



## WAZIR KHAN MOSQUE: A SOUL INSPIRATION FOR THE BELIEVERS

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### Abstract

The city of Lahore is credited for being a hub of art activities since the time period of Mughal Regime. Art and architecture flourished under their administration. Besides secular architecture, religious architecture was given immense importance, the prime example of which can be seen in the form of Wazir Khan Mosque (built in 17th century). Within the narrow streets of Interior city Lahore, this Mosque with its architectural grandeur mesmerizes the senses of viewers and attracts them with a single glance. Its unique style of construction within the thick of bazar made it accessible to the people, whereas its decorative embellishment with references of celestial nuances and the ambience of its enclosure made it a soul inspiration for the believers.

### Keywords

Lahore, art, architecture, Mosque, sub-continent, Mughal Regime.



### 1. Introduction

Wazir Khan Mosque is one of the jewels of architectural heritage of Lahore in Pakistan (fig.1). The selection of the specific architectural wonder is not by chance but a result of the shared association with this monument. It is taken as a source of contemplation not because of the shared religious connection but the way it has been

designed, made it a soul inspiration for many. It has been considered as a marvel in the history of religious architecture executed within the heart of Lahore. Mosque means an open area used for prayer and in Arabic, Persian and Urdu language it is called Masjid (a place of worship). Usually the architecture of a Mosque contains an open area for prayer and a covered area as well (Awan,

2014). Prayer is one of the fundamental parts of a religion, but in the religion of Islam it is one of the five Rukans (pillars/elements) and all Muslims have to follow them for seeking closeness with Allah. Mosque is meant to provide a sacred space to the believers for performing their prayers at the same platform without any classification and it also plays influential role in their lives. The Holy Prophet (P.B.U.H) has said: “The Prayer in congregation is twenty-seven times superior to the Prayer offered by a person alone.” (Qadri, n.d)

Performing prayer in a mosque holds multiple connotations, it not just fulfils the religious duty but also provides a podium to create a link with the Ultimate One. The religious belief of all human beings whether Muslims or from any other religion revolves around a focal point, from where they seek knowledge of their being. This mosque with its ambiance and aesthetically appealing architectural and ornamental details also serves the purpose being a focal point for connectivity with the Ultimate One, inside the narrow streets of interior Lahore. The search for the divine never ends till the last breath. The basic unit for search is associated with each and every individual. The question of being actually starts from this point of seeking for unification. Wazir Khan Mosque is taken as a symbol of soul inspiration that needs to be unfolded. For this reason, this mosque served as a center of inquiry with frequent visits to reach the final conclusion. Talking to a muezzin (an official who proclaims to call for prayer) at the mosque, I came to know

that this mosque was built in 17th century and it was confirmed after reading the available historical references. The mosque took seven years in its completion; the construction started around 1634–1635 AD, during the reign of the Mughal Emperor Shah Jahan. On the orders of Shah Jahan, it was built by Hakim Shaikh Iilm-uddin Ansari, who was a native of Chiniot (Weidner, n.d.). Hakim also remained as a court physician of Shah Jahan and a governor of Lahore. Instead of his actual name, he was famous with the name of Wazir Khan which means a minister in Urdu and Persian language. The name of the mosque was given after his name because of his association with the mosque. This Mosque was built over a Sufi shrine associated with Sufi Syed Ishaq Gazruni (c. 1284 AD), which is still a part of the enclosure located in the main courtyard. The inquiry starts with the exploration of the inner world. The gesture of which unveil so many questions. Initiating with the task to find out what made this subject the selected area of interest, it made me realize the association shared with some places of Lahore since childhood. The underlying truth comes out unconsciously and in this case Masjid Wazir Khan captured my interest. The natural ambiance of the narrow streets in the interior Lahore moved towards my soul inspiration that always captured the inner state of being. Wazir Khan Mosque has been taken under consideration not only because of the bonding I shared with my religious practice for performing prayer, rather it came out as a constant dialogue between a believer and the

