

EVOLUTION OF TOMBS IN ISLAMIC ARCHITECTURE

Today tombs or memorials are rarely constructed but centuries earlier the rulers laid emphasis on constructing tombs. The tomb was an important concern for rulers, the Egyptian Pharaohs built Pyramids during their lifetimes and in India the Mughal kings inspite of constant warfare took time for building tombs during their rule

In Egypt the shape of the pyramid was a triangle, in Stonehenge the monument was set in a circular shape. In India the shape was a combination of the square and circle with the plan being square in shape and a hemispherical dome placed over it. The plan changed from square to octagonal to a combination of square and octagon as it may have been easier to construct the dome over an octagon than a square.

The tomb architecture of the Slave dynasty was part of a complex and indigenous system; in the Lodi and Mughal dynasties the scale of the tomb was monumental, set in landscaped gardens and had Persian influence. The Mughal rulers were powerful and wealthy giving importance to landscaping, with the monument being placed in the Char-bagh (or four gardens).

The tomb of Islamic rulers was generally lavishly decorated and had expensive materials like marble and sandstone clad over it. In spite of poor economic conditions in the Tughlaq period the practice of tomb building continued with the builders resorting to inexpensive materials like rubble covered with plaster.

Each of the tomb evolved blending features of the earlier tomb with new ideas. The tomb can be classified in two types the open and closed, the open consisting mostly of the octagonal type with pillared verandahs and the square tombs being closed type with the entrance in the form of a central archway.



Fig 1. Tomb of Iltutmish, 1235 AD

The tomb of the Iltutmish (fig. 1) built during the Slave Dynasty marks the beginning of the tomb architecture on which later tomb of Tughlaqs and Lodis developed. The tomb is situated at the North western corner of the Qutb Mosque. The exterior of the building is relatively plain with horizontal bands at intervals and a decorated central arch. The dome had collapsed due to inexperience of the Hindu builders to construct a tomb.

The basic concept of the Tomb of Iltutmish was the circular dome supported on the square cube, involving a phase of transition from the square, octagon, a sixteen sided polygon to finally a circle. The domes of Islamic monuments in India were supported by method of squinches. In the tomb of Iltutmish the squinch took the form of a half dome with the facing of an elaborately decorated arch. The tomb could also be a place for prayer with western side that included three mihrabs in the interior face, intricately carved with inscriptions.

The tomb of Ghiasuddin Tughlaq (fig. 2) was built on a fortress which stands within an artificial lake.

The tomb is placed diagonally and oriented towards the Mecca and is constructed of red sandstone with the slope of the wall at an angle of 75 degrees with the ground. The slope could have been made to imitate the nearby fort walls of Tughlaqabad. The finial at the apex of the marble dome resembles the kalasa and amala of a Hindu Temple.

The exterior is decorated with various elements like merlons, paneled niches and a central recessed arch with spearhead fringes. The doorway has a slight projection and

