

The Episode of Shuja Mosque- A historical review

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There is a mosque, named as Shuja Mosque, in the outskirt of Comilla, the district headquarters of Comilla district of Bangladesh. The mosque is a rectangular building being 58' in length along north to south and 28' in width. The walls are made of bricks and lime and are quite thick measuring about 5' - 8". There is an open varanda of about 24' wide in front of the holy place. The structure stands on four octagonal turrets in the four corners. The mosque have three arched entrances in the eastern wall. The main entrance is quite wide and extended outside. The path is decorated with two thin round shaped turrets. There were entrances in the northern and southern wall of the mosque. In the interior, the western wall is decorated with three mehrabs in which the central one is half round in shape and bears ornamental decoration. The other two mehrabs are not worth mentioning. The front wall of the mosque is decorated with pannel works. There are three Gambuzes on the top o the building of which the middle one is larger than the other two. Recently, the original beauty of the mosque have been distorted by constructing two rooms measuring about 22' in length on the two sides of the building and a varanda of about 24' in breadth in front.

The mosque bears no epigraphical plaque. Govinda Manikya (1660 - 1661 A.D., 1667 - 1676 A.D.), was one of the famous mediaeval rulers of Tripura who became immortal by Tagore's famous works 'Rajarshi' and 'Bisarjan'. According to Sri Rajmala, Govinda Manikya abdicated the throne of Tripura in favour of his half brother Nakshatra Ray to avoid a bloody civil war and took refuge in the Court of Arakan. In the war of succession for the throne of Delhi among the sons of Shahjahan, the Mughal emperor of India, Sultan Muhammad Shuja, the Governor of Bengal Suba and the second son of Shahjahan, being completely defeated by Mir Jumla, the General of Aurangzeb who had already occupied the throne on 1658 A.D., Shuja took refuge in the Court of Arakan.

But the King of Arakan was not paying due respect to the brother of the emperor of India and Govinda Manikya who was at that time present in the Arakanese Court protested against such behaviour and requested the King of Arakan to show proper courtesy and respect to the ill-fated Mughul prince, Sultan Shuja, being impressed by the humane behaviour of Govinda Manikya in his odd days offered him a valuable diamond ring and a precious "Nimcha sword" as a memento of his friendship with the exiled King of Tripura.¹ In the second term of his reign, after the death of Chatra Manikya, Govinda Manikya, with a view to showing respect to deceased Sultan Shuja, erected a beautiful mosque on the bank of Gomti in Comilla, the then integral part of the Kingdom of Tripura, by selling the diamond ring which Sultan Shuja offered him at Arakan, changed the original name of the village by Shujanagar and created a market named Shujaganj with the expectation of meeting the daily expenses of the mosque from the income of the Hat (market).² The learned editor of Sri Rajamala further adds that "now a days also the daily expenses of the mosque is maintained from the Lakhiraj property given by Govinda Manikya. The royal Government of Tripura maintained the mosque as and when needed. Even in 1341 - 42 T. E. (1932 A. D.) Maharaja Bir Bikram Kishore Manikya, the present King of Tripura maintained the old mosque³. The aim of this paper is to examine the authenticity of the narration of Sri Rajmala in the matter of construction of the Shuja mosque. K. C. Singha, the famous historian of Tripura, threw some light on the topic when he writes - "Govinda Manikya, the King of Tripura, who was driven out of the throne, was residing in the hilly tract just east of Chittagong. Shuja started from Rangamati, the Old Capital of Tripura, crossed the mountains and reached the residence of Govinda Manikya who showed him much respect and offered kind hospitality. Sultan Shuja, at the time of his departure to Arakan, gave Govinda Manikya, in gratitude, a valuable diamond ring and a precious persian sword of his personal use"⁴ He further wrote that there are two views regarding the construction of Shuja Mosque. (1) Sultan Shuja himself erected this mosque to commemorate the conquest of Tripura and (2) Govinda Manikya built the mosque by selling the diamond ring and the sword given to him by Sultan Shuja. But he preferred the first view as practicable and possible. He further enquired about the epigraphic plaque of the mosque when a very old muslim gentleman told him that about 50 years ago one official of the royal Government of Tripura removed this plaque surreptitiously and dropped

it in Gomti, perhaps, with intention of confiscating this wakf property. ⁵

From the above description of the historical records of Tripura we find the following facts;

(a) According to Sri Rajamala the first meeting between Sultan Shuja and Govinda Manikya took place in the hill tract of Chittagong where Govinda Manikya showed hospitality but the diamond ring and the sword were handed over to him by Shuja in the Arakan Territory. But K. C. Singha holds that these were handed over in the hill tract of Chittagong.