God. There are a few places being there one can feel relaxed and pure, free from the materialistic and polluted environment and Wazir Khan Mosque is one of those places which fulfills the purpose. This place provides spiritually captivating atmosphere for experiencing a discourse with self and the superior being. A Mosque with unique architectural space allowed the believers to find out the inner divine eminence with the belief that God has gifted mankind all the prophetic qualities, but the keys are in their own hands and they just have to find out the way how to activate them for unlocking such hidden treasures within. In the Holy Quran, references can be seen in multiple verses.

English Translation:

“Those who have believed and whose hearts are assured by the remembrance of Allah. Unquestionably, by the remembrance of Allah hearts are assured” (13:28).

## **2. Method & Material:**

For conducting this research, qualitative research methodology has been used with focus on APA Style. Few books, research papers available through internet sources related to Muslim Architecture were consulted and interviews were conducted with scholars of the field and the visitors within the Mosque. Frequent visits to the Mosque helped in analyzing the overall ambiance of the Mosque, the aesthetic interplay of design vocabulary used within the interior and exterior and the impact it created on the senses were also taken under consideration to reach the final conclusion.

## **3. Results:**

In Qualitative research methodology, results are collected through analysis of all features involved within the subject of interest. To reach the desired result, multiple references were reviewed but the final result came out of the personal analysis by the researcher. This research opened another dimension of looking at the subject besides being a reference of architectural heritage; here it serves as a celestial gateway for seeking union with the Ultimate One being a soul inspiration for the believers.

## **4. Discussion:**

Wazir Khan Mosque (fig.2) is an example of flawless architectural constructions within Lahore that has remained a hub of artistic activities in the past centuries under the rule of different monarchs. The monuments constructed under their regime speaks for themselves in terms of their embellishment and philosophical aspects. Wandering in the narrow streets of interior Lahore, one can easily search for a good number of Mosques constructed for fulfilling the needs of prayers for Muslim community. Though, a number of these mosques have been visited personally but when it comes to personal assimilation, complete credit goes to Wazir Khan Mosque. Whenever I went there, the ambience helped in developing a dialogue with each and every corner of the Mosque and the same response was recorded from other visitors after talking to them. The Mosque used to take the believers to another state of mind; where the inner being became more active in terms of union

with the divine. Here the physical journey has not been taken under consideration, it emphasizes the mystical experience which is not usual. Standing in the thick of a bazaar accessed through Delhi gate, the Mosque attracts in a single glance, not only because of its monumental construction but also because of its unique ornamentation, which makes this mosque exceptional as compared to the other constructed mosques of Lahore (fig.3 and 4). A complete chapter of history is preserved which could be unfolded by the understanding of each and every inch of its corners. Besides this mosque, Badshahi mosque is also one of the attractions for the Muslim community and for the national and international tourists as well. Shanta Acharya, a non-Muslim visited Wazir Khan Mosque and recorded his experiences by expressing his feelings in a Blissful manner:

“Rambling through the narrow bazaars of Lahore, a city renowned for its historic splendor; cramped in the middle of the marketplace, I discover Wazir Khan's mosque, its bejeweled brilliance of decor. The floral motifs, the intricate calligraphy, the richness of enameled colors on arches, minarets and domes, the glittering pietra-dura inlay of semi-precious stones, lapis-lazuli, onyx, cornelian, agate and topaz. Compete for my attention with skilled stone carving, stone-inlay work, stucco tracery and fresco paintings; not forgetting the mosaic tiles, carved bricks and glass painting. Once a sheer celebration of magnificence, now sadly fading. I remove my chappals, cover my head out of respect, as I step through the gateway into the forecourt, moving

from one world into the next; as I enter paradise on earth, I am blessed” (Acharya, 1998).

