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Babi Mausolea and Political Identity of The Junagdh State

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ABSTRACT

The expression of power has always been recognized as an important function of architecture[1]. Buildings served as symbolic manifestations of a ruler's political authority. Through their palaces, fortresses, ceremonial buildings, gateways and tombs, the powerful sought to proclaim and articulate their glory with impressive stylistic elaborations. This paper, seeks to examine and explain the architectural highlights and significance of the royal tombs of the Babis which appear to make a conscious statement of political distinction in the immediate locales and beyond.

The city of Junagadh, in peninsular Gujarat has enjoyed historical significance since ancient times as is illustrated in its elaborate built heritage that dates back to the Mauryan era. Among the earliest highlights is the famous third century B.C. rock edict of Ashoka at the foot of mount Girnar. Besides the royal inscription, there is a later epigraph of the western Kshatrapa Rudradaman I, 150 A.D, which details the construction of a reservoir, the Sudarshan Lake during the reign of Chandragupta Maurya, a testimony to the sway of the Mauryan and subsequent rulers, the Shakas and Guptas over the region.[1] The formidable and elaborate Uparkot, (upper fort) citadel complex with its gates and numerous turrets, and all therein, which include Buddhist caves, step wells, and other additions and renovations following the conquest of the region by Gujarat Sultan Mahmud Begada, 1470 and in consecutive times- the Jami Masjid, Portuguese cannons etc.[2] Besides this, is the Jain temple dedicated to Neminath at Mount Girnar constructed by the famous devout Jain brothers, Vastupal and Tejpal in 1232.[3] The noteworthy aspect is that these are major tourist and pilgrim attractions, alongside the pride of Gujarat, the famed Gir National park and Wild Life Sanctuary, home of the Asiatic Lion.[4]

The more recent in the city's built heritage, are structures constructed during the Nawabi era which include palaces, the Nagar-Khana, (ceremonial arched gateway), Ayana Mahal, (palace of mirrors) mosques, public buildings- school, college, leper asylum, clock tower, gardens etc. A distinctly noticeable category that proudly stands as testimony to the bygone era is the maqbara complex which houses royal tombs, notably constructed during the reign of Nawab Mahabat Khan II (r.1851-82). Its layout and elaborately ornate features make them unique and inevitably draw one's attention. It is noteworthy that these are styled in a combination of European gothic and Indo-Islamic architectural traditions.[5] In this paper, I have made an attempt examine and explain the architectural highlights and significance of these tombs which appear to make a conscious statement of political distinction in the immediate locales and beyond. An overview of the Babi antecedents is relevant.

The Babis of Junagadh, were descendants of an Afghan immigrant, Adil Khan Babi who accompanied the Mughal prince Humayun to Delhi in 1555. His grandson, Bahadur Khan rose to prominence under Shah Jahan, and was assigned a jagir in Sirohi, Rajasthan.[6] In 1654, when the Mughal prince, Murad Baksh was appointed as subah Nazim of Gujarat, Bahadur Shah's son, Sher Khan came along with him. Under his descendants the Babis steadily rose to prominence in Gujarat.[7] Sher Khan had four sons: Muahmmad Mubariz Khan, Muhammad Muzaffar, Shahbaz Khan and the most illustrious of all Jafar Khan. It was Jafar Khan's descendants who established the three prominent Nawabis in Gujarat at Radhanpur, Balasinor (Wadasinor) and Junagadh in wake of the imperial breakdown in Gujarat.

[1] Oleg Grabar, The Architecture of Power: Palaces, Citadel and Fortifications, in George Michell, ed., Architecture of the Islamic World, London, 1978, p. 48
[1] M.S Commissariat, A History of Gujarat Including a survey of its chief Architectural Monuments and Inscriptions, Vol. I, Bombay, 1938, pp. xxiv-xxix
[2] Constructed during the reign of Graha Ripu, the Chudasma Ruler in the tenth century, Ibid, p. 166
[3] Ibid, p. lxxxi
[4] http://www.gujarat-tourism.net/Junagadh_Attractions.htm
[5] http://www.junagadhstate.com/books/picturehistory-junagadhstate.pdf
[6] S.B. Rajyagor, History of Gujarat, Delhi, 1982, p. 331
[7] J.W Watson, ed. Statistical Account of Junagadh; Being the Junagadh Contribution to the Kathiawar portion of the Bombay Gazetteer, Vol. III, Bombay, 1880, p. 17

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In the mid eighteenth century, Muhammad Sher Khan Babi, who had earlier served as the naib faujar of Junagadh whence he worked towards carving out his future realm of authority, assumed the title of Bahadur Khan and styled himself as the Nawab, r.1748-58. Junagadh remained a tributary to the Maratha Empire, until it came under British suzerainty after the Second Anglo-Maratha War 1802-1805. In 1807, the Junagadh State became a British protectorate and the chief was given the title of Nawab and an eleven gun salute. This placed Junagadh in the middle rank of Indian states under British protection. Subsequently, Junagadh along with other princely states of Kathiawar were administered under the Kathiawar Agency by the British.

