The Role of Local Artisans in the Architecture and Ornamentation of Masjid Darkhana Wali, Multan

Arfan Javaid Ansari[1], Muhammad Naeem Khalid[2], Alifia Taha[3], Muhammad Ramzan Ansari[4], Sunera Imtiaz[5]

[1]Department of Interior Design, Institute for Art & Culture, Raiwind Road, Lahore, Pakistan
[2]Department of Architecture, University of Engineering & Technology, Lahore, Pakistan
[3]Department of Architecture, Karachi University, Pakistan
[4]Principal Architect, S.A Design Studio, Multan, Pakistan
[5]Department of Building and Architectural Engineering, Bahauddin Zakariya University, Multan, Pakistan

Abstract: Islamic architecture is ornamented and filled with symbols. The early mosques were very simple and plain, and emphasis lay on collective worship. In time, however, mosque architecture developed to integrate a great variety of ornament, such as geometric patterns, arabesque motifs, calligraphy, and elaborate surface decoration. The added elements not only added to the beauty of the religious structures, but also represented to Islamic believers the concept of paradise and the spiritual attributes of Islamic beliefs. A rich and unique language of architectural and decorative motifs thus evolved and spread in the Islamic world. Multan is a city with an impressive architectural and cultural heritage, and there are many historical sites there, including clock towers, city gates, tombs, and mosques, which reflect the rich architectural heritage of the region. In spite of this rich heritage, it seems that there is little documented research available on Darkhana Wali Masjid, which is situated in the walled city of Multan. This current research will fill this void and focus on the architectural character, decoration, construction process, and the materials and craft of the mosque. In this research, the architectural form and artistic features of Darkhana Wali Masjid have been investigated, in particular the rich decoration of the architectural elements. It also delves into the building techniques and materials employed, as well as the role and contribution played by local skilled craftspeople in building and ornamenting it. The traditional knowledge and workmanship are highlighted as being a key to the distinctive architecture of the mosque. The method of research used is the field documentation method, which is carried out by physical survey, photo documentation, and architectural mapping of the mosque. Some of the craftsmen associated with the construction, maintenance, and decoration of the mosque were also interviewed, and discussions were held with the residents, who are qualified for this work. The study is designed to improve the knowledge of Darkhana Wali Masjid regarding its architecture, while introducing the local knowledge about it. The study will also prove to be an important contribution to the study of traditional craftsmanship of Multan architecture.

Keywords: Islamic Architecture, Darkhana Wali Masjid, Architectural Heritage, Mosque Architecture, Traditional Craftsmanship, Local Craftsmen, Construction Techniques, Walled City of Multan, Cultural Heritage, Architectural Documentation.
Email: arfanarch@usp.ed.pk

1. Introduction

A mosque (also known as a masjid) is a sacred place for Muslims, where they go to pray five times a day. In the early days of the Islamic faith in the Arab area, mosques were built as basic and service-oriented buildings. The religion can be understood better if we take into consideration the imaginative and symbolic rather than the cognitive element [1]. Over time, they evolved into intricate, complex, and ornate geometric designs, arabesque and calligraphy designs representing paradise and the beauty of the deities. These elements expressed a pictorial "code" typical of Islamic art and architecture, which the Muslim rulers adopted. Religious architectural historians have seen the edifices as the best way to perform ethnographic study due to representing an unbiased temporal record of a group of religious people [2]. Prayers are offered in four different situations, i.e., individually or alone, in a gathering on Friday, in a gathering at the time of Eid festivals (twice a year), and in an international gathering at the time of hajj in Makkah-al-Mukarma, Saudi Arabia, once a year [3-4].

Mosque architecture has evolved over centuries, reflecting the cultural, political, and technological developments of Islamic civilizations. Different regions developed distinctive architectural styles, including hypostyle, Ottoman, and Indo-Islamic traditions [5]. Islam came to the subcontinent in 711CE when the Umayyad army commander Muhammad Bin Qasim conquered Raja Dahir, the ruler of Sindh at that time. Although there were several attempts by the Muslim Arab Army to conquer the northwestern region of the Indus Valley (Kashmir to the Arabian Sea), it was only Muhammad Bin Qasim who succeeded [6]. The architectural identity of a mosque is expressed through elements such as the Mihrab, Minbar, dome, minarets, courtyard, arches, and prayer hall. These features combine functional requirements with aesthetic and symbolic values [7]. In Pakistan, an Islamic republic, the role of mosques is very special and significant as they have spiritual, educational, and cultural value. The most prominent Islamic buildings in the Indian subcontinent were built by Mughal Emperors. Mughal builders designed the buildings following Hindu and Persian architecture. One of the prominent architectural features of the Mughal Period was the use of mosaics made with colored stones or glazed tiles. The features used in Mughal architecture that inspired the whole world were overlapping arches in abundance, tall minarets, domes in Persian style, and large vaulted roofs. Examples of grand Mosques built in this period are Moti/Pearl Mosque, Maryam Zamani Mosque, Wazir Khan Mosque, and Badshahi.

