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Mughal Monuments in Rajasthan: Revisiting the Tomb of King-Makers Barha Syed Brothers' Mother at Ajmer

Vighnesh Kumar

Professor, Department of History, Chaudhary Charan Singh University,
Meerut, Uttar Pradesh (India) E-mail:<vighneshkmr@gmail.com>

Abstract

This illustrative article revisits a lesser-known Mughal monument in Ajmer City of Rajasthan in India – the tomb associated with the mother of the celebrated Barha Sayyid brothers, who emerged as the powerful “King-Makers” of the Mughal Empire in the early eighteenth century. This monument, which is Situated within Ajmer’s rich Mughal architectural landscape, provides an important link between the political history of the Later Mughals and the architectural traditions of that period. The article briefly traces the historical background of the Barha Sayyid brothers and examines the tomb’s architectural features, including its marble construction, decorative elements, spatial arrangement, and surviving artistic details. The accompanying photographs document the monument’s present condition and architectural character, drawing attention to a relatively overlooked heritage structure. By combining historical interpretation with visual documentation, the article seeks to highlight the monument’s cultural and architectural significance and to encourage greater scholarly and public attention towards the lesser-known Mughal heritage of Ajmer.

Keywords

Barha Syed Brothers, Mughal monument, Mughal heritage, Architectural traditions, Floral design, King-makers, Battle of Jajau, Imperial troops.

Research Foundation International, New Delhi
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Editorial Office : D-59, Shastri Nagar, Meerut - 250 004 (INDIA)
Ph. : 0121-2763765, +91-9997771669, +91-9219658788

6

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There stands the Syed Miyan's mausoleum in the city of Ajmer, almost near the adjoining area of the Railway Junction at Ajmer. It had two tombs belonged to the time of Mughal Empire. Actually, these two tombs were constructed by the sons of one Syed Miyan who had been serving as the Governor of the province of Ajmer¹ during the reign of Mughal Emperor Aurangzeb. Syed Miyan was his popular name otherwise his name was Syed Abdullah Khan Barha². He belonged to the Tehanpuri³ branch of the Barha Syeds of Mughal history who were earlier recognized as the Punjabi Syeds during the Delhi Sultanate period⁴. They claim to be the descendants of one legendry Abul Farah Wasti but the claim has no historical ground and these seem to be of pure Indian origin probably having their origin in Sindhi Brahmins⁵.

Under the heading "Account of the Barha Sayyids", in his famous book the Later Mughals, historian William Irvine mentions⁶:

"The Sayyids of Barha claim to be descended from Abul-farah of Wasit in Mesopotamia. Several hundred years ago, at a date which cannot be fixed exactly, Abul-farah and his twelve [12] sons came from Wasit to India, settling at first in four villages near Patiala in the sarkar of Sirhind and subah of Dihli. From these villages, the four branches into which they are divided, derive their names. Then crossing the Jamuna, they formed a settlement on the eastern side of the upper Duaba, halfway between Mirat [Meerut] and Saharanpur, in a sandy, unproductive piece of country, possibly at that time very is sparsely inhabited. The etymology of the name Barha is disputed; perhaps it is from the word *bara* (twelve), with some illusion to the number of their villages. From the time of Akbar, the men of this clan of Sayyids were famous as military leaders, and by their bravery, had acquired a traditional right to lead the vanguard of the imperial troops."

Discussing about the origin of the Barha Syeds, the author has suggested that it is more authentic to discover their root in Indian origin than to a legendary Arabic one. In this context the following matter is worth seeing⁷:

"Some scholars have suggested that the Barha Syeds may have originated from Sindhi Brahmin family that converted to Islam, although this theory is likewise not free from doubt. Other clues have been interpreted as pointing towards a Punjabi Brahman origin, but

this hypothesis is equally uncertain. Thus, the precise ancestry of the Barha Syeds remains a matter of debate, and none of the competing theories can be regarded as conclusively as established.

Whatever the case may be, it appears that during the reign of Emperor Akbar, the Barha Syeds were regarded by some contemporaries as descendants of Hindu converts. A tradition supporting this view has been still preserved among the Barha Syeds themselves that has been passed down through generations."

