

Mosque Architecture: New Concepts of Bengal During the Sultanate Rule

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ABSTRACT

A mosque is acknowledged as the socio-political and religious hub of Islam; it is more than just a place for prayer. The model mosque for subsequent mosques was the first one constructed in Madinah during the time of the Prophet (s.a.w.). It is indisputable that mosques had a significant influence on the evolution of Islamic architecture. Mosques have played a significant part in the development of Muslim civilization and society. In addition to building mosques in the lands they had conquered as a symbol of their remarkable artistic talent and technique, Muslims are still honored for their outstanding contributions to the Muslim community today. The principles of secular architecture lack cosmic spiritual motivation, whereas mosque building of the Muslim era shows its religious character in an obvious and constant manner. What is expressed by it is undoubtedly determined by the structural concept, the materials used, and the practical and aesthetic uses of the piece. Despite the fact that Islam arrived in Bengal in 1204 A.D. with Ikhtiyar uddin Muhammad Bin Bakhtiyar Khalji, it reached the Indian subcontinent in 712 A.D. Thus, the year 1204 A.D. marks a turning point in Bengali history. The goal of this study is to evaluate and develop the mosque's construction, ornamentation, and material and design choices made throughout Bengal's sultanate era.

Keywords: Architecture, Mosque, Sultanate Rule.

INTRODUCTION

When the Muslims established their power permanently in the Indian subcontinent, they already possessed a highly developed architecture of their own. Within a few years of the conquest of Delhi, Bengal came under Muslim rule. And the establishment of Muslim rule by Ikhtiyar Uddin Muhammad Bin Bakhtiyar Khalji in 1204 A.D. marked a great change not only in the political field of Bengal but also in the social and cultural arena. The rulers focused on mosque architecture from the beginning, when the whole of Bengal was dominated by Muslims. A few specific components have been particularly linked to this architectural style. Generally speaking, they are arch and dome, minarets and mihrabs; those elements are common throughout the Muslim world. However, in addition to these, there are a variety of regional factors that prevail in various areas. These variations give rise to regional styles. They reflect the nature of the terrain they live on. Bengal's Muslim architectural development had a distinct personality and was unmistakably influenced by this deltaic region. Bengal provides her amazing terracotta art designs that are inspired by the country's jungle settings, setting them apart from the green and gold mosaics of Jerusalem and Damascus, the exquisite coloring of Persian tile works, and the magnificent fantasies of Spanish design (Dani, 1961). Bengal was initially inhabited by Buddhists and Hindus, but the horrific waves of Muslim invasion in the twelfth and thirteenth centuries made a lasting impression on their homeland. The mosque was undoubtedly a noble and distinctive architectural variant in the region of stupas and temples. It is true that wherever Muslims migrated, they built mosques to fulfill the tenets of their religion—namely, five daily prayers in congregation. However, the magnificent mosques constructed in Bengal during the early years of Muslim rule are remarkable for their audacity and grandeur, and they demonstrate the talent of Muslim architects as well as their adaptability to the impact of regional architecture (Ahmed, 2016). It is obvious that when the Muslims came as invaders to India and finally Bengal, they brought with them masons and decorators who have long been trained in the art of building in the style prevalent in their regions (Hasan, 1981).

OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY

The main objective of the study is on mosque architecture built from the beginning of Muslim rule in Bengal to the end of the sultanate period. The development of mosque architecture, architectural aesthetics, and the manifestation of innovation in the sultanate period. The objective also includes finding out the influences of the structure, decoration, and materials of the sultanate mosque of Bengal.

METHODOLOGY

At the inception of the study, a methodology for it was formulated. To ensure quality of the study. A field survey was conducted by the author on that selected sultanate mosque of Bengal. The structure, historical context, architectural structure, decoration, and materials are the main topics of this study. The author has taken numerous photos of the Bengali sultanate mosque's structure for the study; some of these photos are included in this paper. For this study, a few secondary materials, including books, journal articles, encyclopedias, and photos, were consulted.

HISTORICAL OVERVIEW OF THE MOSQUE

The Masjid is a symbol of brotherly solidarity and unity throughout the Muslim world, a microcosm that encompasses all Muslims inside the macrocosm of Muslim brotherhood. A mosque of the highest caliber is not only a representation of the Muslim Ummah's religious passion and sacrifices but also a living example of monumental art created in a most sacramental manner. Therefore, it is clear that the first mosque in Islam was built by the Holy Prophet Muhammad (S.A.W.) and that mosque's roof is where his favorite's disciple, Hajrat Belal, recited the first azan. This marks the beginning of Muslim construction. Since then, muezzins from tall, tapering minarets all around the Muslim world have called the faithful to mosques for congregational prayers five times a day. The mosque is a unique kind of Islamic religious architecture and a true representation of Islam. The Masjid, also known as the mosque, is a site of extreme humility and fervent religious devotion that originated from Sajada (Khan, 2003).

