An Unpublished Late Mughal Mosque Inscription: Exploring the Local History of Greater Cumilla

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Abstract

Inscriptions in Bengal, primarily in Arabic and Persian, became prevalent after the arrival of Islam, which, along with associated architectural projects, filled the gaps in historical knowledge with rich textual content and diverse forms. Although Sultanate and Mughal mosques and inscriptions have been published and documented, most of the late Mughal mosques and inscriptions remain undocumented and undeciphered, which can be cross-referenced with other sources, illustrated historical narratives, and reconstructed local history. An unpublished mosque inscription was found during fieldwork in Shuagazi Bazar, Cumilla Sadar Dakshin. The three-domed mosque, influenced by the Mughal style, is locally known as Shuagazi Boro Jame Masjid and is approximately 280 yards from the Dhaka-Chattogram Highway. The mosque's architectural features reflect its historical significance and modern adaptations, making it a notable religious and cultural landmark in the area. The inscription in Arabic and Persian, using *Bahri al-Bangali thulth, Bahri thulth,* and *Nastaliq* as calligraphic styles. It records the construction of a mosque by Shuagazi, son of Shamser Gazi, in 1218 AH (1803 CE). Shamsher Gazi (1712-1760) was a mutineer of the British and the ruler of Chakla Raushanabad, known as '*Bhatir Bagh'* (Tiger of Bhati), and was a leader of the peasants. This research aims to decipher this inscription, providing a detailed archaeological analysis of the Shuagazi Mosque and reconstructing the history of Shamser Gazi and his son Shuagazi.

Key words: Persian Inscription, Late Mughal Mosque, Shuagazi and Shamser Gazi, Local History of Cumilla.

Introduction

The Arabic-Persian inscriptions of Bengal signify a cultural continuity between Bengali Muslims and their counterparts in the greater Muslim world, integrating them into the universal community of the *Ummah.*[1] Inscriptions, as a crucial category of archaeological primary materials,[2] encapsulate religious expressions and reveal

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1 Muḥammad Yūsuf Siddiq, *Arabic and Persian Inscriptions of Bengal: with 607 Plates*, ed. by Enamul Haque (Dhaka: The International Centre for Study of Bengal Art, 2017), p. 122.

2 Neeta Yadav, "Inscriptions as a Major Source for Constructing Ancient Indian History", *Remarking: An Analisation*, Vol. 1, No. 10 (Remarking: An Analisation, 2017), pp. 44-47.

various aspects of Islamic history in particular places. In the Islamic world, inscriptions exhibit notable diversity in linguistic forms and artistic design, manifested through several calligraphic styles including *Kūfī, thuluth, naskh, ruqʿa, rayḥānī, muḥaqqaq, ṭughrā, and Bihārī*.[3] In addition to their aesthetic appeal, Islamic inscriptions have historically functioned as potent conveyors of religious and cultural knowledge, manifesting on structures, fabrics, metals, glassware, ceramics, decorations, weaponry, coinage, and seals.[4]

The oldest dated Arabic inscription in Islamic history is acknowledged as a Kufic inscription commemorating the death of the second Caliph,[5] ʿUmar ibn al-Khaṭṭāb, during the early period of Islam. The advent of Islam in Bengal introduced Arabic inscriptions with monumental buildings, resulting in a rich textual heritage that aids in bridging historical gaps through written records and stylistic expressions. Although the Sultanate and Mughal periods have garnered scholarly interest, a significant portion of the epigraphic corpus from the late Mughal era remains unrecorded and undeciphered, despite its capacity to yield valuable insights when contextualised with other historical sources.

At the local level, mosques and shrines served as vital instruments of Mughal authority, grounding both religious and community life.[6] Mosques functioned as centres for congregational prayer, expressing the universal notion of the *Ummah* within the intimate framework of local communities, thereby integrating the broader and narrower aspects of Islamic identity.[7] The Mughals were notably recognised for their pioneering architectural projects,[8] which amalgamated global, regional, and local influences into some of the most exquisite examples of Islamic architecture. Their mosque architecture, characterised by a uniform morphology, experienced continual

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[3] M.Y. Siddiq, "Inscription as an Important Means for Understanding the History of the Islamic East: Observations on some Newly Discovered Epigraphs of Muslim Bengal", *Journal of Islamic Studies*, Vol. 20, No. 2 (2009), pp. 213–50.

[4] Siddiq, *Arabic and Persian Inscriptions of Bengal*, p. 1.

[5] Enis Timuçin Tan, "A study of Kufic script in Islamic calligraphy and its relevance to Turkish graphic art using Latin fonts in the late twentieth century", PhD thesis (University of Wollongong, 1999), p. iv, https://ro.uow.edu.au/articles/thesis/A_study_of_Kufic_script_ in_Islamic_calligraphy_and_its_relevance_to_Turkish_graphic_art_using_Latin_ fonts_in_ the_late_twentieth_century/27651615?file=50356017.

[6] Richard Maxwell Eaton, *The Rise of Islam and the Bengal Frontier, 1204-1760* (Berkeley Los Angeles London: University of California Press, 1996), p. 229.

[7] *Ibid.*, pp. 229–30.

[8] Palak Shukla, "The Transformation and Development of Libraries During the Mughal Era: A Study of Innovation, Expansion, and Legacy", *IOSR Journal of Multidisciplinary Research (IOSR-JMR)*, Vol. 2, No. 1, Series 1 (IOSR Journals, 2025), p. 30.

alterations and adaptations throughout Bengal, frequently adorned with Persian inscriptions. Numerous inscriptions remain *in situ,* although others have been found on detached stone slabs, occasionally repurposed in subsequent constructions. Comparative analyses indicate that the late 17th to 18th centuries CE were the zenith of mosque construction, but several instances exist beyond formal state safeguarding.

During the Mughal rule, Persian emerged as the dominant language in epigraphy and numismatics, while Arabic was progressively supplanted.[9] Inscriptions were primarily rendered in *Nastaʿlīq* script, introduced to the subcontinent by the early Mughal emperors by the end of the 16th century CE. This evolution signifies the increasing cultural impact of the Persians subsequent to the establishment of Mughal authority in Bengal.[10]

An undeciphered and unpublished inscription was discovered near the Shuagazi Bazar in Cumilla Sadar South by the present researchers. The location features a mosque with three domes, influenced by Mughal architecture, referred to locally as the Shuagazi Boro Jame Masjid, positioned 280 yards from the Dhaka–Chattogram Highway. Its architectural attributes attest to its historical legacy and its ongoing significance as a religious and cultural hub. The mosque's inscription, consisting of six lines in Persian and Arabic, written in *Bahri al-Bangali thulth, Bahri thulth,* and *Nastaʿlīq* styles. During the Mughal period, it is evident that the majority of inscriptions were inscribed in Persian, a widely spoken language throughout the Mughal Empire and in *Subah Bangalah*.[11] It records that Shuagazi, progeny of Shamsher Gazi, erected the mosque in 1218 AH (1803 CE). Shamsher Gazi (1712–1760), known as the 'Tiger of *Bhati*' (*Bhatir Bagh*), was a significant peasant leader and ruler of Chakla Raushanabad, which included southern Cumilla and northern Noakhali, prior to his insurrection against British colonial authority.[12] The inscription is notable for featuring the names

9   Shamsud-Din Ahmed, *Inscriptions of Bengal Volume IV (Being a Corpus of Inscriptions of the Muslim Rulers of Bengal from 1233 to 1855 A.C.)* (Rajshahi: Varendra Research Society, 1960), pp. xii–xiii.