Now-a-days, the Mosque is under construction (fig. 5). Ignorance by the Government has affected these treasures of our heritage. We are as a nation so much ignorant of the fact that with our own hands we are ruining the rich heritage of our beloved country. We are ignorant of the magnitude that serves as an important chapter of historical wonders, the actual life line of Lahore and of Pakistan. The Lahori's have not left any place around the mosque, construction all over the place has affected the ambience and the exterior of the mosque (fig. 6). The Government needs to restore such places and has to take some serious actions. Though, it has been renovated within the past few years but still it needs to be restored from further damage in the coming years. Besides all these factors, the monumental façade of the Mosque enclosed with two tall erected minarets gives a pleasant effect because of different techniques of embellishment used over it which includes Kasha Kari executed at the exterior of the mosque (mosaic work mostly representing floral, geometrical and calligraphic text on glazed tiles), and fresco painting with similar motives in the interior (personal communication with Memoona Khan, 2018). The color contrasts and the amalgamation of different materials make its appearance distinct. The basic structure of red sand stone is used for the continuation of the Indo-Pak tradition followed by the Mughal emperors. Calligraphic inscription at the top, projected balconies flanking at both

sides of the main central arch, the interplay of geometric forms, tile mosaic enhances the impact of the façade with the use of arabesque designs around the arch and the medallions surrounding them attracts the attention of the believers. The calligraphic inscriptions at the top of the façade serves as blessings coming from the celestial world, this tradition could be found at a number of constructed monuments in the sub-continent, the prime example of which could be examined in the form of Taj Mahal (one of the seven wonders of the world). But the gesture or appearance of Taj Mahal's architecture is feminine because of the use of delicate details on the surface of white marble. But here in the Wazir Khan Mosque, the gesture and style of construction is bold, masculine and loud because of the infusion of red sand stone and fiancé mosaic (Kashi Kari). A colorful interplay of decorative vocabulary used at the exterior and interior of the mosque reflected the cultural and religious flavor in an alluring unique style. The main arched entrance of the mosque leads in the direction of the court yard which direct towards the prayer hall in the western corner. The courtyard contains an ablution pool in its enclosure, the reflection created on the water provides a reference of purification not just physical but spiritual as well (fig.7 and 8). The cold evening of the winter with the foggy atmosphere makes the ambience more mystical, it was an experience in itself. The chattri's (elevated dome-shaped pavilions) flanked at both sides of the dome at the entrance of the main prayer hall provides a reference of

similar chattri's built in Akbar's Tomb at Sikandra, India. The style of construction of the mosque in the interior is somewhat similar with the exterior. The romance created by the ambience with the water pond in the center is one of the captivating aspects of this place which also serves for the cleansing of all sins through performing wuzu (a religious practice of cleansing before offering prayer). The minarets standing with elegance and grace invite the attention of the people even from the distance (fig.9). The mosque has four tall minarets at its four corners. The minarets are following the same style of construction as can be seen in Jahangir's tomb (located in Shahdara) but the difference lays in its decorative patterns executed with geometric forms. After close examination one can observe the Persian objects with the representation of Cyprus trees which makes them celestial, these are having heavenly attributes being symbolic representation of the garden of Paradise. The colorful assemblance of these objects in the technique of fiancé mosaic enhances their effect. The colors used i.e., blue, green, yellow, white, red etc. are all associated with the divine nature and are always given immense importance in the Islamic civilization. The enclosure surrounded by repetitive pattern of arches at four sides of the mosque resembles with the Arab serai at the Jahangir's tomb, but here the purpose is different (fig.10). The openings in the mosques at the four sides symbolically invite people from all four corners of the world. It actually highlights the open gesture of Islam. The multistoried houses at

