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Mughal Monuments in Rajasthan: Revisiting Syed Miyan's Tomb at Ajmer

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Abstract

This article revisits the historical and architectural significance of Syed Miyan's Tomb at Ajmer, situating the monument within the wider political, administrative, and social history of Mughal Rajasthan. Ajmer occupied a strategically important position in the Mughal Empire, functioning as a Subah headquarters and as a significant centre of imperial authority from the reign of Akbar onwards. The article particularly examines the appointment of Syed Abdullah Khan Barha, popularly known as Syed Miyan, as Governor of Ajmer during the reign of Emperor Aurangzeb. The study further examines the historical background of the Barha Syeds, their emergence in the upper Ganga-Yamuna Doab, and their growing prominence within the Mughal imperial establishment. Special attention is given to the Arabic stone inscription on the entrance of Syed Miyan's tomb, which records the date of its construction as 1127 Hijri (1705 CE). The monument is therefore examined not merely as a funerary structure but as an important historical source for understanding the political influence, social mobility, and regional presence of the Barha Syed family. The article also traces the subsequent rise of Syed Miyan's sons, particularly Syed Abdullah Khan Barha and Syed Husain Ali Khan Barha, who emerged as the celebrated "King-makers" in the early eighteenth-century Mughal polity. By bringing together architectural evidence, epigraphic material, Mughal administrative history, and the history of the Barha Syeds, the article seeks to foreground Syed Miyan's Tomb as a significant yet comparatively understudied monument of Mughal Rajasthan.

Keywords

Syed Miyan's tomb, Ajmer, Mughal Rajasthan, Barha Syeds, Syed Abdullah Khan Barha, Aurangzeb, Mughal administration, Mughal monuments, Epigraphy, Arabic inscription, 1705 CE, Mughal political history.

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Mughal Monuments in Rajasthan: Revisiting Syed Miyan's Tomb at Ajmer

Rajasthan occupies an important place in the history of the Mughal India and Ajmer served as a strategically significant centre of imperial administration and political authority from the reign of Akbar onwards. Its monuments therefore provide valuable material evidence for understanding the political, social, and cultural history of Mughal rule in the region. Among these, the Tomb of Syed Miyan at Ajmer merits particular attention, not only for its architectural features but also for its association with Syed Abdullah Khan Barha (Syed Miyan), an influential Mughal noble and Governor of Ajmer during the reign of Aurangzeb. The tomb, bearing an Arabic inscription dated 1127 *Hijri* (1705 CE), offers an important epigraphic and historical source for examining the presence and influence of the Barha Syeds in the Mughal establishment. Its study also provides an opportunity to connect the monument with the subsequent political prominence of Syed Miyan's descendants and, more broadly, to explore the relationship between monuments, imperial administration, and social mobility in Mughal Rajasthan. In this context, revisiting Syed Miyan's Tomb contributes to bringing an important yet comparatively understudied monument into the wider historical narrative of Mughal Ajmer.

What Mr. J.D. La Touche, an officer of the Bengal Civil services mentions about Ajmer and Rajasthan (Rajputana) is worth looking at¹:

“In the time of Akbar, Ajmer gave its name to a *Subah*, which included the whole of Rajputana. The district of Ajmer was an appanage of the royal residence, which was temporarily fixed there in this and subsequent reigns, both as a pleasant retreat and in order to maintain the authority of the Empire among the surrounding Chiefs.”

He further mentions²:

“Akbar made a pilgrimage to the tomb of the saint Khwaja Mueiyyin-ud-din Chisti and built a fortified palace just outside the city. Jehangir and Shahjahan both spent much time at the ‘Dar-ul-khair’; and it was at Ajmer that Jehangir received Sir Thomas Roe, the ambassador of James I, who reached the city on the 23rd December 1615.”

Mentioning about Aurangzeb's victory on Crown Prince Dara Shikoh, he records³:

“It was at Ajmer that in A.D. 1659 Aurangzeb crushed the army of the unfortunate Dara, weakened as it was by the defection of Jaswant Singh of Marwar, and forced his brother into the flight, which was destined to terminate only by his imprisonment and death. The celebrated traveller Burnier met and accompanied Dara for three days during his flight, and has given a graphic description of the miseries and privations of the march.”

Ajmer was too important a *Subah* head-quarters right from Akbar to Muhammad Shah '*Rangila*'. Emperor Aurangzeb had to gain the royal throne here in 1659. Twenty years later in 1679, he was almost to lose it to the rebel Prince Akbar, his son. Regarding that episode, Mr. Touche rightly remarks:

“During the war with Mewar and Marwar, which was brought about by the bigotry of Aurangzeb, Ajmer was the head-quarters of that Emperor, who nearly lost his throne here in 1679 by the combination of Prince Akbar with the enemy.”