10   Siddiq, *Arabic and Persian Inscriptions of Bengal*, p. 119.

11   Sahidul Hasan, "Epigraphic Sources: Bangladesh (Recently Discovered Epigraphic and Numismatic Sources)", in: *History of Bangladesh: Sultanate and Mughal Periods. (c. 1200 to 1800 CE),* Vol. 1, ed. by Abdul Momin Chowdhury, (Dhaka: Asiatic Society of Bangladesh, 2020). p. 71.

12   AKM Syfur Rahman and Md. Shahin Alam, *Protatttik Jorip o Onushondhan Protibedon: (2021-2022) Cumilla Zilla (Sadar Dokshin o Borura Upazila) [Archaeological Survey and Investigation Report: (2021-2022) Comilla District (Sadar Dakshin and Barura Upazila)]* (Cumilla, Bangladesh: Office of the Regional Director (Chattogram and Sylhet Division), Department of Archaeology, 2023). pp. 73-76.

of the *Khulafāʾ al-Rāshidūn,* positioned alongside those of Allah the almighty and Muhammad (SM.) in a central position.

This work aims to deliver a thorough examination of the Shuagazi Mosque inscription, in light of the little scholarship on this site, where the sole previous publication provides only a broad description.[13] It analyses the literary and artistic characteristics of the inscription, contextualising it within the wider Mughal and late-Mughal epigraphic traditions, while also reevaluating the history of Shamsher Gazi and his son Shuagazi.

The methodology utilises a mixed-methods approach, integrating field survey with a comprehensive literature study. Firstly, all the relevant literature was studied. Then several fieldwork works were conducted to gather information secondly. During the field survey modern GNSS signal receiver device has been used to collect the geo-coordinates. For taking the measurements, both the analogue measuring tape and the digital laser distance meter were used. Although an Apple mobile phone device with the LiDAR sensor is also used to take some measurements with real-time photographs. On the other hand, to digitize the inscription photograph, the Adobe Photoshop software was used.

During the literature study, it was found that some scholars mentioned about prominent Mosque of Cumilla.[14] Where only Rahman and Alam (2023)[15] provided a detail on the Suagazi Mosque. Although a gap has been identified, focusing solely on the Suagazi Mosque inscription, some relevant references related to the Arabic and Persian inscription have been found in some resources.[16]

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13   *Ibid.*
14   Mahmuda Khanam, *Cumillay Mughal Juger Sthapatya [Mughal-Period Architecture in Cumilla]* (Unpublished M.Phil. thesis), (Dhaka: Department of Islamic History and Culture, University of Dhaka, 2003), pp. 31-60; Ayesha Begum, *Pratnanidarshan : Comilla [The Archaeological Monument of Comilla],* (Dhaka: University Grants Commission of Bangladesh, 2010), pp. 89-120; Abdul Kalam Mohammad Zakariah, *Bangladesher Protnosampad [Archaeological Heritage of Bangladesh],* 3rd edition, (Dhaka, Bangladesh: Dibbya Prokash, 2011), pp. 672-676.
15   Rahman and Alam, *Protatttik Jorip o Onushondhan Protibedon: (2021-2022) Cumilla Zilla (Sadar Dokshin o Borura Upazila) [Archaeological Survey and Investigation Report: (2021-2022) Comilla District (Sadar Dakshin and Barura Upazila)],* pp. 73-76.
16   Mohammad Yusuf Siddiq, *A Descriptive Catalogue of the Arabic and Persian Inscriptions in the Bangladesh National Museum,* (Dhaka: Bangladesh National Museum, 2016); Mohammad Yusuf Siddiq, *Arabic and Persian inscriptions of Bengal: with 607 Plates,* ed. by Enamul Haque, (Dhaka: The International Centre for Study of Bengal Art, 2017); Abdul Karim, *Corpus of the Arabic and Persian Inscriptions of Bengal,* (Dhaka: Asiatic Society of Bangladesh, 1992); Md. Abdur Rob, Sohag Ali and Md. Masood Imran, "A (Hitherto

However, this study seeks to add a new knowledge in the documentation and interpretation of Bengal's late Mughal Islamic legacy by emphasising this neglected inscription.

The Shuagazi Inscription

The inscription comprises six lines: the first (Kalima and Bismillah), the middle portion of the second (Quranic verse), and the sixth line (at the bottom consisting of the date) are inscribed in Arabic, while the rest are in Persian couplet (Figure 1). The material is black basalt, and the size is 30 inches×20 inches. Currently, this inscription is affixed above the lintel/on the upper part of the main entrance. The inscriptional style of the first line— *Bismillah,* and *Kalima*— is *Bahri al-Bangali thulth*, the middle portion is *Bahri thulth*, and the rest are in *Nastaliq*.
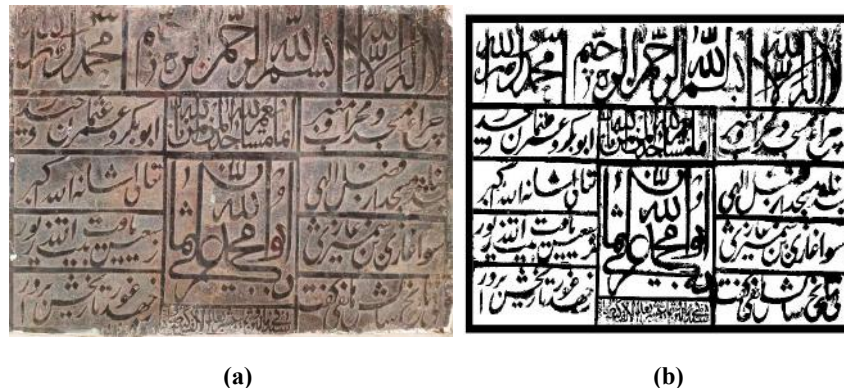

(a)   **(b)**
Figure 1: The Inscription; (a) *in situ* photograph, (b) digitally reconstructed by author.

