

Defining the Intangible Cultural Heritage Integrated to the Built Heritage at the Ancient City of Khalifatabad (Bagerhat)

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Abstract

The heritage inscription from Khan Jahan Ali in the city of *Khalifatabad* is a countenance of indigenous techniques with imperial Delhi, creating a unique identity. Some stunning architectural engravings are revealed here with its own exemplary expression. As well as some of the intangible heritages created and grew up around the built heritages of *Bagerhat* and became a source of some cultural, social and religious inspiration. Although distinct in nature, such traditional patterns form powerful imaginative, global domains through the interaction of meanings and values in spiritual, touristic, scholarly and civic contexts. The purpose of this research is to explore the intangible components and define long-term possessions of the religious built environment on a socio-cultural lifeline. Historical discoveries of remarkable cultural immaterial of present Bagerhat city are indexed. Bagerhat is a UNESCO World Heritage Site. Behind this recognition, as much as its physical and architectural appearance has come to the fore, its underlying embodied soul has not been revealed holistically. In this study an attempt has been made to discover the inner essence of this tradition through physical inspection. Moreover, various books, journals, and papers have been used as a basis. Unstructured interviews and discussions were also held with some recitalists because their ideas could not be rejected if cultural compassions were to be taken. The intangible cultural elements, if properly identified, will contribute to the appropriate live preservation of heritage sites and provide evidence of cultural continuity and fluidity during the past. The outcomes of the study provide some basis for better understanding of the history, culture, rituals, values and later preservation, restoration or conservation of intangible cultural heritages of Khalifatabad.

Key words: Khalifatabad, Intangible heritage, Khan-Jahan style, Cultural relics, UNESCO world heritage.

Introduction

The historic city Khalifatabad is situated in the suburbs of the presently known Bagerhat district of the Khulna Division, which is some 175 kilometers away from the capital Dhaka. The history of this ancient Bangladeshi city is traced to the 15th century. The exceptional number of mosques and Muslim monuments that bear witness to the great architectural skills is the specialty of this ancient city, and it led to the naming of the city the “Mosque City of Bagerhat.”

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Ancient Khalifatabad city is famous for a group of historic brick monuments. Among the presently surviving monuments *Shait Gombuj Masjid* (sixty dome mosque) is magnificent and largest brick structure¹. Some other historical monuments surround it. The monuments are the representation of a rich building pattern. For outstanding architectural value, the World Heritage Committee of UNESCO inscribed Bagerhat in the World Heritage list in 1985 (criteria iv) and it got the status of the second World Heritage site in Bangladesh after *Paharpur*. More than 50 monuments made of brick have been traced in this area representing initial period of the development of Muslim architecture in Bengal. The purpose of this research is to explore the intangible components and define long-term possessions of the religious built environment on a socio-cultural lifeline.

Methodology

Collected data from available published literature reviews and site survey is the main source of evidence for this study. All historical and field information has been analysed and compared with each other to evaluate the original scenario and current state of the intangible cultural heritages associated with the monuments. According to history, some of the cultural components existed in Khalifatabad before around 600 years, but there are no defined literatures. Those historical components spread in a different format by generations. Local people wanted to cherish those traditions, tales or stories in their memories as their glorious past. Also, those components make the heritage places more memorable, meaningful, and interesting.

A. Sources

From the literature, there is no direct information about the intangible cultural heritages, but some indications of past cultural events, beliefs, lifestyles, human activities, rituals, and values are found from the different writers stated in the different sources. Those information has been collected from available sources, such as newspapers, books, journals, seminar proceeding, thesis paper, valid online resources etc. Specifically, information about the Khan Jahan Ali (KJA) fair, pilgrimage, myths, and tales, which were generated about many centuries before and continue to the present. Also there are debates about some of the particular myths, few of those are categorically presented and trying to be justified.

¹ Nazimuddin Ahmed, *The Buildings of Khan Jahan- In and around Bagherhat*, (The University Press Limited, 1989), Dhaka.

B. Fieldwork

Site survey along with the support of primary and secondary sources have been conducted to find out how the most important tangible and intangible cultural components and their outstanding universal values are integrated into each other. Physical survey includes site visit and visual observation and photographic documentation of presently survived monuments, associated popular cultural activities and life lines. There is a lack of existing research data on the cultural heritage of the khalifatabad. Therefore, oral history, city tales and statements from elderly people by interviewing and information about cultural traditions from local sources, are considered as a valuable basis of information to be used for synthesis and analysis.