Throwing light on the Aurangzeb-Prince Akbar episode occurred in Ajmer and Rajasthan in 1679, Professor Jadunath Sarkar, the great historian of the last century, writes⁴:

“Sultan Muhammad Akbar, the fourth son of Aurangzib, was only 23 years of age at that time.....Then Akbar threw the mask. Four theologians in his pay issued a decree under seals, declaring that Aurangzib had forfeited the throne by his violation of the Islamic Canon Law. Akbar crowned himself Emperor (1 January), and created Tahawwur Khan his Premier Noble.....The Emperor's situation at Ajmer was critical.”

The *Subah* of Ajmer was considered in such a high sensitive position that the Mughal Emperors used to appoint the Princes there as the governor. No member out of royal family enjoyed that prestigious post. But Emperor Aurangzeb appointed one Syed Abdullah Khan Barha as the Governor of that prestigious province. The Syed was popular among all and was most often called as 'Syed Miyan'. The word 'Barha' in his name shew that he belonged to a Syed clan named as 'Barha'. Syed Miyan died at Ajmer during the Imperial service and so he was burried there at Ajmer. His sons built his tomb in 1127 Hijri corresponding to 1705 A.D. The archaeological evidence to this effect is the Stone- Inscription settled upon the floral design above the arch of the Entrance Gate. It is in the Arabic that reads:

“Allahu Baaqi Vali Kulli Faani”.

This almost wholly matches with a verse of the Holy Book of the Islam.that says:

“Allahu Baaqi Min Kulli Faani.”

Simply it means that nothing in the world but God only is immortal.

Stone Inscription (in the Arabic) on the top of the Entrance Gate



As regards the **calculation of the Date of Construction** (1705 C.E.), this Stone Inscription in Arabic gives the date of its erection and that is inscribed on the top line (in centre). And this is 1127 *Hijri*.

In 2026 C.E., it is 1148 *Hijri*. So the difference of the years comes:

$$1448 - 1127 = 321 \text{ years.}$$

Thus, the date of this Mughal Monument at Ajmer can be fixed 321 ago.

So, the year in Common Era (C.E.) = 2026 - 321 = 1705 C.E.

This was during the reign of Mughal Emperor Aurangzeb. Later on, during the Later Mughals, his sons achieved the highest positions in the Imperial services and had become the King-makers.

There seems politically a very powerful family of the Syeds during the Greater Mughals residing in the upper Ganga-Yamuna Doab region presently covered by the western part of Uttar Pradesh. The clan is known as the Barha Syeds⁵ which is named after a cluster of 12 (twelve) villages, the number being termed as 'Barha', the Hindi word to denote the number of twelve. Though there stand many a versions to explain the word 'Barah/Barha', but this seems the more appropriate.

Dealing with the 'Musalman Saiyids' in the 'Chapter III The People' there in the Gazetteer of the district of Muzaffarnagar, what Mr. H. R. Nevill records is worth-seeing⁶:

"Of the Musalman population in the district the most important are the Saiyids, although in the point of numbers they are greatly outclassed by many others. They numbered in all 13,638 persons, and belong mainly to the Zaidi and Hussaini sub-divisions."

The total of some more than thirteen thousand and a half, the Syeds had a great importance in the eyes of European officers during those days some more than 100 years ago. The fact being witnessed shows in a particular statement preserved in one line that follows⁷:

"The history of the Saiyids of Muzaffarnagar is in great part the history of the district, and a detailed account of the rise and fall of the great Saiyid families will be given later".

As far as 19th century C.E. is concerned, the term "Zaidi-subdivision"⁸ of the Syeds is actually a non-historical term used in the gazetteer. In fact, historically, it is the Barha Syed subdivision. Going back in history, again, this Barha Syed term seems too new a term. It came into existence during the very 16th century. Prior to that there existed no term as Barha Syeds at all. The stock was identified as the Punjabi Syeds⁹. Few scholars equate the Punjabi Syeds as the Sindhi Syeds¹⁰ for the same stock that itself claims to be Syeds. Their claim to be a Syed was also not beyond doubt even up to the 16th century¹¹. More historically, two of the Mughal Emperors raised doubts for their claim to be Pure Syeds. Emperor Akbar and his son and successor Emperor Jahangir were of the same opinion¹², though both of

them were fond of the traditional customary valour the brave Barha Syed stock had use to show in battlefields¹³.

