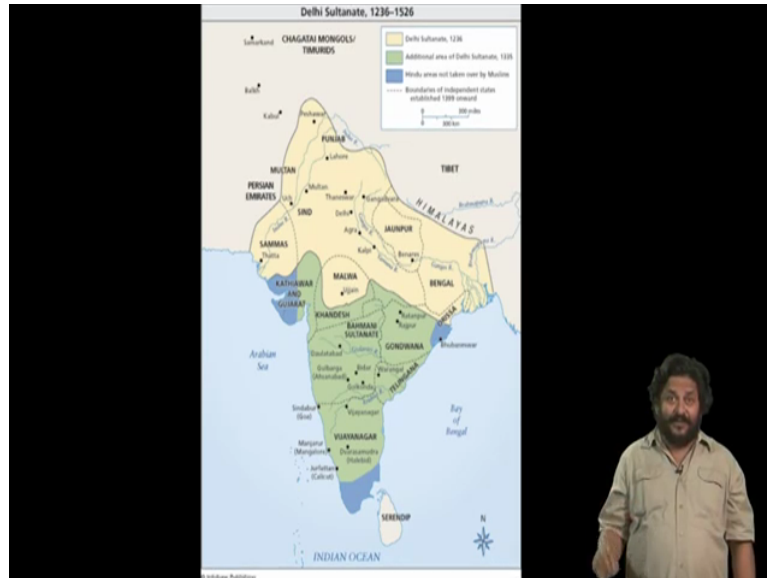


Introduction to History of Architecture in India
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Regional Sultanates

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The Delhi Sultanate is very important in the history of India, in fact in the history of the whole of South Asia. The Delhi Sultanate situated at Delhi started off as a small kingdom that was run by governors who were appointed by the Ghurid dynasty in Afghanistan. Qutb al-Din Aibak, one of their slave generals was appointed governor of this province and he set up an independent kingdom as soon as the rule of the Ghurids weakened.

Delhi was strategic because it controlled the gateway to the fertile gangetic plane for anybody who came in from the North West quadrant of South Asia. The Delhi Sultanate under Alauddin Khalji carried out a series of raids in which it subdued most of peninsular India and exacted tribute from all those kings. After the Khaljis, Muhammad bin Tughluq, a very ambitious and capable king conquered large parts of South Asia which he intended to keep as his empire. Unlike the Khaljis he did not want to exact tribute but wanted to rule over the whole of South Asia.

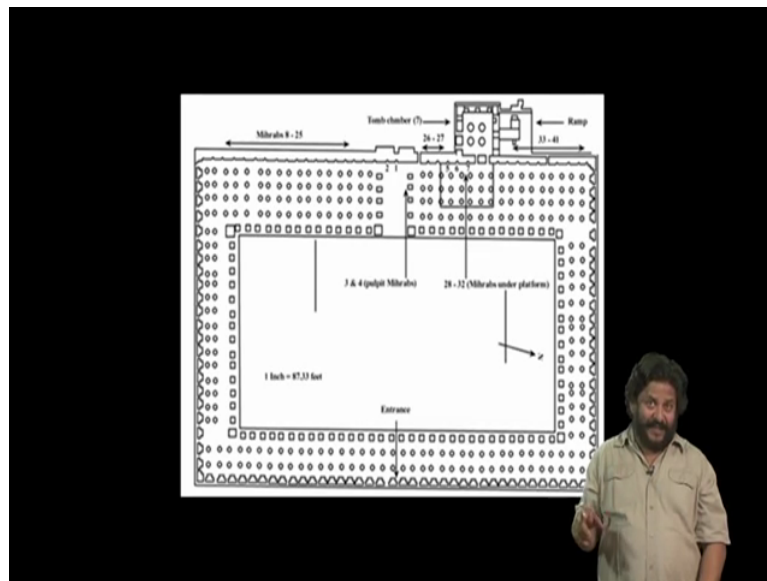
He shifted his capital from Delhi to the Deccan at the site of Devgiri which he called Daulatabad but as soon as his rule weakened the whole of South Asia splintered into a number of independent kingdoms, independent sultanates such as the sultanate of Bengal, of

Gujarat, Jaunpur, of the Bahamanis, the kingdom of Vijaynagar, the sultanate of Madura, of Khandesh, of Malva and so on of the Sammas of Sindh,

And it is these sultanates and also kingdoms, I mean Vijaynagar is born at the same time, these sultanates and kingdoms who share a common history but yet find very different architectural expression largely on account of the kinds of material that is available, building material that is available at all these places but also of local traditions of building and of craftsmanship.