Background Study: Historical Perspective

During the 15th century (1429) Turkish General *Ulugh Khan Jahan* was commissioned by the *Delhi* emperor to establish a Muslim colony in this remote state². So, he conquered part of southern Bengal. He named the area Khalifatabad in honour of the then *Sultan Nasiruddin Mahmud Shah I* (1435-59), the founder of the second Ilyas Shahi Dynasty³ and ruled the area by setting up of administration at Haveli-Khalifatabad, till his death in 1459. The local capital was 50 km² along the Bhairab River, while the city extended into the northern peripheral land of *Sundarban*.

A. Khan Jahan Ali

Khan Jahan Ali of Khalifatabad (present-day Bagerhat) possessed the indispensable qualities to become both a ruler and a successful administrator. Although little has been known about his origin and there happen to be many ambiguous myths and tales; there is no doubt about his abilities.⁴ He was a prominent practitioner of Sufism and was a saviour to the locals.

Khan Jahan Ali was the first individual to bring the swampy region of Sundarbans under the banner of Islam. Exactly where he entered is uncertain, but local tradition says that in Bengal, his first entry was at *Barabazar*, ten miles from Jessore, currently a border town of Bangladesh.⁵ Khan Jahan Ali marched through the jungles and the

² Nazimuddin Ahmed, *Discover The Monuments of Bangladesh*, (University Press Limited, 1984), Dhaka.

³ Ahmed Hasan Dani, *Muslim Architecture of Bengal*, (Asiatic Society of Pakistan, Publication 7, 1961), Dacca, p. 141

⁴ Fatiha Polin and Drubo Alam, *Tracing the Journey of Khan Jahan Ali from Barobazar to Bagerhat*, Jurnal Kemanusiaan, (UTM, 2019), Malaysia.

⁵ S. M. Hasan, *Khan Jahan: Patron-saint of the Sundarbans*, (Islamic Foundation Bangladesh, 2004), Dhaka, p. 38

marshes of *Jessore* with sixty thousand followers.⁶ Every point of Khan Jahan Ali reached a major township, he left behind some of his disciples to engage in social work, and continued to proceed southward with the rest of his entourage.⁷ According to local legend, Khan Jahan Ali and his followers played a vital role in the region, building highways, transforming the region's dense jungles into rice fields and constructing reservoirs to supply drinking water to the local inhabitants.⁸

The saint's primary objective in rendering the swampy region of Bengal habitable was to spread Islam. He was an adept leader and organizer who used abundant manpower to promote architecture, an extremely difficult task in the marshy wetlands of south Bengal.⁹ The saint finally settled at Bagerhat, and legend has it that he constructed 360 reservoirs and 360 mosques in the area. After his death in 1459 C.E., the people of southern Bengal commemorated him as a great warrior-saint, and his tomb remains a renowned pilgrimage destination.¹⁰

B. Khalifatabad.

An ancient settlement existed in the western area adjacent to the present Bagerhat Municipality at around 10-11th century AD. At that time, many of the residents of the area were Hindu and Buddhists. Islamic administration and culture penetrated in the region around the 15th century AD. As a result, it grew into a prosperous city called 'Khalifatabad.' The city was located in the northern part, extended east-west about 7 km and width of 4 km.¹¹ At that time, the river *Bhairab* was flowing along its northern and eastern sides. But later, keeping in line with the change in the course of the river, the history of this city also changed in the same way as the political ups and downs of the history of other parts of Bengal. As a consequence, the settlement lost its importance as a city. During the rise of Hindu feudal powers in the 16th century AD, Hindu culture began to infiltrate the adjacent areas of Bagerhat and the city began to disappear¹². However, before the foundation of a Muslim colony there was a settlement

⁶ J. Westland. *A Report on the district of Jessore: Antiquities, its History, and its Commerce*, (Calcutta: Bengal Secretariat Press, 1871), p. 25

⁷ K. Alamgir, *Khan Jahan (R): Ruler, Builder and Saint*, (Parash Publishers, 2001), Dhaka.

⁸ G. Michell (ed.). *Islamic heritage of Bengal*, (UNESCO, 1984), Paris, pp. 168

⁹ Richard M. Eaton, *The Rise of Islam and Bengal Frontier, 1204-1760*, (Berkeley press of Florida, 2000), p. 210

¹⁰ R. Shahid, *The mystic contribution: Khan Jahan Ali and the creation of Bagerhat*, (Adorn publication, 2010), Dhaka, p. 42

¹¹ Md. Mosharrar Hossain *et al.*, *Khalifatabad, Bagerhat*, (Department of Archeology, Govt. of the Peoples's Republic of Bangladesh, 2003) Dhaka, p. 30.