Mosque and Golden Mosque [6]. Under the tutelage of the Sufi saintly personalities, the city of

Multan, which is run by non-Muslims, emerged as another center of Islamic education and devotion. The town of Multan has developed Islamic architecture, as these saints were also responsible for the propagation of Islam and the construction of mosques, madrasas, etc. Numerous are the tombs and mosques of the city, some of which are highly decorated and symbolic, like the tombs of Shah Rukn-e-Alam, Bahauddin Zakariya, Shahi Eid Gah Masjid, Masjid Wali Muhammad, Shah Shams Tabrez and Shah Yusuf Gardez, and Masjid Phool hat Chowk Bazaar, Masjid Khuddaka near Chowk Fawara, Masjid Nawaban Wali and Masjid Darkhana Wali inside Bohar Gate. They are presented upright and are a testament to the Cultural richness of Multan and the popularisation of Islamic art and architecture in the region.



Figure 1: Aerial View of Darkhana Wali Masjid, Located in the Densely Populated Area. Source: Author

In the busy area of Bohar Gate, Multan, Masjid Darkhana Wali is an important landmark in the cultural and historical background of Multan. The mosque is located in the center of the walled city, making it a symbol of the region's rich cultural heritage and traditional skills.



Figure 2: Location of Darkhana Wali Masjid, Located Within the Bahar Gate. Source: Google Maps, accessed on 20-Aug-2026

It is a fine product of hand-made art and architectural excellence, and was created by the skill and dedication of well-known artisans, such as Ustad Hafiz Mohkim Din, Ustad Hafiz Muhammad Anwar, Ustad Mian Hayat Ullah, Mian Habibullah, Ustad Haji Mashkoor Hussain, Ustad Alam and Muhib Hussain, and their students and colleagues. Most of them were skilled and unskilled, and were residents and neighbourhood people of the walled city of Multan. The mosque was constructed more than 120 years ago (Mosque Mutwalli, Muhammad Akhtar) and over the years has been refurbished to preserve its artistic style and integrity, and its historical and spiritual value.

2. Research Methodology

Field-based research methodology has been used to study the architectural, artistic, constructional, and cultural features of Darkhana Wali Masjid in the walled city of Multan, adopting a qualitative approach. The approach to the research is primarily direct visits to the site, observation, a photographic record, and interviews with local people and craftsmen. The techniques used were chosen to provide a complete understanding of the architectural elements of the mosque and its historical and cultural significance in the local community.

There were several site visits made, and the exterior and interior architectural features of the mosque were studied and recorded. The spatial organisation, the prayer hall, the dome, the

mechrab, the arches, the ablution areas, the hujra, and the surfaces to be ornamented are recorded by direct observation, along with the tilework and the woodwork, etc. The details of condition, proportions, patterns, materials, and craftsmanship were focused on throughout the building. Field observations were also employed to establish how the mosque was built and the connection of the mosque with the urban context. Photographs of different parts of the mosque were also taken during the site visits to record the architectural elements in the mosque. General and specific photographs of the ornamental features were taken and noted, including the geometric patterns, vegetal decoration, calligraphy, Multani blue tile work, arches, carved wood, and other surface decorations. The architectural analysis was used as evidence and a visual record in the form of photographic documentation. The information regarding the history of the mosque, usage, cultural importance, changes, and maintenance was gained through semi-structured interviews and informal conversations with community members and people who use the mosque. Local knowledge was respected as a source of information on the building that does not appear in published literature or formal archives and is of particular value in these situations. The residents' information was analyzed and correlated to look for similarities in historical and cultural stories. Interviews were conducted with local artisans and with people who are knowledgeable about the traditional building and decorative techniques whenever possible. The interviews were conducted on the materials, tools, methods, and craftsmanship of the architectural elements that are used in the construction of the mosque. Traditional skills in tilework, gypsum decoration, wood carving, etc., and other decorative skills were given special attention. The craftsmen's knowledge gave valuable insight into the technical process and skills of the construction and maintenance of the mosque. Observations in the field, photographs, and interviews were collected and systematically organised and analysed by the following main themes: architectural style, spatial organisation, construction techniques, materials, ornamentation, craftsmanship, and social function. The results from various sources were compared for the sake of reliability of observations and to get a comprehensive interpretation of the mosque.

The research aims to record Darkhana Wali Masjid as an architectural monument and cultural artefact in its living condition by the field-based method. Understanding and conservation of the architecture of Multan is another important aspect of the approach.

Local knowledge and traditional craftsmanship are highlighted.

3. Architecture of Masjid Darkhana Wali

A mosque is an important building type in Islamic architecture, serving as a sacred place for Muslims to perform daily prayers and religious activities. It also promotes spiritual reflection, unity, and collective worship [8] (Atmaca & Gedik, 2023). The construction of this mosque is an architectural marvel that stands on a raised plinth, which symbolizes a high place and the elevation of Islam. It's small in scale, but it has a sense of monumentality and sacredness in an urban context. In the decoration of the mosque as well, the Mughal and Persian character dominates in terms of the colors, the shape of the stucco, and the intricacy of the decoration on the surfaces of the mosque. Master craftsmen (Reference) conceptualised the design from the idea to execution. Normally, the chief Ustad (who had no training in architecture) was the designer and the builder in the Middle East and India. The prayer hall is rectangular with three equal bays with shallow domes over each of them supported by a squinch. The central dome is dominant externally, while the two side domes are not visible externally. Two chatai (Line) sized spaces can be used in the internal spatial layout for some 40 worshippers.