These sultanates will have regional identities that are different partly shaped by different architecture but also the evolution of new languages that will emerge under their patronage and so let us look at 3 or 4 sultanates and see how they vary despite having commonalities in terms of their architecture.

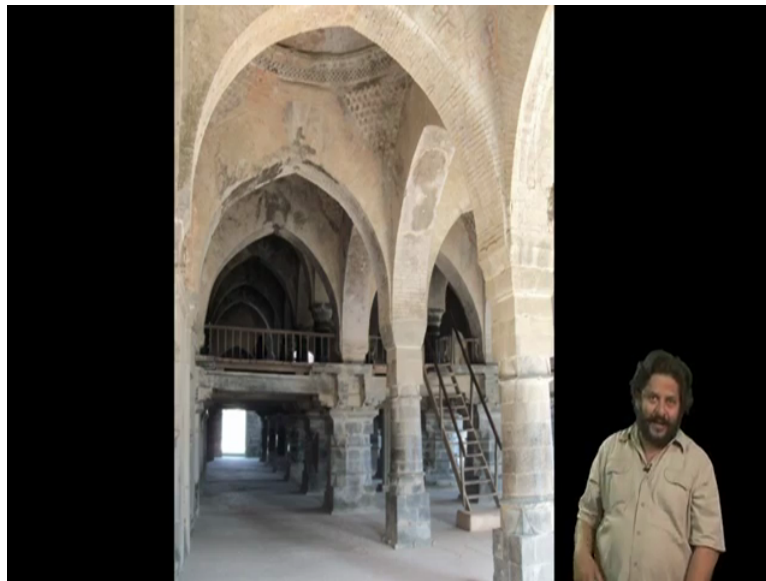
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We will start with one of the earliest sultanates that of Bengal, the Bengal sultanates had its capital at a place called Gaud, it was moved to Pandua where the Adina Mosque was built then it moved back to Gaud which are all in the same region in North Bengal today, the Adina Mosque was the greatest mosques built in India in the 14th and then the 15th century and even today stands as testimony of the might of the Bengal sultanate.

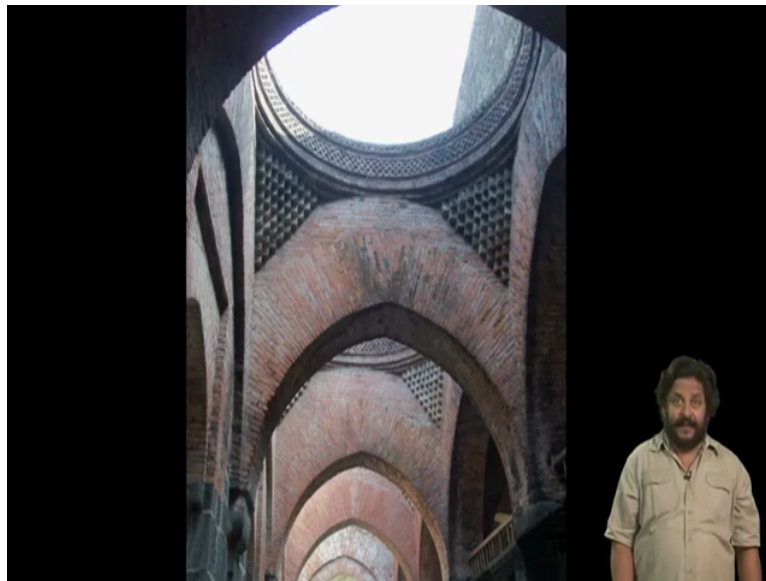
The mosque like a lot of buildings in Bengal is built in brick except for the bottom portion which is built in stone, in Bengal stone is a material that is very difficult to find and therefore it becomes a prestige building material, brick made out of clay is abundant because clay and mud are abundant in Bengal, good building stone has to be brought over large distances.

