

# **Preliminary Analysis on the Evolution of Mosque Sakhi Sultan Shah Ali Akbar's Complex Suraj Miani Multan**

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**Abstract:** A mosque is a sacred space that evokes an awareness of the divine, either through its inherent spiritual atmosphere or its association with holy relics, the presence of pious individuals, or religious activities performed within it. Such spaces are revered as symbols of the divine, representing a heavenly connection that links earthly beings to Allah. The mosque within Shah Ali Akbar's complex holds significant importance in its context, situated in the heart of the city of Multan, known as Madina-tul-Aulia (the City of Saints). This mosque is considered a masterpiece of architectural design, with intricately detailed elements that captivate and inspire admiration in all who behold them. The mosque, though relatively small in size, features a sanctuary crowned by three domes. Each dome rests on a square base transformed into a hexagonal drum, serving as structural support. While some portions of the original mosque still exist, much of its historic structure has suffered continuous damage, with certain elements destroyed due to manmade factors. The addition of new structures has further compromised the historical and contextual significance of this sacred site. The purpose of this paper is to document this historical and sacred space, emphasize its cultural and architectural significance, and raise public awareness about the importance of preserving such historical sites within their visual and contextual integrity. Recommendations are also provided to the archaeology department, urging attention toward smaller-scale monuments. Preserving these sites is essential for safeguarding their legacy and passing them on to future generations.

**Keywords:** Sacred Space, Religious Activities, Symbolism, Madina-Tul-Aulia, Geometrical Patterns, Manmade Factors, Elements of Mosque, Historical Significance, Conservation and Documentation.

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## **1. Introduction**

A sacred space where the faith is revitalized and the soul is illuminated with the devotion of Allah Almighty, and the people achieve purification through a spiritual relic. There is great role of spiritual dimension in the health and disease of human being such a sacred spaces aware us about the presence of the divine this may be due to the natural quality of that space or it may result in the form of the association of that place with the presence of the Holy relics, or the presence of pious person or the religious activities that are performed there. The purpose of constructing this type of sacred space is to spread the pure enlightenment and shadow of the teachings of the religion and the right pure lighting of the pious person who was present at that time, because the religion is spread through the Sufi saints in this region. These sacred structures enable the pilgrims to “gain sight of the light of God,” and by following the guidelines given by

the pious person, they can connect with the divine. Multan, known as “City of Saints,” also called Madina-Tul-Aulia, has a lot of Sufi saints who were sent here to preach Islam. Hazrat Baha-ud-Din Zakriya, Hazrat Shah Rukn-e-Alam, Hazrat Sakhi Shah Ali Akbar, Hazrat Hafiz Jamal, Hazrat Shah Shamas Sabzwari are considerably notable along with others.

The selected site is not only a mosque, but it is also known as a complex. This complex consists of four different spaces, which are listed below:

- a) Mosque of Sakhi Sultan Shah Ali Akbar
- b) Tomb of Sakhi Sultan Shah Ali Akbar
- c) Tomb of the Mother of Sakhi Shah Ali Akbar
- d) Grave yard

This complex is under the department of archeology and museum Govt. of Pakistan under antiquities act 1975 and tombs are recently conserved, but the historical mosque which is situated in this complex is not conserved, however it has very important historical visual context and is not protected and renovated as a historical monument (Tomb of Sakhi Shah Sultan Ali Akber period shows 1585AD/993AH, board fixed by the archeology department).



**Figure 1.1 Shows the Complex of Sakhi Sultan Shah Ali Akbar. Source: Author**

The complex is considered a master piece in this area of the city in Suraj Miani. A local historian has recorded that the original name of Suraj Miani, “Sura Miani”, was derived from Al-Mansura, the name of an Arab cantonment during the Abbasid period. There were once several palaces and gardens in the vicinity, which today have been overrun by the urban sprawl of Multan [1]. The use of geometrical shapes in planning, the use of natural and local materials to beautify the exterior, the use of embellishment, tile inscriptions, and kashikari, which depict the cultural

