

## **EXAMPLE OF MARVELLOUS MUGHAL ARCHITECTURE IN BANGLADESH: TOMB OF BIBI PARI**

**Abu Bakkar SIDDIQUE\***

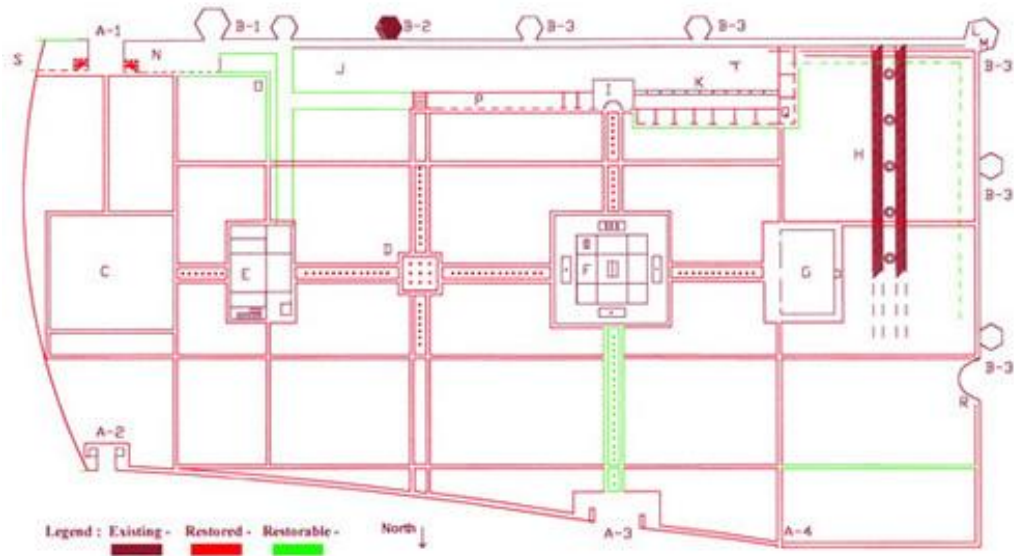
### **Abstract**

The formation of the Mughal Empire by Emperor Babur in the third Battle of Panipath in 1526 AD is an unforgettable event in the history of India. As part of the expansion of the empire, Bengal first came under the Mughal during the rule of Emperor Akbar. The Mughal emperors also began to contribute to provincial territories outside the capital. At that time various architectures were developed in Bengal under the patronage of the provincial governors. Among them, Lalbagh Fort is one of the then provincial capitals of Dhaka. The mausoleum of the Bibi Pari inside the fort continues to bear significant testimony to the Mughal architecture. India's central influence on the shrine that is currently in good shape is clear. The square shrine erected in the middle of a lovely garden is one of the most famous of the Mughals in provincial Bengal in addition to its architectural qualities. And such Mughal architecture has become a special example in the history of the region, which is elaborated in the essays discussed.

**Keywords:** Mughal Empire, Bengal, Dhaka, Tomb Architecture.

### **Historical overview**

Although The Mughal or Timurid (Stein, 2010, 159) rule started in India in 1526 AD by Emperor Babur but the Bengal (the eastern part of the Indian subcontinent) took under control during Emperor Akbar through the battle of Rajmahal in 1576 AD by defeating Daud Khan Karrani (Last independent Sultan of Bengal). The Bengal was wealthiest state or Paradise of the Nations (British Governments India, 1812, 28) and called Subah or province in the Mughal Empire ruled by the Subahdar or Governor and Nawab (semi-autonomous Muslim rulers). The contribution of the Mughals in Bengal is very significant, particularly in architecture like various fields were patronized by the provincial governors. In this region, they established attractive architecture including forts, mosques, tombs, hammams, palaces, bridges etc. Specifically, Dhaka and Murshidabad became the centre of these architectures. Lalbagh Fort is such a shining example erected at Dhaka. It is also called fort Aurangabad, an unfinished Mughal fortress which is situated on the river Buriganga in the southwestern corner of the old city (Rahman, 2006). As a Governor of Bengal Prince Muhammad Azam Shah (the eldest son of the sixth Mughal emperor Aurangzeb) started the construction of the fort in 1678 AD but before completing it he was recalled by his father Aurangzeb. Although as his successor Shaista Khan is appointed in Bengal and stayed in Dhaka until 1688 AD but he did not recommence the incomplete work. However in 1684 AD after the sudden death of Bibi Pari ((Lady Fairy), Shaista Khan built a beautiful tomb inside the fort (Wordpress.com, 2014). Then the Lalbagh fort as the complex is integrated with three aesthetic structures like the mosque, the tomb of Bibi Pari and the Audience Hall attached with Hammam, where the tomb is located right in the middle of the fortress.



