

Landmarks of Indo-Islamic Architecture of Eastern Uttar Pradesh (With Reference to Religious Architecture)

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With the invasion of Mahmud of Ghaznawi Islam was introduced in India in about C.E. 1021-1030 and soon it became one of the important religious faiths in India. Islamic art is contemplative and it aims at worshipping (*Ibādat*) formless (*Avyakta*) '*Allāh*', : the supreme divine. Contrary to the physical manifestation of the Divine Being (*Paramātmā* or God) in all the streams of Indian religion and art, Islam refrained from presenting *Allāh* in visible form and also in the life as human beings or as floral and creeper decorations. Due to this reason the delineations of flowers and creepers are also stylised instead of being actual one. Thus Islamic art has been mainly abstract (*amūrta*) and decorative in nature and style, portraying geometrical, floral, arabesque, and calligraphic designs.¹

The main motivating force of art has always been the religion and its devotional or *Sajdā* aspect. Muslim artists, for whom '*phan or kalā*' is one of the means of *Ibādat* of *Allāh*, did it with utmost love, care and passion. To cater to the need of collective religious worship edifices or monuments were built in every religion of the world from the ancient past. Apparently such monuments would foster the spirit of religion and thereby self-realization among the masses. In Islam as an abode of the Supreme One i.e. '*Allāh*' the Masjid (Mosque) was built which was most sacrosanct place for *Ibādat*. Some other monuments mainly the Maqbarā (tomb) were also built to pay homage to holy saints/prophets and also to the ancestors.

The present study is confined to the Indo-Islamic architecture, specially religious, of Eastern Uttar Pradesh, a region extended from Allahabad district in the west to the Bihar border in the east and the Nepal tarāī in the north to the north-eastern border of Madhya Pradesh. Kutubuddin Aibak was the first Muslim king who overpowered the region in C.E. 1194 and subsequently it was strengthened by his successors who had clash and confrontations with local rulers. As a result Islam (*Dīna*) became a force of religion in the Eastern Uttar

Pradesh by the end of 12th century CE. The process further augmented during the Sultanate and Mughal period when some prominent provincial states like Jaunpur emerged under the Sharqi's. As a result Jaunpur, Kaḍā-Mānikpur, Allahabad and Chunar like places in Eastern Uttar Pradesh became the important political and religious centres.

So far as Eastern Uttar Pradesh is concerned it has been not only the place of manifestation of all types of Islamic architecture at its best but interestingly they also include some of the motifs of Indian art such as Lotus and Diamond. It is worthwhile to note here in passing that in one of the greatest architectural creations of Islamic art at Fatehpur Sikri under the patronage of Akbar, we come across even the figures of Indian deities and motifs namely Hanumāna, *Svastika*, *Pūrṇaghāṭa* etc, which must be attributed to the broad mindedness of Akbar on the one hand and the impact of his Hindu Begum Jodha Bai on the other.

The most important element of Islamic architecture is the use of "*arcuate process*" i.e. an arch or dome which was adopted as method of bridging a space. The use of dome and arch as architectural elements and also of mortar as a cementing agent in construction were unique features of all the Islamic monuments. Through introduction of these new elements and technique, the creation of buildings became faster and monuments became more spacious and long lasting. The Islamic monuments were typical mortar-masonry works formed by dressed stones. It must be emphasized here that the development of Islamic architecture in India was greatly facilitated by the knowledge and skill possessed by the Indian artisans, who had mastered the art of stone work through the experience of centuries. Therefore, it is appropriate to rename Islamic architecture of India as "Indo-Islamic Architecture." Broadly speaking by the term Indo-Islamic architecture we mean the Islamic architecture built in India having some distinct Indian architectural features like trebriated ceilings supported on beams with sculptural renderings such as lotus, Hanumāna, *Svastika*, etc.