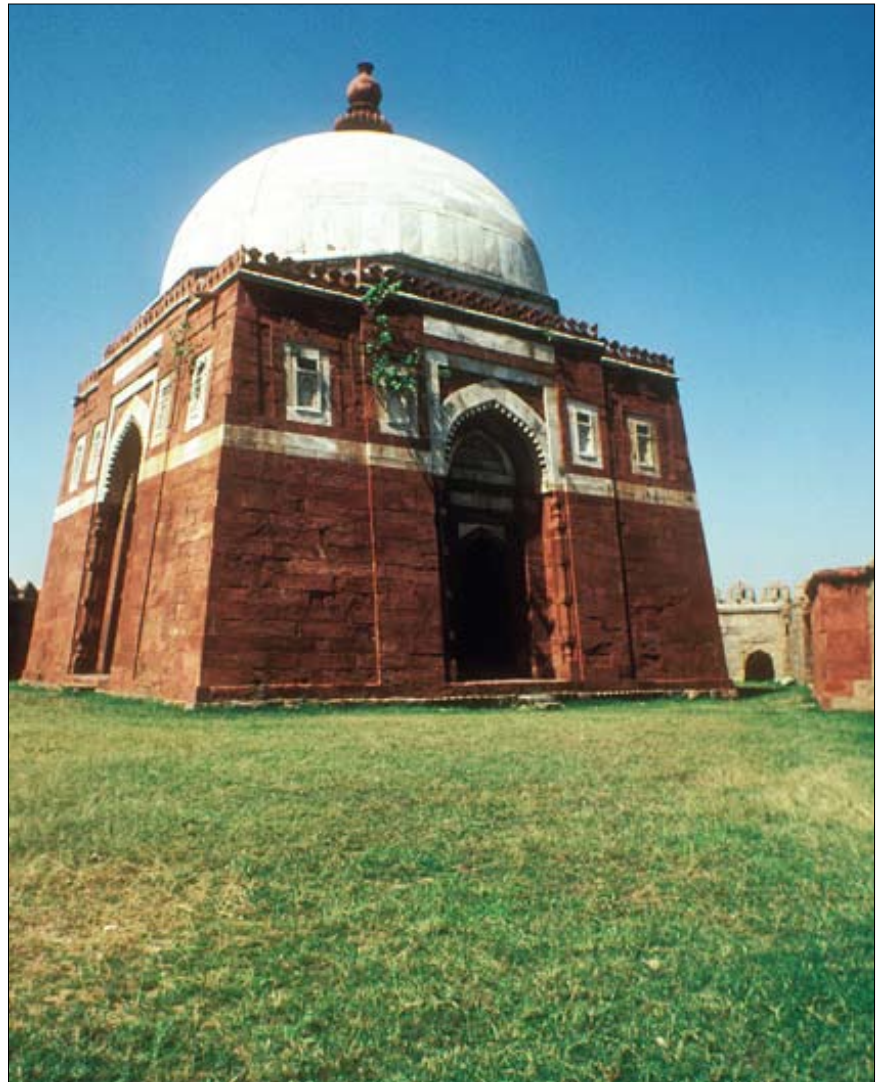


Fig 2. Tomb of Ghiasuddin Tughlaq, 1325 AD



Fig 3. Tomb of Feroz Shah Tughlaq, 1388 AD

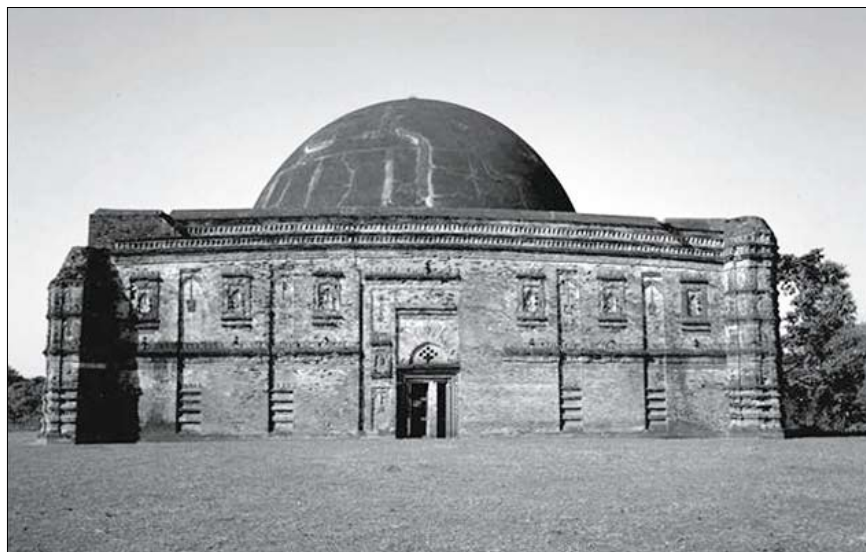


Fig 4. Eklakhi Tomb, 1425 AD

is a combination of lintel and arch with a stone grille in between, the lintel being an indigenous system of construction which loses its structural significance and becomes ornamental. The arch of the doorway is surrounded by a marble band and also supported by nook shafts on either side.

During the rule of Firuz Tughlaq the tombs constructed were plain devoid of ornamentation with inexpensive materials like rubble, lime and plaster. There was lack of skilled craftsmen and poor economic conditions prevailed due to the shifting of the capital from Delhi to Daulatabad by his predecessor, Muhammed Tughlaq.

The plain walls of the tomb of Firuz Shah (fig.3) have a slight slope and is decorated with merlons on two tiers one above the cube and second above the octagonal dome. On the outer surface there is a slight projection towards the centre emphasizing the entrance of the door. On the southern side is a low platform with a stone railing of horizontals and verticals. The exterior and interior of the tomb has limited ornamentation.

The tomb of Telengani, an official of Feroz Tughlaq is the first octagonal tomb with verandahs on eight sides. On each side of the faces are three arches and a wide chajja, a typical Hindu element projects on all the faces. The tomb also marks the development of octagonal tombs of later Sayyids and Mughal Period.

