

GAUR AND PANDUA: THE CULTURAL HERITAGE OF TWO MEDIEVAL CAPITALS OF BENGAL

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Abstract

In the history of Bengal, Gaur and Pandua occupy an important place. Gaur or Gauda, as Ramavati and Lakshmanavati, was one of the royal capitals of Pala and Sena Kings of ancient Bengal. Gaur and Pandua are the two cities of medieval Bengal now located in Malda district of West Bengal bear the rich cultural tradition of Islamic architectural excellence. These splendid architectures had been installed by various sultans at different points in time. Brick build structures and stone carvings depict the excellence of craftsmanship through the artistic impression that is surviving through centuries. The history of Islamic architecture in Bengal started with the conquest of Bakhtiyar Khilji in 1204 AD. The fame and glory of these two cities rose at different times by the different sultans. However, the once populated and glorious cities have declined during the 16th century for various reasons. The present article attempts to see the cultural heritage of these two medieval sultanate capitals of Bengal through the archaeo-anthropological approach. A qualitative research design has been adopted for the study. During fieldwork, standard anthropological methods have been used for data collection. The paper also throws light on the issues related to heritage tourism in this area.

Keywords

Gaur, Pandua, Medieval Bengal, Islamic architecture, Cultural heritage

Introduction

Malda (24°40'20" N - 25°32'08" N; 87°45'50" E - 88°28'10" E), also called Maldah, is a district in the state of West Bengal, India. This district consists predominantly of low-lying plains sloping toward the south with the undulating areas at the northeast. The western location of the district is divided into two parts with the aid of the river Kalindri and the Ganges; the holy river flows alongside the south-western boundary of the district. The archaeological wealth of Malda is wonderful, and any enthusiast who desires to satisfy his quest for the beyond is always desirous to go to this city. Gaur and Pandua are like the twin feathers on its cap of the mesmerising days, left-back through the ages of time.

In Medieval times, Malda district was a part of the *Pundravardhana* (one of the most important *Bhukti* or territorial divisions of ancient Bengal). In the book, *Astadhyayi*, Panini noted a metropolis named Gaudapura in eastern India, and it might not be unreasonable to perceive his Gaudapura with the city of Gaur (Sircar, 1960). According to Kautilya's *Arthashastra*, during the third century A.D., Gaur became an important economic hub in Eastern India along with Pundra and Vanga. In the following century, Gaur became an inseparable part of the Gupta Empire. Still, with the decline of Gupta's imperial power, Gaur established an independent monarchy in the initial phase of the sixth century A.D. (Sircar, 1952). Gradually Gaur attained eminence as a kingdom throughout the reign of Shashanka, the first independent king of a unified polity within the Bengal vicinity in the course of seventh-century A.D. The issued coins, inscriptions, and accounts are available in *Harshacharita*; the biography of Harshavardhana written by Banabhatta provides information about the glorious reign of King Shashanka (Lal, 2019). From the first half of the sixth century, several rulers prior to Shashanka extended the territory of Gaur, but he ruled over extensive areas of Bengal, Orissa and Bihar (Sircar, 1952). The famous Chinese traveller, Xuanzang (Hiuen Tsang), who visited Bengal in the 7th century A.D., mentioned four kingdoms in Bengal, and probably one of these was one of these *Pundravardhana*. At some point in the regime of Lakshmana Sena of the Sena dynasty (1070-1230 AD), Gaur got here to recognise as *Lakshmanavati*, turned into one of the capitals of the Sena kings. It appears that the Sena kings had been within the habit of moving from vicinity to area inside their kingdom. In the early 13th century, Bakhtiyar Khilji conquered Gaur in competition to Lakshmana Sena in 1204 AD and occupied a large area of Bengal, initiating Islamic rule for the first time. Muslim rule spread throughout the greater part of central and northern Bengal, where Bakhtiyar Khilji was appointed as the governor under the Delhi

Sultanate (Sengupta, 1969). After the death of Bakhtiyar Khilji, an unstable political situation was seen among the rulers of Bengal. Then in 1212 AD Ghiyasuddin Iwaj Khilji assumed power and continued till his death in 1227 AD. During this time, governors of Bengal attempted to demonstrate their independence from the Delhi Sultanate throughout the thirteenth century, where Ghiyasuddin endeavoured to legitimise his position by declaring himself an independent ruler going above the head of the Delhi sultan. He transferred the seat of government to the historic town of old *Lakhnauti* (an altered name of Lakshmanavati) at some point in 1220 AD (Sarkar, 2015). The proclamation of Ghiyasuddin as independent ruler of Bengal prompted Iltutmis, the Delhi Sultan, resulting in the invasion of Bengal, defeating and killing the Bengal lord in 1227 AD.

After Ghiyasuddin, Nasiruddin Mahmud, son of Iltutmis, was appointed as the governor of Bengal for a brief period. The direct dependence on Delhi lasted until the middle of the 14th century until Shamsuddin Ilyas Shah/Haji Ilyas in 1342 AD achieved superiority as an independent ruler in Bengal and ruled till 1358 AD. However, the Muslim strength became consolidated at Gaur during this period. Sikandar Shah assumed the seat as a rightful successor of Shamsuddin Ilyas Shah and built the famous Adina mosque at Pandua in 1375 AD (Eaton et al., 1989). In 1414 CE, a local landlord named Raja Ganesha established his Hindu dynasty proclaiming over the Muslims. Later his son Jadu embraced Islam and ruled as Jalaluddin Mahammed Shah. Ganesha dynasty lasted till 1436 CE until Nasiruddin Mahmud Shah restored the Ilyas Shahi dynasty by defeating the son of Jalaluddin. Then Nasiruddin's son Rukunuddin Barbak Shah ruled firmly as the Sultan of Bengal. After him, there had been a period of alternations of rulers from different dynasties. The most noteworthy rule was Alauddin Husain Shah (1494–1519), founder of the Husain Shahi dynasty. During the reign of Husain Shah, the Sultanate of Bengal underwent considerable geographical expansions. His reign, which lasted more than a quarter-century, was distinguished by peace and prosperity, in striking comparison to the time before it. Husain Shah's liberal approach towards the Hindu religion and social reforms was also a defining aspect of his rule (Majumdar, 1990).