The Indo-Islamic architecture is known for the religious as well as secular architecture. Their planning, architectural and artistic dexterity and functional utility were equally important. The religious Indo-Islamic architecture is of two types namely, Masjid (Mosque) and Maqbarā (tomb), while secular architecture includes Qilā, Mahal, Havelī, Bāgh, Bārahdarī and Cārvañserāi. Besides above mentioned Indian features, Indo-Islamic style is characterised by spaciousness, massiveness and breadth. In almost all the prominent buildings, the arch, minār and dome were used and the Masjid became a part of the landscape. The chief means of decoration was surface decoration through the use of geometry, arabesque and calligraphy.

1. Masjid (Mosque) :

The Masjid, as a representation of Muslim art in its simplest form, is the most sacred of all the Islamic monuments. The Masjid is an open courtyard surrounded by a pillared verandah, crowned with a dome. A *Miharāba* indicates the direction of the *qiblā* (direction of holy Mecca) for prayer. Towards the right of the *Miharāba* stands the *Mimbar* or pulpit from where the Imām presides over the proceedings. A minaret is an indispensable part of Masjid from where the *Muajjin* call *Namājis* (faithful) to attend prayers.

Noticeable Masjids of Eastern Uttar Pradesh consist of all the essential elements, as mentioned above. Approximately Masjids were built during Sultanate period to late Mughal period (12th -19th century C.E.). Some of the most important examples from Varanasi are Rājghāṭ Masjid (Rājghāṭ), Bībī Raziya Masjid (Gyānvāpī), Chaukhambhā Masjid (Chaukhambhā), Āḍhāī Kaṅgūre Kī Masjid (Machodari), Ālamgīra Masjid (Darānagar), Dharaharā Masjid (Pañchagaṅgā Ghāṭ) and Gyānvāpī Masjid (Gyānvāpī). Aṭālā and Jāmī Masjids from Jaunpur are similarly important.

Of the above, the Aṭālā and Jāmī Masjids of Jaunpur and Gyānvāpī and Dharaharā Masjids of Varanasi are discussed here in detail.⁴

A. Aṭālā Masjid

Aṭālā Masjid of Jaunpur was first well-developed Masjid in the region (Fig. 23.1). This double storied Masjid was built with the dismantled part of Hindu temple known as *Devī Aṭālā*. The construction of the Masjid began in C.E. 1408 under Ibrahim Sharqi, however, the foundation was laid even earlier during the time of Firuz Shah Tughluq.⁵ The design of Masjid is traditional, which consists of a square central courtyard being enveloped on the three sides by *riwāqs* (colonnades around mosque courtyard). At the centres on all the three sides the *riwāqs* are interrupted by a beautiful structure forming a door, which are surmounted by imposing domes on the north and south. On the north-west end of Iiwān is the second floor surrounded by stone *jālī* (tracery) work. This place was reserved for the *zenānā* (women). The closed chamber for women was a special feature of Sharqi Masjids, a tradition, which ends with Aḍhāī Kangure Kī Masjid of Varanasi.

The most striking characteristic of the entire complex is the huge *propylon* (*Iwān*) that makes up the facade. *Iwān* is a stupendous archway, flanked by grand protruding oblong panels, inclined outwards and divided into two floors decorated with blind arches and small niches. The rear wall of the Masjid is interesting for its special architectonic treatment. Like the domed area, the surface also protrudes strongly towards the exterior and



Fig.23.1 : Sehan (courtyard) and Vazu Hauza (water tank), Aṭālā Masjid, Jaunpur, 1408 C.E.p



Fig.23.2 : 32-Pillared (*Battis Khambhā*) unidentified Maqbarā at Bakariyā Kuṇḍ, Varanasi, c.13th cent. C.E.

is emphasized with tapered turrets that are repeated in larger proportions at the principal corners of the building. Therefore, from the rear side Masjid gives us a feeling of a military building. The entire Masjid reminds us of its prototype of Tughluq era, i.e. Begumpurī Masjid at Delhi.

