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Mosque Design and Changing Ruling Class Identities in Bengal

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Abstract: The paper outlines the development of mosque architecture in Bengal (both Bangladesh as well as the Indian province of West Bengal) by choosing landmark monuments to show evolution under different political conditions and changing identities of the ruling elite. The simple rectangular hypostyle building without any enclosed courtyard ultimately gave way to a modern space that lacks most traditional references to mosque architecture. Beside practical considerations such as climate, mosque designs often reflected the manner in which the sponsors, often members of the ruling nobility, wished to be perceived. The courtyard-type mosque of the central Islamic lands was used only once in early times and later again in the 20th century. Both times the motivations were political so that there could be closer identification with Islamic areas in West Asia. From the 15th century, beginning with the first native ruler, a style derived from the rural Bengali hut became popular. Subsequently and with the coming of the Mughals, an imperial power ruling from North India, a provincial version of the Imperial style was introduced in Bengal. References to the Imperial Mughal style as well as to the Masjid al Haram in Makkah became symbolic of Muslim power in ascendance in the 20th century, later making way for a modern style with the establishment of nation-states.

Introduction

The mosque is identified everywhere as a building that goes hand in hand with the spread of Islam, because one of the ritual needs of the faith is the congregational prayer of believing men. From the time that the first Muslim conquerors established a foothold in Bengal until the present day, a period of almost eight hundred years, thousands of mosques were built to meet the needs of the growing Muslim population. They existed not only as expressions of piety, but as potent visual symbols of the power, wealth, perceptions and affiliations of the sponsors. In this paper only a few significant landmarks from the whole history of mosque architecture of Bengal is used to illustrate how different styles were related to the changing definitions of Muslim identity of the sponsors. The functional requirements of the mosque are quite simple; basically only a large space with a *mihrab* or niche in the qibla wall directing the devotees towards Makkah. It was in the stylistic and spatial preferences of this architecture, that the sponsors, often belonging to the elite class flashed messages to the gathering congregation as well as to the non-Muslim population about their inclinations and expectations.

The setting for Islam in Bengal differed greatly from that of its birthplace, from the desert sands of Arabia, the religion was transplanted to a well-watered delta. Here it was nurtured to such an extent that the area is now home to one of the largest Muslim populations in the world. Bengal in this paper includes both the present state of Bangladesh and the province of West Bengal of India, that is, the entire delta of the rivers Ganges, Jamuna and Meghna before their waters jointly flow into the Bay of Bengal.

Muslim presence before the conquest of 601 H/1204 G was limited to the handful of Arab traders who frequented the ports of the Bay of Bengal. It was only after that conquest that Islam became a force to reckon with. For reasons already mentioned, one of the first

building activities of the conquerors was to establish mosques for congregational prayers. Although historical texts state that several mosques, khanqas, and madrasas were built from the beginning of Muslim rule, there are no extant mosques for almost the first one hundred years, and we have no idea what the earliest monuments were like. Historically this was a time when governors sent by the Sultan residing in Delhi came to administer this remote province. Often they would defy the Sultan and throw off the imperial yoke, but the independence never lasted for very long, and soon they would be brought to book again. [1]

Along with new rulers and a new religion, a new type of building, the mosque, was introduced. This was very different from the existing temples of the Buddhists and Hindus, the two dominant religious groups among the indigenous people. The differences were dictated by the differences in the religions as well as the different manner in which participation was required during ritual prayer. Islam allowed no images, whereas in the temples all devotional activity centered on the image of the deity. A Brahmin priest performed all the rituals in the temple and he alone was allowed to enter the sanctum or holiest of holies, while the rest of the devotees waited outside. The mosque had no such sanctum, and all believers had to stand in straight rows behind the *imam* or prayer leader to pray. A correct orientation was required, as believers were obliged to face Makkah, the direction of the *qibla* during prayers. The size of the congregation could be very large on Fridays, when all men were required to perform the afternoon prayer in a mosque; therefore a large space was needed.

The earliest extant mosque in Bengal is the Mosque of Zafar Khan Ghazi, in Tribeni, built in 698 H/1298 G.[2: 48-49,53-56, 62-69] In inscriptions Zafar Khan is acknowledged as a valiant warrior and military commander who destroyed the obdurate among the infidels, and lavished wealth on the believers. Inscription states that he had also built a madrasa. He is believed to be the first conqueror of Tribeni, a site sacred to the Hindus. The rectangular multi-bayed mosque that has no enclosed courtyard (Fig.1) is built of brick with a veneer of stone. Because of the plentiful supply of clay, brick has been the predominant building material of this region from ancient times. As no stone is quarried in Bengal, the veneer for this mosque was mostly culled from older buildings. Re-use of older material was an act of appropriation by conquerors that is constantly seen in older cultures, both within and outside Islam. The plan shows a completely enclosed rectangular building of five bays and two aisles made up of ten square units, each one covered by a dome. Exactly opposite the five front entrances, are five mihrabs in the qibla wall; it is almost as if each mihrab was generated by an entrance. There are two entrances on each of the two sides. There is no minaret. This plan differs from the early mosques built by the Muslims in other newly conquered areas including the rest of India. Those were usually of the traditional Arab type whose prototype is the Great Mosque of Damascus built by the Umayyad *khalifa* al-Walid in 87 H/706 G. The most conspicuous part of their plans would be an open courtyard in the center, with covered liwans on all four sides, the one on the qibla side being the deepest.

From early times the Muslims in Bengal realized that the traditional type of plan was not suitable for a monsoon drenched land, and so opted for a completely covered building where the congregation could be protected from rain. The dome was regarded as indispensable, probably because of symbolic reasons, as also the multiple mihrabs that emphasized the linearity of a mosque and where believers had to stand in horizontal rows. This organization was very different from a temple, where there was a single niche to hold the image and where the single priest administered the rituals. The absence of a minaret can be explained by the fact that much of the land was flat and densely forested, so that even a tall minaret would not be visible from a distance.