MEANING OF MOSQUE

A mosque is a place of prayer for Muslims. Also referred to as a structure used for Islamic religious ceremonies and gatherings. The Arabic word Masjid, which means a place of prostration before Allah, is the source of the English word "mosque," via the French Mosque, the ancient French Mousquaie, the old Italian Moschea and Moscheta, and the old Spanish Mezquita (Ahmed, 2016). Generally speaking, the phrase alludes to a covered structure, but it can also apply to any location where Islamic prayers are said, including an outdoor courtyard (Longhurst, 2012). Mosques are typically built with a facility for ritual cleaning (wudus) and a unique ornamental niche (a mihrab) inserted into the wall facing the direction of the city of Mecca (the Qibla), which Muslims must face during prayer (Nuha, 2019).

MUSLIM IN BENGAL

A delta region that is low lying in the Indian subcontinent's northwest corner. Bengal's nature is mostly shaped by the Ganges and Brahmaputra rivers, which split into countless branches before joining the sea. Despite being split between the two contemporary states of Bangladesh and India, the region nevertheless maintains some homogeneity due to its Bengali language and culture (A. Petersen, 1996). The triumph of Muhammad Bakhtyar Khalji at Nadiya in 1204 A.D. ushers in a new era in Bengali history and culture. From this point on, history documents the Muslim armies' relentless advance from West Bengal to the East and South, eventually subjugating the entire Ganges-Brahmaputra delta. Islam had an impact on this area, which was now known as Sultanate-i-Bangala or Subah-i-Bangala. Previously, the area was infused with a strong Hindu-Buddhist spirit. Aside from a vague memory linked with the Muslims in "Buddermokan," as documented by Harvey, there are no traces of the early Arab contact with the Bengal coast. Islam had a gradual but noticeable cultural influence, and as a result of its ideals colliding with those of the previous forces, so many people in this area came to embrace Islam that the atmosphere of this humid land now embodies the spirit of the religion

that emerged from the desert. The Muslims intended to settle down in Bengal in order to create a new home for themselves. They had brought with them their advanced Islamic civilization. The inhabitants of this civilization, who are primarily Turks, were driven from their native Central Asia and arrived here as squatters in an attempt to start over. They brought with them the rich legacy of Islamic civilization and newfound martial energy, but it took a while for these new components to adapt to Bengal's perpetually humid climate (Dani, 1961).

SULTANATE RULE IN BENGAL

The Sen Dynasty's capital city of Nadiya in lower Bengal was taken over by Muhammad Bakhtayar Khalji, a general of Qutb uddin Aibak, in 1204, and he established himself at Gaur or Lakhnauti (Gour), also known as Lakhnauti, a ruined city on the border between India and Bangladesh. The majority of the former citadel is located in the Malda district of West Bengal, India, while a smaller portion is located in Nawabganj District of Bangladesh, acting as the governor of the newly formed Turkish Empire. Subsequent Muslim authority, whether under independent chieftains or as nominal subordinates to the Delhi Sultanate (1206–1526 A.D.), strengthened and expanded the first Muslim rule. Several generals and governors whose names we hear are among those who rebelled against the central government and declared independence. The so-called Ilyas Shahis, whose ancestor, Shams uddin Ilyas, declared independence in 1345, stood out among these. Sikandar Shah and A'zam Shah Mahmud (1442-59) were two of his successors. The latter is well-known for his construction projects; he erected a mosque in Sonargaon and restored Gaur's capital, for instance. But after Ilyas, Shah Husain (1493–1518), also known as Sayyid us-Sadat Aala u'd Din Abul Muzaffar Shah Husain Sultan, was Bengal's greatest king. Following his death, the dynasty declined as a result of family conflicts and plots orchestrated by the many centers of power. The state of affairs worsened to the point where Jalal Khan and his son Sher Khan gained notoriety up until the Mughal Empire was established in 1526, at which point Humayun temporarily seized Gaur. But Sher Shah overthrew him in 1539 and went on to rule Bengal independently (Khan, 2003). It has been asserted that numerous massive structures, both religious and secular, were built throughout the empire by Muslim monarchs and their nobles and elites after them. The capital during the sultanate period was frequently the twin cities of Gaur and Pandua (Pandua, also spelled Pandua, is a census town in Hooghly district in the Indian state of West Bengal), while the political and cultural center of ancient Bengal, Vikramapur (Munshiganj), only exists as the name of an area in the Munshiganj district of Bangladesh. The location of the ancient kingdoms in south-eastern Bengal's capital, Vikramapur, can only be estimated based on the data that is currently accessible because the city's remnants are gone. Bengal's ancient administrative, commercial, and maritime hub was called Sonargaon (also written as Sunargaon, meaning "City of Gold"). Located in the heart of the Ganges delta, Dhaka served as the seat of Muslim medieval kings and governors of eastern Bengal. Monumental structures, including mosques, madrasas, tombs, caravanserais, fortresses, and bridges, were built into many of these structures (Khan, 2003).