the back are dominating while looking from the interior, even though the spacious courtyard has its own impact with the repetitive patterns at its four sides. This mosque is also known for its fine faience mosaic work that is among one of the attractive features in its construction. For this arabesque designs were drawn and then different colored tiles were cut out according to the design and were finally assembled accordingly for enhancing the rich effect of ornamentation (fig.11). This technique used here is similar with the technique of inlay work but the materials used for both are different. The elements of embellishment could be closely examined all over the façade of the prayer hall, friezes, medallions, repeatedly used recessed arches around the main arch, fake honey comb patterns inside the arched opening again resembles with the entrance arch leading towards the mausoleum of Jahangir inside Jahangir's tomb. Calligraphic inscription used at the top along with naturally seated birds unfolds the mystic effect. Because of the cold weather of winter, the arches were covered with huge curtains, to keep the interior of the hall warm (fig.12). The recessed niches on the vertical panels embellished with calligraphic specimens were all different, the style of execution with contrasting color schemes such as turquoise against white background made them aesthetically appealing, both these colors are associated with celestial qualities (fig.13). Diversity in terms of aesthetical expression can be easily seen which unites at one point i.e., unity in diversity. Through the decorative surface's

attention is given to the concept of repetition and constant transformation of design. "In the Islamic context these infinitely extensible designs have been interpreted as visual demonstrations of the singleness of God and His presence everywhere. They represent unity in multiplicity and multiplicity in Unity" (Grube, 1984). The tall erected minarets flanked at both sides at the entrance of prayer hall. One on the right side had Persian symbols used over rectangular recessed niches and square panels all mathematically arranged as set of three equally divided on the surface (fig.14). Reference of the Persian objects (jars filled with floral stems sprouting out) at the top receding niches, the combination of geometric and arabesque patterns in the middle square panels and celestial trees normally seen in the Persian miniatures can also be seen at the lower band of three recessed arches. This reference of celestial trees also direct towards the promise of God to the righteous as mentioned in the Holy Quran.

English Translation:

"Allah has promised the believing men and believing women gardens beneath which rivers flow, wherein they abide eternally, and pleasant dwellings in gardens of perpetual residence; but approval from Allah is greater. It is that which is the great attainment" (9:72).

This mosque is unique in its features of embellishment. It also had a tomb inside the courtyard of Hazrat Sayyad Mohammad Ishaq as mentioned earlier, decorated with fresco painting representing arabesque and chevron patterns from

its exterior, a repetitive scheme observed throughout the decorative vocabulary used in the mosque (fig.15). Flanked at all four sides with cupolas. While analyzing the visual features of the mosque, a visitor came in contact who shared his personal feelings by saying: “This is a place I am closely associated with, where I use to spend hours and hours having a dialogue with myself. Whenever I came here, I feel myself light, pure free from the materialistic desires. This place reminds me the reality of what we are and where we have to go? Good deeds and right acts which we perform in our life lasts forever but the material body has no life of its own. This conversation provoked a question of being every believer is in search for? He said, I feel myself relaxed and uncontaminated from the worldly matters whenever I am within the enclosure of this Mosque” (personal communication with Muhammad Ahmed, 2018). God promised his mankind that whoever will be in search of the truth will definitely encounter it. In Quran similar references have been witnessed.

English Translation:

“O man! You are laboring toward your Lord laboriously, and you will encounter Him” (84:6). Sight of this explicitly ornamented panels with calligraphic inscription framing the central arch of the entrance hall provides a reference of spiritual permission to enter the threshold, that invites for the realization of the divine union (fig.16). All the forces unite at one focal point in Islam that calls for divine union. Here calligraphy is used as a driving force and the center of