Plan of Lalbagh Fort, Source: [Banglapedia](#)



General view of Lalbagh Fort Complex, Source: [Pinterest.co.uk](#)



### **The identity of the Bibi Pari**

Regarding the Bibi Pari's identity has more debate, even till now, there is no actual information about the lady. Archaeologist and historian Ahmed Hasan Dani base on a document was signed before the death of governor Shaista Khan, claims that Khan had 7 sons and 5 daughters. Two of his daughters; Iran Dukht and Turan Dukht stayed in Dhaka. Dani identified Iran Dukht as the eldest daughter of Shaista Khan who is known Bibi Pari in the history and she was married to the prince Muhammad Azam Shah (Dani, 1962, 71).

'Glimpses of Old Dhaka: A Short Narration of East Bengal and Assam with Special Treatment of Dhaka' is written by the well-known chronicler Syed Muhammed Taifoor (1956, 198) has a different opinion. He says, "There is no evidence to prove that this young Prince was betrothed or married to the octogenarian Shaesta Khan's daughter born of some obscure concubine. Besides we find that at this time the Prince had already four wives whom he had married in quick succession." His second wife Ramani Gobharu, daughter of Ahom (now in Guwahati, India) king Jaydhajnaravn, was a Buddhist girl. When she was 9 years, Bengal governor Mir Jumla (1660-63 AD) brought her to the royal palace. Afterwards, Mughal Emperor Aurangzeb converted her to Islam named Rahmat Banu and as a faithful guardian gave her in marriage to Prince Muhammad Azam in 1677 AD on a dower of rupees one lakh and eighty thousand. They lived together in Dhaka but unfortunately, she was suffering from puerperal disease and died at an early age. Taifoor also writes that due to her staggering beauty and favourite of the prince, affectionately she was called Bibi Pari or lady fairy.

Chronicler Begum Lutfunnesa Habibullah has written the almost similar thing based on Ahom chroniclers in her paper entitled 'Ahom Rajkonna Bibi Parir Samadhi.' According to some, it is said that the achiyatnama of Shaista Khan, is preserved in the Katra Waqf office under the Government of Bangladesh, has identified Rahmat Banu who was Iran Dukht or Bibi Pari (Pisharoty, 2018).

Although there are many contradictory opinions about the Bibi Pari but is no doubt that she was really beautiful women that is supposed by her name and who was also most favourite one of the Bengal governor. For this reason, in c. 1684 AD after the death of Bibi Pari was buried just inside the Mughal palace-fortress. Basically it is unrecognized that the enchanting tomb architecture is within a fort of Bengal (Haque, 2007, 204) and probably would not find out in the Indian subcontinent like the tomb of Bibi Pari.

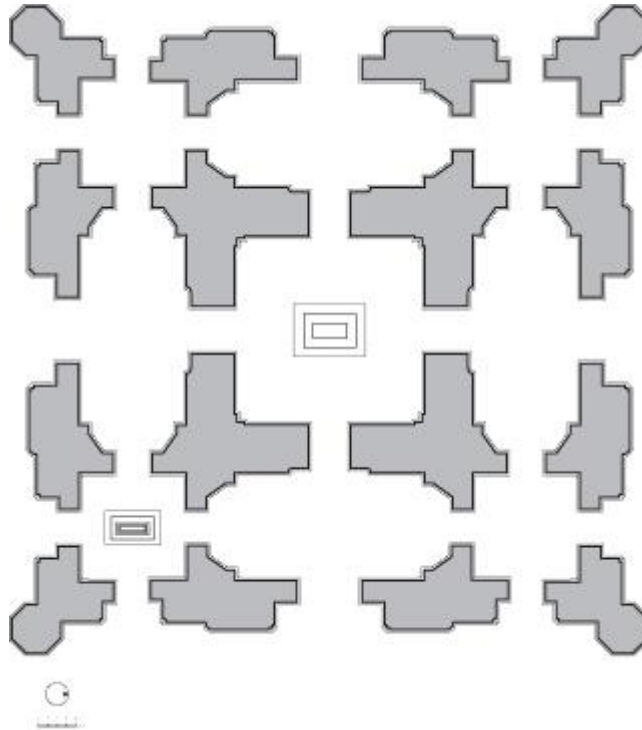
### **Architectural description of the Tomb**