Prominent among the rulers of this lineage, was Nawab Mahabat Khan II r.1851-1882. His reign witnessed progress in various realms- education, including female education, public works, administrative reforms- land revenue, the establishment of Hazur Adalat and Sardar Adalat modelled on the lines of British courts, establishment of a library, postal services, state printing press, development of Veraval port, etc. The department of public works was placed under the charge of a native engineer, Kanji Makanji. The city of Junagadh was transformed. Rest-houses, Dharamshalas, hospitals and roads were constructed. A large square and a clock tower were put up opposite to the Ayna Mahal. Buildings like court houses, Sardarbagh Bungalow, Jail, Bahadur Khan High School and Public offices were erected.[8]
In 1877 A.D. Queen Victoria assumed the exalted title of Kaiser-e-Hind. An imposing Durbar was held in this honour at Delhi, in which among other Indian princes Mahabat Khan too attended. In appreciation of his successful administration, he was conferred the exalted title of K. C. S. I.[9]The Government of India enhanced the Nawab's personal salute from 11 guns to 15.[10]

Possibly the momentum in building activity, besides being guided by the concern to develop modern infrastructure may be viewed as a conscious attempt towards articulating the growing prominence of the princely state's political stature. George Michell states that the expression of power has always been recognized as an important function of architecture.[11]Buildings served as symbolic manifestations of a ruler's political authority. Through their palaces, fortresses, ceremonial buildings, gateways and tombs, the powerful sought to proclaim and articulate their glory with impressive stylistic elaborations. Architecture is more than a history of form and style. It is a product of cultural and environmental factors and an expression of the way of life of the people for whom it is built. It is pertinent to note that the world of Islamic architecture has been far from static. Rulers of Islamic orientation chose to work within the parameters of Islamic architectural prescriptions and traditions, though consciously or otherwise, dominant contemporary and local influences were adapted or fused in the buildings they commissioned to be constructed.

According to Oleg Grabar, though royal or dynastic mausolea are not in themselves directly connected with functions of authority, they serve as symbolic expressions of authority.[12] The Babi cemetery, maqbara in Junagadh which houses more than a dozen royal tombs makes an interesting case in this regard. Although the area is presently covered with weeds and the monuments under the Archaeological Survey of India are poorly maintained, they stand as a testimony to the bygone era of the Nawabs. These Maqbaras are the richly ornamented sepulchres of the rulers of Junagadh which to the 18th and 19th centuries. A perusal of the Babi cemetery is insightful. The pictures of the maqbaras are sourced from the images of the royal tombs from the British Library, India Office Select Material, titled, Lee Warner Collection: Photographs of Junagadh.[13]

The column, arch and dome, considered as the trinity of Islamic architecture, form an essential feature of the Babi tombs.[14] Further, in all these structures, the plinth is either a square or a rectangle which symbolise the material universe, while the dome stand for the circle of eternity.[15] However in the Babi cemetery, besides the profuse presence of these essentials for either structural or ornamental purposes, the important highlight is the abundant presence of short and tall minars, fluted big and small onion domes, cusped arches, elaborate cornices and brackets ornate floral carvings, lattice work, besides European influences- French windows and gothic columns in the tombs of Mahabat Khan and his wazir.

The tomb of the first nawab Bahadur Khan **r. 1748-58** while being an ornate structure with fluted onion domes and elaborate arches, is less opulent then later structures.[16] An important building in this complex is the tomb of Naju Bibi or Maija Sahiba, the mother of Mahabat khan II 1851- 82.[17] This is a freestanding structure with a square plan inside a walled enclosure with four entrances and five domes atop. The inner tomb is surrounded by a colonnade of delicately carved cusped arches crowned by a cornice, cluster of fluted onion domes and small minarets. The entire building is ornamented with a profusion of delicate floral carvings.