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And therefore if you look at a number of buildings in Bengal such as the Adina Mosque you will see that the bottom is done in stone and the top is done in brick or terracotta, stone does get used extensively in areas that are of importance such as this Mihrab, this area of a mosque which is central as a focus of worship.

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The stones that support all the columns, the foundations will be built in stone but on top you have exquisite brick work of a kind that is not found anywhere else in India at all. The mosque is of enormous dimensions though it does not survive in its entirety and this prolific use of brick and terracotta really predates everything.

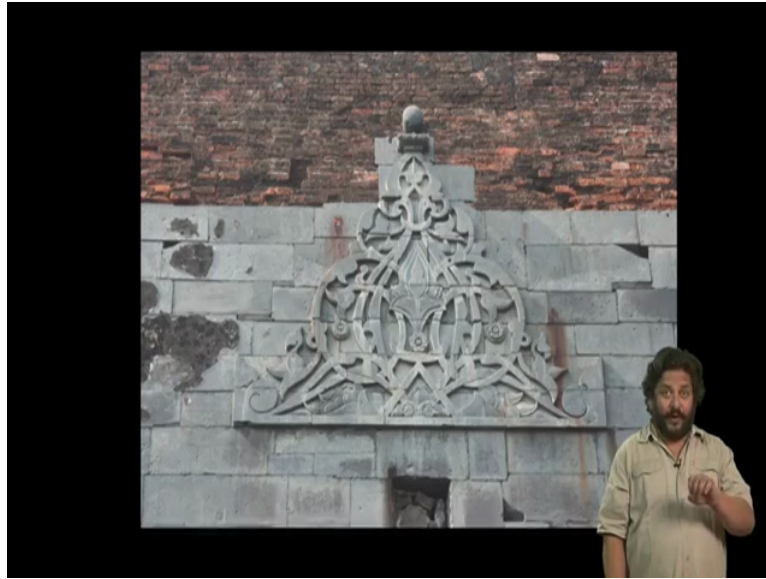
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In the mosque of Adina you have exquisite examples of brick work and terracotta, this kind of decoration becomes the hallmark of architecture in Bengal over the next several centuries. The famous temples at Bishnupur will be used using exactly the same materials but this is the first instance after the decline of Buddhism you have a lot of Buddhist stupas in Bengal which used the same materials of terracotta and brick and here you have this magnificent mosques and tombs.

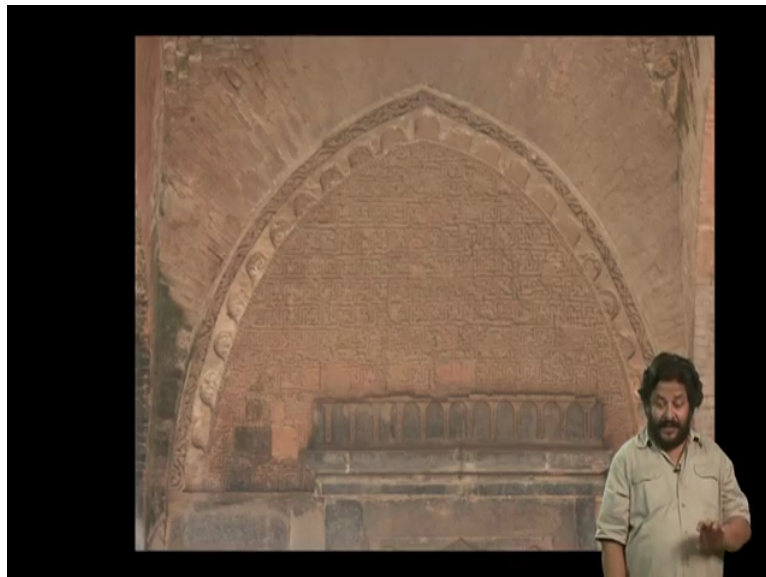
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Again no design is repeated in the multiple arches that are on the Kibla all of this mosque at Adina, new patterns of brick work and terracotta, really in the hundreds can be seen here, all kinds of innovation and experimentation is visible, there is complete mastery over this material and that is because the artisans used are local artisans who really know how to use this well.

