

Preserving Peshawar's Iconic Mahabat Khan Mosque: Exploring various Urgent Measures for Vanishing Islamic Architectural Built Heritage

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ABSTRACT:

The mosque is the representation of the Islamic communities to the religious attraction of the people in the form of art and architecture in buildings. It is a community and public showcase of ritual and close relationship with Islam where no use of technology, but the rich architecture and art are the true representation of religious closeness and spirit. This research is a qualitative analysis of the historical mosque of Masjid Mahabat Khan in the old city of Peshawar which is rich in architecture and artwork in that period of the Mughal Islamic empire. This research will show the details risk to the overall building structure and its art and architecture which is vanishing due to day-by-day climatic conditions. This research is a practical example of the research activities to show how to document the richness of the masjid which is at risk and what intervention adopted and future become a threat to the built heritage. This Research case will be helpful for students and professionals to understand the value of historical masjids and their close relation to religious buildings and how we can protect in future to secure such built heritage practically and digitally through photography and documentation and preserve the assets of Islamic Architecture marvels in our old cities and make it secure for our coming generation and communities that show the worth of our buildings and religious norms and closeness to religion.

Keywords: Masjid Mahabat Khan, Built Heritage, Intervention, Risk, Religious Closeness.

Introduction:

Mosques and their Roles:

Islam's representative symbol is the mosque. In the Muslim world, it is the most significant architectural style. Mosques are regarded as the House of Allah, a place of prayer, an emblem of Islam, and a fundamental building block of the faith. It can be called a melting pot of Islamic civilization, a Muslim parliament, and a learning centre.¹ According to Abul Qaraya (2015), mosques can be thought of as centres for Muslims' social and political lives. Because of this, it holds a special place in Muslims' hearts.²

Mosques are places set aside for the worship of the invisible Allah, so it is difficult to translate their architectural style to that setting. In contrast to other religions, no

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representation of God is allowed, even in symbolic form. Usually, a mosque was made up of a hall where men and women would kneel on the ground and face Mecca in straight rows. There is a mihrab, or niche, in the qibla wall where the imam can lead the prayers. The prayer call was made from the towers or minarets. To facilitate imams' Friday sermon delivery, a minbar with multiple steps was developed.³

Art and Architecture in Islam:

Islam views art as the expression of its responsibilities entwined with religious doctrines. In Islamic art, spirituality is prioritized over materialistic expressions.⁴ Its foundation is the internal science that explains an object's inner essence rather than just its external appearance.⁵ Muslim artists looked for new ways to express their inner feelings and religious enthusiasm because it is forbidden by Islam to depict any kind of animal or living thing in art. They have adorned surfaces with geometric patterns and calligraphy. Any two-dimensional art, such as depictions of animals and living organisms, as well as three-dimensional forms depicting them in the form of sculptures, are prohibited in mosques and other Muslim places of worship. Calligraphic motifs, geometric patterns, and floral patterns define the art's decorative elements.⁶

Early in the seventh century CE, the Arab nomads started to spread Islam. There were barely any long-term physical building settlements.⁷ Islam's prophet Muhammad (SAW) taught His companions to live simply by setting an example for them to follow. His close friends have followed his lifestyle to the letter. They have shown that the propagation of Islam takes precedence over their interest in the creation of kingdoms and a materialistic lifestyle.

Islam has expanded widely as a result of the conquest of notable Roman and Persian emperors in the late 700s CE. With the assistance of the earlier emperors' master masons and architects, the Muslim kings started to construct their cities, palaces, and fortifications. They have made numerous noteworthy architectural achievements and made a substantial contribution to Muslim art and architecture. Instead of being mere copyists, the Muslim emperors diligently assimilated every regional style they encountered in the lands they subjugated.⁸ Their modifications include the addition of new plan and structural features, as well as unique decorative details.⁹

In short, architecture serves as a visual depiction of the socioeconomic and cultural aspects of a civilization. By using architectural styles as our main source of inspiration, we can learn about any civilization. Therefore, it is necessary to clarify and justify the relationship between architecture and Islam before referring to them as one.

