



Medieval Archeology Of Jajpur, Odisha: An Exploration Of Indo -Islamic Monuments

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Abstract: Jajpur, a historically significant region in Odisha, holds a rich archaeological heritage that reflects the cultural and architectural synthesis of various dynastic influences. While primarily known for its Hindu and Buddhist antiquities, the medieval period saw the emergence of Indo-Islamic architectural traditions, shaped by the region's evolving political and social landscape. This study explores the medieval archaeology of Jajpur, focusing on the Indo-Islamic monuments that stand as testaments to cultural integration and artistic exchange. By examining mosques, tombs, and other structures, this research highlights their architectural features, construction techniques, and historical significance. The study also delves into the role of Sufi saints and the gradual spread of Islamic influences, emphasizing the coexistence of diverse traditions. Through an analysis of material culture, inscriptions, and historical records, this research aims to provide a comprehensive understanding of Jajpur's Indo-Islamic heritage and its broader implications for medieval Odisha's socio-religious landscape.

Index Terms - Indo-Islamic, Monument, Archaeology, Jajpur, Architecture.

I. Introduction

Odisha, renowned for its rich cultural heritage and architectural marvels, underwent a significant transformation with the arrival of Islamic influences. While the passage of time may have left only faint traces of this historical transition, archaeological investigations serve as invaluable windows into the region's past. The advent of Muslim communities and their settlement in Odisha marked the beginning of a new chapter, profoundly impacting various facets of society including art, architecture, religion, culture, language, literature, culinary traditions and lifestyle. This cultural assimilation resulted in a vibrant fusion of diverse elements, shaping the unique identity of Odisha's history.

The medieval period in Odisha was a remarkable era characterized by the confluence of diverse cultures, religious traditions, and architectural innovations. This period saw the rise and decline of powerful empires, the interaction of various communities, and the flourishing of art and architecture. Among the many historically significant regions of Odisha, Jajpur stands out as a crucial center of cultural and political importance.

Located in eastern India, Jajpur has a rich historical legacy rooted in antiquity. Its strategic position, nestled between the fertile plains of the Mahanadi delta and the Bay of Bengal coast, contributed to its emergence as a hub for trade, commerce, and cultural exchange. This prosperity played a pivotal role in Jajpur's selection as the capital during the Somavamsi dynasty (Panigrahi, 1986, p. 104). Within this dynamic historical landscape, Islamic influences also left a lasting impact, particularly through monumental architectural contributions that became an integral part of the region's heritage.

This study delves into the Islamic monuments that adorn the historical landscape of Jajpur, offering an in-depth exploration of medieval archaeology. It seeks to uncover the historical narratives embedded within these structures while shedding light on the socio-cultural dynamics that shaped this region during the medieval period. The primary objective of this research is to analyze how diverse architectural traditions, philosophical influences, and socio-economic factors converged to give rise to these monuments. Each structure, whether a

grand mosque or an intricately designed tomb, stands as a testament to the ingenuity of its builders and the enduring legacy of the traditions they sought to preserve.

Archaeology plays a crucial role in reconstructing history, providing tangible evidence that aids in understanding past civilizations. A lesser-explored aspect of Odisha's history is the presence of Indo-Islamic religious monuments, particularly in Jajpur, the former capital of the region. The arrival of Muslim rulers in Odisha in 1568 CE (Pradhan, 2012, p. 91) marked a significant turning point, leaving a lasting imprint on its historical trajectory. The invasion of Kalapahad (Pradhan, 2012, p. 91) is frequently cited as a pivotal event that facilitated the entry of Muslims into Odisha. However, the broader and more enduring impact resulted from the establishment of Muslim administration and the efforts of missionaries, which brought significant transformations, shaping the cultural fabric, traditions, and way of life of the local populace. This period in history encapsulates both narratives of dominance and resistance, yet archaeological evidence and official records reveal a more nuanced picture. Beyond military conflicts, this era witnessed remarkable developments in art and architecture, cultural integration, religious interactions, administrative structures, and public participation. The monuments of Jajpur thus serve as invaluable sources for understanding the complex interplay of artistic expression, cultural synthesis, and historical continuity in medieval Odisha.

The dynastic history of Odisha records the Islamic occupation of the region in 1568. However, the social history of Odisha presents a different perspective, emphasizing the deep-rooted tradition of religious tolerance among the common people, independent of administrative or military influences. Oral narratives suggests that Sufi saints had already established a presence in Odisha long before the advent of Muslim rule. While there is no definitive documentation regarding their initial arrival, the construction of their tombs took place after the establishment of Muslim administration. Nevertheless, the presence of these saints and the dissemination of their spiritual knowledge, which resonated with the local populace without the support of organized missionary activities, underscore their profound influence on Odishan society.