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As we said stone is used only in areas that are of ritual or symbolic importance and therefore every time you have inscriptions you will have them in stone, any kind of focal point in building will be in stone but the rest will be all in brick, an example of where stone is used sparingly, more views of the mosque and this kind of view gives you the makeup of a lot of these buildings where the bottom is completely in stone and the top is done completely in brick.

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More typical of the mosques of the Bengal sultanate is the Lottan mosque, a mosque with a single big span covered by a dome built completely in brick with these curvilinear roof lines and what would have once been covered completely in glazed colored tiles, bright blues, yellows, greens, reds would have made up the color composition of this building and while we see them as built out of dull red brick today, it would have really been colored very differently.

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The unusual mosque that you have in Bengal is Quttubudins mosque because it is built entirely in stone, very rare for this region of the country.

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Another mosque that is built completely in stone is the Baradwari Mosque, again unusual and rare but even if you look at the fortification around the capital cities of the sultanate they are all in brick, brick and terracotta displaying high virtuosity in ornament.

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When you look at the mouldings of this doorway, the Dakhil Darwaza, it mimics the mouldings of Buddhist stupas and of Hindu temples, in fact a number of small ornaments seem to be derived from pre Islamic sources.

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Now contrast this with the other side of the country, a sultanate that is set up in Gujarat in 1411 and which finds its apogee in the early 16th century, one of the earliest monuments built in Gujarat is Ahmed Shahs Mosque, the mosque built by the founder of the dynasty. The buildings in Gujarat are built completely in stone; this is a region which has high proficiency in stone carving as can be seen in the Jain temples in the region built in the 11th and 12th and 13th centuries.

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And almost all mosques in Gujarat will follow this pattern of a large central portal flanked by low walls with openings on the inside of which might be a shallow corbel dome supported on an octagonal ring of columns, these corbel domes will have carved decoration much like you will find in the marble temples at Dilvara.

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The jaalis that you find at temples are also replicated in these mosques, all the motives that you see, all the traceries that you see in the mosques of the Gujarat sultanate can also be seen in the pre Islamic temples of Gujarat, there is a wonderful book on the traceries of Gujarat by the eminent scholar (())(10:35)

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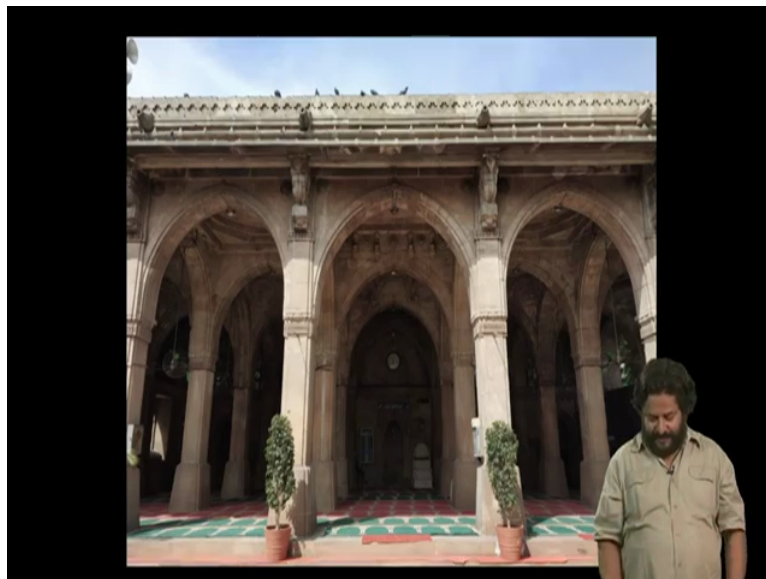
In fact this projection outside Ahmed Shahs Mosque with its plaid base takes on the shape of certain moldings that you have around temples particularly features of temple mandapas where people can sit in the day time.