Tomb of Bibi Pari is the most prepossessing monument stands in the middle of the Lalbagh fort complex. The tomb was built on a high platform and square in plan. There is a total of nine rooms inside the symmetrical building, where the square central one is the main tomb chamber. In the south-east corner is another small grave, who was the daughter of Bibi Pari named Shamsad Begum. The four octagonal towers of the building at the corners

terminated over the horizontal parapet as a solid kiosk with ribbed cupolas. The octagonal dome over the central room was wrapped by brass-plate; actually it was with the gold guild in the past (Hossain & Chowdhury, 2006).

The square building measures 18.28 m. from every side of the tomb and which main chambers measurement is 5.84 m. square. The tomb chamber contains the four openings on the four key points (Chowdhury & Ahmed, 2006, 98). Among the other eight chambers, the four central flanking chambers are 24'-9" long by 10-9" broad. The tomb chamber is completely veneered and in the centre of the chamber is a simple three-stepped cenotaph made of white marble (Haque, 1983, 122).

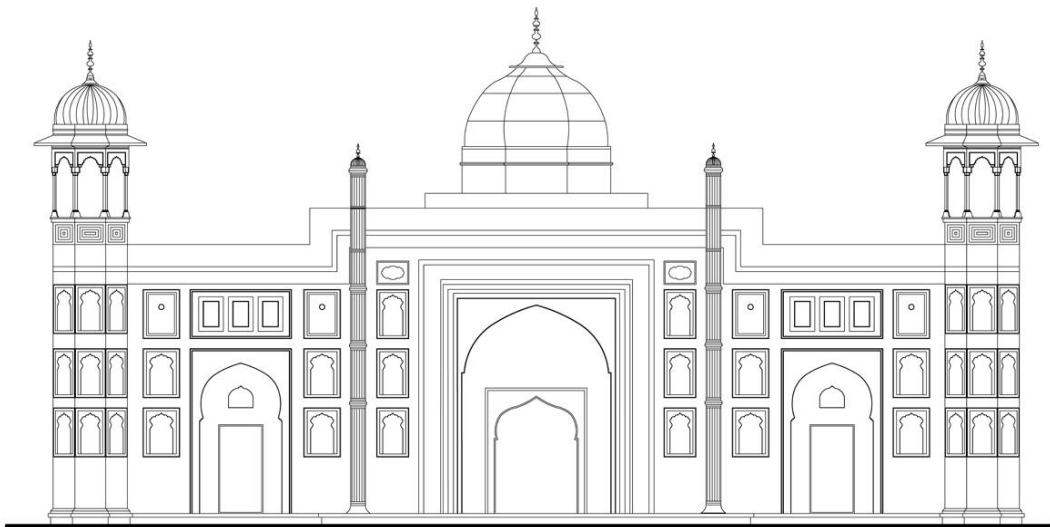
The outer surface of the tomb is decorated with panels and was plastered like usual Mughal buildings in Dhaka. The cenotaph of the tomb chamber is embellished with floral designs and marked as a lady grave by a takhti motif on the peak (Morshed, 2019). The four side rooms of the walls are equipped with white marble which height is up to the dado level. The corner square rooms contain beautiful glazed tiles in several colours depicting floral designs. Among the colours are dark blue, green, orange and purple on a yellow background along with the borders of orange and lilac flowers on a green ground (Wordpress.com, 2014).



Ground Plan of Bibi Pari's Tomb, Source: [Banglapedia](#)



Inside the Main Tomb Chamber, Source: Shajjad Hossain, 2015





Elevation of the Tomb, Source: Shajjad Hossain, 2016



General View of the Tomb, Source: [sixseasonstourism.blogspot.com](http://sixseasonstourism.blogspot.com)



Tiles Decoration inside the Chambers, Source: The Historical Hub, 2014

### **Impact on the tomb**

Actually, the tomb of Bibi Pari was a synthesis architecture where different materials and techniques were used and made it very distinct mausoleum in Bengal. Stones were brought from different places of India. Especially, the white marble is collected from Jaipur as well as the black basalt from Rajmahal hills. The grand pattern of the tomb is built following the Tajmahal at Agra and the tomb of Mughal emperor Humayun at Delhi (Taifoor, 1952, 200). Persian style was implemented in the above mentioned two tombs. The tomb of Bibi Pari is the same kind of architecture which is near to the Persian style had come through Agra and Delhi (Ray, 2017, 487). The Persian Chahar bagh plan is also found here. Basically, Char Bagh or four gardens is a surrounded quadrilateral garden which divides by paths into four smaller sections with flowing water channels (Rakhee, 2008). Aligning the mausoleum of Bibi Pari in the middle and setting up a pavilion on the south along with the northwest gate makes the Chahar bagh design at the Lalbagh fort complex. The Hindu corbelled technique (brick or stone row is set up one above another) of roofing temples was used in this tomb properly. All rooms are internally corbelled by black basalt stones block (Husain, 2007, 300-301).