The pendentives are a joint between the square bay and the circular bottom of each dome that is supported by the very massive load-bearing brick masonry walls. They are employed as horizontal articulation of the surface of the walls and provide vertical emphasis, which is characteristic of Indo-Islamic mosque architecture. The use of pressed bricks of different module sizes is an indication of the economic use of materials and precision of the craft.

It is a symbolic reminder of the direction of prayer (the Qibla wall) and aids the mind to focus on the direction of Mecca, likewise a thickened masonry wall. In reference to the Wazir Khan Mosque, the arched entrance is ornamented with floral design patterns and artistic calligraphy [6]. The facade is broken up by three pointed arch doorways. Two narrow oriels under the axis domes symmetrically flank the central entrance, replacing it with a wide entrance. This is a deliberate design choice to take account of the local climate and so helps to increase the amount of thermal insulation of the outer walls, which is achieved by eliminating fenestration. Passive ventilation is allowed by a small clerestory ventilator.



Figure 3: Main Hall Exterior of Darkhana Wali Masjid. Source: Author

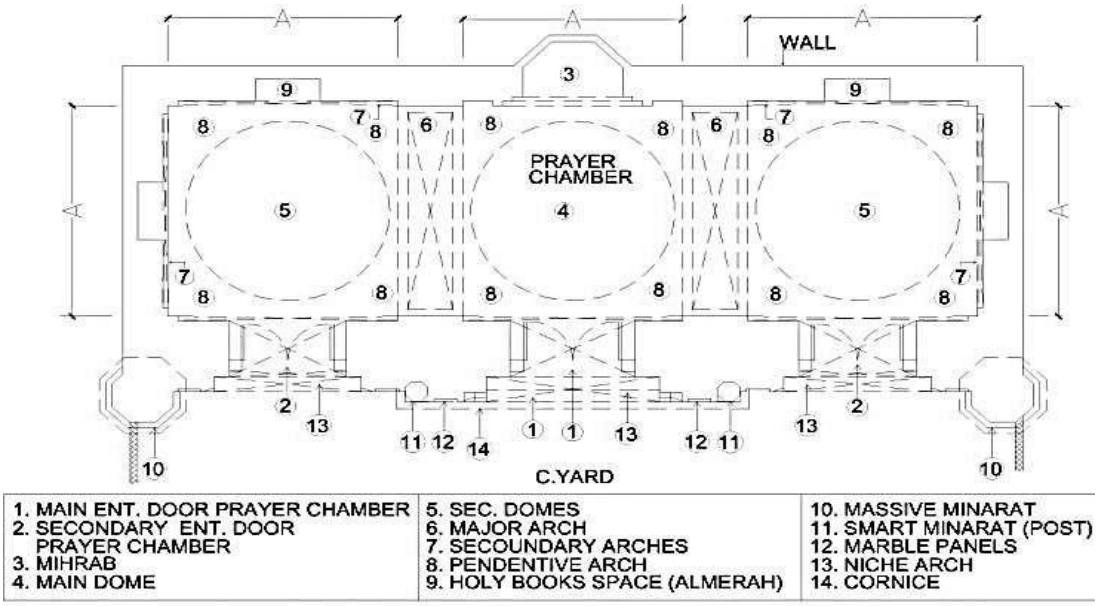


Figure 4: Plan of Darkhana Wali Masjid showing entrances, domes, and other Details. Source: Author

The mosque has a covered prayer area (masala), an open sahn (courtyard area) for the overflow congregation, a wudu (ablution) area, and sanitary facilities on the outside of the building. The mosque is helped out monetarily by a corner stand. The water from an old deep masonry-lined well, previously used for communal purposes and "ablution", is now provided by an

Electric pump. On the upper level there is a hujrah (private chamber) for the imam, which means that it is separated in space from the other worship space.

4. Ornamental Work

Ornamentation plays an important role in Islamic Architecture in terms of decoration as well as symbolism. It may be broadly classified into 3 main groups – geometric patterns, vegetal motifs (arabesque), and Islamic calligraphy. Calligraphy is used as part of religious architecture, where it is the most frequent and is related to the holy text of the Qur'an and the divine word.

Islamic architecture uses geometric ornamentation, which is based on mathematical principles, and is described by the repeated and interlocking nature of the ornament, which is expressed in polyforms like triangles, squares, hexagons, stars, etc. They tend to be part of intricate tessellations, illustrating unity, order, and the infinite possibilities of creation. The geometricity and symmetry of the design elements that are used in both the precise and symmetrical nature of the design, not only add to the beauty of the architectural surface but also bear deeper philosophical meaning that is in linkage with Islamic cosmology.



Figure 5: Decorative Geometric Patterns of Darkhana Wali Masjid at entrance Wall Base. Source: Author

These Cond typology, arabesque or vegetal ornamentation, are taken from the stylized representation of the natural world. The perpetually flowing patterns of fruits, vines, leaves, scrolls of flowers, and whole plants are presented. These are intended to convey the immutability and harmony of nature, and the Divine order in the context of Islamic theology. Arabesque patterns have a dynamic organic quality in the borders, panels, and architectural friezes. The

location of this on the wall.