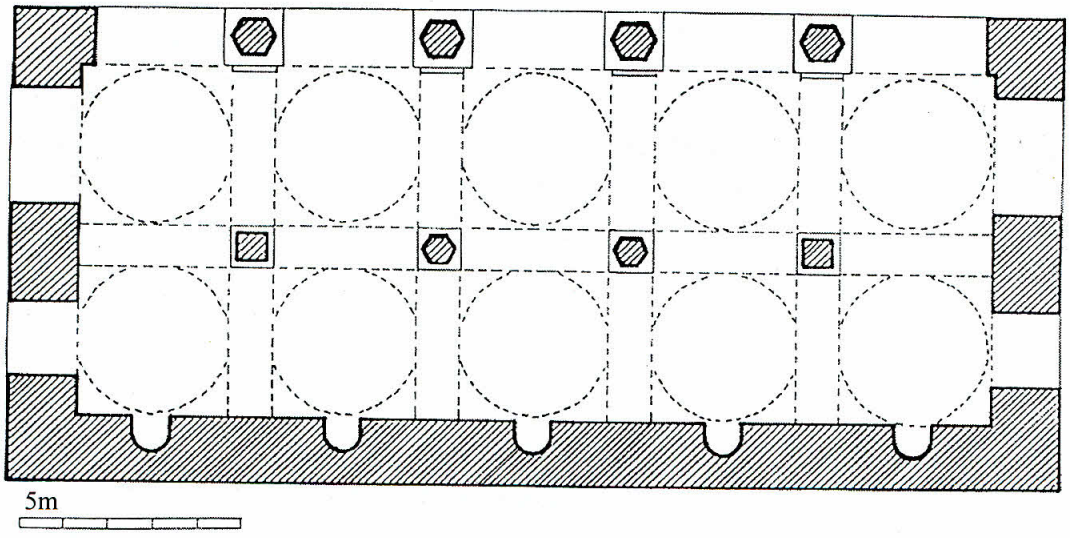


Fig 1: Mosque of Zafar Khan Ghazi, Tribeni, 698H/1298 G (Plan after Catherine Asheer, "Inventory", p. 135).

As a result even the ornamental use of minarets purely for their symbolic value was curtailed. The call to prayer was probably given from the forecourt of the mosque. Thus from the beginning, adjustments were being made to the traditional mosque plan to suit prevailing climate and topographical conditions. Although significant changes were brought about in the elevation, the type of plan represented by the Mosque of Zafar Khan remained popular in Bengal right up to pre-modern times. It is symbolic of an early mosque where the building material testifies to the might of the new conqueror in the appropriation of a new land, and sets out a new building type that was associated with the daily rituals of the new religion.

The ruined Adina Mosque at Hazrat Pandua in Malda district of West Bengal is the second extant mosque. It is the site of the former Muslim capital of Firuzabad, and the mosque is dated by inscription to 776 H/1374-75 G.[2:87-92; 3: 109-11,155-64] In spite of the long gap in time between this mosque and the previous one, there is no reason to conclude that no mosques were built in the interim period. As the buildings were mostly of brick, it was only a matter of time before the mortar between layers got washed out by rain, and the structures fell apart. Moreover the inner cores of the walls were usually of mud and rubble. As the entirely covered type of mosque continued to be popular in later times, we may assume that mosques similar in plan to Zafar Khan Ghazi's Mosque were built in this intervening period.

The Adina Mosque breaks away from this type. It has the double distinction of being not only the largest mosque in the Indian sub-continent but also the only one with the traditional plan of an enclosed courtyard in Bengal right up to the middle of the 20th century (Fig. 2). It is significant that Sikandar Shah, the second Sultan of the newly established independent Ilyas Shahi dynasty built it, after he had defeated the Delhi Sultan Firuz Shah Tughluq. Its rectangular plan with enclosed courtyard, with a screen of arches all around and its vaulted hall that divides the zulla into two symmetrical wings immediately, recalls al-Walid's Great Mosque of Damascus.

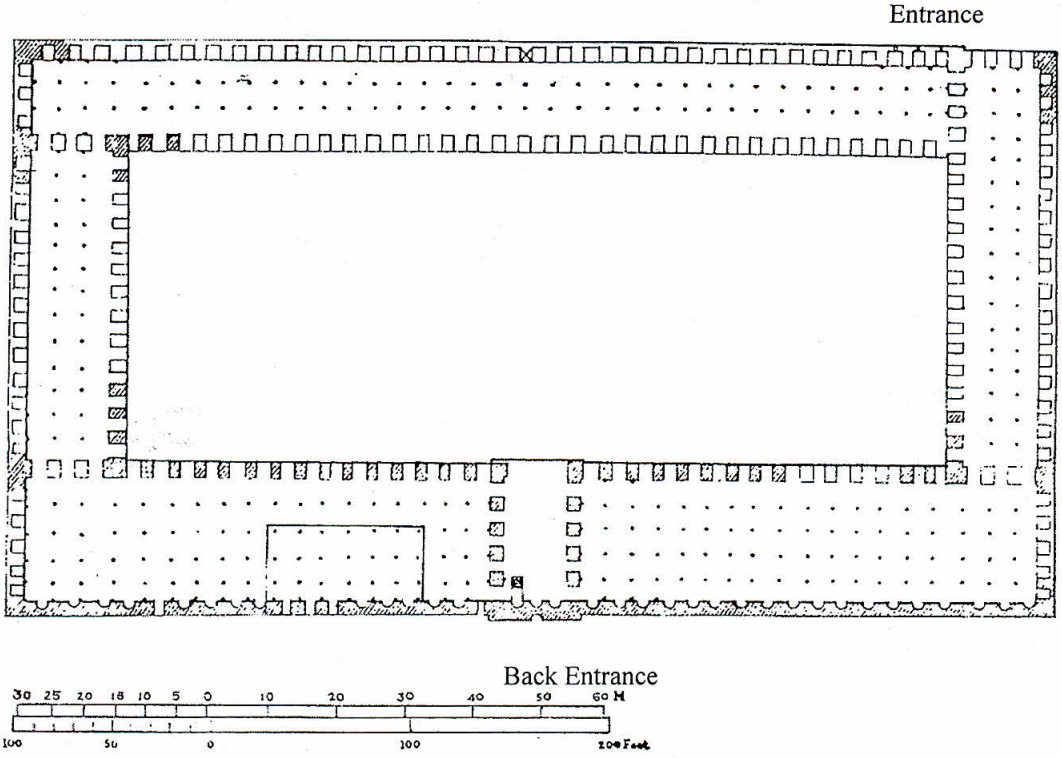


Fig 2: Adina Mosque, Hazrat Pandua. 776 H/1374-75 (Plan after Alexander Cunningham Archaeological Survey of India Report, Vol. XV, Plate VII).

Looking carefully we discover that the spatial arrangement of each wing of the zulla is quite similar to that of the earlier Mosque of Zafar Khan Ghazi. Columns divide each wing into multiple square bays, every one of which is covered by a dome. There is a mihrab corresponding to each arched entrance in front. Thus there is a total of forty-one mihrabs along the qibla wall. The walls up to the springing of the arches are faced with stone, much of which was quarried from older buildings. Although the entire brick built vault of the central aisle or transept has now collapsed it is possible to guess that it was fronted by a *pishtaq* through which there was a clear view of the grand qibla area. This area is faced with dressed stone, has an exquisitely carved mihrab with a crown motif above a row of merlons and an elaborate stone minbar to the right.