Text

L-1	لا اله الا الله | بسم الله الرحمن الرحیم | محمد الرسول الله
L-2	چراغ مسجد و محراب و منبر |إنّما یعمر مسا جد الله من آمن با لله | ابو بکر و عمر عثمان و حیدر
Centre of inscription	اللهِ محمد ابو بکر عمر عثمان حیدر
L-3	بنا شد مسجد از فضل الهی | تعالی شانه الله اکبر
L-4	سو اغاز بن شمشیر غازی | ز سعیت یادت بیت الله زیور
L- 5	تاریخ سالش مانفی گفت | ز جهد غور تاریخشن برآور۱۲۱۸
L- 6	سنت مئتان ثمانین عشر بعد الف کسر صادقت

Unpublished) Late Mughal Mosque Inscription of Bengal: An Analytical Look", *Journal of Bengal Art,* Vol. 24 (2019), pp. 151–155.

Translation

L-1	In the name of Allah, most merciful, most kind, there is no God but Allah, Muhammad (swa) is the messenger of Allah.
L-2	Mosques of Allah will only be visited and maintained by those who believe in Allah. The light, the mosque, mihrab (prayer niche), and mimbar (pulpit) are (represented respectively by)-Abu Bakr, Umar, Uthman, and Haidar (Ali R.)
Centre of inscription	Allah, Muhammad (swa), and the names of the four caliphs.
L-3	This mosque was built with the grace of Almighty Allah, exalted Allah is great.
L-4	by Shuagazi, son of Shamshir Gazi, from the endeavour of the memory of Allah's house (Ka'ba), an ornament.
L-5	The history of its year was said by the angel, from deep efforts, the approximate date 1218 AH [1803 CE].
L-6	In the year of one thousand two hundred and eighteen.

Analysis of Inscription and Discussion

The Quranic verse (Sura at-Tawbah:18) of the epigraph is, fine calligraphy, and the date are placed in the middle of the inscription, while the Persian couplet is placed on both sides.

The Mughal inscriptions start with *Bismillah, Kalima,* and sometimes a Quranic verse. Similarly, this inscription follows the Mughal inscription's features.

The Quranic verse of this inscription (9:18; إِنَّمَا يَعْمُرُ مَسَاجِدَ اللَّهِ مَنْ آمَنَ بِاللَّهِ) usually inscribed in the Sultanate Mosque inscription.[17] But it was rare in the Mughal and late Mughal periods. The Ambar Shahi Mosque inscription in Karwan Bazar, Dhaka, contains a similar Quranic verse.[18] This Quranic verse records that houses of worship should receive support and maintenance from individuals who possess unwavering trust in Allah, do not ascribe partners to Him, believe in the Day of Judgement, and fear none but Allah. Believing Muslims utilised the architectural creations to remind them of their obligations and to renew their commitment to strict following, and used them as a powerful vehicle for the propagation of Islam as well.[19]

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[17] Siddiq, *Arabic and Persian inscriptions of Bengal*, pp. 203–570; A. Karim, *Corpus of the Arabic and Persian Inscriptions of Bengal* (Dhaka: Asiatic Society of Bangladesh, 1992), pp. 17–411, https://books.google.com.bd/books?id=ut0NAAAAYAAJ.
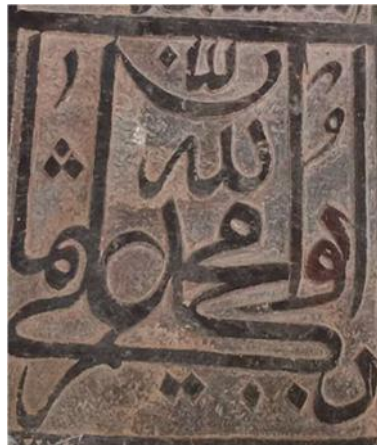
[18] Siddiq, *Arabic and Persian inscriptions of Bengal*, pp. 638–9.

[19] Muhammad Abdul Qadir, "Eight Unpublished Sultanate Period Inscriptions of Bengal", *Journal of Bengal Art*, Vol. 4 (1999), p. 240.

In the centre of this epigraphic text (Figure 2.a), the calligraphy of Allah, Muhammad, and the names of the four Caliphs is beautifully inscribed. This type of phrase and presentation is found in the inscription of the Lalbagh Fort Mosque (Figure 2.b) on both the *mihrab* wall and the entrance wall (1684 CE)[20] and the Nidaliya inscription (1662) (Figure 2.iii), Lalmonirhat district.

The majority of the late Mughal inscriptions employed the popular benedictory prayer phrase (چراغ مسجد و محراب و منبر| ابو بکر و عمر عثمان و حیدر), typically associated with the four caliphs of Islam. Hazrat Abu Bakr R., Hazrat Umar R., Hazrat Uthman R., and Hazrat Haidar (Ali R.) represent the light, the mosque, the *mihrab* (prayer niche), and the *mimbar* (pulpit), respectively. This couplet is a poetic, devotional recitation in religious gatherings in Persian, Urdu, and regional Islamic traditions. It is practised during *Milad-un-Nabi* gatherings, *Urs* ceremonies at Sufi saints' shrines, and the completion of the Quran in masjids. The prayer phrase is practised to show respect and love for the Prophet ﷺ and his companions, emphasise unity, connect with Sufi devotional traditions, and remind that such construction work resembles not only the building but also the leadership and guidance of the rightly guided caliphs.

The text describes how Shuagazi constructed his mosque as a gift for his son, Shamser Gazi, in the year 1218 AH (1803 CE). As a rebel against British occupation, Shamsher Gazi (1712-1760) led Chakla Raushanabad, which spanned the southern part of present Cumilla and northern part of Noakhali districts, until he gained full control over the Cumilla.

(a)

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20   Karim, *Corpus of the Arabic and Persian Inscriptions of Bengal*, pp. 476–77; Siddiq, *Arabic and Persian Inscriptions of Bengal*, p. 643.
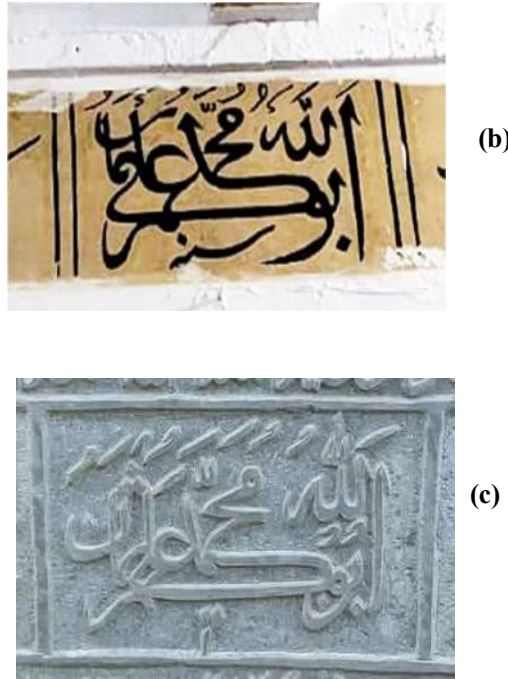
Figure 2: Central part of the Inscription of (a) Suagazi Mosque, Cumilla (1804), (b) Lalbag mosque (1678-79), (c) Nidaliya, Lalmonirhat (1662).

