

الأهمية المعمارية والتاريخية لمسجد كسبا ذو التسع قباب في باريسال،  
بنغلاديش: دراسة مقارنة في التراث الإسلامي

محفظة أكثر

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## The Architectural and Historical Significance of the Nine-Domed Kasba Mosque in Barisal, Bangladesh: A Comparative Study with Islamic Heritage

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**Keywords** : Kasba Mosque, Islamic Architecture, Sultanate Period, Nine-Domed Style, Khan Jahan Ali Style, Bengal Heritage.

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### المستخلص

يُعد مسجد كسبا، الواقع في منطقة غورنادي بمحافظة باريسال، أحد أبرز المعالم الإسلامية التاريخية في جنوب بنغلاديش. يتناول هذا البحث دراسة تحليلية لتاريخ وعمارة هذا المسجد ذو التسع قباب، والذي يعود تاريخ بنائه إلى القرن الخامس عشر أو السادس عشر الميلادي. على الرغم من غياب النقوش الكتابية، إلا أن الخصائص المعمارية تشير بوضوح إلى تأثره بنمط "خان جهان علي" الذي ساد في العصر السلطاني بالبنغال، وهو نمط يظهر تقارباً فنياً مع تقاليد القباب المتعددة في العالم الإسلامي الواسع، بما في ذلك العراق. يتميز المسجد بتصميمه المربع (١٦.٩٦ م لكل ضلع) وجدرانه السميك (٢.١٨ م)، وينقسم فضاءه الداخلي إلى تسع وحدات بواسطة أربعة أعمدة حجرية ضخمة من البازلت تحمل القباب. يسلط البحث الضوء على الزخارف الفخارية الدقيقة (التراكوتا) التي تزين المحاريب، والتي تعكس الفن الاندماجي في بنغال العصور الوسطى. كما يتطرق البحث إلى الروايات



التاريخية لهنري بيفيريدج والدكتور أحمد حسن داني حول القيمة الجمالية للمسجد. يخلص البحث إلى أن مسجد كسبا يمثل حلقة وصل أساسية في فهم انتشار الحضارة الإسلامية في دلتا البنغال. وبالنسبة للباحثين في العراق، تقدم هذه الدراسة رؤية فريدة حول كيفية تطور "الحمض النووي" للعمارة الإسلامية في تضاريس شبه القارة الهندية مع الحفاظ على جوهرها الروحي الأصيل.

### Abstract

The Kasba Mosque, located in the Gaurnadi Upazila of Barisal district, stands as one of the most prominent ancient Islamic monuments in southern Bangladesh. This research investigates the historical origins and unique architectural features of this nine-domed structure, which dates back to the 15th or 16th century. Although no foundational inscription has been discovered, architectural similarities strongly link it to the "Khan Jahan Ali" style of the Bengal Sultanate, showing a fascinating parallel to the multi-domed traditions found in the wider Islamic world, including Iraq. Architecturally, the mosque is square-shaped, measuring 16.96 meters on each side with thick walls of 2.18 meters. Its interior is divided into nine equal bays by four massive stone pillars, believed to be made of basalt.

The research highlights the intricate terracotta ornamentations—lotuses, chains, and floral patterns—representing the syncretic art of medieval Bengal. The study also explores accounts by Henry Beveridge and Dr. Ahmad Hasan Dani, recognizing the mosque's role as a religious hub. By analyzing its structural layout, this paper presents the Kasba Mosque as a crucial link in understanding the expansion of Islamic influence in the Bengal Delta. For international readers, particularly in Iraq, this study offers a unique perspective on how Islamic architectural DNA evolved in the humid terrains of the Indian subcontinent while maintaining its core spiritual essence.

### 1.1 Background of the Study

The Islamic architectural heritage of Bengal is a profound testament to the region's rich socio-religious history. Among the numerous historical monuments scattered across the delta, the Kasba Mosque in Barisal stands as a magnificent example of medieval Islamic brilliance. Located in the Gaurnadi Upazila of Barisal district, this nine-domed structure is not merely a place of worship but a silent witness to the transition of power and culture during the Sultanate and Mughal periods.

Historically, the Barisal region was part of the ancient 'Chandradwip' and 'Bakla' kingdoms. During the Sultanate era, the influence of the great



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saint-warrior Khan Jahan Ali reached these coastal belts, leading to the construction of several mosques that mirrored the architectural style of Bagerhat. The Kasba Mosque, popularly known among locals as the "Allah's Mosque" or "Gayebi Mosque," was rediscovered after being hidden under dense forest for centuries. Its rediscovery during the reign of Emperor Jahangir brought this architectural marvel back to light, showcasing its unique blend of Sultanate and local Bengali influences.

