



Historical Mosques of Kabul and Their Current Status

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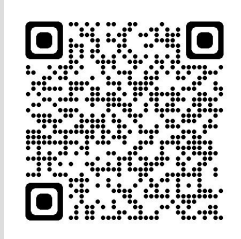
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Abstract: This research investigates the current condition of historic mosques in Kabul, Afghanistan, highlighting their cultural, religious, and architectural significance. These mosques have historically served as centers for worship, education, and social cohesion. However, decades of conflict, natural deterioration, unplanned urban expansion, and insufficient preservation efforts have placed many of these monuments at risk. Through qualitative analysis of documented sources and field observations, this study identifies key factors contributing to both the degradation and conservation of these mosques. While some restoration initiatives have been undertaken, a lack of cohesive preservation strategies and public awareness continues to threaten their survival. The study emphasizes the urgent need for coordinated efforts involving local communities, religious authorities, government agencies, and international organizations to ensure the protection and sustainable maintenance of Kabul's Islamic architectural heritage.

Keywords: *Historic Mosques; Kabul; Architectural Heritage; Cultural Preservation; Islamic Architecture; Urban Development; Conservation Challenges; Afghanistan*

Introduction

The city of Kabul, the historical capital of Afghanistan, houses invaluable remnants of Islamic culture and civilization, among which its historic mosques are of paramount significance. These structures have served not only as places of worship and communal gathering for Muslims but also as symbols of Islamic architecture, indigenous art, and the cultural identity of the people of Kabul. Mosques such as Pul-e-Kheshti, Shah-Do Shamshira, Eidgah, and Asheqan wa Arefan each narrate a distinct part of the history and religious beliefs of this land's inhabitants.

However, in contemporary times, many of these mosques face serious threats. Prolonged wars, natural deterioration, unregulated urban development, and institutional neglect have led to the gradual degradation of these historic monuments. In light of this, the central research question posed by this study is: "What is the current condition of Kabul's historic mosques, and what factors contribute to their preservation or destruction?"

The objective of this inquiry is to critically examine the present circumstances and to propose practical solutions for the protection of this valuable heritage. The primary hypothesis of the study is that the lack of a coherent and structured program for the restoration and maintenance of these historical mosques has rendered them vulnerable to decay. Moreover, insufficient public

and governmental awareness of the historical and cultural significance of these mosques has contributed to the neglect of their preservation.

Nonetheless, with systematic and scientific planning, it is possible to restore these mosques and reinstate their rightful place within the urban and cultural landscape. The significance of this research lies in its attempt to draw the attention of cultural institutions, academic centers, and civil society to the critical state of these religious and historical landmarks. Preserving these structures not only safeguards Islamic religious and architectural heritage but also embodies the protection of the historical and cultural identity of Kabul and Afghanistan at large.

Through this study, a deeper understanding of the value of historic mosques can be achieved, and effective steps can be taken toward their restoration and revitalization.

Research Methodology

The research methodology employed in this article is both library-based and field-oriented. Initially, data was collected from credible and scholarly sources regarding the historical mosques of Kabul. Subsequently, field visits were conducted to the identified sites. These locations were examined comprehensively, and the collected data was analyzed using qualitative research methods to ensure a deeper understanding of the current conditions and historical context of the sites.

Kabul in Historical Records

It is well-established that Afghanistan, our cherished homeland, possesses a vast number of Islamic monuments. Each of these monuments represents an aspect of the nation's rich cultural and historical heritage, and they are considered integral components of Afghanistan's tangible cultural heritage, which necessitates active preservation and protection.

The city of Kabul itself boasts a deep historical legacy and has been referred to by various names throughout the centuries. In the *Zend-Avesta*, the name Kabul appears in the form of Kapool. In other historical records, it is referred to as Kavura or Kapura (Azizi, 2013, pp. 45–46). Moreover, in some of the earliest known manuscripts of the *Shahnameh*, the name is found as Kāvōl (Sakai, 2011, p. 26).

