

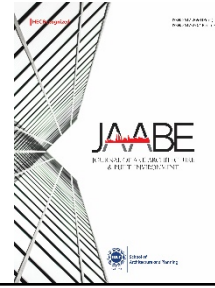
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# Religious Tourism in Lahore: Case Study of Mosque Architecture under the Mughals

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## Abstract

The city of Lahore is well known for both its magnificent architecture and rich cultural legacy. Lahore saw a dramatic transition under the Mughal rule with the building of several famous mosques that continue to draw religious travelers from all over the world. This case study examines the possibilities for religious tourism keeping in view the Mughal era mosques of Lahore, while emphasizing their spiritual appeal and architectural value. The architectural integrity and beauty of these mosques require ongoing preservation and restoration efforts. Religious tourism in Lahore can boost the local economy by creating jobs, generating business revenue, and promoting cultural exchange, thus fostering interfaith dialogue and showcasing the Mughal mosque architecture. On the other hand, sustainable tourism practices, such as waste reduction, water and energy conservation, and responsible tourism behavior can mitigate the negative environmental and community impacts of religious tourism. The study highlights how crucial it is to protect and promote these locations in order to respect the Mughal architectural heritage, maintain religious customs, and improve the city's standing as a center for religious tourism.

**Keywords:** conservation, cultural exchange, restoration, mosque architecture, Mughal era, preservation, religious tourism

## Introduction

Traditionally, tourism has been defined as leisure travel. Although, in recent years, the meaning of this term has broadened to cover any travel outside of one's typical work or residential area. Tourists are frequently drawn to countries because of their climate, culture, or natural beauty (Theobald, 2005). Tourism has become a huge economic sector around the world, with many national economies relying heavily on it. However, tourism must not be viewed solely as a source of fiscal gain and individual leisure. It also

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serves another important function in human life, that is, it is the root of our respect for different cultures (Gupta, [2002](#)).

Pakistan is a vast country with a rich history and culture. Enormous cities, massive mosques, tombs, forts, shrines, temples, sarais, churches, palaces, exquisite paintings and sculptures, and a wide variety of other artistic works, bear witness to a glorious history of civilization in the country (Mughal, [2011](#)). Additionally, it is a living civilization whose customs have direct historical roots. Pakistan is distinctive in this regard. However, despite its potential, tourism in Pakistan has not significantly impacted the society. On the contrary, tourism is already ingrained in people's yearly routines in western nations. Religious tourism is the only form of tourism that truly impacts the Pakistani way of life. Travelers can visit Sufi shrines, mosques, Hindu temples, Sikh gurdwaras, and Buddhist monasteries in Pakistan and learn about the history of one of the world's oldest civilizations (Bora, [2004](#)).

Special interest tourism, which typically refers to pilgrimages made by the adherents of a specific religion to places regarded as holy sites, includes religious travel as a significant component (Blackwell, [2007](#)). Due to their cultural, historical, and religious value, religious sites are frequented by both pilgrims and worshippers, as well as non-religious tourists (Gupta, [2002](#)).

The first type of tourism, stretching to almost the beginning of time, is religious tourism. (Blackwell, [2007](#)). Religious destinations have long played a significant role in local marketing efforts and the economies of the host communities (Bulatović & Stranjančević, [2019](#)). They are also an integral aspect of the cultural landscape. It's difficult to establish a precise explanation of religious tourism and why it exists. Thus, the terms "culture travel" and "religious travel" are used interchangeably. This is due to the fact that the majority of cultural tourists — also known as religious tourists — visit religious sites as part of their travel schedule (Bora, [2004](#)).

Lahore, a city rich in religious variety and history, is home to several mosques from the Mughal era, which are magnificent examples of the architectural brilliance and magnificence of the period. Mughals held power from the early 16<sup>th</sup> century till the mid-18<sup>th</sup> century, with the Mughal Empire being one of the most powerful empires in the history of the Indian

subcontinent. During the height of the Mughal Empire, Lahore played a pivotal role and numerous impressive mosques were added to the cityscape.