aspects of Multan, had a magical impact on the viewer’s eye. The use of the octagonal shape, tapered buttresses located at each corner of the octagon, resembles the Shah Rukn-e-Aalam tomb architecture style. The main structure of the tomb of Sakhi Sultan Shah Ali Akbar has an octagonal-shaped base, drum, and a hemispherical dome. The main entrance of the tomb has Quranic inscriptions, which are considered an example of beautiful calligraphy. The mother’s tomb of Sakhi Sultan Shah Ali Akber has a Square shape structure with tapered walls having a single door towards the south for the entrance to the tomb, slightly raised over a platform with a little flat dome. The lower half of the tomb has only plain lime plaster, while the other upper part has blue tiles Fig. 1.1.

The mosque is another part of the complex, which is used by the pilgrims to offer prayers five times a day and for the purpose of religious occasions. In the current and historical times, the complex is currently under the Shi’s sect. The historical mosque once had a beautiful contextual importance in the complex, but recent structural additions to the mosque have spoiled its contextual architectural legacy. This is further discussed as an objective of the paper.

## 2. Location

The complex is located in the heart of the city of saints, it is located on the road named Soraj Miani Road and Soraj Miani Mohallah. The surrounding area consists of residential areas and some famous graveyards, and this area is also famous for Imam Bargahs.



**Fig 1.2 Location Plan of the Complex (Satellite Map Taken on 01 Jan 203 Site Location 23.217339, 71.438454'E)**

### 3. Mosque of Shah Ali Akbar

The Sakhi Sultan Ali Akber Shah Mosque in Multan, Pakistan, is a remarkable historical and architectural gem that reflects the region's cultural and religious heritage. Situated near the tomb of Hazrat Sakhi Sultan Ali Akber Shah, this mosque has evolved significantly over the centuries, mirroring the spiritual and architectural traditions of its time. The mosque is situated to the left of the main mausoleum of the Sufi saint, Sakhi Sultan Shah Ali Akbar, when facing west (marked as Location "d" on the map). The currently existing historic mosque, along with the main mausoleum of Sakhi Sultan Shah Ali Akbar and the tomb of the Sufi's mother and “e” residential area, is depicted in Figure 1.2. The historic mosque is relatively small in size and features a sanctuary with three domes. Each dome rests on a square base, which transitions into a hexagonal shape (six-sided polygon), which serves as the drum or supporting structure for the dome.



**Fig 1.3 Old Picture of Historic Mosque (Left) (Courtesy of Mapio.net), Exterior Front Picture Taken on 22-11-2022 of the Mosque of Sakhi Shah Ali Akbar (Right) Source: Author**

In Figure 1.3 (left), it is evident that the original, historic portion of the mosque has suffered significant damage, and new additions have been made alongside the original structure, as shown in Figure 1.3 (right, part "e"). Rather than preserving the historic mosque with respectful conservation methods, similar to those used for other monuments within the complex, the mosque has undergone new interventions and expansions. These changes, aimed at increasing the mosque's area, have disregarded its historical and contextual integrity within the complex. The additions, constructed using concrete and cement plaster, have completely compromised the aesthetic and historical significance of the original structure. Currently, the old historic mosque comprises the central section, shown in Figure 1.3 (right, part "e"), featuring five doorways,

while the existing domes are concealed behind a recently added parapet wall, depicted in Figure 1.3 (right, part "f")



**Fig 1.4 Comparison of Old (Left) (Courtesy of Mapio.net) and Present (Right) Picture of Mosque Taken on 22-11-2022. Condition of the Mosque. Source: Author**

### ***3.1 External Elements of an old historic mosque***

The external features of the mosque include the following elements:

- a) Three domes, with the central dome being larger and the two side domes smaller in comparison.
- b) A closed verandah on the eastern side, adorned with beautiful arches.
- c) Small minarets are located at the corners of the eastern front verandah.
- d) An arched gateway on the eastern side, leading into the verandah and then into the domed area on the western side of the mosque, which has three arched doorways.
- e) A west-facing mehrab (prayer niche).
- f) A staircase located behind the mehrab, providing access to the roof.