II. Historical Evolution of Jajpur: A Continuum of Political and Cultural Significance

Jajpur, an ancient city of Odisha, has been known by various names across different historical periods, reflecting its evolving political and religious significance. In antiquity, it was revered as Viraja Kshetra, named after its presiding deity (Patel, 2005, p. 52). During the Bhaumakara dynasty, it was referred to as Guhadewa Pataka or Guheswarapataka, indicative of its continued prominence in regional governance and spiritual traditions (Pradhan, 2012, p. 34). Before the Somavamsi dynasty assumed control, the city was known as Vinitapura, a name that was later changed to Jajatinagara by King Yayati I, under whom it flourished as a major political and administrative center (Panigrahi, 1986, p. 104). With the advent of Mughal rule, Jajpur was recorded in contemporary chronicles as Jajnagar, underscoring its continued importance in the region's governance (Acharya, 1945, pp. 129-139).

The city is widely believed to have derived its name from King Yayati I (Patel, 2005, p. 52) and served as the capital of Odisha for nearly three centuries. During this period, Jajpur played a pivotal role in shaping the socio-cultural and political landscape of the region, serving as a hub of administration, trade, and religious activities. However, its political significance waned when Anangabhimha Deva III of the Ganga dynasty relocated the capital from Kalinganagara to Cuttack (Kataka). This strategic move, driven by geopolitical and military considerations, marked a new era in Odisha's governance. With the establishment of Cuttack as the new seat of power, Jajpur gradually lost its administrative dominance but retained its distinct identity in the socio-religious fabric of Odisha. Despite this transition, early Muslim chroniclers continued to refer to Odisha as Yajanagar, reflecting the historical continuity of the region's political identity (Acharya, 1945, p. 130). The medieval historian Shams Siraj Afif, in his *Tarikh-i-Firoz Shahi*, documented that Cuttack was identified as Baranasi, highlighting its strategic importance. He further noted that every ruler who ascended the throne of Yajanagar contributed to the expansion of Barabati Fort, leading to its transformation into a formidable military stronghold (Biswal, 2005, p. 61). Thus, Jajpur, once a thriving political center, transitioned into a cultural and religious stronghold, preserving its historical legacy despite the shifting dynamics of political power in Odisha.

Ancient Name	Period	Associated Rulers/Dynasties	Remarks
Viraja Kshetra	Ancient Period	Local Hindu rulers, Brahminical influence	Named after Goddess Viraja, a prominent Shakti Peetha
Guhadeva Pataka or Guheswarapataka	6th–7th century CE	Bhaumakara Dynasty	Found in inscriptions, indicating Buddhist influence
Jajatinagara	9th–10th century CE	Somavanshi Dynasty (Jajati Keshari)	Named after King Jajati Keshari, who made it his capital
Jajnagar	13th–16th century CE	Ganga Dynasty, Gajapati rulers, Mughals	Referred to in Muslim chronicles like Tabaqat-i-Nasiri and Tarikh-i-Firuz Shahi
Jajpur	Modern Era	British and post-Independence Odisha	Official name in present-day Odisha

Fig: 1
Different names of Jajpur

In 1568 CE, Kalapahad, the assistant army general under Sulaiman Khan Karrani, led a decisive invasion against Mukundadeva, the last independent Hindu king of Odisha (Pradhan, 2012, p. 91). In an attempt to resist the Muslim forces, Mukundadeva appointed Raghubhanja Chhotaraya to confront the invaders, but Raghubhanja's betrayal resulted in the loss of Cuttack and forced the king to surrender to the Bengal army. During this turbulent period, Ramachandra Bhanja, the commandant of Sarangagarh fort (Baranga), rebelled against Mukundadeva. The king was ultimately killed at Gohiratikara, near Jajpur, due to the treachery of two generals, Sikhi and Manai, further exacerbating his defeat (Dash, 2011, p. 84). Ramachandra Bhanja, who proclaimed himself the ruler of Odisha, played a significant role in Mukundadeva's assassination. In the Madalapanji, he is mentioned under both the names "Ramachandra Bhanja" and "Ramachandradeva," with the latter being more likely (Panigrahi, 1995, p. 243). The period also saw the destruction of key Hindu religious icons, including the Mahisamardini image, revered as Goddess Viraja, which was broken into two pieces. These actions were part of a broader campaign to suppress Hindu religious practices and solidify Islamic dominance in the region.

The history of Jajpur, rich in political and cultural evolution, reflects its significant role in key historical events. Over time, the region has undergone profound transformations, shaped by dynastic changes and foreign invasions. Its resilience and influence have been central to the broader history of Odisha.

