

CONSERVATION CHALLENGES IN PRESERVATION OF CULTURAL HERITAGE OF PAKISTAN: MARYAM ZAMANI MOSQUE; THREATS, AND RISKS

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ABSTRACT

Maryam Zamani mosque has its religious significance. This mosque is about 4000 years old. Jahangir built this mosque after his mother and later on Raja Ranjit Singh converted the mosque to a gunpowder factory and then the British returned the mosque to the Muslims. Recently the WCLA (walled city authority) documented and conserved some parts of the mosque. This research aims to study the impacts of the conservation and restoration works that includes the shrine and ablution parts of the mosque. The methodology adopted for this research is through site surveys, documentation of the conservation report by WCLA. The research findings indicate that the conservation attempt is arguable because conservation of the heritage buildings should be in their original context. Walled city of Lahore authority did a short-term solution of this by filling cracks with plaster, but they did not pay attention to its material and its decoration. Another cause is ignoring this heritage site for decades and the material of this mosque is also outdated. Other than authorities, people should also take responsibility toward heritage buildings. Cultural heritage should be respected because respecting the heritage means respecting the forefather's efforts.

Keywords: Damage mapping, Cracks, Conservation, Lahore, Maryam Zamani, Mosque

INTRODUCTION

Begum Shahi Mosque is located in Pakistan's Walled City of Lahore. Nuruddin Salim Jahangir constructed it for his mother Maryam-uz-Zamani, the Hindu bride of Mughal Emperor Akbar. The mosque is situated within the old Masti Gate and is one of Lahore's first mosques. The significance of the mosque is also attributable to its outstanding paintings, which are examples of a type of art known as "Monnabat Kari." The mosque is ornamented with both Quranic and non-Quranic inscriptions. The non-Quranic inscriptions executed over the entrance gate's arch identify the name of the mosque's¹ founder and the date of its completion.

Historical Significance

The mosque was constructed between 1611 and 1614 by the Mughal emperor Jahangir. Some historians suggest that it was Akbar's Rajput wife Jodha Bai, while others believe it was his Portuguese wife, but this issue remains unsolved. Maryam ul Zamani or Maryam-ul-Makani was the name of the Mughal queen or the mother of the throne's heir. According to certain historical accounts, the ladies of the fort would also go there to pray. During the Sikh era, Maharaja Ranjit Singh converted the mosque into a gunpowder factory and gave it the name Barood Khanawali Masjid. In 1850, the British Raj transferred the mosque to the Muslims, who restored it to its full splendor¹.

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Lahore Fort and Badshahi Mosque are located near Maryam Zamani Mosque. The Gurdwara Bhai Mani Singh is also located near this mosque. These different landmarks represent the tolerance of people at that time⁴. Nowadays, mosque is surrounded by the Rim market and residential buildings as well which are illegal and are ruining the beauty and glory of this mosque. Due to this illegal construction, there is no direct access to the mosque. For easy access go to the opposite side of Lahore fort and ask for Masti Gate instead of the mosque. The mosque is found tucked between auto repair shops and the houses which have encroached around its compound[†]. There is a Police station near the mosque located just beside the Masti gate.

As shown in Fig-1, It is located at Fort Road, Walled City, Lahore, and Punjab. It is surrounded by encroachments. On one side there is the Moti bazaar (the largest shoe market in Asia) on the other side there is the Rim market. Its main access is from the circular road instead of fort road because of the illegal market. The route from the circular road is through the Masti gate near police station in the market. Back then in the Mughal era, this Masti gate was connected with Lahore fort, used for offering prayers by the ladies back in time.



Fig 1: Plan shows the location of Maryam Zamani mosque on map (google map)

