutions after convalescence. A grand ceremony was held and on that occasion Jehangir presented Hakeem Ilm-ud-Deen Ansari a Khilat or robes of honour worth

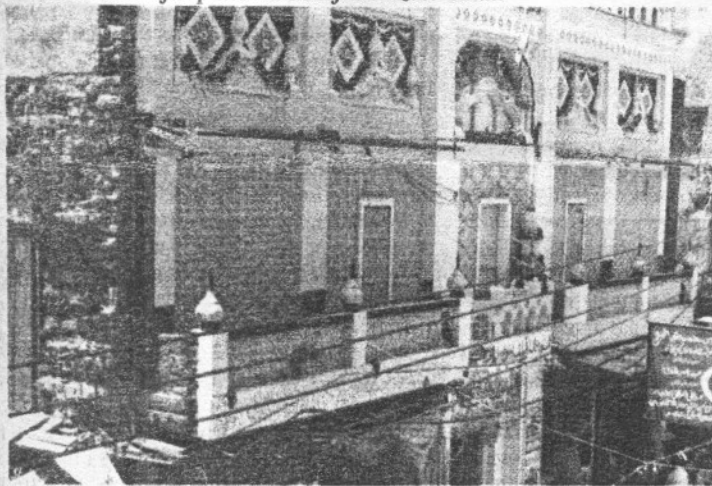
without parallel

world

Lahore, The Nation 11.1.04



Another beautiful panel in Masjid Wazeer Khan



left for Bharat.

The mosque was built as a part of the court of the Nawab for the convenience of the visitors and callers and not as a congregational mosque. The mosque was reconstructed or rebuilt in 1899 by a God-fearing philanthropist, Mian Chiragh Din Daalgar. The rebuilt mosque was double-storied, with shops on the street level and the prayer chamber on the first floor. The rebuilding was done with great love and care. Bricks were especially moulded and burnt for the purpose so were terracotta tiles for lining and veneering the exterior. The tiles carried the Muslim Creed and other words and legends calligraphed in a beautiful hand. One tile carried the words 'Khush Aamedaid' or 'welcome' in Persian or Urdu and was fixed in alternate positions of the walls. It looked that large portions of the walls welcomed each and every visitor.

The mosque has been remodelled quite recently by adding permanent ceilings in the courtyard and ruining the looks. The job seems to have been unnecessary and shabby. The aesthetics are lost and the place gives the appearance of a mess. The words 'Khush Aamedaid' on the walls now seem to mean little to the caretakers or servants, for their behaviour needs a lot of improvement. ●

Exterior of the private masjid of Nawab Wazeer Khan, now modified

sanitation and improvement of streets of the city. In the process a number of structures were effected and even some edifices of the Nawab's palaces could not escape demolition.

Around nineteen seventy the mosque was 'renovated' by an overzealous imam or prayer leader, who destroyed the facade of the mosque. Practically all the kashikari or the tile work was removed. Nevertheless a small portion of the Ayat-ul-Kursee or the 'Throne Verse' can still be seen in a part of the wall, hidden from public view and not easily accessible to everybody. One wonders if the Department of Archaeology can make a small

effort to preserve this part behind a glass pane.

Another mosque built by Ilmud-Deen Ansari is situated in the Shahaalami Bazaar, near the spot where the street from Papar Mandee comes and joins the bazaar in its southern half. Ilmud-Deen Ansari as Nawab Wazeer Khan had his courts in this place and is still known as Paree Mahal by some, though, most of the edifices were, more or less, cleared a century or so ago. What ever remained was devastated in the Great Fire of August, 1947 when the Hindus of the area put the place to torch in order to deny it falling in the hands of the Muslims after they, the Hindus,