Mahabat Khan Mosque:

Mahabat Khan mosque, located in the City of Peshawar, Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, Pakistan named after the Mughal Governor of Peshawar in the times of Emperor Shah Jehan and Aurangzeb. This mosque was constructed in the 1670s with a peculiar architectural style. It is quite easy to get to Masjid Mahabat Khan from Peshawar Cantt, Kohat Road, and Grand Trunk Road (G.T Road). The mosque is surrounded by multi-story buildings and the Ander-Shehar bazaar. Chowk-Yadgar is a minute's walk

from this masjid. You can walk to the historic Gantaghar (clocktower) in ten minutes. The Mahabat Khan Mosque has a great deal of experiential value and adds to the shared Mughal architectural heritage of India and Pakistan. The Mosque's location near the historic Gor Khatri site suggests it was intended as a landmark, a representation of hospitality, and an expression of power.¹⁰

Architectural Features:

The open courtyard is featured an ablution pond in the center while the rooms are allocated on the sides of the pond. On the western side, the prayer hall is adorned with two tall minarets. The persistent efforts of the faithful prevented the mosque from being destroyed during the 1895 fire that tore through the Andar Sheher Bazaar.

The prayer hall's interior, which is brightly painted with geometric and floral patterns, is shaded by three low-fluted domes.¹¹¹²

The Mosque measures 185 feet by 163 feet. There are three elevated entrances leading up to it: one on the east, one on the south, and one on the north. Three fluted or ribbed domes encircle the Aiwan on the west, while a row of cells encircles the center open courtyard on the south and north. On the southeast and southwest sides of the prayer hall, were provided two huge minarets having balconies that project outwards. A domed pavilion perched atop a covered platform held up by several brackets atop the platform. A railing with screened balustrades enhances the platform. A set of slender steps serves as the access to the three-story minarets.



View of Masjid Mahabat Khan

The parapet is provided with several small minarets, especially above the Aiwan's principal arched doorways. To the east, the five arched doorways lead into its five sections. Half-domes and engrailed arches around the arched apertures. The chamber's front features ornate arched panels split by flat borders that extend along the sides and top of the recessed arch. A row of merlons crowns the battle-minted parapet. The three fluted ones have gilt finials and cavettos.¹³

The dome's circular base is supported by internally well-devised pendentives that have been built to form a zone of transition, while the other compartments feature flat vaulting. Each compartment has a deep, recessed arch that serves as a mihrab set into the thickness of the western wall, and the arches that divide them rest on tall piers. The main mihrab's arch is significantly deeper in the main central compartment.

Mural paintings adorn nearly the whole interior surface, which is composed of panels in a variety of sizes, forms, and patterns. The walls and ceiling are decorated with exquisite frescos depicting floral themes, leaves, vases, and interwoven greenery. The Holy Quran's verses are also painted exquisitely. Early in the current century, the ornamentation was repainted, most likely following the original design.



(Paintings) Floral work in the interior at Masjid Mohabat Khan

Description of Physical Situation:

What Happened?

The mosque is currently in danger of collapsing because of the deterioration of its exquisite calligraphy and floral arrangements throughout its various sections. e.g., walls, domes, and arches. In several areas, there is also significant damage to the plaster.



The plaster is peeled off from the surface due to the dampness.

Structural Issues:

Upon our inspection, we observed that the entire structure had damage in multiple areas.

Large cracks have formed on several of the mosque complex's areas and components for the reasons listed below.