¹² Ibid, Fig. 1; H. Rahaman and K.M.D. Darain, *A Description of Buildings in Khalifatabad City, Bagerhat*, (Protibesh 11-01: *Journal of the Department of Architecture*, BUET, 2007), Dhaka.

of Buddhists and Hindus during the period of 10-13th century AD.¹³ So, this small prosperous township sprawls abandoned along the bank of the Bhairab River on an earlier settlement about five hundred years old, then known as the mint town of Khalifatabad.¹⁴

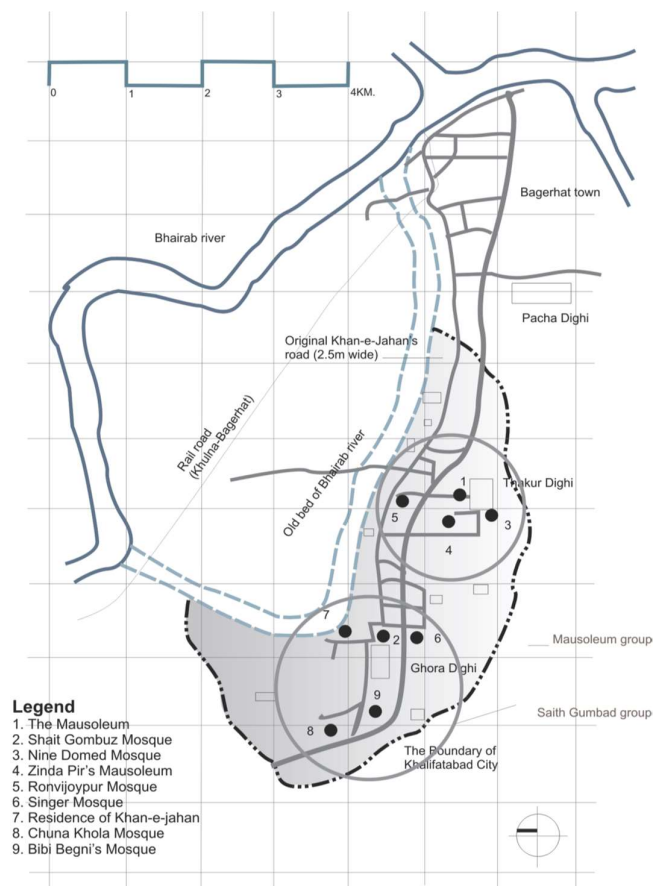


Fig. 1 The area of Old city Khalifatabad and its historical monuments.

In the inhospitable mangrove forest of the *Sundarbans*, this prosperous township was systematically laid out in the mid-fifteenth century by an obscure warrior-saint, known from his inscription as Ulugh Khan Jahan.¹⁵ Khan Jahan Ali, acquired the forest area of the Sundarbans as *jagir* (fief) from the sultan of Delhi and subsequently from the sultan of Bengal. He spent the rest of his life to develop a well-organized locality in this marshland with the spirit of Islamic philosophy. History says that he

¹³ Md. Shafiqul Alam, *Paharpur and Bagerhat: Two World Heritage Sites of Bangladesh*, (Department of Archeology, Govt. of the Peoples's Republic of Bangladesh and UNESCO, 2004), Dhaka, p. 17.

¹⁴ Architectural conservation of Paharpur and Bagerhat, *Architectural & Urban Conservation in the Islamic World*, Vol. 1, (The Aga Khan Trust for Culture, 1989), Dhaka.

¹⁵ Ibid

constructed about 360 mosques and similar structures and as many freshwater tanks, as well as palaces, mausoleums and other public buildings in a short period.¹⁶

The obscure Sufi Saint-General also built roads, bridges, river ports, and necessary urban facilities to spread religious and spiritual influence in the southern region of the country.¹⁷ Still now, the old city of Khalifatabad contains some major architectural and historical monuments. Fig. 1 shows the area of the city and the locations of the monuments that exist presently. The historical monuments of Khalifatabad represent a unique architectural pattern named as *khan-e-jahan* style.¹⁸

Intangible Heritage of Ancient Bagerhat (Khalifatabad)

The intangible cultural components integrated with built heritage are also a valuable cultural part of Bagerhat city. In the city, Khan Jahan's spiritual presence is quite obvious, and there are various folklore and miracles attributed to the saint and his followers, as well as some magnificent monuments. The architectural monuments acted as the symbolic centre point for many activities. And it demonstrates the activity

