Development of Mosque Architecture in Medieval Gujarat

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Introduction: Islam was known to Gujarat from its inception through Arab travelers while some of the contemporary Arab travelers settled in the region\(^1\). The historical text advocates the existence of mosques in the region even before the Islamic rule in North India. Historical mosque in Diu Island of Gujarat evidences the earlier Islamic construction in Gujarat\(^2\). Gujarat region was famous for having pioneer artisans of medieval India\(^3\). Muslim rulers utilized the skills of these artisans for building palaces, tombs and mosques. These artisans were carrying the legacy of indigenous architecture that mingled with Islamic architecture with time. The early mosques of Gujarat were built with the used materials of temples as happened in Delhi during the initial phase of Islamic conquest. These earlier mosques in Gujarat were in a more trabeated system and later arcuated construction was selected at least for the façades of prayer halls. The façade consists of odd numbers of arches with a taller central arch although the hall behind it was constructed in a trabeated system. The roof of the central portion of the prayer hall was raised to accommodate the central large arch of the façade. The façade is further surmounted by a row of merlons. In comparison to other contemporary provincial styles of medieval India, the legacy of Gujarat architecture has influenced most of the building of the Islamic period in the region. This paper investigates the development of mosque architecture in medieval Gujarat with several case studies.
Historical Background: Gujarat is an Indian state, located at its northwest coastline consisting of peninsula and mainland. It is bordered by Rann of Kutch to the west, Rajasthan to the northeast, Madhya Pradesh to the east, Maharashtra to the southeast and the Arabian Sea in the west which is separating it from Sind. Gujarat region has an ancient history of having an archaeological site, Dholavira. The site is presumed to be one of the largest Harappan cities of its time. Several dynasties ruled Gujarat from the ancient period to the thirteenth century. Gujarat was invaded by Muslims in 1024 AD, 1178 AD and 1197 AD, however, early invasions remained the raids that merely plunder the region. In 1299AD, Allauddin Khilji defeated Karna Waghela, who was ruling Gujarat from his capital Karnavati. Gujarat came under the Khilji rule and became part of the Delhi Sultanate by the early fourteenth century. In 1391, under the reign of Feroz Shah Tughlaq of Delhi Sultanate, Zafar Khan Muzaffar was appointed as the governor of Gujarat. Later, at the time of Mongol devastation, he declared himself the ruler of Gujarat and established the Sultanate of Patan. In 1411, his son, Ahmad Shah shifted the capital to a newly built city at the bank of river Sabarmati, named Ahmadabad. Gujarat Sultanate was flourished during the Islamic period, several mosques were built including Patthar Wali Masjid, Kevada mosque, Rani Rupmati Mosque, Jami Masjid at Cambay, Jami Masjid Ahmadabad, Jami Masjid Champaner and Sidi Sayyid mosque.

Akbar conquered Gujarat in 1572 AD and it became the province of the Mughal Empire. For the next century, Gujarat was almost peaceful and the cities like Surat, Sarkhej and Bharuch were contributing to the production of Silk, Velvet and bleached Calico. The early seventeenth century marked trouble years for Gujarat due to the warfare of Malik Ambar, a general ruler of Deccan. Azam Khan, who built a Sarai next to the citadel of Ahmadabad, was among one of the several governors appointed by Shahjahan during his reign. The Mughal dynasty declined after Shahjahan’s reign and later treasure of Gujarat was almost exhausted. By 1758, Maratha conquered almost all the provinces except Surat, Radhanpur, Cambay, Bharuch and Junagadh which remained under Muslim Nawabs. In 1817 Gujarat was overtaken by the British army after defeating Peshwa.