Oral traditions suggest that the arrival of Sufi saints in the region predates the Islamic political occupation of Odisha, marking an earlier phase of spiritual influence. The earliest known Indo-Islamic monuments in Jajpur were constructed in 1686-87 i.e. Abu Nasar Masjid (Jena, 2005, p. 293), during the reign of Aurangzeb, who played a significant role in initiating missionary activities across various parts of India. This establishment in Jajpur laid the foundation for a transformative devotional ethos among the local populace, fostering belief in the Sufi saints. The presence of these saints became a source of spiritual guidance, and their influence grew, leading to the construction of dargahs dedicated to them. Over time, these dargahs were not only promoted by local officials but also became focal points for expanding missionary efforts, further embedding Islamic practices within the cultural and social fabric of the region. This process facilitated the gradual spread of Sufi teachings, profoundly shaping the religious landscape of Jajpur and its surrounding areas.

An Exploration of Indo-Islamic Monuments at Jajpur

Jajpur, a town of historical prominence in Odisha, is widely recognized for its deep cultural and religious heritage. While it is traditionally associated with Hinduism, particularly as a significant center of Shaktism and Kalingan temple architecture, Jajpur also preserves a lesser-explored legacy of Indo-Islamic monuments. Constructed during various phases of the medieval period, these structures exemplify a confluence of architectural traditions, shaped by sustained interactions between Islamic and indigenous artistic influences.

The Indo-Islamic monuments of Jajpur, including mosques, tombs, and other architectural remnants, provide valuable insights into the historical presence of Muslim rulers, traders, and settlers in the region. These structures stand as tangible evidence of the cultural synthesis that occurred over centuries, integrating Persian, Mughal, and Odishan architectural elements. Analyzing these monuments not only enhances our understanding of the architectural evolution of the region but also offers a broader perspective on the socio-political and economic forces that influenced their construction and significance.

3.1 Abu Nassar Masjid

The Abu Nasar Masjid, also known as the Sahi Masjid, stands as a significant Indo-Islamic architectural monument on the banks of the Baitarani River in Jajpur. This mosque was commissioned by Abu Nasar Khan, who held the position of deputy Subedar of Odisha during the year 1098 Hijri, corresponding to 1686–87 CE (Jena, 2005, p. 293). His lineage traces back to the influential Mughal noble Shaista Khan, who served as the Subedar of Odisha from 1676, playing a crucial role in the administration of the region (Mallik, et.al., 2023, p. 161).

During the reign of Emperor Aurangzeb, Prince Mohammad Azam was appointed as the Subedar of Odisha in 1678 (Mallik, et. al., 2023, p. 161). However, as he was reluctant to assume the position in person, the role of Deputy Subedar was entrusted to Abu Nasar Khan. In 1686 CE, Abu Nasar Khan, referred to as a "nawab" in the inscription on the mosque's doorway, constructed a mosque in Jajpur. This contradicts the claims made by both Stirling and Hunter, who erroneously attributed the mosque's construction to Mohammad Taqi Khan (Sahu, 1956, p. 289). According to the Madalapanji, the temple chronicle of the Jagannath Temple, Abu Nasar Khan advanced towards Pipili with the intent of demolishing the sacred shrine at Puri. However, as he reached Pipili in the month of Chaitra, a sudden and intense thunderstorm occurred. This unexpected natural phenomenon was perceived as an ominous sign, compelling Abu Nasar Khan to abandon his mission. Instead of proceeding further, he retreated to Cuttack, where he ultimately forged an alliance with the Raja of Khurda. (Mohiuddin, 2000, p. 69)

The *pistaq* of the monument features five inscriptions on both the front and back, adorned with Quranic verses and historical details about the mosque. These inscriptions serve not only as records but also as decorative elements enhancing the mosque's aesthetic appeal. Among the inscriptions on the front, one contains a two-line Persian verse attributing the mosque's construction to Zaman Abu Nasar Khan in AH 1098 (1687–88 CE). The date is elegantly embedded within a chronogram, and the text is beautifully rendered in the refined *Nastaliq* script. However, literary sources suggest that the mosque was commissioned by Mohammad Taqi Khan, indicating some historical ambiguity regarding its patronage.

Mohammad Taqi Khan, however, was responsible for the construction of another mosque and a palace in Jajpur. It is recorded that Gouranga Ray, an Amlidar under the Marathas, dismantled parts of Taqi Khan's palace and mosque, repurposing the stones to build his own residence and the Govindji Temple at Bhaga Mahadev (Banerji, 1871, p. 2). Presently, Jajpur town has only one mosque, known as the Abu Nasar Khan Masjid (Seth, Tapaswinee, 2016, pp. 300–301).