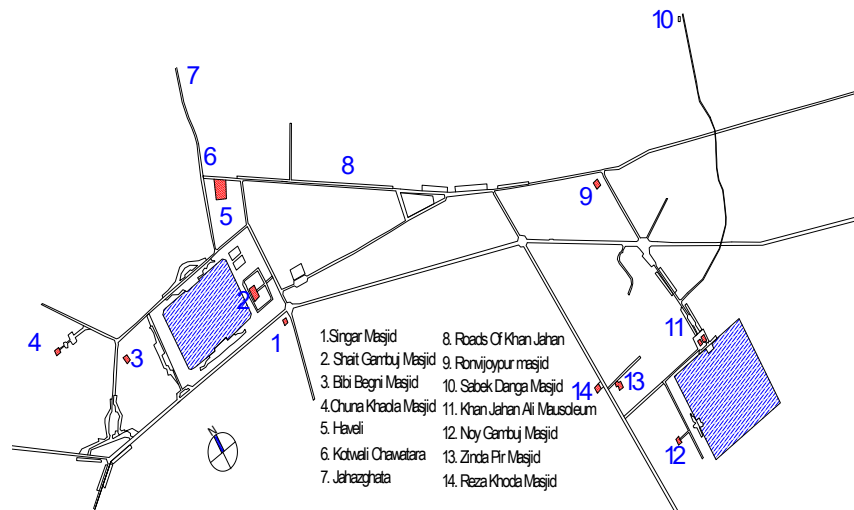


Fig. 2: Present site locations of tangible cultural heritages of Khalifatabad, Bagerhat. (Illustrated by author)

¹⁶ S. C. Mitra, *Jasohar Khulnar Itihas*, (Vol. 1, Bangla, 1963), p. 233

¹⁷ Nazimuddin Ahmed, *The Buildings of Khan Jahan- In and around Bagherhat*, (The University Press Limited, 1989), Dhaka.

¹⁸ M.A. Naqi, H. Rahaman and Sk. Maruf Hossain, "A Study on the Structural Components of Buildings of Khan-e-Jahan Style, Bagerhat" (unpublished), (research funded by Khulna University Research Cell, 2004).

as an organized and permanent manner. As a result, many intangible cultural events grew here that were indigenously associated with the built heritages. Those intangible cultural events are living religious heritages, which are of particular importance, given their vital role in conveying, expressing, and sustaining the faiths that give spiritual identity, meaning, and purpose to human life.¹⁹ Also, understanding living religious heritage requires recognizing the intangible significances of tangible religious objects, structures, and places, which is the key to their meaning.²⁰ The tangible and intangible components cannot be separated since all cultural materials have particular values.

The local people of the old city of Khalifatabad embraced it as a core part of their cultural identity, preserving much of its intangible heritages through oral traditions passed down through generations. However, these traditions are declining due to a lack of proper documentation and preservation efforts. Many myths have already been lost, though some still continue to influence the daily lives and activities of the community.

A. Intangible cultural components:

The built heritage introduced by Khan Jahan Ali added a great value to Khalifatabad. At the same time, it is the container of various types of socio-cultural activities. These activities rise from the remains of his life, his spirit, his philosophy along with his development of architecture, monuments and other urban components. These socio-cultural components become an integrated part of the local tradition and beliefs. Various Folklore like legends, myths, popular beliefs, city tales, etc, are found about Khan Jahan and his spiritual power. Sufi music is a strong local trend around the built heritages of Khan Jahan which is grown based on the life and spiritual power of Khan Jahan Ali. Also, from ancient times, there were some festivals, including the Khan Jahan Ali fair, which occurred in the Khalifatabad city each year.

i) ‘Pilgrimage activity’

It is a well-known fact that Khan Jahan began his career as a missionary and died as a patron saint of the locality. He is regarded as a ‘*Pir*’, even the crocodiles of the big tank in his dargah are looked upon as having miraculous powers.²¹ If we trace the tract of lands he traversed from Barabazar to Bagerhat, he established a vast and well-planned road network in southern region.²² From the legends, it took at least 20 years

¹⁹ Herb Stovel, Nicholas Stanley-Price & Robert Killick (ed.), *Conservation of Living Religious Heritage*, Papers from the ICCROM 2003 forum on living heritage: conserving the sacred, (ICCROM Conservation Studies, 2005), Rome.

²⁰ Ibid, Image 1: G. Michell (ed.), *Islamic heritage of Bengal*, (UNESCO, 1984), p. 173

²¹ Abdul Karim, *Banglar Itihas: 1200-1857* (in Bangla), (Jatio Sahitto Prokash, 2023), Chittagong, p. 74

²² S. M. Hasan, *Khan Jahan: Patron-saint of the Sundarbans*, (Islamic Foundation Bangladesh, 2004), Dhaka, p. 55

to complete all the extant monuments at Bagerhat. People say that Khan Jahan had 60,000 soldiers and their only weapon was the spade. His warrior soldiers dug a great number of ponds in a short span of time. Exaggerating these people a little, Khan Jahan Ali used to excavate huge piles in one night and he used to do all these strange things at night.²³

So, he was an adept leader and organizer who used abundant manpower to promote architecture- an extremely difficult task in the marshy saline wetland of South Bengal.²⁴ The saint finally settled at Bagerhat, and legend has that he constructed 360 reservoirs and 360 mosques in the area.²⁵ After his death in 1459 CE, the people of

southern Bengal commemorated him as a great warrior-saint, and his tomb remains a renowned pilgrimage destination.²⁶ He is credited with building many of the nearby monuments that now lie in ruins. The oldest reference to pilgrims visiting his shrine is from 1866 CE²⁷ in an unpublished manuscript, *Reginald Craufuird Sterndale*, talks about the arrival of numerous pilgrims coming from across Bengal to perform their *ziyarat* (pilgrimage) at the shrine of Khan Jahan Ali.²⁸ Many devotees and lovers of the Sufi saint also gathered here repeatedly in several regular religious occasions.