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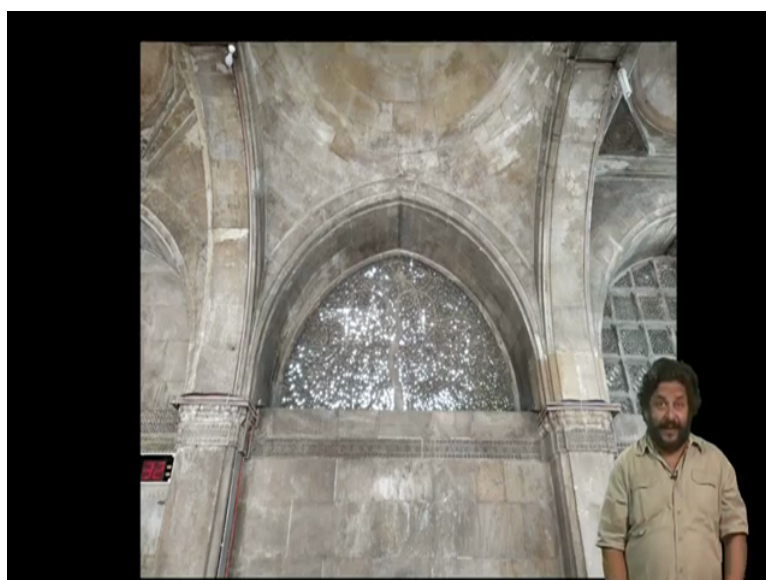
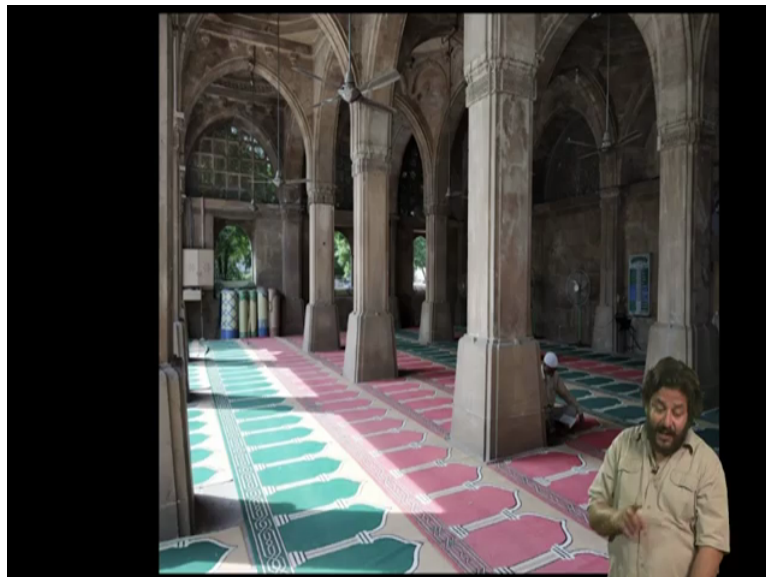
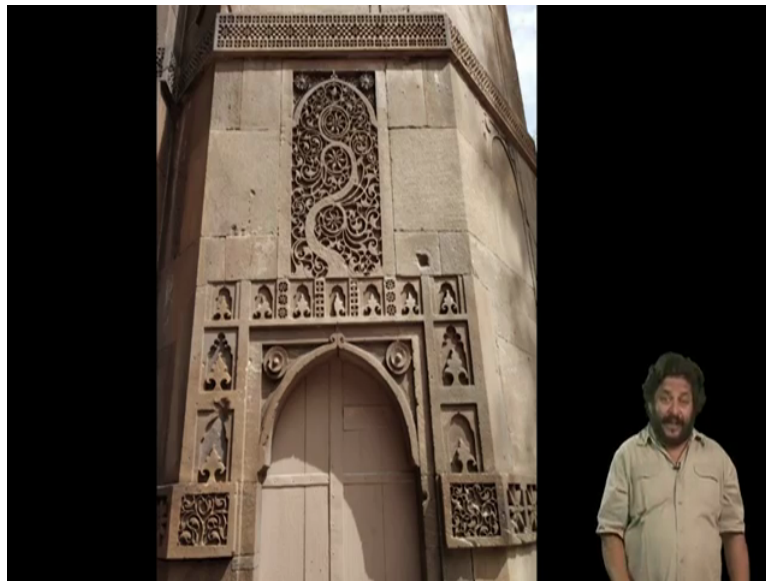
What is also unusual about the mosques in Gujarat is that the mihrab projections will have stepped roofs on top unlike anything else seen in the country.