The Kabul Shahs ruled from 645 CE until the conquest of Kabul by Ya'qub al-Layth al-Saffari, demonstrating nearly two centuries of resistance against their adversaries and a determined defense of Kabul. During this period, the city faced multiple invasions by both the Umayyads and Abbasids. However, each attempt to capture Kabul was met with strong resistance from its people. Eventually, the city was conquered by Ya'qub al-Layth al-Saffari, an event that led to the destruction of numerous Buddhist temples (Moradi, 2000, pp. 37–38).

Following this conquest, the construction of Islamic monuments in Kabul began. This article seeks to shed light on some of the significant Islamic architectural heritage sites from this era within Kabul Province, in order to enhance the reader's understanding and appreciation of these important historical assets.

The Role of Mosques in Education and Training in Afghanistan

Throughout the history of Afghanistan, mosques have played a central and irreplaceable role in the education and upbringing of generations. Recognized as the first and most widespread institutions of religious, educational, and cultural learning in Afghan society, mosques have served as foundational pillars of knowledge transmission. Since the early Islamic centuries, they

have functioned as centers for teaching the Holy Qur'an, Islamic beliefs ('*aqīdah*), jurisprudence (*fiqh*), Hadith studies, and Islamic ethics to both children and adults (Hafiz, 2015).

In addition to serving as places of worship, mosques provided basic religious education, which often laid the groundwork for further studies in madrasas and *Dār al-'Ulūm* (religious seminaries). During the golden age of Islamic civilization in the region, several Afghan mosques—such as the Great Mosque of Herat under the Timurid dynasty—became renowned centers of advanced learning. Eminent scholars such as Khwāja 'Abdullāh Anṣārī, Fakhr al-Dīn al-Rāzī, and 'Abd al-Raḥmān Jāmī were among those associated with these centers. Similarly, the Great Mosque of Balkh was recognized during the Abbasid Caliphate as one of the major institutions for the instruction of religious sciences (Kakar, 2020).

During the periods of British and later Soviet occupation, when formal schools were either closed or placed under direct surveillance, mosques emerged as sanctuaries for education and moral upbringing. Many imams and religious scholars assumed the roles of informal educators. Throughout the jihad era, thousands of Afghan children began their education in mosques located in liberated areas. Friday sermons (*khuṭbahs*), religious study circles, and public lessons significantly contributed to the political, social, and religious consciousness of the people. These activities played a vital role in mobilizing societal thought, especially in the face of colonialism and cultural invasion (Emadi, 1997).

Thus, mosques in Afghanistan have served not only as centers for religious instruction but also as the backbone of the country's traditional educational system. They have played a key role in fostering social cohesion, cultivating intellectual leadership, and preserving the Islamic identity of the Afghan people.

Shah-Do Shamshira Mosque

The Shah-Do Shamshira Mosque is regarded as one of the earliest and most significant Islamic-era structures in the city of Kabul. Located in the heart of the capital, along the main public road known as Ahmad Shah Road and adjacent to the Kabul River, this mosque occupies a prominent geographical and historical position. Over the centuries, the mosque has undergone multiple phases of restoration and reconstruction. Its most recent architectural transformation was carried out in 1360 AH (circa 1941 CE) during the reign of King Amanullah Khan, under the patronage of his mother, Sarraj al-Khawātīn. The current two-story structure reflects the high craftsmanship of traditional Afghan architecture in various elements such as stucco design, woodwork, and stone carving (Moradi, 2000).

Historically, the mosque is believed to have been established during the early Islamic period, at the time when Muslim forces, including tribes from Sistan and Zabulistan, succeeded in conquering the region of Kabul through military campaigns. According to historical accounts, the victorious Muslim army performed their first congregational prayer on the northern bank of the Kabul River. On the day that Laith ibn Qays was martyred, he was buried near the riverbank, following funeral rites, and the first mosque of Kabul—later known as Shah-Do Shamshira—was subsequently constructed at the site. The mosque has been renovated multiple times, including a notable restoration by Nasruddin Humayun.