Khan Jahan spent his retired life here, and after his death on 25 October 1459 (27 *Zilhajj* 863 AH),



Image 1: Earliest representation of Khan-i Jahan's mausoleum & Khanjali Dighi. Water colour made by Reginald Craufuird Sterndale in or just after 1866.

²³ S. C. Mitra, *Jasohar Khulnar Itihas*, Vol. 1 (in Bangla), 1963, p. 221

²⁴ Richard M. Eaton, *The Rise of Islam and Bengal Frontier, 1204-1760* (Berkeley press of Florida, 2000), p. 210

²⁵ S. C. Mitra, *Jasohar Khulnar Itihas*, Vol. 1 (in Bangla), 1963, pp. 371-372

²⁶ R. Shahid, *The mystic contribution: Khan Jahan Ali and the creation of Bagerhat*, (Adorn publication, 2010), Dhaka, p. 41

²⁷ G. Michell (ed.), *Islamic heritage of Bengal*, (UNESCO, 1984), Paris, p. 173

²⁸ Shahid, *Ibid*, Dhaka, p. 42

his tomb built by himself has been preserved.²⁹ In the absence of his physical existence, the tomb is now a pilgrimage site where people pay homage to the saint. Pilgrimage performs frequently to Sufi shrines to seek the intercession of a saint in their communication with the almighty. They believe that the saint has the ability to help them.³⁰

Majority of the pilgrimage are married women who came to votive offerings.³¹ The pilgrimage touches and feeds the two crocodiles, *dhola pahar* and *kala pahar*, that are said to be the carriers of Khan Jahan.³² The present two crocodiles are not the generation of Khan Jahan's pet crocodiles, which live in the same *dighi*. But the local people believe and respect those as so. They feed and touch the pet crocodiles as a sign of a saint having divine power; it could fulfill their '*Manat*' (positive mind's desire). It is interesting that there is no record of the crocodiles to attack any people.

Besides, a large number of people come to Bagerhat to visit the ruins of Khalifatabad, the world heritage site, and the outstanding Shat Gambuz Mosque. The architectural aesthetics, the construction technique, the styles of Khan Jahan impressed them.

ii) '*Khanjali mela*'

Khanjali mela is the local name of Khan Jahan Ali fair. The fair is as big as old. It seems to the fair sits before hundreds years.³³ Local tradition describes Khan Jahan as a wise and benevolent ruler, devoted to the cause of Islam. To uphold teachings and influences of the obscure Sufi Saint-General who adorned the city Bagerhat for spreading religious and spiritual influence to the southern region of the country, an annual fair '*Khanjali mela*' is held on the *dargah* (mausoleum complex) at the supposed anniversary of his death (*Orosh*), premises in the bright half (full moon) of the lunar month in the Bengali month of *Chaitra* (March-April).

Khan Jahan Ali Mela is held every year in the bank of *Tagore Dighi*. Generally, the fair stays three days. Local inhabitants and lots of visitors attend the fair from local and surrounding regions. Hindu, Muslim get together in the festive fair without religious boundary.³⁴ The trend is now active but not very well organized (Image 6

²⁹ S. C. Mitra, *Jasohar Khulnar Itihas*, Vol. 1 (in Bangla), 1963, p. 242

³⁰ S. J. Raj and W.P. Harman (ed.), *Dealing with Deities: The Ritual Vow in South Asia*, (State University of New York press, 2006). USA, p. 88

³¹ P. Hasan and O. Grabar, *Sultans and Mosques: in The Early Muslim Architecture of Bangladesh*, Tauris. I.B, 2007, p. 117

³² S. C. Mitra, *Jasohar Khulnar Itihas*, Vol. 1 (in Bangla), 1963, p. 240; S. J. Raj, W.P. Harman (ed.), *Dealing with Deities: The Ritual Vow in South Asia*, (State University of New York press, 2006). USA, p. 91

³³ S. G. Miah, *Bagerhat er Itihas* (Part 1, in Bangla), Belayet Hossain Foundation, Bagerhat, 2001

³⁴ Ibid.