There was a raised platform in the north-western area which served as a maqsura for the Sultan, being screened off all around and having a separate entrance from the back of the mosque. The royal symbolism of the central mihrab area, the massive proportions of the mosque, as well as its obvious associations with the Great Mosque of Damascus, or even the great iwaned hall of the 3rd century Sassanian palace of Taq-i- Kisra in Ctesiphon [3] are best understood if we refer to the Sultan's inscription. This is fixed on the exterior of the qibla wall where Sikandar Shah boldly proclaims himself as: 'The exalted Sultan, the wisest and most just, the most liberal and most perfect of the Sultans of Arabia and Persia...'.

Without mentioning Bengal or North India, it is with the central Islamic lands in the west that Sikandar seeks affiliation in order to assert his power as a Muslim king. The sources of legitimization are clearly identified to be extra-territorial. Courtyard type plans are found again only in modern times, and perhaps again for symbolic reasons. The open courtyard was not suitable for the prevailing weather conditions, and because the native craftsmen did not have the technical expertise to build vaults of such gigantic proportions. The scheme of a central aisle dividing the interior of a covered mosque into two equal halves, and at the same time creating a specially marked-out area in front of the central mihrab, was used in a few of the later mosques. In these, the vault was either smaller as in the Gunmant Mosque in Gaur, or was broken up into smaller bays, each one to be covered by a vault, as in the Shait Gumbad in Bagerhat, or Darasbari, and Chhoto Sona mosques in Gaur.[4:75, 41-42, 69, 71] Significant changes in the design and elevation of mosques evolved in the 15th century.

That local craftsmen were still not confident of building a single dome over a large area is evident from the primitive manner in which the solution to the zone of transition has been sought. To avoid the problem of having to build large squinch arches to achieve the transition from the square chamber to the circular base of the dome, an octagonal room was built inside the square one, and the interspace was filled in with brick. This resulted in inordinately thick walls. As evidenced from the ruined Buddhist monasteries of Paharpur and Mainamati, which date from the 8th century, brick and terracotta are native to this area from ancient times. The other elements of this style, such as the modest size, corner towers, and curved cornice were all drawn from the village hut which even today abounds in the countryside of predominantly rural Bengal.

A hut is built with mud or bamboo matting supported by a frame of wood or bamboo poles. Four corner posts support its entire fabric. These posts are generally not visible from the outside, being concealed inside the corners of bamboo matting daubed with mud. Sometimes, as in the illustration (Fig.3), there are additional posts in-between.

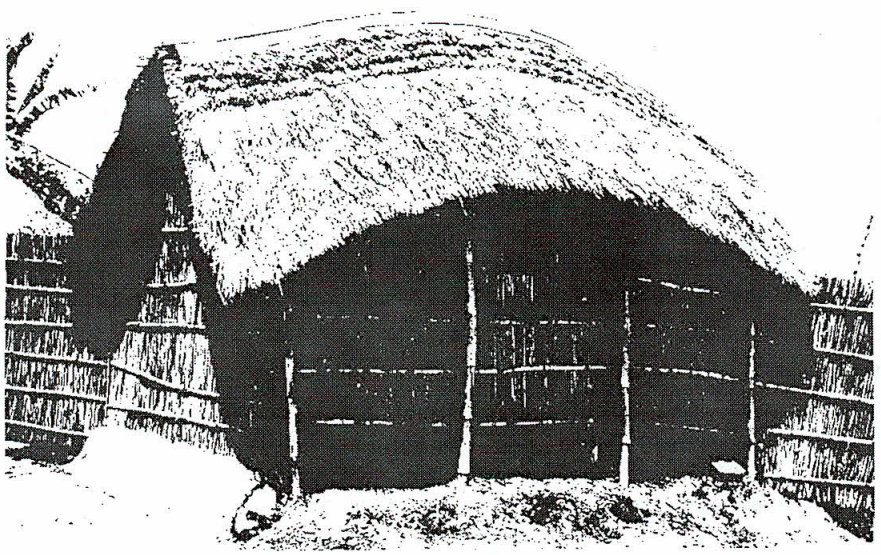


Fig 3: Do-chala hut in a village in Bangladesh.

The curvature of the cornice is related to the natural behavior of the bamboo with which the frame of the roof is made. The strips are strong in tension but bend easily. The roof is called a *chala* in Bengali, and is known as *do-chala* when it is in two sections, and *chau-chala* when it is in four. A *do-chala* roof is supported by a row of bamboo poles planted inside the chamber, with the tallest one in the middle and diminishing in height toward the ends. This causes the curvatures on the ridge of the roof as well as on the hanging eaves. The curved shape of the ridge and eaves of the hut roof was adopted for the cornice of buildings in the Bengal style. In a *chau-chala*, where the roof is in four segments, the two longer sections meet to form a ridge at the top, while the end sections are triangular.

These roof forms were not used to cover the main space of the mosque during the Sultanate period, but were used for smaller spaces in a unique manner. The ornamental appeal of their miniature forms, as well as the idea that the dome was considered the only appropriate form of roofing for the main mosque area, could be the reason for this.

The reason why Sultan Jalal al-Din chose a style rooted in the native hut tradition for his buildings, is perhaps best explained by the fact that he was the first Sultan of native origin. Being the converted son of Raja Ganesh, a nobleman of ancient lineage, his seventeen-year reign heralded the beginning of an era when the sultanate firmly grounded itself in the culture of the land. The new outlook is best reflected in the architecture of the period. The style incorporated forms that were natural to huts made of bamboo and mud into a more permanent brick medium. It was so well anchored and became so popular that it persisted even after the overthrow of Jalal al-Din and the restoration of the old Ilyas Shahi house in 837 H/1433 G. Thus from the 15th century right up to the end of the 16th , when imperial Mughal influences were beginning to be felt, the majority of mosques were built in a strong regional style with forms that were easily recognizable as derived from a hut.