Figure 6: Arabesque (Sketch) of Darkhana Wali Masjid Crafted by the Ustads. Source: Author



Figure 7: Arabesque (Vegetal Motif) of Darkhana Wali Masjid Crafted by the Ustads. Source: Author

The third and most revered art form is Islamic calligraphy. Calligraphy can be inscribed with verses from the Quran or sacred phrases and can be used to visually express worship as well. It is normally constructed on domes, mihrabs, arches, and walls to harmonize with other decorative elements, and to create an atmosphere of the spirit of the area. Script is well thought-out to fit the

Architectural composition, and well designed and executed in detail.



Figure 8: Calligraphic Impressions of Darkhana Wali Masjid. Source: Author

In the elevation of masjid Dhrakhanda, all three types of ornamentation – geometric, vegetal, and calligraphic – are used. They contribute to the complexity of the architecture and symbolize and exemplify the principles of Islamic art, such as abstraction, symbolism, and spirituality, which are important in its artistic presentations. Some of the artworks from the combined art and the masjid being studied are shown below.

5. Blue Tile Work Main Entrance of Prayer Chamber

The theme of blue tile work is most typical of the facade of the prayer chamber of the mosque, and can be divided into three decorative zones. Two types of blue tiles are used: the first is dark blue tiles, which are handmade and ornamented in a traditional Multan style; and the second is decorative blue tiles, the patterns and flowers on which are handcrafted. The second type are hand-made geometric clay tiles which were finished in a sky blue colour, which were manufactured by machines rather than by hand. It is worth mentioning that the ceramic tiles manufactured by machines and applied to the facade surfaces of the mosque and the interior surfaces are not part of the architectural design of the mosque, but are added after the completion of the mosque. The latter additions are more historical/artistic, whereas the former additions are more contemporary and are not as significant. It is decorated with blue tile panels with the names of Allah arranged rhythmically around the façade. They are set into the geometric tracery windows (jali work) that contributes to the depth and spiritual ambience of this building.



Figure 9: Flowerily Handmade Panels of Blue Tiles of Darkhana Wali Masjid. Source: Author

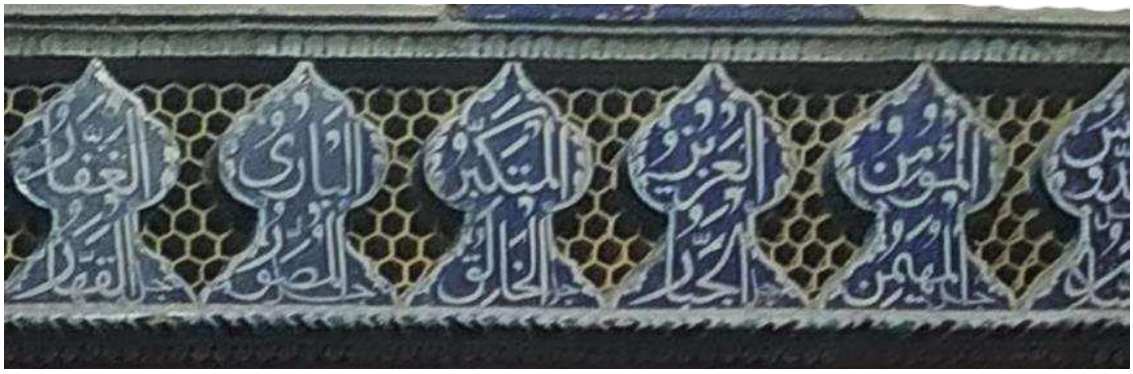


Figure 10: Blue Tiles Series Panels of Allah (SWT) Names with Geometric Tracery Window of Darkhana Wali Masjid. Source: Author



Figure 11: Blue Tiles Series of Flowerily Panels with Geometric Tracery of Darkhana Wali Masjid. Source: Author

6. Carving work in Clay

A focal point in Islamic religious architecture, which is nicely decorated with Multani tile work is called Mehbar niche. The scalloped arch (muqarnas-style frame) is carved in a warm terracotta colour, which nicely contrasts with the numerous blue and turquoise tile mosaics found in the niche interior. On the inside, it is divided into three pointed arches, with each of them having Arabic calligraphy inscriptions, particularly the names of Allah, carved in deep cobalt blue tiles.



Figure 12: Mihrab Ornamentation in Clay work and Multani Tilework of Darkhana Wali Masjid. Source: Author

The background is filled with floral motifs and vegetal designs, typical of the Persian and Mughal influence. The overall design is meant to convey a sense of sacredness and beauty, and to emphasize the importance of the Mehrab. In traditional Islamic ornament, examples of the sophisticated use of geometry, script and nature are hand glazed tiles, calligraphic panels and the use of symmetry.

7. Prayer Chamber Exterior

A good example of great craftsmanship and architectural richness is the facade of the main prayer chamber. The east façade is skillfully designed and adorned with the traditional Multani blue tile-work and is divided into three distinct entrance bays which are artistically designed. The side entrances on the north and south are smaller in size and in scale, and the minarets flanking them are large, whereas the central entrance is large in scale and size and the side entrances have

slender minarets. The small side minarets balance with the large ones and the whole elevation has a sense of grandeur.