and 7). Different religious and cultural events are performed in the fair. Many people give *shirni* to the fair people in the name of Saint Khan Jahan Ali. Hindu Muslims both offer *shinni* to the saint, and if they feed crocodiles, people think that they pleased the saint.³⁵

To support the huge gatherings, different types of temporary shops are established that sell various products, like souvenirs, handicrafts, local dry foods, clothes, potteries, etc. The fair also displays some of the large children's playing events with full installations in the adjacent places (Image 8). The fair started its journey after death of Khan Jahan Ali and still continuing as one of the largest cultural festival of the city.

iii) *Cultural activity*

Sufi Saint General Ulugh Khan-e-Jahan came to this southern part of Bengal not only as a ruler but also as a 'cultural mediator'. In a land of hostility, this saint-general came for the salvation of the local people by bringing them into the religious orders of Islam through a motivational process.³⁶

Local music, versions, tales are peaceful medium of spreading message. The muslim saints, over the centuries, created and incorporated local nonsectarian traditions.³⁷ This traditional religious music is a popular meditative and mystic song (*Sufi-Baul* type) presented in raw format with local light instruments associated with the KJA mausoleum (Image 9). The purpose of the music is considered in relation to God and passionate love for Him and his lovers.

The musical programs are arranged around the KJA mausoleum complex on an occasional and regular basis and performed by various local artists, which are spiritual attractions for the pilgrimage and local people. These locally arranged programs bear unique characteristics in consideration of its lyric, devotion and spiritual message. Generally, whole night is dedicated to the performance and sometimes it attracts tourists also.

iv) *Myths & City Tales*

There are number of city tales about the construction of Khalifatabad city and the spiritual power of KJA. After conquered of Bagerhat it seems that he was alive for 30-40 years and adorns his city with various monuments.

³⁵ Ibid.

³⁶ Nazimuddin Ahmed, *The Buildings of Khan Jahan- In and around Bagherhat*, (The University Press Limited, 1989), Dhaka.

³⁷ S. J. Raj and W.P. Harman (ed.), *Dealing with Deities: The Ritual Vow in South Asia*, (State University of New York press, 2006), USA, p. 88

There is a proverb in Jessore that during the time of *Shahjalal*, 12 *Fakirs* (saints) came to the Jessore region to spread the religion and first settled on the bank of Bhairab, which was called 'Barabazar' in the name of 12 saints. Khan Jahan Ali was the hero of these twelve saints.³⁸ When he ordered a permanent haveli or residence in Bagerhat, his disciple's number increased to 360. He built 360 mosques and dug 360 dighis in Bagerhat region for these disciples.³⁹ Though all those are now tales, but many of them still exist. The necessity of excavating tanks is twofold: firstly, to provide sweet drinking water in a deltaic bay where salinity is the main problem; secondly, to obtain alluvial soil of the excavated tank for manufacturing bricks for his building projects.⁴⁰

Although there is a singular paucity of authentic history about Khan Jahan, there is no dearth of legends and local traditions, surrounding his personality. These bewildering legends have been compounded by an increasing number of stories, woven round him by his arduous devotees.⁴¹ These legends, hearsay says and mysterious stories are related to the performance of miracles, conversion of the Hindus into Islam, and stories related to the famous crocodiles, named 'Kalapahar' and 'Dhalapahar'. Such legends and stories are current in '*Punthis*' or hand-written booklets, now those are going to extinct, one of them is as follows:⁴²

খান জাহান মহামান বাদশা নফর
যশোরে সুন্দর লয়ে করিল সফর
তার মুখ্য মহাপাত্র মাহমুদ তাহির
মাড়িতে বামুন বেটা হইল হাজির।
পূর্বেতে আসিল সেও কুলিনের নাতি
মুসলমানি রূপে মজে হারাইলো জাতি।

Translation: "Khan Jahan was a great but humble king who came to Jessore along with his disciples. His principal minister was Mahmad (Muhammad)Taher, who was keen on converting *Brahmins*, though he himself was previously a *Kulin* Brahmin, and by becoming a Muslim, he lost his caste. He started living in *pirallah* village (*Poyogram*) by assuming the title of *Pirali* (saint)."⁴³ The gullible people of the locality still believe

³⁸ S. C. Mitra, *Jasohar Khulnar Itihas*, Vol. 1 (in Bangla), 1963, p. 212

³⁹ Ibid.

⁴⁰ S. M. Hasan, *Khan Jahan: Patron-saint of the Sundarbans*, (Islamic Foundation Bangladesh, 2004), Dhaka, p. 112

⁴¹ Nazimuddin Ahmed, *The Buildings of Khan Jahan- In and around Bagherhat*, (The University Press Limited, 1989), Dhaka, p. 40

⁴² S. M. Hasan, *Khan Jahan: Patron-saint of the Sundarbans*, (Islamic Foundation Bangladesh, 2004), Dhaka, p. 57

⁴³ F. E. Pargiter, *Revenue History of the Sundarban*, 1885, quoted by A.F.M.A. Jalil, *Sundarbaner Itihas*, (Dacca, 1964), p. 121

many legendary stories to be true. The general people consider Khan Jahan Ali as a spiritual personality who has the power to help the helpless people. He is the special representative of the almighty and maintains strong connection with him. So, people offer votives to convince him.