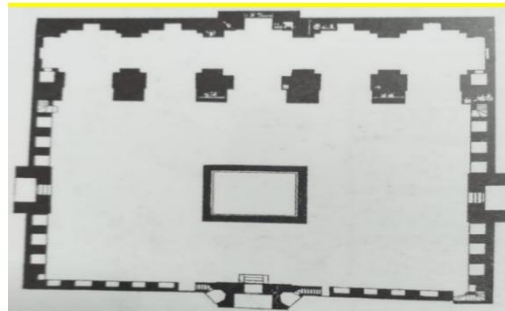


Fig 2: Old Architectural plan of Maryam Zamani mosque



Fig 3: Rim market



Fig 4: Police Station

Architectural Significance

Being one of the first mosques in Lahore, Maryam Zamani is of great importance due to its layout as well apart from its historical significance. The layout of the mosque is square as it covers an area of 135'-0" X 127'-0". The courtyard measuring an area of 128' X 82' is situated a few feet below the level of the road as shown in Fig 2. It has a five-bay facade that became the pattern for many mosques built by the Mughals in the subcontinent like Wazir Khan Mosque and Badshahi mosque etc. The mosque structure is made of fine brick masonry rendered with plaster, a common material used during the Mughal era for constructing mosques and other buildings. The fresco designs in the interior include floral and mosaic artwork with line patterns. Entrances of this mosque are from three sides, all of them opening in the central courtyard. The mosque is divided into three parts covered, semi-covered and open to the sky. Covered in the first five-bay prayer hall and this pattern are followed in many other mosques like the Wazir Khan mosque. The central courtyard having a pond used as an ablution area and is semi-covered by the canopy[‡] as seen in Fig 5 and 6. The area open to the sky is also used for offering prayers in case of more pilgrims at a time. Just beside the main entrance, there was a shrine on one side that was of Hazrat Maulana Ghulam Bakhtawar Bherwi and graves of other Sufi's and Maulana as well Fig 7 & 8. There are three staircases (out of which two for access to the Minaret and dome area and the

[†]Rahmānī, A. (2016). *Lahore: History and Architecture of Mughal Monuments*. Oxford University Press.

[‡]Soomro, F. (2015). A visual delight – Maryam Zamani and Wazir Khan Mosques, Dawn newspaper.

other for access to residents of Maulvi living in this mosque). The height of the central bay is more than that of the other four followed by the central dome that is larger than the other.



Fig 5: Covered five-bay prayer hall (self-documented)



Fig 6: Semi covered ablution area (self documented)



Fig 7: Shrine of Hazrat Mulana Ghulam **Fig 8:** Graves of other Mulana and Sufi Bakhtawar Bherwi



In the interior of these five bays, are Muqarnas at the corners of the roof as shown in Fig 9. The interior walls from the lower part are decorated with stucco work Fig10. The central Mehrab arch is treated with geometric, floral, Mosaic artwork and stucco ornaments². The mosque is adorned with Arabic calligraphy as in Fig 13. The Arabic calligraphy was firstly used in this mosque and afterwards was followed in many other mosques like Wazir Khan Mosque etc. They used bricks on the walls and marble on the courtyard floor. Marble is replaced by brick masonry in the conservation carried out by the authority recently.



Fig 9: Muqarnas at the top



Fig 10: Fresco work at rest of the wall



Fig 11: Floral patterns on the wall



Fig 12: Mosaic artwork



Fig 13: Arabic calligraphy written on the top of arches inside the prayer hall

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

A detailed survey of the Maryam Zamani Mosque was conducted by the WCLA (Walled City Lahore authority), followed up by its documentation and later in the conservation process some amendments were made by the authority in the mosque. The cracks on the ceiling and walls are filled with lime plaster and marble was used for flooring. A semi-covered canopy on the ablution area was also added yet this is a short-term solution. The courtyard earlier was atoned with the bricks were used in the flooring in other Mughal era. Earlier the ablution area was not covered but open in air is now covered with a canopy. They also conserved the shrine as well for which the materials used was conserved with lime plaster and not with the original material. The stairs in the prayer hall and the roof of the mosque are not conserved. In the earlier survey, the site access and encroachments were also investigated as due to this illegal development where the site is unapproachable the beautiful mosque is being deteriorated slowly as seen in Fig 14.. Therefore, the WCLA authority proposed to shift the surrounding Rim market to somewhere else so this glorious mosque could be conserved in its original glory Fig 15. People can adore its original glory and visit this mosque more often.



Fig 14: Present view of the mosque (Lahore heritage club Face book page)



Fig 15: Proposal given by WCLA (Lahore heritage club Face book page)

The major causes of decay of this mosque were negligence, Illegal neighborhood planning and activities surrounding the mosque for example the largest shoe market. As there was no legal policy or byelaws the mosque' exterior has also been used without permission and was harm to the structure. For instance the shoemakers hang their things on the wall of the mosque which caused damage to the structure. The Mosque conserved but not long-term conservation yet short term proposals have been implemented. Just beside the main entrance, they built new structures on both sides for shrines and graves. These short-term measurements were held by using modern materials and modern techniques. Some of these short term measurements have been discussed earlier and can be seen in the Fig 16 & 17.