The domes, once glorious representations of Islamic architectural beauty, are now in a critically deteriorated state. The outer surfaces of the domes have been severely damaged due to a combination of natural and human-made factors. This decline is largely attributed to a lack of knowledge, negligence, and the community's disregard for the historical significance of the structure. Additionally, new structures added to the northern and southern sides have further detracted from the mosque's original architectural context.

The domes, as shown in Figure 1.5, are integral structural elements, serving as load-bearing components of the mosque. Their sizes differ, with the central dome being the largest and the two side domes smaller. However, all three are rapidly deteriorating due to the community's careless approach to preserving the monument. The lower layers of brickwork and the poor condition of the plaster are clearly visible, highlighting the urgent need for restoration to protect these historically significant elements.



**Figure 1.5 represents the Present Condition of the Domes' Exterior. Source: Author**

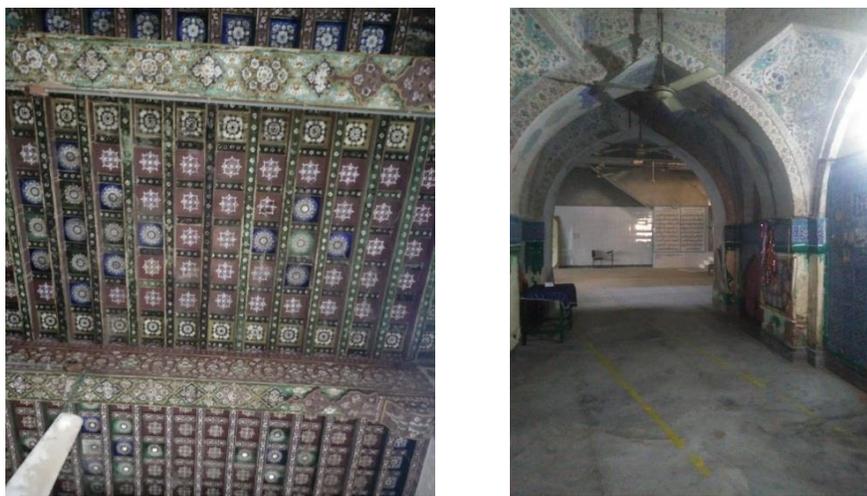
The front minarets on the eastern side, visible in Figure 1.4 (left), once held significant importance as architectural elements of the mosque. Unfortunately, they have been destroyed, and new structures have been added to the northern and southern sides of the mosque, as shown in Figure 1.3 (left). In continuation of the historic structure, several modifications have been made that undermine its authenticity. The original wooden doors have been replaced with local steel doors, and the traditional plaster has been removed and replaced with cement mortar. However, a portion of the mosque still retains its original mud-husk plaster, which can be observed on the interior of the arched doorway at the entrance (Figure 1.6). This original plaster, though still intact, is gradually deteriorating due to a lack of preservation efforts, as shown in the accompanying images.



**Fig 1.6 The Present Condition of the Mosque, Addition of Steel Doors and Windows (Left), Interior, A Corner of the Arched Door Way and the Material Condition of the Historical Structure (Right). Source: Author**

#### **4. Interior View of the Mosque**

The interior of the mosque is a remarkable masterpiece of the architectural craftsmanship of its time. The ceiling of the front verandah is adorned with intricate floral patterns carved into wood, showcasing exceptional artistry. These patterns are further enhanced by the use of vibrant colors, adding to the visual appeal and elegance of the roof. The use of wood in the ceiling, combined with the detailed carvings and colorful designs, significantly enhances the overall beauty of the mosque's interior.



**Fig 1.7 Kashikari in the Ceiling of the Verandah (Left), an Interior View of The Domed Hall (Right). Source: Author**

The central archway connecting the verandah to the main domed hall of the mosque is exquisitely decorated and serves as the focal point, marking the primary entrance to the prayer hall. The main hall itself is divided by additional archways, with an elongated dome enhancing the grandeur of the central entrance, emphasizing the historical significance of the monument.

Unfortunately, the floor of the main domed hall has been raised, altering the original scale and proportions of the architecture. This change has rendered the central arched doorway difficult to use for entry, as one can no longer pass through in an upright position (Figure 1.8, left). However, the added arches on the north and south sides of the mosque provide sufficient access to the domed hall (Figure 1.8, right).



