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Historical and Architectural Study of the Ambar Shah Mosque, an Ancient Mosque in Dhaka , Bangladesh

Sazzadur Rasheed¹, Mian Md Jawad Ibne Iqbal^{1*}, Farhana Sharmin²

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ABSTRACT

The development of Islamic cities over the ages has always been aided by magnificent mosques. The religious practices of Islam's teachings on nationhood serve as an example of this viewpoint, and the mosque concept has gained widespread acceptance as a means of both community building and religious expression. However, this focus on design, function, and aesthetics is examined and addressed as important topics regarding how the Muslim community interacts with mosques. According to this study, the continued performance of Islamic nationhood in the community is seen as indicative of the historic state mosque's survival as a "iconic colossal edifice." This study examines the perception of metropolitan city people's preferences for the continuation of mosques as a symbol of national integration empirically. Because of the significant roles it performed as a location for historical events and as an architectural symbol that represented Islamic laws, this mosque is a structure of extraordinary architectural quality and unexceptional historical importance to the state. Despite the fact that our research was able to capture information on the mosque's condition and architectural features, it is clear that more information is required to illustrate how to keep the mosque from deteriorating. Future generations must continue to examine every part of the mosque to make sure that the information needed for repair and maintenance work along with the nation's progress toward modernity and globalization is not lost.

INTRODUCTION

Bangladesh is a country rich in antiquities, culture, and history. There are lovely monuments and historic sites there that have been treasured and conserved for many years. The "Ambar Shah Mosque," also known as "Khwaja Ambar Shah's Masjid," is a famous historical site that is situated in Karwanbazaar, Dhaka. Due to its durability, the mosque today draws visitors from all over the world.

METHODOLOGY

Two different methodologies were used in this study: case studies and content analyses. To make sure that the pertinent data is examined and located in order to address the research questions and objectives, the techniques are carried out in stages. The case study is completed as part of a field study using measured drawing, which includes observations, informal interviews, and photography. The parts of a famous historic mosque were seen and noted in a log book. Ambar Shah Mosque was photographed from top to bottom to create a documentary record of its current state. To gather further details on the former land-use and usage of the place under study, informal interviews were held. The responders were chosen at random and questioned about their prior encounters with the location and memories of it. the analysis information created using the measured drawing and content analyses techniques and the site inventory. This method of gathering data on-site includes taking photographs and doing an inventory. The main goal of the site inventory is to gather the fundamental data on the current state of the Ambar Shah Mosque. The inventory was carried out to determine the mosque's fundamental architectural

details. A measured drawing is done to help the data and make it stronger. Beginning with the dissemination of a questionnaire survey to residents and guests of the Ambar Shah Mosque, empirical research for this subject was conducted. The questionnaire focuses on gauging public opinion about the importance of the historic building by asking questions about four different topics: place identity, nationhood, the relationship between local identity heritage as a whole, and heritage building preservation.

Background of the Site Area

Throughout Mir Jumla's Assam expedition, army convoys regularly stopped at Kawranbazaar, a caravanserai and checkpoint for northern travelers. (Banglapedia, 2022) The Grand Trunk road, one of the oldest roadways built, connecting Sonargaon and Gaur spanning east to west. This route's alignment has mostly been preserved as the Mymensingh highway. Within the Ramna parks and woods, just outside of Mughal Dhaka, stood the urban hamlet. The Europeans built their factory nearby in Tejgaon. Malik Ambar Shah, the principal court eunuch, constructed the modest three-dome mosque in 1679–1680 in the Shaista Khani architectural style. (Kalerkontho, 2022) He also constructed a well, bridge, and garden to make it easier for the travelers to walk around and retire. The Pandu River Hatirjheel Bridge, which connected SAARC Fountain and Bangla Motor, was in place until the 1960s. (Banglapedia, 2022)

Architecture of the Mosque

Mughal influences may be seen in the building style. The

¹ Department of Architecture, Primeasia University, Dhaka, Bangladesh

² Department of Architecture & Built Environment, University of the West of England, Bristol, United Kingdom

* Corresponding author's e-mail: pau.203001052@gmail.com

western part of an elevated platform, that is approximately 12 feet (3.66 m) well above ground, is occupied by the three-domed mosque. (Wikiwand, 2022) A row of closed lotus-petal patterns may be seen at the top of this pedestal. At each of its four corners are four sizable side turrets. The little domes on top of the octagonal towers, which are somewhat taller than the plinth. An arcade with a stone-framed arch is accessible from the eastern end of the building via a set of stairs. The well that Khwaja Ambar excavated was to the right of this stairs, but it has since been covered with dirt. Khwaja Ambar's grave is located to the east of the plinth. [Figure. 1] Here, only stone gravestones could formerly be seen, but a brick structure has since been erected on top of them. (Mosjid Directory of Bangladesh, 2022) Spiral scrolls are carved into the recessed area here between projected band and the rectangular frame in shallow relief.