### **Methodology**

The study focuses on the Mughal era mosque architecture in Lahore, aiming to understand its historical, cultural, and architectural significance. It involves archival research, physical visits, interviews with local historians, religious leaders, and tourism officials, and focus groups with tourists and visitors. The aim is to understand their experiences, motivations, and perceptions of the mosque architecture, as well as the factors influencing their decision to visit these mosques. The study also seeks to assess their satisfaction with the tourism infrastructure and architectural heritage of these mosques.

### **Aims and Objectives**

1. To examine the religious tourism potential of Lahore, Pakistan with an emphasis on the Mughal era mosque architecture, explicating its historical, cultural and aesthetic worth.
2. To assess the current state of the preservation and conservation efforts for Mughal mosques in Lahore.
3. To identify the challenges and opportunities for promoting sustainable tourism.
4. To develop recommendations for enhancing the religious tourism experience in Lahore.

### **Historical Background**

Lahore has a rich cultural life, a magnificent architectural and urban legacy, and a long and proud past (Leonard, [1986](#)). Lahore, once a dependency of Lalit Aditya, King of Kashmir, may have been the capital of a Rajput state, but its pre-Islamic history is nebulous (Latif, [1982](#)). Mahmud of Ghazna, the son of Sebuktigin, launched his seventeen incursions into the subcontinent in the latter half of the 10<sup>th</sup> century AD (Wheeler, [1950](#)). Due to these military operations, Muslim dominance in Punjab expanded. Eventually, the Ghazanvids established Lahore as their first capital. Ghazanvids were later replaced by Ghaurids.

Many secular and religious buildings were constructed in Lahore before the arrival of the Mughals. However, most of these buildings have not survived due to the effects of time. Indeed, they have completely

disappeared. Mughal monuments have, nonetheless, partially survived. The Mughals, including emperors Akbar, Jahangir, Shah Jahan, and Aurangzeb, were patrons of arts and architecture. They left a lasting legacy of architectural wonders, including mosques. For thirteen years, the third Mughal emperor Akbar made Lahore his capital. Hence, the Akbari Sarai Mosque of Jahangir's tomb can be used as a starting point when discussing the mosque architecture of Lahore during the Mughal era. This mosque was constructed along what is now known as the Grand Trunk Road and named after the Mughal emperor Akbar (Latif, [1982](#)). It was constructed using a traditional design. After Akbar, his wife Maryam Zamani constructed a mosque known as the Begum Shahi or Maryam Zamani mosque during the reign of Jahangir. This pattern for mosque construction in Lahore eventually led to the construction of the Badshahi mosque (Baqir, [1984](#)). Mughal mosques are famous for their historical and cultural significance and are among the largest and most iconic landmarks in Lahore, Pakistan. These mosques are a symbol of Mughal architecture and Islamic heritage, attracting visitors from all over the world.

### **Mosque Architecture of Lahore**

Religious tourism of Lahore, with a focus on mosque architecture under the Mughals, provides a unique opportunity to explore the intersection of history, culture, and religion. The mosques in Lahore are not just architectural marvels but also living symbols of the city's rich heritage and the enduring legacy of the Mughal Empire. Mughal mosque architecture in Lahore is characterized by a harmonious fusion of Persian and Indian design elements, featuring intricate geometric patterns, elegant calligraphy, and the use of high-quality materials including marble and sandstone (Arif & Panakkal, [2023](#)). These mosques not only serve as places of worship but also stand as cultural and historical landmarks, attracting tourists and visitors from around the world. They continue to be a source of pride for the people of Lahore and are recognized for their contribution to the city's rich architectural and cultural heritage.

#### **Akbari Sarai Mosque**

This mosque is located in the middle of the cell rows of the western side in the Akbari Sarai of Jahangir's tomb at Lahore. It was built originally during the reign of Islam Shah Suri. Later on, it was completely renovated at the time of the construction of Jahangir's tomb (Latif, [1956](#)).

