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DEVELOPMENT OF MOSQUE ARCHITECTURE IN DELHI: EARLY ISLAMIC TO MUGHAL PERIOD

Asif Ali*

INTRODUCTION

The Prophet (SAW), just after migration from Mecca to Medina, laid the foundation of a mosque. It had an enclosed space of 56 square yards, built in mud bricks with a courtyard and rooms for Prophet's (SAW) wives on the eastern side (Cresswell, 1958, p. 4). The palm trunks were used to support the palm branches roof to cover the prayer hall on the southern side. Another small colonnade platform was on the northern side near entrance called *Suffa*, a shelter for poor companions of Prophet Mohammad (SAW). The entrances were provided on all the three sides except the southern. A pulpit was added at centre of southern wall to deliver sermons by the Prophet (SAW). The primary mosque was not spectacular but simple, austere and strictly functional. Based on this prototype, earlier mosques were simple in plan, rectangular or square with a hypostyle prayer hall, on *Qibla* side, opening into the courtyard, supposedly a spill out space. The structural limitations of roofing materials of prayer hall necessitated a number of columns inside the hall. When Islam reached to Persia, a new version of mosque architecture was evolved. It was influenced by Parthian and Sassanid architecture (Pope, 1965, p. 78). Arches, domes and four *Iwans* pattern were the prominent elements of Persian mosques. In India, during Ala-al-Din Khilji's period, many craftsmen from Saljuq empire sheltered to safeguard themselves from Mongol's devastation. It had a great impact over mosque architecture of later period in India.

1) The age of conflict and amalgamation

With the arrival of Muslims in India, an urgency of place of worship and to give a sense of Islamic dominance in the new territory induced the rulers to utilize the used material from temples. The early structure was further screened with a hybrid technology where the conflict and amalgamation of the local and

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immigrated methods of construction may be experienced.

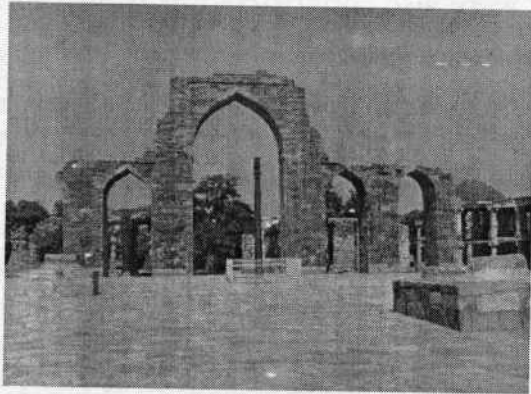


Fig. 1 Quwwatul Islam Mosque

Qutubuddin Aibak took the citadel of Rai Pithora and laid the foundation of the first mosque in Delhi, Quwwatul Islam mosque (Warraich, 2008, p. 165). The courtyard of the mosque is surrounded by cloisters on three sides and a four aisled deep prayer hall on the west. The entrance to the mosque is on the east. Later in 1299, the superimposed arched screen on the western (Fig.1). Hindu style sanctuary was constructed to add Islamic character to the building (A. & Desai, 1979, p. 13). The local artisans translated the idea of mosque for their new rulers using their native technology. The prayer hall and cloister's lantern type shallow domes are supported on Hindu pillars by corbelling techniques due to unawareness of local craftsmen to the technology of new rulers. The verses from Quran were engraved in relief work in *Kufic* and *Nakshi* inscriptions. A tall iron column in front of central arch is located that dates back to Gupta period. The structural features of this mosque typology, with some refined version, were also repeated at Ajmer in 1200 AD (Brown, 1956, p. 12). The hypostyle halls with extensive courtyard and isolated minarets were main features of this pre-Islamic building in India. The minarets were more of victory towers rather than a place for *Muezzin* to call for prayers or the symbolic elements of a mosque, Thus, in the beginning, it was an era of conflict between two technologies and it took almost a century for acceptance of the immigrated technology by the local artisans and its first example may be seen in the arch at Balban's tomb. And from this point of time, the true arcuated system became

prevalent for mosques even though a number of secular buildings were also constructed in trabeated system.