Due to ongoing building in the area, some of which is annoying and endangers the Ambar Shah Mosque's aesthetic integrity, the thakhana (podium) on which it was built has now subsided. Rajmahal basalt was used to construct its mihrab, mimber, and certain structural components. When mounted on semi-pendentives, the centre dome is taller than the side domes. Merlons in the shape of petals are used as decoration on the upper shoulder. Its four facades are surrounded by around 20 corner turrets, thinner pilasters, and distorted cupolas that extend just above the parapets. The mosque is inscribed twice. A passage from the Quran may be found in the first inscription located over the main mihrab. The second inscription, which is located on the outside above the main door, also includes the year of construction. [Figure. 2] (Wikipedia, 2022)



Figure 1: Tomb of Khwaja Ambar Shah (Source: Author)



Figure 2: Inscription placed over the main entrance of Ambar Shah Mosque (Source: Author)

Restoration and Expansion

The structure has undergone several renovations and additions. A three-domed veranda was erected to the

east of the mosque in the 1960s after it had undergone extensive repairs. [Figure. 3] Early 1980s multi-story additions to the east of the building gave it a more



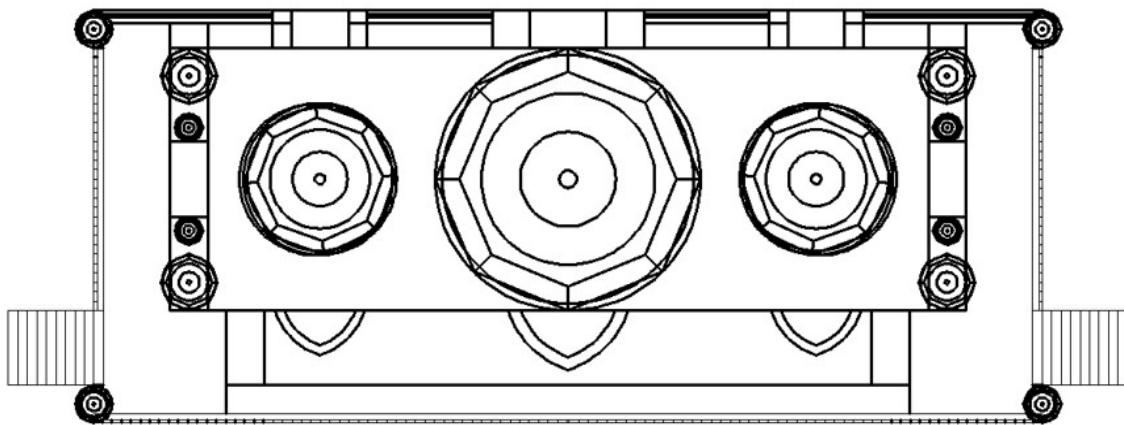
Figure 3: The expansion of Ambar Shah Mosque (Source: Author, Using Google Earth)

contemporary appearance. (Banglapedia, 2022)