Although there is a singular paucity of authentic history about Khan Jahan, there is no dearth of legends and local traditions surrounding his personality.⁴⁴ According to legend Khan Jahan Ali erected 360 mosques throughout his domain and beautified his capital with an equal number of sweet water tanks. Even he could dig a grand pond within one night!⁴⁵ One cannot believe that those large numbers of sweet water tanks were dug in the shortest possible time. During that period there was no modern equipment to dig such large tanks. So probably myths were created to support the tales.

A popular city tale is established about deemed arrival of Khan Jahan Ali accompanied by two crocodile 'Kala Pahar' and 'Dhola Pahar',⁴⁶ is a strong believe that Khan Jahan Ali rode on those to move. These two crocodiles have been painted by Reginald Craufuird Steradale in an unpublished manuscript on Bagerhat, which contains a number of water-colour illustrations (Image I). It is generally believed that the two crocodiles, living in the Thakur or Khanjaali Dighi or Tank never eat human flesh. But unfortunately, they had eaten several boys.⁴⁷ Simple people believe that these crocodiles can bless young (childless) ladies to come, and their blessings are sure to bear fruit. Accordingly, many young women repair to this place to bath in sacred water of the tank and implore the blessing of the satirian monsters.⁴⁸ They offer them fowls and paint a human figure with red lead on a stone pillar in the neighbourhood, and embracing it vow to give away to the crocodiles the first fruit of their blessings. This vow is never broken, the first born is invariably brought to the tank, and when, at the call of the Fakirs, the crocodiles rise to the surface, the child is thrown on the water's edge with words implying a presentation. But it is taken up immediately after and borne home amid the rejoicings of the family.⁴⁹ This story is too atrocious to believe. However, one story goes that Khan Jahan brought these two crocodiles from the marshy lands down the Bay of Bengal and put them in the Thakur dighi in the hope

⁴⁴ Nazimuddin Ahmed, *The Buildings of Khan Jahan- In and around Bagherhat*, (The University Press Limited, 1989), Dhaka.

⁴⁵ S. C. Mitra, *Jasohar Khulnar Itihas*, Vol. 1 (in Bangla), 1963, p. 222

⁴⁶ A. Roy, *The Islamic Syncretistic Tradition in Bengal*. (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2014) p. 231

⁴⁷ A.F. M.A. Jalil, *Sundarbaner Itihas*, (Dacca, 1964), p. 12

⁴⁸ S. M. Hasan, *Khan Jahan: Patron-saint of the Sundarbans*, (Islamic Foundation Bangladesh, 2004), Dhaka, p. 57

⁴⁹ Ibid.

that people of the locality or pilgrims would not pollute its water for fear of these animals.⁵⁰

Another tales said that Khan Jahan transformed his two favourite horses into two crocodiles during his excavation visit!⁵¹ There is a tale regarding the name of the lake is Ghora Dighi. As far as a horse ran, a huge lake was dug according to its circulation of 1500×900 ft. Also, it was so deep that its waters never run dry round the year.⁵² Those grand water bodies express a wondrous beauty among the scarcity of sweet water.

Khan Jahan Ali always wanted to build his Khalifatabad city, which would have easy accessibility to other cities. It is a well-known fact that he built a wide network of roads. At the same time he promoted riverine transport by establishing a River Port or *Jahajghata* on the bank of the river Bhairab.⁵³ At the site a carved stone column engraved with an image of an eight-handed *Mahismardhini Durga* (9th/10th century), is found embedded in the ground and still indicates the site of the port.⁵⁴ Most of the black stones used in Khan Jahan monuments in Bagerhat as bases of pillars, in all likelihood, were imported from *Chittagong* or the Hill-Tracs by water routes and unloaded at this Jahajghata.⁵⁵ There was a myth about the bringing of those stones. It is said that Saint Khan Jahan carried these from Chittagong to Jahajghata by floating on water!⁵⁶ Also Myths about his disciples, such as *zinda pir*, *chillakhana* etc. are also popular to the local people of Khalifatabad. They think the disciples of Khan Jahan contributed to the mystic activity of the Sufi saint and also paid votive to them. All those are popular beliefs, though there is no scientific evidence, but those are very interesting to the common people and tourists.

v) *Traditional Street shops*

For the increasing visitors and local people's demand of the ancient city Bagerhat, a large number of Souvenir and tourist shops are growing around the monuments. Basically, those shops are arranged on both sides of the streets on the various pathways

⁵⁰ Ibid.

