

# THE FRAGILE LEGACY OF BLUE: REASSESSING THE UNFINISHED CONSERVATION OF MIAN GHULAM NABI KALHORO TOMB FOR ARCHITECTURAL PRESERVATION AND TOURISM REVIVAL

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## ABSTRACT

*The Mian Ghulam Nabi Kalhoro Tomb adorned with Hala blue Kashi-Kari tiles, represents Sindh's artistic and cultural heritage. Over the years, the tomb has suffered severe architectural decay, including tile loss, structural deterioration, environmental neglect, and vandalism. This study critically examines the conservation failures and highlights the urgent need for restoration measures to preserve its architectural identity and enhance its tourism potential. In alignment with International Council on Monuments and Sites (ICOMOS) and Venice Charter conservation guidelines, the study proposes a comprehensive restoration strategy, including tile reinstallation, heritage tourism initiatives, and sustainable maintenance practices. Additionally, it advocates for community engagement, technological interventions, and government collaboration to ensure long-term preservation. The paper emphasizes the need for reassessing conservation approaches, with a strong focus on integrating heritage preservation with tourism development, to safeguard this iconic Sindhi monument for future generations.*

**Keywords:** *Architectural Conservation, Heritage Tourism, Hala Tilework, Sindh Heritage, Conservation Challenges.*

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## INTRODUCTION

The Mian Ghulam Nabi Kalhoro Tomb, built in the late 1770s, is an architectural marvel of the Kalhoro dynasty, showcasing the artistic and structural grandeur of Islamic architecture in Sindh. Situated in Hyderabad, Pakistan, this tomb is a historical and cultural landmark that reflects the region's rich heritage, making it a potential focal point for tourism.

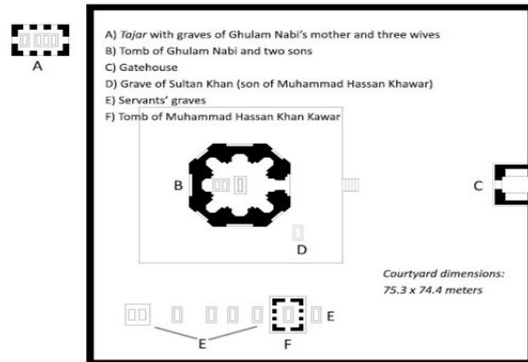
### Historical Context

The Kalhoro dynasty rose to prominence during the Mughal era, with its political and architectural legacy reaching its zenith under Mian Ghulam Shah Kalhoro, the founder of Hyderabad. His nephew, Mian Ghulam Nabi Kalhoro, ruled for a brief period from 1775 to 1776, a time marked by political instability. Despite the short tenure of his rule, the dynasty demonstrated remarkable resilience by constructing this tomb as a lasting symbol of their power and wealth.

### Architectural Features

The tomb embodies the quintessential elements of Islamic funerary architecture, blending monumental proportions with intricate decorative details. Key architectural elements include:

*Octagonal Layout:* The tomb is based on an octagonal plan, a hallmark of Islamic architecture, symbolizing cosmic order and spiritual transcendence.

**Fig. 1: Plan of Ghulam Nabi's Tomb**

**Hemispherical Dome:** A 16-sided drum supports the hemispherical dome, creating a grand visual impact and enhancing the interior's spatial quality.

**Qibla Orientation:** Like many Islamic monuments, the tomb is oriented slightly counter-clockwise to align the qibla direction with Mecca, approximately 3,000 kilometres away.

**Blue Kashi-Kari Tiles:** The façades are adorned with vibrant blue-glazed tiles, or Hala tiles, featuring intricate floral and geometric motifs. These tiles are a significant feature of Sindh's architectural identity, symbolizing artistry and craftsmanship.

**Interior Details:** The interior is relatively austere, with painted walls and an undecorated plinth for the marble cenotaph, reflecting a utilitarian approach to funerary design.

## Structural Layout

The tomb is located on a plot measuring 75.3 x 74.4 meters, surrounded by heavy enclosure walls. The primary structure, standing on a low plinth of 35.4 x 33.5 meters, features corner kiosks and spires, adding to its fort-like appearance. A staircase within the south-western wall leads to the roof, offering panoramic views of the surrounding area.