Mr. Irvine, further, writes⁸:

"Until the reign of Farrukhsiyar, they seem to have been little distinguished outside the profession of arms, and judging from what we know of their descendants. In the present age, they probably had little love of learning. Brave, proud, lavish, always were; and in our day when their swords have been perforce beaten into pruning hooks, they have succumbed only too completely before the wily money-lender. In Muzaffarnagar, many is the story current of the Sayyids Sahib's reckless improvidence and ignorance of the commonest rule of business."

Quoting the Siyar-ul-mukhterin, Mr. Irvine points out the most common image the Barha Syeds had⁹:

"In the 18th century a Barha ka ahmaq, or 'Barha blockhead', was a common saying and there was a rhyme to the effect that all the asses there were Bahadurs and all the Bahadurs, asses".

When Aurangzeb had once decided to take Bijapur, he ordered Raja Jai Singh to march and capture the Bijapur. Raja did it but failed. And so viceroyalty of Deccan was given to Prince Muazzam, assisted by Jaswant Singh. Finally, it was September 12, 1686 (Sunday) when the Mughals won and Bijapur Adil Shahi was ended. Sir Jadunath Sarkar, thus records the event¹⁰:

"Sunday, 12 September 1686, saw the downfall of the Bijapur monarchy. Amidst the tears and lamentations of his subjects who lined the streets, Sikandar, the last of the Adil Shahi Sultan's gave up his ancestors thrown and issued from the capital of his house at 1 o'clock in the afternoon in charge of Rao Dalpat Bundela, and went to Aurangzib's camp in Rasulpur."

Giving the details about Sikandar, the last Adil Shahi Sultan of Bijapur, the historian again writes¹¹:

"The last Adil Shahi Sultan was for some time lodged in the State prison of Daulatabad. Later, he was again carried about with the camp of Aurangzib, as a captive. In this condition he died outside Satara fort on 3 April 1670; he had not yet completed 32 years of age. According to his last wishes, his mortal remains were carried to Bijapur and there

buried at the foot of the sepulchre of his spiritual guide Shaikh Fahimullah, in a roofless enclosure.”

It was Bijapur where Mughal Emperor Aurangzib appointed Syed Abdullah Khan Barha, a Tihanpuri Barha Syed as the *Subedar* (Governor) of the Province of Bijapur.¹² Syed Abdullah Khan Barha earned a high reputation among the Bijapuri subjects. His popularity reached the ears of Aurangzeb and he was very much pleased with the Syed. As a result of ensuring high position in emperor’s mind, the Syed was made the Governor of the province of Ajmer¹³. It was his popularity that he was known as the Syed Miyan, a respectful title among the subjects. Syed Miyan died there in imperial service and was buried in Ajmer. Later on, his sons the famous Syed brothers, the King-makers built a grand tomb keeping his grave in centre. The entrance gate of Syed Miyan’s tomb had an Arabic Inscription which dates back to 1127 *Hijri*¹⁴. This corresponds to 1705 C.E. The author mistakenly took it as the date of construction of the Syed Miyan’s *Maqbara* while now, when writing this article, the author has changed his previous opinion on the basis of more historical data and now declares it as the year of Syed Miyan’s death in Ajmer serving the Mughal Empire as the Governor of that province.

Syed Miyan had 2 wives. The first wife’s name was Khurshida Begam¹⁵ who was the daughter of one Syed Hamid Ali Khan¹⁶, a Tehanpuri Barha Syed of Nawa¹⁷ (Nawaa-Jarhoda). It is a village of Tehanpuri Barha Syeds¹⁸. The historically important *Kothi* of Liyaqat Ali Khan, the first Prime Minister of Pakistan at Muzaffarnagar is the residence originally belonged to the descendants of Syed Hamid Ali KhanTehanpuri¹⁹.