⁵¹ Ibid.

⁵² S. C. Mitra, *Jasohar Khulnar Itihas*, Vol. 1 (in Bangla), 1963, p. 231

⁵³ A.F. M.A. Jalil, *Sundarbaner Itihas*, (Dacca, 1964), p. 142

⁵⁴ S. M. Hasan, *Khan Jahan: Patron-saint of the Sundarbans*, (Islamic Foundation Bangladesh, 2004), Dhaka, p. 110

⁵⁵ Nazimuddin Ahmed, *The Buildings of Khan Jahan- In and around Bagherhat*, (The University Press Limited, 1989), Dhaka, p. 51

⁵⁶ S.S. Zaman, *Bangladesher Sufi Shadhok o Oli-Awlia* (in Bangla), (Rahmania Library, 2008), Dhaka, p. 97

to the historical monuments (Image 10). Those colourful shops are one of the great attractions for the local peoples and visitors which are based on local crafts & potteries. In addition, there are many interesting floating shops or hawkers on the traditional vehicles which contain various low-cost and attractive traditional products.

The following table represents the relationship between tangible and intangible components, where the built elements are the place of performance or spiritual containers of intangible heritage.

Table 1: Re-defining Intangible cultural components of Khalifatabad in a brief

Sl. no.	Place of performance	Source of spirit	Intangible cultures (associated artistic & cultural features)
01	Khanjahan Ali mausoleum complex & Shait gambuj Mosque	Khan-e-Jahan gained the status of a spiritual leader among his followers, both the Muslims and Hindus.	Pilgrimage- Pay Homage to KJA, Visit, Prayer, Candle lightening, Touch & feed the generations of pet Crocodiles, Collection of Holy Water
02	<i>Image of Khalifatabad (ancient Bagerhat city)</i>	Sufi Saint Khan Jahan Ali & his spiritual power is recognized by the local people and creates some myths and oral tales.	Folklore/Oral tradition/myth 2. Associated tales on creation of the city and construction of city infrastructures 3. Associated oral history about his disciples, such as <i>zinda pir</i> , <i>chillakhana</i> etc.
03	Khanjahan Ali mausoleum complex	The Traditional religious music as a popular meditative & mystic song (Sufi-Baul type) considered in relation to God	Traditional Religious Music, The occasional and regular programs around the place of Khan Jahan Ali mausoleum performed by various local artists dedicated whole night. The Locally arranged programs bear unique characteristics

Sl. no.	Place of performance	Source of spirit	Intangible cultures (associated artistic & cultural features)
04	Khanjahan Ali mausoleum & surroundings	<i>'Khanjali mela'</i> held on the supposed anniversary of his death (<i>Orosh</i>) on the full moon of Bengali months <i>Chaitra</i>	Fair Events Assembly of peoples, <i>'Waj Mahfil'</i> (Muslim religious talks), meditative religious activities (<i>jikir</i> etc), Children playing events, commercial activities (product exhibition & selling) etc.

Conclusion

The monuments of world heritage site have important cultural values. There are unique cultural heritages that were grown and developed in the historical place and continue till today. These socio-cultural components become an integrated part of the local traditions and beliefs- conveying the spirit, philosophy and memory of Khan Jahan and his colourful history. Cultural inheritances grown along with the physical structure of the ancient Khalifitabad are not only literary elements, but it has a close relationship with the build form, articulation, space arrangement. Culture sometimes requires additions, modifications, or preservation of certain features in tangible legacy to allow that culture to flourish at its own courses. Before this, understanding these intangible cultural components is necessary to preserve and restore this famed installation of Khan Jahan Ali. In the article, the intangible cultural heritage is described, but further study on the components will help to create more profound knowledge of the impact and influence of that on our national heritage.

Additional images provided by the authors



Image 2: Pilgrimage gathering at the front of Khan Jahan Ali Maosoleum
(Source: Daily Sun, 2017)



Image 3: Pilgrimage visit the *Shait Gambuj* mosque (Source: Daily Sun, 2017)



Image 4: Pilgrimage gathering at *Khan Jeli Dighi* (Source: Author, 2015)



Image 5: Feeding the pet crocodile (Source: Daily Star, 2011)



Image 6: Khan Jahan Ali fair (Source: Jago news24.com, 2011)



Image 7: Khan Jahan Ali fair (Source: Jago news24.com, 2011)



Image 8: Children playing activity at Khanjalimela



Image 9: Cover page of an audio song album devoted to Khan Jahan Ali



Image 10: A series of street shops established on the way of Khan Jahn Ali mausoleum based on local crafts & potteries. (Source: Author, 2015)

Image References

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