Fig: 1: Map of Bengal during the Sultanate periods.

1204 A.D.	1339 A.D.	1412 A.D.	1436 A.D.	1486 A.D.	1576 A.D.
Era of the governors	First regime of Illias Shahi family	The regime of king Ganasha and Jalaluddin Muhammad Shah	Second regime of Illias Shahi family	regime of the Hossain Shahi Family	

Table -1: Muslim Dynasties of the Sultanate period in Bengal.

CHARACTERISTICS OF THE SULTANATE MOSQUE

The Bengali style of architecture broadly falls into two chronological phases, the Sultanate (pre-Mughal) and the Mughal (Kabir, 2009). The Muslims of this region developed the characteristics of the mosque using the local features of their houses and the local materials like brick. The basic features of the Sultanate mosques in Bengal are:

- The chala hut (traditional segmented roof of the village house).
- Brick construction (the important feature to identify Bengal's mosque architecture).
- Square domed unit (the basic module for Sultanate mosques).
- Pointed arch.
- Multiple mihrabs. (Situated at the Qibla or west wall.)
- Curved cornice.
- Engaged corner towers (resulting from the corner post of the village huts).
- Minarets (traditionally associated with mosques).
- Terra-cotta decoration on the surface.
- Ponds or large tanks.
- Inscriptions or 'Quranic text (Hasan, 1981).

Fundamentally, the mosque architecture of the Sultanate period had some of its own characteristics:

1. With a few exceptions, the majority of sultanate buildings have cornices and parapets that curve.
2. The arch in the sultanate buildings is two cantered and pointed, emanating from heavy piers on pillars.
3. The dome in the buildings of the sultanate periods is usually semi-circular and without any shoulder drum so that it lacks height and grandeur. Additionally, it is supported by pillars that create aisles and bays within the structures' interiors, which are primarily mosques. As a result, the number of domes determines how many aisles there are in bays rather than how many front doors there are in side doors.
4. Finally, the walls of the Sultanate mosque are not plastered but are decorated with terracotta designs.

TYPES OF SULTANATE MOSQUE

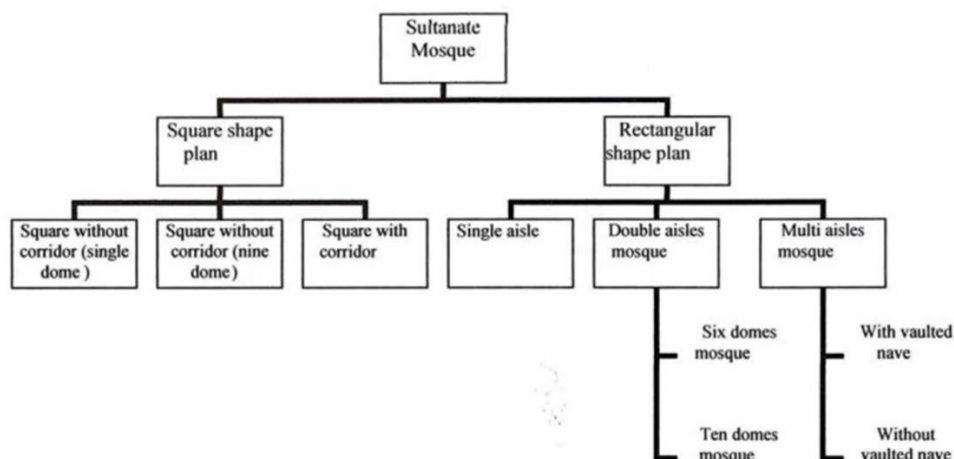


Table - 2- The different types of Sultanate Mosque (Kabir, 2009)

TRIFLES OF SOME GLORIOUS MOSQUE DURING THE SULTANATE PERIOD IN BENGAL

ADINA MOSQUE IN PANDUA (1373 A.D.)



