



## Koshaituli Mosque

# Echoing back Islamic voice

The gas-driven three-wheeler bumped its way through Bangshal Road as the streets seemed gasping for breath while people of various trades, rickshaws and other vehicles pass each other on it.

Under the spell of a gloomy blur of the aging buildings but colourful wholesale commodities of all sorts on both sides of the road, the eyes searched for something different. Then suddenly the three-wheeler stops as if escaping from a journey of agony to give the message that from this point it is better to continue the next few minutes by rickshaw or on foot. The narrow lane leads more and amid the dense brick and concrete jungles of the area and despite the careless attitude stands graciously a marvellous building -- a mosque.

The cross section of narrow spiral roadways gives the full view of the west or main façade of the mosque at the bottom of which inscriptions express the name as "Qassabtuly Jame Masjid (Hijri 1338) now referred as Koshaituli Mosque.

The time the mosque was built was a period of political changes

and incidents in the whole of colonial India. In 1919 when the foundation of the mosque was laid by Abdul Bari Bepari and others, the Jallianwala Bagh incident of the British barbarism killing innocent men, women and children took place in Jallianwala Bagh, India. It was also the time after the annulment of the Partition of Bengal of 1911 which had its impact on the Muslims of Bengal.

At a time like this, when the British were ruling this country, the influence of Islam in these regions was dominating and the nationalist movement was rising, the Islamic heritage or the rich legacy of Islam in the fields of architecture, art, culture and literature deeply pervaded the social and cultural life in Bengal drawing inspiration from the past glory.

Mosques were then one of the most representative examples of the Muslim architecture in Bengal apart from other buildings like palaces, forts, monumental gateways, madrassahs, mausoleums, roads, embankments and bridges. One such small endeavour was this Koshaituli Mosque which even totally under

the colonial period took its inspiration from the glory of pre-Mughal as well as some Mughal architectural features.

Koshaituli (butcher's quarters) was named after the dwelling place of a group of butchers, mostly followers of Moulana Keramat Ali as stated by Dr Wise.

The Koshaituli Mosque is special for its surface decoration and is one of the most ornate mosques in Old Dhaka. Although the foundation of the mosque was laid in 1919, it was not completed then. Further extensions were done in 1945 and renovation and ornamentation was done in 1971.

The exquisitely beautiful mosque is a three-fluted domed mosque with its entire surface done by coloured broken pieces of ceramic or *chini-tikri*. The rectangular building built on a high plinth with the three-domed roof is very typical of Mughal architecture. The domes are placed at the western side of the structure with the bigger onion-shaped dome at the middle while the other two smaller shaped similar domes are placed by its two sides topped by finials.

Red oxide finished stairs with

small pieces of off-white mosaic edging surface gives access to the surrounding roofed verandah of the mosque on the northern side. The doorways that lead to the main chamber are multi-foiled arches with exquisite floral

decorations in pink, green and white. The main chamber of the mosque accommodates around 120 people while the outer hall gives a gathering of 1,000 people to offer their prayers at a time.

The west façade of the mosque is buttressed by corner towers that soar high in tapering stages and finally up to

pinnacles. These towers are complemented by similar turrets crowned by cupolas or small domes -- all supporting some panels decorated not only in geometric and floral decorations but also calligraphic inscriptions.

The panels are also highlighted by recessed niches housing the multi-foiled or cusped arches and adorned by intricate floral motifs referring to the pre-Mughal architectural features.

The pinnacles, finials and the parapet break the monotony of the skyline. The Qibla wall is characterised by the exclusive concave mihrab resembling the

onion-shaped dome at the top and having the multi-foiled arch at its entry point. The Mihrab's decoration is again characterised by floral motifs rising from vases and gives an overall impression of dazzling yellow,

green, blue, pink and brown.

The avoidance of animals and human motifs which being iconoclastic and therefore un-Islamic and instead, the use of floral motifs or objects like vases, the stars and crescent shapes as well as geometric motifs naturally reflects the strong adherence of Islamic principles. The total surface of

the mosque is such enveloped by mosaic tiles intricate decoration that they resemble the delicate embroidery of an exclusive material, blue being the predominating colour. The Hindus here had no knowledge of glazed tile work and were more comfortable with brick terracotta which by the advent of time had also influenced the pre-Mughal architecture. However, the use of glazed tiles in this mosque, its artistic designs and decorative ingenuity of exquisite fineness although an influence of Persian origin takes the pride of indigenous skill.

The Huzurkhana Koshaituli Mosque, a three-storey building that stands just opposite the west façade of the mosque might have been built to house the Imam Shahibs of the mosque. But now housing on its ground floor small shops like Nahin Confectionery or Ruma

Automatic Dry Cleaners, the building is occupied by tenants on the upper floors. The imams have their accommodations inside the extended part of the mosque. A Hafizia madrassah built in 1977 stands just beside the main entrance of the mosque. Standing in front of the main façade of the mosque and looking around, imagination may play in the minds to portray what it must have been like in the days of the colonial reign.

The charm of this marvellous and delicate ornamentation although almost hidden still reveals its brilliance from the shadows and confusions of our urban matrix.

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## CONSERVATION

There exists a wide array of historically and architecturally significant properties and assets which need the caring hands of preservation and if required conservation. It is beyond question now how powerfully a single artifact, a single building, a complex, a city no matter how plain or exclusive can both recall the past and chart a course for the future.

But most of our heritage buildings have slid into destruction. It is the duty of the government and the responsibility of each of us, the citizens that these heritage buildings or sites that still exist today may not crumble into nothingness with the aggression of nature, time or unwanted vandalism. The Koshaituli Mosque is in regular use by the community around and admits one of the criteria of conservation. The local mosque committee looks after the mosque and does the necessary maintenance work at an interval of two years. The endeavour also gives a positive direction. But still lies ahead the significant measures to do more so that the witness of timeless art and architecture, the craftsmanship not only is preserved but can unfold itself as an attractive tourist heritage site.