### ***Architectural Description***

It is a rectangular building which takes an oblong shape built on a high platform. Internally, the prayer chamber is divided into three compartments by means of lateral arches. In the western wall of the prayer chamber, a *mehrab* has been created in the form of a recessed arch (Abbasova & Abbasov, [2021](#)). The prayer chamber is approached through three arch openings on the eastern side. Each is marked by a rectangular frame, which shows a combination of red sandstone and white marble. In front of the prayer chamber, there is a courtyard having an ablution tank with a fountain, which is definitely a creation of the Mughal period. The arches of the Sarai Mosque mark a technically clear development. Its curves become gentle and lenient as compared to the Tughlaq mosque in Pak Patan and Depalpur. It demonstrates the cumulative experience of architects from generation to generation and also shows foreign influences (Khan, [1991](#)).

#### **Figure 1**

*Facade of the Akbari Sarai Mosque*



## Figure 2

*Front Elevation of the Akbari Sarai Mosque*



## Maryam Zamani Mosque

This mosque is situated inside the Masti gate, nearby the Lahore Fort, on its eastern side. It was built in 1025 AH/1616 AD by Maryam Zamani, mother of the Mughal emperor Jahangir. Henceforth, it is known after her as the Begum Shahi Mosque or Maryam Zamani Mosque (Baqir, [1984](#)).

### *Architectural Description*

This mosque was built originally in the manner of an Islamic Mosque. However, both technically and architecturally, it exhibits remarkable advantages in both the shape of the mosque and the art of the building. It has a rectangular, single aisled, prayer chamber which occupies the western half of the original plan of the mosque. This sanctuary or prayer chamber is divided into five compartments and each is interlinked by lateral arches (Awan et al., [2014](#)). On the eastern side through the courtyard (sehn), the mosque chamber is approached through five arches, the central one being larger than the flanks. On each corner of the prayer chamber there is a pavilion, a square structure which has four arch openings roofed or crowned with cupolas. Each cupola is placed on an octagonal drum. This feature (pavilion) appeared for the first time in Maryam Zamani Mosque. This is a

Hindu architecture element, which did not appear before the Begum Shahi Mosque (Awan et al., [2014](#)).

The second important feature which appeared for the first time in the Muslim architecture of Lahore in general, and particularly in Begum Shahi Mosque, is the four-centered arch in its full-fledged form. Each compartment of the prayer chamber is roofed with a dome. This is also a new feature. The central compartment or dome invites special attention because it is a double dome in its appearance. It is a device introduced in Lahore during Jahangir's reign. So far, its origin is concerned, it depicts the influence of Iranian architecture. Since then, double dome has become a very important feature of Muslim architecture, especially of the mosque architecture in Lahore. Besides, the earliest domical ceiling of this mosque, with attributes of Allah inscribed in Naskh, later on appeared on the cenotaph of Jahangir's tomb at Shahdhara, Lahore. As far as its origin is concerned, it also depicts the influence of Iranian architecture. Another very important feature of this mosque is its decoration. The interior of the mosque is decorated with fresco paintings. Fresco is a native tradition which was applied for the first time in the mosque architecture of Lahore in the Maryam Zamani Mosque. Seemingly, Maryam Zamani Mosque—reflects some experimentation (Khan, [1991](#)).

### **Figure 3**

*Double Domes of the Maryam Zamani Mosque*





**Figure 4***Central Main Arch of the Maryam Zamani Mosque***Moti Masjid or Pearl Mosque**

Moti Masjid or Pearl Mosque is located to the western side of the Maktab Khana of Lahore Fort. Originally, the mosque was built during Jahangir's reign. However, the present structure was renovated and modified during Shah Jahan's period. This mosque is known for its elegant white marble construction and beautiful floral motifs (Latif, [1956](#)).

***Architectural Description***

The mosque was entirely built with white marble and it shines in the sun like a pearl, therefore, it is called Pearl Mosque or Moti Masjid. Its built structure follows the traditional pattern as it is divided into two parts, that is, the prayer chamber and the courtyard. Its prayer chamber consists of two deep aisles divided by engrailed arches into ten compartments or bays. All compartments stand on the piers, whereas the façade of the mosque shows five arched openings, the central being larger than the flanks (Sheikh, [2018](#)). The outline of the central arch is simple whereas the flanks show cusps, therefore, these arches are known as cusped arches. The prayer chamber is roofed with three domes over the eastern aisle, one over the central compartment and the other on the extreme ends on both sides. The rest of the mosque is vaulted. Internally, the western wall has a recessed mehrab. Before each compartment there is a blind arch on the western wall. This is regarded as a new feature in Mughal mosques. Also, the cusps and the engrailed designs in the line of arches are new devices which appeared for