Fig: 2
Abu Nasar Masjid

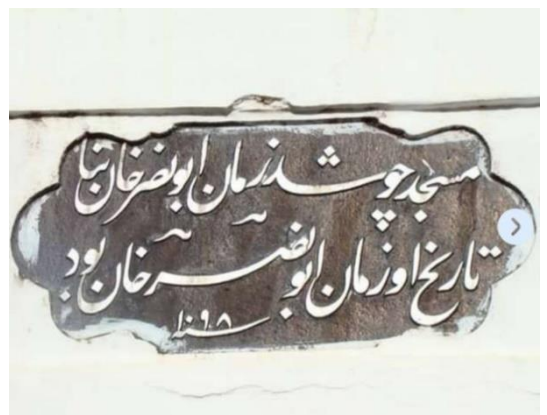


Fig:3
Inscription at Abu Nasar Masjid

The establishment of the Abu Nasar Masjid reflects not only the political dynamics of Mughal rule in Odisha but also the architectural and cultural influences that shaped the region during this period. The mosque stands as a testament to the patronage of Mughal officials who contributed to the urban and religious landscape of Jajpur, blending Persian, Mughal, and local Odishan elements in its design.

The interior of the mosque features elegantly curved ceilings within its domes, contributing to its overall aesthetic appeal. On the eastern facade of the mosque, there are three striking *pistaq*, or large gateways, that stand out as significant architectural elements. These *pistaq* are adorned with intricate calligraphy, skillfully carved with verses from the Persian Quran, along with informative inscriptions regarding the mosque itself. The original structure features three prominent ogee arches adorned with intricate floral jali work. The walls on either side of the arches are decorated with a geometric square pattern. The *pishtaq* is embellished with arch-like motifs, enhancing its architectural elegance. Between the three ogee arches stand two substantial pillars, each intricately carved with a flower vase design. The vase is adorned with lotus petals covering its upper section, while the walls of the pillars feature additional geometric patterns. The entrance within the arch is fitted with a wooden door, adding to the structure's historic charm.

Unfortunately, much of this remarkable detailing is obscured from view due to newer constructions that have been erected in front of the mosque, limiting the appreciation of its original grandeur. To the right of the mosque's entrance, there is a pavilion featuring a dome and four corner turrets or *guldasta*, adding to the monument's complexity. The mosque itself boasts three domes, accompanied by four turrets, contributing to its imposing silhouette. The drum of the dome is adorned with a diamond-shaped pattern featuring a subtle curved touch. The dome itself is embellished with lotus petals and is crowned with a finely crafted finial, enhancing its architectural elegance. In addition, the monument includes two octagonal minarets, each designed in a style that incorporates small cupola and domelike structure. These features combine to create a harmonious architectural ensemble, showcasing the mosque's historical significance and the artistry of its builders.

The Abu Nasar Masjid stands as a significant testament to Mughal architectural and political influence in Odisha. Its intricate design, blending Persian, Mughal, and local Odishan elements, reflects the region's rich cultural heritage. Despite modern obstructions, the mosque's elegant arches, domes, and ornate details continue to highlight its historical and artistic importance in Jajpur's urban and religious landscape.

3.2 Tahakat-I-Sulaiman Dargah

The Tahakat-i-Sulaiman Dargah was constructed during the reign of Nawab Sujauddin Muhammad Khan in honor of the revered saint Hazrat Suleiman, who is believed to have visited the summit of Altigiri/Alamgiri Hill near Balichandrapur (Jena, 2005, p. 294). Situated atop Alamgiri Hill at an elevation of 2,500 feet in Mouza Charinangal, Jajpur (Sahu, 1997, p. 120), the dargah is a modest yet significant structure. It consists of a single-room shrine, enclosed within a domed roof. In front of the shrine lies a platform, while a thin boundary wall with a northern gateway encircles the complex, designed to accommodate darvishes and pilgrims, further enhances the site's spiritual and functional significance. To the south of the building, a sacred tank adds to the sanctity of the location (Seth, 2016, p. 302).



Figure: 4
Tahakat-I-Sulaiman Dargah

According to Tapaswinee Seth, a Persian inscription on a tablet within the dargah attributes its construction to Sujauddin Muhammad Khan. The origins of the dargah are linked to a compelling legend. It is believed that Hazrat Suleiman Sahib, a revered saint, initially arrived in the region and settled at Lalitagiri Hills before moving to his final meditative retreat atop Alamgiri Hill. Immersed in prayer and spiritual contemplation within the dense forest, his presence remained largely unnoticed until a passing Muslim army commander, leading his troops through the area, spotted a flag fluttering on the hill. Upon investigating, the commander and his men encountered the saint and, in a moment of reverence, vowed to commemorate him should they emerge victorious in their impending battle. Following their triumph, the victorious army fulfilled their pledge by constructing the Tahakat-i-Sulaiman Dargah at the summit of the hill, enshrining the memory of Hazrat Suleiman Sahib and his spiritual legacy (Seth, 2016, p. 302).