In 1226 AH (circa 1811 CE), after the conquest of Kabul by Ahmad Shah Durrani, the first official prayer was once again performed in this mosque, which was subsequently repaired during his reign. This mosque thus stands as the first Islamic place of worship in Kabul and a sacred monument representing the victory and religious identity of the early Muslim settlers. At

the right side of the entrance, an inscribed plaque commemorates the latest renovation, while on the left side, a symbolic motif of Afghanistan's independence featuring two swords and a wheat sheaf has been engraved (George, 2001).

On the southern side of the mosque facing the road, a black stone inscription is displayed, engraved in Nastaliq script with the following text:

“In the name of Allah, the Most Compassionate, the Most Merciful. The sacred site of Shah-Do Shamshira (may Allah's mercy be upon him), which was damaged during the wars of the 1980s, was repaired and restored in the year 1381 SH (2002 CE) upon the recommendation of the Ministry of Information and Culture and through the personal funding of Mr. Abdul Ghafar Dawi. The painting work was done by Mr. Asif Alf, calligraphy by Mohammad Mahfuz Saidkhaili, stone carving by the sons of Haji Abdul Rahman and Sher Afghan Farmuli, and architectural supervision by Haji Jan Mohammad.”

Additionally, the mosque contains a marble inscription also written in Nastaliq script, which reads:

“In the name of Allah, the Most Compassionate, the Most Merciful” (written in Thuluth script at the upper-right corner).

“This purified mausoleum is the burial place of Laith ibn Qays (may Allah be pleased with him), the grandson of the uncle of the Seal of the Prophets, the Best of Creation, Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him).”

The text further states that Laith ibn Qays, alongside Jabir al-Ansari and Tamim al-Ansari (may Allah's mercy be upon them), was martyred in 81 AH (circa 700 CE) during campaigns to spread and defend Islam against the rulers of Kabul and the Rutbil dynasty. He was buried near the Kabul River, and his shrine became a site of visitation for both the general public and religious pilgrims (Azizi, 2011, p. 29).

More recently, the restoration of the Shah-Do Shamshira Mosque began in 1398 SH (2019 CE) by the order of then-President Mohammad Ashraf Ghani, a process which lasted two years. The calligraphic work was executed by the young artist Musa Khan Raja (Faizi, 2024, p. 24).

During my own field visit to the Shah-Do Shamshira Mosque in 1400 SH (2021 CE), I observed that the structure was in relatively good condition following the recent renovations. The dome and the mosque's external façade had been carefully restored in accordance with preservation standards. The surrounding area was paved with stone, and access routes were well-prepared for visitors. However, some minor internal damages were still noticeable, indicating the need for ongoing maintenance. The mosque remains an active site for religious and pilgrimage activities, highlighting its continued cultural and spiritual significance.

Pul-e-Kheshti Grand Mosque

The Pul-e-Kheshti Grand Mosque is one of the most prominent sacred Islamic structures situated in the heart of Kabul. From an artistic and architectural perspective, it stands as a significant monument that embodies the distinctive features of Islamic art and architectural tradition. According to historical accounts, the foundation of this mosque dates back to the early Islamic conquests of Kabul, possibly established by one of the esteemed companions of the Prophet—either 'Abd al-Rahmān ibn Samurah or 'Abd al-Rahmān ibn Ash'ath (Faizi, 2024, p. 24).

In 1167 AH (circa 1753 CE), the mosque underwent restoration by order of Tīmūr Shāh Durrānī. During his reign, a bridge made of baked bricks and plaster was constructed near the mosque over the Kabul River, designed in the architectural style of Kandahar. Due to the proximity of this bridge to the mosque, the general public began referring to it as the Pul-e-Kheshti Mosque (“Mosque of the Brick Bridge”) (Hotak, 2016, pp. 98–99).

During the reign of ‘Abd al-Raḥmān Khān, as Kabul’s population grew, the mosque’s original structure could no longer accommodate the increasing number of worshippers. A new prayer hall was thus added in the central section of the mosque. By 1271 SH (circa 1892 CE), this new section was completed as a single-story structure consisting of three corridors, seven iwans, and 21 domes. In the center of each dome, a large oil lamp was suspended using chain mechanisms, allowing it to be raised and lowered. These lamps were considered grand and magnificent for their time (Bawari, 2016, p. 78).

