

## THE ARCHITECTURE OF THE IMAMABADAS IN LUCKNOW; IMAMBADA SIBTAINABAD

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### ABSTRACT

*Every year the historic city of Lucknow observes the rituals of Muharram, the Islamic month commemorative of the martyrdom of the family of prophet Muhammad. The city is overcome with grief as thousands of Shia Muslims ritually mourn the carnage at Karbala. Along with people of other faiths, they gather in processions that wind through the city during the months of Muharram and Safar, and attend the concomitant religious assemblies (Majlis) held in the Imambadas and private households which resound with the cries of Ya Husain!. The processions gather, begin and conclude at the various Imambadas, which were built by the Nawabs and their associates for the observances of Muharram.*

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**KEYWORDS:** *Imambadas, Lucknow, Imambada, Architecture & Islamic Culture*

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### INTRODUCTION/

Every year the historic city of Lucknow observes the rituals of Muharram, the Islamic month commemorative of the martyrdom of the family of prophet Muhammad. The city is overcome with grief as thousands of Shia Muslims ritually mourn the carnage at Karbala. Along with people of other faiths, they gather in processions that wind through the city during the months of Muharram and Safar, and attend the concomitant religious assemblies (Majlis) held in the Imambadas and private households which resound with the cries of Ya Husain!. The processions gather, begin and conclude at the various Imambadas, which were built by the Nawabs and their associates for the observances of Muharram.

These Imambadas are the glorious examples of the local craftsmanship, ambitious engineering, monumental imagination and experimentation in Indo Islamic style of architecture.

Imambada or the “house of the Imam” was built by the rulers of Awadh who were primarily Shia by faith for the purpose of Azadari.

Out of the many Imambadas located in Lucknow, the most striking and famous is the Bara Imambada, built by Nawab Asafuddaula, which was perhaps the most ambitious building of the legendary nawab. having

commissioned the best of architects and more than 20,000 men for this project the nawab created one of the most beautiful architectural marvels of Lucknow.

Another Imambada, which deserves a special reference is the Imambada Sibtainabad which has had a near death experience, subjected to utter neglect and restored to unfathomable glory and splendor due to the efforts of some awakened and self-motivated individuals. This Imambada which could have disappeared in the pages of history and erased an architectural masterpiece of the bygone nawabi era, fortunately, stands rescued in all its resplendent glory.

The monuments of Lucknow withhold within their antiquity, stories of the bygone era. These vintage edifices represent our history and glorify our past. Known and celebrated for its magnificent palace complexes, gateways, and Imambadas the capital of the kingdom of Awadh's home to a unique style of architecture; marvelous and outstanding in its own way. Grand palaces, mosques, and mausoleums were erected during the nawabi era, which in turn paved the way for the aesthetic and stylistic identity of the kingdom of Awadh inspired by the architectural marvels of the great Mughals with a European flavor.

The most visited and renowned amongst the monuments of Awadh is the Bada Imambada more popularly known as the Asafi Imambada which is amongst the grandest buildings of Lucknow. Imambada is an essential element of the buildings made by the rulers of Awadh.

Imambada or Azakhana literally means "*the house of mourning and represents a building specifically built to facilitate the mourning ritual during Moharram*". It also houses the insignias related with such ceremonies. Azadari refers to the practices of mourning and commemoration of the martyrdom of Imam Husain and his family, the 72 (Shaheedaan-e-Karbala), the period of remembrance and mourning lasting for over two months. Imambadas are special to Lucknow and they may range from a small niche in a poor man's house to elaborate complexes. The city houses many Imambadas having a distinct style of architecture and sculpture, the most significant being the Asafi Imambada (Built by Nawab Asaf-ud-daula: 1784), the Husainabad Imambada (Built by King Mohammad Ali Shah: 1837) and the Shah Najaf Imambada (built by the King Ghazi ud din Haider) between 1818 – 1823, Imambada Ghufraan Maab constructed by the Shia cleric Syed Dildar Ali Naseerabadi (1753-1820) and the Imambada Sibtainabad built by King Nawab Amjad Ali Shah (1847)