By the two marriages, Syed Miyan had numerous sons:

Hasan Ali Khan, Husain Ali Khan, Sirajuddin Ali Khan, Nazmuddin Ali Khan,²⁰ Nuruddin Ali Khan²¹ who was found dead at the Battle of Jajau and Saifuddin Ali Khan. He had 3 more sons - all minors - found murdered while in the Ganga Khadir when on a hunting expedition²². Who killed them is not yet known²³.

The rise of Syed Miyan’s eldest son Syed Hasan Ali Khan Barha and next to him Syed Husain Ali Khan Barha was not a thing gained by them by chance. It took a very long time in real sense of the term. Highlighting this very fact, historian William Irvine records²⁴:

“The two Sayyid brothers, who now come into such prominence were not the mere upstarts, men of yesterday, that it was too often the fashion to make them out to be. Besides the prestige of Sayyid lineage of descent from the famous Barha branch of that race and the personal renown acquired by their own valour, they were the sons of a man who held in Alamgir’s first the subahdari of Bijapur in the Dakhin and then that of Ajmer, appointments given in that reign either to Princes of the blood or to the very foremost men in the State. Their father Sayyid

Abdullah Khan, known as Sayyid Miyan, had risen in the service of Ruhullah Khan, Alamgir's Mir Bakshi, and finally, on receiving an imperial mansab, attached himself to the eldest Prince Muhammed Muazzam Shah Alam."

The following list shows the high official positions the two Syed brothers²⁵ held till 1711 C.E.:

Hasan Ali Khan (Afterwards Abdullah Khan Kutub-ul-mulk)	1109 H/1697-98 Faujdar of Sultanpur Nazarbar in Baglana Suba (Khandesh) Faujdar of Siuni Hoshangabad (Khandesh)	May 1707 Mansabdar of rank 3000 Jat 2000 Sawar with kettle drum	18 June 1707 Fought in the Battle of Jajau	Feb 1708 Rank was raised to 4000 and Hasan Ali Khan received his father's title of Abdullah Khan October 1708 Appointed Subedar of Ajmer but the order was withdrawn before joining. 10 January 1711 Prince Azimushshan made his Naib (Deputy governor of Suba Allahabad
Husain Ali Khan (afterwards amir-ul-umara)	Faujdar of Ranthambhor in Suba Ajmer, Faujdar Hindaun Bayana in Suba Agra	May 1707 Mansabdar of rank 3000 Jat 2000 Sawar with kettle drum	18 June 1707 Fought in the Battle of Jajau Severely wounded in the Battlefield	1 April 1708 Prince Azimushshan made his Naib (Deputy Governor) of Bihar Patna





Syed Miyan's Tomb (Maqbara) at Ajmer having an Arabic Inscription (dated 1127 Hijri i.e. 1705 C.E.) on the top of the Entrance Gate.

Below the inscription is a floral design²⁶ probably of the flower of the Gulchini²⁷ or popularly known as Chini Champa²⁸ (*Plumeria alba*) or its close relative species. Observing its flower and leaves, the author was some confused to have a floral design of foreign origin. In fact, this variety (more correctly this species) was brought in India by the Portugese²⁹. Surprisingly it is reported surviving there in the famous temple of the Vijaynagar Empire³⁰. For last 5 centuries it is visible in graveyards tombs and mausoleums throughout in India³¹. The reason being firstly its survival easier as no herbivorous eats its leaves and secondly plant of this species demands no amount or a little amount of water to survive³². This species depicted on the Entrance Gate of Syed Miyan's mausoleum provides an evidence of the flora existed there in these memorials in India. According to a taxonomist³³, this floral design suggests to be of female genetic part of the species inscribed in stone. If so, it makes a value.





Tomb of the King-makers Barha Syed Brothers' mother in her husband Syed Miyan's Maqbara at Ajmer in Rajasthan (India)

It may be concluded that the tomb of the mother of the Barha Sayyid brothers is a significant yet relatively overlooked example of Mughal heritage in Ajmer. Its historical associations and architectural features reflect the political and cultural legacy of the Later Mughal period in India. Proper documentation, preservation, and wider scholarly attention are essential for safeguarding this valuable monument for future generations.