Significant expansion of the mosque took place in 1341–1342 SH (circa 1962–1963 CE) during the reign of King Zahir Shah. The renovations, carried out by the Kabul Municipality, included inscriptions of verses from the Qur’an in Kufic and Thuluth scripts, meticulously written by the calligrapher ‘Aziz al-Dīn Wakīlī Popalzai on the mosque’s outer walls (Popalzai, 2001, pp. 259–260).

The Pul-e-Kheshti Mosque features a single minaret and a large green dome. The minaret stands 64 meters tall, and the dome rises to a height of 18 meters. The mosque is also adorned with a grand chandelier weighing approximately 1,600 kilograms, containing around 300 light bulbs. White marble has been extensively used in the mosque’s construction, and it can accommodate up to 3,000 worshippers at one time (Bawari, 2016, p. 125).

During a field visit to the Pul-e-Kheshti Mosque, I observed that comprehensive structural restoration was undertaken between 1396 and 1398 SH (2017–2019 CE). The domes and minarets were reconstructed using traditional techniques and materials consistent with historical architecture. Both the interior and exterior areas were paved with appropriate stonework, and the mosque’s water supply and drainage systems were upgraded. Today, the mosque continues to serve as one of Kabul’s primary religious and cultural centers, hosting daily and Friday prayers as well as various religious gatherings.

From a sociocultural perspective, the Pul-e-Kheshti Mosque plays a crucial role in promoting unity among different ethnic and sectarian groups. It remains a central venue for communal worship, religious celebrations, and public events, making it a vital component of Kabul’s religious and civic life.

Mullah Mahmood Mosque

Mullah Mahmood Mosque is one of the historic religious monuments located in the city of Kabul. It is situated in the Shor Bazaar neighborhood, adjacent to Kharabat Alley, directly opposite the Hindu Dharamsal, and near the Peshawari Caravanserai, within the jurisdiction of District 1 of Kabul city. This mosque has been officially registered under number 01/01/4 in the inventory of historical monuments maintained by the Directorate for the Preservation of Historical Monuments, Ministry of Information and Culture.

This religious structure is considered one of the oldest mosques in Kabul, constructed using traditional materials such as wood, stone, sun-dried bricks (khesht), and mud. The architectural style of the mosque follows the traditional design of Kabul and incorporates elements influenced by Mughal–Indian architectural ornamentation. The mosque’s walls are built using a technique

known as sanj, a method commonly found in traditional Kabul architecture. From both religious and architectural perspectives, the mosque holds significant scholarly and historical value.

According to historical evidence, the mosque dates back to the 18th century CE and has been recognized as one of the influential sites during the freedom movements of Kabul's citizens against British incursions. Throughout its existence, the building has undergone several major renovations, the most recent of which was carried out in 1384 SH (2005 CE) by the Ministry of Information and Culture in collaboration with the Development and Humanitarian Services for Afghanistan (DHSA) (Khalili, 2019).

The structure of the mosque comprises two stories. The first floor contains six structural pillars designed to enhance the stability of the building—an architectural feature considered rare. Some portions of these columns are ornamented with carved wood, and special niches (*shamdanī*) have been built into them for placing lamps or candles. Each column has a width of 78 cm and a length of 220 cm. This floor also contains seven windows, which, unfortunately, are currently in poor condition and require urgent repainting and preservation.

The second floor is in comparatively better condition. Its ceiling is wooden, and this level includes nine windows, twenty supporting pillars, one mihrab, and one minbar. However, a newly constructed wall within the courtyard area has partially compromised the historical aesthetic of the mosque. Moreover, a metal canopy built at the front entrance has negatively affected the mosque's traditional exterior appearance.

In addition to its daily religious functions, Mullah Mahmood Mosque also hosts funeral prayer ceremonies (*fatihah*), reflecting its ongoing relevance and active role in the religious and social life of the local community.