Unravelling the Local History

The mosque inscription is not just a piece of text. It has a deeper connection to society. The Shuagazi inscription contains some links between the then societies. Here, an attempt has been made to unravel the local history linked with the text of the Shuagazi Inscription.

Shuagazi Bazar Jama Mosque

The mosque serves multiple purposes within society.[21] An old mosque with a modern extension (Figure 3), known as Shuagazi Bazar Jama Mosque, is located in the study

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[21]   Sara Ali *et al.,* "Role of Mosque Communities in Supporting Muslims with Mental Illness: Results of CBPR-oriented Focus Groups in the Bay Area, California", *Psychiatric Quarterly*, Vol. 93, No. 4 (2022), pp. 985–1001; Nayeem Asif *et al.,* "The Study on the Functional Aspects of Mosque Institution", *Journal of Islamic Architecture*, Vol. 6, No. 4 (2021), pp. 229–36; Suud Sarim Karimullah, "The Role of Mosques as Centers for Education and Social Engagement in Islamic Communities", *Jurnal Bina Ummat: Membina dan Membentengi Ummat*, Vol. 6, No. 2 (2023), pp. 151–66.

area. A mosque generally means a place of practising Islam by praying salat. Sometimes, a mosque is not only the place of praying but also the centre of the administration, as we find in the Sixty dome mosque of Bagerhat.[22]

(a)

(b)   (c)

Figure 3: (a) Old Mosque with the modern
extension, (b) old mosque, (c) modern extension

Here, the Suzgazi Bazar Jama Mosque is an archaeological site located in Purbo Bot village, inside Sadar Dakshin Upazila's Paschim Jorkanon Union of the Cumilla District. It is situated toward the southern edge of Shuagazi Bazar, at 23°22′29.9″ N 91°14'24.3″ E. This Mughal-style Mosque at Shuagazi Bazar features three domes as its architectural features.[23] With dimensions of 16 meters by 7 meters, this rectangular

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22   M A Bari, "Shatgumbad Mosque", *Banglapedia: National Encyclopedia of Bangladesh* (Dhaka: Asiatic Society of Bangladesh, 2021), https://en.banglapedia.org/index.php/ Shatgumbad_Mosque, accessed 21 May 2025.

23   Rahman and Alam, *Protatttik Jorip o Onushondhan Protibedon: (2021-2022) Cumilla Zilla (Sadar Dokshin o Borura Upazila) [Archaeological Survey and Investigation Report: (2021-2022) Comilla District (Sadar Dakshin and Barura Upazila)]*, p. 73.

mosque measures 44 feet 10 inches in length and 13 feet 8 inches in width. The mosque maintains a 1.5-meter wall thickness and has three entry points that face eastward. Modern building techniques led to mosque expansion through new construction on its eastern and western sides. An expansion area stretching 16 feet 2 inches across 48 feet 1 inch exists on the western side, adjacent to the primary mosque structure. A narrow pathway connects the new extension through an opening cut into the western wall, which mirrors the position of the mihrab. The extension spanned four feet in length but reached a height of seven feet eleven inches. An addition was constructed next to the mosque's eastern wall, which spans 51 feet 6 inches by 33 feet 5 inches (Figure 4).
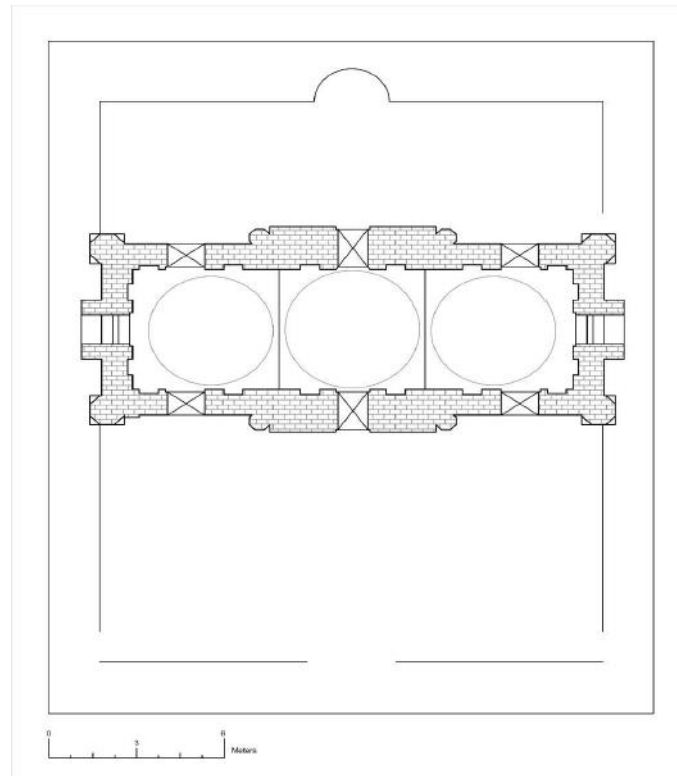

Figure 4: Ground plan of Shuagazi Mosque; modified after Rahman and Alam.[24]

Local authorities installed tiles across the prayer area floor. The unexpected construction alongside the floor tile installation and wall plaster application caused

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24   *Ibid.*, p. 75.

damage to the mosque's original features.[25] Among the three domes the central one measures approximately 13 feet 6 inches by 13 feet 10 inches, which creates a nearly square geometric form. The mosque follows 18th or 19th-century construction dating based on its observed architectural characteristics.

There is no direct indication that the mosque served as the administrative centre of the community at the time. However, its closeness to the grand trunk road and Shuagazi Zamindar Bari suggests that it was a central praying place for the society.

Connection with the water reservoirs/ponds

Shuagazi Dighi stands nearby as a historical water reservoir occupying about 1.3 hectares of land (Figure 8). The site spans 160 meters in length with 90 meters in width. The local landlords originally constructed the pond at Shuagazi through excavation.[26] The historic Shuagazi Jorkanon Dighi (23°21′44.5″ N, 91°14'57.2″ E) exists approximately 1.5 km to the south of Shuagazi Bazar Jame Mosque on the western side of the Dhaka-Chattogram Highway near the old Grand Trunk Road. Shuagazi Jorkanon Dighi spans 6 hectares, measuring 420 meters in length and 150 meters in width. Landfill procedures constructed a manmade hill in the middle of the pond. During the field visit, no records were found that provide historical details about their construction. Probably this pond received its current depth through the work of the Shuagazi landlords.[27]

The Shuagazi Zamindar Bari and the Shuagazi Mosque

Shuagazi Zamindar Bari (23°22′13.7″ N 91°14'19.1″ E) is approximately 500 meters south of Shuagazi Bazar, and the local inhabitants refer to it as *Saheb Bari* (Figure 5).