Jami Masjid Bharuch: Jami Masjid Bharuch is located at the top of the hill at Bharuch Fort, built by Khan Jahan, the governor of Ghayasuddin Tughlaq. It was built in the early thirteenth century with used materials from temples. The plan consists of a courtyard approachable through three entrances and a prayer hall on the fourth side (Fig. 01). The prayer area is a hypostyle hall covered largely with three large and ten small corbelled domes. Qibla wall has one larger mihrab flanked by two smaller mihrabs on each side aligning with the centre of the dome. The central mihrab has a stepped sandstone mimber with an arched passage underneath. The walls of the prayer hall are punctured with arched windows with decorative lattice screens. However, the arches used in mihrab and windows are not true arches. The prayer hall is open to the courtyard with a view of bracketed columns covered with protruded eaves, without any arched screen unlike contemporary Delhi Sultanate mosque (Fig. 02). The courtyard is surrounded by walls instead of cloisters. The work
Indian Journal of Archaeology

seems the efforts of local artisans who were not well acquainted with the design of a mosque however, they were well skilled with the indigenous architecture of the region.

Fig. No. 01: Plan of Jami Masjid Bharuch

Fig. No. 02: Elevation of Jami Masjid Bharuch
Jami Masjid Cambay: A few years after the construction of Jami Masjid Bharuch, another congregational mosque of the early Islamic period in Gujarat was built at Cambay, a prosperous port city of medieval Gujarat. The interior of the prayer hall is hypostyle, covered with corbelled domes resting on bracketed columns (Fig. 03). The screened area on either end of the prayer hall was raised, approachable through stairs probably it was built for ladies. Lambourn (2001) suggested that the raised screened space was more a measure (a place for the ruler) instead of a zenana (a place for ladies). It is possible that on one side raised screened area had been built for the ruler as maqsura while on the other side it had been dedicated for women. Three mihrabs including the central one are projected outside the qibla wall in the form of buttresses. While two mihrabs in the screened prayer are without any buttress. Qibla wall is punctured with several arched and rectangular windows with lattice screens. A white marble stepped minber was built at the central mihrab to deliver the sermon. The trabeated construction of the prayer hall is masked with an arched screen. The arched openings of the prayer hall open into a courtyard surrounded by a cloister (Fig. No. 04). The façade of the prayer hall with a central large arch flanked by two small arches evokes the Jamat Khana Mosque at Delhi built during Ala-ud-din Khilji’s sovereignty (Fig. No. 04). There is no minaret attached to the mosque. At the mid of the eastern cloister, an entrance evokes the temple portico covered with a dome that accesses directly to the raised and screened prayer area. The centre of the courtyard is embellished with an ornately carved chhatri. An inscription at the northern entrance dated its construction in 1325 by Daulatshah Mohammad-al-Butihari under the rule of Mohammad Tughlaq. The mosque is built with yellow sandstone with a glimpse of white marble and grey-green stone.
Fig. No. 03: Plan of Jami Masjid Cambay
Jami Masjid Ahmedabad (1424): In 1411, Sultan Ahmed Shah I founded the city of Ahmedabad at the site of an old settlement called Asaval. Located outside Bhadra fort, in the centre of the old walled city of Ahmedabad, Jami Masjid was built in 1424 (Fig. 05). It was the third mosque built by Ahmed Shah I in the city, nevertheless, it was on a grand scale in comparison to the previous structures. The prayer hall, covered with multiple domes is a hypostyle hall with bracketed Gujarati columns (Fig. 06). The structure is built with yellow sandstone. An extensive courtyard is accessible from three entrances from East, North and South. However, the main entrance lies at the centre of the southern side of the courtyard. At the centre of the courtyard is a rectangular tank for ablution. The courtyard is surrounded by a single-bay cloister. The prayer hall consists of three roof levels among them the central portion is the tallest (Fig. 07).
Fig. No. 05: Jami Masjid Ahmadabad
Jami Masjid Sarkhej (1451): Jami Masjid Sarkhej is a grand mosque with dimensions around 150 X 210 feet. The triple bays main entrance opens to the southeastern side of the courtyard. The extensive courtyard is surrounded by a single bay cloister on three sides and a prayer hall on the qibla side (Fig.
The hypostyle prayer hall directly opens to the courtyard without any arched screen. A raised prayer area, approachable through a separate entrance, at the northwest corner of the prayer hall, is screened for the women of the court.