## **IMAMBADA ARCHITECTURE**

The architecture of the nawabs commands international importance in the world of heritage and this was verily brought out during the crumbling down of the mighty Mughal Empire. As the Mughal Empire weakened the Nawabs of Murshidabad, Awadh and Hyderabad began to establish their own independent states. The architecture sponsored by the rulers and inhabitants of these new domains was heavily dependent and therefore inspired by the Mughal style established during the reign of Shah Jahan and Aurangzeb, yet in each case, new formal interpretations and meanings gave way to older forms. The results were often highly creative expressions, reflecting the religious attachment and expressions of these new kingdoms. Architecture under the Nawabs of Awadh was quite a perceivable mission, with the new stately union endeavoring to make a mark striving to come out from the shadow of the Mughal empire.

Most of the great heritage structures and monuments of India are made of stone and some of them have an iron frame within. But in Awadhi architecture, brick and mortar have been shaped into impressive structures contributing to the development of a unique style and form.

The nawabi architecture comprising of the mosques, imamabadas, dargahs and the palaces is inspired by the central Asian countries and Mughal architecture. Lucknow, the building material used in the religious buildings was lakhori bricks, which made necessary the use of structural forms like the dome, minaret, arch and vault. The use of 'lakhauri' enabled the local masons to form remarkably fine details on the wall and other common surfaces. These buildings were constructed over a raised platform. The surface ornamentation including arabesque and floral patterns of multiple designs, inscriptions in different scripts, enamel tiles of various colours, gliding, painting and inlay work. No adornment in human forms or any other animate objects is to be found anywhere the same being not permitted by religion. The Imamabadas had a separate room for men and women in keeping with the cultural and religious requirements of the times.<sup>1</sup>

Lucknow's religious buildings are arranged in a manner unique to Awadhi architecture, they are all established forms utilized earlier on Mughal and other Islamic edifices. Thus, in the architecture of Lucknow, just as in the other well-established Muslim houses of north India - long-standing Islamic forms had served as the basis of religious structures, while European sources stood behind administrative and residential structures. Thus religious and administrative buildings drawing a subtle yet distinct line of difference. European forms were meticulously avoided for religious architecture. Rather, the models for religious buildings were structures that had been erected by earlier Indo-Islamic houses. These models were, however, associated not with a dynasty but with the very essence of Islam.

A notable feature of Imambada architecture is that the structure is adorned with magnificently rendered high stucco relief, numerous arches edged with deep cusping and crowned by a parapet of bulbous domes. The central hall of the Imamabadas is more elongated. The Imamabadas are sometimes roofed by the dome and sometimes vaulted. The baseline and architecture of the Imamabadas continued to be in the tradition of the Islamic principles but with necessary modifications as now, they were brick and stucco instead of in stone like their predecessors.

The most distinctive feature of these Imamabadas and the other monuments of those times was the use of lakhori bricks as already mentioned, which was not the usual building material of the Mughal style of architecture. P.C.Mukherje, the historian writes "*On the whole, the building art of Lucknow as of Indo Saracenic in general, has some principles of its own...they aim to produce not only useful, but ornamental and tastefully regulated buildings which while filling all the wants of native life have such a margin left as to allow the means of luxury and to supply a beautiful sight.*"

The mehrab (semicircular niche in a wall), cursive engravings with floral patterns, kangooras or semi arches being one unique aspect attributed to the style of architecture in Awadh. Another notable feature was the use of pottery art for the decorative purpose. Imambada Mughal Sahiba is one example where such style of decoration has been used besides in other buildings. Carving in stone creating a net or jaali like design for ventilation, light, and partition was also popular in Imambada architecture and can be seen at Karbala Talkatora and Karbala Puttan Sahib as recorded by Roshan Taqui the author of Lucknow Monuments, Even before the Mughal period, Hindu artisans were renowned for making stone jalis with simplified geometrical designs. With the advent of the Mughals, the technical expertise of the Hindu jali makers was put to work. These artists were employed for carving new Timurid and Safavid designs. The height of the Mughal jali art was achieved under the Mughal Emperor Shah Jahan when a new lexicon of Mughal decorative designs, as used for other stone carvings; painting, etc., was applied to perforated marble screens. It is not hitherto been realized that unlike the earlier Hindu jalis, the Mughal jalis follow the decorative vocabulary of the court.<sup>2</sup>