Saheb Bari traces its origin through three generations, beginning with Khwaja Chowdhury, followed by Md. Fayez Chowdhury until the birth of the third-generation Tofazzal Ahmed Chowdhury. Among the six sons of Tofazzal Ahmed Chowdhury, Omar Ahmed Chowdhury held the final zamindari position in 1951. The Zamindari estate management responsibility fell to him until the British abolished the Zamindari system from Bengal. The political figures of the Indian National Congress during British India included his family members. As Education Minister of Pakistan, Mr. Ashraf Uddin Ahmed Chowdhury served before the partition.

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25   *Ibid.*
26   *Ibid.*, p. 77.
27   *Ibid.*, p. 81.

During their time, they built many educational institutions and religious buildings. Several large water ponds were excavated to provide access to drinking water. Time slowly passes through this heritage structure from the 18th and 19th centuries, as it remains deteriorated.[28]

History of Shamsher Gazi and the Inscription

According to the 4th line and the term Shamser Gazi (شمشیر غازی) of the inscription, it is stated that Shuagazi is a son of Shamsher Gazi. However, no other source has been mentioned him as the son of Shamsher Gazi.

Figure 5: Reconstructed Suagazi Zamindar *Bari (Saheb Bari).*

Shamsher Gazi, a valiant Bengali from Chakla Roushanabad, emerged in the aftermath of Bengal's downfall post-Plassey.[29] He governed from Jagannath-Sonapur and Udaipur, orchestrating a revolt against tyrannical zamindars in Dakshinshik and mobilising peasants, commoners, and certain criminals. He seized control of Raushanabad and a significant portion of Tripura with the *Lathial* force. Renowned for his equity and administrative acumen, he designated competent officials, formed advisory groups, executed agricultural and flood-control initiatives, regulated markets, and fostered religious tolerance. He constructed mosques, temples, madrasas, and water reservoirs, thereby promoting education and welfare. British forces ultimately apprehended him, and the circumstances surrounding his execution remain

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28   *Ibid.*, p. 79.
29   Jamir Ahmed, *Fenir Itihas [History of Feni]* (Chattogram: Samatata Publisher, 1990), p. 98; Sheikh Manuhar, *Gazi Nama [The Book of Gazi],* ed. by Ramendra Barman, (Agartala, Tripura: Akshar Publications, n.d.).

contentious.[30] People knew how much he loved his benefactor Jagannath Sen and his wife Sona Devi, so he named the Jagannath-Sonapur region after them. After his death his main fortress was destroyed, leaving only ruins. However, places in Chhagalnaiya, Parshuram, and Tripura still bear his memory. Pyar Bakhsh Muhammad and Kaiyara Bibi were Shamsher Gazi's parents. His descendants, including Nur Bakhsh Chowdhury, Muhammad Fasi Chowdhury, Muhammad Dayem Chowdhury and others, continued to be involved in various socio-political activities over time. According to the field survey and literature data, it can be assumed that Nur Bakhsh Chowdhury has some link with Shuagazi or both the names may represent the same person (Figure 6).
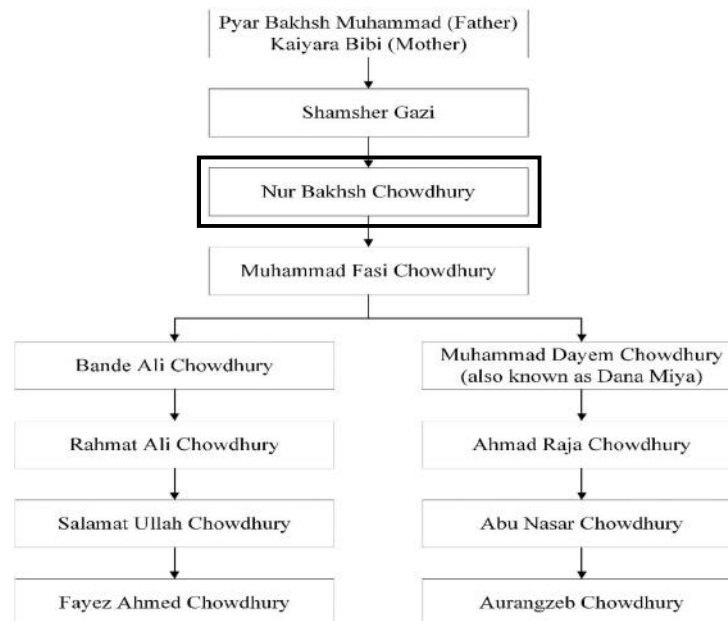

Figure 6: Genealogy of Shamsher Gazi, after Ahmed (1990, p. 116).

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30   Shirin Akhtar, "Chakla System", *Banglapedia: National Encyclopedia of Bangladesh*, Second edition, ed. by Sirajul Islam and Ahmed A. Jamal (Asiatic Society of Bangladesh, 2021), https://en.banglapedia.org/index.php?title=Chakla_System; J. G. Cummings, *Survey and Settlement of the Chakla Roshnabad in the District of Tippera and Noakhali 1892–1899* (Calcutta: Bengal Secretariat Press, 1899); Nandan Debnath, "British relation with Chakla Roshnabad and Hill Tripura", *International Journal of Scientific Development and Research (IJSDR)*, Vol. 7, No. 10 (2022), pp. 123–4; Bibhas Kanti Kilikdar, *Tripura of eighteenth century with Samsher Gazi against feudalism: a historical study* (Agartala: Tripura State Tribal Cultural Research Institute & Museum, Govt. of Tripura, 1995).

Background: Shamsher Gazi, born in 1712 in the humble peasant village of Kungura inside Dakshin Shik Pargana, north of Chittagong, became one of the most contentious and prominent personalities in the 18th-century political history of southeastern Bengal and Tripura.[31] His formative years were characterised by significant socio-economic adversity, as his father, Pir Mohammad, attempted to provide for the family. Notwithstanding these challenges, Shamsher's remarkable intellect and talent were recognised by Nasir Mahmud, a local zamindar of Tripura, who subsequently took him under his patronage and reared him alongside his own offspring.[32] This developmental atmosphere afforded Gazi educational opportunities and administrative experience, culminating in his designation as a Tehsildar at Kutghate. During this period, Shamsher Gazi observed the repressive actions of zamindars and British agents towards peasants, an event that significantly influenced his subsequent policies and rebellious nature.[33] Sheikh Manuhar's *Gazi Nama* indicates that Shamsher obtained the heavenly favour of a Pir, illustrating the mystical themes associated with his life that merged religious legitimacy with his socio-political endeavours.[34]