the first time in the history of mosque architecture in Lahore. Bulbous domes are applied on the roof of the prayer chamber. The central one is larger than the flanks (Sheikh, [2018](#)). The central dome is placed on a raised square platform and stands on a circular drum, whereas the other two domes are erected only on circular drums and do not have a raised platform. Marble has been used extensively. Pearl mosque also shows Pietra dura work or inlay work with semi-precious stones in the marble. Pietra dura work appeared for the first time in the history of mosque architecture in Lahore in Pearl Mosque or Moti Masjid (Khan, [1991](#)).

**Figure 5**

*Cusped Arches of the Prayer Hall of Moti Masjid/Pearl Mosque*



**Figure 6**

*Facade of the Pearl Mosque*



## Wazir Khan Mosque

Wazir Khan mosque was built during Shah Jahan's reign in 1634 AD by the then governor of Lahore Hakeem Ilmuddin Ansari, who is better known by the name Wazir Khan. It is situated in the heart of the old city. It is well renowned for its intricate frescoes and tile work, making it a masterpiece of Mughal architecture (Khan, [1991](#)).

### *Architectural Description*

The mosque structure is constructed on a raised platform approached by a flight of six steps paved with red sandstone. This mosque follows the typical plan of mosques. Towards the west there is a sanctuary/prayer chamber. While, towards the east there is a courtyard covered on three sides by small apartments with entrances through arched doorways. Originally, the courtyard of the mosque was approached through southern and eastern gateways (Bilal & Parvez, [2017](#)). However, the eastern gateway of the mosque is its main gateway which is itself a very imposing building. It is, in fact, a vestibule covered with a high bulbous double dome, the crest of which shows a finial. The external body of its dome is also reverted with colored tiles. The square chamber vestibule leads to a spacious courtyard which is paved with finely dressed brick forming various geometrical designs (Walli Ullah, [1964](#)). There is also a row of thirty-four apartments on the east, south, and north of the courtyard, accessed through five arch openings. The central arch is bigger and higher than the flanks. The prayer hall is confined to a single aisle building divided into five compartments. Each compartment is roofed with a double dome which are five in number. The central dome is larger than the flanks. The central archway of the façade is placed within a high frame which is much more prominent than the rest of the building. The interior of the prayer chamber is decorated with fresco paintings showing geometrical and floral designs. On the four corners of the mosque, there are four three-storey octagonal minarets. The central frame of the facade shows two octagonal pavilions on each side. The interior of the prayer chamber of Wazir Khan Mosque is built on the pattern of the interior of Maryam Zamani Mosque. The pavilions on the four corners of the Maryam Zamani Mosque have been replaced by octagonal minarets in the Wazir Khan Mosque. These pavilions are about 100ft high and stand on square platforms. They are divided into three parts, namely the base, the shaft, and the pavilion (Latif, [1956](#)).

Wazir Khan mosque clearly marks a new development, not only regarding decoration but also in its structural setting. Another prominent feature of this mosque regarding decoration is its mosaic work. The dominant colors in mosaic decoration include blue, yellow, and red. This tradition was borrowed from Iran during the Mughal period. Likewise, the concept of minaret was borrowed from the Persian architecture (Chishti, 1870).

**Figure 7**

*Richly Embellished Muqarna with Fresco*



**Figure 8**

*Facade of the Wazir Khan Mosque*



## Badshahi Mosque

Badshahi mosque was built by Emperor Aurangzeb in 1674 AD / 1084 AH. This is one of the largest mosques in the world. It's known for its symmetrical design and beautiful white marble inlay work. The tradition set by the Badshahi mosque has been followed in the subsequent period till today. Indeed, this mosque has served as a model for the subsequent mosque architecture in Pakistan. This marvelous mosque is, therefore, also called the imperial mosque. It is situated on a raised or high platform, 100 ft. above the ground level, opposite to the Alamgiri gate of the Lahore Fort (Khan, [1991](#)).

