

How the original 'sabz gumbad' disappeared

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INSIDE the red light area of Taxali is the Bazaar Sheikhupurian. This "seedy" road leads to the edge of the Tibbi police station opposite the wall of the old tehsil. This is where lie two interesting buildings of the past, both of which may no longer remain with us.

The first is the "sabz gumbad" or the shrine of 'Pir Sabz'. There was a time when this, now virtually unknown shrine, was considered among the most beautiful examples of Mughal architecture. One of the main reasons for its decline and destruction was that it is smack in the middle of where the prostitutes of Lahore 'officially' operated. Secondly, during the Sikh era Raja Sujeet Singh built his haveli there and included most of the huge gardens of the shrine in his plans. That encroachment was the first of a series that still continue. With the fall of the Sikhs, encroachments mushroomed very quickly, and what is now left is just a small portion of the shrine of 'Pir Sabz.'

In its historic context it is important to understand that this is one of the oldest surviving structures of the golden age of Akbar. The shrine was surrounded by huge gardens and fountains, and was built by Maulana Hisamuddin Sabz, or by a gent, probably the same person, known as Hisamuddin Surkh. Maulana Hisamuddin died in the year 1550 AD, or AH 970, nearly 452 years ago. There is a possibility that this shrine was that of his elders, who belonged to a leading Sufi order. For this reason today the ladies of the area go to the shrine to seek 'solutions' to their problems by offering *fateha* and a *mannat*. But our interest lies in the age and architecture of the shrine, or the miserable remains.

When compared to the Nila Gumbad near Anarkali Bazaar, which is of relatively recent origin, the 'sabz gumbad' is not *sabz*

(green) at all, for all the fine patchwork tiling has been removed, leaving an ugly dark mud exterior. But the brick tiling certainly is very rich and an exquisite example of the finest craftsmanship of Akbar's reign. Where exactly Hisamuddin was buried is also not known. The building was known to be surrounded on all sides by a huge garden. In here the evenings were passed in music and poetry, for he was a man of exquisite taste. This was the first known centre of music and poetry in Lahore, a tradition that took root and has continued to this day. Even today in the streets of Lahore there is a saying for young men who display an interest in musical pastimes as being "Hisamuddin di aulad", the offspring of Hisamuddin. It was this curious expression that I heard from an old man inside the tehsil area that sparked a search for Hisamuddin and his 'aulad.'

In a sense, the tradition set forth by Hisamuddin is the starting point of the cultural city of Lahore. The tradition was the picking up of the pieces after Emperor Babar burnt the city down after the Bhattis had resisted the Mughals. Today, these Bhattis live mostly in the strip from Sheikhupura to Lahore, and Bhati Gate was named after these Bhat warrior Rajputs, relentless fighters that they remain. For this reason the shrine is in Mohallah Sheikhupurian, with mohallahs getting their names from the location and professions that flowed from them.

In the same area is another building that merits consideration, for it belongs almost to the same era. This is the Masjid Tibbi in Bazaar Hakeeman. This Mughal era mosque was converted into an ammunition depot by Maharajah Ranjit Singh, who later on the intervention of Hakeem Azizuddin returned the mosques to the Muslims, but only after he had removed the

best marble from the dome and walls and used it for rebuilding the Akal Takht in Amritsar. Built on the orders of the Emperor Shah Jahan by Ghulam Mehdi Khan, a marble placard to this effect was removed during the Sikh era. In the initial years of British rule this mosque remained locked, but then the British allowed Maulvi Ghulam Qadir to renovate it and put it to use again.

Today, the mosque can be approached through the Madressah Naghmania just opposite the gate of the Tibbi police station. This mosque merits consideration as a building of outstanding quality of the Shah Jahan era. Just last week, young bearded men had set up speakers and were shrieking away for funds to rebuild the madressah and mosque inside it.

Given the current official wave against madressahs, it has been left to the people of the old city to raise funds themselves to save this almost 440-year old building. Inside the courtyard is a lot of rubble, and it seems that the 'builders' of today need specialist help in reconstructing the mosque and the madressah, for crude cement structures have started coming up where once stood beautiful brickwork.

The Masjid Shahjahanian, next to the Tibbi mosque and Madressah Naghmania, is from the same era and was also built on the orders of the Emperor Shah Jahan. It is relatively a modest mosque, but its architecture is typical of the era to which it belongs. Though locked most of the time, these two mosques rank among the 20 oldest in Lahore, which has a mosque or two in every mohallah and lane of its intricate web-like setting. Both these ancient buildings need to be protected from the ravages of time and ignorance, and appropriate steps taken to save them from shoddy solutions that its current caretakers, in their innocence, are taking.