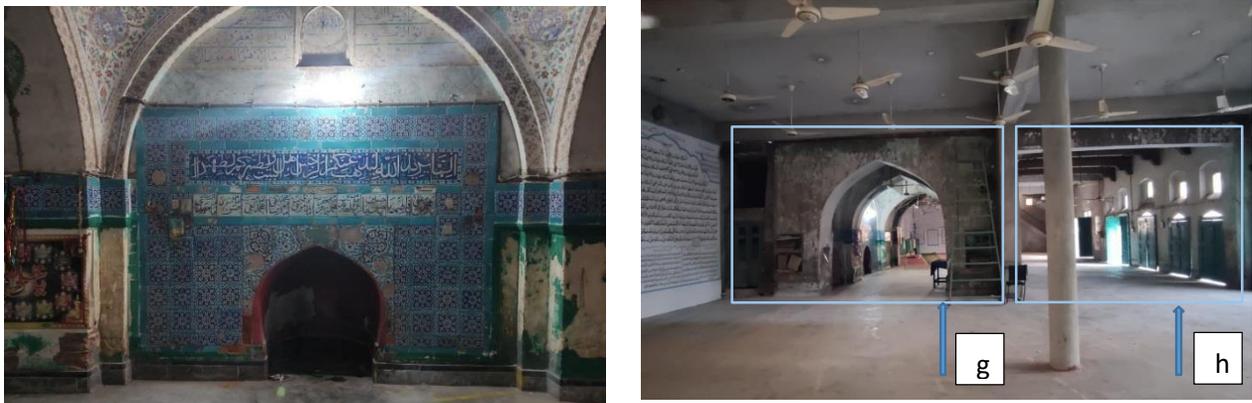
**Fig 1.8 The Inside View of the Mosque from Verandha Toward Domed Hall, West Side (Left) and View from Domed Space Hall Towards North (Right). Source: Author**

The interiors of the domes are exquisitely adorned with intricate patterns and kashi gari (traditional tile work), showcasing a variety of designs that elevate the aesthetic appeal of the domes. Floral patterns are a prominent feature of the decorative elements used in the dome interiors, adding to their artistic charm. These intricate designs significantly enhance the beauty and visual impact of the mosque's domes, reflecting the rich craftsmanship of the era.



**Fig 1.9 Interior view of the domes, the central large dome (Left) and the smaller side dome (Right) of the Mosque. Source: Author**

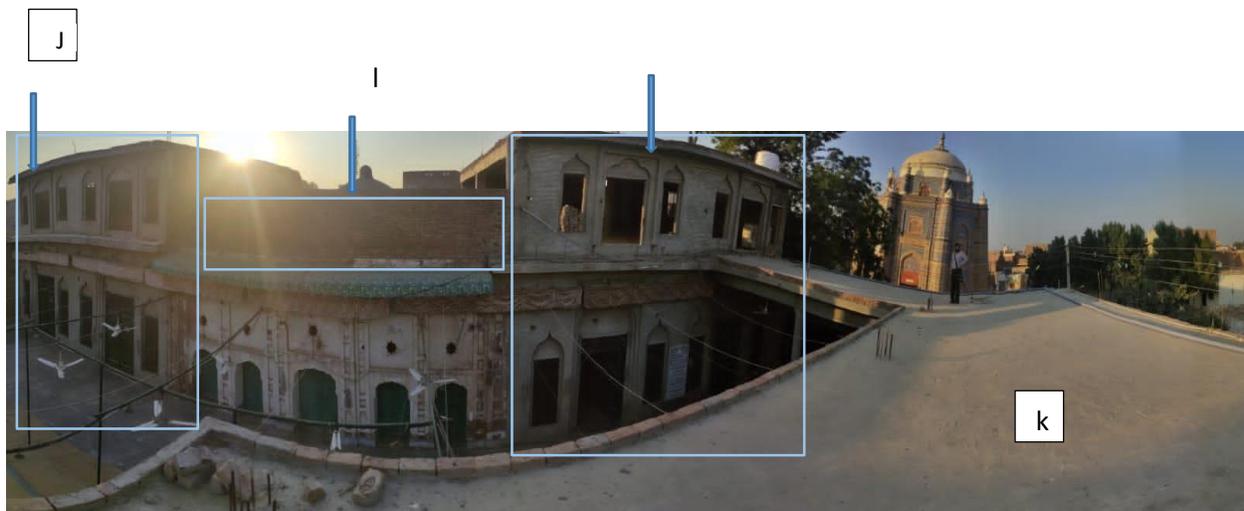
As previously mentioned, the domed prayer hall is divided into three sections, each topped with a dome and connected by arched gateways (Figure 1.8, right), which provide access to the newly added structures on the north and south sides. The change in floor level is evident in Figure 1.10 (left), where only the upper part of the mehrab is visible, while the lower portion is obscured due to the raised floor, which was adjusted to align with the side halls (Figure 1.10, right). This alteration in the floor level has significantly affected the functionality and historical integrity of the mehrab, rendering it unusable as a focal point for the imam during prayers.