Figure 13: Ornamentation in Clay work and Multani Tilework of Darkhana Wali Masjid Entrance. Source: Author

The main entrance portal is made up of alternating square and rectangular tile panels decorated with marble in floral designs, and topped by a frieze of Qur'anic calligraphy. The convex and concave Shikarpuri style glasswork, along with several foils and blue tile work form a niche of particular ornamentation, which is recessed into the wall surface, a central niche. Hand glazed Multan tiles have been used to decorate the adjoining niches, which reflect traditional techniques.





Figure 14: Ornamentation in Clay work and Multani Tilework of Darkhana Wali Masjid Entrance. Source: Author

The contrasting texture of the terracotta red, carved and hand-pressed clay tiles in the central panel to the multifoil arches, which are set in two parallel bands on either side of the enclosing railing, are a remarkable feature which enhances the overall composition. A parapet-like crowning element at the roofline is made up of a circular band of blue glazed tile "golas" and a calligraphic mural panel (above). The solid Sheesham wood doors have enhanced with artistic embellishments and hand-carved with traditional Multani‘ munawat' designs, resulting in a visually appealing and a timeless entrance that adds to the traditional woodworking skills of Multan.

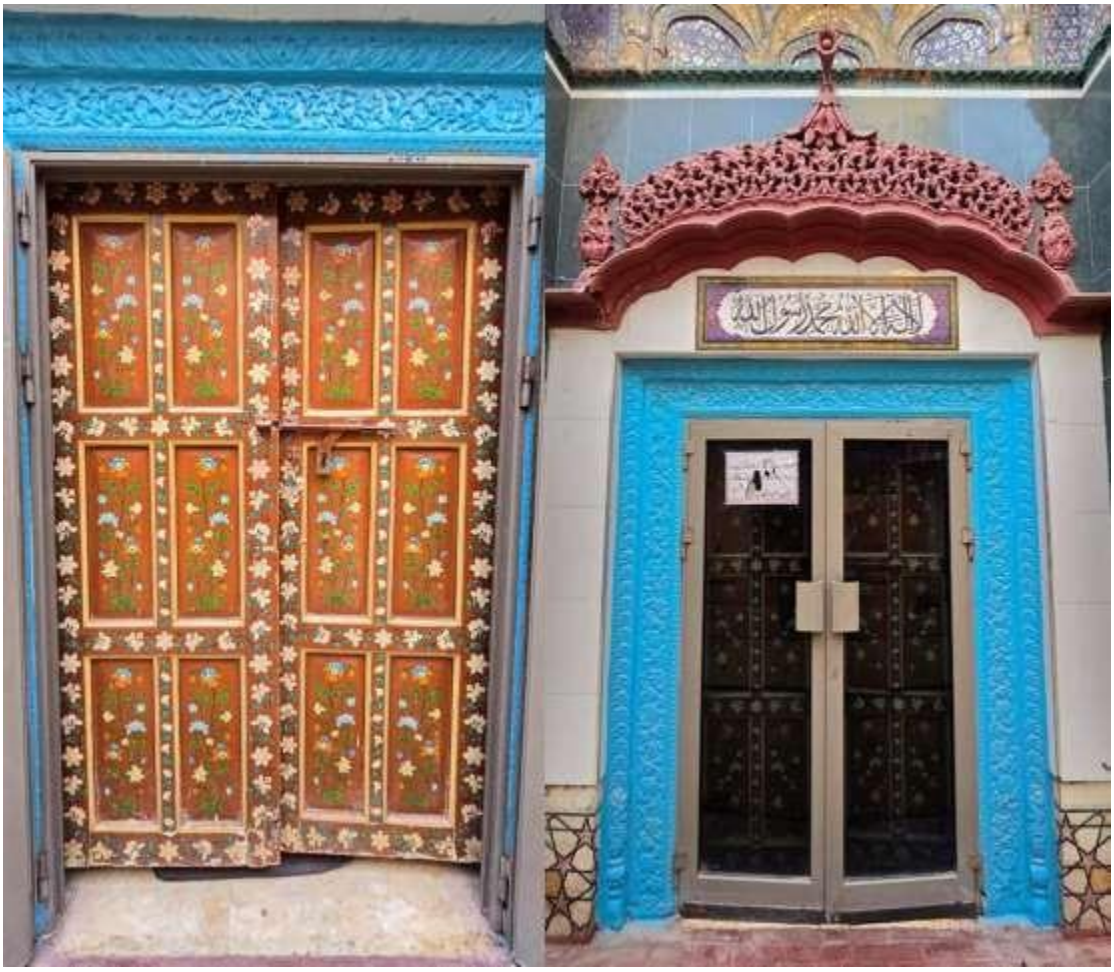


Figure 15: Ornamentation in Wood Work in Doors of Darkhana Wali Masjid Entrance. Source: Author

8. Architectural Significance of the Minaret

The minaret is a symbol and a tall structure in Islamic religious buildings, and the call to prayer (adhan) was made from it, as well as to remind the people of the existence of the mosque. The overall structural, material and ornamental harmony of this mosque is well reflected in its minaret which plays an important role in the spatial and visual hierarchy of the complex as a whole.