Sri Mohan Jena, in his article on the Cultural Heritage of Jajpur, cites settlement records confirming that Shuja-ud-Din Muhammad Khan, Murshid Quli Khan-I, and Raja Jaunji Bhonsla collectively granted 16 batis of land for the maintenance of the Tahakat-i-Sulaiman Dargah (Jena, 2005, p. 294; Seth, 2016, p. 302). Of this endowment, the produce from four batis was specifically allocated for the cleaning and upkeep of the dargah, while the remainder was designated for various religious and charitable activities, including sirin (charitable feeding), fatiha (prayers for the deceased), sanja (ritual offerings), cheragh (lighting of lamps), the accommodation and care of travelers (musafirs), and the repair of the shrine. According to local tradition, the dargah's origin is linked to a revered saint, Suleiman Saheb, who first arrived in Alamgiri before settling at the present location, where he devoted himself to prayer and meditation in the dense forest. During a military campaign, a Muslim commander, while leading his troops through the region, encountered the site and noticed a flag fluttering atop a hill. Moved by the saint's presence, he vowed that if his army emerged victorious in battle, he would commemorate the holy Pir Saheb by establishing a lasting tribute. Following their triumph, this pledge was honored through the construction of the dargah. The settlement records further substantiate that the land was formally dedicated as a waqf, ensuring the long-term sustenance of the shrine and the continuation of its religious and social services. (Jena, 2005, p. 294; Seth, 2016, p. 302)

The Takht-i-Sulaiman stands as more than just a religious monument; it is a symbol of the spiritual heritage and the lasting cultural footprint of Islam in Odisha. The elevation of the dargah on Altigiri hill not only highlights its importance as a place of worship but also as a site of historical and architectural value, reflecting the region's deep-seated traditions of religious devotion and the confluence of local and Persian influences.

Tahakat -I-Sulaiman Dargah is a single dome building which is constructed like Indo Islamic dome design. It shaped like Half circle dome but it has also a cemetery from four sides with Mark of the corner line. It was pointed towards top with an installation of a small rod. It might be used for decoration during festival. The dome is based on a drum (Architectural term) which is associated on a single room. The inner side of the dome also curved accordingly. The center of the dome has venerated by the devotees. That was the foot of print and hand print of Hajrat Suleiman (Oral narrative). That was covered by Chadhar with a wooden based (Now a days the base is made of glass). That area which is believed to be the print of saint is surrounded by wooden balcony with decorative small wooden pillars. (Now a days new wooden structure has installed). The inner wall has eight Mihrab in local term is known as Thana used to keep as storage. The main entrance of the Dargah has lances Arch with floral curved feature of Indian. Both side of the arch has two small pillars pointed towards top. The wall above the arch has engraved with 3 dot shows like decorate that space. The right side of the arch has the calligraphy mentioned Muhammad and left side has the calligraphy design mentioned Allah. There are two mihrab like design decorated with Makka and Madina in two sides of the arch or front wall.

The shrine featured an open Wazu Khana or water tank situated to the left of the shrine, serving as a sacred site for devotees to perform ablution before entering the sanctuary. This revered space held profound importance in the religious observance of the worshippers. (This one is closed and locked because of some



Fig: 5
Urur Khana

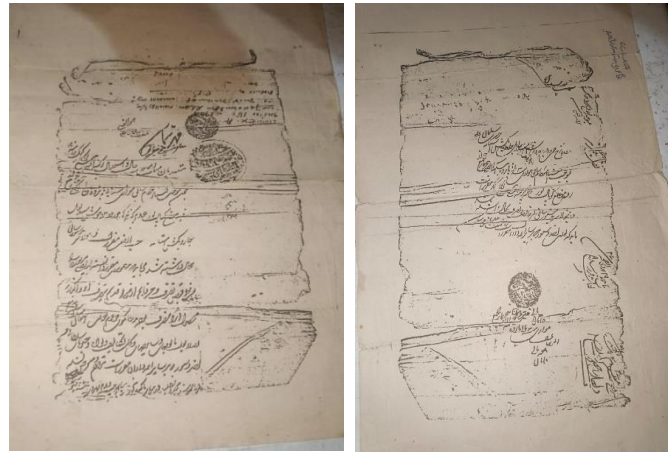
legendary). According to the legend, there was a tank near the shrine that was used for worship at the Dargah. It was considered sacred and held significance in the religious practices of the devotees. As the legend goes, a woman unaware of the sacredness of the tank or possibly out of ignorance, bathed in it, causing the water became green, then dry up instantly. Following this event, it is said that tragedy befell the woman, as her son died. (Oral narratives).