Construction Details

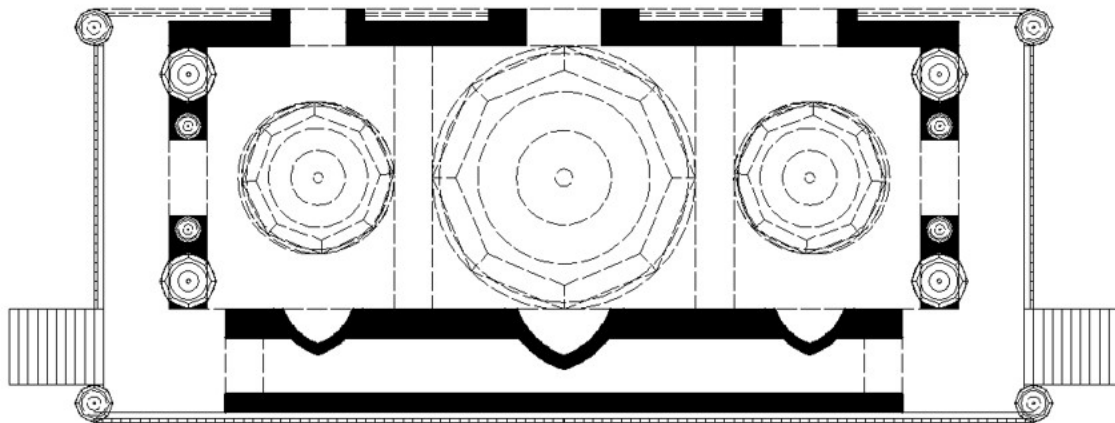
The mosque is 13.41m x 6.71m around the outside and has an oblong shape. The building's four external angles are strengthened by the octagonal turrets, which protrude over the parapet's horizontal line. It features five arched doorways: three in the east, one on the south and north sides, and one in the north. Black basalt makes up the entire huge central gateway and the projecting fronton that is surrounded by decorative turrets. The remaining four doors feature black basalt arched frames and surrounding decorative turrets as well. Inside the qibla wall, there are three semi-octagonal mihrabs that correspond to the three eastern archways. The larger center mihrab is expanded

outdoors and has the customary decorative towers on either side of it. Only the arches of the side mihrabs are built of stone, unlike the central mihrab, which has a rectangular frame around it and is fully composed of black basalt. Towards the north of the central mihrab is a three-stepped pulpit that is likewise made of stone. The interior of the mosque is divided into three bays, the central one being 4.27 meters square, by two east-west broad arches on joined brick pillars. Three somewhat bulbous domes on octagonal drums are mounted over the roof, with the center dome being bigger than its flanking counterparts. The domes are supported underneath by the same structure as in the Lalbagh Fort Mosque and are topped with lotus and kalasa finials. [Figure. 4 & 5]



TOP VIEW

Figure 4: The top view of Ambar Shah Mosque (Source: Author)



PLAN AT +15 FEET LEVEL

Figure 5: The plan of Ambar Shah Mosque (Source: Author)

Changes Occurred

The mosque's ornamentation have mainly vanished as a result of time's ravages and subsequent repairs. Originally decorated with panels, the walls have been rendered

simple with cement plaster. A sizable medallion that once marked the inside of the central dome's peak is now missing. [Figure. 6 & 7]