Jalal al-Din's short inter-regnum was significant in many ways. An astute king who knew how to play the credentials of his new Muslim identity, he adopted the Hanafi legal tradition, rebuilt the mosques destroyed by his father, and supported the construction of a religious school in Makkah. Gifts were sent to Sultan Ashraf Barsbay, the Mamluk sultan of Egypt and the most prestigious ruler of the central Islamic lands, in order to establish close ties with him. The Mamluk Sultan in return sent a letter of recognition to Jalal al-Din. He re-introduced on his coins the Muslim confession of faith, the *shahada*, which had disappeared from Bengal coinage since the early 13th century. A few years into his reign, the Sultan also introduced the title of *khalifat Allah* on his coins. At the same time he did not attempt to hide his identity as the son of a Hindu raja, but proclaimed his paternity in Arabic as *bin Kans Rao*, or son of Raja Ganesh. His patronage of Bengali Islamic architecture went hand in hand with his overall patronage of Bengali culture as described by a contemporary Chinese traveler who reported that although Persian was understood by some in the court, Bengali was the language that was more universally used. [3:56-63]

With an economy based on agriculture, a society of feudal structure, and surrounded by belligerent neighbors eager to destroy the Sultanate's independence, Bengal was so culturally isolated that it was forced to turn inwards. Thus even when later sultans of foreign origin assumed power, like the Restored Ilyas Shahis (837-891 H./1433-1486 G) and the Husayn Shahis (899-945 H/1493-1538 G) they considered it wiser to continue to support the local culture because they needed the allegiance of the people.

In fact, there was a flowering of regional culture during Husayn Shahi rule, which was a new dynasty founded by Ala al-Din Husayn. Ala al-Din was an Arab from Makkah who had risen to the office of chief minister during the confusion and palace intrigue that had followed the overthrow of the restored Ilyas Shahis. The Mosque at Goaldi in Panam near

Dhaka dated by inscription to 15th Shaban, 925 H/August 12, 1519 G built by Mullah Hizbar Akbar Khan is an example of a mosque in the typical Bengal style (Fig.4). [2:311]

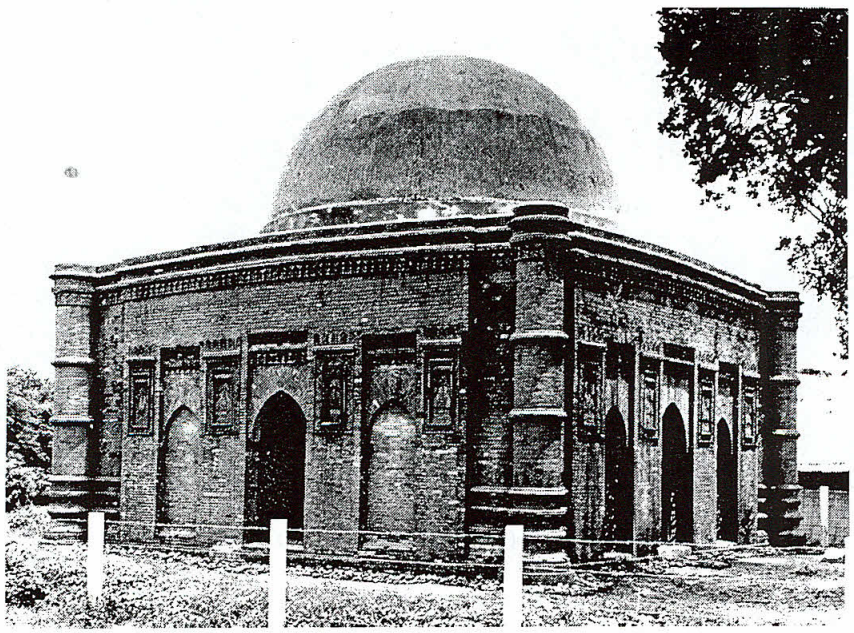


Fig 4: Mosque at Goaldi, dhaka, 924 H./1519G.

A square building with a dome, it is of small size, built of brick, and is pavilion-like in appearance. There are three entrances in front, opposite which are three mihrabs in the qibla wall, and blind doorways on either side of the entrances on the north and south sides. Thus the organization of space inside is similar to the individual units of the large rectangular mosques discussed earlier. The inter-columnar spaces of each unit in the larger mosque are here filled with walls. The external elevation and decoration are derived from local buildings.

Large rectangular mosques continued to be built even though they were not as numerous as the square single-domed square ones. The Bagha Mosque in Rajshahi district, built by Sultan Nusrat Shah son of Husayn Shah in the year 930H/1523-24G, is a ten-domed mosque of two aisles and five bays (Fig. 5). [2:44] Columns divide the interior into ten square units each one covered by a dome, with a mihrab opposite each doorway in the east. There are two entrances each on the north and south sides. The continuity of the same type of plan as first seen in the Mosque of Zafar Khan Ghazi can hardly go unnoticed. The external elevation and decoration with the familiar curvature in the cornice, engaged corner towers, as well as profuse terracotta decoration resembles the Mosque at Goaldi and the earlier local buildings

The village hut often has a verandah or porch added to the front. This feature was also faithfully replicated in some of the Sultanate mosques from the 15th century. They are more numerously found in the small single-unit square mosques, and on rare occasions in the large rectangular multi-unit ones.

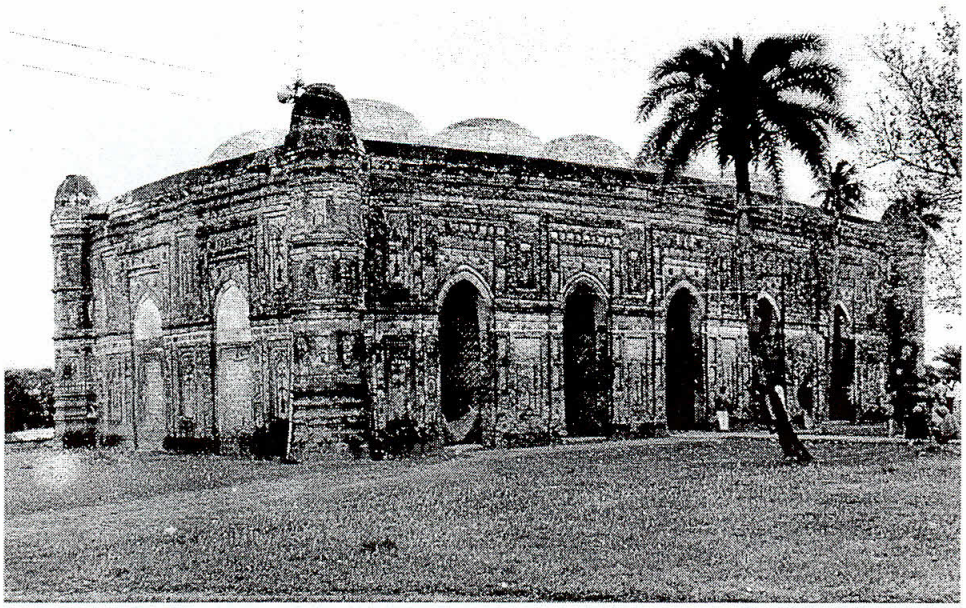


Fig 5: Mosque at Bagha, Rajshahi, 930 H./1523-24 G.