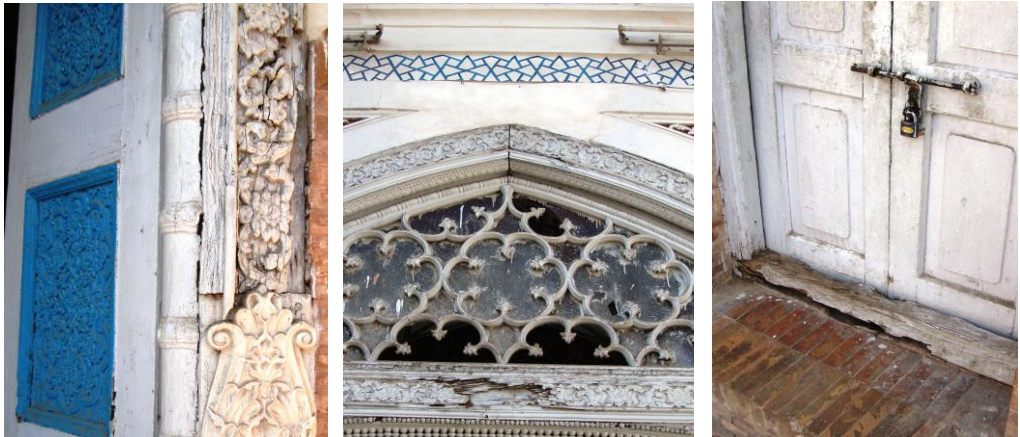
- Lack of Maintenance.
- Dampness issues/Seepage from rooftops and the earth.
- lack of supervision from the Concerned public department.

Images are given below showing cracks in the structure.



Degradation of Windows and Doors:

As seen in the photographs, termites and weather-related factors have harmed the wood of doors and windows, and the glass in these items has also broken.



Concerns department, community, architects, historians, and archaeologists are accountable Since everyone is aware of how significant this cultural legacy is, nobody has come forward and is instead waiting for someone else to preserve it.

Interventions Responsible for Multiple Issues:

This historic mosque has undergone several changes that have deteriorated its historical fabric and are the main cause of other related problems.

Fountain:

A fountain has been installed at the courtyard's centre for ablution. This is causing water leaks to harm the floor. The mosque's beauty is being negatively impacted by fungi that are appearing on the fountain's surface due to water leaks.



Installation of electric appliances:

The mosque has a lot of poorly installed electric appliances, which detracts from the beauty of the interior floral design and damages the wall's surface.



Flooring:

The original floor is taken out and replaced with new material to fake the building. Also, the task is performed by an unskilled individual without any discernible patterns. This is against the Bura Charter's regulations, which stipulate that they must be upheld and restored. There won't be any new material introduced; just the original will be used.



Signboards and Posters on Surfaces:

Various sign boards and posters are affixed directly to wall and door surfaces using steel wires, glue, and nails. The mosque's arabesques and floral patterns are seriously being harmed by the poster's direct application.



Approach Chosen & Challenges:

The magnificent and historic Masjid Mahabat Khan is in Peshawar. It affects every Muslim's heart, which is why many Muslims from all over the city come here to pray unwind and clear their minds. The significance of this location in terms of architecture, history, and regency made it a choice. It is accessible via Ander-Shahar Bazaar and is in the interior of Peshawar. During our visit to Masjid Mahabat Khan, we meet with the locals who provide us with an update on the mosque's problems as well as an overview of the building. This mosque is under the ownership of the Auqaaf Department.

During our visit, we observed several problems with this mosque, which are covered in detail in our paper. The main reasons for this mosque's decline are the public's lack of awareness of its architectural significance and the authorities' neglect of their duty to preserve and protect this building from outside interference.

Critical Evaluation & Conclusions:

We can all learn a great deal from this fruitful research project as learners. This gives us valuable lessons and helps us recognize the importance of our history, legacy, and historical sites and monuments. It forces us to pause and think about the best ways to preserve it for the present and the future because it symbolizes our cultural and historical heritage. The structure is a masterful example of both architecture and art. The great ability and genius of the artisans of that era are evident in the exquisite craftsmanship. Preserving it and numerous other Khyber Pakhtunkhwa historical sites from destruction is of utmost importance. Ultimately, this structure is a part of our cultural legacy, and as such, all necessary measures should be taken to ensure its preservation.

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