It is also an opinion about their Indian origin that those are originally Brahmins of Sindh¹⁴. Whether the Sindhi Brahmins or the Punjabi Syeds or anything else, historically the Barha Syeds were considered not of the Arab origin at all and the case was same up to the reigns of Emperor Akbar and Jahangir.

The undoubtful lineage as their Muslim ancestor seems unbreakable from one Daud¹⁵ who had 3 more brothers. The names of the all four brothers were - Syeds Daud, Abul Fazl, Abul Fazail and Nazmuddin Husain¹⁶. From Punjab, the division of the family took place. One branch migrated to Bilgram and the other to Marahra. Their closely relation with the Khairabad¹⁷ and Fatehpur Haswa¹⁸ branches has been always claimed and accepted. All of these branches had their origin in the Punjabi Syeds¹⁹.

The fifteenth century seems a blessing to the Punjabi Syeds because of the reign of the Syed dynasty²⁰ over the Delhi sultanate. It ruled from 1414 to 1451 C.E. During that rule, the Punjabi Syeds received 12 villages in the upper Ganga-Yamuna *doab* region²¹. Presently these are situated in both the Meerut and Saharanpur Divisions.

Syed Daud's descendants settled in the villages of Dhasri and Kumhera. From these early settlements, the Tihanpuri Branch of the Barha Syeds expended to other villages and towns but around the same area.

What the District Gazetteer records in this context is as follows²²:

"Throughout the reign of Akbar and his immediate successor, the Barha Saiyids took part in almost every important campaign; their usual place was in the forefront of the army, and they distinguished themselves by their courage and bravery. In the twenty-first year of Akbar's reign, the Sayids were engaged against the Hindu rebels of Ajmer. In the 41st year Saiyid Jalal fought in the Deccan. In the war with Khusru, one Saif Khan, the son of Saiyid Mahmud, did excellent service having received no less than seventeen wounds, and Saiyid Jamal-ud-din was mortally wounded."

The District Gazetteer, further, records²³:

"The Kundliwals came first to notice, and next to them, the Tihanpuris, who under the brothers Saiyid Abdullah Khan and Saiyid Husain Ali Khan, raised the family name to its highest glory. Their acquisitions in this district were not, however, of a permanent nature, and so complete was their downfall that not a tithe of their ancient possessions now remains to their descendants."

At this point regarding the highest glory achieved arises a more relevant question. No doubt the Tihanpuris rose to the place of the highest prominence under the famous Syed Brothers: Syed Hasan Ali Khan later on assumed the title of his father and Syed Husain Ali Khan (the king-makers)²⁴; but on the other hand, it is not the contribution of merely their alone. Equally or some more historic

background was provided by their father Syed Abdullah Khan Barha popularly known as the Syed Miyan who had been posted as the Governor of Ajmer during the reign of Emperor Aurangzeb²⁵. He was considered a pious man, genuine and justice-loving efficient administrator. He died in Ajmer²⁶. According to Mr. Nevill, Syed Miyan had only son named Syed Ghulam Muhammad. Mr. Nevill wrongly writes that the Syed brothers (the King makers) were the sons of Syed Ghulam Muhammad²⁷ and thus, according to his information, they were the grandsons of the Syed Miyan²⁸.

After the death of Aurangzeb in 1707 C.E.,²⁹ the war of succession began among all his three surviving sons in which, ultimately Bahadur Shah emerged victorious³⁰. He died a natural death in 1712. Among all his 4 sons, there was fought the war of succession at Lahore. Prince Muazzam, the eldest won and sat on throne with the name of Jahandar Shah³¹. He was threatened by his nephew Prince Farrukhsiyar. After defeating him with the sole assistance of Syed Abdullah Khan Barha and his brother Syed Husain Ali Khan Barha, Farrukhsiyar became the emperor in 1713 C.E.³². Both the brothers were the Governors of the *Subahs* of Allahabad and Patna respectively. Farrukhsiyar could sit on the royal throne because of the great efforts made by the Syed brothers who had lost the lives of their real brother Nazmuddin Ali Khan Barha. They had to bear great losses in terms of lives of their so close blood relatives.

Emperor Farrukhsiyar rewarded the Syeds by raising the eldest brother Syed Abdullah Khan Barha as the *Wazir*³³ (Prime Minister). The younger brother Syed Husain Ali Khan Barha was rewarded in the same way and was made the *Mir Bakshi*³⁴ (Commander-in-Chief). Thus, The Syed brothers reached to the highest positions in the imperial services. They built the tombs of their late father Syed Miyan at Ajmer in Rajasthan. After the death of their mother Syedani Khurshida Begam (daughter of Syed Hamid Ali, a Tihanpuri Syed chief of Nawaa or Nawaa-Jadoda), they also built her tomb in the same beautiful premise of their father's tomb. These are two extremely beautiful monuments the Barha Syeds ever had.

