



WORSHIPERS of the Khan Jahan Ali mausoleum nor onlookers of the ceremony of the chicken feeding to the saint's holy crocodile, can overlook the sparkling of a red brick-building amidst the dense vegetation on the western side of the *Thakur Dhagi* at Bagerhat.

Bagerhat is well known to visitors because of the Shait Gambuz mosque as well as Khan Jahan Ali's tomb. Yet this untitled mosque located on the west-bank of Thakur Dhagi blending into the deep green vegetation is worth mentioning in the development of architectural style of Bengal and Khan Jahan Ali. The legendary Islamic hero of Bengal, Ulugh Khan Jahan Ali built, in addition to his large congregational mosque, numerous square shaped smaller mosques neighbouring the large one. This is locally known as the nine-domed mosque and goes to the credit of Khan Jahan Ali. The mosque was built in the mid-fifteenth century.

The growth and development of a rural settlement in Bengal always take place around a big tank, which solved the domestic water problem. The clay and mud from the tank are used as building materials. Most ancient mosques in Bengal were built similarly on the bank of a large dhagi or tank, which can also be used for ablution for daily worshippers. Following the same principle, the Nine-domed mosque is placed about the centre of the western bank of the thakur dhagi.

Existence of a ruined ghat, which has a strong axial relationship with this mosque, is still visible. This ghat was a place of interaction between worshippers before or after daily prayers, which also replace the ablution fountain of typical Islamic architecture. The conventional orientation of a dhagi of Bengal is about north south, but Khan Jahan Ali changed the orientation of all



Nine-Domed Mosque

The other Bagerhat attraction

water bodies to east west to which group this dhagi belongs.

Khan Jahan Ali introduced an unconventional design of mosque -- square shape-- which is a typical form of a Muslim mausoleum or central shrine of a Buddhist temple or a *garbagriha*

of a Hindu temple. All these mosques are small single domed neighbourhood types. To accommodate large number of worshippers or to provide bigger space, the builders of Bagerhat introduced multi-domed mosques retaining Khan Jahan

Ali's favourite square shape. This type of multi-unit square shaped mosque is virtually uncommon and rare in the Islamic world. However this is one of the three surviving nine-domed mosques in Bengal, which is seemingly in a good

state and presently surrounded by a new boundary wall. The Directorate of Archaeology and Museum of Bangladesh have renovated the outer surface of this building.

The 17-metre (m) square shaped prayer hall, surrounded by a 2.6m thick wall, divided by three equal aisles and bays, is roofed with nine low hemispherical domes. It has three arched entrances to its east, north and south, bordered within tall rectangular bands of terracotta ornamentation. The band or panel is decorated with a geometrical pattern, which is to some extent abstracted or simplified form of natural flora. Unlike the architecture of Hussain Shah, there was use of less ornamentation and the real shape had been discarded. Repeated use of a single abstracted form of a leaf is a proof of such, which also implies the simplicity or austere life of the great builder.

The western or qibla wall is relieved inside with three corresponding *mihrabs* of which the central one is the largest. The central *mihrab* is projects from the outside. The frontal surface of all these *mihrab*

niches is faced by a corbel arch and not by a typical true arch used in Islamic architecture. The arches terminate in a spearhead detail. A chain and bell terracotta motif decorates the apsidal centre of each *mihrab*; with a large terracotta rosette placed above the apex. Besides there are four small niches in northern and southern wall, which were used as place of the oil lamp.

There are four free-standing black basalt pillars in the hall. The shaft of the slender pillars is not monolithic like the pillars in Gaur. Here the shaft consists of two small pieces joined in the middle by iron dowel. The source of stone for Bengal was mainly Rajmahal hill of Bihar, which is far from Bagerhat. So constructors of Bagerhat imported small sized stones to avoid breaking taking into consideration easy transportation.

The cornice or the upper part of all facade is curved consisting of two bold string-courses with extensive terracotta panels in between and also just below the moulded courses. Combination of all these details acts as a highly decorative and rhythmic termination of the building.

Minaret or tower, the essential feature of a conventional mosque in the Islamic world, was discarded in Bengal as well as in the mosques of Khan Jahan Ali. This mosque has only four circular turrets, one at each corner of the building; four mouldings of string courses on the turrett divide the shaft into five parts.

Instead of a minaret of the mosque architecture, a distinctive type of turret is seen which invariably form a part of the buildings and were built either as corner strengthening or merely ornamental appendages.

The existing dampness of the floor should be removed and a patent stone neat cement finished tiled floor may be constructed to respect the original stone floor, so the life of this mosque can be prolonged through the regular use by worshippers living surrounding this historical edifice.