B. Jāmī Masjid

After Aṭālā many Masjids like Lāl Darwāzā, Adhāī Kaṅgure Kī and Jhāñjharī were built but all of them are more or less similar to Aṭālā Masjid in style. After many years of building of Aṭālā Masjid the most ambitious Masjid of the region Jāmī Masjid (locally known as Baḍī Masjid) was constructed at Jaunpur. Husian Shah completed it in C.E. 1473. Its central *Iwāns* on all the three sides of the courtyard are more elegant and each one is covered with a fine dome. However, the *Iwān of qiblā* is 26 meter high and 23.5 meter wide at the base. Jāmī Masjid shows contrast in terms of style of its *Iwān* having a barrel vaulted roof and its construction over a high plinth.

The cultural importance of both the Jāmī and Aṭālā Masjid of Jaunpur is that they suggest Hindu impact in the form of decoration of Lotus flower. Noteworthy is that the inscription of east gate of Aṭālā Masjid refer to a Hindu architect Padmū, son of Visaī as one of the main architect of the Masjid.⁶

In Mughal period political centre was shifted to Agra and Delhi due to that importance was not given to Eastern Uttar Pradesh. Only during the reign of Aurangzeb Varanasi witnessed few important Masjids unfortunately built over dismantled Hindu temples. The Ālamgīra Masjid⁷ was built over Kṛttivāseśvara temple. Dārānagar and Dharaharā Masjids said to have been built over dismantled Hindu temple of Bindu Mādhava, Pañchgaṅgā Ghāt and the famous Gyānvāpī Masjid was built over Viśvanātha temple.

C. Gyānvāpī Masjid

Gyānvāpī Masjid is an important Masjid which has three bay aisles running north to south. Its dome has beautiful floral and geometrical decorations in colour, which is similar to Dargāh Śarīfa of Chunar. Its exterior *qiblā* wall is definitely the part of original Hindu temple (which was rebuilt during the time of Akbar by a Rajput noble Todarmal).

D. Dharaharā Masjid

The imposing Dharaharā Masjid has all essential elements of Masjid like Dome, Vault, Minaret and Vazu hauz. Its *qiblā* wall bears an inscription, referring to the restoration of the Masjid. It also has beautiful polychrome work in its small *Iwān*. The selection of

Pañchagaṅgā ghāṭ for Dharaharā Masjid by Aurangzeb represents his keen interest in proving their might of Islam at Varanasi, the capital of Indian culture and religion.

2. Maqbarā (Tomb) :

The Maqbarā usually consists of a solitary compartment or chamber known as the *huzrāh* in the centre of which is the cenotaph or *Zehiya*. The entire structure is usually covered with an elaborate dome. In the underground chamber the dead body is buried in a grave or *qabra*.

Presently we have major surviving Maqbarās in three cities of Eastern Uttar Pradesh namely -Varanasi, Jaunpur and Allahabad, which are datable between Sultanate and Late Mughal period.

A. Varanasi

In Varanasi we have following important Maqbarās: Maqbarās at Bakariyā Kund Complex, Maqbarās at Fātmān and Bādshāh Bāgh, unidentified Maqbarā at Alaipur Railway Station and Maqbarā of Lāl Khān at Rājghāṭ. Of the above we have discussed only the following two on the basis of their architectural importance.

(i) Maqbarās at Bakariyā Kund Complex

There are two tombs at Bakariyā Kund. These are built over an earlier unknown dismantled temple. One of the two Maqbarās is of Sayyed Fakhruddīn, a warrior saint of 13th century C.E. It is presently in worship and it also has an Īdgāh⁹. The other important Maqbarā is 32-pillared Maqbarā, locally known as *battisa khambhā* (Fig. 23.2). The pillars of the unidentified Maqbarā originally belonged to some ancient Hindu temple.

(ii) Maqbarā of Lāl Khān (Fig. 23.3)

It is again an important example built in C.E. 1773 at the highest level of Rājghāṭ. It was built for a Muslim minister at the time of Chet Singh, the Maharaja Banaras and reminds of earlier Timurid tradition of building. The Maqbarā is situated in the centre of enclosed paradise-garden. On its four corners, octagonal towers are roofed by Mughal *chatarīs*. Maqbarā itself stands on a small octagonal platform. The most important feature of this monument is its external decoration that connects it with the Timurid tradition of coloured tile work. However, in the present case only turquoise and cobalt tiles have been used.

