

Culture  
Lahore  
Nation  
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# Mausoleum of ancient origins

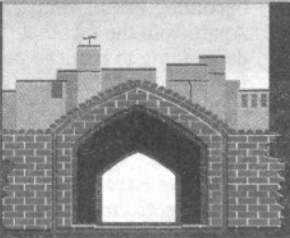
**SAJID ABBAS** visits a spot reputed to be the oldest settlement of Muslims in the  
Sub-continent, albeit, not authenticated by any well-known chronicler

*The mausoleum of  
Bibian Sahib*

*Bibian Sahib—Masjid  
Muhammad Jamal on the  
left, the mausoleum behind*



*Bibian Sahib—the 'wan' tree*



**O**n the Sharey Abdul Hameed bin Badees, formerly the Empress Road, about half a kilometre north of the Simla Pahari, a narrow street takes off to the east. The street starts off opposite the entrance of the District Police Lines, close to the Church of Saint Anthony and ultimately meets the Durand Road at a point where the Queen Mary College and the Convent of Jesus and Mary are situated.

Somewhere near the middle of this narrow track there is a well-known cemetery of Lahore, the Bibi Paak Daaman or Bibian Sahib. The graveyard is spread around an old mausoleum, that of the Pious Ladies. Last week the place was very, very busy, crowded by people, young and old, men and women, all devotees, coming from different sections of the society and from practically all over the country, for, it was the time of the annual fair of the Pious Ladies, which takes place in the beginning of the month of Muharram. Nevertheless, the place remains busy throughout the year, as adherents of both the major sects continue to visit the place with great regularity.

The mausoleum used to be visible from the street linking the Empress Road and the Durand Road, before it was hidden by the structures of the residential colony that has sprouted around it during the last three or four decades.

The mausoleum used to be of brick and mortar but, during the past decade, it has been veneered with marble, changing its original shape and features. Nobody is sure of the time when it was built. There seems to be hardly any record of its construction. Some people say that the (old) tomb was built by Mahmood of Ghazni, but that seems to be

unlikely, for, the construction was typically Moghul and more like of the times of Shahjehan. One could see a bit of kasheekaari or tile work, that had survived a decade and a half or so ago when the authorities had the place dolled up and veneered. The space around the shrine used to be open till the administration decided to put boundary walls around and build rooms towards the south, for the visitors.

The legend associated with the place is quite interesting. It takes one back to the early days of Islam. As the story goes, the mausoleum and the space around it is occupied by the remains of six pious ladies and members of their retinue. The ladies are said to be, Hazrat Ruqaiya alias Bibi Haaj daughter of Hazrat Ali and five of his nieces, all daughters of Hazrat Aqeel, the brother of Hazrat Ali. The five ladies were, Bibi Taaj, Bibi Hoor, Bibi Noor, Bibi Gohar and Bibi Shahbaz. Amongst them Bibi Ruqaiya was married to Muslim bin Aqeel, the brother of the five ladies.

When Imam Hussain was on his way to Kufa, he asked the six ladies on the ninth day of Muharram to leave his train and make for the safety of the Sub-continent! After some hesitation, the ladies did as they were told. At last, they reached a mound on the outskirts of Lahore, which was a small settlement in those days ruled by a non-muslim raja, Burmastri or Mahabaran, by name.

As the story goes, when the ladies and their body of followers reached this place, the fires in the kitchens of the settlement (of Lahore), went out. The ruler sent for the 'Astrologer Royal' and all the soothsayers to determine the cause of such an odd happening. The 'investigators' came to the conclusion that a group of foreigners, professing a different faith had landed in the vicinity. A search for the strangers was organised and the ruler deputed his son, Bikramasahai to produce them in the presence of the former. Nevertheless, the young prince could not succeed in persuading the ladies to present themselves before the ruler. On the contrary, the influence of the ladies was so much that Bikramasahai, the prince, changed his religion to Islam and his name to Abdullah. Some say that he was named Muhammad Jamal by the ladies upon his conversion. Later on,

he came to be known as Baba Khaki and has his resting place near the mausoleum.

The news of the failure of the mission of his son and his adopting the new faith, was enough to enrage the raja and prompt him to mount an expedition to round up the outsiders, by force. When the ladies learnt about the plans of the ruler, they prayed to Allah to save them from capture and humiliation. It is said, that the Earth beneath them parted and took the ladies in its safety. Bikramasahai alias Abdullah alias Muhammad Jamal alias Baba Khaki became a fakir after this incidence and spent the rest of his days as the keeper of the tombs of the ladies, which he built.

The keeper built a mosque too, towards the south of the mausoleum, it still exists, though, repaired and renovated and is called the Masjid Muhammad Jamal.

That is not the end of the story. Baba Khaki, the keeper, was approached by a group of Jats of the Belum sub-tribe. Their chief had a daughter who was handicapped and a cripple. The chief was anxious to have his daughter treated. Baba Khaki married her and she was cured. The union gave the shrine a long line of keepers.

It is said that Syed Ali Hajveri alias Data Gunj Bakhsh meditated under a tree to the south-east of the tomb. The tree was of 'Ber', a sort of plum, botanically known as *Ziziphus Nummularia*. The place is marked by a marble slab now. The tree is no longer there, but this scribe remembers that there used to be one, more than half a century ago. Nonetheless, one cannot be sure whether it was the original 'Ber' tree or not.

Within the compound, there is another tree, that of 'Wan', behind the small mosque. One can find, at times, somebody rubbing him or herself with dust from the tree to get rid of troublesome itch.

The story of the Pious Ladies is pleasantly intriguing, but somebody mentions Bibi Haaj and Bibi Taaj as daughters of Syed Ahmad Tokhta. Bibi Haaj was married in the ruling family of Makran and passed away around 1177. Syed Ahmad Tokhta passed away in Lahore and is resting in Mohalla Chehal Bibian in the walled city. His daughters, having the same name as the Pious Ladies could be somebody else.