Notes and References

1. J.D. La Touche, *Gazetteer of Ajmer-Merwara in Rajputana*, Calcutta: Office of the Superintendent of Printing, 1875, 14.

2. Vighnesh Kumar, "Mughal Monuments in Rajasthan: Revisiting Syed Miyan's Tomb at Ajmer", *Journal of National Development*, 39, Special Mansoon Issue, 2026, 74, 75.
3. There are 4 branches of the Barha Syeds (Punjabi Syeds) namely: Tehanpuri, Chhatrauri, Jajeri/Jagneri and Kundliwal. A very popular Hindi proverb to this effect is still prevalent among these Syeds. It reads:
*"Tehanpuri tikhi ani, Chhatrauri saal /
 Jagneri jagmag karein, asal Kundliwal//"*
By courtesy: Late Nawab Muzaffar Ali Saheb, Nawab of Kaithoda and his younger brother's wife in an Interview some where in 2006 C.E.).
4. H.R. Nevill, *Muzaffarnagar: A Gazetteer being Vol. IV of the District Gazetteers of the United Provinces of Agra and Oudh*, Allahabad: United Provinces Government Press, 1922.
5. Vighnesh Kumar, *Ibid.*, 77; Vighnesh Kumar and Zeenat Zaidi, "An Introductory Note on the Tihanpuri Syeds Brothers (Up to the Governorship of Allahabad and Patna)", *Contemporary Social Sciences*, 35(2), April-June, 2026, 206-207
6. William Irvine, *Later Mughals*, Vol. I, 1707-1720, [London: Luzak & Co.] Calcutta: MC Sarkar & Sons, 201.
7. *Ibid.*, 206-207.
8. *Ibid.*, 202.
9. *Ibid.*
10. Jadunath Sarkar, *A Short History of Aurangzib* [first published 1930], Hyderabad: Orient Longman Limited, edition 1979, p. 222.
11. *Ibid.*, 223.
12. William Irvine, *op. cit.*, 202-203. The Syed was serving under Ruhulla Khan who was an important officer during the Bijapur expedition.
13. *Ibid.*
14. Vighnesh Kumar, "Mughal Monuments in Rajasthan: Revisiting Syed Miyan's Tomb at Ajmer", *Journal of National Development*, 39, Special Mansoon Issue, 2026, 75-76.
15. **Interview**, Mr. Zahoor Mehdi, a direct descendant of Syed Barha ancestry, former Gram Pradhan of the village of Tanderha in Muzaffarnagar District of U.P. (India), presently resident of Nazar Colony, Ansari Road, Muzaffarnagar, Uttar Pradesh, India.
16. *Ibid.*
17. *Ibid.*
18. *Ibid.*
19. *Ibid.*
20. Nazmuddin Ali Khan fought in many-a-battles with his brothers.
21. William Irvine, *op. cit.*, 204.
22. **Interview**, *op. cit.* Also some 65 other Barha Syed descendants of all the four branches of the Saadat-i-Barha.

23. *Ibid.*
24. William Irvine, *op. cit.*, 202-203.
25. *Ibid.*, 203-205.
26. It has 5 petals clearly visible from naked eyes of a onlooker or visitor.
27. **Interview**, Kunwar Ajay Vansh Narayan Singh, former President and one of the leading founding members of the Indian Nurserymen Association, Hapur, U.P., India.
28. *Ibid.*
29. This species of *Plumeria alba* is reported to be in the Vitthal Temple of Hampi, the capital city of the Vijaynagar Empire now in Karnataka, the state in India.
30. The Vijaynagar Empire flourished in South India from 1336 to 1646 C.E.
31. **Interview**, Mr. N.P. Singh, President, INA, New Delhi; Mr M.K. Tyagi and others, the growers of the *Plumeria alba*.
32. *Ibid.*
33. **Interview**, former Prof. Vijay Malik, Department of Botany, Chaudhary Charan Singh University, Meerut;
Interview, Lt. Col. Kesri Singh, a direct descendent of Saint Poetess Meerabai's parental lineage of the Rathore - royalty of Merta, Rajasthan. ★