B. Jaunpur

Jaunpur has yielded two examples of Maqbarās, which was built during Sharqi

period. However, the other one belonging to the Mughal period was apparently more important and hence mentioned hereunder.

Maqbarā of Firuz Shah

Firuz Shah's Maqbarā, situated in the midst of Jaunpur city on a high plinth, reveal the influence of Lodi Maqbarā of Delhi. The attractive part of this Maqbarā is the central dome of Lodi style¹⁰ and the use of blue coloured glazed tiles in decorations.

C. Allahabad

In Allahabad we have following important Maqbarās: Maqbarā of Shāh Begum, Maqbarā of Khusrau, Maqbarā of Nisār Begum and Maqbarā of Tambolan Bī. Of the above four Maqbarās, we have referred to only three on the basis of their comparative importance as examples of Indo-Islamic architecture. All these magnificent Maqbarās, situated in Khusrau Bāgh, are constructed between C.E. 1605-1630 on the same axis for Shāh Begum, Khusrau and Nisār Begum.



Lay-Out of the Maqbarās at Khusrau Bāgh, Allahabad: i). Maqbarā of Shāh Begum (C.E. 1605), ii). Maqbarā of Khusrau (C.E. 1622), iii). Maqbarā of Sultan Nisār Begum (C.E. 1622-25).

(i) Maqbarā of Shāh Begum (C.E. 1605)

Shāh Begum married to Jehangir, was daughter of Rājā Bhagwāndās Kachhwāhā and sister of Mān Singh.¹¹ She was first wife of Jehangir and gave birth to two children one was daughter (Sultan-un-Nisā on 26 April, 1586) and another was son Khusrau (on 6 August 1587 at Lahore). After birth of Khusrau she was given high sounding title: Shāh Begum (Royal Queen) which denotes her position in the *harem*. She was very much disturbed with the attitude of Khusrau towards his father and committed suicide on 26 Zil-Hijja 1013/ 6 May 1605 C.E. Jehangir immortalised the unhappy incident, by making a beautiful mausoleum in her memory in the year C.E. 1605. Āqā Rizā the principal artist was entrusted with the responsibility of constructing Shāh Begum's Maqbarā,¹² which has been referred to by European traveller William Finch during his visit to Allahabad in C.E. 1611.¹³

It is a square building of three receding stories. The lowest is just a platform or *caukī* to support the main building and also to give it an elevation. It has double series of

steps on the south side leading to the first terrace. Above it, in the middle of the first terrace, leaving enough open space on all sides, is the double storied structure of which the lower part serves as a *caukī* or base and the uppermost terrace is a *Bārahadarī* having four pillars with three openings (*dar*), on each side (= 12 openings in all, literally justifying the nomenclature *Bārahadarī*). In its base *gavākṣa* has been used as ornamental motif. Its shafts are twelve sided and the capitals have the typical stalactite design being commonly used during this age.¹⁴ The cenotaph has two Persian inscriptions, which refer to the virtues of Shāh Begūm and give the date 1012 Hijari/ C.E. 1603-04.¹⁵ This Maqbarā is important in the context of being the first example of *Bārahadarī* style of Mughal Maqbarā. This style continued for next 30 years and can be easily seen in the Maqbarās of Akbar (Agra), Mariam-Zamani (Agra), Itmad-ud-Daulah, Jehangir and Noor Jehan (Lahore).

(ii) Maqbarā of Khusrau (C.E. 1622)

Khusrau a rebellion son of Jehangir was defeated by his own father and imprisoned¹⁶ and was subsequently killed by his brother Shah Jehan on 16 January C.E. 1622.¹⁷ The Maqbarā of Khusrau square in plan is situated on the eastern end of the main plinth. It appears to be two storied from the outside but actually it is a single storey Maqbarā. It has a dome, which surmounts entire Maqbarā. It also has a typical Mughal *chatarī* on each corner. The ground floor contains a series of ornamental arches and each of them creates a beautiful frame composed of the pilasters, brackets and the lintels. But this unique composition was not functional in the architectural sense; rather it was done to enhance the aesthetic effect. The inner wall of Maqbarā is painted with cypress, floral and other motifs. The Persian inscription inside the Maqbarā tells about the tragedy of the life of Khusrau.