The Gopalganj Mosque in Dinajpur district is a small single-domed mosque (Fig 6) dated to 865 H/1460 G, built by the direction of the great Khan, the noble Chief, the hero of the age and the period Ulugh Iqrar Khan Commander and Wazir. Although in a ruined state, it is the earliest extant example of a mosque with verandah in front. The three entrances in the east are aligned with the entrances into the prayer chamber as well as the mihrabs in the qibla wall. The verandah in front is divided into three groin-vaulted bays. There are side entrances into the prayer chamber as well as into the porch. Thus set principles of space organization are rigidly followed even though the interior is less than four meters square. It is also worthy to note that the sponsor, although a high ranking official, did not consider it unbecoming to build such a small mosque. In a countryside where almost all buildings including mosques were of mud and thatch, buildings of brick decorated with terracotta designs were no doubt considered grand.

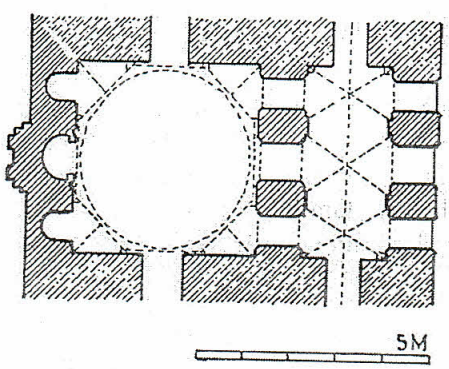


Fig 6: Mosque at Gopalganj, Dinajpur (Plan) 865 H./1460 G..

The fruit of an extraordinary effort, these mosques were not the utilitarian structures required in any Muslim neighborhood. The verandah vaults became a popular means for experimenting with different forms. Sometimes the entire length of the porch was covered by a *do-chala*, e.g. the Masjidbaria Mosque in Patuakhali built in 870 H/1465 G with the brick ornamentation in the interior of the vault resembling the woven patterns of actual bamboo matting (Fig. 7).

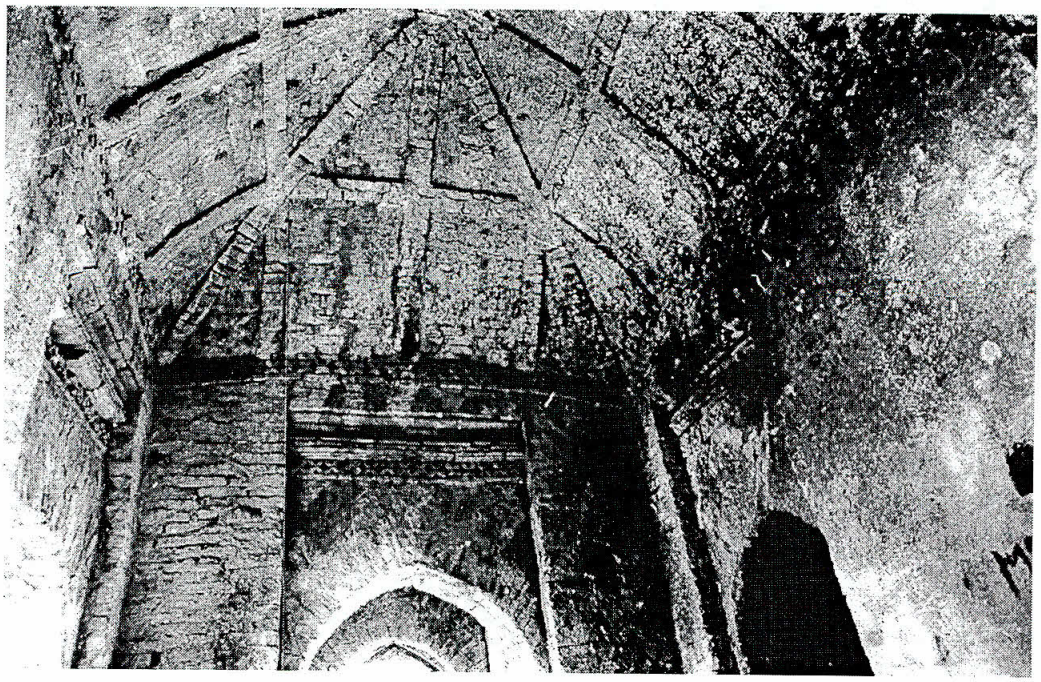


Fig 7: Mosque at Masjidbaria, Patuakhali, 870 H./1465 G. Interior of do-chala vault of verandah.

It could also be broken up into smaller bays where both small domes and miniature *chau-chala* forms would be used, e.g. the Lattan Mosque of the late 15th century in the ancient capital of Gaur, Lakhnawti of the Muslims. Large mosques with verandahs are rare. The only example in Bangladesh is the ruined Darasbari Mosque in Gaur, built by Sultan Yusuf Shah and dated by inscription to 884 H/1479 G. Although much smaller in size than the Adina, there is a resemblance in the plan of the zulla, because both have wide central aisles that divide it into two wings.

In the Darasbari Mosque smaller rectangular bays with *chau-chala* vaults replace the long barrel vault of the Adina, and are continuous with the central vault of the verandah which is also a *chau-chala* (Fig. 8). This emphasis on the central aisle, an echo of the transept of the Mosque of Damascus, seems to be associated with mosques sponsored by royalty or very high officialdom.

This use of small *chau-chala* vaults to mark off the central aisle of a large mosque first appeared in the Shaitgumbad Mosque in Bagerhat in the middle of the 15th century (Fig. 9).