The use of chattri or umbrellacarved out of stone can be seen on the gates of the Asafi Imambada. The Shahnajaf Imambada and the Sikanderbagh palace exhibit the use of stucco chattris on the parapet with the aptly matched column and the flower in stone cutting on the top. The Imambada Mughal Sahiba, a lesser known Imambada of Lucknow is the finest example of floral design in stucco. The trimming of mehrab with floral stucco is a common sight in the Chhota Imamabada and Imambada Zainul Abidin. Another form of decoration used in these buildings is calligraphy, used generously in the writing of the ayats of the Quran in a number of the Imamabadas-Imambada KaiwanJah(1830-1832), Masjid of Tahsin Ali Khan(1790), Imambada Ikram Ullah Khan(1800), Kala Imambada(1792), Imambada Malka Zamani(1840), Karbala of KhudaBuksh, Talkatora(1816), Imambada Azeemullah Khan(1844), Mausoleum of Naseer ud din Haider(1837), Imambada Dayanat-ud-Daula(1851), Chota Imamabara(1837-1839) to name a few.

Khat-e-Nastaliq is the popular script used in these monuments for calligraphy. Nastaliq style of calligraphy was developed in Iran in the 14<sup>th</sup>-15<sup>th</sup> century and was mainly used for titles and headings. The Chota Imambada however uses calligraphy in the form of tughra design which mainly served as a calligraphic monogram. The grand Imamabara built by Agha Baquir Khan a risaldar of 5000 sawars who served under Shujaudaula is one good example of the said style. Syed Anwar Abbas in his book the Lost Monuments of Lucknow quotes J.R.I Cole saying that the '*edifice served as a model for the Husainabad Imambada almost a century later*'. It is further stated that '*the king in his old orchard of jamania bagh laid the foundation of Imambada Husainabad, based on the design of Imambada of late Agha Baquir, which was included in the precincts of macchi bhawan and had been demolished*'.<sup>3</sup>This imambada is reported to have been destroyed in 1857-58 while the Bara Imambada was converted into a fort during the said period. However, later on the said Imambada became a part of the Wakfs registered with the Uttar Pradesh Shia Wakf Board, which appointed Management Committees for its reconstructions and repairs and the magnificent edifice was reconstructed and is now one of the most revered and sacred places for the Muslims of the country who congregate here all through the year, more particularly during the navchandi Thursdays and Muharram.

### THE SPECTACULAR ASAFI IMAMBADA

Out of the numerous Imambadas spread all through the beautiful city of Lucknow, the most spectacular is the Asafi Imambada built by Nawab Asaf-ud-Daula, the generous builder in the year 1784. The Bara Imambada during the time of its construction was a technological achievement, for it possessed the largest vaulted hall spread over an uninterrupted space. Yet other aspects of Asafud-Daula's Imambada belong to an expression of standard ornament found on mosques and madrasas throughout north India. This Imambada is an interesting building with a huge congregational hall. There are seven arched openings in the façade while the use of vaults portrays a strong Islamic influence.

This hall is said to be the largest arched hall in the world. The construction is very interesting, as the bricks have been interlocked without any support of girders and beams. The roof stands steady without any pillars supporting it. The extremely heavy roof is supported by air cushions which is an unbelievable scientific phenomenon. It is therefore, the largest unsupported hall in the world.

The Imambada is a three-storeyed building, containing a number of cells inside, made of "lakhauri" bricks, decorated with lime plaster and exquisite stucco work, the roof is capped by two "chhatris" on either side. The dual fish motif, part of the coat of arms of Awadh state, is seen on the exterior. The interior is embellished with extravagant chandeliers, tazias, alams, and mirror, adding to the illumination of the building. There exists no use of wood or metal in the building material utilized in the construction of the edifice.

On the top, Bhool bhulaiya or labyrinth with intricate balconies and passages with 489 identical doorways is a very special attraction. Some of which have dead-ends, some end at precipitous drops while others lead to the entrance or exit points. It is always advised to visit the bhoorbhulaiya with a trained guide.