Eidgah Mosque

According to historians, the area now occupied by the Eidgah Grand Mosque was historically known as Eidgah Square during the reign of Ahmad Shah Durrani. At that time, the civilian and military residents of Bala Hissar, the royal citadel of Kabul, would gather in this spacious open field—located east of Urdu Bagh and near the Mastan Canal and the cedar trees along the Kabul River—to perform Eid prayers, particularly when the festivals of Eid occurred during the summer and autumn seasons. In the year 1169 AH (circa 1756 CE), when the Eid al-Adha festivities coincided with the month of Sunbula (August–September), Ahmad Shah Durrani performed the Eid prayer at this very site along with military and civil officials stationed in Kabul.

The formal construction of the mosque began in 1311 AH (circa 1893 CE), when Amir 'Abd al-Rahmān Khān issued an order for the building of the Eidgah Mosque in the month of Thawr (April–May). He appointed his eldest son, Sardar Habibullah Khan, as his representative for the project. The foundation stone was ceremonially laid by Amir Habibullah himself. The initial construction was undertaken by the renowned Kabul architect Ustād Muḥammad Akbar, son of Ustād Muḥammad 'Umar (Michel, 2001, p. 706).

The mosque's interior width measures approximately 10 meters, and its length is estimated at around 222 meters. Historically, the mosque was surrounded by a garden, which was enclosed by a wall featuring elaborate architectural designs and a grand arched entrance, all constructed with detailed plasterwork and artistic finesse. This eastern façade served to separate the mosque from the adjacent road. Unfortunately, in 1362 SH (1983 CE), the garden and the entrance wall were

demolished by the ruling government of the time, and the area was subsequently paved with asphalt (‘Aṭā’ī, 2010, pp. 307–308).

During my field visit to the Eidgah Mosque, I observed that despite the historical damages sustained, the structure has significantly improved following recent renovations. The restoration of the wooden doors, ceilings, and walls, carried out under the supervision of professional engineers, has enhanced the mosque’s structural quality. Nevertheless, signs of moisture infiltration and water damage remain visible in some areas of the ceiling and walls, indicating a need for ongoing maintenance and conservation.

The mosque continues to function as an active center for Eid prayers and other religious ceremonies. Its surrounding grounds have been designed as a park and green space, contributing to its appeal and attracting a growing number of visitors and worshippers.

Andarabi Mosque

The Andarabi Mosque, constructed within a 12-by-12-meter compound, reflects influences from both local Kabul architecture and possibly Turkish design. It was built during the reign of Amir Habibullah Khan, father of King Amanullah Khan, by his mother—known by the honorific title ‘Aliya Rutba—at the entrance of Andarabi Alley, one of the oldest historical alleys in the old city of Kabul.

The interior of the mosque includes two rooms: one measuring 116 square meters, and a second, carpeted space measuring approximately 3 by 11 meters. The mosque’s walls, constructed from a combination of sun-dried (khesht) and fired bricks, are approximately one meter thick. According to the architectural layout, the structure contains three arched two-step windows and three horizontal (floor-level) windows placed in the second room.

In Ramadan of 1393 SH (2014 CE), the mosque suffered a fire caused by an electrical short circuit, which completely destroyed the main ceiling. However, the roof of the carpeted room survived the fire, thereby preserving essential design elements of the structure. The Department for the Preservation of Historical Monuments at the Ministry of Information and Culture played a crucial role in restoring the mosque’s architectural integrity by utilizing photographic records of the original dome design (Khalili, 2019).

During my field visit to the Andarabi Grand Mosque, located in central Kabul, I observed that, following the fire incident of 1393 SH, the mosque had undergone considerable reconstruction efforts, thanks to community initiatives and institutional support. While the ceiling and parts of the interior were damaged, subsequent restoration has led to a partial revival of the structure. The mosque remains an active religious site, regularly hosting daily and Friday prayers.

Despite these efforts, it is evident that the mosque requires continued preservation and maintenance to safeguard its historical and cultural authenticity. Sustained attention and conservation measures are essential to ensure the longevity and heritage value of this important monument.

