

MASJID MAHĀBAT KHĀN

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The biggest and still the most beautiful mosque of Peshāwar popularly known as Masjid Mahābat Khān (Pl. 1) is situated in the Andarshahr area of the city inside the Asamai Gate and is also accessible from the well-known Chowk Yādgar. The mosque had a chequered history in the past. In June 1898 it was almost destroyed by fire which burnt down nearly the whole of the adjacent bazar and was only saved by the ceaseless and unremitting efforts of the Muslim population of the area¹. During the Sikh period, the *Gazetteer* records, its minarets were frequently used by Avitable— the Governor of Peshāwar— as a substitute for the gallows². The present decoration of the mosque therefore belongs to a much recent time.

The actual mosque building measuring 185x163 feet stands upon a high podium and is accessible from three sides— north, south and east. At the present however the northern entrance is out of use and the mosque enclosure can only be approached through the southern and eastern entrances. In ground plan the mosque follows the traditional pattern of a rectangular enclosure with an open courtyard, having an ablution tank in the middle, *iwans* on the sides consisting of a single row of rooms and prayer hall which runs the whole length of the western side (Pl. 2) Internally this prayer hall consists of a lavishly decorated large hall without a verandah on the front. The roof comprises of three fluted domes, and on the sides the hall is marked by two high minarets.

There has been some confusion about the builder of this mosque. Tradition attributes its construction to a certain Mahābat Khān³. But who this Mahābat Khān actually was and when did he build this structure, the tradition has nothing to say. Nabi Bakhsh in his *Halat-i-Sulfa* has added more to the confusion. He remarks, “one outstanding mosque built in red sandstone in Peshāwar is that of Muḥabbat Khān. This is the most beautiful building in Peshāwar”. According to Raverty⁴ the mosque was built by Mahābat Khān Afghān. S. M. Jaffer gives the name of the builder as Zamāna Beg alias Mahābat Khān⁵. While it is easy to demonstrate that Nabi Bakhsh’s informer was a native *pashṭū* speaker who tended to suppress the sonant *h* and pronounced Mahābat as *Muabat* which, by turning into Muḥabbat, became readily meaningful to the former, it is not so easy to decide which of the Mahābat Khāns was responsible for its construction. Moreover the grand scale of the mosque, relatively costly material used in its construction, its lavish decoration, all speak of royal patronage. It is certainly the adventure of a wealthy governor, the highest official in the province and not that of an ordinary individual. But no governor of Peshāwar with the name Muḥabbat Khān is known from historical sources. It is obvious therefore that the name Muḥabbat Khān is a misconceived form of Mahābat Khān. But who this Mahābat Khān actually was?

Ṣamṣām ad-Daula Shāhnawāz Khān in his famous *Ma’āthir al-Umarā*⁶ has mentioned three individuals bearing the title or surname Mahābat Khān who served the Mughal emperors in high positions. These are as follows.

1. Mahābat Khān Ḥaidarābādī⁷
2. Mahābat Khān Khān-i Khānān, Sipāh Sālār⁸
3. Mahābat Khān Mirzā Luhrāsp⁹.

Mahābat Khān Haidarābādī, also known as Muḥammad Ibrāhīm Qamarbāz, was a native of Iran¹⁰. He entered the service of Abu al-Ḥasan Qutb Shāh, the ruler of Telangāna, and after some time was appointed commander in chief of his army with the title Khalitullah Khān Palang Ḥamla. In the 28th year of his accession to the throne, Aurangzeb 'Ālamgir appointed prince Shāh 'Ālam Bahādur to suppress Abu al-Ḥasan. Consequently the army of Telangāna suffered a crushing defeat and Khalitullah Khān presented himself to the prince with a request to join Mughal army. He was given the *mansab* of six thousand *dhāt* and six thousand *sawār* and the title of Mahābat Khān. In the 31st year of Aurangzeb he was given the governorship of Panjāb. But in the following year he died in H. 1099. This brief account of Mahābat Khān Haidarābādī shows that he had no association with Peshāwar and can be easily dismissed.