### 1.2 Statement of the Problem

Despite its immense historical and architectural value, the Kasba Mosque has often been overshadowed by more prominent sites like the Shait Gumbad Mosque. There is a lack of comprehensive academic literature that detailedly explores its specific role as a defensive center and its unique administrative significance during the medieval period. This research seeks to bridge that gap by providing an in-depth analysis of its structural composition and historical context.

### 1.3 Objectives of the Study

The primary objectives of this research are:

- To investigate the historical origins and the context of the mosque's construction.
- To analyze the unique architectural features, including its nine domes and massive stone pillars.
- To explore the mosque's significance as a center for Islamic preaching and its defensive role in the coastal region.
- To document the current state of preservation under the Department of Archaeology, Bangladesh.

### 1.4 Significance of the Research

This study is significant for historians, architects, and researchers interested in the evolution of Islamic architecture in the Indian subcontinent. By documenting the Kasba Mosque, this research contributes to the preservation of Bengali Muslim identity and offers insights into how Islamic structures adapted to the local climate and topography. Furthermore, this study aims to promote the site as a key destination for historical tourism in Iraq and the wider Islamic world.

#### 1.4 Significance of the Research

The significance of this research lies in its multi-dimensional approach to documenting a primary Islamic heritage site in southern Bangladesh. The importance of studying the Kasba Mosque is outlined below:

#### 1.4.1 Architectural Preservation and Documentation

The Kasba Mosque is a classic example of the "Khan Jahan Ali" architectural style, characterized by its nine domes and massive stone pillars. While much has been written about the Shait Gumbad Mosque in

Bagerhat, the Kasba Mosque remains under-researched. This study provides a detailed structural analysis, including its unique wall thickness of 2.18 meters (approx. 8 feet) and its square-shaped ground plan measuring 11.58 meters on each side. By documenting these measurements and the materials used (basalt pillars and terracotta bricks), this research serves as a vital record for the Department of Archaeology and future conservationists.

#### **1.4.2 Historical Contextualization of the Bengal Delta**

Historically, the Barisal region (ancient 'Chandradwip' or 'Bakla') was a strategic frontier. This research highlights how the mosque served as more than a religious space; its massive walls suggest it may have functioned as a defensive fortification or "Security Fortress" against external threats during the Sultanate and early Mughal periods. Furthermore, the transition of the area from a dense forest to a settled administrative center named 'Sarker Bakla' under Emperor Akbar's reign underscores the mosque's role in the regional socio-political evolution.

#### **1.4.3 Cultural and Religious Identity**

The mosque is deeply embedded in local folklore, often referred to as the "Gayebi Mosque" or "Allah's Mosque" due to its mysterious rediscovery from deep forests after centuries of neglect. This study analyzes how such local traditions contribute to the cultural identity of the Muslim community in Barisal. It also explores the mosque's role as a center for Islamic preaching in southern Bengal, which was essential for the spiritual and social cohesion of the newly formed settlements.

#### **1.4.4 Academic Contribution to the Islamic World**

By presenting this research to an international audience, specifically through journals in Iraq, this study bridges the gap between the Islamic architectural traditions of the Middle East and the Bengal Delta. It showcases how Islamic design DNA adapted to the humid, riverine landscape of Bangladesh, using local terracotta art and thick masonry to withstand the tropical climate. This comparative value makes the research significant for global Islamic history.

Research Methodology

### **2.1 Introduction**

The methodology of this research is designed to provide a comprehensive and systematic analysis of the Kasba Mosque. Given the historical and architectural nature of the subject, a qualitative research approach has been adopted. This involves a combination of historical investigation, architectural description, and the analysis of existing archaeological data.





## 2.2 Data Collection Sources

To ensure the accuracy and depth of the study, data has been gathered from both primary and secondary sources:

●**Primary Sources:** These include direct physical observation of the mosque's structure, its nine domes, and its four basalt pillars. Information regarding its rediscovery during the Mughal era and its current preservation status under the Department of Archaeology is also treated as a primary historical context.

●**Secondary Sources:** A significant portion of the data is derived from historical texts and records. These include Henry Beveridge's *History of Bakerganj*, Dr. Ahmad Hasan Dani's *Muslim Architecture in Bengal*, and the national encyclopedia *Banglapedia*.

## 2.3 Historical-Descriptive Method

The research primarily employs the historical-descriptive method. This involves:

●**Historical Analysis:** Examining the regional history of 'Chandradwip' and 'Bakla' to understand the socio-political environment during the mosque's construction.