Entrance Gate of Syed Miyan's Maqbara from outside



Entrance Gate of Syed Miyan's Maqbara from inside



Maqbara of Syed Abdullah Khan Barha alias Syed Miyan, the Governor of Suba of Ajmer during Emperor Aurangzeb Alamgir



Another view of the Maqbara



It may be concluded that Syed Miyan's Tomb at Ajmer is significant not merely as a funerary monument but as an important historical and epigraphic source for understanding Mughal Rajasthan. Its inscription, association with Syed Miyan, and connection with the influential Barha Syeds illuminate the political authority, social mobility, and changing fortunes of an important Mughal-era family. A closer study of the monument thus enriches our understanding of Ajmer's place in the political and administrative history of the Mughal Empire and highlights the need to preserve and further explore its historical heritage.

Notes and References

1. J. D. La Touche, *Gazetteer of Ajmer-Merwara in Rajputana*, Calcutta: Office of the Superintendent of Government Printing, 1875, 14.
2. *Ibid.*
3. *Ibid.*
4. Jadunath Sarkar, *A Short History of Aurangzib*, Orient Longman Limited, [first published 1930], New Delhi, First OL edition 1979, 148-150.
5. Syed Zahoor Mehdi, *Tarikh-i-Aaina : Sadat-i- Barha*, Muzaffarnagar, 2003.
6. H. R. Nevill, *Muzaffarnagar: A Gazetteer being Volume IV of the District Gazetteers of the United Provinces of Agra and Oudh*, Allahabad: U.P. Govt. Press, 1922, 159.
7. *Ibid.* 90.
8. *Ibid.*
9. *Ibid.*
10. E. T. Atkinson, *Statistical, Descriptive and Historical Accounts of the North-Western Provinces of India*, Volume III Part I, Allahabad: N.W.P. Government Press, 1876.
11. Vighnesh Kumar and Zeenat Zaidi, "An Introductory Note on Tihanpuri Syed Brothers (Up to Governorship of Allahabad and Patna)", *Contemporary Social Sciences*, 35(2), (April- June), 2026, 206-207.
12. H.R. Nevill, *op. cit.*
13. *Ibid.* 160.
14. *Ibid.*
15. Vighnesh Kumar and Zeenat Zaidi, *op. cit.*
16. H.R. Nevill, *op. cit.*
17. *Ibid.*
18. *Ibid.*
19. *Ibid.*
20. *Ibid.*
21. The names of the rulers of the Syed dynasty are:
Khizr Khan (1414-1421), Mubarak Khan (1421-1434),
Muhammad Shah (1434 - 1445) and Alauddin Alam Shah (1445-1451).
22. H.R. Nevill, *op. cit.*, 161.
23. H.R. Nevill, *op. cit.*, 162.
24. Syed Zahoor Mehdi, *op. cit.*, 34-48.
25. *Ibid.*

26. *Ibid.* APPENDIX No. II gives a different evidence that shows that Syed Miyan means Syed Abdullah Khan Barha, the Governor of Ajmer had only one son named Nawab Ghulam Muhammad whose 2 sons were Hasan Ali Khan and Husain Ali Khan. This record does not match to the tradition prevailed in the oral history of the clan in itself. Syed Zahoor Mehdi, a Barha Syed, in his book mentions the Syed brothers as Syed Miyan's sons. For details, please see: Mehdi, Zahoor, *Taarikh-i-Aina, Muzaffarnagar*, 2003.
27. *Ibid.*
28. Jadunath Sarkar, *op. cit.*, 321; William Irvine, *Later Mughals*, Volume I (1707-1720), London: Luzak & Co., 1922 [Calcutta: M.C. Sarkar & Sons, 1922], 1. But the famous historian Jadunath Sarkar gives February 20, 1707 C.E. as the date of Aurangzeb's death, however, William Irvine, the historian of same repute gives this date as March 7, 1707 C.E.
29. Jadunath Sarkar, *op. cit.*,
30. William Irvine, *op. cit.*, 34.
31. *Ibid.*, 186.
32. *Ibid.*, 244.
33. *Ibid.*, 258. He was made Nawab Qutub-ul-mulk, Yamin-ud-daulah Saiyid Abdullah Khan, Bahadur Zafar Jang, Sipah-salar, Yar-i-wafadar.
34. *Ibid.* He was made Umdat-ul-mulk, Amir-ul-umara, Bahadur, Firuz Jang, Sipah-sardar. ★