Sher Shah Suri, a legendary general and conqueror, invaded Bengal in 1538 AD and defeated Sultan Mahmud Shah. As a result of his victory, he could depose the governing Mughal emperors and replace them with his Suri dynasty. Sher Shah defeated Humayun, the Mughal emperor, in the battle of Chausa (near Buxar) in 1539 AD and took the title of '*Shah*'. On capturing Bengal, he appointed Khizr Khan as its provincial governor. In the following year,

he fought Humayun once more, drove him out, and seized the throne of Delhi (Ali, 2021). After the Suri dynasty Karrani dynasty (AD 1564-1576) lasted in the Bengal sultanate for a brief period until the Mughals under Emperor Akbar's rule attacked Bengal and dethroned Daoud Shah Karrani in 1576 AD. The capital was moved to Gaur from Tanda, and Khan Jahan was made the first *Subahdar* (provincial governor) of Bengal under the direct Mughal rule.

Methodology

The present study had been carried out in Gaur and Pandua sites of Malda District of West Bengal (Figure 1). A qualitative research design has been adopted for the study. Standard anthropological methods have been used for data collection during the study, such as questionnaire, interviews, case studies, informal conversations, etc., along with photographic documentation. Interviews were conducted at three levels: individual level, group discussion and thorough discussion with the local people and visitors. Information was collected from all aspects of the cultural heritage of above mentioned two historical cities. Different places of the cities have been selected to gather the empirical data for this study. People of different age groups of different communities have been selected for data collection. Prior to heading off to the field, fundamental work was performed using the accessible published materials and other documents as secondary resources.

Historicity of Gaur and Pandua

Gaur, famously called Gauda, transformed into the capital city of medieval Bengal, wherein a colossal piece of Bengal's history got composed. It has been said that the name Gauda might have come from the Sanskrit word *gau* (cow). In numerous works, Gauda has been cited interchangeably as the regional area and the people. Since the beginning of the 7th century AD, Shashanka, lord of Karnasuvarna, ruled over Gaur for three decades. After Shashanka, the Pala dynasty heavily influenced Gaur, the Khalimpur copper-plate engraving of Dharmapala alludes to the ruler as *Gaudeshwar* (master of Gaur). Gaur assembled conspicuousness as thought about one of the most significant medieval urban communities of the subcontinent, somewhat inside the Sena Dynasty. The city changed into place at the eastern portion of land, the majority of the Ganges and the Mahananda streams, and south of the predominant city Malda (Sen, 1943). It is conceivable that the Sena dynasty that displaced the Pala dynasty in Bengal legitimate felt the requirement for new managerial capital to diminish the Pala impact. It is believable that the

procedure may have been begun by Vijaya Sena or Ballala Sena, however, given the final shape by Lakshmana Sena (Sircar, 1952). Regardless, its most especially announced history begins with its triumph in 1204 AD by the Muslims, who held it as the focal seat of their ability in Bengal over centuries. During that time, *Lakshmanavati* was changed into *Lakhnauti* (Sengupta, 1969). In the early sixteenth century, Alauddin Husain Shah made Ekdala the capital for a long time. Gaur appears to have again become the capital of Bengal as Sher Shah captures Bengal in 1538 AD. In the later years of establishing the Karrani dynasty by Taj Khan Karrani (1564 AD), the capital was moved to Tanda. When Bengal came under the direct rule of the Mughals, the capital was reinstated at Gaur (Eaton, 1993).

The ruins of Gaur have withstood the ravages of time and the systematic destruction over many years, not only by private construction but also by the state authority's negligence. From the book *'Memoirs of Gaur and Pandua'* written by Abid Ali Khan in 1931, we find that the city of Gaur was surrounded by a high earthen rampart, the top of the wall or embankment being covered by structures. There were innumerable structures within the town, which commanded a magnificent side. During this Islamic advent in Bengal, the Hindu style of architecture was renovated with the Islamic style. However, sculptures of Hindu Gods and Goddesses were still found in some monuments and tombs (Sengupta, 1969). The available records reveal that at one point in time, Pandua was also known as Pundravardhana/Pundranagar. From the 3rd century B.C. to the 12th century A.D., it was a prominent administrative, religious, and cultural centre from the Maurya Empire to the Sena dynasty. The genuinely affirmed history of Pandua begins in the Sultan time allotment with the removal of the capital from Gaur by Shamsuddin Iliyas Shah in the year 1353 AD (Haque et al., 1997). The explanation doled out for its decision as the capital around then is its situation, with waterways and bogs shielding it from the assault from each side. During the mid of the fourteenth century, the Sultans of Bengal set up their independence and moved their seat of government to Pandua, in like manner in Malda. Pandua, the once complimented capital of Bengal, was first settled by Shamsuddin Iliyas Shah.

People and economy

In the *Brihat-Samhita*, Varahamihira alludes to Gaudakada rather than Gaudas or Gaudiyas as the people in the Eastern Division. On the other hand, Vatsyayana seems familiar with the Gauda people, especially their relationships and other social characteristics. According to him, Gauda's women adored luxury. On their foreheads, they used vermilion dots on their bodies, fragrant sandal powder and sandal paste, and on their hair knots, they utilised flowers.

The upper-class females who resided in towns were accustomed to a certain amount of pomp and luxury. The village women, on the other hand, led a bare, uncomplicated life. Women from lower castes were the ones who suffered the most. In a male-dominated society, women's self-respect and freedom were stifled (Chakladar, 1926).