Geopolitical Context (Chakla Roshanabad): The political geography of the territory ultimately governed by Shamsher Gazi was intricate. Chakla Roshanabad, the administrative territory he ruled, had four parganas: one in Sylhet, two in Tippera, and one in Noakhali.[35] The estate was delineated to the north by Sylhet, to the west by parganas such as Daudpur, Sarail, Gangamandal, Homna, Kasba, Lalmai Hills, and Noakhali, to the south by Chattogram district, and to the east by the Tippera hills.[36] The term *'Chakla'* denoted a significant Mughal administrative division created in Bengal by Murshid Quli Khan in the early 18th century to optimise tax collection and guarantee consistent remittance to the imperial treasury.[37] 'Roshanabad' translates to

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[31]   Kilikdar, *Tripura of eighteenth century with Samsher Gazi against feudalism: a historical study*, p. 69; Satyadeo Poddar (ed.), *History of Tripura: As Reflected in the Manuscripts* (New Delhi: National Mission for Manuscripts Dev Publishers & Distributors, 2016), p. 4; Nalini Ranjan Roychoudhury, *Tripura Through the Ages: A Short History of Tripura from the Earliest Times to 1947 A.D.* (India: Sterling, 1983), p. 34, https://books.google.com.bd/books?id= Mq0dAAAAMAAJ.

[32]   Kilikdar, *Tripura of eighteenth century with Samsher Gazi against Feudalism: A Historical Study*, pp. 69–71.

[33]   *Ibid.*, p. 71.

[34]   Poddar (ed.), *History of Tripura*, p. 4; Sheikh Manuhar, *Gazi Nama [The Book of Gazi]*, ed. by Ramendra Barman, (Agartala, Tripura: Akshar Publications, n.d.).

[35]   Cummings, *Survey and Settlement of the Chakla Roshnabad in the District of Tippera and Noakhali 1892–1899*, p. 1.

[36]   *Ibid.*

[37]   Akhtar, "Chakla System".

'land of light' and was commonly referred to as Plain Tripura or Chakla Roshanabad Zamindari.[38] The spatial context is essential for comprehending Shamsher Gazi's ascent, as it situated him at the convergence of several cultural, economic, and political networks, simultaneously bringing him into direct conflict with established feudal and Mughal powers.

Ascendancy to Power: Shamsher Gazi's rise to power amalgamated military prowess with opportunistic use of regional turmoil. He initially solidified his authority by usurping Nasir Mahmud, the zamindar who had elevated him. Accounts indicate that Shamsher, following the rejection of his marriage proposal to Nasir's daughter, retreated to the forest, amassed followers, and initiated a campaign that resulted in the slaughter of Nasir Mahmud's family, with the sole exception of the daughter, whom he subsequently married.[39] Subsequently, he seized Dakshin Shik and Meherkul parganas, asserting dominion over these regions and therefore positioning himself as a local power broker. His authority expanded progressively, leading him to gain control over the Comilla district and then conquer Nizampur Pargana, thereby establishing himself as the de facto ruler of the area delineated by the Meghna, Muhuri, and Manu Ganga rivers.[40]

Historiography Centred on Shamsher Gazi: The historiography of Shamsher Gazi illustrates a figure of considerable complexity. Colonial sources, such as Webster (1911)[41] and Sandys (1915)[42], often depict him as a "notorious Muslim plunderer" who persisted in his habitual brigandage despite possessing official authority. Webster wrote, "It is reported that he could not relinquish his former thieving tendencies and would occasionally raid the residences of the affluent, distributing his spoils among the impoverished".[43] The Gazette of Noakhali similarly says that he attacked wealthy households and transferred their assets to destitute individuals.[44] These reports,

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[38]   Debnath, "British relation with Chakla Roshnabad and Hill Tripura".
[39]   Poddar (ed.), *History of Tripura*, p. 4; J.E. Webster, *Eastern Bengal and Assam District Gazetteers: Noakhali* (Pioneer Press, 1911), pp. 22–23, https://books.google.com.bd/ books?id=lE66ngEACAAJ.
[40]   Ali Nawaz, "Shamsher Gazi", *Banglapedia: National Encyclopedia of Bangladesh*, Second edition, ed. by Sirajul Islam and Ahmed A. Jamal (Asiatic Society of Bangladesh, 2021), https://en.banglapedia.org/index.php/Shamsher_Gazi.
[41]   John Edward Webster, *Eastern Bengal and Assam District Gazetteers: Noakhali,* (Assam: Pioneer Press).
[42]   E. F. Sandys, *History of Tripura,* (Agartala: Tripura State Tribal Cultural Research Institute & Museum, Govt. of Tripura), p. 22.
[43]   Webster, *Eastern Bengal and Assam District Gazetteers: Noakhali*, pp. 22–23.
[44]   Kilikdar, *Tripura of eighteenth century with Samsher Gazi against feudalism: a historical study*, p. 78.

frequently sourced from colonial administrative records, highlight Shamsher Gazi's resistance to established authority while concurrently portraying him through a prism of criminality. Conversely, indigenous historiography and vernacular sources, such as *Gazi Nama* and the works of B. K. Kilikdar depicts him as a benevolent sovereign and advocate for peasants, emphasising his contributions to social welfare, education, and the mitigation of peasant oppression.[45] This dichotomy illustrates the overarching difficulties in 18th-century South Asian historiography between the perspective of ruling elites and subaltern figures.

Administrative Regulations and Societal Reforms: Shamsher Gazi's administrative strategies were especially distinguished by their progressive nature relative to the prevailing regional standards. Notwithstanding his initial notoriety as a brigand, he instituted a series of initiatives aimed at alleviating the hardships of the peasantry and fostering economic stability. He provided rent exemptions to impoverished peasants, conferred freeholds to both Hindus and Muslims, excavated numerous ponds *(dighis)* to facilitate irrigation and fisheries, and established educational institutions, including Kaiyar Sagar, the largest of these establishments.[46] *Gazi Nama* states that Shamsher Gazi "commanded the excavation of multiple ponds in various villages and erected a brick road from Domoghati to Khadal." He founded an educational institution at his residence, offering instruction to many students".[47] These projects demonstrate that his government integrated economic redistribution with infrastructure and cultural development, reflecting a nuanced comprehension of statecraft beyond simple military conquest.