Nur al-Islam Grand Mosque (Chobforoshi Mosque)

The Nur al-Islam Grand Mosque, commonly known as the Chobforoshi Mosque (“Lumber Market Mosque”), is one of the most significant historical and religious structures in the city of Kabul. It was constructed during the reign of Zaman Shah Durrani. According to historical sources, upon ascending the throne after the death of his father, Zaman Shah initiated the foundation of two major mosques in Kabul as part of his early administrative and religious

reforms. One of these was the Nur al-Islam Mosque. The king appointed ‘Abd al-Karim Khan Ishaqzai and Mullah Ahmad Khan to oversee the construction. The building process was completed in the year 1213 AH (circa 1798–99 CE).

Following Zaman Shah’s downfall, Sardar Fath Khan, the vizier of Shah Mahmud, targeted many of the late king’s supporters, including ‘Abd al-Karim Khan. He was pressured to submit an account of the mosque’s construction costs, which amounted to over sixty tomans of silver rupees. However, upon learning of this, the reigning monarch declared the mosque overseers innocent of any wrongdoing (Popalzai, 1958).

During the reign of ‘Abd al-Rahman Khan, in 1300 AH (circa 1883 CE), the mosque underwent extensive renovations. The materials used in the construction included baked brick, gypsum, lime, iron, and wood. Architecturally, the mosque features arches, arcades, and domes, demonstrating a synthesis of regional Islamic architectural traditions. Adjacent to the mosque once stood a domed building known as the Royal Madrasa, which previously housed the Dar al-Hifaz, the ‘Ulama Association, and numerous scholars and religious students. This madrasa was destroyed during recent conflicts, but has fortunately been reconstructed in recent years.

The mosque occupies a single-story rectangular area of considerable size, measuring approximately 80 meters in length and 23 meters in width. Within its prayer hall are 31 small domes and one central large dome. A white marble ablution basin (ḥawẓ) is located in the courtyard for ritual washing (Raḥmānī, 2003, p. 23).

The Nur al-Islam Mosque is officially registered under number 01/01/5 in the National Inventory of Historic Monuments maintained by the Directorate for the Preservation of Historical Monuments, Ministry of Information and Culture. In past centuries, due to the high concentration of lumber shops surrounding the mosque, it became popularly known as the “Chobforoshi Mosque.”

At present, the mosque’s original main entrance has been rendered inaccessible due to the elevation of the street level. The exterior façade reflects architectural styles typical of 16th to 18th-century Kabul, characterized by its arched motifs and symmetrical proportions (Khalili, 2019).

According to field observations, a secondary, more accessible entrance is located approximately 20 meters from the original gate and is currently in use by the public. Overall, the structural condition of the mosque is relatively stable, although some pillar bases are damaged. According to a mosque official, restoration work began during the former Republic period but has since stalled due to the regime change. The courtyard is in poor condition and requires re-paving and drainage improvement.

Inside the mosque, multiple load-bearing columns can be observed, each approximately 1.5 meters wide. However, modern commercial shops have been constructed along the mosque’s exterior wall, significantly diminishing the historical and architectural character of the building’s outward appearance.

Mir Waiz Kabuli Mosque

The Mir Waiz Kabuli Mosque is one of the historical edifices located in Barana Alley within the old fabric of Kabul city. The mosque is a two-story structure built primarily with sun-dried bricks, reflecting traditional architectural styles characteristic of Kabul over the past century. On the western side of the mosque, adjacent to the mihrab, six old wooden windows are installed,

while the interior features numerous small niches. The ceiling is constructed from flat wooden panels supported by four wooden load-bearing columns intricately decorated with hand-carved motifs, exemplifying the local and historic architectural craftsmanship of approximately one hundred years ago (Mohtaj, 2015, p. 180).

According to local residents and existing evidence, the mosque's age exceeds one hundred years. Unfortunately, the first floor is in poor condition and currently unusable. Portions of this level have suffered structural damage and are being used for storing construction materials. The ceiling, similar to the second floor, is wooden. The first floor contains one mihrab and seven windows but lacks load-bearing columns; the space is divided into two sections by a wooden partition. Access from the first to the second floor is provided via six wooden stairs (referred to as the prayer stairs), which themselves are in a deteriorated state.