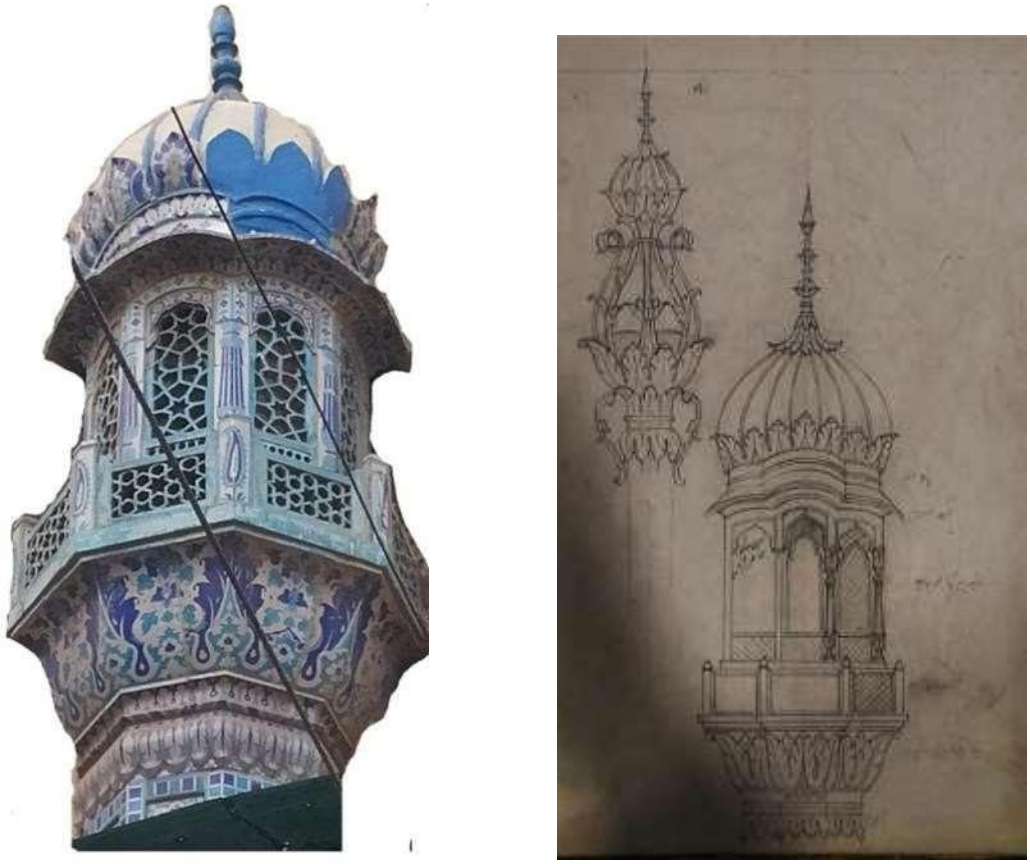


Figure 16: Minaret Decoration of Darkhana Wali Masjid Crafted by the Ustads Original on Left Sketch on Right . Source: Author

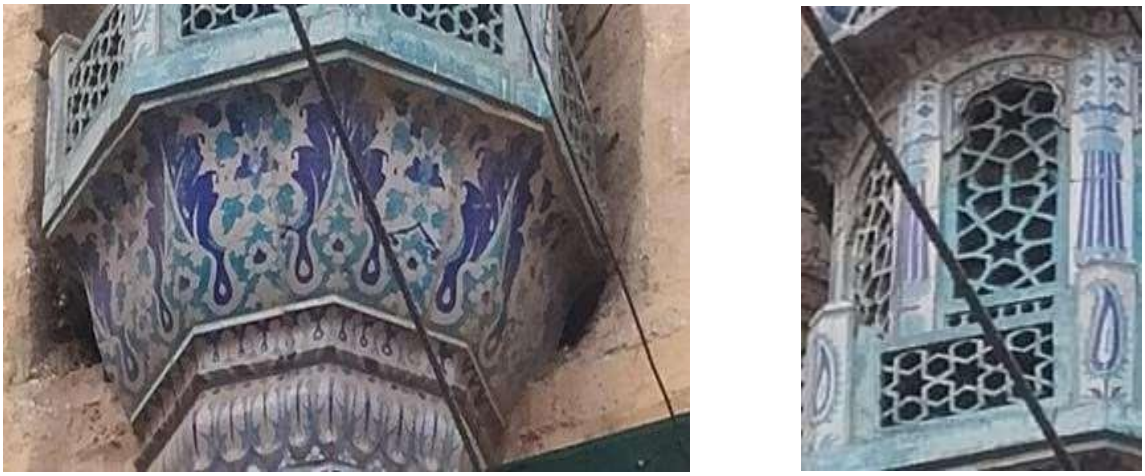


Figure 17: Minaret Capital Decorations of Darkhana Wali Masjid Crafted by the Ustads. Source: Author

9. Structural Composition of Minarets

The minaret is a symbol and a tall structure in Islamic religious buildings, and the call to prayer (adhan) was made from it, as well as to remind the people of the existence of the mosque. The overall structural, material and ornamental harmony of this mosque is well reflected in its minaret which plays an important role in the spatial and visual hierarchy of the complex as a whole.