(b) According to Sri Rajamala the sword is maintained in the royal house with care⁶ but Sri K. C. Singha opines that it is also sold.

(c) Both of them are of the opinion that Govinda Manikya built the Shuja mosque at Comilla.

Now let us examine the following facts :

(1) Whether Sultan Shuja had a chance to meet Govinda Manikya in the hill tract of Chittagong or in the Court of Arakan.

(2) whether Sultan Shuja himself erected this mosque and (3) whether Govinda Manikya was a friend of Shuja.

Sri J. N. Sarkar narrates that on 12th April, 1660 A.D. Sultan Shuja reached Dhaka and on 6th May he left Dhaka and glided down the river towards sea and on 12th May, 1660 A. D. he finally left the land of his successors forever for Arakan from Chittagong by sea.⁷ According to the Dutch record Shuja was killed by the Arakanese by the February 1661.⁸ Stuart also holds the same view that Shuja was executed by the Arakanese in the year 1661 A. D.⁹ K. M. Karim narrates the path of Sultan Shuja's flight to Arakan according to Alamgirnama - "Shuja set out from Tanda on boats to Dacca (Jahangirnagar). His elder son reached there before him.

Zainuddin had arranged with the Raja of Arakan that Shuja would be escorted to Arakan after his arrival at Dacca. At that time Manur Khan, a Zaminder of Dacca, who tried to obstruct the plan, was chastised by Zainuddin and his Arkanese allies. Starting from Dacca on boats guarded by the Arakanese Shuja passed through Dhapa (a place situated 7 miles from Dacca), Sripur (24 miles north of Dacca), Bhalva (which formed the southern limits of the Mughul dominion in Bengal) and thence to Arakan"¹⁰. Thus the route of Shuja became Dacca - Dhapa - Sripur - Bhulua (Noakhali)- Chittagong. He never dwelt in the hill tract of Chitta-

gong. He never dwelt in the hill tract of Chittagong as he came to Chittagong through waterways.

Now let us examine the coronation and the flight of Govinda Manikya to Chittagong hill tract with the help of other evidence except Sri Rajamala. According to numismatic evidence Govinda Manikya became the King of Tripura in 1582 Saka ¹¹ which corresponds to 1660 A. D. Rajmala of Bangiya Sahitya *Parisat* manuscript (accession No. 2259) gives the date of *accession* of Govinda Manikya as 25th Jaistha 1582 Saka ¹² as Kalyan Manikya died on that day and according to the tradition of the royal house of Tripura, Govinda Manikya had to first ascend the throne in the midst of 'Selambari' and then had to pass order for the last ritual of the deceased King. This date of 25th Jaistha 1582 Saka corresponds to 16th June 1660 A. D. Thus Govinda Manikya became the King of Tripura thirty five days after Sultan Shuja had left port of Chittagong for Arakan. So there was no scope of meeting of the two princes in the hill tract of Chittagong. According to Sri Rajamala, Govinda Manikya abdicated the throne after one year of his coronation as the Raja. ¹³ Govinda Manikya along with his brother Jagannath erected a temple at Udaipur, popularly known as "Jagannather Dol", in memory of their mother Saharwati, the queen of Kalyan Manikya, and dedicated it to the Lord Vishnu on the 'Kartiki Purnima' of 1583 Saka as the epigraphic plaque records. ¹⁴.

The Kartiki Purnima generally falls in the later part of the month of November. So he must have dedicated the temple in the later part of November 1661 A.D. when Nakhtra Rai organised an armed expedition against him and advanced towards the capital. Ramdev, the eldest son and heir apparent of Govinda Manikya was deputed against Nakhtra Rai and the battle was fought near Amtali, a village near Comilla, now in Bangladesh, and Ramdev was completely defeated and retreated to the capital and Govinda Manikya had to leave the capital along with his retinue as early as possible. Taking into consideration of the condition it may be safely assumed that the battle of Amtali took place in the month of December 1661 A.D. and Govinda Manikya left his capital either in the last part of November 1661 A.D. or in the early part of December 1661 A.D. In the mean time Shuja had already been executed in Arakan in the early part of 1661 A.D. So the meeting of the exiled princes in the Court of Arakan is impossible and baseless. Thus the episode of the diamond ring and the nimcha sword becomes a mere story and can not be considered as a historical fact.