The Eklakhi tomb (fig.4) in Bengal is a modified version of the cube and hemisphere of the Imperial Style with the dome being supported by thick walls instead of squinches. Because of heavy rains in the regions the roof of the tomb was designed with a slight curve and a heavy cornice to throw of



Fig 5. Shish Gumbad, 1497 AD

the excess rain water. The role of the indigenous craftsmen is seen in the exterior surface being decorated with ornamental panels.

The tomb is divided in to bays with pilasters and a string course giving the appearance of a two storied structure. It evokes the Imperial style with octagonal turrets at each corner. There is dominance of solid over void in the façade with a narrow doorway with pointed arch. The tomb is octagonal in the interior with the door being a combination of the arch and beam influenced by the tomb of Ghiasuddin Tughlaq.

The octagonal tomb of Mubarak Sayyid (1434 AD) is placed in a landscaped garden unlike the earlier tombs which were part of a complex.

The tomb of Mubarak Sayyid was of experimental nature as the upper dome is visually hidden behind the smaller kiosks and this error was rectified in the later tombs. An innovative feature on face of the octagonal are arched verandahs shaded by chajjas and decorated by merlons on top. The angles of the tomb are sloped by means of a sloping projection, evocative of tomb of the Feroz Shah. A decorative feature which differentiates the design of the domes from the earlier tombs is the petal like motif at the base of the dome.

The square shaped Shish Gumbad (fig.5) has no sloping parts and is reminiscent of the Alai Darwaza with projecting entrance and blind arcades

on the first floor giving an appearance of a two storied structure. On the parapet wall are small turrets which define the exterior of the tomb and the drum of the dome is decorated with petal shaped motif. The cornice and string course of the the tomb is decorated with coloured glazed tile.

The tomb of Sikander Lodi (fig.6) is built without kiosks and has a double dome -a Persian concept – an inner and outer shell. This creates an imposing exterior and reduces the scale of disproportionately tall interior. On each of the octagonal side are arched verandahs taking the cue from the earlier tomb of Mubarak Sayyid. The tomb is the focus of an elaborately landscaped garden within a walled enclosure



Fig 6. Tomb of Sikander Lodi, 1518 AD



Fig 7. Tomb of Sher Shah, 1545 AD

and gateways on all four surrounding sides. The later Mughal tombs were based on the idea of double domes and tombs related to landscape.

The tomb of Sher Shah (fig. 7) proportions are placed on an artificial lake, connected by means of causeway to the mainland. The form is pyramidal in five distinct stages not strikingly different from its Sayyid Prototype. The height increases with kiosks at each angle the plan being octagonal in shape. The lower storey is in the form of a verandah having triple arches in each of its sides with a projecting chajja and a high parapet with merlon motifs. The shape of the structure changes at each level from a square basement to octagonal tiers and a circular dome.



Fig. 8 Humayun's Tomb 1572 AD

The plan of Humayun's Tomb (fig.8) is composed of five octagons with chamfered corners and the tomb is placed in the centre of a large walled garden. Some of the ideas developed for design of Humayun's Tomb like double dome, charbagh concept had precedence in the Sayyid and Lodi Tombs. It has monumental gateways and stands on a large platform containing arcades and vaulted chambers. The tomb is of a family more than individual tomb, the surrounding chambers contain sarcophagus of his wife, and later Mughal emperors.

The kiosks surrounding the marble dome in tombs of Sayyid Dynasty had matured to chattris with chajja, an indigenous influence. An innovative detail is the spandrel of the arches

highlighted with light brown sandstone and marble bands emphasizing its shape. The marble bands are a decorative feature which gives a sense of unity to the whole structure.

The central Iwan on all four sides of the monument resembles the maqsura screen of a mosque and obscure the dome. The exterior has an undulating effect with various faces of the octagonal mass producing a contrast of recessed arches with smaller blind arches. Slender minarets and chattris are placed at corner of the building creating an interesting skyline.

The Humayun's tomb has the characteristics of all earlier tombs with certain modifications with the kiosks transformed to chattris, the simple square and octagonal shape of the

earlier tombs have been combined in the octagonal composition, rectangular panels of Alai Minar with arches incised in them, the arcades of Mubarak Sayyid, merlon motifs on the parapet and is considered one of the crowning glories of Mughal Architecture.

References

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