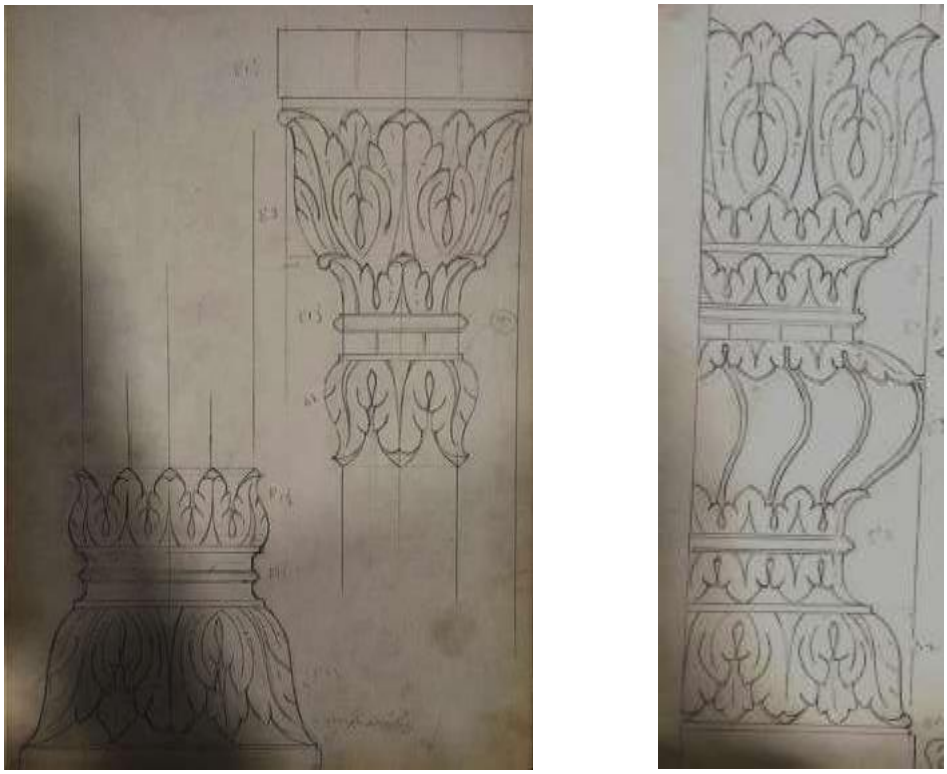


Figure 17: Minaret Basel Decorations Sketch of Darkhana Wali Masjid Crafted by the Ustads.

Source: Author

10. Interior Chamber of Masjid

The main feature that a mosque will be designed around is the axis. Makkah is the main focus for all Moslems around the world, as they pray towards Qibla (meaning direction). The Kabah located in Makkah holds great importance to the Muslim community; as it is their holy city of pilgrimage. The Kabah dates back longer than the time of Muhammad (SAW). The shape of the Kabah is a cuboid, with an empty interior. The Kabah is made from stone and has been rebuilt many times through history [7].Interior prayer space of masjid is an exemplary example of

Islamic spatial design, which is a functional space that has a spiritual aspect. The main feature is the Mehrab, which is wonderfully adorned with arches of multifoil, and a green domed shape representing God and the garden of Paradise. The Mehrab is marked with gold bands of decoration and the rich decoration on ceramic elements is inspired by Mughal and Persian architecture. The ceiling is vaulted and adorned with sparkly mosaic tiles in geometric designs, reminiscent of stars and the cosmos, creating a spiritual ambiance. Mosaic panels on the upper section of the wall and patterned tiles in a checkered design on the lower section make the wall look well proportioned, and help ensure the durability of the tiles.

Beautifully incorporated into the tile work are the Arabic calligraphy and the arabesque floral decoration, which give the space its sanctified ambiance. Its practical features, like the digital prayer timer, built-in fans, and Quran storage areas, are well-planned, blending tradition with necessity. The layout gives saclear orientation to Qibla and spatial configuration offers an unobstructed view of the Mihrab emphasising unity in congregational worship. The interior is in general a beautiful balance of religious symbolism, decoration and structure.



Figure 18: West (Qibla) Wall and Mehrab Decorations of Darkhana Wali Masjid. Source: Author



Figure 19: View of Internal Main Hall (Right) and View Inside Out (Left) of Darkhana Wali Masjid. Source: Author

Overall, the interior Mihrab of the masjid Darkhan Wali is a testament to the beauty and intricacy of traditional craftsmanship and sacred art, reflecting the depth of handmade artistry and spiritual symbolism. The intricate detailing of the Mihrab was achieved by using the gypsum powder (bhedak work) which was not produced from molds and is bound with the help of gold leaf (warq), natural pigments and isapgol liquid. The architecture is composed with strong projecting multifoil arch supported by ornamental engaged columns very similar in style to miniature minarets. The embossed dome motif, which is also deep green, is suggestive in style with both the revered Roza-e-Rasool (PBUH) in form and colour above the Mihrab. This element evokes symbolic significance of the Holy tomb of the Prophet(s) in Madinah to enrich the aesthetic and spiritual richness of the Mihrab. The overall design includes everything that is typical of Islamic architecture and blends in local decoration which creates a spiritual centre that enhances the spiritual atmosphere of the prayer hall.