### *Architectural Description*

It also follows the traditional pattern with a prayer chamber on the western side and a courtyard on the eastern side. The prayer chamber has two deep aisles consisting of different compartments connected by the means of lateral arches having cusped and engrailed designs (Hussain & Juan, [2023](#); Hussain & Juan, [2023](#)). The prayer chamber is approached through eleven arches, the central arch being larger than the flanks. The central arch is framed in a rectangular shape and the side ones or flanks also show the outline of a rectangular frame achieved by inserting the marble in the surface of red sandstone. The roof of the prayer chamber is vaulted and also shows the tradition of having three domes (Awan et al., [2014](#)). These double domes are bulbous in shape. Internally, the prayer chamber is decorated with fresco paintings showing different floral and geometrical designs. It also shows the relief carving and stucco ornamentation. There are four octagonal minarets on each corner of the courtyard. The minarets of the prayer chamber are lower in height as compared to the courtyard minarets. Badshahi mosque is the first mosque with eight minarets. This is the best and finest example of an architectural device termed as semetry or jawab, later observed in all Mughal monuments (Chishti, [1870](#)).

The courtyard is square in shape. In the middle of the courtyard there is a tank of water for ablution. There are three gateways, one each on the eastern, northern, and southern side. The main entrance is on the eastern side which is itself an imposing and splendid building in the form of a large vestibule which has three storeys, several pavilions, rooms, and corridors. The central archway is crowned by a half dome and is accelerated with an engrailed arch. The surface is decorated with panels in red sandstone lined

with marble. The gateway is approached by twenty-two steps. The grand mosque is ornamented by relief carving with marble on the surface of red sandstone, with fresco painting showing different geometrical and floral designs and stucco ornamentation inside the chamber. It can be said that the Badshahi mosque is a well-proportioned, well-articulated, and well-balanced building (Walli Ullah, [1962](#)).

**Figure 9**

*Exterior View of the Main Prayer Chamber*



**Figure 10**

*Interior View of the Badshahi Mosque*



## Religious Significance and Tourism Impact

These mosques continue to be active places of worship and hold religious significance for the local Muslim community in Lahore. They also attract pilgrims and tourists interested in exploring the cultural and architectural heritage of the region. The mosques in Lahore are popular tourist attractions, drawing both domestic and international visitors. Their historical and architectural significance contributes to the cultural and economic prosperity of Lahore. The mosque architecture of Lahore reflects the city's historical, cultural, and religious identity. It serves as a testament to the harmonious synthesis of Persian and Indian architectural styles under Mughal rule. Efforts to preserve and maintain these architectural treasures are essential to ensure their longevity and cultural value. Conservation projects often involve the restoration of decorative elements, addressing structural issues, and improving visitor facilities.

## Recommendations

Based on the findings of the current case study, it is recommended that concerted efforts be made to support the preservation and restoration initiatives for these mosques. This should include raising awareness, securing necessary funding, and involving local and international stakeholders.

## Cultural Exchange and Education

Promoting educational programs and cultural exchanges at these sites can further enhance the tourist experience. These initiatives can provide visitors with a deeper understanding of the religious and historical significance of these mosques.

## Conclusion

The study of religious tourism in Lahore, particularly focusing on mosque architecture under the Mughals, reveals the complicated interaction between history, culture, and heritage tourism. Mosques such as the Badshahi mosque, Wazir Khan Mosque, and Moti Masjid or Pearl Mosque are examples of architectural marvels that combine artistic creativity, religious devotion, and historical grandeur to provide a window into the past. These locations provide both visitors and residents with a genuine and spiritual experience; they are more than simply artefacts from a bygone era — they are vibrant representations of Lahore's cultural character. The

economy of Lahore is greatly impacted by religious tourism which creates opportunities for job creation. However, these historical gems must be preserved and conserved since their delicate creative and architectural legacy needs constant upkeep, repair, and awareness-raising. The results also emphasize the significance of religious and cultural education in enriching tourist experiences and ensuring that Mughal heritage stays accessible to and is enjoyed by future generations. The study thus emphasizes these priceless sites' sustained maintenance and promotion.

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