Significantly, alongside this structure are the graves of twelve noblemen of the Tughluq times classed as Bara Saiyad, possibly a corruption of the word Shaheed, martyr. During the reign of the Delhi sultan, Firuz Shah Tughluq when Zafar Khan, the Gujarat governor invaded Junagadh, these twelve warriors were taken captive by the Rajput ruler

[8] Ibid, pp. 62-101
[9] Knight Commander of the Star of India
[10] J.W Watson, p 58,
http://www.junagadhstate.org/nawab6.htm
[11] Oleg Grabar, The Architecture of Power: Palaces, Citadel and Fortifications, in George Michell, ed., Architecture of the Islamic World, London, 1978, p. 48

[12] Ibid, p. 76
[13]https://www.bl.uk/catalogues/indiaofficeselect/PhotoShowDescs.asp?CollID=31
The prints have brief captions on the actual prints and some have manuscript captions below. The title is
stamped in gold on the front cover which also states; 'By F. Nelson'. On the front free endpaper is the
inscription: 'With best compliments from H.H. Rasulkhanji, Nawab of Junagadh (India)'. The album contains
numerous architectural and topographical views from Junagadh State.
[14] James Dickie, Allah and Eternity: Mosques, Madrasas and Tombs, in Geroge Michell, op cit, p. 34
[15] Ibid 47-48
[16] http://www.alamy.com/stock-photo-one-of-the-ornately-carved-18th-century-stone-mausoleums-babi-dynasty-85056401.html
[17] Mahabat Khan II was just 14 years when he acceded. While administration undertaken by a council, his mother, Maijja Bibi had an influential role in his life and state matters.

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of Junagadh and killed and thus martyrs.[18] James Dickie states that cemeteries expand as a process of organic growth around a focus of grace, *Baraka,*[19] the focus largely being the tomb of a saint.[20] The Babi cemetery in proximity to the tombs of the Bara Saiyads and the Jama Masjid suggest a conscious concern to draw upon divinity or divine grace integral to those structures. This has a parallel in the numerous important structures

Possibly the most elaborate of these structures is the maqbara built over the grave of Nawab Mahabat Khan II 1851- 82. Its architecture is a combination of Indo-Islamic and European influences pronounced in the French windows and gothic columns, common feature of late 19th century architecture in India. The medium used is stone and marble. The structure displays a somewhat un-aesthetic exuberance in its profuse domes, arches and highly ornate embellishment. James Fergusson's view on the stylistic inadequacies which compromise on symmetry and aesthetics on the mausoleum is insightful:

> "*There is a cemetery in Junagurh, in Gujarat, where there exist a group of tombs, all erected within the last century, some within the last forty or fifty years, which exhibit.....the forms toward which the style was tending. This style is not without a certain amount of elegance in its detail. The tracery of the windows is frequently fascinating from its beauty..... but.....every detail would be more appropriate for woodwork....than for a building in stone. The domes especially can hardly be traced back to their grand and solemn form as used by Pathan (i.e. sultanate) architects. The pinnacles are fanciful and the brackets designed more for ornament than work. It is a style, in fact, broken loose from the true principles of constructive design, and when this is the case, no amount of ornament, however elegant, it may be, will redeem the want of propriety it inevitably exhibits"*[21]

It is interesting that this analysis of Fergusson's was for the tomb of Maija Sahiba as is indicated in the image of this tomb in his book which was built in 1856 by an anonymous Salat or mason in 1856, way before the tombs of Mahabat Khan and his Vazir, Baha-ud-din Hasain which perhaps were more fit for his comment.[22]

Architecture that was practiced in medieval India has been classed as Indo- Islamic. This evolved very gradually with stylistic innovations, adaptations and fusion of Hindu and Islamic building traditions. The culmination point in this process of evolution is best illustrated in the Taj Mahal, an architectural marvel which fused extravagance, aesthetics, symmetry and style in complete harmony.

During transition of the late eighteenth and nineteenth century, architecture underwent significant changes. On the one hand was the rich medieval legacy of Indo-Islamic architecture, on the other was the growing influence of the European art and architecture. While rulers of successor states were conscious of the power of architecture in articulating their identity, they display lesser concern for eclecticism and essentials of architectural principles. Stylistic aspects were often a matter of emulation rather than an attempt at integrating architectural essentials in spirit and structural designing. Possibly logistics, naivety, access to skilled expertise and resources may have been constraints.
In his prediction on the impact European contact on architecture in India, Fergusson did opine that any local development would swiftly be overtaken by "the fatal imitation of a foreign style."[23]

This is dimension is illustrated in the tomb of Nawab Mahabat Khan II, built in 1878–92. Although it retains the general conception of an Indo-Islamic *maqbara*, many of the details, especially the form of the arches and the decorative carving, reveal the influence of the Gothic. The tomb was built by the *mìr 'imàrat* (the Nawab's architecture department), which was then under the supervision of Shaykh Mahmud Hafizuddin.[24] Further though the building exudes exuberance and opulence it seems lacking in form, aesthetics and symmetry which interestingly one notices in the palaces and other public buildings.