●**Architectural Description:** Detailed recording of the mosque's dimensions, such as its 16.96-meter length and 2.18-meter wall thickness, to compare it with the "Khan Jahan Ali" style found in Bagerhat.

## 2.4 Comparative Analysis

To validate the construction period (15th or 16th century), this study uses a comparative approach. The structural layout and decorative motifs (lotus, chain, and diamond patterns) of the Kasba Mosque are compared with the Shait Gumbad Mosque and the Masjidkur Mosque in Khulna. This comparison helps in establishing its stylistic link to the Bengal Sultanate period.

## 2.5 Qualitative Interpretation of Folklore

The research also interprets local oral traditions, such as why the structure is known as the "Allah's Mosque" or "Gayebi Mosque". By analyzing these folklores, the study investigates the period of the mosque's abandonment and its cultural impact on the local Muslim community.

## 3: Geographical and Administrative Location

### 3.1 Regional Context

The Kasba Mosque is situated in the Gournadi Upazila of the Barisal district, specifically on the boundary of the villages of Maula and Kasba. Geographically, it is located approximately 24 kilometers away from the main Barisal city. Its strategic location near the Joyoshree Stand on the Barisal-Dhaka Highway makes it an accessible yet historically secluded landmark.

### 3.2 Meaning and Etymology of 'Kasba'

The term 'Kasba' is derived from the Arabic word '*Qasbah*', which literally translates to a 'small city' or 'suburb'. Historically, this name indicates that the area was planned to be a significant administrative and commercial hub during the medieval period. The mosque was built on an elevated platform (Vita) to protect the structure from floodwaters, reflecting the geographical awareness of its architects.

Chapter 4: Historical Evolution: From Chandradwip to Mughal Bengal

#### 4.1 The Ancient Kingdoms of Chandradwip and Bakla

In ancient times, the Barisal region was part of the 'Chandradwip' and 'Bakla' kingdoms, which were sub-divisions of the greater 'Banga' janapada. Chandradwip was one of the most powerful Hindu kingdoms in southern Bengal, remaining independent for a long time even after the Muslim conquest by Ikhtiyar al-Din Muhammad bin Bakhtiyar Khalji in 1204.

#### 4.2 Transition to Muslim Rule

With the expansion of Muslim rule, the region became known as 'Bakla-Chandradwip'. The area where the Kasba Mosque stands was a vital part of this administrative territory. During the reign of Mughal Emperor Akbar, Raja Man Singh designated this region as 'Sarker Bakla'. Under the Mughals, Barisal served as a crucial naval base and commercial center to defend against Portuguese and Magh pirates.

Chapter 5: Construction, Mystery, and Local Legends

#### 5.1 The Legend of 'Allah's Gayebi Mosque'

One of the most fascinating aspects of this mosque is its folk history. Due to centuries of neglect, the mosque became hidden under dense forest and wild vegetation. When locals rediscovered it during the reign of Emperor Jahangir, they could find no records of its builder. Because it appeared suddenly from the wilderness in its complete, supernatural beauty, the locals began to call it 'Allah's Gayebi Mosque' (The Mysterious Mosque of Allah), a name that persists today.

#### 5.2 Scholarly Opinions on Construction Date

Archaeological evidence and the architectural style (such as the 8-foot thick walls and low domes) suggest that the mosque was built during the Sultanate period (1450–1550 AD). Some historians believe it was built by a representative of the saint Khan Jahan Ali, while others attribute its construction to Sabhi Khan in the early 16th century.

6: Architectural Features and Structural Design

#### 6.1 Ground Plan and Dimensions

The Kasba Mosque is a square-shaped structure with external measurements of 16.96 meters on each side. The interior prayer hall





measures 11.68 meters by 11.68 meters. The walls are remarkably thick, measuring approximately 2.18 meters (nearly 8 feet), which is a characteristic feature of Sultanate architecture in Bengal designed for both durability and cooling.

### **6.2 The Nine-Dome Configuration**

The roof consists of nine hemispherical domes arranged in three rows. These domes are supported by four massive stone pillars placed in the center of the hall, dividing the interior into nine equal bays or 'units'. These pillars are believed to be made of volcanic basalt or dolerite, providing immense structural support.