2) The Persian influence

Many artisans from Persian Empire migrated to India to defend themselves from Mongol's devastation. That is why we find the influence of Persian architecture in many Khilji's structures. Ala-al-Din planned to enlarge and unite the two earlier mosques of Qutub-al-Din Aibak and Iltutmish in one campus but due to his early death, this project could not be completed. He also intended to construct a minaret at the centre of his new campus almost double to the size of Qutub Minar. However the one of the four gateways to the extended plan of Quwwatul Islam mosque shows the refinement of the emergence of mosque architecture in medieval India. The cuboidal gate surmounted by shallow dome and its high horse shoe arch with lotus bud at its intrados influenced the architectural style of later period. Tohfewala Gumbad at Shahpur Jat is also the mosque of the same period, only central part with dome is survived and a mosque known as Jamaat Khana at Nizamuddin has a rectangular plan and three arches on the façade, evokes the Alai Darwaza in its style. The building was constructed to serve the purpose of tomb and when Nizamuddin Aulia preferred to be buried outdoor, it was converted into mosque and the two wings were added by Mubarak Khilji (Alfieri, 2000, p. 33). The Khilji dynasty at its termination point left the mosque's plan with a court yard and hypostyle hall on the western side as can also be seen in the example of grand mosque at Daulatabad.

3) The era of experiment

During Tughlaq period, many mosques were built in Delhi, however grey sandstone was replaced to red sand stone which was hard to carve, which resulted into less decorative buildings (Chandra, 2012, p. 185). Jami Masjid at Kotla Ferozshah is now in ruined form has a central courtyard surrounded by domed arcades. There was a pool in the centre of courtyard, covered with domed canopy. A narrow corridor approachable from North West and South West corner, behind *Qibla* wall is seen first time in the mosque, which became a common feature for the mosques built also later during Sultanate period. Begumpuri mosque at Jahan-Panah, is based on Persian model. The courtyard has prayer hall on western

side and domed arcades on rest of the three sides with an entrance at the centre. At the centre of prayer hall a projected *Iwan* with tapering turrets are flanked by two domed aisles. Khirki mosque at Jahan-Panah and Kalan Mosque (Fig.2) at Hazrat Nizamuddin are similar in their cruciform plan and both have basements, perhaps for the staff of the mosque or dormitory for pilgrims. The domed arcades running at the centre of courtyard divides the courtyard into four parts. The plan of these two mosques is unusual. The entrance to both the mosques is flanked by sharply tapering turrets. The Tughlaq mosques in Delhi have generally placed on one storey high raised platform or a basement which were used as market place or living rooms for mosque attendants and pilgrims, however it enhances the domination of courtyard by necessitating the flights of steps leading to the entrance (Grover, 2006, p. 108).

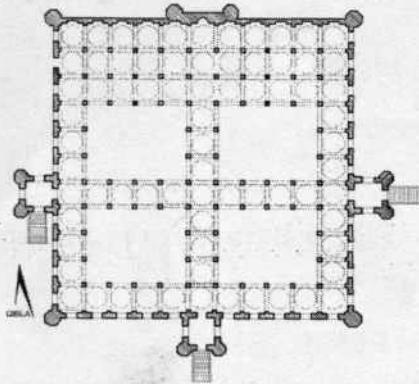


Fig. 2 Plan of Kalan Mosque

4) Emergence of single nave prayer hall mosque

At the juncture of fourteenth and fifteenth century, the turbulence due to Timurid devastation left the region without construction of new buildings for decades. During Lodi's period, a major change came into being as the hypostyle prayer hall was converted to a single nave prayer hall. The mosque of Sikander Lodi commonly known as Bara Gumbud Mosque (Fig.3) is one of the early example of these kinds of mosques (Alfieri, 2000, p. 52). This feature was later continued to the Mughal period. Perhaps the development of an unusual arch evolved during late Tughlaq's period prompted Lodis to build such type of mosques. Moth ki Masjid has a

similar plan as that of Sikander Lodi's mosque, however, it has a façade with better proportion where the central arch is wider. The *Muqranas* are used in the lateral domes and pendentives in central dome similar to Sikander Lodi's mosque. The prayer hall is surmounted by three domes. The *Iwan* is flanked by tapering turrets similar to Tughlaq's mosques. In its form the Moth mosque with pointed arches, raised on a floor, tapered turrets and cylindrical corner towers, is Firuzian. However most of the mosques of this period are an amalgamation of Lodis and Tuglaq Style. Mohammad Wali mosque in Siri area is also similar to the Moth Mosque built in red sandstone.