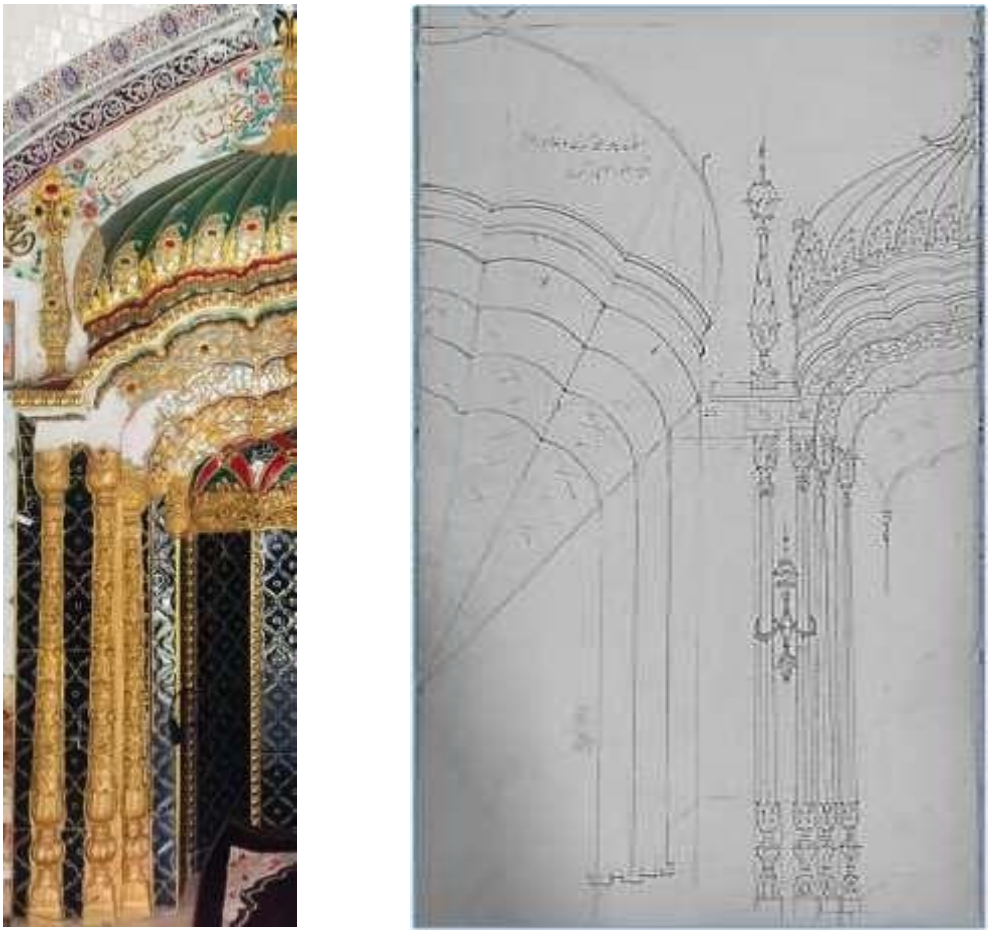


Figure 20: View of Mehrab (Left) and Sketch Crafted by Ustads(Right) of Darkhana Wali Masjid.

Source: Author

11. Conclusion

In this study the architectural, artistic and cultural values of mosque have been discussed and an attention has been paid to architectural features of a historically notable mosque of Multan. The analysis of its exterior and interior elements is a fine example of the careful application of architectural shape, geometric design, calligraphy, vegetal ornament, traditional handicrafts, traditional techniques and skills of the "Ustads" and craftsmen of the region. The spatial layout and the architectural elements of the mosque, such as the domed prayer hall, the proportioned "Mehrab", multi-foil arches and the complex decorative tiled elements, reveal a perfect balance of spiritual symbolism and the architectural traditions of the region. It is also adorned with outstanding Multani blue tiles which have endowed this mosque with significance.

The culture/artistic identity of the part of the country. The architectural use of traditional building

techniques, the use of local materials, like gypsum, “isapgol”, handmade tiles and carved wood demonstrates the technical knowledge, creativity and craftsmanship of the local artisans. These methods are particularly important because they are construction techniques that were developed and utilised long before the use of the architectural elements and technology started in the modern world. The mosque was not just an architectural and esthetic element, but also provided certain social and communal functions. Beyond religious worship, activities that took place at the mosque, such as ablution facilities, the imam's “hujra” and rental shops which helped sustain the economy of the mosque, added value. The building thus is a single institution: the religious, social, economic and cultural services are combined in one architectural space. In conclusion, the mosque is not just a religious edifice, but also a valuable treasure of the architectural heritage and traditional skills of Multan. It is a manifestation of all structural forms, decorative vocabulary, construction technology and material practices in one, which represent the knowledge, identity and cultural memory of successive generations. So, it is very important to preserve and record such structures to preserve tangible and intangible heritage of Islamic architecture in Multan. The study also focuses on the importance of the traditional craft skills of the local craftspersons which have been integral to the architecture of the area and highlights and documents these.

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