### **6.3 Ornamental Details (Terracotta Art)**

The mosque showcases traditional Bengali architectural decorations:

- **Pendentives:** The transition from the square bays to the circular bases of the domes is achieved through traditional triangular pendentive decorations.
- **Terracotta Motifs:** The mihrabs and doorways are adorned with intricate terracotta designs, including lotus, chain, diamond, and rose patterns.
- **Curved Cornice:** Following the local "Bangla" style, the cornices of the mosque are slightly curved, which helps in draining rainwater effectively in the humid climate of Barisal.

## **Chapter 7: Comparative Analysis with Other Islamic Monuments**

### **7.1 Link with the 'Khan Jahan Ali' Style**

The Kasha Mosque shares a striking resemblance with the Nine-Dome Mosque in Bagerhat and the Masjidkur Mosque in Khulna. This stylistic link suggests that after Khan Jahan Ali brought this region under Muslim influence in the mid-15th century, his followers or representatives constructed this mosque following his architectural DNA.

### **7.2 Differences from Mughal Architecture**

Unlike typical Mughal mosques which often have three domes and tall minarets, the Kasha Mosque features a low-profile roof and shorter, rounded corner turrets that do not extend far above the roofline. This proves its origin belongs to the earlier Sultanate period rather than the later Mughal era.

## **Chapter 8: Social and Defensive Significance**

### **8.1 The Mosque as a 'Security Fortress'**

Based on the 8-foot-thick walls, archaeologists believe the mosque was not only a place of worship but also a 'Security Fortress'. During times of attack or natural disasters, it could provide safety to the local community, functioning as a defensive outpost in the riverine frontier of Bakla-Chandradwip.



## 8.2 Center for Islamic Preaching

The mosque served as a 'Missionary Hub' for spreading Islam in southern Bengal. Its location in 'Kasba' (meaning small town) suggests it was the heart of a planned settlement intended for administrative and religious activities.

9: Notable Landmarks and Relics Associated with the Mosque

### 9.1 The Shrine of Doot Mallik

To the north of the Kasba Mosque lies the Mazar (Shrine) of a renowned saint named Doot Mallik. According to historical records, this shrine was established on the 1st of Jaistha in 890 Bangabda (approximately 1483 AD). The presence of this shrine alongside the mosque indicates that the area was a significant spiritual center during the 15th century, predating the Mughal era.

### 9.2 The Royal Seal of Empress Nur Jahan

A highly unique historical artifact associated with this region is the 'Panja' (Royal Seal) of Empress Nur Jahan. Historical accounts suggest that Emperor Jahangir donated 'Lakheraj' (tax-free) land for the maintenance of the saint's shrine. This donation deed, engraved with the Empress's seal, has been preserved by the local Kazi family of Kasba for generations. This relic highlights the administrative importance of the Kasba region during the height of the Mughal Empire.

### 9.3 The Ancient Pond

Directly in front of the mosque, there is a large ancient pond. It is believed to have been excavated concurrently with the mosque's construction to provide water for 'Wudu' (ablution) and other needs of the devotees. While it is currently nearly dry, its existence proves the planned nature of the mosque's surrounding environment.

Chapter 10: Current Status and Preservation Efforts

### 10.1 Under the Department of Archaeology

Currently, the Kasba Mosque is a protected monument under the Department of Archaeology, Bangladesh. Despite its age, the mosque remains an active place of worship where regular prayers are held, maintaining its original spiritual purpose.

### 10.2 Challenges in Conservation

Like many terracotta structures in the humid Bengal Delta, the Kasba Mosque faces challenges such as salinity and dampness. This paper argues for more intensive restoration efforts to preserve the intricate terracotta motifs and the structural integrity of its nine domes for future generations

11: Geographical Context and Environmental Adaptation





### 11.1 Topography and Soil Composition

The Kasba Mosque is situated in the heart of the Ganges-Brahmaputra Delta, specifically in the Barisal region, which is characterized by its alluvial soil and riverine landscape. The soil of Gaurnadi is primarily composed of **Alluvial Silt** and **Clay-Loam**, which is highly fertile but poses significant challenges for heavy masonry structures due to its soft and moist nature. The builders of the Kasba Mosque displayed remarkable engineering skills by constructing the mosque on a raised artificial platform (local name: *Bhita*) to safeguard it from seasonal flooding and the high water table of the delta.

### 11.2 The Use of Red Burnt Bricks and Basalt

Given the lack of natural stone quarries in the Bengal delta, the primary construction material used was high-quality red burnt bricks, made from the local clay. These bricks were joined with a lime-surkhi (brick dust) mortar, which provided the necessary flexibility to withstand the region's seismic activities and humidity. However, for structural stability, the architects imported massive basalt stone pillars (likely from the Rajmahal hills of India or through river routes from other Islamic regions) to support the weight of the nine domes. This combination of local 'earth' (bricks) and imported 'stone' (basalt) signifies the mosque's hybrid architectural identity.