Another notable feature of the Imambada architecture is the double wall system. The outer walls of the Asafi Imambada is double walled, the empty space within was used as air passage and ventilation to keep the building cool. It is also reported that the sound waves were transformed from longitudinal to transverse. The Asafi Imambada is claimed to be the biggest achievement of Imambada architecture. The main hall where the tazia is placed being on a higher plinth as designed by the architect Kifayatullah. One important trend of Imamabara construction being the Imamabaras built with a north-south orientation<sup>4</sup>. The rauza style of karbala buildings is copied in the Imambada. (Rauza in perso-arabic meaning a shrine or a tomb). The Nawabs developed this new building type from the earlier Mughal example of Tomb or Rauza.

However, they become formal qualities of the building, like a tomb, derived from the square and a cube. The basement is constructed with the raft foundation, the outer walls of the ground floor are solid and based on arches of the basement so the load is distributed at several points and the basement is safe with the replica of the grave of Imam Husain. The Asafi Imambada is often referred to as the trendsetter in Imambada architecture of the kingdom of Awadh. The Imambada also exhibited fourteen cenotaphs bearing the holy numbers like 1 for Allah, 5 for Panjtan, 72 for Martyrs of Karbala as recorded.<sup>5</sup>.

Another notable feature being the construction of lofty and imposing gates, being an example of integrated architecture of the Mughal and Rajput style. One striking feature of Imambada architecture is that each Imambada is entered through a large garden and flanked by a mosque. These complexes were used to incorporate the tomb of the patron. Banmali Tandan, the all famous writer of "**The Architecture of Lucknow and its dependencies**" writes, that the eastern and western facades of the Rumi Darwaza are stylistically distinct, and he hypothesizes that the gate was either intentionally built in two phases by one patron or by Shuja-ud-Daula and followed by Asaf al-Daula. He views the Great Imambada as a "structural tour de force" and central to defining later Imambada design, spawning imitations throughout Lucknow; he writes, "*The Great Imambada is of central importance in the evolution of Nawabi architecture, as it led to the widespread adoption of an Imambada type.*" This has been made evident in Neeta Das's 1991 architectural study of Lucknow's Imambadas which identifies a number of smaller Imambadas patterned after the Great Imambada. With respect to the congregational mosque adjacent to the Great Imambada, Tandan suggests that it likewise served as a template for later mosques in the city. With its arched profile, large leafy ornament, and radiating stone-rose flourishes, the elaborate Rumi Darwaza cuts a unique profile.<sup>6</sup>

### **SIBTAINABAD-AN ARCHITECTURAL MARVEL**

Another Imambada attributed to the grandeur of the nawabs of Awadh is the Imambada Sibtainabad located in the heart of the city of Lucknow. The mention of the Imambadas, of the erstwhile Kingdom of Awadh is not complete without the discussion about Sibtainabad, the lofty Imambada built by King Amjad Ali Shah, as his final resting place and for the observance of the mournings of Muharram, in Lucknow, the capital of Nawabi Awadh.

This Monument apparently has seen been a victim of administrative apathy than any other monument in Lucknow. Unlike it's predecessor the grand Asafi Imambada, this building has never been the object of limelight in the history of architecture. Representing the nawabi style of architecture Imambada Sibtainabad is a beautiful example of intricate stucco work and is an architectural masterpiece. The construction of this Imambada was started in 1847 by the

then Nawab of Awadh, Amjad Ali Shah whose mausoleum is situated inside the complex. This building was later completed by Nawab Wajid Ali Shah the successor of Amjad Ali Shah. The Imambada was briefly used as a church during the British rule with Sunday mass being a regular feature at the monument for some time. Declared a heritage monument in 1919, it went into the hands of Lucknow Improvement Trust (later LDA) in 1921, which allotted various residential portions to the Anglo Indians, whose families still reside in its sprawling campus. This monument is not only a live Imambada today, but is also an important tourist destination and has had a tryst with destiny before finally being restored and given a new lease of life.

‘This imambada is a bad imitation of Husainabad Imambada, but if it were illuminated like Husainabad at the time of Muharram, then the eastern part of Lucknow would also become a blaze of light.’<sup>7</sup>

### **THE STORY OF SIBTAINABAD**

A lot has been written and discussed about the various monuments of the city of the Nawabs including the Bara Imambada, Husainabad Imambada, Rumi Gate, Residency etc, this Monument is now evolving towards a rejuvenation and is being spoken and written about.