**Fig 1.10 West Facing Mehrab (Left) and Interior Arch Way (Right) Source: Author**

Internally, Figure 1.10 (right), part (g), illustrates the domed hall of the historic mosque, which has been connected to two internal halls through the addition of a concrete slab to expand the

prayer space. Part (h) of the same figure shows the internal verandah of the old historic mosque, featuring the richly adorned interior previously discussed and depicted in Figure 1.7. However, the addition of these new structures, as shown in Figure 1.10, was carried out without consultation with experts, causing significant harm to and destruction of the mosque's internal beauty. The most critical concern is the impact these changes have had on the mosque's external visual appeal, particularly within the context of the historic monument complex. While the surrounding monuments have retained their spiritual legacy and visual integrity, the mosque's aesthetic and historical significance have been severely compromised, diminishing its value within the complex.



**Fig 1.11 Panoramic view of the Mosque, New Added Structures (Parti, j, k &l) Source: Author**

The addition of double-story structures, as shown in Figure 1.11, parts (i) and (j), has completely obstructed the view of the mosque from the outside. Standing within the complex, it is now impossible to perceive or appreciate this historic mosque from an external perspective. This demonstrates a complete disregard for the contextual significance of this historical monument, as its visibility and prominence within the complex have been entirely overlooked.

## **5. Wazir Khan Mosque: an overview as a Case Study**

Wazir Khan Mosque is one of the jewels of the architectural heritage of Lahore in Pakistan. The selection of the specific architectural wonder for conservation 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, making it a soul inspiration for many. It has been considered a marvel in the history of religious architecture executed within the heart of Lahore. Located on the western side of Wazir Khan Square. Wazir Khan Mosque complex is the centerpiece of a historic urban ensemble. [2]