### 11.3 Hydro-Geography and the Frontal Pond

Water management was a central theme in the layout of the Kasba Mosque. The large pond located to the east of the mosque was not merely for aesthetic purposes; it served three critical functions:

- Excavation Material:** The soil dug from the pond was used to create the elevated platform for the mosque.

- Ablution (Wudu):** It provided a constant water source for the devotees.

- Cooling Effect:** The proximity of the water body helped in reducing the ambient temperature of the mosque during the hot and humid summer months.

### 11.4 Climatic Adaptation: Thick Walls and Curved Cornices

The mosque's walls, measuring 2.18 meters (nearly 8 feet) in thickness, act as a natural thermal insulator, keeping the interior cool. Furthermore, the traditional curved cornices (resembling the thatched roofs of rural Bengal huts) were a strategic design choice to facilitate the quick runoff of heavy monsoon rainwater, preventing dampness in the structure.

## 13: Results and Discussion

### 13.1 Archaeological Findings and Identification

The primary result of this study confirms that the Kasba Mosque is a definitive specimen of the Sultanate-era "Khan Jahan Ali" architectural



style. The structural measurements—16.96 meters external length and 2.18-meter wall thickness—align perfectly with the nine-domed mosque typologies found in Bagerhat and Khulna. Although local legends initially labeled it as a "Gayebi" or mysterious mosque, the architectural DNA—specifically the low-profile domes and circular corner turrets—points to a construction period between the mid-15th and early 16th centuries.

### 13.2 Structural Resilience and Material Analysis

The discussion reveals that the choice of materials was a strategic response to the geography of southern Bengal.

- The use of **basalt stone pillars** within a brick structure highlights an advanced logistical network, as these stones were likely transported via river routes from distant quarries.
- The **8-foot-thick walls** were not merely for aesthetic grandeur; they provided essential thermal insulation and served as a defensive barrier against the frequent tropical storms and historical pirate raids of the Bakla-Chandradwip region.

### 13.3 Artistic Synthesis and Cultural Identity

The terracotta ornamentations observed on the mihrabs and doorways, such as the lotus, chain, and rose patterns, represent a unique synthesis of Islamic geometric art and local Bengali folk motifs. This suggests that the craftsmen were local, while the architectural vision was Islamic. The presence of the **Mazar of Doot Malik** and the **Seal of Empress Nur Jahan** in the vicinity further confirms that this mosque was the epicenter of a thriving, religiously diverse, and administratively significant settlement long before the formal Mughal annexation.

### 13.4 Comparative Significance with the Islamic World

A key point of discussion is the mosque's adaptation to its environment. While contemporary mosques in the Middle East (including Iraq) utilized tall minarets and soaring domes, the Kasba Mosque adopted a compact, sturdy, and low-domed design. This indicates that Islamic architecture in Bengal was not a rigid imposition but a flexible evolution that respected local topography and climate.

### 13.5 Comparative Chronological Analysis

To better understand the chronological placement and unique identity of the Kasba Mosque, it is essential to distinguish its features from the later architectural styles. The following table (Table 1) provides a comparative analysis between the Sultanate style of the Kasba Mosque and the subsequent Mughal architectural school that dominated Bengal.





**Table 1: Comparative Analysis of Sultanate vs. Mughal Architectural Features**

Architectural Features	Kasba Mosque (Sultanate Style)	Typical Mughal Mosques	Mughal Style
Wall Thickness	Extremely Thick (2.18 meters / 8 feet).	Relatively thin walls, focused on height.	Thinner walls,
Dome Configuration	Nine (9) equal-sized domes in a grid.	Usually Three (3) domes (central one larger).	domes
Roofline/Cornice	Curved Cornice (Bengali Hut style).	Straight and flat rooflines with battlements.	
Corner Turrets	Circular, sturdy, and low-profile.	Octagonal, tall, often with kiosks (Chhatris).	
Primary Decoration	Terracotta (Burnt Clay) floral motifs.	Plaster, Stucco, or Marble inlay works.	
Support System	Massive central Basalt stone pillars.	Mainly uses arches and squinches for support.	

**13.6 Synthesis of Findings**

The data presented in the table above clearly demonstrates that the Kasba Mosque belongs to the pre-Mughal Sultanate period, specifically the "Khan Jahan Ali" architectural school. The reliance on massive walls and internal stone pillars indicates a period where structural durability and defense were as important as religious expression.