## Objectives

- To document and analyze the architectural features of Mian Ghulam Nabi Kalhorro Tomb.
- To identify conservation issues affecting the structural and aesthetic integrity of the tomb.
- To assess the site's potential for heritage-based tourism.
- To propose integrated conservation and tourism strategies in line with ICOMOS guidelines.

### **Research Questions**

- What architectural and cultural values are embedded in the tomb's design and ornamentation?
- What are the primary causes of deterioration and neglect?
- How can the site be restored and reimagined as a heritage tourism destination?
- What role can community involvement and policy intervention play in its sustainable conservation?

## **LITERATURE REVIEW**

The conservation of Islamic funerary architecture in South Asia has gained attention in recent years due to its socio-cultural and tourism potential (Khan, 2015). The Kalhorro tombs represent a synthesis of Mughal, local, and Islamic architectural influences, characterized by octagonal plans, domes, and intricate blue-glazed tiles (Ansari, 2018). These elements not only define stylistic identity but also carry spiritual symbolism in Islamic cosmology.

The fragile condition of heritage monuments in Pakistan is symptomatic of broader systemic neglect. Rahman (2017) identifies lack of funding, poor documentation, and untrained labor as major conservation obstacles. The same is evident in the Kalhorro tomb, where fallen Hala tiles, blackened ceilings, and graffiti mar the site's integrity. Siddiqui (2020) notes that defacement not only damages physical heritage but also erodes communal memory.

ICOMOS's Venice Charter (1964) and UNESCO's 1972 Convention emphasize the necessity of maintaining cultural authenticity, continuity, and documentation during conservation. Article 1 of the Venice Charter asserts that sites must be preserved as historical evidence (ICOMOS, 1964). The degradation visible at Ghulam Nabi's Tomb, such as missing tilework and waste accumulation, directly contradicts this principle.

Recent research has highlighted the role of traditional craftsmanship in the revival of cultural heritage. Memon (2020) emphasizes the importance of preserving indigenous techniques, such as Hala tile-making, which are at risk of extinction due to modernization and outsourcing. Baloch (2019) underscores that these tiles are not merely decorative but encode artistic, symbolic, and material knowledge.

Tourism has often been cited as a viable tool for conservation through economic incentive. Baig (2021) discusses the potential of heritage tourism in Hyderabad, arguing that with proper site management and public awareness, sites like the Kalhoro tomb can generate both cultural and economic value. However, as ICCROM (2019) notes, tourism must be regulated through heritage-sensitive infrastructure, guided tours, and education to prevent overuse and commodification.

An integrated approach, as proposed by ICOMOS Pakistan (2021), combines restoration, public engagement, and adaptive reuse. This is echoed in global charters that advocate for participatory heritage practices. Such strategies ensure not only architectural longevity but also public ownership and pride.

## **METHODOLOGY**

This research employs a qualitative case-study approach, grounded in:

1. On-site documentation through photography, visual assessment, and spatial analysis of the tomb's architecture.

2. Comparative analysis of Kalhoro-era funerary structures.
3. Archival research on historical tilework and Islamic funerary traditions.
4. Policy analysis using ICOMOS Venice Charter (1964) and national conservation guidelines.
5. The assessment integrates visual deterioration mapping, stakeholder identification, and tourism potential review.

## DISCUSSION & ANALYSIS

### Tourism and Conservation Potential

This tomb, situated in close proximity to key landmarks in Hyderabad, such as the Central Jail and Eye Hospital, offers immense tourism potential. Its strategic location, historical significance, and architectural grandeur make it a valuable asset for promoting heritage tourism in Pakistan. Key aspects for its tourism appeal include:

***Cultural Experience:*** The tomb serves as a gateway to exploring the Kalhoro dynasty's legacy, offering visitors a deeper understanding of Sindh's history and architecture.

***Architectural Appreciation:*** The intricate blue Kashi-Kari tiles, a hallmark of Sindh's craftsmanship, provide a visual treat for art and architecture enthusiasts. Restoring these tiles would significantly enhance the site's appeal.

***Accessibility:*** Its central location in Hyderabad ensures easy access for both domestic and international tourists.

***Photographic Attraction:*** The tomb's unique octagonal structure, majestic dome, and vibrant tiles make it a picturesque site, ideal for photography enthusiasts.