Tomb with Chahar Bagh Plan, Source: The Historical Hub, 2014



Ceiling internally with corbelled technique, Source: Shajjad Hossain, 2015



## Conclusion

The tomb of Bibi Pari is the most winsome and protecting monument in the historical Dhaka of Bangladesh. It is a unique example in tomb architecture of the Mughal in provincial Bengal. Where there is a great combination of different techniques like building materials. Beautifully ornamented and the distinctive tomb is also momentous among other Mughal architecture in this region. The Archaeology Department of Bangladesh has taken under control this tomb along with the whole Lalbagh complex since 1974. Before that, the British administration during the colonial period had been constructed inside the fort complex in the large-scale but some edifices altered from its original look which has been removed and renovated by the Archaeology Department of Bangladesh (Morshed, 2019).

## Reference

- British Governments of India (1812) *A Collection of Treaties and Engagements with the Native Princes and States of Asia Concluded on Behalf of the East India Company*, London, p. 28
- Chowdhury, N. & Ahmed, B. (2006) *Mughal Monuments of Bangladesh*, Dhaka: Traditional Photo Gallery, p. 98
- Dani, A.H. (1962) *Dacca: A Record of its Changing fortunes*, Dacca: Mrs. S. S. Dani, p. 71
- Haque, Enamul (1983) *Islamic Art Heritage of Bangladesh*. Dhaka: Bangladesh National Museum, p. 122
- Haque, Enamul (2007) *The Art Heritage of Bangladesh*. Dhaka: The International Centre for Study of Bengal Art, p. 204
- Husain, A.B.M. (Ed.). (2007) *Architecture: A history through the ages*, Dhaka. Bangladesh: Asiatic Society of Bangladesh, p. 300-301
- Morshed A.Z. (2019) Understanding Mughal Dhaka, *The Daily Star*, Retrieved From: <https://www.thedailystar.net/in-focus/news/understanding-mughal-dhaka-1700224>
- Pisharoty, S.B. (2018) In search of a Lost Ahom Princess, *The Wire*, Available at: <https://thewire.in/history/dhaka-pori-bibi-tomb-ahom-princess>
- Rahman, H. (2006). Lalbagh Fort, *Banglapedia: National Encyclopedia of Bangladesh*, Online Ed., Dhaka: Asiatic Society of Bangladesh, Retrieved From: [http://en.banglapedia.org/index.php?title=Lalbagh\\_Fort](http://en.banglapedia.org/index.php?title=Lalbagh_Fort)
- Rakhee (2008) Char Bagh Garden, Humayun's Tomb, Delhi, *Flickr*, Available at: <https://www.flickr.com/photos/olderock/4452337509>
- Ray, Aniruddha (2017) *Towns and Cities of Medieval India: A Brief Survey*. New York: Routledge, p. 487
- Stein, B. (2010) A history of India, *The Blackwell History of the World* (Second Ed.), David Arnold (Rev. & Ed.), United Kingdom: John Wiley and Sons Ltd, p. 159

Taifoor, S.M. (1956) *Glimpses of Old Dhaka: A Short Narration of East Bengal and Assam with Special Treatment of Dhaka*, Dacca: S.M. Perwez, p. 198,200

Wordpres.com Blog (2014) Tomb of Pari Bibi, *Old Dhaka in New Look*, Retrieved From: <https://doerstthree.wordpress.com/2014/01/07/tomb-of-pari-bibi-2/>

Yakub Hossain A.K.M. & Chowdhury A.M. (2006) Bibi Pari, *Banglapedia: National Encyclopedia of Bangladesh*, Online Ed., Dhaka: Asiatic Society of Bangladesh, Retrieved From: [http://en.banglapedia.org/index.php?title=Bibi\\_Pari](http://en.banglapedia.org/index.php?title=Bibi_Pari)