Military Operations and Governance of Tripura: Shamsher Gazi's military prowess was notable, as he effectively established a *Lathial Bahini,* an armed peasant militia utilising bamboo sticks, to safeguard his territory and combat both Portuguese pirates and Mughal-aligned forces.[48] His fight against the Harmads, Portuguese-influenced coastal raiders, established the sea boundaries of his territories and bolstered his power among local communities.[49] The extension of his dominance into Tripura resulted in the temporary ousting of Krishna Manikya, the monarch of Tripura, from his capital at Udaypur. Shamsher Gazi appointed Banamali Thakur, Uday Manikya's nephew, as a nominal ruler under the title Lakshman Manikya, thereby solidifying his de facto

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[45]   *Ibid.*, pp. 76–8.
[46]   *Ibid.*, p. 77; Nawaz, "Shamsher Gazi".
[47]   Kilikdar, *Tripura of eighteenth century with Samsher Gazi against feudalism: a historical study*, p. 77.
[48]   Nawaz, "Shamsher Gazi".
[49]   Poddar (ed.), *History of Tripura*, p. 4.

authority over the Tripura kingdom while ostensibly circumventing a direct assertion of monarchy.[50] *Gazi Nama* notes that "Lakhsman Manikya ruled in Tripura as a puppet king for merely three years, after which Samsher Gazi proclaimed himself 'Shri Shrijut Mahammad Samsher Choudhury' and commenced his reign over Tripura".[51]

Fall of Shamsher Gazi: This era of political dominance, nonetheless, was unstable. Shamsher Gazi encountered continual resistance from tribal subjects in the mountainous regions of Tripura who opposed taxes, alongside dispossessed feudal lords and the deposed Krishna Manikya. The latter sought assistance from Nawab Mir Qasim of Bengal, who mobilised a formidable force that ultimately vanquished Shamsher Gazi, resulting in his capture and execution in Murshidabad in 1760.[52] Colonial record validate these occurrences, indicating that he "was captured and imprisoned in Murshidabad, and shortly thereafter, was sentenced to death".[53]

Socio-Economic Contributions and Cultural Heritage: The socio-economic and cultural policies of Shamsher Gazi exemplify a notably egalitarian administrative structure. He allocated land to the landless, regardless of caste or faith, granting them tax exemptions.[54] Although several historians have labelled this as preferential treatment for Muslims, evidence indicates that he extended comparable chances to Hindus, thus fostering inclusivity in education, government, and land tenure.[55] Shamsher Gazi monopolised the trade of commodities, including cotton, rice, and salt, providing advances to producers without market access, a strategy that reinforced his economic dominance and mitigated peasant vulnerabilities.[56] Furthermore, he founded institutes for the instruction of Arabic, Persian, Bengali, and Quranic studies, exemplifying his dedication to the intellectual and spiritual advancement of his subjects.[57]

Popular Memory and Historiographical discourses: The historiographical discourse around Shamsher Gazi is comprehensive and exemplifies the contentious

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50   Suresh Kant Sharma and Usha Sharma, *Discovery of North-East India. 1: North-East India: a Panoramic View* (New Delhi, India: Mittal Publication, 2005), p. 24; Omesh Saigal, *Tripura, Its History and Culture* (Concept, 1978), p. 39, https://books.google.com.bd/books?id=TNECAAAAMAAJ.

51   Kilikdar, *Tripura of eighteenth century with Samsher Gazi against feudalism: a historical study*, p. 76.

52   *Ibid.*, pp. 81–2; Poddar (ed.), *History of Tripura*, p. 4.

53   Webster, *Eastern Bengal and Assam District Gazetteers: Noakhali*, pp. 22–3.

54   Kilikdar, *Tripura of eighteenth century with Samsher Gazi against feudalism: a historical study*, p. 88.

55   *Ibid.*, p. 90.

56   *Ibid.*, p. 91.

57   *Ibid.*, p. 77; Sharma and Sharma, *Discovery of North-East India,* Vol. 1, p. 24.

aspects of his legacy. Indian historians frequently characterise him as a "dacoit, infamous Muslim marauder, and usurper of royal power",[58] highlighting his criminality and unlawful conduct. However, Kilikdar's study depicts him as a kind ruler and an advocate for peasants, whose reforms epitomised an early manifestation of social justice in Tripura.[59] Folk myths and *Gazi Nama* bolster this portrayal, extolling his bravery, administrative skill, and advocacy for marginalised groups.[60] This duality highlights the dilemma between elite. The historical and the subalterns in historiography-- a prevalent issue in South Asian studies of the pre-colonial era.

Heritage and Importance (Figure 7.i and ii): Beyond his administrative and military accomplishments, Shamsher Gazi significantly influenced the cultural and geographic terrain of southeastern Bengal. He is linked to the establishment and nomenclature of many locations in Noakhali, Feni, Comilla, and Tripura, while archaeological vestiges like as the Gadkhai moat, Ekkulla Dighi, and tunnels (Figure 7) in Champaknagar exemplify his infrastructure endeavours.[61] These heritage sites reflect an administration which is people oriented, secure and culturally active.

 Shamsher cultivated an early consciousness of political rights among agrarian subaltern groups.[62] Kilikdar proposed that his administration established the foundation for future social and political awareness in Tripura and southeastern Bengal, marking a significant milestone in the region's fight against feudalism.[63] Gazi's endeavours to incorporate both Hindus and Muslims into administrative and educational systems exemplify an early implementation of secular administration, which impacted later rulers and established precedents for communal inclusivity.[64]

Link to the Spatial Interrelations of Feature

Spatial features play a crucial role in the planning of a human settlement. The closest location to a convenient communication route is always preferable. By analysing the spatial distribution of archaeological sites in Bagerhat, Imran (2014)[65] interpreted that Khalifatabad has been a planned town. In this article efforts are being made to explore

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58 Saigal, *Tripura, Its History and Culture*, p. 39; Sandys, *History of Tripura*, p. 22.
59 Kilikdar, *Tripura of eighteenth century with Samsher Gazi against feudalism: a historical study*, pp. 1–3.
60 Poddar (ed.), *History of Tripura*, p. 4.
61 Nawaz, "Shamsher Gazi".
62 Kilikdar, *Tripura of eighteenth century with Samsher Gazi against feudalism: a historical study*, p. 90.
63 *Ibid.*, p. 92.
64 *Ibid.*, p. 90.
65 Masood Imran, "Quantifying the Spatial Pattern of Medieval Urban Space of Khalifatabad, Bangladesh", *Pratna Samiksha,* (2014), pp. 87-95.

the spatial relationship between the mosque and its surroundings. To have a deeper understanding, Table 1 and Figure 8 presents site-to-site distance measurements that include the Grand Trunk (GT) Road, one of the oldest thoroughfares in South Asia, connects the eastern and western areas of the Indian subcontinent and has significantly contributed to uniting the populace of the area,[66] the mosque, the Zamindar Bari estate, the pond, the canal, and the *dighi*.

(a)   **(b)**

Figure 7: (a) An Image of Shamsher Gazi's Tunnel Road, (b) Trail Trench at the Shamsher Gazi's Kella.