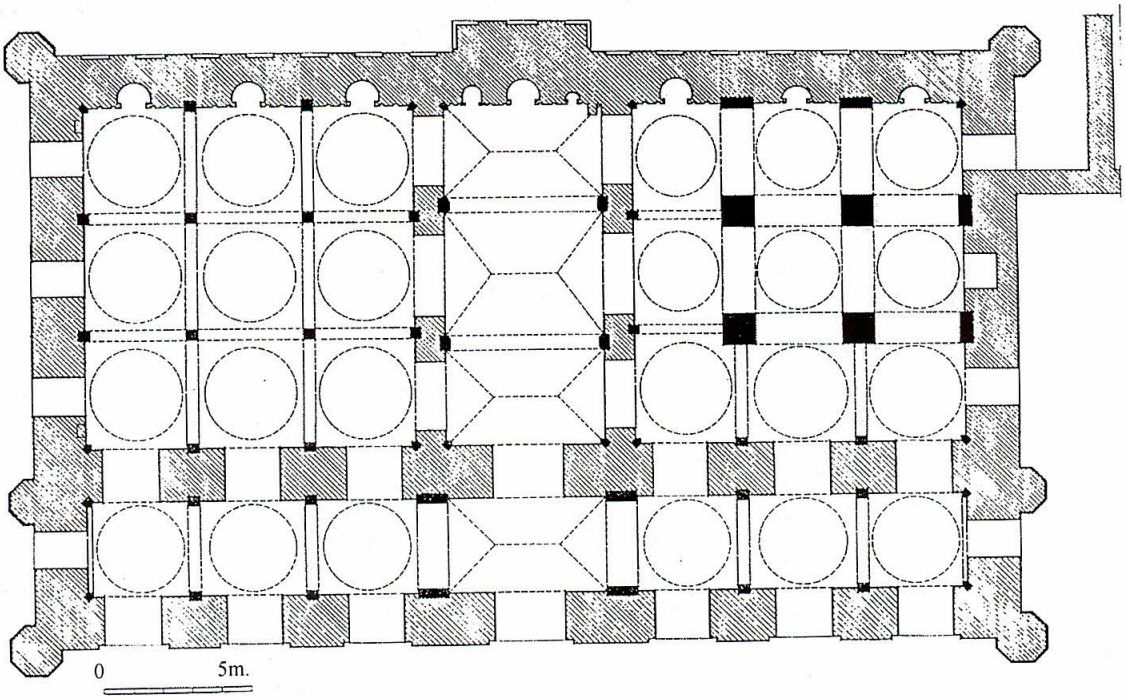


Fig 8: Darasbari Mosque, Rajshahi, 884H/1479 G. (Plan).

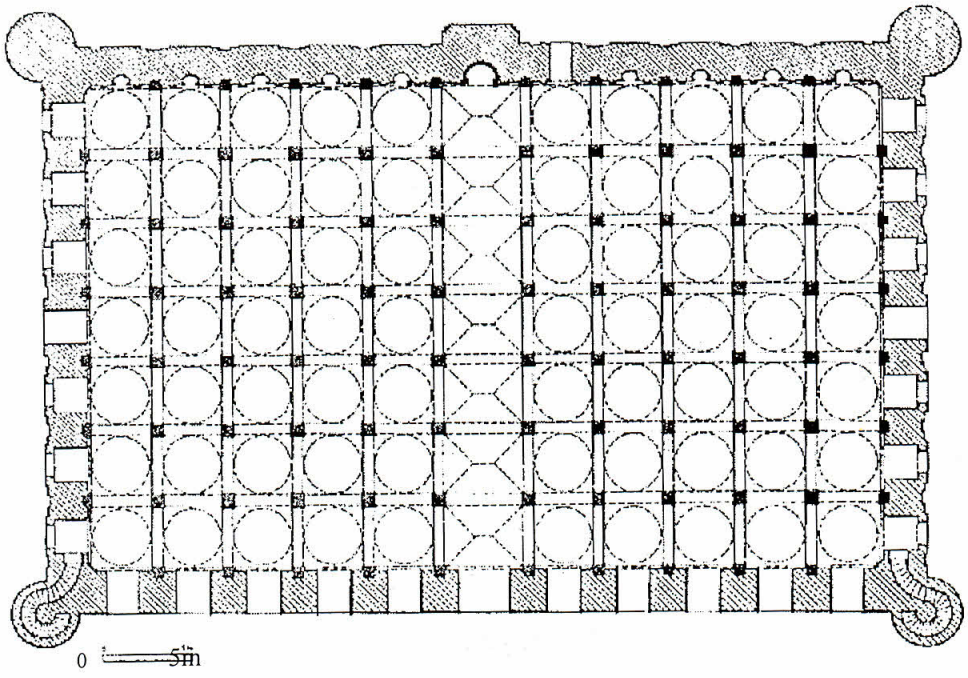


Fig 9: Shaitgumbad Mosque, Bagerhat Mid 15th Century G. (Plan).

Although missing an inscription, it is the second largest mosque in Bengal and is believed to have been built by Ulugh Khan Jahan, whose buildings' inscription nearby records his date of death as 863 H./1459 G. [2:41-42] We do not know whether Khan Jahan was an independent ruler, as there are no coins struck by him. But his monumental buildings with the adjacent mosque, as well as local legends that honor him as a hero and clearer of forests, indicate that he was a person of high status. There are strong indications of a processional path or a maqsura in this specially vaulted central aisle leading to the central mihrab area. The practice was continued into later times as we see in the Chhota Sona Mosque, also in Gaur, that was built during the rule of Sultan Husayn Shah. The Bagha, Darasbari, and the Chhota Sona mosques also have platforms in the northwest corner, just as in the Adina , which served as *maqsuras*.

Mosques building in the Bengal style continued till the beginning of the 17th century when the last of the independent Sultans was overthrown by the Mughals, an imperial power who were by then well-entrenched in North India. The founder of this dynasty, Zahir al-Din Muhammad Babur, a Timurid by descent, had been the ruler of the small principality of Ferghana located in modern Uzbekistan. He conquered Delhi in 933 H./1526 G after defeating Ibrahim Lodhi, the last Sultan of an Afghan dynasty. Babur's successors ruled North India until 1275 H./1858 G, when India officially fell under the rule of the British crown. In their capitals of Delhi, Agra, and Fatehpur Sikri, the Mughals were known as master-builders and produced monumental mosques with central courtyards, fortresses, palaces, and caravansaries, in a distinctive style that incorporated the local Indo-Muslim styles of the sultanates, as well as strong influences from Iran and Timurid Central Asia. Typical Mughal monuments were grand buildings of red sandstone and white marble that were finely carved and inlaid.

During Sultanate times, each of the sultanate states of India had a distinctive regional style so that there were clear differences between the buildings of Bengal and those of Gujrat or Kashmir, for example. Things changed with the coming of the Mughals. Architecture now reflected the imperial nature of their power. As one by one the outlying states were brought under Mughal rule, an ubiquitous architectural style reached out to the remotest provinces. Thus even in Bengal where culture under the Sultanate had had such strong local roots, Mughal architecture took over.

Mughal mosques in the imperial capitals were usually single aisled with three bays separated by wide lateral arches. Many of them had a central courtyard enclosed by liwans. Their exteriors were veneered with stone or marble, and their surfaces articulated with recesses. Some of the later mosques were more elaborate and the marble was inlaid with semi-precious stones. Sometimes the lime plaster of the surfaces was polished to look like marble and painted with plant motifs or arabesque designs. The domes were on high drums.

Provincial versions of Mughal mosques usually followed the three-bayed plans but were less elaborately decorated. The earlier tradition of building without a central courtyard continued. As neither stone nor marble was quarried in Bengal, the exterior and interior of the walls were lime plastered and burnished to a shine. Although the surface articulation was not as extensive as that of the imperial architecture of Agra, Lahore or Delhi, recesses broke up their exterior surfaces, and replaced the terracotta plaques of earlier times.