**Jama Masjid Champaner (1513):** Jami Masjid Champaner was built by Nasir-ud-Din Mahmud Shah I Begada. The hypostyle prayer hall is covered with many small and large domes. The central *mihrab* of the qibla wall is flanked by three smaller *mihrabs*. The central bay is double heighted area covered with a large dome. The central large arch of the façade of the prayer hall with two tall minarets is flanked by two small arches on each side. On the northwest corner of the prayer hall, a screened area was dedicated for the royal family for the prayer with a separate entrance to the north of the prayer hall. This screened area directly opens to the outside through a small door. There is a small minaret at each corner of the prayer hall. The arcuated façade of the prayer hall opens to the courtyard surrounded by cloisters. The courtyard is accessible through gates on the east, north and
south sides (Fig. No. 09). The eastern entrance is approachable through a screened square covered entrance. The mosque doesn’t have a grandeur entrance in comparison to its contemporary mosque such as Adhai Din ka Jhongpra mosque at Ajmer. However, its prayer hall is larger in comparison to the Jami Majid Ahmadabad.

![Plan of Jami Masjid Champaner](image)

**Fig. No. 09: Plan of Jami Masjid Champaner**

**Rani Rupmati Mosque (1515):** Rani Rupmati Masjid, located at Mirzapur in Ahmadabad, was built by Sultan Mahmud Begada in 1515. The mosque was named after the queen Rupmati of Sultan Begada. The prayer hall is covered with three large corbelled domes. Each dome is resting over twelve pillars arranged in a square leaving an aisle on all sides (Fig. No. 10). The central domed roof is raised in comparison to the rest of the roof of the prayer hall. It provides a clerestory in between the roof levels to light the space and room for the monumental central arch. The central large arch is flanked by minarets and smaller arched entrances. The arcuated façade of the prayer hall has lattice and balcony windows, deep chajja, minarets and carving motives. A combination of trabeated and arcuated styles were prevalent during the reign of Mahmud Shah I and this could be observed in the Rani Rupmati mosque.
Shah Alam Mosque (1550): Saint Shaikh Shah Alam was a spiritual advisor to Sultan Mahmud Shah Begada and the son of Saint Abdullah Qutub Alam Bukhari. Shah Alam mosque is located to the southeast of the old city of Ahmedabad. The mosque complex has the tomb of Shaha Alam, a guest house and another large tomb in the vicinity. The complex is popularly known as Shah Alam
Rauza. The buildings in the complex were built at different times during the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. However, stylistically, the tomb of Shah Alam seems the oldest structure of the complex. The complex is approachable through a double-storey square gateway.

The domed and vaulted prayer hall of the mosque is a hypostyle hall consisting of three rows and seven bays. The arched façade of the prayer hall opens to the courtyard. An ablution tank is situated at the northeast corner of the courtyard. Alternate arches of prayer hall of different spans as per the bay sizes. At both ends of the façade, there are tall tapering cylindrical minarets with balconies projected at several levels. The balconies are separate different sections of variably carved ornamental motifs. Qibla wall of prayer hall has three mihrabs. At the south of the mosque, is a cemetery having several smaller cenotaphs and a large tomb.