interest for Muslims with focus on divine characteristics. Another interesting feature observed in its surrounding space was the vertical panels at both sides highlighting the motive of trees. These trees symbolizes the garden of Heaven; another celestial reference taken from Persian miniature painting to highlight the significance of submission in front of Allah. These stimulating references were meant to influence the aesthetic and religious dimension towards the right direction. The interior of the prayer hall is also elaborately decorated with fresco paintings, highlighting vegetation alongside calligraphic inscriptions. Delicately executed details heightens the grandeur of this place. The concept of oneness can also be found here, in each and every decorated corner, there is a center of interest in each geometric form, and explicit of all is the band of calligraphy surrounding the four sides of the walls making them unite at one point (fig.17). Geometrical patterns and arabesque designs were designed in each panel whether a rectangle or a square repetitively highlighting the celestial cosmology used symbolically, intricately designed with a certain movement towards the apex under the dome. Prayer hall has a specific place for the Muezzin to call believers for prayer (fig.18). This call by the Muezzin is a reminder for the believers to arrive and perform prayer without any worldly classification; it demands submission of the soul. Prostration in front of the divine power is actually the initial journey that leads towards the final submission. At the facing wall

behind, vertical panels are visible decorated with the motives of trees blossomed out of the mound shown at its base symbolizing the unification of the worldly with the heavenly panorama. All panels are balanced aesthetically with the addition of geometry. Variety of colored tones have been used with main focus on inner and the outer realities symbolized through the application of white, yellow, green, blue, red, golden and orange colors. Interior of the hall with repeated recessed chambers are also lavishly designed with symbolic imagery comprised of arabesque designs, geometrical patterns and calligraphic text framed in separate panels divided mathematically to balance and highlight the symbolic suggestions (fig.19). The facing chamber adorns a recessed arch with fake honey-comb pattern, a similar feature replicating the designed vocabulary located at the apex of this chamber. Multitude of designed patterns painted in fresco technique makes them exceptional and aesthetically appealing. Each portion invites the viewer to search for the hidden dimension beneath the designed surface. calligraphic text is used on the centrally focused segments (i.e., on the upper panel with slightly sunken arch filled with calligraphic text flanked with rectangular panels again adorning calligraphy, similarly on the lower panel, the border of the recessed niche and the medallions on both sides also represents calligraphic text) to heighten the spiritual altitude. Again, the concept of unification at one point is given more importance. All the aspects move towards the same direction. The use of colors

creates a soothing and pleasant ambiance in the interior decoration as well.

Beneath the dome, ceiling is covered with decorative patterns similar to the illumination designs used for book illustration during the climax of Mughal Period. All the patterns are precisely composed again to reinforce the concept of unification as can be seen in the focal point all entities move towards a single metaphor to express unity in multitude (fig.20). The squinches are also elaborately adorned with fresco paintings highlighting geometric patterns. The design vocabulary used on the ceiling of the dome represents blessings descending from the heaven to mankind; reference of celestial trees painted at the corners of the ceiling with rhythmic motion takes the eyes of the viewers from bottom to the apex. This tradition of decorating the ceiling of the dome could be witnessed in almost all the constructions or tombs made in the sub-continent under the rule of Mughal emperors highlighting the concept of unification. The notion of driving energy which is in fact a source of life can be seen in the form of trees surrounding all sides of the ceiling, this symbolically represents the eternal quest of a believer as well. Besides it, all these visual metaphors also reminds few of the Quranic verses that says:

English Translation:

“It is Allah who made for you the earth a place of settlement and the sky a ceiling and formed you and perfected your forms and provided you with good things. That is Allah, your Lord; then blessed is Allah, Lord of the worlds” (40:64).



The sight of the dome from the roof top explains a picture that the main and the central dome is flanked by two small domes each at both the sides making them five in number. The central dome has a tall erected finial at its center that serves as the source of unification of the worldly with the celestial (fig.21). The cluster of houses built at the surroundings of the mosque gives an impression of typical Lahori tradition in the interior city. The mystic unification seems more highlighted because of the foggy atmosphere in the evening of winter where image seems to diffuse with just impression (representing the inner state of the believer).