Furthermore, the discussion emphasizes that while the architectural framework remained Islamic, the execution—through terracotta and curved cornices—was deeply rooted in the Bengali landscape. This synthesis suggests a high degree of social harmony and local participation in the construction of Islamic monuments in the 15th-century Barisal region. By comparing these results with the broader Islamic world, we find that the Kasba Mosque is not an outlier, but a brilliant example of regional adaptation of universal Islamic architecture.

**14: Conclusion and Recommendations**

**14.1 Conclusion**

This research has provided a comprehensive architectural and historical analysis of the Kasba Mosque in Barisal, Bangladesh. The study concludes that the mosque is an exceptional surviving example of the 15th-century Sultanate architecture, specifically following the "Khan



Jahan Ali" school of design. Its unique nine-dome configuration, supported by massive basalt pillars and 2.18-meter-thick walls, reflects a sophisticated blend of Islamic structural engineering and local environmental adaptation. The mosque served not only as a religious center but also as a defensive outpost and a social hub for the early Muslim settlements in the Bakla-Chandradwip region. The discovery of the Royal Seal of Empress Nur Jahan and the proximity of the Mazar of Doot Mallik further solidify its status as a site of immense administrative and spiritual importance throughout the Sultanate and Mughal eras.

#### **14.2 Recommendations**

**1. International Collaboration:** Scholarly exchange between the archaeological departments of Iraq and Bangladesh should be encouraged to study the cross-cultural evolution of brick and terracotta architecture.

**2. Conservation Efforts:** The Department of Archaeology, Bangladesh, should implement advanced chemical treatments to protect the terracotta motifs from salinity and humidity.

**3. Tourism Development:** The Kasba Mosque should be promoted as a major destination for Islamic heritage tourism to attract international researchers and visitors.

#### **15: Socio-Religious Impact and the Missionary Spirit**

##### **15.1 The Mosque as a Community Center**

Historically, the Kasba Mosque was not just a prayer hall; it functioned as the primary social and legal center for the newly settled Muslim community in the Bakla-Chandradwip region. During the Sultanate period, mosques were often built at the heart of new settlements to provide a sense of security and identity. The massive architecture of the Kasba Mosque gave the local population a sense of permanent belonging in a land that was frequently disturbed by natural disasters and coastal raids.

##### **15.2 The Concept of "Dawah" and Sufi Influence**

The presence of the Doot Mallik Mazar nearby suggests that the mosque was a base for Sufi saints and preachers who came to southern Bengal. These missionaries used the mosque as a "Madrasah" (educational center) to teach the principles of Islam, Arabic, and Persian to the locals. This scholarly environment is what eventually led to the area being called "Kasba" (a planned administrative town), attracting traders and scholars from other parts of the Islamic world.



## **Chapter 16: Decorative Symbolism in Terracotta Art**

### **16.1 Floral and Geometric Harmony**

The terracotta designs on the Mihrabs (prayer niches) of the Kasba Mosque are more than just decorations. The Lotus motif, which is frequently found, symbolizes purity and is a classic example of how Islamic art in Bengal adopted local floral symbols to represent spiritual growth. The Chain and Bell motifs represent the continuity of faith and the connection between the earthly and the divine.

### **16.2 Comparison with Middle Eastern Motifs**

While Middle Eastern Islamic architecture (like in Iraq) often uses intricate calligraphy and tile work, the Kasba Mosque uses burnt clay (terracotta). This choice was deliberate because stone was scarce and clay was abundant in the delta. By using clay to create high-quality Islamic art, the builders showed that Islamic values could be expressed through any medium provided by nature.

## **Chapter 17: Folklore and the "Gayebi" Phenomenon**

### **17.1 Oral Traditions and Historical Memory**

The term "Gayebi Masjid" (The Hidden/Mysterious Mosque) carries deep sociological meaning. For centuries, when the mosque was hidden under a dense canopy of trees, it lived on in the oral traditions of the local people. This "mysterious" status protected the structure from being demolished or vandalized, as locals held a deep spiritual fear and respect for the "hidden house of Allah."

### **17.2 Rediscovery as a Symbol of Resilience**

The rediscovery of the mosque during Emperor Jahangir's reign was seen as a "miracle" by the then-Muslim community. This paper argues that the survival of the mosque despite centuries of abandonment and the harsh tropical climate is a testament to the exceptional quality of Sultanate masonry and the strength of the lime-mortar used in its construction.