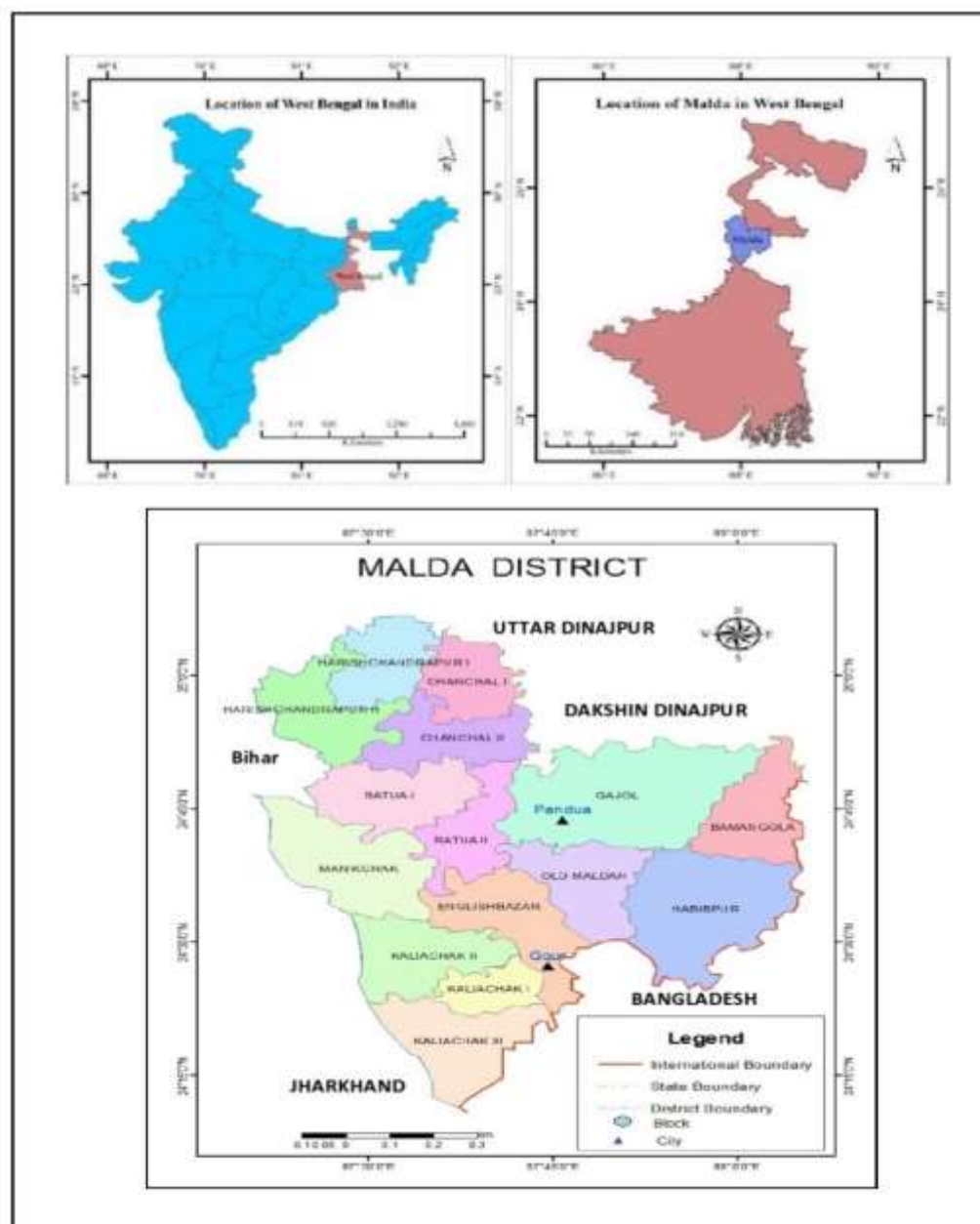


Figure 1. Map of Gaur and Pandua in the State of West Bengal.

In *Natyasastra*, *Bharata* has made a specific reference to the style of the *Gauda* ladies. In most of the Pala engravings, alongside the Malavas, Khasis, Hunas, Kulikas, the *Gaudas* are also mentioned as representatives of the Palas. Maybe every one of these individuals was utilised in the Pala armed force as hired soldier shoulders. The Pala rulers who had ancestral roots in Bengal were Buddhist, yet they didn't look to force the Buddhist religion of the individuals of Bengal. The tolerant ethos of the Pala rule, which went on for around 400 years, gave the humanist way of thinking of the *Sahajiyas* a social space for striking a deep anchorage in Bengal (Chattopadhyay, 1991).

The anchorage, notwithstanding, started to confront an emergency when the new Brahmin rules of the Sena administration, who removed the Palas towards the end of the eleventh century, released a sorted-out endeavour to disintegrate the broad *Sahajiya* social base in Bengal. (Dasgupta, 2004). The Sena dynasty was expelled during the thirteenth century by the Turk-Afghan chieftains, whose religion was Islam. The significant Muslim gathering, which went with the Turkish chieftain, comprised merchants, directors, conventional *mullahs*, *maulavis* and literati. These foreigners from past the Khyber region, who tried to embrace the Perso-Islamic way of life and develop Arabic and Persian writing, were signified as Ashraf or Muslim Aristocrat classes (Eaton, 2001). Their primary goal was to consolidate their political power under the Sultan or the provincial ruler in a territory which was almost entirely non-Muslim. The orthodox *mullahs* and *maulavis*, belonging to the Ashraf classes, tried to prevail on the Sultans to build a religious infrastructure that could expedite political consolidation. However, Alauddin Husain Shah, the most important Sultan in the Turk-Afghan period, was deeply concerned to have the steady cooperation of the zamindars of Bengal in his thrust to sustain a kind of autonomous position in matters of the land revenue administration of Bengal. In this crucial context, he was not interested in hurting the religious sensibilities of the Hindu zamindars of the province. Therefore, Hindus also hold some of the most powerful positions. Rupa Goswami was the *Sakar Mallik* (revenue minister), Sanatana Goswami was the *Dabir-I-Khas* (the Sultan's private secretary), Jagai and Madhai were Navadvipa's *Kotwals* (police personnel). He admired Sri Chaitanya Mahaprabhu, the celebrated medieval saint whom he considered an incarnation of God. His governors Paragal Khan and Chhuti Khan patronised Kavindra Parameshwara and Shrikara Nandi, who prepared the Bangali version of the *Mahabharata* (Chowdhury, 2021).

It was also true that Husain Shah responded to the requests of the orthodox Ashraf clarifies to some extent. Thus, he extended his cooperation to build mosques and madrasas, patronised

Islamic scholars, supported Islamic religious endowment and appointed Qazis or Islamic judicial officers (Ahmed, 2001). During this period in Bengal, society had been seen the advancement of various workmanship and culture. Both Hindus and other local residents, alongside the Muslims, surrendered many of their obsessions by living beside each other for a long time. A spirit of tolerance was formed among them. The improvement of new artwork inside the architecture has been seen through various kinds of building development. During this time, society had been seen as the advancement of the educational framework. Numerous formal and informal education centres had been set up in various parts of Bengal, focusing on various age groups and classes of individuals with different subjects (Islam, 2017). Mosques have been created as the operational hubs of society. Among the various mosques of Bengal during the Turko-Afghan period, the most noteworthy mosques are *Adina Mosque*, *Eklakhi Mausoleum* of Pandua and *Baro Sona Mosque* of Gaur. Aside from mosques, the Sultans of Bengal established madrassas for education in Lakhnauti, the capital, and other important authoritative centres in their conquered domains (al-Uthmani, 2010).

Structural heritage of Gaur

Baro Shona Mosque or Baradwari Mosque or The Great Golden Mosque

Baro Shona Mosque, constructed during Sultan Nusrat Shah's rule, is located in Gaur, a vast stretch of a kilometre south of Ramkeli and 12 kilometres south of Malda town. The name of this mosque has a few different interpretations; however, the most well-known and widely accepted explanation is that they named the Mosque 'Sona' because of the enormous expenses spent on its construction (Figure 2). Another important fact is that the arches of this mosque were covered, which means that most of the surface used to be illuminated under the sun or moon's rays. The Baro Shona Mosque is the largest of all the monuments in Gaur, with a 200-foot-wide open square in front and handsome arched gateways in the middle of three of its sides. The sanctuary, a rectangular structure of brick and stone, is 168 feet long by 76 feet wide. A 20-foot-high parapet forms a long shallow curve below, spaced with eleven entryways between them, although the name implies twelve doors. Hints of different structures are to be seen on raised ground on the north and northwest sides. They are maybe locales of madrassas and rest houses.



Figure 2. Different portions of Baro Shona Mosque (a) Courtyard gateway, (b) Exterior part, (c) External (interior) wall of the ruined musalla with marks of fallen domes, (d) Arched pattern of the interior portion, (e) Aisle.

Dakhil Darwazah or Selami Darwazah

Dakhil Darwazah, the magnificent gateway, is a prominent Islamic architectural landmark in Gaur (Figure 3). It is a large entrance gate about a mile southwest of the Baro Sona Mosque. The Dakhil Darwazah was the main entrance to the north's fortification and also known as the Selami Darwazah (Sengupta, 1969). It was constructed of red bricks and showed signs of highly ornate terracotta work. Massive openings in bits of stone connected to the dividers of the entryways demonstrate how enormous the doors were hanging from these stones. The wings of the door were darted by a massive iron bar or wooden pin, as is seen from long openings running into dividers, one on each side of the section. The walls on the two sides of the entrance were ornamented with boards loaded up with chains and ringers (Figure 3). This ruling structure is more than 21 m. high and 34.5 m. wide. Its four corners are topped with five-story high towers. A twelve-sided tower, five stories tall and divided by an arch, stands at each fort's four corners. In the southeast corner, a 20-meter high wall encases the ruins of an earlier royal house where cannons were once fired.



Figure 3. Dakhil Darwazah or Selami Darwazah (a) Frontal view of Dakhil Darwazah, (b) & (c) Exceptionally ornamented terracotta work on both interiors and exterior walls of the architecture.

Firuz Minar/ Firoz Minar

Firoz Minar, also known as the 'Blue Tower,' is a 25.60 m tall tower with a spiral staircase with 73 steps most likely built by Saifuddin Firoz Shah (1486-89 A.D.), worked in the Tughlaqi style of design. This structure is otherwise called the Pir-Asha-Minar or the Chiragdani. The minar is a polygon of twelve sides for three-fifth of its tallness and roundabout for the staying two-fifths. Although it is assumed that the cellar of the pinnacle was initially beneath the ground and that the pinnacle was based on a hillock (Figure 4), the archaeologists thought that fortification of the base with earthwork turfing it over so it may resemble a hill (Sengupta, 1969). The tower rises in three levels, each with twelve sides, from the foot of the door. Each storey is divided by decorative terracotta carvings. The fourth and fifth stories have a smaller diameter and are circular. Some restorers transformed the last floor into an open arched room covered by a dome into an open flat roof. The minar itself has been differently asserted as a triumph tower, a structure for bringing the devoted to prayer, or as a landmark honouring the deeds of Sultans. It is thought to be a Bengal version of the Qutab Minar.



Figure 4. (a) Firuz Minar/ Firoz Minar, (b) Terracotta curving on the outer wall, (c) Granite made entrance.

Ballal Bati or old palace of the king of Gaur

The Ballal Bati site carries uncovered dome-shaped structures that look like Buddhist stupas (Figure 5). Another possibility is that this site would be the King's Durbar. According to historians, this imperial royal house was used during Ballala Sena's reign from 1160 to 1179. The royal house was destroyed during the Muslim invasion, and only the columns and plinth base remain. The royal mansion was surrounded by a palace wall that stretched around it. In 1466 A.D., Barbak Shah built a conduit beneath the palace, which served as half of the doorway, according to an inscription discovered at Guamalti.



Figure 5. Different views of Ballal Bati.

Kadam Rasul Mosque

The Prophet Mohammad's footprints are depicted as Kadam Rasul. According to the local belief, Hazrat Muhammad's footprints can be found in a stone of the mosque. This monument is preserved in a one-domed square structure located inside the fort's enclosed area to the east of the royal quarters (Figure 6). The dividers are 5 feet thick and have an absolute measurement of 63 feet. Three sides have nine-foot-wide verandahs. Three arched entrances flanked by massive stone columns lead to the Mosque (Figure 6). The walls are made of brick and are exquisitely ornamented. The walls are split into two panels into both sides. On the four corners, there are four black marble towers (Fig. 6), with sophisticated artwork securing the towers on top.

The mosque was built in 1513 AD by Sultan Nasiruddin Nusrat Shah. A small curved platform of black marble offered a stone portrayal of the Prophet Muhammad's footprint within the construction under the dome. The design of the decorated stone capitals on the upper corner turrets of this mosque is magnificent. Such work is not found in any other Gaur or Pandua structure. A roofless structure in front of the Kadam Rasul was supposed to be a guest rest house. The architecture of this monument dates from the Mughal period. The structure features thick

walls and which were once protected by a flat rooftop. The construct has three rooms, the central one being a large corridor, while the side rooms are small, with one arched opening on each of the west sides.



Figure 6. (a) Front view of Kadam Rasul Mosque showing the marble towers on the corners, (b) One of the arched openings, (c) Ornamented exterior wall of the mosque.

Chika Mosque

A single domed structure to the southwest of the Kadam Rasul is commonly referred to as *Chika Mosque* by locals (Figure 7). There is no evidence of supplication specialities in the west wall or any platform in the construction; hence it is not a mosque. Hindu deities appear to have been obliterated in the stones of the entryways and lintels. In the construction, antique materials from Hindu architecture were used. It is remarkable to see that the building is substantially similar to Pandua's Eklakhi Tomb. Both have square towers with cut towers at the corners. Each has four entryways and is protected by a single dome. Columns are designed around the cornice and corner with glazed tiles of various colours (Figure 7). On the west side of this structure, there existed another massive structure. The structure's top has collapsed, but the stone columns that supported the curves and vaults have been reinstalled in their original locations.



Figure 7. (a) Frontal view of Chika Mosque, (b) Glazed tiles on the outer wall, (c) & (d) Rich terracotta ornamentation.

Lukochuri Gate

The Lukochuri Gate is located near the Kadam Rasul Mosque to the southeast. This is a massive three-story entranceway. The imperial access to the fortification might have been the priority. On each side of this gateway, *Naqqar Khana* (place for pounding drums), there are guardrooms or more, the top of which is a whole level curve constructed of blocks. The main entranceway is only about 10 feet wide. In 1655, Shah Shuja was reported to have built it. Its architecture is later Mughal in style, with much contrast in developing curves from different structures. Its compositionally praiseworthy and verifiably significant architectural style makes it compositionally commendable and verifiably significant. The term 'Lukochuri' is thought to have originated from the imperial play of hide-and-seek.

Gunamant Mosque

This mosque is the most difficult to reach among the all in Malda; hence it stays pristine and magnificent (Figure 8). With a vaulted focal nave, three passageways, and four entrances on either side, this massive mosque was most likely constructed in 1484 AD by Sultan Jalaluddin Fateh Shah (1481 – 87 A.D.). According to Sengupta (1969), half of the 24 vaults were enrolled in their names in complete genuine history books, while the other half remained flawless to demonstrate the presence of the substance itself.



Figure 8. The astonishing architecture of Gunmant Mosque.

Gumti Gate

It is a single domed small structure that appears to have functioned as one of the stronghold's east entranceways. The door's defence walls are located on the north and south sides of the structure. The inward room is 25 feet square with 8-foot thick walls. Each of the four arched openings is around 5 feet wide. The vivid ornamentation on the door's corner mainstays is almost identical to that on the Lottan mosque. Coloured bricks make up the columns. There were fluted brickwork portions on both sides of the entryways, and the structure was decorated with an elegant cornice all around.

Lottan Mosque

It was once wholly decorated with enamelled brickwork; however, the more prominent part is gone. Old blocks were used to rebuild the damaged segments. The mosque's floor had been damaged in the past, but it has now been repaired. The overall length and width of the structure are 72.5 feet and 5 feet, respectively. A single vault covers both square chambers, with a veranda or hall in front. The mosque's main room is 34 feet square. There are three arched openings at the front and one at either end of the passage. The mosque features three openings on the front and sides that are identical to the hall front openings. Three niches on the back wall correspond to the entryways on the other three sides. The mosque's interior was covered in glazed tiles in four different colours: green, yellow, blue, and white. The colour of the bricks has almost completely

faded, and the cracks in the walls have been filled with plain, engraved bricks. According to many historians, the mosque was built in 1475 AD., possibly by Sultan Shamsuddin Yousuf Shah (Sengupta, 1969).

Tantipara Mosque

This mosque is an elliptical block with two passageways and an octagonal pinnacle at each corner, separated by four stone columns running down the centre. The mosque's walls are 6.5 feet thick, with five arched arches at each end and front. Huge panels with anticipating blossoming fringes adorn the external countenances; each panel is brightened with a sharp arch, beneath which is the usual bell-shaped decoration suspected from a long chain (Figure 9). The towers are likewise ornamented in the same style. The mosque's ornamentation is rich, and huge adorned panels stand out in high relief against the plain walls (Figure 9). The entire structure is of uniform rich red shading that is considerably more satisfying than the affected glazed tiles of the Lottan mosque. However, the mosque, most likely installed by Mirsad Kha, is referred to locally as Umar Qazi's Mosque and is likewise called after the Tanti (weavers) quarters.



Figure 9. (a) Frontal view of Tantipara Mosque, (b) Inside of Tantipara Mosque with marks of fallen domes, (c) Terracotta floral panel stands out in the high relief against the plain wall (exterior), (d) & (e) Rich terracotta ornamentation.

Kotwali Darwazah

It is the main entranceway on the south wall of the city of Gaur. It once featured a magnificent archway that has now collapsed. The door had a 30 feet high and 16.5 feet long brick archway. There are bastions east and west of the doorway. Also, there are openings on either side, which were used to fire on the enemies. It is possible to say that it is a far older form of the building than fortress entryways. Two inclining half-circle towers stand at each entryway. There are profound specialities with pointed arches laying on decorative columns of each side of these towers.

Structural heritage of Pandua

Eklakhi Mausoleum

Eklakhi Mausoleum is one of the main square brick tombs in Bengal, said to be built by Jalaluddin Muhammed Shah, son of Raja Ganesha. The tradition goes that rupees one lakh was spent in its construction and hence got the name Eklakhi. There are various lotus themes and the theme of doorbell seen even today in the outside wall, which unmistakably delineates the domain of Hinduism. It is made of brick with a solitary grandiose located at a short distance from the Qutub Shahi Mosque. Its measurements are 78.6 feet by 74.6 feet, the internal breadth of the vault being 48.6 feet. The entryway openings are 6.7 feet by 13.6 feet, and the dividers are 13 feet thick. The outer walls of this structure are ornamented by bent tiles, and the roof of the vault is conveniently put and wrapped with decorative work (Figure 10). The inside is octagonal, just lit through the four little entryways, one on each side. Over the passage, the entryway is a lintel with a Hindu deity cut on it. Around the entryway are different stones on which might be recognised partial portrayals of the anthropomorphic figure. There are three graves inside, and these graves are of Jalaluddin Muhammed Shah and his wife and son Shamsuddin Ahmad Shah (Figure 10). There are two stone pillars at the top of the tombs of Jalaluddin and Shamsuddin. The design of this structure is of the standard Indo-Saracenic style, which shows the architectural brilliance during the Ganesha Dynasty (Figure 10). The mausoleum has an arch likewise in the walls at the cornices to emulate the standard appearance of the bungalow. There are two broad groups of luxuriously enlivened brickwork underneath the cornice. The ornamentation is an exceptionally fluctuated plan, and no single example is frequently rehashed.



Figure 10. (a) Frontal view along with stone doorway of Eklakhi Mausoleum, (b) Octagonal turret, (c) graves are of Jalaluddin and his wife and child, (d) & (e) Terracotta ornamentation along with floral panels on the exterior walls, (f) Details of terracotta work in the panel.

Chhoti Dargah

It is one of the renowned dargahs of Pandua, arranged about a fourth of a mile toward the northwest of the hallowed place of the Shah Jalal. The dargah's most significant objects of enthusiasm are the *Chilla Khana*, *Sijda-gah*, the Mosque of Qazi Nur, *Mitha Talao*, *Bahisht-ka-Darwazah*, *Bibi Mahal* and stone capitals. The *Chilla Khana* is of brick with stone confronting, and there are a decent number of stone carvings inside. On the east side, there are three entryways, and each contains inscriptions. The *Bahisht-ka-Darwazah* is a little one-domed structure southwest of the tomb of the Hazrat Nur Qutb Alam. It is said that Shaikh Zahid's grandson Nur Qutb Alam was born in this building, consequently got holy, and people visit it with the expectation that their wrongdoings will be pardoned after prayer. Over the door, there is an engraving in interested characters, yet just *Ya Allah* and *Ya Fatah* are readable. It is said that *Ism A'zam* (Allah) is composed of it. Close to the *Bahisht-ka-Darwazah*, here is another structure which is known as *Bibi Mahal*. It was the house for the array of mistresses of the holy person Nur Qutub Alam. The structure was expected to be decorated with colourful bricks (Sengupta, 1969).

Qutub/Qutb Shahi Mosque

It lies halfway between the holy place of Nur Qutub Alam and Eklakhi Mausoleum. It is made of brick and stone and has ten vaults. The rooftop has already fallen; however, the walls and the lectern are standing. Its measurements are 82.6 feet by 37.8 feet. The inscription was apparently installed in 1582 AD by Makhdum Shaikh, the son of Muhammad al-Khalidi, a relative of Hur Qutub. The development of the mosque is astounding; however, it was worked with materials gathered from different structures. The walls are bent at the cornices to mimic the presence of a home. The hemispherical vaults laid on pointed curves that were worked over the columns when the columns sunk, the curves split, and the push of the messed up curves made the arches fall. For the most part, the columns in the mosque are cumbersome and crumble when the rooftop has been terraced.

Adina Mosque

Adina Mosque embodies a progressively recognisable indigenous design, blending east and west features. It is a fourteenth-century mosque located 20 kilometres north of Malda. Sultan Sikandar Shah built this mosque to declare his victory over Delhi ruler Firuz Shah Tughlaq during 1373-75 A.D. The mosque is thought to be built over a Hindu shrine and consists of a series of hypostyle corridors designed around a yard (Figure 11). The yard's facade is made up of 88 curves supported by docks and topped by a parapet. From north to south, it measures 507.5 feet and from east to west, it measures 285.5 feet. The corridors on the east side, where an irrelevant entrance joins the structure, are 38 feet wide and have three pathways. The overall space is divided into 108 squares by transverse brick walls and stone columns, each of which was initially guarded by a small vault. The northern and southern sides are built in a similar design, having 39 and 51 vaults, respectively. The western section of the corridor, which was 64 feet wide, had five walkways; however, because the nave of the mosque was located in the middle, the number of arches on this side was equal to that of the eastern house, i.e. 108.

The number of vaults covering the corridor was along these lines 306 taking all things together. The prayer hall is five walkways profound, while the north, south and east shelters around the patio comprise triple paths. Altogether, these walkways had 260 columns and 387 domed bayous. In the focal point of the Prayer Hall, a monstrous iwan-like barrel-vaulted hall leads from the court to the mihrab and minbar (the lectern from which the message is conveyed) presently roofless and broken (Figure 12). Three coves toward the north of the mihrab is a raised



Figure 11. Exterior view of Adina Mosque



Figure 12. Different Architectural parts of Adina Mosque. (a) Small domes raised over each bay supported by pendentives. These pendentives were formed of brick built in oversailing courses, (b) Mihrabs, (c) Range of arches carried by pillars, (d) Central nave of the sanctuary is in the form of a well-proportioned hall aligned east and west earlier had a barrel vault, (e) Pillars of prayer hall which are Graceful fluted shafts and carried different arches.

stage initially screened and surmounted by 18 vaults higher than those over different straights of the petition corridors. The interior of the yard is a continuous facade of 92 curves topped by a parapet, past which the narrows' vaults can be observed

Architectural Brilliance

Architecture is the mother of all arts, as it incorporates the science and art of structuring and building, painting and mould and the ornamental expressions; truth be told, the speciality of structures communicated the profound situated desires of a country and the best articulation of the elective character of its way of life. The Architectural Legacy of Gaur and Pandua is shaped by socio-political history, the inherent religious impact, unconstrained aesthetic convention, and stylish cognisance of the manufacturers. In Bengal, the Muslims carried their shapes in similarity with their religious needs while the Hindu–Buddhists contributed to development procedures. Obviously, alongside structures, Muslims additionally imported strategies related with their structures up to this point obscure in India, for example, the function of the curve and column in moulding a façade, and of the pendentive and squinch in holding an arch. These highlights were not initially Muslim but were received from Romano-Byzantine and Persian wellsprings of the pre-Islamic root in such a way and shape that they became an integral part of Muslim structures throughout the Islamic world (Khan, 1931). Minhaj's *Tabakat-I-Nasiri* rightly points out that Muslim architecture in Bengal began with Bakhtiyar's success (al-Uthmani, 2010). In many of the Muslim structures of Gaur and Pandua, it is evident that the manufacturers utilised a few pieces of temples to introduce the mosques and different structures. From the rule of Shamsuddin Iliyas Shah, Bengal has gotten a specific type of Islamic architecture with apparent, distinguishable features than Delhi Sultanate style or other territorial styles of India. Both Shamsuddin Iliyas Shah and the Alauddin Husain Shah made substantial commitments. The landmarks that are enduring today of that timespan are a subject of imperial support.



Figure 13. Beautiful architectural designs in resemblances with Central Asian styles



Figure 14. Decorative designs on brick structures (Source- Mitra, 2010)

The characteristics of the Sultanate constructions of Gaur and Pandua are that they were worked in blocks, the walls being extensive and secured with stone facings or stone lintels running evenly through the centre. The corners are fortified by the erection of towers, generally octagonal; however, once in a while, additionally round, rising just up to the degree of the

rooftop was bow-cut, a component derived from the overall type of thatched roof of Bengal. Over the rooftop rose altered timber-formed vaults of local type, fabricated for the most part on triangular pendentives. However, every so often raised above squinches (the structural components that help bolster a dome), both being adjusted from outside sources. Inside, thin, however hard rock sections pointed curves inside massive structures, giving a feeling of softness and breezy space. The structures were embellished with string mouldings and terracotta designs of neighbourhood sources. The most significant feature being creepers shaping edges, these contained motifs of various structures from the chain and ringer theme of the temple's decorations. One significant thing is that shading enamelled bricks for building, and this style likely originated from central Asia (Figure 13). We can see this beautiful brick use during the fifteenth-century mosque design in Samarkand (presently in Uzbekistan) (Dani and Prasad, 1961).

The architectural character of Gaur and Pandua is not quite the same as other medieval designs in India and somewhere else. It has made a style that may incidentally be depicted as the autonomous Bengal style. Brick was the chief raw material for installing the structures and drives this area's design in a particular style (Figure 14). From the accessibility of brick as a building material, it very well may be assumed that there was a large stock of brick. The greater part of the mainstays of the structures was made of basalt, and most likely, it was acquired from the Rajmahal slope locale, much closer to Malda. As of late, a portion of the basalt quarry locales has been reported from this hilly slope. However, how they had carried the stones from that part is as yet obscure.

The decline of Gaur and Pandua

The monuments of Gaur and Pandua currently are quiet declarations to those energising times. These structures speak to the most extravagant imaginativeness of the skilled workers. The splendour of architecture, the greatness of terracotta and stone workmanship raised Malda to the world map of aesthetics. Most researchers have alluded to the moving of the river course toward the west as the explanation behind the decline of Gaur. James Rennell found that the stream had moved about ten miles toward the west of Gaur toward the finish of the eighteenth century. The two European voyagers, Father Manrique (1648) and Robert Hedges (1687), did not specify the shifting of the river and distinctly portrayed the description of the royal residence, which the

latter described as greater than that of Constantinople (present-day Istanbul) (Ray, 2021). There was no explanation behind Taj Khan Karrani's moving the capital to Tanda towards the west similarly wherein the river was moving. The primary purpose behind the decline of Gaur gives off an impression of being political unsteadiness. While the port of Chittagong had become the bone of dispute between Arakan, Tripura, and Bengal, later joined by the Portuguese globe-trotters, the Bhagirathi zone had gotten insecure with the success and loot of Gaur by Sher Shah from the end of 1538 (Ali, 2021). It is essential to note that while the Portuguese traders had settled first at Saptagram and afterwards at Hughli, their daring comrades started their plunders in the beachfront zones influencing the exchange course. The last surge came in the wake of the Mughal-Pathan challenge, which crushed the northern part of Bengal. Such nonstop disorder brought about the disregard of the support of the stuffed city. The channels connecting the tidal pond and the Ganges and filling in as the city's help must be appropriately kept up. In 1575 AD, this brought about the flare-up of a severe plague, which diverted three hundred people each day. It is conceivable that the association between the Mahananda and the Ganges through the city's channels had snapped because of the absence of support because of the start of the westbound development of the Ganges. The Portuguese control of Malacca from the mid-sixteenth century made issues for the Muslim shippers continuing exchange between Gaur-Saptagram and the southeast. It might be assumed that the Portuguese were controlling the exchange connections between the Bhagirathi and Southeast Asia, which influenced the progression of silver into Bengal. Combined with political instability and insurgency, the business and monetary universe of Gaur was progressively declining. The Mughal success and the moving of the capital from Tanda to Rajmahal toward the east of the waterway meant another episode that put a stamp on the fall of Gaur (Sengupta, 1969).

Heritage Tourism in Gaur and Pandua

Cultural Heritage tourism is one of the biggest and quickest developing worldwide tourism industry markets. It covers all parts of travel that give a chance to discover other regions' history, culture, and way of life. India has a vast assortment of cultural heritage like monumental heritage, natural heritage, traditional art and craft heritage, music and dance heritage etc. The state of West Bengal has all the mentioned heritage destinations. Hence, national and foreign tourists love to visit this state over having a significant social legacy sway in the broadest

sense (Sen, 2018). Gaur and Pandua, the two capitals of medieval Bengal, are prestigious for their legacy in the tourism industry. This is the most well-known tourist destination of the northern part of West Bengal for individuals keen on exploring the spots with a long history and rich archaeology, amalgamated with brick and stone (Figure 15). A particular sort of architectural delight alongside beautiful brickwork and ornamentation complicatedly designed with walls and facades has made these two old capitals of Bengal a genuinely heritage site of universal significance.



Figure 15. Tourists enjoying the marvellous architecture of the sites.

An analysis of the visitors' satisfaction level has been shown in Table 1 by considering some of the primary development parameters among 1220 visitors; local transportation, accommodation, guide facility, drinking water facility, information centre about the sites are some of the primary sectors where people think an up-gradation is necessary.

Table 1: *Tourists' satisfaction response on the facilities available in and around the sites*

Sl. No.	Parameters	Visitors satisfaction level (n = 1220)			
		Highly satisfied (%)	Satisfied (%)	Moderately satisfied (%)	Need upgradation (%)
1.	Local transportation	15	23	27	35
2.	Accommodation	16	27	25	32
3.	Food availability in the nearby locations	24	31	22	23
4.	Guide facility	12	21	29	38
5.	Healthcare infrastructure around the heritage sites	17	20	30	33
6.	Facilities for specially abled visitors	0	0	0	100
7.	Drinking water and sanitation facility inside the site/site complex	13	18	32	37
8.	Knowledge and information centre about the site	7	13	25	55
9.	Site preservation and conservation	34	26	22	18

Based on the findings of Table1, a few recommendations for the better ramifications of heritage tourism in the sites are as follows:

- There is a need for some proper marketing strategies to advance heritage tourism at Gaur and Pandua. The coordination among heritage and tourism in the settings of occasions in the territory ought to be fathomed for the viable marketing campaign.
- A good set-up package program for heritage tourism is required. Even though there are some package programs, but tourists can barely depend on them.
- Light and sound shows are must be organised inside the heritage sites to attract more tourists.
- There need to set up a local market around the destinations in such a keyway that traveller can proceed to purchase and with it, to some extent the local economy will increment by the tourism.
- The museums and their galleries assume an indispensable job in the heritage management of the country. There is a need to create site museums in these destinations to promote heritage tourism. Museum-related exercises, such as special lecture programmes, heritage

awareness programmes, heritage walk programmes, guided tours to exhibition halls, and so forth, ought to be there.

Conclusion

The ascension and development of Muslim society in Bengal, most likely, was the consequence of the joined endeavours of the rulers, intellectuals, transients and Sufi saints. In the unified and integrated society where individuals had various religious beliefs, lived-in fit agreeable connections and associations among them occurred. It provided for the ascent of regular practices and customs in the general public. During this time, Bengal prospered financially, its business relations with China, Indonesia, and Malaya landmass and different parts of the nation stayed continuous in any event, during the time of military commitment. The coin-hoards of the Sultani time frame recovered from various parts of Bengal and Bihar set up that business ties through vendors and merchants stayed continuous. With the approach of Turko – Afgan rule, the urbanisation process began in Bengal, which led to the rise of many towns and cities and the foundation of new technologies, workmanship, art and craft advanced society. The architectural articulation of the Bengal Sultanate can be seen as an imaginative mix of foreign and neighbourhood conventions. While we are talking about the medieval architectural tradition of Gaur and Pandua, a monstrous assortment and innovation should likewise be perceived. A transformation of Middle Eastern and Central Asian architectural designs, techniques, strategies, and ornamentation into a provincial Bengali style was observable by the fifteenth century. Altogether, this provincial Bengali style is characterised by rehashed references to pre-Islamic stupendous traditions and contemporary local vernacular structures (the mud and thatched huts). In this way, most of the mediaeval structures of this region are Islamic and Bengali, showing the dynamic capacity of Islamic design to change itself by adaptation. In any general study of the various architectural conventions of the Islamic world, that of Bengal, for the most part, gets little importance. The mosques and tombs at Gaur and Pandua, for instance, draw in not many tourists and therefore, the particular highlights of these heritages are not referred to inside the nation just as in the universal level. To experience this issue legacy, the travel industry can assume a significant tusk. The study has additionally found that both positive and negative factors are overseeing tourism in this area. It very well may be proposed that the tourism in this area be executed in a manageable and gainful manner without decay of the local environmental

condition, values, and traditions. As the tourism comprises of both negative and positive effects in the studied locale, so cautious methodology, appropriate administration, network-based mindfulness program to spare the heritage property, just as budgetary and infrastructural improvement of the zone alongside the study of the perception and view of the tourists, can go about as impetuses for the fruitful heritage tourism in this area.

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Competing of Interest

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Authors' Contribution

WKB & PD - Conceiving and designing the research, field investigation, data analysis and preparation of the of the manuscript; SB – Preparation of Map, revision of the manuscript.

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