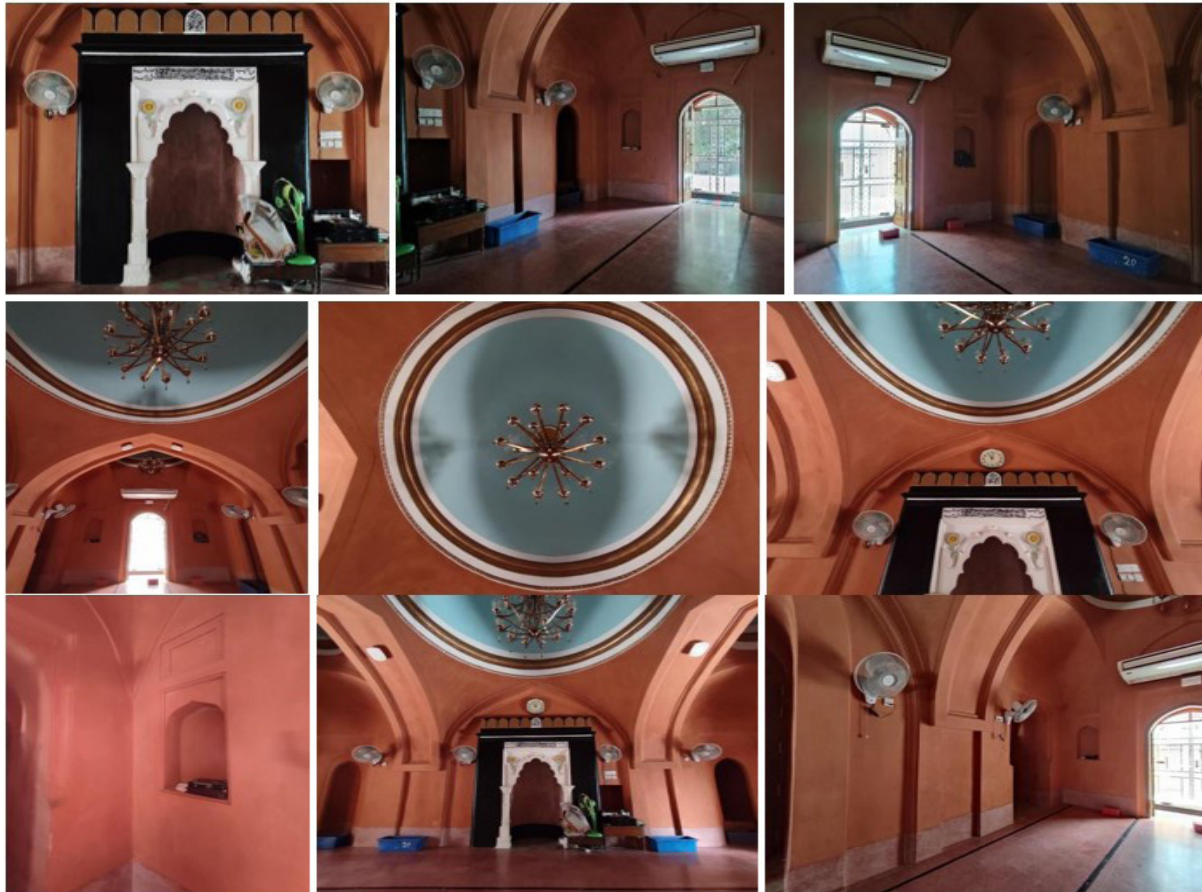


Figure 6: Present situation of the interior of Ambar Shah Mosque (Source: Author)



Figure 7: Present situation of the exterior of Ambar Shah Mosque (Source: Author)

Present Scenario

This old mosque in Karwan Bazar is surrounded by some tin-roofed homes, businesses, and vehicle garages. In the open area of the mosque itself, just in front of it, is a shoe shop for a large corporation. A sizable canopied shoe

display facility is now visible on the side of the road where the mosque formerly stood. On the opposite sides, multi-story structures have been constructed. The mosque's expanded structures, a new mosque with five stories, a madrasa, and a multi-story bazaar are all close by. [Figure. 8]



Figure 8: The present scenario of Ambar Shah Mosque and surroundings (Source: Author)

Islamic Practice

Here, following Asr and Isha prayers, Talim and Zikir are held in addition to the five daily prayers. It is noteworthy that Muslims participate in Jumu'a Prayer. Every time they pray together here, 2000 to 2500 Muslims. Here, Tabligh Jamaat has a unique setup.

Present Facilities

The mosque has constant access to water for ablution. Also included are roughly 50 restrooms. For security, there are butlers and guards. The mosque committee manages an orphanage. There is a library within the mosque. There is a library with more than 500 volumes in it. A 35-person group is in charge of the mosque's upkeep.

Conservation

RAJUK carried out conservation of this mosque, the Archaeology Department (DOA) refused to include it in the protection list, blaming RAJUK for damaging the architectural elements and thus reducing its heritage value. (The Daily Star, 2022) It is the 22nd oldest mosque in Dhaka. Khwaja Ahsanullah gave waqf of some land for the maintenance of the mosque. Local people once renovated it by collecting donations.

RECOMMENDATION

The current study's breadth is constrained due to its short study time and low funding. Future studies on other related topics are still required. The following are the fields of study that still need to be done:

- i. The report provides information on the present preservation plan used for the historic structure. Future research on preservation tactics for various building kinds is conceivable.
- ii. The studies also highlighted the historic structures that shape nationalism. It is crucial to conduct a thorough analysis of the factors that influence the emergence of nationhood.
- iii. It was discovered during the site visit and literature review that the region is home to a variety of historic structures. It is important to examine the entire region

as a heritage city rather than just one particular structure.

CONCLUSION

Numerous ancient structures that showcase several historically introduced architectural forms can be seen in Dhaka, particularly in Karwanbazaar. Each structure has a unique importance and history that adds to the history of our country. Studying historical structures may teach us a lot about the past, the development of technology, the social and cultural life of the area at that time, and other things. Future development may have huge potentials as a result of Ambar Shah Mosque. There are two recommendations for the ancient Ambar Shah Mosque in light of the findings of this study. The first is to strengthen the feeling of identity among locals and visitors, resulting in their integration, with cultural heritage activities and events serving as a functional interface between them. Second, this interface should be user-friendly, emphasizing how cultural components have been incorporated into the historic area while also emphasizing how the public may actively engage with museums and galleries to learn more about the significance of the historical city.

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