## **18: Strategic Defense and Security Architecture**

### **18.1 The Mosque as a Multi-functional Fortress**

A unique finding of this research is the mosque's potential role as a defensive structure. In the 15th-century Bengal delta, coastal regions were frequently under threat from Magh and Portuguese pirates. The 8-



foot-thick walls and the extremely small, high-placed windows suggest that the Kasba Mosque was designed to be a "Security Fortress." During an attack, the local community could take shelter inside its massive masonry, which was strong enough to withstand primitive artillery and heavy storms.

## **18.2 Strategic Vantage Points**

The circular turrets at the four corners are not just decorative; they provided structural stability to the massive walls. Historically, these turrets could have served as watchpoints. This dual-purpose architecture—religious and defensive—is a hallmark of the early Islamic settlements in the riverine frontiers of South Asia.

## **Chapter 19: Logistical Marvel: The Journey of Basalt Pillars**

### **19.1 Procurement of Raw Materials**

One of the most intriguing aspects of the Kasba Mosque is the presence of four massive Basalt stone pillars. Since the deltaic region of Barisal is entirely composed of silt and clay, there are no natural stone sources. These stones were likely transported via ancient river routes from the Rajmahal Hills in Bihar (India) or perhaps reused from older structures.

### **19.2 Engineering Precision in a Soft Landscape**

Transporting these multi-ton stone pillars over hundreds of miles by boat and then erecting them on the soft, alluvial soil of Gournadi was a logistical masterpiece. The builders used a specialized foundation technique, likely involving deep timber piling or a heavy brick base, to ensure that the heavy stone pillars did not sink over the centuries. This highlights the advanced engineering knowledge available in the Bengal Sultanate.

## **Chapter 20: Future Prospects: Promoting Islamic Heritage Tourism**

### **20.1 Global Recognition and UNESCO Standards**

While the Shait Gumbad Mosque in Bagerhat is a UNESCO World Heritage site, the Kasba Mosque remains a "hidden gem." This study proposes that the Kasba Mosque be included in a "Sultanate Heritage Trail" connecting Bagerhat, Masjidkur, and Barisal. Such an initiative would not only preserve the site but also bring international researchers from the Middle East and beyond to study this unique architecture.





## 20.2 Digital Documentation and 3D Modeling

As a final recommendation, this paper suggests the use of Photogrammetry and 3D scanning to create a digital archive of the terracotta motifs. This would allow scholars in Iraq and other Islamic countries to study the intricate Bengali designs virtually, fostering a deeper cross-cultural understanding of Islamic art evolution.

## 21: Economic and Administrative Infrastructure of 'Sarker Bakla'

### 21.1 Revenue and Land Grants (Lakheraj)

The area surrounding the Kasba Mosque was historically part of 'Sarker Bakla', a vital administrative unit during the Mughal era. Records suggest that the maintenance of the mosque and the adjacent shrine of Doot Mallik was supported by 'Lakheraj' (tax-free) land grants. This economic model ensured that the religious complex remained a self-sustaining institution. The donation of land by imperial decree, evidenced by the seal of Empress Nur Jahan, proves that the central Mughal government in Delhi recognized the administrative importance of this remote deltaic town.

### 21.2 Trade and Connectivity

The location of the mosque near the riverine routes of Gaurnadi facilitated trade between Barisal and other parts of Bengal. Historically, the 'Kasba' served as a marketplace where local produce, particularly salt and rice, was traded. The mosque provided a safe spiritual haven for traveling merchants and scholars, further integrating the region into the broader Islamic economic network.

## Chapter 22: Technical Analysis of the 'Nine-Dome' Engineering

### 22.1 Load-Bearing Mechanism of the Central Pillars

The engineering of the nine domes is a masterpiece of medieval physics. Each of the four central basalt pillars acts as a critical load-bearing point, distributing the weight of the domes equally across the structure. The transition from the square interior to the circular base of the domes is managed through intricate 'Pendentives'—a series of corbelled brick layers. This design allowed for a vast, open prayer hall without the need for many obstructive walls, showcasing the advanced masonry skills of the Sultanate period.

## **22.2 The Science of Lime-Surkhi Mortar**

A significant reason for the mosque's durability is the use of 'Lime-Surkhi' mortar (a mix of lime and powdered bricks). This traditional binding material is more flexible than modern cement, allowing the building to breathe and adjust to the shifting alluvial soil of the Barisal delta. This research highlights how this ancient chemical composition has resisted the high salinity of the coastal air for over five centuries.

## **Chapter 23: The Mosque in the Context of Regional Folklore**

### **23.1 Oral History and the 'Invisible' Builders**

In the absence of a stone inscription, oral history has filled the gap. Local villagers believe that the mosque was built overnight by 'Jinns' or unseen forces—a common legend associated with many ancient Sultanate mosques in Bengal. From a sociological perspective, these stories reflect the awe and respect the local population felt toward the monumental architecture, which was far superior to the humble thatched houses of the era.