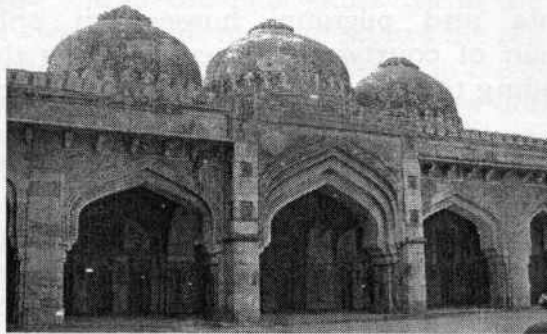


Fig. 3 Bara Gumbad Mosque

5) Classical phase

With the arrival of Mughals in India, Timurid architectural elements with precedents from earlier Delhi Sultanate style were emerged and incorporated in contemporary Indian architecture. Jamali kamali Mosque at Delhi near Qutub area is one of the best preserved and most beautiful mosques of Babur's period. It was built by Sheikh Fazal al Allah also known as Jalal khan Jalali in 1528-29 AD. It is single domed, two aisles with projected *Pishtaq* from the wings. Fluted small circular towers are framing the central *Pishtaq*. However, the oldest Mughal mosque is at Sambhal. Qila-i-Kuhna Mosque is single dome having two bays on both the sides of *Pishtaq*. The large *Pishtaq* is projected out from the rest of the building, framed with calligraphic inscription of *Qur'an* and having turrets on both the corners. The extradoses of arches are having lotus in relief work while a border of lotus flowers is running along the intrados of the central large arch. On the

ground floor, there is a separate entrance for members of the royal family. Red sandstone with grey stone is cladded with stone inlays of various colours. The *Mihrab* and *Pishtaq* of this mosque may be seen in the mosque of later period like Khairul Manzil at Delhi and Jami Masjid at Fatehpur Sikri with a little modification. Maham Anga's mosque, popularly known as Khairul Manazil is located opposite to the old Fort of Delhi. It was built by Akbar's wet nurse Maham Anga in 1561-62 under the supervision of Shihab-al-Din Khan. The entrance to this mosque is in red sandstone and the prayer hall block is in rubble masonry finished with stucco. The two storey arcade on the north and south of the courtyard originally had a *Madarsa*. The central *Pishtaq* is projected from the rest of the building flanked by octagonal turrets and crowned with a dome. None of the above mentioned mosques have distinct features of Mughal architecture. The architectural characteristic of these buildings are more of Lodi's style.

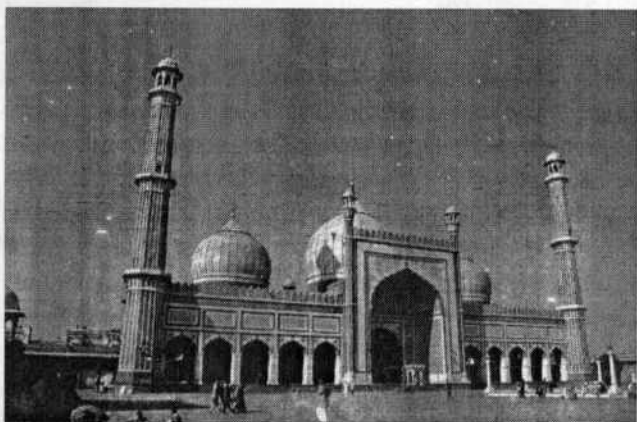


Fig. 4 Jami Masjid

Sher Shah conquered Delhi and Humayun had to flee and finally took refuge in Persia. It took more than a decade for Humayun to recapture Delhi. But his long stay in Persia developed a passion with the Persian culture and architecture. This incidence influenced further development of architecture in India and the first most significant building of Mughal architecture came into being as Humayun's tomb. With the contemporary Persian influences and beautifully articulated in Indian context, the tomb building illustrate the distinguishing Mughal design elements. Though, the distinctive features of Mughal architecture were developed in mosques at a later stage. Jahangir's period is observed

as the age of transition when white marble replaced the red sandstone as a finishing material preferred for sacred buildings. Clear evidences of full application of white marble on the building surfaces could only be seen during Shahjahan's reign and continued for next centuries. The Jami Masjid in the city of Shahajahanabad built by Shahjahan was proposed near bazaar to serve the population outside the fort (Fig.4). The mosque was constructed on a raised platform having three sides arched gateways at the centre of each side approachable through pyramids of steps. The prayer hall is independent from the surrounding *Pishtaq* and framed with the help of four stories tall minarets. Three white bulbous domes are surmounting the prayer hall. The strips in white marble on the surface of minarets enhance their verticality.