Fig: 2



Fig: 3

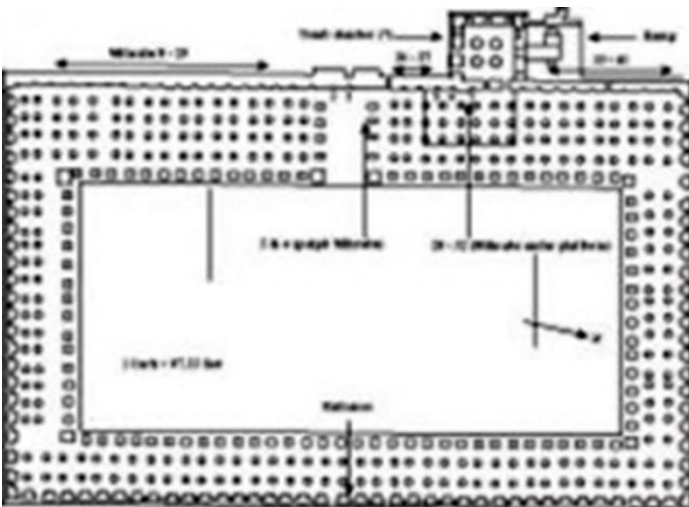


Fig: 4

In Bengal, the Adina Mosque at Pandua near Gaur is an example of a more unique regional design that blends elements from the east and the west. With dimensions of 155 by 87 meters, this mosque is one of the biggest

in India. It is made up of several hypostyle halls grouped around a courtyard. The façade of the courtyard is made up of 88 arches that are supported by piers and have a parapet on top. The mihrab and minbar are located at the heart of the prayer hall, where a large barrel-vaulted hall resembling an iwan leads from the court. Now broken and without a roof. A tall screen, presumably inspired by the Iranian Pishtaq, framed the vault. The lowest portions of the structure were constructed using stone spolia from temples, but the arches and the 370 brick domes were constructed with brick above the impost. Three bays to the north of the mihrab is a raised platform that was originally screened and surmounted by a parapet. In the center of the prayer hall, a massive iwan-like barrel-vaulted hall leads from the court to the mihrab and minbar. Now roofless and shattered, the vault was farmed by a high screen, undoubtedly modeled on the Iranian. The 370 brick domes and the arches above the impost were constructed with brick, while the lower portions of the structure were constructed with stone spolia from temples. Three bays to the north of the mihrab is a raised platform that was originally screened and surmounted by 18 domes higher than those over the other bays of the prayer halls. This type of platform is found in several large mosques of the sultanate period and probably served as an elevated maqsura. Although the size and plan of the Adina Mosque are atypical of other Bengali mosques, which are much more modest in scale, its multiple mihrabs are typical of mosques in the region. Such as the mosque of Zafar

khan Ghazi in Tribeni (1298), which was five. The grandiose quality of the Adina Mosque and the similarities to buildings in Islamic lands further west can be explained by the ambitions of the patron, who in the foundation inscription, called himself "the most perfect of the sultans of Arabia and Persia" (J.M.B. and S.S. Blair (ed.), 2009). But now it is in ruins following the earthquakes in the 19th and 20th centuries (Encyclopaedia, 2006).

SATH-GUMBAZ MOSQUE IN BENGAL (1442-1459 A.D.)