A pendal is associated with the left side of Dargah which was used for ritualistic purpose. It has one wall of the wall of pendal which is in opposite to the Dargah and four pedestal in the side of the Dargah has constructed to make a support to cover the pendal. (Now a days the pillar has constructed and cover the pendal with asbestos). The setting of the Dargah on a hill with stairs leading up to it adds to the site's significance and ambiance. The description of the stairs, starting from broken stones at the bottom and gradually becoming more refined towards the top, suggests a historical evolution reflecting the passage of time and the varying levels of attention given to maintenance and preservation. The fact that some of the stairs are now scattered due to neglect highlights the importance of conservation efforts to protect and restore these valuable historical features. Archaeological remains showcasing the original stairs provide valuable insight into the site's history and construction, offering a glimpse into the past that can be preserved and appreciated for future generations. Conservation efforts aimed at stabilizing and restoring the stairs, as well as ongoing maintenance to prevent further deterioration, are crucial for ensuring the integrity and authentic of the site. By conserving these original features, we can continue to honor and celebrate the cultural heritage of the Dargah and its surrounding environment.



Fig: 6
Seal of Mughal Official
(Discovered by Miss Rachana Das)

The archaeological remains and historical evidence depict the rich history of the monument and its surroundings. This monument was constructed during the time of Aurangzeb. A seal and some land property document has found from a native near Dargah named as Shaikh MD. Rashid Hossain. That seal has engraved as “Shaikh Fakir Muhammad Charmangal” and Persian prose text is engraved in Nastaliq characters. Date is not mentioned. Here Shaikh fakir Mohammad was a Mughal official who has settled down at the region of Charmangal and given Jagir land to the officials who were get engaged as the employee of the Dargah or engaged in any other officials who were get engaged as the employee of the Dargah or engaged in any other officials under Mughal suzerainty. (DECIPHERED BY MISS JEENAPRIYANKA JETHI, ASSISTANT PROFESSOR, DEPARTMENT OF HISTORY AND ARCHAEOLOGY, FAKIR MOHAN UNIVERSITY, ODISHA WITH SOME INPUTS OF DR. G.S. KHWAJA, FORMER DIRECTOR, ASI, EPIGRAPHICAL BRANCH, NAGPUR, MAHARASHTRA.) This is an Islamic tradition as the officers belonged region gradually adopted with them as their Surname. This small hill which forms a part of the Asia range and diamond triangle and the house this Dargah in all probability was named Alamgiri hill after the name of Alamgiri Aurangzeb.



Fg:7
Land Document has a seal of Mughal Administrator

Other Land document has the Seal of an official of Mughal Emperor Aurangzeb which has mentioned “Abu Nassar Zameer Khan Banda e Alamgiri Badshah Ghazi”. Translated as, the official name is Abu Nassar Khan Zameer Khan who was an official of Aurangzeb. But the date is not readable on the seal.

In Odisha, which had a rich cultural heritage and a distinct administrative structure, the Mughal occupation under Aurangzeb brought changes that influenced socio-cultural and administrative history. One significant impact was the imposition of the Mughal administrative practices and systems, which replaced or overlaid existing local structures. This led to shifts in governance and taxation that affected the socio-economic fabric of the region. Overall, Aurangzeb’s rule left a lasting impact on Odisha, shaping its socio-cultural dynamics and administrative structures in ways that persisted long after his reign ended.

3.3 Sayad Ali Bhukari Dargah

According to a compelling legend, also discussed by historians such as Mohan Jena and Mohammad Yamin, Sayyed Ali Bukhari played a significant role in the campaign led by the Afghan general Kalapahar during the battle of Gohiritikri, as they advanced to capture the Barabati Fort in Odisha. As the conflict raged and victory seemed imminent, tragedy struck—Sayyed Ali Bukhari was fatally wounded, his head severed by enemy forces. However, the story takes an extraordinary turn. In a display of unwavering spirit, his headless body remained mounted on horseback, seemingly driven by an unseen force. The loyal steed carried its fallen master across vast distances, unwavering in its course, until it finally reached Jajpur. There, with deep reverence, Sayyed Ali Bukhari was laid to rest, and a tomb was erected in his honor, preserving his memory for generations to come.

This tomb, standing to this day, has become a site of pilgrimage, where visitors pay their respects to a figure who transcends mere history, embodying the spirit of resilience and devotion. The loyal horse, who played such an extraordinary role in the saint's final journey, was also honored with a grave beside its master under a Neem tree, symbolizing the deep bond between the saint and his steadfast companion. But the tale of Sayyed Ali Bukhari's sacrifice does not solely belong to Jajpur. It is said that near the base of the Barabati Fort in Cuttack, another tomb was constructed on the spot where his severed head was believed to have fallen. This site too became sacred, marking the very ground where the last physical connection to the saint was severed but spiritually remained ever-present (Mohiuddin, 2000, p.71). The dual tombs of Sayyed Ali Bukhari—one in Jajpur, marking his final resting place, and the other in Cuttack, commemorating the site of his decapitation—create a symbolic link between the two locations. They stand as silent witnesses to a time when battles were fought not only on the physical plane but also in the realms of belief, devotion, and loyalty. These sites continue to be revered today, embodying the enduring legacy of a saint whose story has become a vital part of Odisha's cultural and religious heritage.