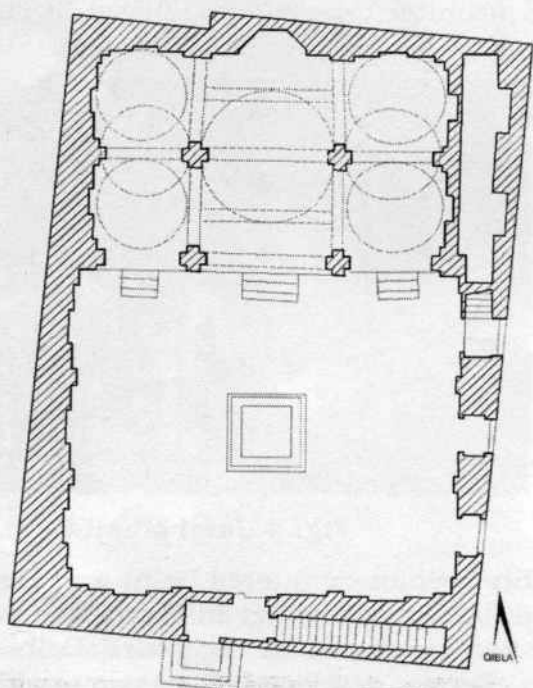


Fig.5 Plan of Moti Masjid, Red Fort

Moti Masjid in Red Fort, Delhi was built in 1662 by the Emperor Aurangzeb. Constructed in white marble with fine craftsmanship was a private worship place of the emperor with a separate entrance for Royal women. Outer walls finished with red sandstone were aligned to the rest of the buildings of the fort campus while the inner walls in white marble were oriented towards *Qibla* which induced varied thickness of walls (Fig.5). A small

courtyard with an ablution tank in the centre is enclosed by high walls which gives a sense of separation and seclusion from outer world. The *Pishtaq* of the mosque was headed with curved Bengali cornice which was first incorporated in Mughal mosques in Nagina Masjid at Agra Fort, completed in 1637 (Koch, 1991). The distinct feature of Moti Masjid is dominated sinuous lines used on the surface for decoration which became a significant characteristic for the mosques of later period. The prominent curved lines used for decoration confuses the viewer to perceive the overall form of the building. Three bulbous domes which were originally covered with copper later were replaced with white marble, crowned with prominent lotus moldings and finials are not in well proportion with the small structure of the building. The parapet is decorated with small minarets. The mosque resembles the Nagina Masjid at Red Fort, Agra, but with more decorative relief work of floral pattern.

6) Age of declination

With the declination of Muslim rule in India, the patronage of mosque architecture was weakened and the mosque architecture lost its monumentality as well as its planimetric vastness, while the stylistic features of late Mughal architecture were continued with its quality of innovativeness on a smaller scale. Moti Masjid, located near shrine of Bakhtiyar Kaki (RA) was built by Shah Alam Bahadur, a descendent of Aurangzeb. The mosque, built in plane marble is a single aisled in comparison to Moti Masjid at Red Fort which is a double aisled mosque with sinuous lines on surface. The mosque is surmounted by three bulbous domes, which became a common feature of a mosque for next century. Sunheri Masjid in Chandni Chowk is a three bays single aisled mosque raised on a high platform and surmounted by gilt metal plated bulbous dome. The mosque is attributed to Raushan- al- Daula Zafar Khan, an *Amir* during Mohammad Shah's reign. Another mosque based on three bulbous domes structure but somewhat having reflection of Shahjahani Mosque, called Fakhr-al-Masajid, is located near Kashmiri gate. Other examples of single aisled, three bays surmounted by three bulbous domes mosques are Mohtasib's Mosque and there was a great damage to Delhi's monumental structure due to Nadir shah's invasion and city's devastation. The city was quickly recovered and the new buildings were erected soon after the

devastation. During Ahmad Sah's reign, his mother Qudsia Begum built mosque at Qudsia Bagh, Sunheri Mosque and Shahi Mardan Mosque. Most of the mosques of this period have same morphological features like three bulbous domes ribbed or without ribs, three bays with single or double aisles, however in different finishing materials. Mosque of Hamid Ali Khan, the last mosque under Mughal rule in the walled city of Shahjahanabad was built by the Prime Minister of Bahadur Shah II (Ashar, 2003, p. 309). The mosque is three bays structure but without dome and the central gateway is surmounted by trefoil arch.

CONCLUSION

From the first, Quwwatul Islam Mosque in Qutub area to the last, Hamid Ali Khan mosque in Shahjahanabad during Muslim rule in Delhi, mosque architecture reflects a tremendous diversity in their morphology, spatial perception and building materials. The historical events, politics and personal involvement of the patrons in the design made the mosque style of a particular period discernable not only to the other regions but also to the style of other patrons. In Delhi, the glory of mosque architecture reached at its zenith under the sovereignty of Mughals, especially under Shahjahan. With limited vocabulary of forms Shahjahan's architects implied them with different details and proportions. With the declination of Mughals, the patronage of mosques passed on from the royal members to the sub ruling class, however, the Mughal architecture continued to grow, its example can be seen in the form of mosque architecture of later period in the region.

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