Figure: 5



Fig: 6

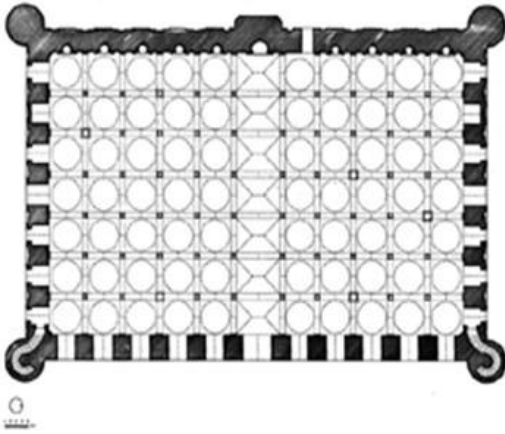


Fig: 7

The red brick mosque of sixty domes built by a local ruler, Khan Jahan Ali, is a massive structure of considerable dimension. The lawn measures 160feet from north to south and 108 feet from east to west. The façade on the east has eleven slightly recessed, two-centred arched openings or doorways, while each corner has been strengthened with batter towers surmounted with dome lets. The central opening is slightly higher than the others. Above, a cornice runs all through the length of the front end, while the central arch has a triangular pediment. Internally, the chamber is divided into eleven aisles from north to south and seven from east to west, while the western wall has been provided with the mihrabs in the shape of two-centred, engraved arched recesses. The domed roof is raised on slender octagonal pillars of stone. Seven central bays have pyramidal domes, but the others are surmounted by hemispherical domes. The square shaped aisles have been divided at the top into octagons by means of pendentives erected with corbelled brick work. The mihrabs are conceived of a gate-like framework having decorative floral patterns in low relief (Khan, 2003). It is now a pilgrimage site where people pay homage to the man who dedicated his lifetime to build the city and its monuments. An annex building of this mausoleum, the Pir Ali Tomb (of Pir Ali, a close associate of Khan Jahan), has the same design. The tomb is connected to a mosque known as the Dargah Mosque.

MOSQUE OF BINAT BIBI (1454 A.D.)



Fig: 8

A number of ancient and crumbling monuments show that before the Mughals arrived, the current city of Dhaka was a thriving hub of trade and commerce as well as religious and cultural activity. Before the Mughals came to power in Dhaka, a densely populated Muslim community known as Narandia, or modern-day Narinda, arose around the old Dhulai canal now filled in to make way for a modern road in the eastern portion of the city. Presumably, a thriving township emerged in this region during the fifteenth-century rule of Sultan Ilyas Shah, as evidenced by the construction of a stunning mosque that served as the focal point of the Muslim community's activities. From an architectural perspective, Gaud depicts it as a tidy, square, single-domed

edifice at first. Even though it has undergone a full transformation, its pre-Mughal characteristics are still clearly visible. Inside, the mosque is 12 feet square, with three arched doorways leading from the east, north, and south. One single hemispherical dome atop the square room. Like the majority of pre-Mughal monuments, it was originally unplastered. The battlements and curving corners of the mosque, which are still visible from the Qibla side, are its most defining characteristics. It is the oldest continuously operating Muslim place of worship in Dhaka. A new verandah has been added to the east and south, and a domed prayer room has been added to the south (Hasan, 1981). Right now, a portion of the mosque is being dismantled as part of a repair plan that also calls for expanding the existing structure from three stories to seven stories and constructing a 70-foot (21-meter) high tower.

BABA ADAM SHAHID MOSQUE, RAMPAL (1483 A.D.)



Fig: 9



Fig: 10



Fig: 11

The mosque was constructed by Malik Kafue during the reign of Fateh Shah, the final Ilyas Shahi ruler, and is named after the region's most revered saint, Baba Adam, Shahid. Instead of the lion, the mosque is situated on an oblong plot of ground that is 434 feet long and 36 feet wide, and it has the customary octagonal cornerturrets. Three two-centre arched openings inside a framework that protrudes slightly can be seen on the eastern façade. The cornice has a convex curve from above. Three hemispherical domes adorn the prayer room, and three intricately decorated mihrabs in the form of engrailed, two-centred arched niches can be found in the west wall (Khan, 2023). Adjacent to the mosque lies the tomb of a Muslim saint known as "Baba Adam." People in the area claim that "Baba Adam" visited them during Ballal Sen's reign in order to propagate Islam. But "Ballal Sen" ordered "Baba Adam" to be slain, and he was buried here afterwards.

DARASBARI MOSQUE (1479 A.D.)



Fig: 12



Fig: 13



Fig: 14

Shamsuddin Abul Muzaffar Yusuf Shah constructed the famed Darasbari Mosque in 1479 A.D. It is situated in Chapai Nawabganj's Shibganj Upazila. It is 34 m by 20.6 m on the outside and 30.3 m by 11.7 m within. The pillars are made of stone; however, the structure is made of brick (Hasan, 2009). 24 domes and 4 chouchala vaults covered the mosque's verandah-covered roof. But currently, everyone has collapsed. There are seven pointed-arch openings from the verandah that lead to the prayer chamber on the east side. Conversely, the southern wall has two pointed archways, and the northern wall has three. The remnants of a royal gallery may be found inside the prayer room in the northwest corner. Eleven Mihrab are located on the Qibla wall; two of these are part of the top-level royal gallery. Plaques made of clay decorated it. Under the cornice on the western and southern outside wall surfaces, a few terracotta plaques can still be seen (Hossain, 2012).