The monument, also known as “Jannat Makan ka Imambada” is located in the upmarket place of Hazratganj. This place came to be known as Hazratganj after the name of Amjad Ali Shah, the term 'Hazrat' being equivalent to Saint, attributed to Amjad Ali Shah for his saintly qualities. Standing tall, within commercial hub of Lucknow- the Hazratganj, the Sibtainabad Imambada looks splendid, enthralling, and majestic. But a few years back, it was a different story altogether. It showcased a dilapidated monument whose beauty had been eclipsed by the encroachers, squatters and residents. This glorious monument despite being a centrally protected Monument has had a history of administrative neglect and apathy has stood witness to the sorry state of affairs of the historical monuments of the city.

Imambada Sibtainabad, (signifying the names of Hasan and Husain, the grandsons of the holy Prophet PBUH) however is now a fully restored and renovated “Live Monument”, due to the efforts of Mr Mohammad Haider, a corporate lawyer and a heritage activist, who is also a Mutawalli (Caretaker of the Imambada appointed by the State Wakf Board) and his team of the Committee of Management of Wakf Imambada Sibtainabad Mubarak. Mr Mohammad Haider has rightly quoted to be a “One Man Preservation Movement” by the Economist, London.<sup>8</sup>

This building is commonly known by the name of Imambada Sibtainabad while the older generation of Lucknowites calls it the Chota Imambada, owing to its unique resemblance with the Asafi or the Bada Imambada. The building was originally furnished with costly fittings, all of which were plundered during the mutiny. On the whole, the building has no architectural pretensions, and, after the storming of the Begum Kothi, this was the next place taken by Colin Campbell, on the 14th of March 1858, after a severe struggle<sup>9</sup>.

It is reported that the King spent Rs. Ten lakhs on its construction.<sup>10</sup> The place where this grand edifice was built was earlier the Chhavni(cantonment) of Mendu Khan Risaldar(the eldest Son of Mirza Khurram Bahkt, a prince of Delhi, a cavalry commander during the reign of Ghaziuddin Haider with 2000 sawars under him) who also had serai(inn)in its vicinity. A description from the 1850's mentions the Sibtainabad Imambada to be in the centre of the gated area.<sup>11</sup> The main architecture of this Imambada was copied from the Asafi Imambada(Bara Imambada) by the architect Husain Ali Khan. The structure was surrounded on all four sides by two enclosures with gateways at the middle of the Ghulam Gardish which are arched cloisters meant for attendants. The main building is placed on an eight feet high platform

overlooking open land and a tank of water for ablutions.

Beneath a trap door, in the center of the hall, a few steps lead to a vault where the King's body lies, forlorn and forsaken.<sup>12</sup> The sarcophagus is fused with the floor of the main hall. The Imambada, which was spread over an area of more than 16 Bighas, had two Mahal serai at the two corners of the mausoleum, Hammam on the east and the kitchen on the west. The Imambada structure was later referred to as maqbara, for bearing the mortal remains of King Amjad Ali Shah. It is also believed to be housing the grave of one of his grandsons Mirza Javed Ali and the grave of Najmun Nissan Begum, a queen of Wajid Ali Shah who was formally addressed as Ashiq Mahal. In his brilliant work "Architecture of Lucknow and its dependencies, 1722-1856", Banmali Tandan, speaking of the magnificence of this Imambada remarks- ***"The imambada's facades reveal a constancy to the standard Imambada design. The east - or the entrance-front is designed by five large round-headed arches. The outer hall of Imambada Sibtainabad conserved and restored with superimposed foliated ones. To their flanks are sets of six smaller arches each, in superimposed levels. This arcade is surmounted by spacious eaves supported on brackets; and the roofline is articulated by a perforated arcade of an outline recalling that used in Saadat Ali Khan's Tomb. The materials used in the Imambada are bricks of the usual small Nawabi type and stucco; the interior is sumptuously decorated, with permissible Islamic decorative motifs being executed in a variety of hues. The Imambada has served as a tomb of Amjad Ali Shah, which again, demonstrates that Imambadas could be used both for ritual and for the burial of important personages."***