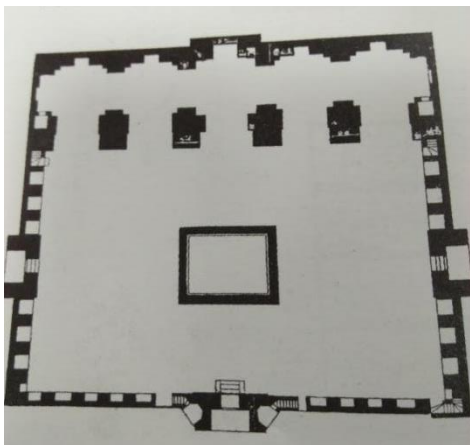


Fig16: Original plan of Mosque

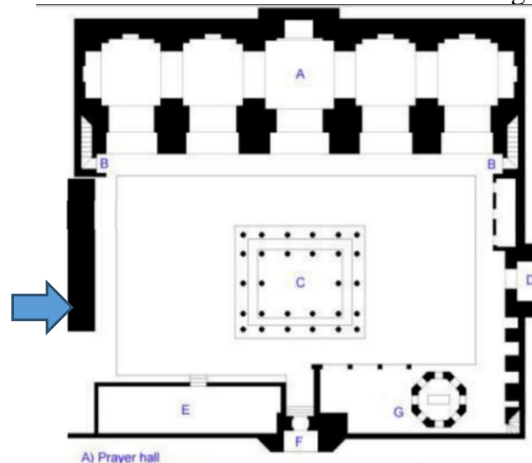
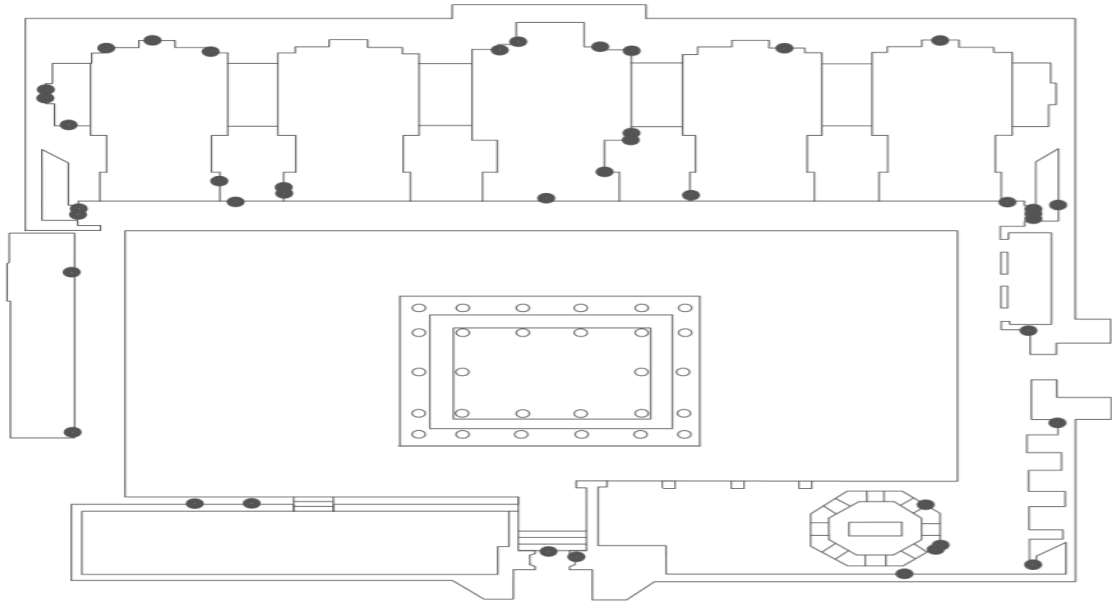


Fig 17: Plan after conservation

There are many cracks specifically in prayer hall walls, on the roof of the prayer hall, on the five domes and columns as well, majority affecting the structure of the mosque yet few just exposing the material originally used. Fresco work from pillars and walls of the prayer hall is almost destroyed and is from some places is filled with lime plaster to cover the exposed brick masonry. Muqarnas at the roof of prayer halls and calligraphy written on niches are also deteriorating and almost vanished from the niches of the left-most bay and 2nd bay from the left side. The main Mehrab also decaying slowly as the material from walls just beside the Mehrab is completely vanished and brick masonry is exposed.