## Environmental Hygiene Challenges

The image of garbage near the boundary wall of the "Mian Ghulam Nabi Kalhoru Tomb" highlights the neglect in maintaining and conserving this significant heritage site in Hyderabad, Pakistan. This issue is not only detrimental to the site's aesthetic value but also undermines its historical, cultural, and tourism significance. In the context of the International Council on Monuments and Sites (ICOMOS) principles, which emphasize the proper care and preservation of cultural heritage, the following points are relevant:

1. Article 1 of the Venice Charter (1964): States that monuments and sites must be safeguarded as historical evidence. The presence of garbage near the tomb contradicts this principle, as it reflects negligence in preserving the historical context and environment of the site.
2. Article 4 of the Venice Charter: Emphasizes the duty of ensuring proper conservation of heritage. Allowing litter to accumulate near a significant historical structure demonstrates a failure to uphold this responsibility.

## Architectural Decay and Negligence

The condition of the "Mian Ghulam Nabi Kalhoru Tomb," as depicted in these images raises significant concerns about its architectural conservation. Observations such as black smoke on the entrance ceiling, chalking and graffiti on the walls, deteriorated plaster, and uneven flooring highlight the neglect and lack of maintenance for this important cultural heritage site. These issues not only compromise the structural integrity of the tomb but also diminish its historical and aesthetic value, negatively impacting its role as a tourism spot.

***Deterioration of Tiles:*** The images show many tiles missing from the façade, leaving gaps that compromise the building's beauty and authenticity. The missing tiles reveal the underlying brick structure, diminishing the intricate pattern and elegance that once defined the tomb.

***Neglect of Repair and Maintenance:*** The exposed masonry and damaged sections of the wall indicate poor conservation efforts. Traditional methods and materials appear to have been ignored, leading to a loss of the site's original character.

***Impact on Aesthetics and Heritage:*** The lack of consistent restoration is causing the tomb to lose its historical and visual significance. The absence of tiles disrupts the harmony of the design, leaving the structure incomplete and uninviting.

***Significance of Hala/Blue Tiles:*** The Hala/Blue tiles found on the façade of the Mian Ghulam Nabi Kalhoro Tomb are not just decorative elements; they are an essential part of Sindh's cultural and architectural identity. These tiles:

***Historical Value:*** Represent the craftsmanship of artisans from the Hala region, a legacy dating back centuries.

***Research Importance:*** The tiles are crucial for studying historical materials, techniques, and glazing methods. Researchers and conservationists can analyse them in laboratories to understand the composition, durability, and artistic styles of the past.

***Symbolism:*** The vibrant blue hues and floral or geometric patterns are integral to Islamic art, symbolizing tranquility, spirituality, and infinity.

### **Criticism of Current State of the Tomb**

***Neglect and Damage:*** Many tiles have fallen off the façade, as shown in the images, and are carelessly discarded into garbage heaps. This negligence not only damages the structure but also erases a vital element of cultural heritage.

***Impact on Aesthetics:*** The missing tiles disrupt the visual harmony and diminish the tomb's grandeur, making it less appealing to tourists and visitors. The gaps in the tilework expose the underlying masonry, creating a stark contrast that detracts from the architectural beauty.

**Loss of Unique Elements:** The dropped tiles in the garbage reveal a lack of proper preservation practices. Each tile represents unique artistry and historical knowledge that is being lost due to inadequate handling.

**Uniqueness of the Elements:** Handcrafted Tiles: The Hala tiles are handcrafted with intricate floral and geometric patterns, representing a blend of local and Islamic artistic traditions.

1. **Traditional Techniques:** The tiles are made using unique glazing and firing techniques that are historically significant and not commonly replicated in modern practices.
2. **Cultural Identity:** These tiles symbolize the rich heritage of Sindh, connecting the region to its historical roots and artisanship.

### **Comparative Analysis**

The tomb shares similarities with other Kalhoro monuments, such as that of Mian Ghulam Shah Kalhoro, but also exhibits distinct features:

- Unlike the gallery behind squinches found in Ghulam Shah's tomb, Ghulam Nabi's dome sits directly on the drum, supported by eight clerestory windows, allowing natural light to brighten the interior.
- The Tajar, or burial place for the ruler's wives and mother, is located outside the courtyard, a unique deviation from traditional layouts.
- The terrace lacks a railing, giving the structure an unfinished appearance, yet retaining its monumental charm.