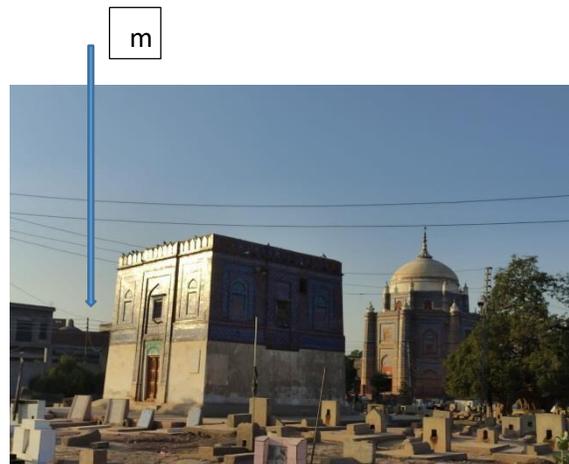
The mosque is built with brick masonry and lime mortar, and generally, the condition of the building fabric of Wazir Khan Mosque is satisfactory. Detailed inspection reveals that the structure of the mosque has been suffering from serious damage due to neglect and lack of maintenance. The structure at Level I shows that the majority of damage is in the form of cracks, subsidence, and leaning. The cracks in the main arches of the main prayer chamber adjacent to the two minarets have a direct relationship with the leaning pattern of the minarets. Although it is not confirmed when these cracks developed, the major restoration phase in 1971-78 noticed these cracks. Rising damp in the walls of level-0 shops and level-I hujras has damaged the surface lime plaster, and in certain locations, it has eroded the lime mortar constituting the masonry work. The intricate and delicate surface embellishments of the mosque are vulnerable to weathering and prone to damage caused by environmental and man-made factors. All the floors in the mosque are made of brick and have a variety of geometrical patterns, particularly in the courtyard and the main prayer chamber. Almost all surface decorations, except the frescoes in the main prayer chamber and entrance portal, are directly exposed to the weather conditions. Inadequate care and maintenance threaten this world-class monument in a variety of ways. A significant amount of natural and man-made damage has already occurred. The project needs to identify all these threats and map the weathering forms and damages to the structure, both at a macro and micro scale. The structural damage that has occurred will be rectified by the repair and stitching together of the masonry fabric. Careful monitoring of the behavior of the building will be mandated thereafter. Pilot restoration initiatives on the various kinds of surface decorations will be carried out first, before expanding these to a larger scale. In a situation where heritage conservation has always been regarded as a non-development sector and facing a lack of resources and expertise, this partnership with the Government provided an opportunity to apply the best practices in urban regeneration and conservation planning in Pakistan [2].

## **6. Suggestions /Recommendations for the Mosque**

It is essential to cultivate knowledge and awareness about historical monuments, as they serve as valuable links to our past and a source of historical learning. Preserving such landmarks in their

original context and true spirit is crucial. The tomb of Sakhi Sultan Shah Ali Akbar has recently been renovated by the archaeology department, which employed experts and trained staff with expertise in historical heritage. Similarly, this historic mosque urgently requires conservation efforts to restore its significance within the complex.

A small but impactful step toward restoration would involve removing the front parapet (Figure 1.11, part "l") located in the center of the mosque's structure, as it obstructs the view of the domes. Once this barrier is removed, the domes—still structurally intact—can be externally restored to their original form and appearance. Additionally, all new structures built within the mosque can be reassessed to ensure the monument's preservation. Notably, conserving the mosque's external elements would require a relatively modest budget while achieving significant results in restoring its historical grandeur.



**Fig 1.12 New Added Parapet (Part m). Source: Author**

The external visual impact of the mosque's domes can still be partially appreciated from the eastern side of the mosque (Figure 1.12, part "m"). However, the decaying condition of certain internal elements, particularly at the arched doorways, requires immediate repair to prevent further deterioration. Conservation efforts should aim to restore each part of the mosque to its original form, preserving the historical legacy of this significant monument.

In the long term, the removal of the newly added double-story structures on the north and east sides of the historic mosque is essential to enhance its visual prominence and restore its contextual integrity. This would allow the mosque to regain its historical grandeur and cultural significance. Furthermore, community knowledge-sharing and training programs are crucial to

fostering awareness and ensuring that such monuments are preserved in their original historical context. Currently, substantial resources have been allocated to constructing new structures within the mosque, yet the care and attention required for maintaining the original elements, such as the domes, are lacking. The deteriorating condition of the two smaller domes, where exposed brickwork is visible due to the decayed plaster, highlights the urgent need for repair to protect the structure. As a sacred space with a rich historical legacy, the mosque must be restored to its original state to the fullest extent possible. Unfortunately, this has been largely neglected, with little effort made to preserve the monument. The archaeology department must take proactive measures to conserve such historical landmarks, demonstrating a commitment to preserving their spiritual and cultural heritage.

## **7. Limitations**

This is a preliminary analysis of the complex, with a specific focus on the evolution of the mosque. The purpose of this analysis is to highlight the importance of preserving these historical sites in their original context. A more detailed and critical examination of the mosque will follow, including architectural drawings that illustrate its structural form, the extent of damage, and the current condition of the mosque. This analysis will consider the mosque's status as both a historical landmark and a living monument that requires attention to ensure its continued significance as a spiritual and historical site for future generations.

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