Straight cornices usually decorated by a row of merlons replaced the curved ones of Sultanate mosques. Several mosques of this style built during the 17th century, when Dhaka was the provincial capital, are still extant. An elegant example is the mosque built by Haji Khwaja Shahbaz, a rich merchant, in 1089 H/1679 G (Fig. 10).

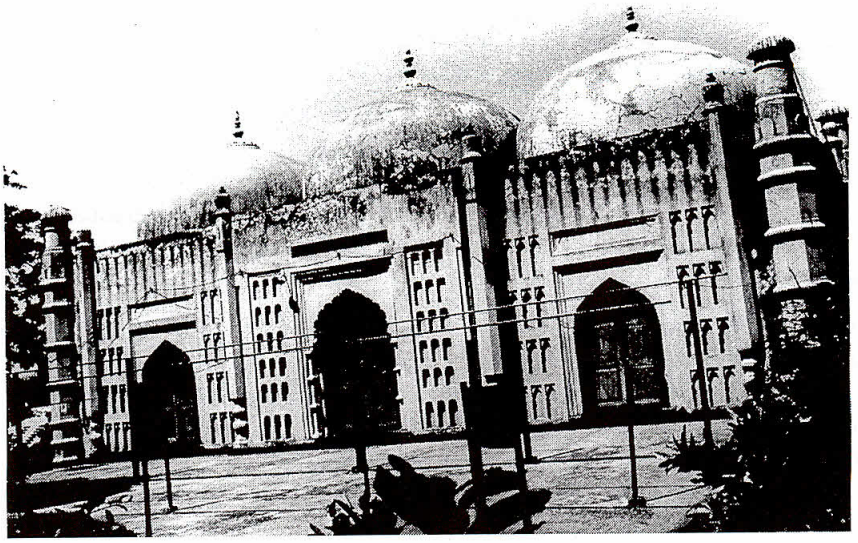


Fig 10: Mosque of Haji Khawaja Shahbaz, Dhaka, 1089 H./1679 G.

Apart from the general plan, several elements are seen here that had become stylish after their use in Delhi. The entrance, mihrab, and lateral arches of the interior are cusped, and miniature versions of these are seen within the recessed panels of the exterior walls. This elaborate cusping, as well as the exterior and interior engaged colonettes with bulbous bases, are inspired by the imperial architecture of the emperors Shah Jehan and Aurangzeb. While the rich and influential in Dhaka tried to emulate the royal fashions of Delhi, the landed nobility who lived away from the provincial capital continued to build in the regional style that was popular during the Sultanate, as if registering a form of defiance to the current trend. The Atiya Mosque built in 1018 H/1609 G by Bayezid Khan Panni (Fig. 11), and Sadi's Mosque in Egarasindur built in 1062 H/1652 G are both small single-unit mosques, with curved cornices and terracotta embellishment

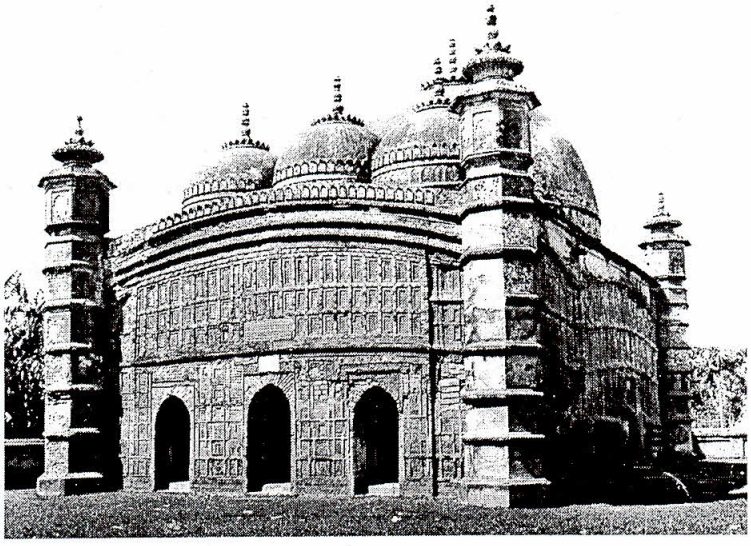


Fig 11: Atiya Mosque Tangail, 1018 H./1609 G.

The Atiya even has a verandah in front roofed with three domes like many of its Sultanate ancestors. The high drums of the domes are telltale Mughal characteristics.[4:40&64]

In 1115 H/1703 G, Murshid Kuli Khan, a high-ranking *amir* shifted the capital from Dhaka to Makhsusabad, renaming it Murshidabad after himself. By 1717, he had established himself as an almost independent ruler, but continued to send the annual revenue remittance to the imperial court in Delhi, thus never losing his status of Mughal agent. One of his most important projects in the new city was the building of a Jami mosque in 1137H/1724 G, known as the Katra Mosque.[4:91] In plan this single-aisled five-domed mosque has Mughal influence. But the massive quality of the building, the small entrance arches as well as the surface decoration shows a harking back to the Bengali style of the Independent Sultanate. The style of the mosque reflects its patrons double identities, a Mughal agent, as well as one trying to break away from Mughal ties.

While Mughal power was waning, Europeans who had entered earlier as traders gradually took over the administration of the country, and by the middle of the 19th century India was brought directly under British rule, a jewel in the crown of Empress Victoria. But by the thirties and forties of the present century it was becoming clear that the British would have to leave. Together with the demand for an independent India, there arose a demand for a separate state for the Muslims. The Nakhoda Mosque in Calcutta was built in 1942, during the heyday of the Muslim League and Muslim nationalism. Located in a crowded urban area, it is an enormous building in four storeys incorporating a central courtyard. Faced with white marble and red sandstone, it consciously harks back to the architectural traditions of the Mughals, who once held cultural and political sway over the whole of India. Four storeys of arched facades flank its imposing arched pishtaq. (Fig. 12)

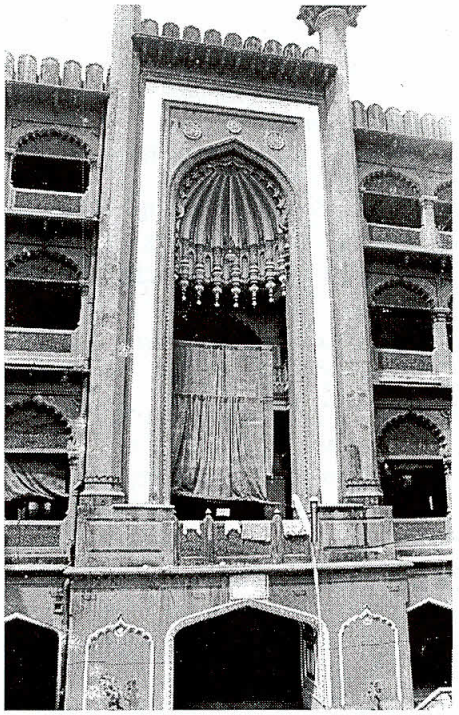


Fig 12: Nakhoda Mosque, Calcutta, 1942 G.