### **23.2 Symbolic Meaning of the 'Nine' Domes**

In Islamic numerology and architecture, the number nine often holds symbolic significance, sometimes representing the celestial spheres. In the Bengali context, the nine-domed style became a symbol of regional power and religious authority, establishing a permanent Islamic presence in a land that was previously dominated by dense forests and ancient local kingdoms.

## **Chapter 24: Glossary of Technical and Local Terms**

- Alluvium: Fine-grained fertile soil deposited by flowing water.
- Basalt: A dark, fine-grained volcanic rock used for the mosque's pillars.
- Corbeling: A structural piece of stone or brick jutting from a wall to carry a weight.
- Kasba: An Arabic term for a fortified town or a sub-district headquarters.
- Mihrab: A semicircular niche in the wall of a mosque that indicates the 'Qibla'.
- Pendentive: A constructive device permitting the placing of a circular dome over a square room.
- Sultanate: A state or country governed by a Sultan.





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- Terracotta: A type of fired clay, typically brownish-red in color, used for ornamental tiles.

### 25: The Architectural Influence of Iraq and the Middle East on Bengal's Sultanate Style

#### 25.1 The Migration of Architectural Ideas

The architectural DNA of the Kasba Mosque, though deeply rooted in the soil of Bengal, carries the ancestral echoes of the wider Islamic world, particularly from the regions of Iraq and Persia. During the 15th century, Bengal was a melting pot of cultures, attracting scholars, administrators, and architects from the heartlands of Islam. The concept of the "Multi-domed Mosque," which is the defining feature of the Kasba Mosque, shares a structural lineage with the early Abbasid architecture of Iraq. The use of baked bricks and thick masonry was a common necessity in both the alluvial plains of Mesopotamia and the Bengal Delta.

#### 25.2 Comparative Analysis of Brickwork

In Iraq, the use of decorative brickwork reached its zenith during the Abbasid period (e.g., the Al-Abbas Mosque or the walls of Baghdad). Similarly, in the Kasba Mosque, we see a mastery of brickwork where the bricks are not just structural units but also decorative elements. The transition from the square base to the circular dome using brick pendentives is a technique that was perfected in the Middle East and later adapted by Bengali craftsmen using local clay. This cross-cultural exchange highlights the unity of Islamic architectural thought across vast geographical distances.

### Chapter 26: The Role of the Mosque in Local Governance and Justice

#### 26.1 The Mosque as a 'Qazi's Seat'

In the medieval 'Kasba' or administrative towns, the mosque was often the venue for the local 'Qazi' (judge) to deliver justice. The central location and the massive, imposing structure of the Kasba Mosque provided the necessary authority for legal proceedings. Local traditions suggest that disputes regarding land, trade, and social conduct were settled within the mosque's courtyard. This multi-functional use of the mosque as a courthouse (Dar-al-Adl) ensured that the Islamic principles of justice were deeply integrated into the rural administration of Barisal.





## 26.2 Administrative Records and Local Lineage

The presence of the Kazi family in the Kasba region, who have preserved the Royal Seal of Empress Nur Jahan, proves that the mosque was the center of a long-standing administrative lineage. These families served as the bridge between the central Imperial government and the local populace. By maintaining the mosque, they also maintained the social order of 'Sarker Bakla'. This chapter argues that the mosque was the heartbeat of local governance, ensuring stability in a frontier region.

## Chapter 27: Challenges of Contemporary Urbanization and Site Encroachment

### 27.1 Modern Threats to Historical Integrity

As the Gaurnadi area undergoes rapid urbanization, the Kasba Mosque faces new challenges. Modern construction near the mosque site poses a threat to its visual integrity and the stability of its ancient foundation. The vibration from heavy traffic on the nearby highway and the potential encroachment on the ancient pond (dighi) are serious concerns. This research emphasizes that a "Buffer Zone" must be maintained around the mosque to prevent modern structures from overwhelming this delicate 500-year-old monument.

### 27.2 The Role of Local Community in Conservation

While the Department of Archaeology is the official guardian, the local community remains the primary protector of the mosque. This study observes that the continued use of the mosque for daily prayers is its greatest protection, as it keeps the building 'alive' and prevents it from falling into ruin. However, there is a need for educational programs to inform the local youth about the global historical significance of the mosque, transforming them from worshippers into heritage ambassadors.

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