The second floor is in comparatively better condition. This floor includes two wooden load-bearing columns supporting the ceiling. However, the interior space has been partitioned with plastic curtains, regrettably compromising the original architectural aesthetics. This area urgently requires repainting and restoration. Additionally, the second floor houses one mihrab, one pulpit (minbar), and a small room designated for the mosque's imam. The roof is coated with bitumen to protect against further damage from snow and rain.

Local informants report that approximately one hundred worshippers gather simultaneously in this mosque for prayers. Behind the mosque, there are residential structures built with materials closely resembling those of the mosque; these appear to have been constructed illegally, a matter warranting serious investigation.

It is also noteworthy that to the north of the mosque lies the Mir Waiz Kabuli Khanqah, which remains active to this day. Given the mosque's historical, architectural, and religious significance, immediate measures for its protection, restoration, and maintenance are imperative. Without such interventions, this historic monument—considered part of Afghanistan's cultural heritage, particularly in Kabul province—faces the risk of total destruction in the near future.

Gadri Mosque

The Gadri Mosque is located in District One of Kabul city and is officially registered under number 1-01-01 in the inventory of the Directorate for the Preservation of Historical Monuments, Ministry of Information and Culture of Afghanistan. This mosque stands as a monument commemorating Kabul's six-hundred-year history and is considered one of the oldest mosques in the city.

Two main narratives exist regarding the etymology of the name "Gadri." The first suggests that the mosque was constructed on a deep water-filled pit, with the word "Gudal" (meaning pit) gradually evolving into "Gadri." The second narrative refers to an eccentric old man who wore a fur coat adorned with gold and silver coins. After the coat was lost and found by a woman, the coins were sold, and the proceeds were dedicated to building the mosque. Since "Gadri" means "fur coat" in the Mongolian language, the mosque was named accordingly.

It is believed that the mosque was originally constructed during the reign of Shah Jahan; however, archaeological excavations indicate that its origins predate his period, and it was likely renovated and rebuilt during his time.

Throughout its existence, the mosque has undergone at least two major restorations. Evidence shows that the original foundation has been preserved through various phases, with newer

constructions erected atop earlier ruins and foundations. During restoration efforts in 2018–2019 (1397–1398 AH Solar), accompanied by archaeological excavations, foundations of the initial structure were uncovered on the first floor, including square columns measuring 120×120 cm made of sun-dried bricks and clay. The foundation of the newer structure, by contrast, was constructed using mountain stone and features larger columns of 180×180 cm with less intricate craftsmanship.

The mosque's main building comprises five rooms. The southern room contains a small, ancient mihrab with no notable artistic decoration. The central two rooms house the mosque's primary mihrab. The two northern rooms lack mihrabs but form an integral part of the main prayer space. These rooms are interconnected by plastered, arched vaults.

The approximate height of the first-floor rooms is about 8 meters, with arched vaults spanning between columns. The architectural style of this section reflects a synthesis of Mongol–Indian and Durrani influences, as evidenced by the plasterwork and arches. Materials used in the walls include baked bricks (20×20 cm and 26×26 cm), sun-dried bricks, wood, clay, mountain stones, straw-clay mixtures, lime, and iron sheets. The walls are coated with white clay plaster.

In the mosque's northern courtyard, there existed an old winter prayer hall of which only the mihrab remains today. This winter mosque was constructed in the traditional Kabul style, employing sanj and majusha techniques on its walls (Khalili, 2019, p. 171). Overall, the mosque's architecture represents a blend of Mongol–Indian, Durrani, and Kabul styles.

At the time of inspection, the mosque's general condition was reported as satisfactory, with many sections recently restored. Among the remaining historical features are two large iwans located outside the mosque. Unfortunately, irresponsible residential constructions around the mosque have disturbed the historical buffer zone of the monument.