King Wajid Ali Shah made sure that his father's tomb was completed and duly and faithfully maintained. After ascending the throne he deposited Rs.7 lakhs in the British Residency's treasury as a perpetual loan for the expenses of his father's mausoleum in Hazratganj, so that his late Majesty's soul may always derive the benefit of this permanent charity. Expenses included the employment of a daroga (supintendent), 11 men to read the Quran, watchmen, sweepers, gardeners, masons and carpenters, chowkidars, muezzins, bhishtis, musicians, sepoy and many more. According to local traditions, it is believed that nearly 170 men were to be employed at an annual cost of Rs.16000/- for the upkeep of the Imambada. Along with this there was a sum of Rs. 5000/- earmarked for Muharram every year, the same amount to mark the death anniversary of the late King and Rs. 500/- to be spent during the month of Ramazan. Wajid Ali Shah was deeply devoted to his 'revered' father having made much of genuine efforts to ensure a proper upkeep of his mausoleum, which makes the long term neglect of the Sibtainabad Imambada all the more sad and disrespectful particularly when it was being used as a Government Office and a carpentry workshop for many decades. The single storey apartments around the Imambada which were later allocated to Anglo Indian families were originally intended to house the pilgrims and devotees coming to pray at Amjad Ali Shah's tomb and attend to the mournings of Muharram.

Way back in the year 1856, the province of Awadh had been annexed by the British East India Company and Wajid Ali Shah was exiled to Calcutta the year before the rebellion broke out. This high-handed action by the East India Company was greatly resented within the state and elsewhere in India and worldwide. The first British Commissioner (in effect the governor) appointed to the newly acquired territory was Coverley Jackson. He is said to have behaved thoughtlessly, and Sir Henry Lawrence, an experienced administrator, took up the appointment just a few weeks before the onset of the revolt. History writes that with the military occupation of Lucknow there was a widespread retribution against the inhabitants of the city. The savagery of Delhi was repeated. The city of Lucknow was punished to send across a message as to what would happen to an entire city if it opposed the British rule. The objective was to strike terror among the 'subject race'. The entire layout of the city was transformed. The task of reshaping Lucknow was entrusted to military

engineers led by Col. Robert Napier. A large part of the densely populated area around Macchi Bhawan, the traditional centre of the city, was demolished. Nearly two-fifths of the entire city was destroyed and the residents uprooted. One pro English Historian, Munshi Mendi Lal stated the situation after the British Control. "All of a sudden, city demolition started. A typical type of excavators were used. The madrasis and negroes were forced to work in order to carry out the destruction work of walled construction and high rise buildings were excavated; including the foundations. The destruction work continued regiment after regiment. The ground houses of very famous persons were razed to the ground using bulldozers."<sup>13</sup> Even the majestic Sibtainabad Imambada, was no exception to the barbarities of the British. It was attacked and occupied by the Sikh troops of the British army on March 13th 1858, on their way to the assault on Begum Hazrat Mahal and her loyal freedom fighters at the Qaiserbagh, that finally led to the recapture of Lucknow. "***Two companies of the 10th Foot and about a hundred men of the Ferozapore Sikhs formed a storming party, feeble resistance was offered and the troops pressed on to an outlying building of the Kaiser Bagh Palaces***"<sup>14</sup> The local hooligans could not withstand the attractions of loot. They stripped the Imambada of everything of value. The horrific plunder of the Imambada Sibtainabad on the 14th of March 1858 is recorded in the History of The Indian Mutiny 1857-1858 Vol II by Col. G.B. Malleson, London, published by William H. Allen and company in 1879 on pages 390-391. He writes "***Early on the morning of the 14th, the heavy guns, at a distance of thirty yards, were still pounding at the breach —*** " the 8-inch shot, at this short distance, walking through three or four thick masonry walls in succession as if they had been so much paper. The enemy were replying from the walls with musketry fire. At length, about 9 o'clock in the morning, the breach was reported practicable; and the stormers, who had been drawn up, awaiting the signal, received the order to assault. The storming party was composed of sixty men of Brasyer's Sikhs and two companies of the 10th Foot, supported by the remainder of the two regiments. These men, gallantly led, dashed at the breach with all the impetuosity of their pent-up energies. The defenders waited to receive them; nor was it until after a very sharp struggle that they were forced back in disorder. Once forced back, they fled as though panic-stricken, and in a few minutes the Imambada was in the possession of the stormers. The support and reserve followed, completing the lodgment. In the assault there fell a very gallant officer of the regiment of Ferozpur, Captain Da Costa, who had volunteered for this special service.