Fig.: 8
Epigraphical Stone at Sayed Ali Bukhari
Inscription

An inscription found on the tombstone of this memorial at Cuttack reads: "This Asthana of Sayyed Ali Bukhari, who was killed alongside his companion Diler Khan in the year 1170 Amli (1764 A.D.), was built by Wali Baig Khan, a merchant." The inscription serves not only as a tribute to the saint's ultimate sacrifice but also as a testament to the historical narrative that intertwines valor with faith. It underscores the role of individuals like Wali Baig Khan, who felt compelled to immortalize the legacy of these warriors through the construction of a memorial (Mahatab, 1960, p.399), ensuring that their deeds would not be forgotten by future generations. Despite efforts to locate it, no physical or digital copy of this inscription has been found. This absence leaves a gap in the historical record, making it difficult to verify the details that the inscription is said to have contained.

An inscription discovered within the mosque's premises is a two-line Persian epigraph executed in relief. This inscription indicates that Wali Beg Khan constructed a compound wall around what is believed to be the auspicious threshold of Saint Bukhari. Additionally, he established a garden adorned with flowering trees, reflecting his pure intentions and sincere devotion. Unfortunately, the inscription does not specify a date, but it is written in *Nasaliq* script, a distinctive style of Persian calligraphy. Based on paleographical analysis, it can be tentatively dated to the 18th or 19th century CE. This inscription not only highlights Wali Beg Khan's dedication to honoring the saint but also serves as an important artifact that provides insights into the architectural and cultural practices of the time.



Fig.: 9
Nephew's Tomb



Fig.: 10
Horse's Tomb

(DECIPHERED BY MISS JEENAPRIYANKA JETHI, ASSISTANT PROFESSOR, DEPARTMENT OF HISTORY AND ARCHAEOLOGY, FAKIR MOHAN UNIVERSITY, ODISHA WITH SOME INPUTS OF DR. G.S. KHWAJA, FORMER DIRECTOR, ASI, EPIGRAPHICAL BRANCH, NAGPUR, MAHARASHTRA.)

The tomb originally existed as a simple grave without any accompanying structure. It was later enclosed within a boundary, though this addition was a more recent construction. In its earlier form, the tomb was surrounded by large stones placed on the ground, but these have been entirely displaced due to subsequent renovations. At the right corner of the main tomb lies the grave of Bukhari Baba's nephew, which occupies a small, enclosed space. This enclosure features intricate *jali* work adorned with floral vine motifs, indicating that it was also a later addition. In front of Bukhari Baba's tomb, the grave of his horse is situated in an open area beneath a neem tree. The three tombs those of Bukhari Baba, his nephew, and his horse are deeply revered by the local community. Devotees offer incense sticks and food as acts of devotion, reflecting the enduring bond between Baba and his nephew. This practice also highlights the cultural and spiritual traditions of the people of Odisha, where nature worship has been an integral part of religious life. The veneration of both the neem tree and the horse for generations underscores this deeply rooted belief system.

According to legend, a Brahmin pandit once experienced great blessings through the worship of Bukhari Baba. As a result, he began venerating Baba with deep devotion, offering chadar during the annual Urs celebration. He also took on the responsibility of maintaining the dargah, ensuring its cleanliness every year during the festival. Numerous such legends surround Bukhari Baba, reinforcing his spiritual significance. His shrine transcends religious boundaries, attracting both Hindus and Muslims, who worship him with equal reverence and sincerity.

The Takhat-i-Sulaiman Dargah is an important historical and cultural site in Odisha, commemorating the revered saint Hazarat Suleiman. Built by Nawab Sujauddin Muhammad Khan, it reflects the rich Indo-Islamic heritage of the region. The inscription by Wali Beg Khan highlights his dedication to honoring the saint and enhancing the site's sanctity. The legend of Sayyed Ali Bhukari, who journeyed from battle to his final resting place, adds to the Dargah's significance. Today, it remains a symbol of spiritual devotion and cultural confluence in Odisha's history.

During the time of Urs (death anniversary) ceremony of saint every year thousands of people throng at Jajpur to pay tribute to the saint at his shrine. Recital of Qawwali, offering of cheddar and related ritual were performed in the Dargah by the devotees. The shrine of the saint brought the Hindu and Muslim closer by which a cultural synthesis emerged between Hindu -Muslim in Odisha. (Yamin Mohammad, 2011.P-56).