Interestingly, these inadequacies are less relevant for the other public buildings and palaces that were built around the same period. Giles Tilloston notes that many of the public buildings had an overwhelming European influence, indicating a desire to emulate the cultural standards and pluralism of the dominant imperial power and neighbour which left however them little impressed as is reflected in the comment of the archaeologist James Burgess, who visited Junagadh in 1874:

> *"Public Works Officers and Italian workmen are doing their best to kill native art, and in the larger and wealthier towns of Gujarat with fatal effect, by erecting palaces for the chiefs in a foreign style, badly imitated and unsuited to the climate or the age: and this example is rapidly being copied in less prominent places by native workmen".*[25]

The maqbara of Wazir Bahaduddinbhai Hasainbhai [26], one of the chief nobles in the Court of Nawab Mahabat Khan II of Junagadh is another classic example architectural

[18] Anjali Desai ed., India Guide Gujarat, India Guide Publications, 2007, P. 257
[19] In Islam Barakah or Baraka, means the flow of blessing and divine grace that emanates from gods and flows through that and those closest to God.
[20] Ibid. p. 46
[21] James Fergusson, History of Indian and Eastern Architecture, Vol. II, New York, 1891, pp. 221-222
[22] Giles Tillotson, Architecture and Identity in Indian States, in Islamic Art in the 19th Century: Tradition, Innovation and Eclecticism, ed. By Doris Behrens- Absoueif and Stephen Vernoit, Brill, Leiden, 2005, p. 388
[23] Ibid, p. 389
[24] Ibid, p. 389
[25] James Burgess, *Report on the Antiquities of Kathiawad and Kachh*, 1874-75, London, 1876, p. 176.
[26] Shaikh Bah-ud-din Hasain was a resident of junagadh and father of Laddi Bibi who was married to Mahabat Khan II. Though she died in 1864 her son Bahadur Khan was recognised as the heir by the Government of India. Bahauddin grew in prominence becoming the state Vazir. The Maqbara was constructed by Sheikh Bah-ud-din with his own funds during 1891-1896.Watson, P. 58

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emulation, inadequacies and pomposity, though less opulent than the mausoleum of Mahabat Khan. The construction of the Maqbara started in 1878 and finished in 1892. The structure is a combination of Indo-Islamic and Gothic architecture- onion domes, arches, columns, elaborate carvings on the buildings inner and outer facades, French windows and shining silver doorways.

A unique feature of this structure are four tall minarets which surround the square platform. Interestingly, on the adjacent mosque too, are similar minarets encircled from top to bottom with winding spiral staircases. These minarets have external staircase that spiral in opposite directions to maintain symmetry. A closer look at the structure draws a faint recall of the magnificent Taj Mahal with its square platform, bulbous domes and four minarets. Though the apparent layout has traces of resemblance to the Taj Mahal, maybe was inspired by the same, it comes across as a crude replica in view of its inadequacy in terms of architectural aesthetics, harmonious fusion of Indo Islamic and European traditions.

In conclusion it may be apt to state that the Babi mausloea was an articulation of the distinct Islamic orientation of the lineage. Despite their conscious concern to maintain an identity with the architectural essentials of the Maqbaras, the structures constructed lacked these essentials in spirit. European influences though inevitable, failed to fuse harmoniously with the Indo-Islamic, rendering the buildings especially, the maqbaras of Mahabat Khan and his vazir Bahauddiin Hasain somewhat asymmetrical and un-aesthetically opulent. The profusion of small and large domes, minarets, ornate floral embellishment as a facade is an apt illustration of a conscious concern towards articulating the identity of the Junagadh state and making a statement. This is in contrast to the secular buildings, the palace, durbar hall which bear strong European influences with lesser anomalies.[27]

[27]https://www.bl.uk/catalogues/indiaofficeselect/PhotoShowDescs.asp?CollID=31
http://www.junagadhstate.com/books/picturehistory-junagadhstate.pdf

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