The case of Mahābat Khān, Khān-i Khānān, is however quite different. His actual name was Zamāna Beg and his father Chayyūr Beg Kābulī hailed from a (Rizvi) Sayyid family of Shīrāz. He first joined the service of Mirzā Muḥammad Ḥakīm and then enrolled himself in the Mughal army of Akbar¹¹. Meanwhile Zamāna Beg took service under prince Salīm. At the instigations of the prince he killed the Rājā of Ujjain and was given the title of Mahābat Khān. Under Jahāngīr he made quick promotions and in the 12th year of his accession, when Shāh Beg Khān, Khān-i Daurān, was transferred from Kābul, he instead became the governor of Peshāwar. and Kābul. In the 17th year he was recalled from Kābul and was appointed to chastise prince Shāh Jahān. But he was suspicious of the intentions of Nūr Jahān and proceeded very cautiously. He then served in the Deccan and actively took part in the campaign launched by the emperor Jahāngīr against Shāh Jahān. On 29th October 1627 Jahāngīr died and Shāh Jahān ascended the throne of Delhi. Mahābat Khān was promoted to 7000 *dhāt* and 7000 *sawār* and received the title Khān-i Khānān Sipāh Sālār. Having been first appointed in the government of Ajmer he was then transferred to Deccan. In the second year of the accession of Shāh Jahān he was given the *ṣūbedārī* of Delhi. In the fifth year however he was sent back to Deccan. He died there in H. 1044/A.D. 1634 when he was planning the siege of Parindā. According to the *Ma'āthir-al-Umarā* he was not at all inclined to any religion, though towards the end of his life he became a follower of the Imāmia Sect. Nor was he punctual in offering prayer and observing fast. Thus, in view of his utter lack of interest in religious matters and also his rather short stay in Kābul, it is less likely that he would have undertaken the construction of a grand mosque which involved huge sums of money and also change of heart. We are now left with Mahābat Khān Mirzā Luhrāsp, son of Mahābat Khān, Khān Khānān. He was a very capable and brave person and is known to have rendered valuable services during the conquest of Daulatābād Fort, along with his father¹². It was largely due to his devotion, bravery and intelligence that he received quick promotions in the employment of the Mughal Emperors. In the 25th year of the accession of Shāh Jahān he was given the title Mahābat Khān instead of Luhrāsp Khān; and after the death of Said Khān he got the governorship of the *suba* of Kābul. In the 32nd year he was ordered to accompany Prince Aurangzeb in the campaign against the 'Ādil Shāhīs. In the year 1068 he was once again appointed in the government of Kābul and stayed there till the 5th year of the accession of Aurangzeb. He was then transferred to Gujrāt. In the 11th year he was once again given the governorship of Kābul but in the 13th year he was recalled to serve in the Deccan. In the 16th year he was again sent to Kābul after the assassination of Muḥammad Amīn. In the 18th year (H. 1085/A.D. 1675) he died near Eminābād (Gujrānwala Distt.) in the Panjāb.

This brief account of the life of Mirzā Luhrāsp shows that in the period starting from the 25th year of Shāh Jahān and ending with the 18th year of Aurangzeb he was appointed in the government of Kābul four times for periods much longer than that of his father. Peshāwar being the winter capital must have witnessed his presence for longer durations. Of all the

Mahābat Khān he is therefore the most likely person who could have undertaken such a lavish construction.

According to S.M. Jaffar "in design and detail this sacred structure follows the usual form of a Muslim place of prayer and closely resembles the Badshahi Masjid of Lāhore and the Jami Masjid of Lucknow¹³. This however is not entirely true. Badshahi Masjid of Lāhore in the number of its minars and also in the arrangement of its prayer hall is very different from Masjid Mahābat Khān¹⁴. In any case, as Dr. A.H. Dani says "in its decorative beauty, proportion of its different parts and majestic height of its minarets, the mosque is an elegant product of the Shāh Jahānī period and a real ornament of the city of Peshawar¹⁵".

NOTES AND REFERENCES

1. N.W.F. Province Gazetteers, Peshāwar District, 1931, p. 303.
2. Gazetteer of Peshāwar District, 1897–98, p. 363.
3. It is generally related in Peshāwar that Mahābat Khān and his three brothers such as Qāsīm Khān, Ganj 'Alī Khān and Dilāwar Khān built mosques in Peshāwar in their own names. But no such brothers of Mahābat Khān are known from history. See also O. Caroe, *The Pathan*, London 1962, p. 232. Gazetteer of Peshāwar District, p. 363. H.g. Raverty, 'An Account of the city and Province of Peshāwar', *Transaction of the Bombay Geographical Society*, Vol. X, 1852, p. 22; S.M. Jaffar, *Peshāwar Past and Present*, Peshāwar 1945, pp. 89–94.
4. Raverty, op. cit., p. 22.
5. S.M. Jaffar, op. cit., pp. 89–94.
6. Urdū trans. Markazi Urdū Board Lāhore, Vol. III, 1970.
7. *Ma'āthir al-Umarā*, p. 520.
8. Op. cit., p. 327.
9. Op. cit., p. 490.
10. This brief life sketch of Mahābat Khān Haidarābādī is based on *Ma'āthir al-Umarā*, Vol. III, pp. 520–524.
11. See *Ma'āthir al-Umarā*, pp. 327–346.
12. This account is also based on *Ma'āthir al-Umarā*, pp. 490–493.
13. S.M. Jaffar, op. cit., p. 91.
14. See Percy Brown, *Indian Architecture* (Islamic Period).
15. *Peshāwar-Historic city of the Frontier*, Peshāwar 1969, p. 175.