Cracks and deteriorated walls



Fig 18: Crack just beside the right side entrance



Fig 19: Crack on the wall of the shrine



Fig 20: Cracks on main entrance filled with lime



Fig 21: Material exposed from left side plaster just beside the graves near the main entrance



Fig 22: Crack on the wall near right side entrance



Fig 23: Crack on the wall just beside the right most bay



Fig 24: Crack on muqarnas of rightmost bay



Fig 25: Cracks on the wall beside mehrab roof



Fig 26: Fresco work vanished and lime exposed



Fig 27: Material deteriorated from wall mortar is being exposed



Fig 28: Cracks on Mehrab wall

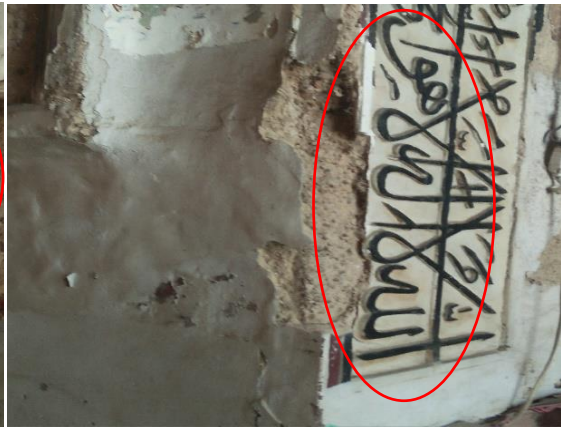


Fig 29: Cracks on niches provided on walls



Fig 30: Crack on the left bay wall and fresco work vanishes (self-documented)



Fig 31: Material vanished from mehrab (self-documented)



Fig 32: Crack on stairs on left side accessing minarets and domes



Fig 33: Major crack on a column of left most to top of



Fig 34: Crack on the column of 2nd left bay pillars of bays



Fig 35: Some major and minor cracks on pillars of bays

The most major cause of the decay of this mosque is that in the Sikh era it was made as a gunpowder factory and due to that gun powder interior of this mosque vanished away and major cracks are formed. Another main reason for decay is the neglect of authority; if this mosque was restored and taken care of by time then its present condition would be different which is today. This mosque is the most precious heritage authority that should have to take a look at its restoration and should take action to take it in its original position. Domes of this mosque are a unique type of domes and are continued in many other mosques of the Mughal era Fig 36. But its present condition is not very satisfactory. There are many cracks on the exterior side as well as on the interior side of the domes. There are five domes and the central one was heavily decorated with floral patterns and God's attributes painted circularly. The interior of the other four domes is decorated with floral fresco paintings Fig 37.



Fig 36: Allah's attributes written on central dome In a circular manner



Fig 37: Fresco work on other domes



Fig 38: Muqarnas on the roof of prayer hall



Fig 39: Muqarnas on central dome



Fig 39: The central dome exterior



Fig 40: Side dome exterior view



Fig 41: Exterior of left side domes



Fig 42: Cracks on exterior of domes



Fig 43: Sectional elevation of Maryam Zamani Mosque

CONCLUSION

The Walled City of Lahore is one of the oldest heritage sites and the mosque has its significance due to religion and Architectural heritage. Back then mosque was connected with Lahore fort; therefore, the royal ladies would go there for offering prayers. It is concluded that by not neglecting the heritage building and conserve these building from time to time, it is not possible to reach at this point. The Maryam Zamani Mosque is barely standing due to its present condition and the materials are decaying with the passage of time. It is suggested that by using its original material and building techniques it should bring in its original form and glory. Both short and long term conservation strategies should be devised by the authorities to save the structure. The Interiors should be done by using stucco work as well as fresco work. The Rim market and market should be relocated because it is destroying the glory and original significance of our prestigious heritage because of the continuous noise, the construction of rims and iron is hazard to the structure. Also shoe market is ruining its religious norms because the shopkeepers hung shoes on the walls of the mosque and the nails they drilled on walls on each side of the mosque are causing structural cracks. Taking necessary actions this mosque could be revived again and it could become one of the most visiting mosques by tourists as well as by native people which are unaware of this beautiful heritage building. The authority already proposed a long-term plan, yet there is a need to do a detailed documentation of mosque for example regarding the condition of material, its structural condition and condition of its ornamentation. Importance should be given to the heritage building and should conserve them at appropriate time so that the building should not reach at peak that were about to decay.

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