Moreover there is doubt about Govinda Manikya's presence in the Court of Arakan. Francis Burnier, the famous French traveller, who reached Arakan just a few days after the execution of Sultan Shuja narrated his search for truth in details. But among many other references including servants even there is no mention of Govinda Manikya or any thing about Tripura. Had Govinda Manikya been there at that time his humane activities must have come to the knowledge of the traveller. At best the track of Govinda Manikya's flight may be traced upto the ruined place by the side of the river Kassalong in the Chittagong hill tract where Capt Lewin had heard that once a King of Tripura had lived there who was driven out of his country ¹⁵. But this is also doubtful whether Govinda Manikya passed all the days of his exiled life there as the Tripura Buranjee narrates that after his dethronement he was hiding in his residence, organised a coup against Chatra Manikya with the help of the leading officials of the State and ultimately he became successful when he killed his brother and occupied the throne again. ¹⁶ Any how we are not fully aware, at least with the present state of our knowledge, about the details of his exiled life. But it can be safely assumed that he had not been in the Court of Arakan as described by Sri Rajamala.

Now let us examine the opinion of K.C. Singha when he opined that the Shuja Mosque was built by Sultan Shuja to commemorate the conquest of Tripura. In Sri Rajamala the conflict between Kalyan Manikya, father of Govinda Manikya, and Sultan Shuja, the Governor of Bengal (1639 - 1660 A.D.) have been described at length. According to Rajamala the engagement ended with the defeat of the Mughul army when Kalyandev was pleased to make Govindadev the crown prince of Tripura as he was the commander of the Tripura army. ¹⁷ This fact is testified by a medieval manuscript named 'Naubahar-i-Murshid Kuli Khani' by Azad-ul-Hussaine in which it is stated that Sultan Shuja could not conquer the Tripura Kingdom even after continuous warfare of one year ¹⁸, and the boundary of the two kingdom was settled at Mirzapore far away from Comilla in the vicinities of Daudkandi on the Meghna. So how Sultan Shuja could build a Mosque in the territory which was not held by him nor conquered by him?

Mr. Abul Kalam Muhammad Jakaria holds that Sultan Shuja himself did not erect this mosque. Because there is no historical proof that Sultan Shuja came to Comilla or in the territory of the previous Tippearah District during his long tenure as the Mughul Governor of Bengal¹⁹.

Now let us examine the probability of friendship between Sultan Shuja and Govinda Manikya. Shuja was the son of great Mughul emperor Shahjahan and the Governor of Bengal, Behar and Orissa whereas Govinda Manikya was ruler of a small hilly State. There is no evidence that Govinda Manikya, at least during his crown prince period, went to Rajmahal to visit that Mughul prince where as we have already stated that Shuja too never came to Tripura territory. He was residing in Ramjahal in pomp and splendour. So their friendship does not stand to reason. We have already seen that the Mughul army attacked Tripura during the tenure of Kalyan Manikya and it was Govinda Manikya who fought them and defeated them. Thus the question of friendship even does not stand on reality. If for arguments sake even it is taken for granted that they were friends each other then why should he sold those valuable mementoes of his dear deceased friend for erecting a Mosque? These mementoes were worth preservable. Govinda Manikya was a hereditary hindu monarch of a very old dynasty with rich cultural heritage. He was not short of wealth because he erected many temples and dug many tanks. His secular attitude is reflected in his land grants given to both hindu brahmins and Muslim faquirs ²⁰. Then how could he do such a work which is not worth of his tradition? So he had no connection either with these diamond ring and sword or with this mosque now termed as Shuja Mosque.

Thus we can arrive, from the above discussion, at the following conclusions:

- 1) Shuja Mosque was not erected by Govinda Manikya of Tripura by selling the valuable mementoes.
- 2) Sultan Shuja and Govinda Manikya never met with each other in their exiled life and hence the episode of diamond ring and Nimcha sword is a mere story and can not be considered as a historical fact.
- 3) With our present state of knowledge we are not in a position to find out who was actually the erector of Shuja Mosque at Comilla as the main evidence the epigraphic plaque is missing.
- 4) **Bir Bikram Kishore Manikya's** maintenance of the old Mosque does not give us sufficient evidence that it was erected by his forefather.

Notes & References

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