(iii) Maqbarā of Sultan Nisār Begum (C.E. 1622-25)

Nisār Begum's Maqbarā, built in C.E. 1624-25, stands between the Maqbarās of Shah Begum and Khusrau (Fig. 23.4). It is a square building standing on a high plinth. The plinth contains the *qabra* and also serves as base for upper storey. On the upper storey we have a beautiful domed chamber, which is carved beautifully from outside and also has a painted interior with beautiful geometric dados (pattern) and floral motifs. The Paintings on this Maqbarā are regarded as "the best preserved examples of Painting in any Mughal tomb."¹⁸

The above study based on survey and documentation reveals that cities of Eastern Uttar Pradesh like Allahabad and Varanasi being the confluence of different cultural streams, and also as the cities of the art and culture, have yielded all the forms and varieties of Indo-

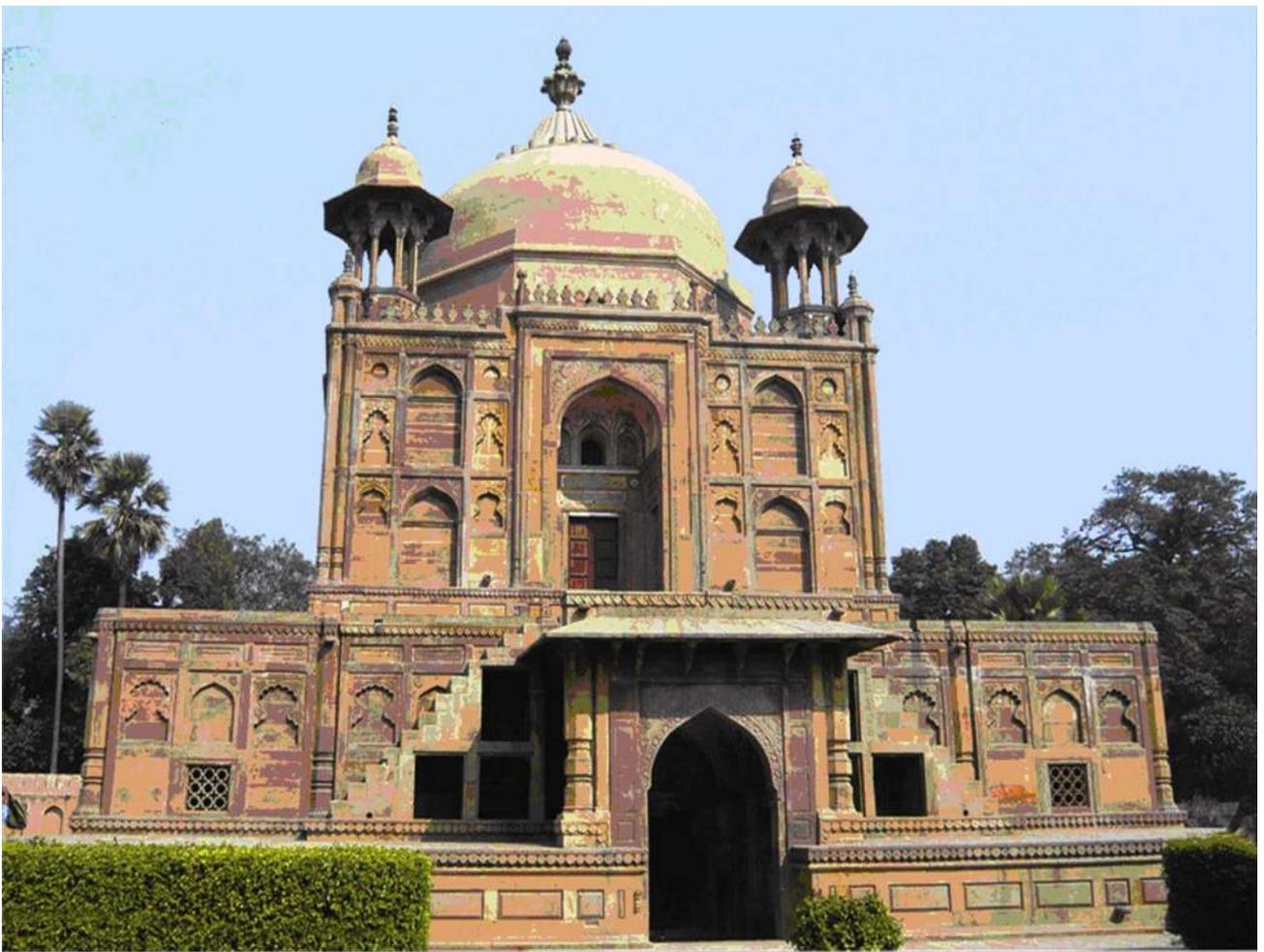


Fig.23.3: Maqbarā of Sultan Nisār Begum, Khusrau Bāgh, Allahabad, c. 1605-30 C.E.