Within the mosque premises, a Shishkhana (display case) has been installed, exhibiting artifacts discovered during archaeological excavations. In the southern part of the mosque, a small mihrab enclosed by plastic sheeting is used only during winter prayers. One of the mosque's columns is protected by glass for demonstration purposes to allow observation of its ongoing deterioration and restoration. Additionally, a newly constructed room in the courtyard detracts from the mosque's internal aesthetic.

The courtyard is decorated with beautiful flowers, and in 2024 (1403 AH Solar), a deep well was dug with financial support from the late Haji Mohammad Aman and his wife to resolve the mosque's water scarcity. Furthermore, a boys' religious school operates within the mosque, providing Islamic education to children.

Research Findings

1. Current Condition of Historic Mosques in Kabul

Numerous studies indicate that the historic mosques of Kabul city have suffered significant damage in terms of physical structure, decorative elements, and their religious and cultural functions. While some mosques are relatively well-maintained, the majority are exposed to deterioration and destruction due to lack of effective preservation and insufficient attention from both the government and the public. Mosques such as Pul Khishti Mosque, Eidgah Mosque, and Shah Do Shamshira Mosque remain standing and active but are in urgent need of restoration and reconstruction.

2. Factors Affecting the Preservation or Deterioration of Historic Mosques

Based on observations, multiple factors influence the preservation or destruction of these monuments, which can be categorized into two main groups:

a. Destructive Factors:

1. **Lack of Government Attention and Supervision:** The absence of organized restoration programs, dedicated budgets for cultural heritage preservation, and negligence by relevant institutions are major causes of deterioration.
2. **Uncontrolled Urban Development:** Unplanned urban growth and encroachment on mosque boundaries have directly damaged their structures.
3. **Pollution and Climatic Conditions:** Dust, heavy rainfall, and climatic changes contribute to the erosion of the buildings.
4. **Lack of Public Awareness:** Insufficient public knowledge regarding the historical value of these mosques has led to indifference toward their maintenance.

b. Preservation Factors:

1. **Role of Local Communities and Religious Leaders:** In some cases, the involvement of local residents and imams has played a significant role in the maintenance and repair of the mosques.
2. **Religious and Social Significance:** The continued religious function of mosques has helped preserve some of them, albeit in limited capacity.
3. **Intervention of International Cultural Organizations:** In certain limited instances, international aid and preservation projects have been effective, although such cases remain rare and sporadic.

Conclusion

The historic mosques of Kabul represent invaluable cultural, religious, and architectural heritage that reflects the rich Islamic history and identity of Afghanistan's capital. These mosques, such as Shah Do Shamshira, Pul Khishti, Eidgah, Mullah Mahmood, Noor al-Islam (Chob Froshi), Mir Waiz Kabuli, Andarabi, and Gadri Mosque, have played pivotal roles not only as centers of worship but also as institutions for education, social cohesion, and resistance throughout the centuries.

Despite their cultural and historical significance, these monuments face numerous threats that jeopardize their structural integrity and functional relevance. Factors such as prolonged armed conflicts, natural deterioration, unregulated urban expansion, insufficient governmental oversight, and a general lack of public awareness have contributed to the progressive decay of many of these sites. While some mosques have benefitted from restoration efforts—often supported by local communities, religious leaders, and sporadic international aid—the overall preservation remains fragmented and insufficient.

The architectural styles of these mosques showcase a rich blend of indigenous Kabul traditions alongside Mughal, Indian, and Durrani influences, which further underscores their importance as tangible records of Afghanistan's diverse historical narratives. Restoration efforts that have been undertaken emphasize the need for a systematic, scientifically informed, and culturally sensitive approach to conserve these monuments effectively.

Therefore, urgent and coordinated measures involving governmental bodies, cultural institutions, local communities, and international organizations are imperative to safeguard these mosques. Such efforts should prioritize sustainable maintenance, raise public awareness regarding their cultural value, and integrate these sites into the broader framework of Kabul's urban development. Protecting these mosques is not only essential for preserving Afghanistan's religious and architectural legacy but also vital for maintaining the social fabric and historical identity of Kabul.

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