## **5. Conclusion:**

Having an overview of Wazir Khan Mosque, it has been concluded that the journey from outside towards the inside helps in the realization of its importance for being one of the jewels in the history of Islamic Architecture in Pakistan. The mosque serves for the purpose of purification, free from the materialistic desires; its natural ambiance also helps to create a bond with the soul for the realization of unification with the God. The desired pursuit found its deep roots in finding that unseen power could never be seen but felt only through pure meditation.

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**Figures:**



Figure. 1. Interior of Wazir Khan Mosque (Source: Photograph taken by Muhammad Irfan on 5<sup>th</sup> November, 2018)



Figure. 2. The exterior façade of Wazir Khan Mosque (Source: Photograph taken by the author on 20<sup>th</sup> December, 2018)



Figure. 3. Close-up view of the spandrels at both sides of the main arch headed by calligraphic inscription at the façade of Wazir Khan Mosque (Source: Photograph taken by the author on 20<sup>th</sup> December, 2018)

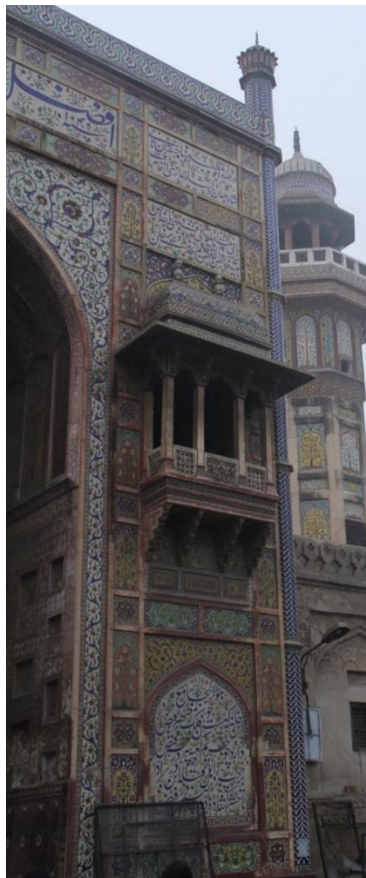


Figure. 4. Decorative patterns used at the cupola, projected balcony and recessed niches on the façade of Wazir Khan Mosque (Source: Photograph taken by the author on 20<sup>th</sup> December, 2018)





Figure. 5. The façade of Wazir Khan Mosque with tightly constructed houses at its corners (Source: Photograph taken by the author on 20<sup>th</sup> December, 2018)

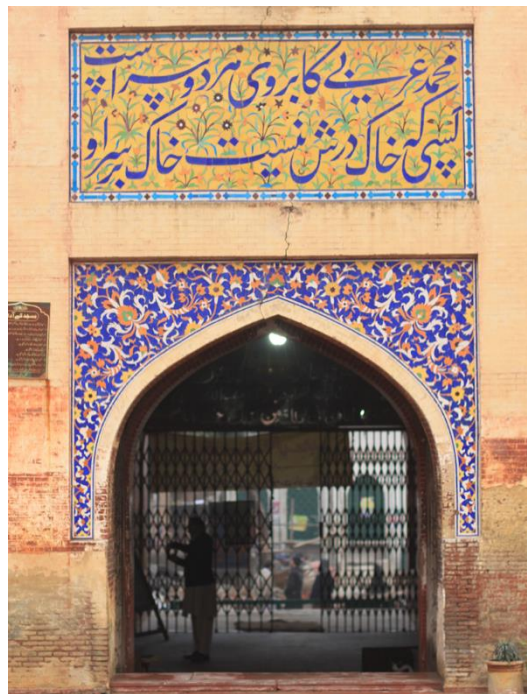


Figure. 6. Inside the main façade towards the courtyard of Wazir Khan, decorated with Persian calligraphic text and Arabesque designs at the spandrels with true Islamic color scheme (Source: Photograph taken by the author on 20<sup>th</sup> December, 2018)



Figure. 7. The main court yard of Wazir Khan Mosque with the water pond (Source: Photograph taken by the author on 20<sup>th</sup> December, 2018)