### **Defacement and Visitor-Induced Damage**

The Mian Ghulam Nabi Kalhoro Tomb, a significant architectural and cultural heritage site in Hyderabad, Pakistan, is facing a severe conservation crisis due to visitor-induced defacement. The presence of chalking, graffiti, and unauthorized inscriptions on the façade of

the tomb is not only an act of disrespect but also a major threat to the authenticity and historical integrity of this iconic structure.

### **Loss of Architectural Aesthetic**

One of the most alarming conservation issues is the falling and missing traditional blue-glazed tiles from the façade. The intricate Kashi-Kari (Hala) tiles, known for their vibrant floral and geometric patterns, have either fallen off or been removed over time due to neglect and environmental factors. The exposed brickwork leaves the structure looking incomplete and historically disconnected from its original grandeur. This not only diminishes the aesthetic integrity of the tomb but also compromises its historical authenticity, a key principle in conservation.

## **CONCLUSION**

The Mian Ghulam Nabi Kalhoro Tomb is more than a funerary monument; it is a silent yet eloquent witness to the political, artistic, and spiritual fabric of 18th-century Sindh. Embodying the architectural ingenuity of the Kalhoro dynasty through its octagonal form, drum-supported hemispherical dome, and vibrant blue Hala tiles, the tomb once stood as a symbol of power, faith, and craftsmanship. Today, however, it sits on the edge of oblivion, bearing the weight of negligence, environmental stress, visitor-induced damage, and a glaring absence of institutional accountability. The degradation of the monument is not just physical; it reflects a broader crisis of heritage management, policy fragmentation, and disconnection between the past and the present. The fallen Kashi tiles, blackened ceilings, graffiti-stained walls, and piles of garbage represent more than material decay; they signify a fading collective memory and a societal failure to recognize the value of its own cultural capital.

This paper, through a detailed architectural assessment and literature-informed critique, reveals the disconnect between the monument's potential and its current condition. Despite being listed

among significant cultural sites, the tomb remains structurally vulnerable and underutilized as a cultural asset. Yet its central location in Hyderabad, its distinct architectural character, and its associations with the Kalhoro lineage make it an ideal candidate for integrated heritage tourism. The application of ICOMOS and UNESCO conservation guidelines offers a globally informed framework to guide restoration, but any successful intervention must also root itself in local context through traditional craftsmanship revival, particularly Hala tilework, and participatory approaches that involve artisans, local stakeholders, and heritage professionals. Moreover, the reinterpretation of such colonial-era or Islamic monuments in postcolonial societies like Pakistan requires careful navigation. Conservation must extend beyond restoration aesthetics to include inclusive narratives, public engagement, and educational value.

The study also emphasizes the strategic potential of this monument within a tourism and economic framework. As Pakistan seeks to reposition its cultural landscape in global tourism circuits, sites like the Kalhoro tomb can play a pivotal role in reshaping national identity through heritage-led regeneration. However, this transformation cannot be achieved through cosmetic changes or isolated projects. It demands long-term policy support, inter-agency collaboration, sustainable funding, and institutional accountability. Furthermore, conservation must be underpinned by education both of the public and decision-makers on the significance of preserving architectural heritage not just for its aesthetic appeal, but for its role in fostering identity, continuity, and cultural pride.

In conclusion, the Mian Ghulam Nabi Kalhoro Tomb should no longer be treated as a passive relic but as a living narrative of Sindh's historical consciousness. By implementing integrated strategies that combine architectural conservation, environmental management, digital documentation, and tourism development, the tomb can be transformed into a vibrant symbol of resilience and cultural continuity. It can stand not only as a restored monument but as a

reinterpreted space one that educates, inspires, and reclaims heritage within the framework of decolonized and community-centered preservation. The success of this endeavor depends on whether we, as heritage professionals, policymakers, and citizens, choose to view such structures as burdens of the past or as bridges to a more culturally rooted future.

By integrating restoration, environmental preservation, tourism enhancement, and community engagement, the Mian Ghulam Nabi Kalhoro Tomb can be transformed into a model heritage site in Pakistan. These strategies will not only restore its lost grandeur but also position it as a key historical and tourism landmark, ensuring its cultural and historical legacy endures for future generations.

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