While it is widely acknowledged that Sher Shah constructed the GT Road in the 16th century, its history predates this period and the four names of the road have been found. Initially constructed during the Mauryan period as 'Uttarapath' extending from Balkh in Afghanistan to Tamraliptika or Tamluk in West Bengal of India. It was further enhanced by Sher Shah as 'Sadak-e-Azam' or 'Shah Rah-e-Azam' (the Great Road) during the Sur dynasty and connected from Kabul, Afghanistan, to Sonargaon, Bangladesh. Then it was 'Badshahi Sadak' during the Mughal era. Finally, the British renamed the road as the 'Long Walk' or Grand Trunk Road after reconstructing it between 1833 and 1860, which was extended to Kabul, Afghanistan to Chittagong, Bangladesh.[67] The route commences in Afghanistan, traverses Pakistan, enters Punjab, proceeds to Uttar Pradesh, Bihar, Bengal, and ultimately concludes in Chittagong, Bangladesh. This metric information offers spatial insights between location points that may guide us.

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[66]   Nasir Raza Khan, "Grand Trunk Road: Continuity and Changes", *International Journal of Applied Research*, Vol. 3, No. 1 (IJAR, 2017), p. 55.

[67]   Raghubir Singh and Jean Deloche, "On the Road Today", in *The Grand Trunk Road: a Passage Through India,* ed. by Raghubir Singh, (New York: Aperture, 1995), pp. 4, 10-11; "Sites along the Uttarapath, Badshahi Sadak, Sadak-e-Azam, Grand Trunk Road", *UNESCO World Heritage Convention,* https://whc.unesco.org/en/tentativelists/6056/, accessed 21 Nov. 2025.

Table 1: Distance among the features.

Name	Distance (m)
Trunk Road to Mosque	143.5
Trunk Road to Mosque's Pond	28.447
Trank Road to Zamindar Bari	731.172
Trunk Road to Jor Kanon Dighi	8.238
Canal to Mosque	134.112
Mosque to Jor kanon Dighi	1785.026

The shortest recorded distance is 8.238 meters, which measures the separation between the Grand Trunk Road and Jor Kanon Dighi. This reservoir feature is located near the main roadway. Travellers on the trunk road may use the pond water during their journey. The 28.447-meter distance connecting the Trunk Road to the Pond illustrates the strategic planning of water sources near the road and religious buildings for convenient access to water. The longest documented distance stretches from the Mosque to Jor Kanon Dighi, extending to 1785.026 meters. Despite being a prominent architectural feature, the mosque is distant from this substantial water. It is widely believed that the builder of the mosque and Jor Kanon Dighi is the same individual, Shuagazi, son of Samshar Gazi. The 731.172-meter Trunk Road leading to Zamindar Bari demonstrates a notable length, indicating that the estate was distantly positioned from the primary road, likely due to landholding and security needs. The mosque's location near the main road at 143.5 meters suggests easy access, making religious buildings significant components of cultural integration in community life. Multiple water bodies, including ponds, *dighi*s, and canals, played a central role in the planning of the settlement as they were strategically. The 1785.026-meter distance between the mosque and Jor Kanon *Dighi* is interesting and needs explanation the construction of the water body, which served the residents probably or travellers along the Grand Trunk Road. It is also noted that there is a distance of 134.112 meters between the Canal and the Mosque.

It suggests communication possibilities via the trunk road and canal leading to the mosque and Zamindar Bari settlement. The observed distances highlight the settlement's functional design, showcasing access features, water resource systems, and the distribution of religious and administrative areas. It is reasonable to assume that the Shuagazi Mosque was built at a strategic location for trade and commerce,

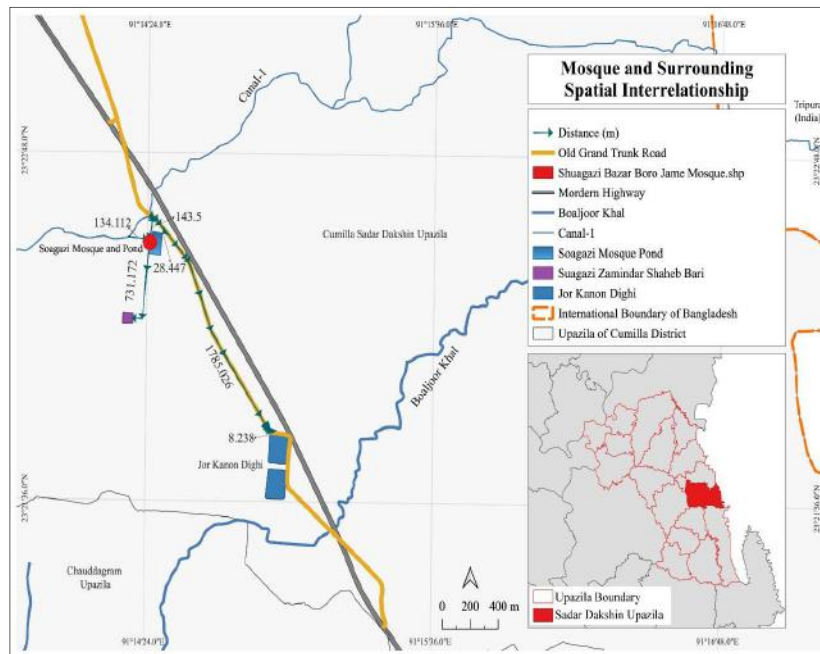linking land and water routes, and it continues to uphold this legacy through the Shuagazi Bazar.

Figure 8: Mosque and Surrounding Spatial Interrelationship.

Conclusion

Research on Mughal mosques has been conducted in general in Cumilla district. But regional variation, detailed surveys, and classification have not yet been conducted. Hence, our knowledge on detailed documentation and physical characteristics is scarcity; further research is required to identify physical characteristics to document mosque inscriptions and geographical settings of Mughal monuments of the Cumilla region. The inscription of the Shuagazi Bazar Mosque illustrates the intersection of epigraphy, architecture, and regional history in late Mughal Bengal, uncovering layers of cultural, religious, and socio-political importance. The Arabic and Persian writing along with intricate calligraphic techniques, records the mosque's construction by Shuagazi and honours his genealogy and association with Shamsher Gazi. In addition

to its religious affiliation, the mosque and its adjacent elements, such as Shuagazi Dighi and the Zamindar Bari, exemplify the intentional spatial arrangement of habitation, water management, and community design, underscoring strategic factors for commerce, communication, and social cohesion. The architectural and epigraphic features demonstrate Mughal stylistic influence while highlighting local modifications, emphasising the dynamic interaction between regional identity and imperial culture. Moreover, the historical account derived from the inscription and ancillary sources portrays Shamsher Gazi as a complex individual, whose administrative expertise, socio-economic reforms, and cultural patronage profoundly influenced southeastern Bengal and Tripura in the eighteenth century. This study underscores the significance of late Mughal inscriptions as major sources for comprehending local histories, socio-political networks, and cultural heritage, highlighting the necessity for additional documentation and academic investigation of these epigraphic records.

Acknowledgments