Figure. 8. Visitors preparing for the Maghreb prayer while performing *wuzu* (Source: Photograph taken by the author on 20<sup>th</sup> December, 2018)



Figure. 9. The main court yard with one tall erected minaret (Source: Photograph taken by the author on 20<sup>th</sup> December, 2018)



Figure. 10. Another view of the main court yard with the surrounded arches (Source: Photograph taken by the author on 20<sup>th</sup> December, 2018)





Figure. 11. Spandrels of the side arches decorated with arabesque designs in the technique of faience mosaic with Islamic color scheme (Source: Photograph taken by the author on 20<sup>th</sup> December, 2018)



Figure. 12. Close-up view of the interior façade leading towards prayer hall at the western side (Source: Photograph taken by the author on 20<sup>th</sup> December, 2018)



Figure. 13. Section of a rectangular recessed arch around the arched opening inside the interior of the mosque  
(Source: Photograph taken by the author on 20<sup>th</sup> December, 2018)

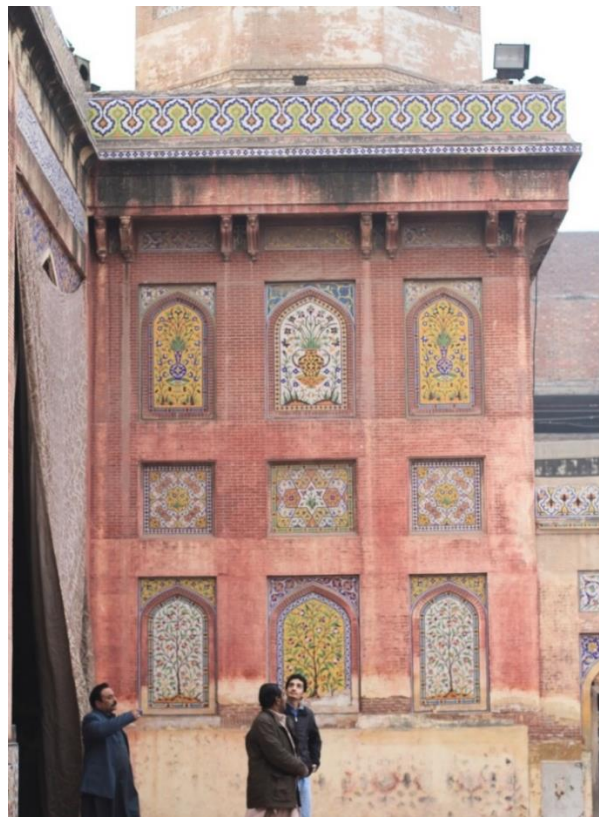


Figure. 14. Corner below the minaret with rectangular and square recessed divisions (Source: Photograph taken by the author on 20<sup>th</sup> December, 2018)





Figure. 15. The shrine of Hazrat Sayyad Mohammad Ishaq constructed inside the mosque adorned with decorative floral and chevron patterns in fresco technique (Source: Photograph taken by the researcher on 20<sup>th</sup> December, 2018)



Figure. 16. Calligraphic inscription framing the arched entrance into the main prayer hall (Source: Photograph taken by the author on 20<sup>th</sup> December, 2018)