MAJLISH AWLIA MOSQUE IN FARIDPUR (1393-1410 A.D.)



Fig: 15



Fig: 16

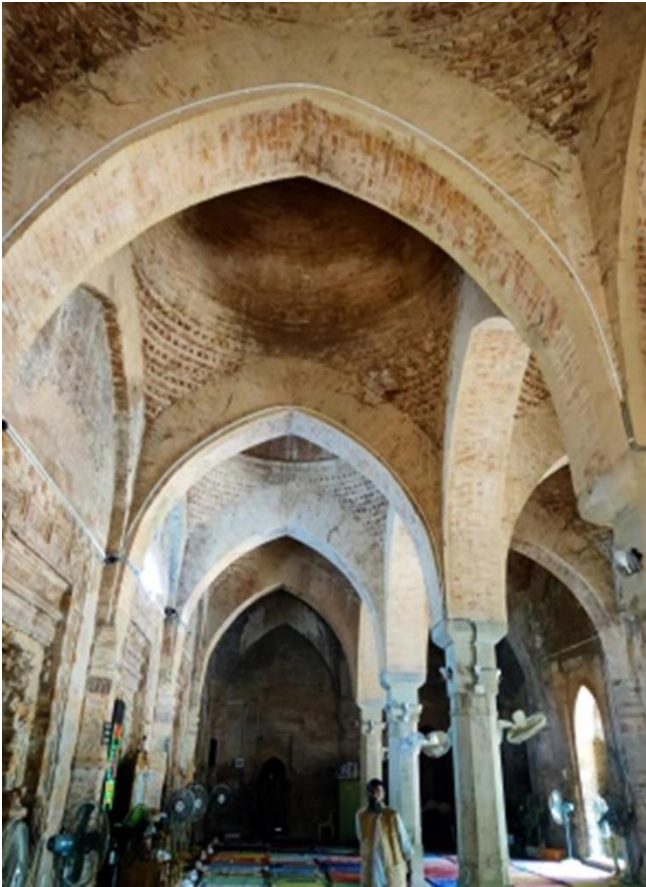


Fig: 17

Pathrail Mosque is another name for Majlish Awlia Mosque. It was constructed between 1393 and 1410 A.D., under Bengal's Sultan Ghiyasuddin Azam Shah's rule. The Pathrail Mosque's architectural style is reminiscent of Rajshahi's Choto Sona and Bagha mosques (Bari, 2012). The shape of the Historical Pathrail Mosque is rectangular. Ten identically sized domes are positioned over the roof and are held up by the interior vim. The roof has a nail-like, minor curvature. There are two on the north and west sides and five outlet entrances on the east side. Four pillars support the wall in each corner, and the same number of pillars stand apart inside the building to split the floor into two aisles. The area of each wall measures 21.79 x 8.60 m and is 2 m wide. Maximum height is 6.5 m. On the other side, there are five Mihrabs oriented towards the eastern doors. Every doorway's arches resemble a vault, with the largest one having a rectangular projection. Rectangular terracotta ornaments the mosque's walls. Rosettes, flowery scrolls, cusped arch motifs, nappies, and hanging patterns are a few examples of decorative design variations.

CONCLUSION

Architecture is one of the most important creations in the progress of civilization. Architecture is the best example of artistic aesthetics. The socio-economic, political, and cultural aspects of the region are related to the architecture of artifacts. The greatest example of Muslim architecture is the mosque. Due to the Muslim community's fast growth as a result of conquests and missionary efforts, the mosque is among the most advanced examples of religious architecture that has been set aside. a restricted space used for organized collective prayer in big cities or towns. In this continuation, a revolution in the mosque architecture was achieved through the Muslim rulers of Bengal in the 12th to 15th centuries. The sultanate period was a glorious time for the development of 'Sultanate style' in mosque architecture. The sultanate style was unique among the other styles practiced in the Indian subcontinent and outside of India in other Muslim countries. Sultanate style is also known as Bengali style. This custom persisted into the Islamic era, incorporating the modifications imposed by Muslim authorities in its development. Muslims adopted an already-existing form, modified it to suit their requirements, enhanced it, and returned it to the original culture (Hasan, 2009).

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