After the assault in the period from 1858, till it's being rebuilt in the year 1860, the British used the Imambada Sibtainabad as a Church. Author Yogesh Praveen writes in his Lucknownama that Lord Canning on his visit to Lucknow attended the Sunday Mass in the open area of the Imambada.<sup>15</sup>

## THE 'UN LOST' MONUMENT

"The Imambada (Sibtainabad) which is loved and revered had been surely on its way of becoming a lost monument"<sup>16</sup>

Only two of the gateways, one on the front, opposite the Halwasiya market and the other at the entrance of the Imambada are extant today but are facing the threat of decay and destruction by the encroachers which include the high and mighty businessmen of Lucknow. Archaeological Survey of India (A.S.I.) has, done a yeoman's job in restoring part of the main Imambada structure in its control, in the form of a hall with decorated archways. Still, lots need to be done by the concerned stakeholders which include the Archaeological Survey of India, the Wakf Board, the District Administration, the Municipal Corporation and the Lucknow Development Authority, who need to ensure that this majestic monument is not only restored, but also maintained with all its splendour. The area of the Imambada Sibtainabad is around to 16 Bighas 7 biswas 12 biswas and eleven kachwas. A correspondence of May and June 1945 under the signatures of the then

Deputy Commissioner of Lucknow and Chairman of the Improvement Trust testifies that the “building is in a dilapidated condition and in the middle of the floor of the Imambada, the beams which formed a vault over the grave of the late king have collapsed in a heap of rubble”.

After independence the Directorate of Agriculture and the census office procured possession of the two main halls and made material changes in the building, to suit their own requirements. The Archaeological Survey of India, being the major stake holder and guardian of the monument could not do much to save the monument from being vandalised, citing resource and man power crunch, thought the real fact seems to be its engagement in the conservation of ticketed monuments of Lucknow which included the Residency, the Asafi Imambada and the forlorn Bibiapur Kothi. All through these years, the Imambada Sibtainabad and its precincts kept getting altered, defaced and ruined with each passing day, with the main Imambada complex also having become dilapidated and inhabitable. The monument, though has been a part of the protected monuments of the Archaeological Survey of India ever since 1919, not much could be done to conserve it from the vagaries of time. The documentary evidence which finds the place in the recollections herein proves that the alleged descendants of the entombed King, who were provided an annuity for the maintenance of the monument failed in discharging their responsibilities which resulted in further decay and destruction of this monument. The committee of Imambada initiated a strong action, which included the correspondence and follow-up with the highest which led to a systematic and time-bound restoration of the monument by the Archaeological Survey of India. The methodical and systematic approach has helped in the revival of the almost lost Imambada and same needs to be emulated in the other monuments which are a testimony of our rich cultural heritage. This Imambada today hosts with elan, the majlises throughout the year with a grand observance of the mournings of Muharram. The Monument has served host to many religious and secular programmes conveying strongly the message of communal harmony and peace, which is the underlying current of Lucknowi culture.

Lucknow which was a non-descript city before being made into the capital city by Nawab Asafuddaula, not only paved the way for unparalleled cultural but also some majestic architectural achievements. The Imambada architecture is definitely an epitome of the coming of age of Lucknow as a seat of Indo Islamic culture.

## **CONCLUSIONS**

The Sibtainabad experience shows how the determination, grit, passion and commitment of heritage enthusiasts joined together can rescue a lost heritage. Be it the writing of requests, sending letters and petitions, researching the historical aspect ,following up with the government authorities and the other relevant stakeholders by using the RTI act, gathering relevant information, or the filing of the Public Interest Litigation before the High Court and ensuring a time-bound action towards heritage conservation for a systematic and time-bound restoration of this almost lost Monument is a success story in itself which can be replicated for the monuments which are on the verge of disappearance.

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