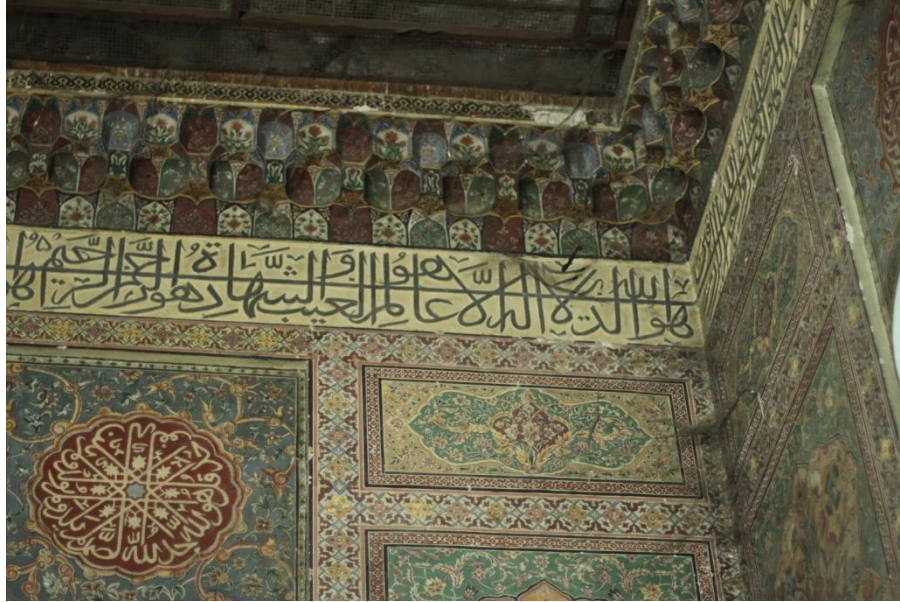


Figure. 17. Interior of the prayer hall with calligraphic band and decorative elements of embellishment (Source: Photograph taken by the author on 20<sup>th</sup> December, 2018)



Figure. 18. *Muezzin* performing *Azan* as a call for prayer (Source: Photograph taken by the author on 20<sup>th</sup> December, 2018)



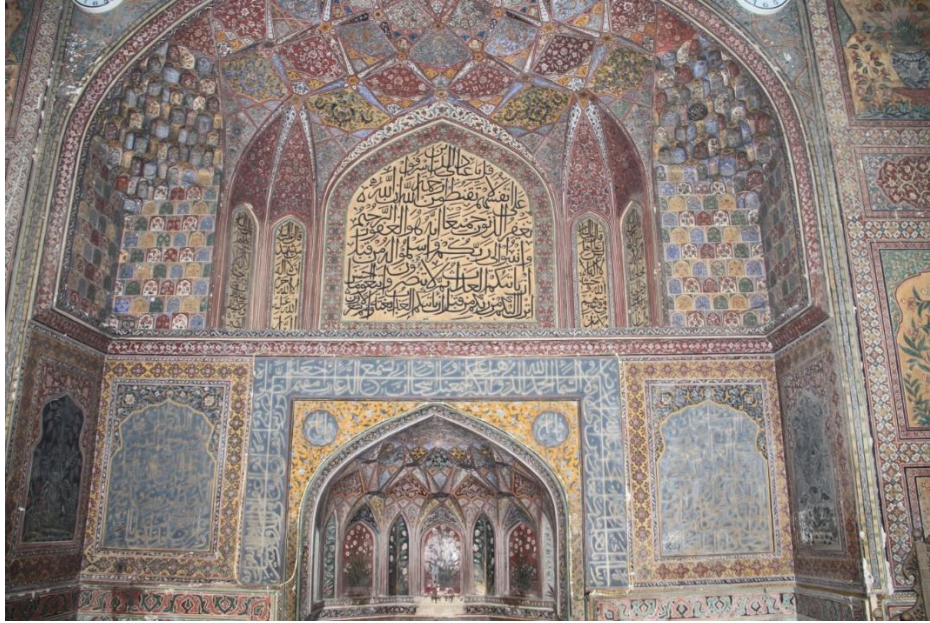


Figure. 19. Lavishly decorated chamber within the interior of the prayer hall (Source: Photograph taken by the author on 20<sup>th</sup> December, 2018)



Figure. 20. Interior of the dome (Source: Photograph taken by the author on 20<sup>th</sup> December, 2018)



Figure. 21. Aerial view of the domes above the prayer hall (Source: Photograph taken by the author on 20<sup>th</sup> December, 2018)