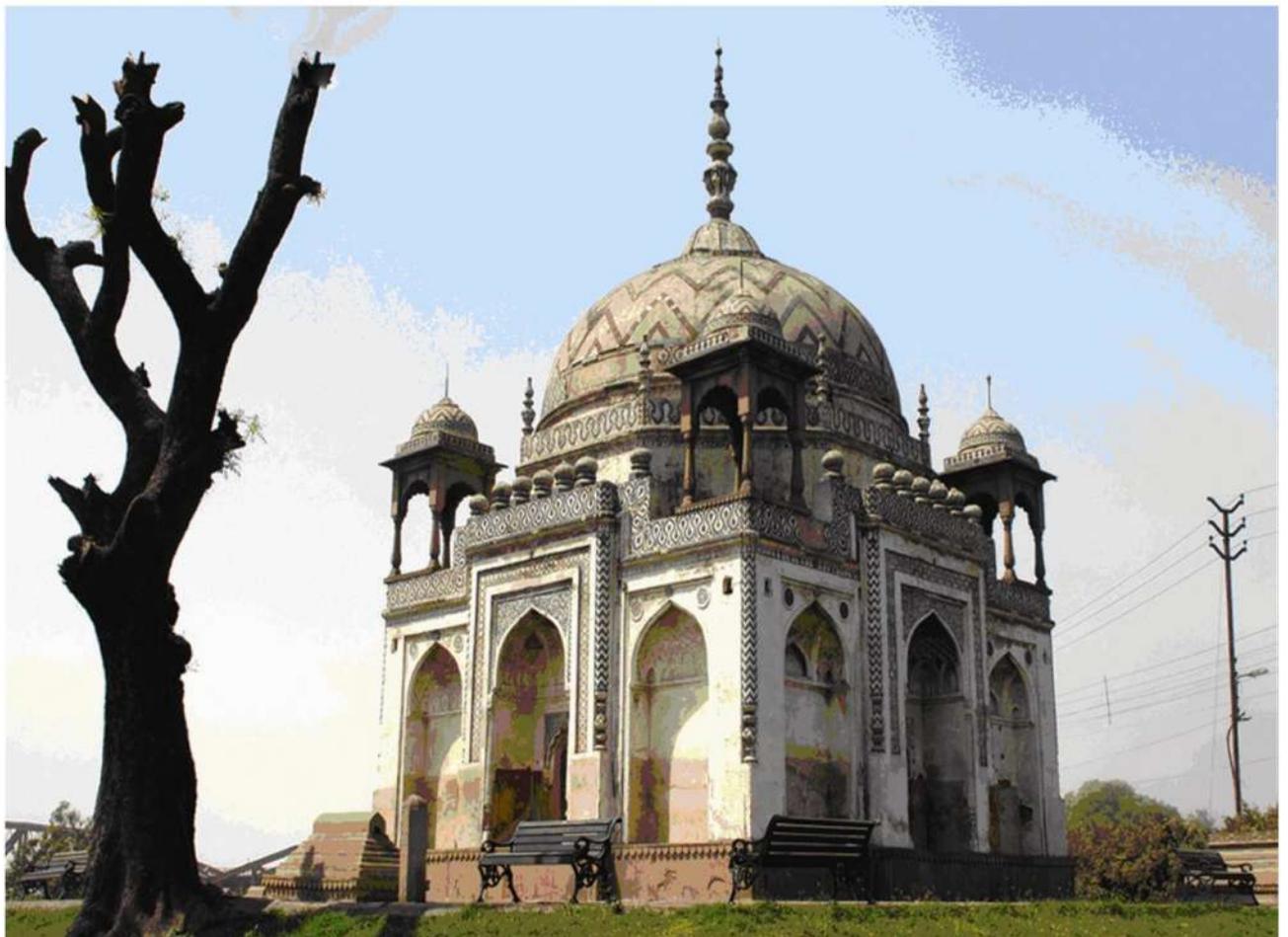


Fig.23.4: Maqbarā of Lāl Khān (*Lāl Khān kā Rauzā*), Rajghat, Varanasi, c. 1773 C.E.

Islamic architecture at their best. The Masjids and Maqbarās of Eastern Uttar Pradesh from Sultanate to Late Mughal period are excellent in form and composition as well as in floral and geometrical ornamentations.

References and Notes

1. Saeed Abdullah, *Islamic Thought-An Introduction*, New York, 2006. pp-97
2. Bianca Maria Alfieri, *Islamic Architecture of the Indian Subcontinent*, London. 2000 and Percy Brown, *Indian Architecture (Islamic Period)*, Bombay, 1956.
3. Sayyed Salar Masud also known as Gazi Mian (12th century C.E.) is credited with the Introduction of Islam in Varanasi which further spread in Allahabad, Jaunpur, Mirzapur and nearby places.
4. Aṭālā Masjid is one of the earliest and well developed Masjid of the region. Jāmī Masjid is known for its huge *Iwān* and also for its construction over a very high plinth. Gyānvāpī Masjid is famous for its foundation over one of the most prestigious Hindu temple and Dharaharā is famous for its situation over Pañchagaṅga ghāt, one of the most sacred ghāts of Varanasi.