III Methodology

This study employs a multidisciplinary research design, combining historical, epigraphic, architectural, and anthropological approaches to explore cultural synthesis in medieval Jajpur. The methodology is organized into the following components:

3.1. Review of Secondary Literature

A critical review of secondary sources formed the conceptual foundation of the study. Historical texts, scholarly articles, and previous research on medieval Odisha and Mughal administration were analyzed to contextualize the region's political history and cultural developments. This literature helped trace the trajectory of cultural interaction between indigenous Hindu traditions and Islamic governance in Jajpur.

3.2. Primary Data Collection and Field Investigation

Extensive fieldwork was conducted at key heritage sites, including the Jama Masjid, Takhat-i-Sulaiman, and the dargah of Sayyid Ali Bukhari. Primary materials such as land-grant documents, a Mughal-period seal, and a stone epigraph were located, photographed, and examined. These artefacts provided direct evidence of Mughal administrative presence and religious patronage in the region. The site visits also enabled close observation of architectural features and spatial planning.

3.3. Epigraphic and Scholarly Consultations

The analysis of inscriptions and seals was undertaken with the guidance of Dr. G.S. Khwaja, an eminent epigraphist, whose expertise ensured accurate interpretation of Indo-Persian texts and their historical significance. Additionally, academic insights were gathered from Dr. Prabhat Mallik, former Reader in History, whose research on Odisha's Islamic heritage helped interpret the broader cultural implications of these sites.

3.4. Oral Histories and Local Narratives

Oral accounts were collected from local residents, custodians of religious shrines, and elderly members of the community. These narratives shed light on the legends, rituals, and popular beliefs associated with the monuments. Stories such as those explaining the disuse of the water tank at Takhat-i-Sulaiman illustrate how local memory continues to shape perceptions of the past and provides insight into lived religious practices that transcend textual history.

3.5. Architectural and Ritual Analysis

Architectural and spatial analysis was conducted to study the placement and design of mosques and dargahs in relation to the Baitarani River and surrounding Hindu sacred geography. This was complemented by a comparative study of syncretic religious rituals, such as the offering of food at dargahs and the veneration of Sayyid Ali Bukhari's horse. These practices reveal the blending of Islamic and Hindu traditions and highlight how sacred spaces functioned as shared cultural environments.

This integrated methodology enabled a nuanced and layered understanding of cultural accommodation, religious interaction, and the material legacy of Mughal rule in the Jajpur region.

IV FINDINGS AND CONCLUSION

The region of Jajpur in Odisha has held a position of historical and cultural prominence from the earliest periods of recorded history. Revered as a sacred and culturally enriched land in ancient times, it continued to maintain its significance through successive historical phases. During the medieval period, the area came under Muslim rule, particularly under the Mughals, while the local population remained predominantly Hindu. This socio-political configuration laid the groundwork for a dynamic process of cultural assimilation, rather than parallel dual authority, which became visible in various dimensions of local life—art, architecture, language, literature, food habits, and lifestyle.

A prominent emblem of Mughal authority and the strategic importance of Jajpur is the Jama Masjid, constructed under the command of Emperor Aurangzeb. Its location on the banks of the Baitarani River is not merely symbolic but functional, integrating the Islamic requirement for Wuzu (ritual ablution) with the Indian tradition of ritual purification through sacred water bodies. This blending of religious architectural norms reveals the adaptive sensibility of Islamic architecture within the cultural geography of Jajpur.

Further reinforcing the Mughal presence are epigraphic records, seals, and land documents found in association with key Islamic structures such as the Takhat-i-Sulaiman and the epigraphical stone of Sayyid Ali Bukhari, a respected Sufi saint. These materials provide critical evidence of the administrative integration of the region within the broader framework of Mughal governance, highlighting both the political and spiritual networks established during their rule.

The Takhat-i-Sulaiman complex includes a now-defunct water tank, which historically would have served ritual and practical functions in alignment with both Islamic and Indian traditions. Although local legends currently discourage its use, its existence affirms the centrality of water architecture in religious and communal spaces.

The cultural synthesis fostered during this period is also evident in religious practices. The offering of food at dargahs (Sufi shrines) and the worship of Sayyid Ali Bukhari's horse's tomb represent a remarkable convergence of Hindu devotional elements with Islamic spiritual traditions. These practices speak to a shared religio-cultural ethos that evolved over centuries, shaped by the lived experiences of a Hindu majority population under Muslim political stewardship.

Jajpur's medieval history is not merely a chapter of political change but a testament to deep-rooted cultural interaction and adaptation. The region's architectural monuments, inscriptions, and living traditions collectively demonstrate how religious plurality and administrative change gave rise to a distinctive syncretic culture, deeply embedded in both the material and spiritual life of its people. This synthesis continues to define the enduring legacy of Jajpur as a site of historical and cultural confluence.

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