

The World Cultural Heritage
Shait Gumbad Mosque at Bagerhat.

Shait Gumbad Mosque is the best representative example of the Khan Jahan style. The building of this mosque is universally attributed to Khan Jahan (d. 1459). It is an oblong multi-domed structure built of brick and measures 160 feet by 108 feet externally having very thick walls. The mosque is entered by eleven arched doorways in the east wall and seven in the north and south walls. There is also a postern door in the back wall immediately to the north of the central bay. There are four circular tapering towers at the corners. These towers rise above the parapet wall and are crowned with small domes. corresponding to the archways in the east wall, there are semi-circular mihrabs recessed in the west wall, except that occupied by the postern gate. The space inside the mosque is divided into seven longitudinal aisles and eleven deep bays. Consequently, there are 77 compartments interiorly, of which those of the nave, numbering seven are of oblong shape, roofed over by chau-chala covering and the side ones numbering 70 are of square formation and covered with cup-shaped domes. The wall surface in the north, south and west outside is variegated with vertical offsets and recesses. The doorways in the north and south walls open within the offsets, while the projections in the west wall serve as response to the mihrabs inside. The mosque has the usual curved cornice and battlements, but in the east wall over the central doorway is seen a triangular pediment a peculiar element in Bengal architecture. There is no inscription recording the date of its erection, but the mosque is traditionally ascribed to Khan Jahan. Except the stone carvings on the central mihrab, the decoration of the mosque was executed in terracotta.

In other respects, such as the tempering round corner towers, many domes and austerity of wall surface, the influence of the Tughluq architecture of Delhi is discernible.¹²⁶ Some of the buildings also betray influence coming from Persia in certain of their elements. The remains of a large number of these buildings, said to have been erected by Khan Jahan ¹²⁷(1459) most probably an administrator – general of the Ilyas Shahi rulers, are now scattered over Khalifatabad. The atmospheric salinity of the region together with human piracy have caused most of their undoing. But those that still survive constitute a large number to enable a fair study of their architecture and ornamentation. The existing examples are mostly located at Bagerhat ¹²⁸ from where Khan Jahan ruled the conquered region. These include these include the Sat-Gumbad Mosque, the Bibi Begni Mosque, the Ronbijoypur Mosque, the Singra Mosque, the Chuna Khoka Mosque and the Mosque of Zindapir, all at Bagerhat, while sporadic survivals from other areas of Khalifatabad. The spandrels of the entrance arches depict on their back face various ornamental motifs in terracotta. Some of these show beaded necklace with lotus inside, some interlocking pattern containing diamonds, while some others have intersecting creepers bearing flowers.

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