All references to Bengali architecture are deliberately dispensed with. The engaged colonettes, domed kiosks, ornamental kanjuras on the parapet, as well as the carved floral motifs of the great central mihrab that is visible from all the floors establish strong links to Mughal architecture. By this time "Mughal" had become a symbol of Muslim unity and power and therefore Muslim League ideology. With the creation of Pakistan in 1947 and its subsequent declaration as an Islamic republic, there was a need to publicly identify with an Islamic brotherhood that transcended national barriers. Of the numerous mosques that were built, the one that reflects these ideas best is the Bait al-Mukarram Mosque of Dhaka, the largest and most centrally located mosque in the city. Built in the 1960s, it consists of two stories, the lower one being a busy shopping centre (Fig. 13). Not only does it have an enclosed courtyard like the classical mosques of the central Islamic lands, but the main prayer area is in the shape of a cube, a conscious imitation of the Kaba or Bait al-Haram in Makkah.

The last mosque that will be mentioned in this paper is not a full-fledged mosque at all, but a prayer room. It is located above the entrance to the Parliament Building in Dhaka that was designed by the American architect Louis I. Kahn (Fig.14). The complex has been recognized as one of the masterpieces of the architect as well as of modern architecture in general. Kahn was quick to relate his realization that Assembly is of a transcendent nature with his observation that religion was very important in the lives of the populace. It led to his thought that a mosque woven into the space fabric of an Assembly would express that transcendence. In the first sketches' the mosque was conceived with four minarets, then one. The final design resulted from the recognition that traditional references to Arab, Turkish, or Persian Islamic architecture were not necessary at all to imbue the building with a deep religious sense. Deeply sensitive to Islamic religious precept forbidding the worship of images, the final design resulted from Kahn's search for light as an essence of the divine.[5&6] The resulting space is a high ceilinged room, with large geometric openings from which light streams into the interior, where the only traditional reference is a tall wooden mihrab to mark the qibla. The majestic proportions, the light, and ambience is more conducive to meditation, reflective thought, and prayer than any hackneyed traditional reference. The design reflects a deep understanding and respect for the religion of the users, as well as the spiritual bent of mind of the architect himself.

The evolution of mosque design in Bengal, starting from the earliest extant 13th century example and up to modern times, shows several links between mosques and regional identity. The traditional hypostyle plan was first adapted to suit the climate of the region, and came to symbolize affiliations, status and identity.[7&8]. The early example of a traditional courtyard-type mosque illustrates an early Sultan's attempt to seek legitimacy from Muslim sources in the central Islamic lands, as Islam was still relatively new to the region and the prime invocation of Muslim power and identity was achieved through reference to foreign sources. From the 15th century rule of the first native Muslim sultan, a single-unit domed structure inspired by the local rural hut became the favored building type, and shows the increasing identification of Islam and mosques with indigenous culture. The Mughal rulers, sufficient in their own power as undisputed emperors of north India, needed neither foreign nor local identification and were satisfied with a provincial version of the imperial style which flourished in their north Indian capitals. In the twentieth century, usage of the classic north Indian Mughal style linked contemporary Muslim nationalist aspirations with a romanticized period when Muslim power was ascendant. The final twentieth-century example of a prayer area within a parliament building reflects a modern freedom to design a unique and unconventional space for a traditional ritual activity, associated with the rise of modern nation-states and their historical break from the past.



Fig 13: Bait al Mukaram Mosque, Dhaka, 1960s G.

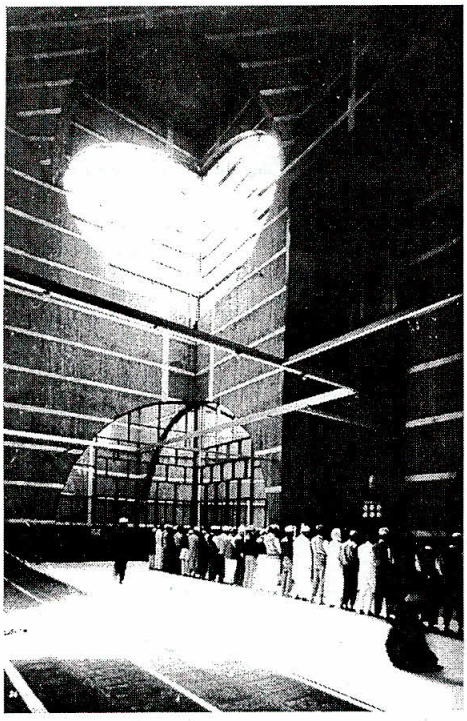


Fig 14: Prayer Hall, Parliament Building, dhaka, 1962-83 (after Global Architecture), Edited and Photographed by Yukio futagawa, A.D.A. Edita Tokyo, 1994.

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تصميم المساجد والتغيرات في هويات الطبقات الحاكمة في البنغال

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ملخص البحث: تلخص هذه الورقة تطور عمارة المسجد في البنغال (بنجلادش وولاية البنغال الغربية في الهند) وذلك باختيار معالم تظهر تطورها عبر الحقب السياسية المختلفة والتغيرات في هويات الطبقات الحاكمة. ترك المسجد المستطيل المبني بنظام البلاطة والأعمدة وبدون أي أفنية فقد المجال للفراغات الحديثة التي افتقدت المرجعية التقليدية لعمارة المسجد. بجانب عوامل أخرى مثل المناخ، فإن تصميم المسجد غالباً ما عكس رغبات الممولين, الذين هم في أغلب الأحيان أعضاء في الطبقة الحاكمة, الذين يرغبون في السمعة. بدأت المساجد ذات الصحن السائد في البلدان الإسلامية الوسطى في الظهور في بداية القرن العشرين ومرة أخرى في نهايته. وفي كل الأوقات كانت الأهداف سياسية وهي ظاهرة مرتبطة بالمناطق الإسلامية في غرب آسيا. فمنذ القرن الخامس عشر وبداية الحكم الوطني الأول فإن النمط الإمبراطوري إلى البنغال بمرجعيته للنمط الإمبراطوري المنغولي مثل ما كان الحرم المكي رمزا لقوة المسلمين في بداية القرن العشرين، والذي أفسح المجال لطرز حديثة ظهرت مع تأسيس الولايات الحديثة.