Sidi Syed Mosque: Sidi Syed mosque was built in 1572 AD by Sidi Syed in Ahmedabad in the reign of Bilal Jhanjar Khan. Sidi Syed was an Abyssinian saint of African descent who served in Ahmed Shah’s army. The mosque is located at Lal Darwaza, the heart of the city. The façade of the prayer hall is embellished with five arches and octagonal bastions at its end. The mosque is constructed in an arcuated system. The qibla wall has intricate jali work in the arched panels (Fig. No. 12). This mosque has very detailed and astounding jali work and carving on stone. However, being marvellous jali work, it was never imitated by Mughals in North India because of more Persian influence on contemporary North Indian Mughal architecture. 
Discussion: The earliest examples of mosques in Gujarat, constructed with the used material of temples, are the Adina mosque at Patan and Tanka mosque at Dholka. While reusing the pillars, the living figures were defaced as Islam prohibit figurative representation. The early period of mosque architecture in Gujarat was heavily influenced by the architecture of the Solanki dynasty which resembled the Maru Gurjar style of Rajasthan. However, the plan of the mosque was altered due to different liturgical ways of Islamic worship. The indigenous architecture of Gujarat, constructed with bracketed columns and lintel remain dominated on mosque architecture for centuries in the region. Square lattice screens used in the mosques are also indigenous Gujarati characters. Jami Masjid Bharuch and Jami masjid Cambay further contributed to the dominance of indigenous Gujarati architecture as they are built entirely in a trabeated system, with richly carved pillars and ceilings. Another feature of Gujarati architecture in the mosques is raised central bay roof above the side roof level to provide a clearstory sort of element. At times this gap between the roof levels was filled with lattice screen to reduce glare and entry of birds and inclined rain. This gap works in two ways, firstly, it allows more air and light in the central portion of the hall and secondly it increases the monumentality of the space. In case of Jami masjid Ahmadabad the roofs are at three levels
which eliminate the monotony of the façade and allows more air and light to the prayer area. The exterior facades of the mosques are comparatively austere except for some stringcourses at different levels and carved buttresses. In some cases, these buttresses are tapered similar to the Tughlaq style such as the Haibat Khan mosque. Apart from the use of buttress for mihrab towards the qibla side, they have been used in place of turrets flanking the central arch at the façade of the prayer hall. Perhaps it was the beginning of the minaret at the sides of the central arch of the façade as in later mosques these buttresses were converted into minarets such as Sayyid Alam mosque. A more slender version of a minaret with carving at the lower level was introduced in the 15th century, which gave an elegant look to the mosque architecture in Gujarat such as Jami Masjid Ahmadabad. The upper part of the minaret at Jami Masjid Ahmadabad was fell during an earthquake in 1819. Cambay mosque has a more Islamic character due to the occurrence of a triple arch façade with a central arch larger in comparison to the other two arches. The arches of Jami Masjid Cambay are similar to Khilji’s mosque in Delhi. Mosque architecture in medieval Gujarat reached its zenith during the reign of Mahmud Begada. In the later period, the triple larger domed prayer hall dominated the skyline of Gujarati mosques which evokes the Lodhi and Mughal style mosques. During the late Mughal period due to the declination of kingdoms, the construction quality of buildings was suffered which can be evidenced by Shujat Khan’s mosque built-in 1695. The mosque has a triple domed prayer hall flanked by minarets, a typical feature of the late Mughal period.

**Conclusion:** The mosque architecture in Gujarat is an amalgamation of Hindu, Jain and Islamic architecture. They are the most indigenous in their forms in comparison to other mosque styles in medieval India. The vibrant and alive style of Gujarati ancient architecture was so prominent that its dominance was inevitable even in the mosques and tombs’ design. It took centuries for local craftsmen to introduce Islamic architectural elements in Gujarati mosques (Such as true arch, domes and minarets). Local craftsmen who were skilled with Jain and Hindu temple mandapas construction style continued to utilize with its multipliable units to fulfil the Islamic liturgical needs in the design of mosques. The corbelled dome and the flat roof resting on bracketed columns constructed by the local artisans, convert the praying spaces into a hypostyle hall. The traditional decorated corbelled dome, carved horizontal panels of flat roof and cupolas at different heights provided a dynamic spatial organization to the mosque design in medieval Gujarat. The absence of figurative representation and use of pointed arch made the traditional architecture suitable for the mosque.

Three styles were observed in the development of mosque architecture in Gujarat.

- **Early Period (1360-1411):** During this period used materials of temples were utilized in the construction. It was an experimental phase as local artisans continued the indigenous techniques in the construction of buildings for the Muslim rulers. Examples: Jami Masjid
Patan, Jami Masjid Bharuch. The two earliest mosques Jami Masjid Cambay and Hilal Khan Masjid Dholka are heavily influenced by pre-Islamic Solanki architecture.

- **Middle Period (1411-1458):** Design quality was improved during Ahmad Shah’s period. Example: Jami Masjid Ahmadabad, Ahmad Shah mosque
- **High Period (1459-1550):** It is the most significant period for mosque architecture under Mahmud I Begara. Examples: Jami Masjid Champaner and Sidi Sayyed Masjid.

References:


