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# Extreme Dependency as a Creative Catalyst in Early Indo-Islamic Architecture of the Slave Dynasty

## Introduction

The most severe form of extreme dependency is enslavement. This ideologically charged term still influences our notion of what we understand by the dualistic concepts of ‘slavery’ and ‘freedom’.<sup>1</sup> However, there are many more nuanced forms of dependence and there is not only the black and white dichotomy of these two notions. Especially in the areas of art and architecture, cultures have again and again found means to express artistic freedoms even in situations of severest dependency. In a way it is one of the most creative stimuli for an artist to be confronted with restrictions.

This paper examines the architecture of the Quwwatu’l Islām Masjid, the first congregational mosque (*jāmi masjid*) built under settled Islamic rule in India. It argues that although the local builders – ordered by the new Muslim overlords to construct a mosque – were undoubtedly in a situation of extreme dependency as they were forced to dismantle their own temples to use the debris to raise the *jāmi masjid* in Delhi (Dillī), they were, however, not only in a position of enslavement but used the little leverage they had, to shape the development of the architecture they produced. By actively integrating their own motives and building conventions, the local craftsmen implemented a good amount of artistic freedom. However, even when more passively, materials which bore the imprint of their own tradition, were used, at a stage during which they were

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<sup>1</sup> See the page ‘Research Objectives’ on the webpage of the Bonn Centre for Dependency and Slavery Studies (<<https://www.dependency.uni-bonn.de/en/our-research/research-objective/research-objective>>) (last accessed on: 21.07.2020).

severely suppressed, even this succeeded in influencing the style and development of the new and dominant Islamic culture in the north of India. As a consequence, a hybrid and in many ways integrative early Indo-Islamic architectural style was shaped, bringing together the cultures, traditions and artistic conventions of the suppressed and the suppressors.

## The Historic Background

After the Prophet Muḥammad's death in Medina in 632 CE, Islam spread rapidly beyond the Arabian Peninsula throughout the adjoining lands. In 712 CE, Islamic armies reached the area bordering the Indus river in today's Pakistan. The Arab conquest of Sindh led to the creation of a number of trading settlements at the mouth of the river Indus. Small mosques were raised inside these villages and towns for the local Muslim population during the eighth century (Asher 1992: 2; Blair and Bloom 1995: 149; Mitter 2001: 85). However, the territory did not come under Muslim occupation.

Numerous incursions into the area of northern India followed under Maḥmūd of Ghazni during the eleventh century (Nath 1978: 1; Tillotson 1990: 1; Asher 1992: 2). These were largely raids in which wealthy pilgrimage centres and temples were targeted and treasures looted.<sup>2</sup> The Hindu Rājput families in the north of India tried to defend their territories but in 1192 CE, the central Asian Islamic ruler Muḥammad of Ghur defeated the Rājput clans at the second battle of Tarain.<sup>3</sup> The victorious Muḥammad Ghurī, too, did not intend to settle in South Asia. However, for the first time, he left behind a representative, his principal general, the military commander Qutb-ud-dīn Aibak.<sup>4</sup> He was born in Turkestan and sold into slavery as a child, first in Persia and then in what is today Afghanistan. Until the assassination of his master in 1206 (Sharma 2005: 8; Volwahren no date: 5), this former Turkic Mamluk (Mamlūk) slave ruled the area in Muḥammad Ghurī's name. However, after his death, Qutb-ud-dīn Aibak proclaimed himself an independent ruler, a *sultān* of India. This gave rise to the foundation of the first

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<sup>2</sup> During these raids, the famous Hindu pilgrimage centres of Kanauj, Mathura (Mathurā) and Somnath (Somnāth) were targeted (Nath 1978: 2; Watson 1989: 89; Tillotson 1990: 1; Dehejia 1997: 251; Sharma 2005: 8).

<sup>3</sup> Muḥammad of Ghur ascended the throne in 1173 (Sharma 2005: 8). He is known by a number of names and titles, such as Muḥammad-bin-Sam and king Mu'izz ad-Din Muḥammad Ghori. Ghur can also be spelled Ghor(e) or Ghaur. It is a town between Ghazni and Herat in Afghanistan. Tarain is modern Taraori, close to Karnal in Haryana, also known as Tarori or Tarawari.

<sup>4</sup> As for all Muslim names, there are various alternative forms and spellings, such as: Qutb al-Dīn Aibak (Hillenbrand 1988: 107).

independent Islamic state in India, the Delhi Sultanate, ruled by the Mamluk dynasty.<sup>5</sup> This consisted of five short-lived dynasties, which were largely Afghan or Turkic by origin and lasted all together from 1206 till 1526. Collectively, these are known as the Delhi sultanate(s).<sup>6</sup> As the founder and most of its rulers were Mamluks and as such slaves, the dynasty is alternatively known as the Slave dynasty (Tillotson 1990: 2; Sharma 2005: 8, 22; Volwahren no date: 6).

## The New City Foundation at Delhi

In 1193, shortly after Muḥammad Ghurī's victory over the Cāhamānas and their allies near Tarain, his deputy, Qutb-ud-dīn Aibak, conquered the former twelfth-century Rājput Fort of Rāi Pithorā with its inner slightly earlier Tomar citadel of Lāl Koṭ (Davies 1989: 119; Tillotson 1990: 28; Sharma 2005: 8). This had been the seat of power of the defeated Chauhān Rājput king Pṛthvīrāja III at Delhi.<sup>7</sup> Today, this area is known as Mehrauli to the south of New Delhi. Already at the time, it had a good infrastructure and resident local population and was transformed into the first Islamic city of the newly acquired Indian dominion. The continuity of sites is a well-known phenomenon in the study of religions and architecture, which indicates the importance given to certain places based on their previous significance (Eliade 1987: 20–24; Hegewald 2012: 34–35; Dehejia 1997: 252) and the wish of successive rulers to be associated with these. In this sense, Delhi continued to act as the seat of power for several dynasties. Already during the first Sultanate, Delhi was transformed into an eminent seat of Muslim religion and culture. Even after the establishment of the Mughal dynasty, Delhi continued to act as one of their capital cities (Blair and Bloom 1995: 149).

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<sup>5</sup> 'Mamluk' (*mamlūk*) is a term used for somebody sold into slavery, usually to become a soldier, who has converted to Islam. This trend appears to have started in the ninth century. The Mamluks increasingly, gained in power, developing into an influential military class which played prominent roles in a number of Islamic regions, such as Egypt, the Levant, Iran, Iraq and India. Hillenbrand and Patel draw our attention to the fact that 'Sultanate architecture' or the 'Sultanate period' are not uniform entities as the name might suggest (Hillenbrand 1988: 105; Patel 2006: 9).

<sup>6</sup> These were the Mamluk dynasty of the Delhi Sultanate (1206–1290), the Khiljī dynasty (1290–1320), the Ṭughlāq dynasty (1320–1414), the Sayyid dynasty (1414–1451) and the Lodī dynasty (1451–1526).

<sup>7</sup> This site had been the capital of a number of Hindu ruling Rājput families, such as the Tomars and the Chauhāns. Altogether, there were seven cities at Delhi, founded by successive ruling dynasties (Tillotson 1990: 27–28), before the British made it their later imperial capital.

## Reasons for the Construction of the Imperial Mosque

At the centre of the annexed Hindu fort, Qutb-ud-dīn Aibak had a large number – based on an inscription found on the eastern gate of the mosque, there were twenty-seven – Hindu and Jaina temples raised to the ground by elephants to create space for the erection of the first major mosque in India (Nath 1978: 9; Hillenbrand 1988: 109; Tillotson 1990: 29; Nath 1994: 53, 61; Sharma 2005: 21). The dismantled construction material was used as building stones to raise the earliest congregational mosque built by a separate Muslim power on Indian ground. The mosque is called the Quwwatu'l Islām Masjid. Colloquially, it is known as the Qutb Complex or the Qutb Mīnār Complex as the religious compound also contains a prominent minaret, to be discussed later. The creation of a congregational or Friday mosque, a *jāmi masjid*, was amongst the primary interests of the new rulers. This acted as a proclamation of the victory of Islam and through this legitimised the rule of the *sultān* (Asher 1992: 2), whose conquest was portrayed as an act of religious expansionism and not as one of personal enrichment. Furthermore, it aimed to rival constructions of Muslim rulers in other regions (Mitter 2001: 87). It also provided the Islamic armies with an adequate place of worship. Today, the mosque and its associated sacred buildings are all that survives of this first Islamic city at Delhi (Tillotson 1990: 28).

## The Architectural Development of the Site

Building on the mosque started in 1193 under Qutb-ud-dīn Aibak. However, successive *sultāns* added to the original core building over the following centuries and substantially enlarged the initial design.

### *The Form and Material of the First Mosque*

Contrasting with the indigenous Hindu, Jaina and Buddhist architectural traditions in India, in which individual worship is normally at the forefront, the Friday mosque in Delhi was primarily designed for congregational worship. Following the traditional style of mosque building, originally derived from the house of the Prophet in Medina, in which the first converts assembled for prayer (Hillenbrand 1994: 39; Dehejia 1997: 252; Davies 1989: 28), the Delhi mosque has a large paved courtyard (*ṣaḥn*) at its centre (Plate 1, inner mosque (1) in white). This was meant to accommodate all male members of the resident Muslim community for Friday prayer. The spacious central courtyard is surrounded by an open cloister on the south, the east and the north. It is entered through gateways placed in the middle of the three

arcades.<sup>8</sup> On the west, the direction of Mecca (*qiblā*), is the prayer hall (*līwān*, *musallā*),<sup>9</sup> which is deeper than the arcading on the other three sides. The original hall measures about 44 metres (147 feet) in length and 12 metres (40 feet) in depth (Sharma 2005: 21). Slightly later, as will be discussed below, a high screen of five pointed arches facing the court, was added at the front of the *līwān*. These architectural elements were raised between 1193 and 1198 (Tillotson 1990: 29).

This core mosque building (excluding the screen) was virtually wholly made out of the spoils of the dismantled former Hindu and Jaina temples. To destroy the sacred structures of the defeated population and to raise their own sanctuary at the same site – documenting the continuity of sacred sites – was a powerful religious but also a poignant political statement of the new Islamic power in India. Hillenbrand identifies this first early phase of interaction between the new overlords and the extremely dependent defeated locals in this only just subjugated province as one of “naked assertion of power” (1988: 109, 112). During this, a psychological propaganda dimension played an essential role (Hillenbrand 1988: 105). The violent act of destruction of the most sacred sites of the indigenous residents aimed to proclaim the triumph of Islam and the authority of the new rulers. This idea is also expressed in the name given to this first major mosque raised on Indian soil. “Quwwat’l Islām” means “The Might of Islam” (Hillenbrand 1988: 109; Tillotson 1990: 29; Asher 1992: 2).

In more detail, the arcade enclosing the courtyard was constructed out of overtly re-used Hindu and Jaina temple pillars.<sup>10</sup> This is clearly visible in the typical decorations, including bells on chains and the water pot (*pūrṇa kalaśa*) imagery, adorning the shafts of the pillars (Plate 2). As the pillars were too short for the envisaged elevation of the cloister and the prayer hall, one was set on top of another, to create double the height. Above, pillaged trabeate domes were employed as roof coverings (Plate 3). Furthermore, looted bracket stones and lintels were employed. One problem, the Muslims overseeing the construction of the mosque encountered, was that they preferred embellishments consisting of vegetal ornamentation, such as the arabesque, geometric designs and calligraphy instead of representations of human and animal shapes. Although there is no outright ban on the representation of living forms in Islam, the Ḥadīths recommend caution with regards to depicting these, as no human should arrogate the creator role of God.<sup>11</sup> However, many of the building blocks, re-used from Hindu and Jaina temple edifices, were profusely decorated with figural representations

<sup>8</sup> In India, the main entrance of mosques is usually positioned in the east, opposite the sanctum, facing west (Sharma 2005: 16).

<sup>9</sup> An alternative spelling is *muṣallā*. See, for instance, Hillenbrand (1988: 109).

<sup>10</sup> For an introduction to the theory of re-use, see Hegewald (2012: 30–54).

<sup>11</sup> This has only been stated in the *Ḥadīths*, the sayings, and not in the *Qur’ān* itself. See, for instance, Dehejia (1997: 250). But this ban has not always been followed with the same force.

of donors, devotees, enlightened teachers (Jinas, Tīrthaṅkaras) and various semi divine and divine beings. Where these were not too obviously visible, in places higher up on the pillars, figural sculptures were frequently left untouched (Plate 4). However, in more prominent places, lower down on the shafts, the statues were usually carefully chiselled away, leaving faint hints in empty niches and carved full-body mandorlas (Plate 5). As the ancient columns were re-employed without substantially changing their design, Hindu and Jaina decorative motives and even some figural images, entered the scheme of this early Islamic edifice.

### *Additions to the Original Mosque*

A second means by which Hindu and Jaina ornamental conventions were re-employed in the early Islamic vocabulary of architecture in India is exposed by the screen of the mosque, facing west (Plate 6). The screen is an important element in Islamic architecture as it indicates the direction towards Mecca to those praying in the mosque's courtyard.<sup>12</sup> Behind it lies the sanctum, which is used for prayer on ordinary day. However, on Fridays, when the entire male population of an area is present, worshippers also use the open court for their prayer rituals. In the Quwwatū'l Islām Mosque, the screen, pierced by four lower and one central tall pointed arch, was set up at the front of the earlier hypostyle prayer hall, a few years after building on the mosque commenced (Plate 7). The reason behind it appears to have been that the flat hall, constructed entirely out of re-used temple pillars and ceilings, was perceived as too local, Hindu and Jaina (Hillenbrand 1988: 109; Asher 1992: 4). In order to increase the Islamic appearance of the building, a tall screen with typical Islamic design features, such as pointed arches and calligraphic writing, resembling Iranian models, was attached to the front of the flat roofed hall of prayer in between 1197 and 1199 (Hillenbrand 1988: 108; Davies 1989: 35; Dehejia 1997: 253).

Although there are a few hints indicating the presence of pointed arches in local architecture before the arrival of Islam in India,<sup>13</sup> these are unusual exceptions. The pointed arch is not a typical Indian shape but is visually strongly associated with the architecture of Islam. It is Seljuk (Saljūq), originating in eleventh-century Iran (Tillotson; Mitter 2001: 87). The pointed arch was an unfamiliar and foreign shape to local Indians, for whom it symbolised Islam. Pointed arches in Islamic architecture are true arches. Its curved shape results from a construction

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<sup>12</sup> Those praying in the hall of the mosque usually have a central and sometimes additional shallow flanking niches (*mīhrābs*) integrated into the back of the prayer hall, to indicate the *qibla* direction.

<sup>13</sup> A rare example is the true arch found in the Gupta brick temple at Bhitargaon, Uttar Pradesh (Dehejia 1997: 253).

method consisting of a fan of radiating voussoirs, wedge-shaped blocks, held together by the downward thrust of a central key stone at the very tip of the arch (Sharma 2005: 17). Contrasting with this construction technique, in Hindu and Jaina architecture, openings, such as windows or gates, had so far traditionally been enclosed with a trabeate system of post and beams, which is a horizontal post-and-lintel system (Fergusson 1967: 203-204; Nath 1978: 5; Hillenbrand 1988: 113; Asher 1992: 4). Supported on upright posts, vertical courses, each one slightly overlapping the one below, known as corbelling method, were used to enclose openings (Tillotson 1990: 30).<sup>14</sup> The arched shape of the Quwwatu'l Islām Masjid represent a combination of both approaches in so far that the outer appearance is that of pointed arches, signalling Islam, but the actual system of engineering is trabeate and as such home-grown Indian. The Muslims supervising the construction of the mosque obviously had an idea of how the arches should look but they had no trained engineers with the knowledge of how to form true arches.<sup>15</sup> Therefore, the local artisans who were told what visual shape to create employed the building techniques they knew, piling up overhanging courses and cutting off the projecting ends (cantilevers) to create an even pointed arch in shape (Plate 8).<sup>16</sup> Thus, the engineering of these arches, their construction technique, is Indian and as such indigenous, but the resulting visual shape is Islamic, perceived at that time still as foreign.<sup>17</sup> This shows that it is easier to transport a form in one's mind than to transfer an engineering technique. However, it demonstrates also how important the appearance of a building is and what significant roles architecture plays in transmitting religious but also political messages. The style of architecture, here that of Seljuk Iran, signals a cultural alignment and expresses foreignness and difference and in extension the might of Islam and the suppression of local culture.

A similar process took place in the ornate carvings adorning the front of the screen of pointed arches. The decorations on the piers were carved anew out of red and buff-coloured sandstone by indigenous craftsmen on the site. The ornamentation consists of vertical bands of *Qur'ānic* inscriptions intertwined with vegetal

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<sup>14</sup> In Hindu and Jaina edifices, this technique continues to be employed also after the arrival of Islam as priests defend the standpoint that there should not be any tensions inside a building for it to function ritually. Interestingly, the later Moghul architecture of Fatehpur Sikri (Fāṭḥpur Sīkrī) re-uses the trabeate construction technique as a tribute to the indigenous architecture of Gujarat.

<sup>15</sup> According to Nath, the first Muslims to occupy Delhi were soldiers, only accompanied by clerics and administrators (1978: 10; 1994: 61).

<sup>16</sup> Today, the very top part of these arches has some voussoirs (Tillotson 1990: 30) but this appears to be the result of some later restoration works.

<sup>17</sup> Nath and Tadgell argue that the shape is more ogee than pointed and related to the shape of a horse-shoe arch (*gavākṣa*), more familiar to the Hindu and Jaina artisans working on the site (Nath 1978: 10-11; Tadgell 1990: 156-157).

design patterns (Plate 9).<sup>18</sup> In these elements, which were newly carved for their Islamic masters, no human or animal forms were employed. However, it seems that the stone masons had a lot of freedom in designing the plant ornamentation as they employed arabesque-like foliage almost identical to that adorning earlier Hindu and Jaina temples in the region. As such, local indigenous foliage adornments were interwoven with calligraphic writings of *Qur'ānic* verses in what look like Kufic and Nashki writing (Nath 1978: 10; Dehejia 1997: 255).<sup>19</sup>

However, it is fascinating, that the carved calligraphy is entirely illegible. It appears that the local stone carvers did not read Arabic script and copied something they did not understand. Remarkably, this does not appear to have been considered problematic, as no attempt was undertaken to correct it. In this context, one has to stress how typical it is of Islamic architecture more generally, to be adorned with large-scale calligraphic writings. Similarly, to the visual appearance of the pointed arches which are *trabeate* in construction, also in the ornamentation, it seems to have been more important to look like Arabic lettering and to symbolise Islam, than to be actually readable. Therefore, the primary audience of these inscriptions appears to have been the local Hindu and Jaina population and not the Muslim believers, at least not those capable of reading. Therefore, in the last two examples, local Indian techniques and patterns did not enter the Islamic way of building through the direct re-use of pre-existing materials as was shown in the first step, but through the production of new components, both structural and ornamental, carved by Hindu and Jaina craftsmen in local indigenous ways.<sup>20</sup>

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<sup>18</sup> It is typical of Islamic architecture in general that the surfaces of objects and edifices have entirely been filled with ornamentation and that no patch is left unadorned. This has been described as *horror vacui* (Asher 1992: 4), a fear of empty space.

<sup>19</sup> Asher points out how much flatter in appearance Iranian decorative ornamentations adorning Ghurid Iranian mosques are (1992: 4). This shows the strong Indian element in these newly carved elements.

<sup>20</sup> Qutb-ud-dīn Aibak also commenced with the construction of a tall minaret, known as the Qutb Mīnār, just outside the central courtyard in 1199 or 1200 (Davies 1989: 119; Sharma 2005: 8). Although it, too, is adorned with Indic design patterns, it has been modelled on precedents from Iran in the region of Ghur (Nath 1994: 52) or from Afghanistan (Mitter 2001: 88). Minarets are usually employed for the call to prayer (*azān*), uttered by the (*mu'azzin*, *mu'adh-dhin*), the announcer. However, as it is so typical of Islam, it also carries a certain symbolic value (Dehejia 1887: 252). The latter point is particularly important with regards to the Qutb Mīnār, as it is so tall (about 73 metres) that a *mu'azzin* calling from its tip could not be heard (Nath 1994: 54). This fact turns it primarily into a ceremonial tower, symbolising victory and proclaiming the might of Islam (Hillenbrand 1988: 109; Davies 1989: 35; Watson 1989: 95; Tadgell 1990: 156; Mitter 2001: 88; Volwahren no date: 13). Qutb-ud-dīn, whose own name means “Axis of the Faith” gave it this name to honour himself and also to stress its symbolic importance as an axis of Islam (Tillotson



Although the resident population was defeated, severely suppressed and their sacred places of worship had been destroyed, their culture nevertheless – at least indirectly – penetrated and influenced the art and architecture of the new dominating elite. This happened through the integration of fragments which bore the ornamental features of Hindu and Jaina religious buildings and even some figural representations, as well as through the engagement of local craftsmen, who continued to employ their familiar building techniques and decorative patterns. In this way, at least some elements of the culture and the artistic and architectural tradition of the subjugated survived. The extent and impact of this will only become fully apparent when we examine the extension of this earlier core building element.

### *Extensions of the Mosque*

Qutb-ud-dīn Aibak died unexpectedly in 1210 CE.<sup>21</sup> He was briefly replaced by Arām Shāh, who only ruled for eight months (Sharma 2005: 8), and then by Shams-ud-dīn Iltutmish, a renowned general and a former slave of Aibak in 1211. He ruled until 1236.<sup>22</sup> While Qutb-ud-dīn Aibak had expanded his territory in northern India, Iltutmish is thought to have consolidated the empire. The Muslim community at Delhi had grown. In order to accommodate it but also intending to visually express his own might and to rival the earlier constructions, Iltutmish expanded the Quwwatu'l Islām Mosque. He elongated the screen and prayer hall at both ends beyond the former cloister and erected a new outer colonnade. As the arcade of Qutb-ud-dīn Aibak's earlier mosque was not pulled down, this resulted in the first mosque building being contained inside a larger second courtyard, with both parts sharing an extended *qibla* wall and sanctum (Plate 1, first extension (2) in light grey).<sup>23</sup> The third Islamic ruler to enlarge the Quwwatu'l Islām Mosque was Alai-ud-dīn Khiljī,<sup>24</sup> who ruled Delhi from 1296 till 1316 CE and expanded the Delhi Sultanate towards the south. Like Iltutmish before, he further enlarged the screen and started

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1990: 31) and of victory. The *mīnār* was completed by Shams-ud-dīn Iltutmish in 1220 CE (Sharma 2005: 8).

<sup>21</sup> Allegedly, he died at Lahore while playing *chaugan*, an Indian version of polo (Sharma 2005: 8; Volwahren no date: 5).

<sup>22</sup> Iltutmish was Aibak's son-in-law (Hillenbrand 1988: 107; Watson 1989: 95; Asher 1992: 4; Sharma 2005: 8; Volwahren no date: 5).

<sup>23</sup> This second larger courtyard then enclosed the Qutb Mīnār which formerly was standing beside the original first mosque.

<sup>24</sup> Again, we find a variety of diverse spellings for this name: Alai-ud-dīn Khalji, 'Ala' al-Din Khalji, 'Alā' ud-Dīn Khiljī.

raising a third arcade, enclosing the aforementioned two courtyards (Plate 1, second extension (3) in dark grey).<sup>25</sup>

As all the material from the demolished Hindu and Jaina temples had been used for the construction of the first mosque by Qutb-ud-dīn Aibak, new columns and building parts had to be produced for Iltutmish's and Alai-ud-dīn Khiljī's extensions (Plate 10). It is fascinating to observe, that the design of the newly carved columns closely resembles that of the former looted Hindu and Jaina temple spoils. The newly created columns are plainer, as they lack the characteristic Indic decorations but they clearly match those of the inner cloister in principal. Even the impression of two pillars having been pilled-up has been recreated in the design of the freshly carved examples. This is significant, as at this stage, completely new columns were created, the patrons could have opted for a more Islamic model, for instance, a central Asian or Iranian style. However, additional pillars were made on the basis of older, re-used types. This shows that at this stage, stylistic continuity and the unity of design of the whole mosque complex appear to have been considered more important (Tillotson 1990: 33) than political associations or regional fraternities.

## **Concluding and Further Thoughts**

Whereas small local mosques were raised in Sindh and on the south-western coast of India at least from the eighth century onwards, a distinctive Indian Islamic architectural tradition only began to develop from the late twelfth century onwards, when Qutb-ud-dīn Aibak settled in Delhi. The Quwwatu'l Islām Mosque is the first major Islamic monument, built under an Islamic sultanate in India. In a way, it could have been a one-to-one copy of a Turkic, Iranian or Afghan mosque, recreating the style of architecture, typical of the new rulers' homelands. Instead, it exhibits various forms of indigenous Indian re-use. The largely unaltered building material from dismantled Hindu and Jaina temples was directly recycled in the core building structure. In the earliest additions made to the original edifice, decorative and structural conventions, both local indigenous (Hindu and Jaina) and foreign imported (Islamic) were combined. It is therefore a fascinating building to study with regards to re-use and to the creation of artistic and architectural forms fashioned under extreme forms of dependency.

The Quwwatu'l Islām Masjid is not unique in this respect, but it is the earliest example. Only slightly later and following in many respects the same scheme is

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<sup>25</sup> Alai-ud-dīn Khiljī also commenced erecting a second even taller minaret which had double the diameter and was planned to reach double the height of the Qutb Mīnār (Tillotson 1990: 32). However, it was never completed and only a stump remains today.

the Arhāi-din-kā Jhonprā Masjid (Two-and-a-half days Mosque) in Ajmer (Aj-mīr), started only a few years later, probably in 1199.<sup>26</sup> Ajmer, too, was a city of strategic importance. In this early mosque, spolia from a Jaina college or temple, erected in 1153,<sup>27</sup> were re-used in the cloister and the sanctuary – made of triple columns with corbelled domes above. In this mosque, too, a more Islamic-looking screen was added later by Iltutmish, probably between 1299 and 1230.<sup>28</sup> As Aibak captured Ajmer in 1196 (Sharma 2005: 8), he might well have been the patron of this mosque as well (Hillenbrand 1988: 107). As such, also in the early mosque at Ajmer, local building materials and indigenous construction techniques were fruitfully joined with an imported plan and an – at this stage still – new and foreign religious function.

After the defeat at Tarain, in what Hillenbrand calls “the crucial first generation of Muslim dominance in northern India” (1988: 105), the inhabitants of the conquered territory of the first Islamic state in India found themselves in a position of extreme dependency and were unable to prevent the desecration and complete destruction of their treasured sacred sites and temple buildings. They were forced to use the spoils of their own revered sanctuaries, regarded as the home of their gods, to raise a structure expressing the victory of Islam over their own people, culture and religion. Nevertheless, the new Muslim ruler and his followers depended on the locals for the assembly of the first congregational mosque out of re-used debris and for the carving of new additions. Through this, inadvertently, Hindu and Jaina conventions, such as decorative motives and building techniques entered not just this building, but as can be seen in the extensions of the mosque under the Khiljīs, the vocabulary of Islamic architecture more generally and more lastingly. Although there are Muslim dynasties in the subcontinent who defined themselves more clearly by the culture of their home countries in Turkey, Iran, Central Asia or Afghanistan, such as the Deccan sultanates, Islamic architecture in India

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<sup>26</sup> While Hillenbrand, founding his argumentation on an inscription on the *mihrāb* of the mosque, places the start date of the mosque at 1199 with a completion in 1200, Nath argues for an earlier start in about 1194 and a completion in about 1229 (Nath 1994: 62).

<sup>27</sup> See, for instance, the discussion in Hillenbrand (1988: 108, 109). Other authors state that it was created out of demolished Hindu temples (Nath 1994: 62; Sharma 2005: 22). However, references to a Jaina college prevail.

<sup>28</sup> For further details, see Hillenbrand (1988: 107). Although very few edifices survive from this early period of Islamic construction on the subcontinent (Hillenbrand 1988: 105), Fergusson refers also to early mosques at Kanauj, Dhar (Dhār), Mandu (Māndū), Jaunpur and Ahmedabad (Ahmadābād, Amdāvād) which were raised out of originally Hindu and Jaina temple parts, however, without providing further details (1967: 201). Hillenbrand refers also to the Sitā-ki Rasoī (Sitā's Kitchen Mosque) at Kanauj, the Shāhī Masjid in Khatu (Khatū) and the Chaurasī Khamba Mosque in Kaman (Kamān) as further early examples of Sultanate architecture in India (1988: 105).

strongly involves the incorporation of indigenous themes and local technology. Whereas certain elements did not acquire widespread usage or were even rejected outright, such as figural sculpture, by the Islamic architecture of the subcontinent, others were adopted and given new-life and meaning in the architecture of Islam in India.<sup>29</sup>

One example is the Indic religious symbolic as well as ornate motive of the pot of plenty (*pūrṇa kalaśa*). In Hindu and Jaina temples, this can be found at the base of pillars and temple entrances as well as in the crowning element at the tip of temple towers. Through the integration of spoils into early mosque architecture, this element became part of Islamic decorations, too, where again, it can be found on the base and top of columns and at the tip of domes (Sharma 2005: 18).<sup>30</sup>

While the impact of local Hindu and Jaina cultural conventions and motives is especially pronounced at the start of this artistic interaction, during the Delhi Sultanate, the early architecture of the Slave Dynasty functioned in many respects as a creative foundation for later Mughal developments and refinements.<sup>31</sup> This can be seen in the palace architecture of Delhi and Agra – for instance in the *bāngālā* roof forms – but also in the design of the Tāj Mahal, with its pot, lotus and floral design patterns.

However, this is also particularly evident in the mosque architecture of Bengal (Nath 1994: 73; Davies 1989: 43) and Gujarat (Davies 1989: 46). Although Indian builders in due course acquired the expertise to construct true arches, vaults and domes, Islamic constructions in Gujarat essentially carried on with employing tra-beate post and lintel constructions.<sup>32</sup>

Through these interactions, and despite the fact that the Muslims were the dominant force and Hindu and Jaina inhabitants initially in an extreme position of dependency, a complex and in many ways multifaceted dialogue commenced between initially external Muslims from Turkey, Iran, Central Asia and Afghanistan and local Hindus and Jainas from India. Despite an initial and ongoing dependency over several centuries, a reciprocal give-and-take, a two-way cross-fertilisation of motives and building techniques still took place and led to discernible changes in both cultures. As such, initial dependency, suppression and destruction eventually, through prolonged cohabitation, exchange and dialogue, have in the long run led to the formation of a distinct Indo-Islamic style of architecture and the integration of originally Islamic forms of building in the

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<sup>29</sup> See the discussion of ‘new-life re-use’ in Hegewald (2012: 31–33).

<sup>30</sup> Another image one could explore in this context would be that of the lotus. See the discussions in Sharma (2005: 18) and Davies (1989: 31).

<sup>31</sup> For a more detailed discussion of this connection, see Hillenbrand (1998: 105) and Asher (1992: 2).

<sup>32</sup> This has been mentioned by Lambah (2006: 13) with reference to the work by Alka Patel.

indigenous architecture of the subcontinent as well as Indian elements in Islamic styles. This interaction and exchange have contributed to the development of free, more united and level religious and cultural traditions in modern India even if these are at times threatened by recent political developments.

## Image Credits

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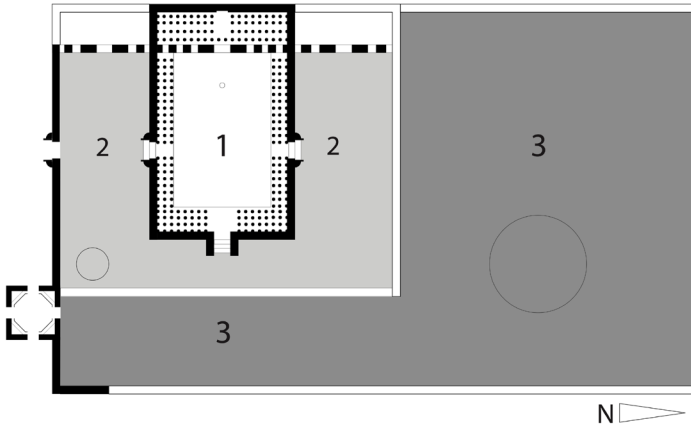
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Plates

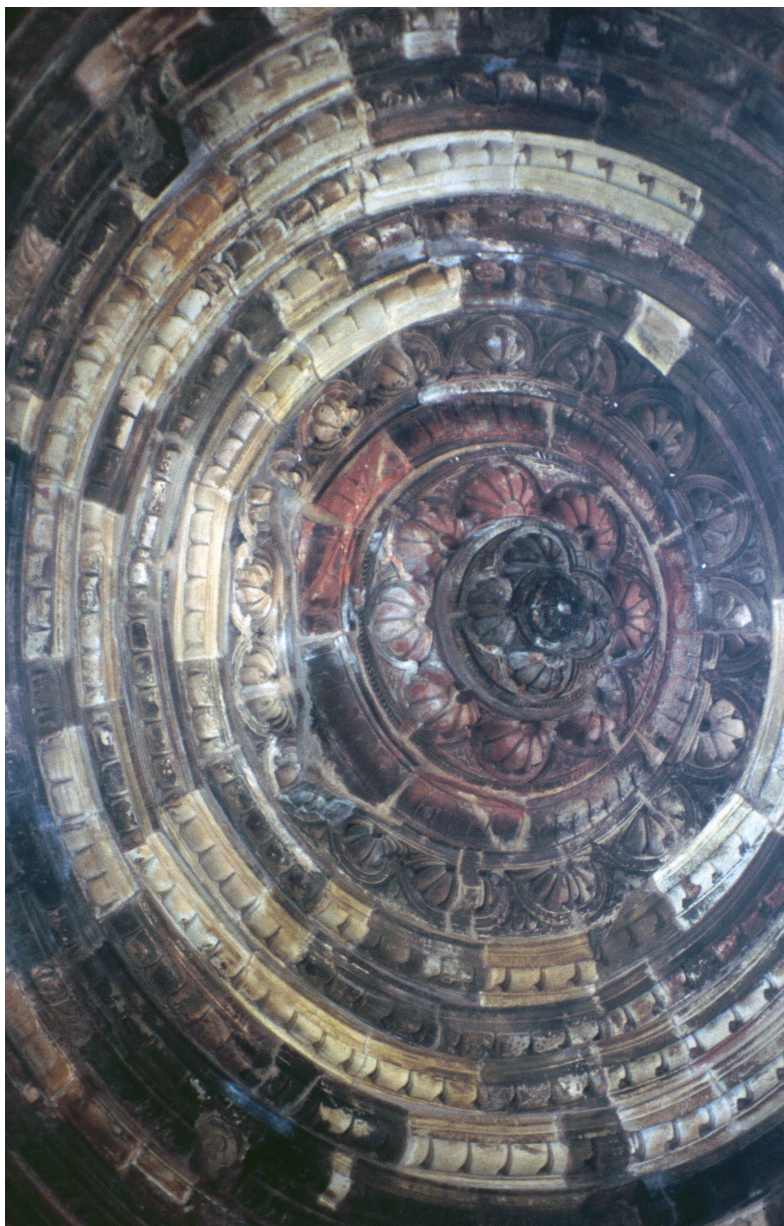


*Plate 1: Plan of the first inner mosque by Qutb-ud-dīn Aibak (1, white), the first extension by Shams-ud-dīn Iltutmish (2, light grey) and the second extension by Alai-ud-dīn Khiljī (3, dark grey).*



*Plate 2: Two pillared-up re-used Hindu and Jaina pillars have been used to form the prayer hall and the arcading of the Quwwatu'l Islām Mosque in Delhi.*





*Plate 3: Trabeate domes from dismantled local temples were re-used as roof coverings for the prayer hall of this early mosque.*



*Plate 4: Hindu and Jaina figural imagery has been preserved on the pillar spoils in less obvious locations.*



*Plate 5: In very visible places, figural sculptures derived from the local temples were removed from the pillars when they were integrated into the arcading of the early mosque.*



*Plate 6: Today, the later added screen of five pointed arches adds a more strongly Islamic touch and dominates the open courtyard of the Quwwatu'l Islām Masjid.*



*Plate 7: View onto the back of the earlier columned prayer hall with flat ceilings raised out of temple debris and the later much taller screen of arches.*



*Plate 8: Although the arches look arcuate, they have been created by superimposing horizontal stone courses and cutting off the cantilever ends.*



*Plate 9: On the newly carved screen, arabesque designs derived from local temple architecture have been interwoven with calligraphic Qur'anic inscriptions.*



*Plate 10: The pillars of the first mosque extension by Shams-ud-dīn Iltutmish clearly imitate the design of the earlier re-used Hindu and Jaina temple columns.*