5. R. Nath, *History of Sultanate Architecture*, New Delhi, 1978. p. 100. He discussed a stone inscription of the Eastern Gate of Aṭālā Masjid which records its commencement in the regime of Firuz Shah Tughlaq by Khwaja Kamal Khan Jehan in 1376 with a Hindu architect *Padmū*, son of *Visāī*.
6. *Ibid.*, p. 100
7. Ālamgīra masjid is a simple one having no minaret and dome and was built in Aurangzeb's reign.
8. Bianca Maria Alfieri, *Islamic Architecture of the Indian Subcontinent*, London, 2000. Percy Brown, *op.cit.*
9. A mosque having only a qiblā wall and remains open for use only on the day of Īd for the Namājī's.
10. Lodi Maqbarā consists of a dome raised on twelve columns over a square platform. The typical octagonal drum of the dome is of modest height, and the dome is usually surrounded by *kaṅgūrā* (crenulations) and a *chajjā* (projecting eave).
11. It is inscribed on his grave, and also appears on the information board of Archaeological Survey of India at the site.
12. Asok Kumar Das, *Painting under Jehangir*, Calcutta, 1978, pp 50, 99.
13. Catherine B. Asher, *op.cit.*, p. 104
14. R. Nath, *op.cit.*, p. 336
15. *Epigraphia Indica Arabic and Persian supplement* (1961)
16. *Ibid.*, p. 432
17. *Ibid.*, p. 432 : Catherine B. Asher, *op.cit.*, p. 147
18. *Ibid.*, p. 148

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