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A 130, 140 years after that mosque probably is one of the most magnificent mosques known in Gujarat the mosque built, patronized or commissioned by Siddi Syed, a gentlemen at the court of Gujarat of Habshi or Abyssinia origin, this mosque though small was the center piece of diplomacy by prime minister Modi when he hosted the Japanese premier Shinzo Abe in 2015.

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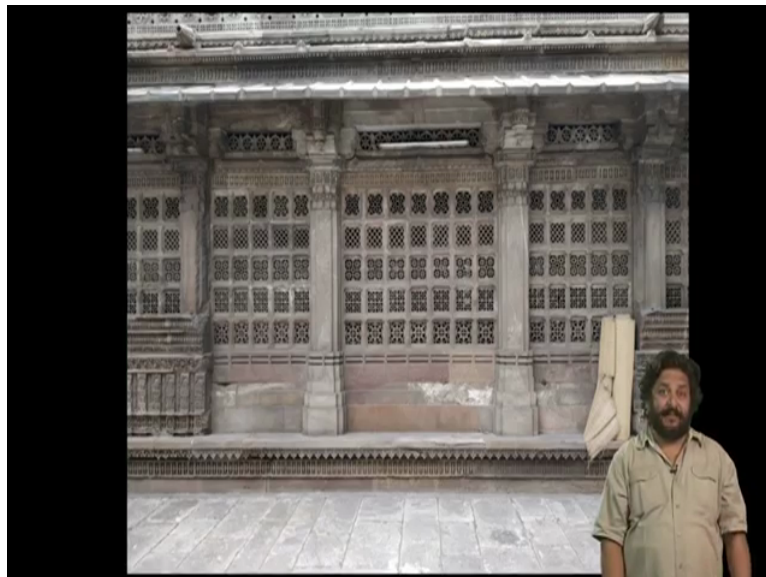
The carving is of an exquisite order again motives like the Jain kalpvriksh are modified to suit the decoration for a mosque. But what is most magnificent about this mosque are not the simple screens at the ends but the screens on the mihrab wall which represent various kinds of vegetal decoration.

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Made famous the world over, this mosque really is one of the finest examples of Gujarati Jaali carving, the trellis work is called a Jaali and Gujarat is one of the places from where the Mughals will also learn about it and take it back and build exquisite jaalis such as the ones in the shrine of Salim Chishti at Fatehpur Sikri.

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There are other buildings such as the mosque and tomb of Rani Sabrai, also in Ahmedabad that you find built under the Gujarat Sultanate, there is a lot of innovation and experimentation, one of the commonest forms for tombs arrived at in the Gujarat Sultanate is a plan that is a series of concentric ambulatory passages supported on columns with a large central dome and the whole building is surrounded completely by these jaalis set in squares, this is the tomb of Rani Sabrai.

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Across from the mosque of Rani Sabrai, details of which you see here, again the same decorative that you would find on temples in Gujarat are used here but with a very different logic.

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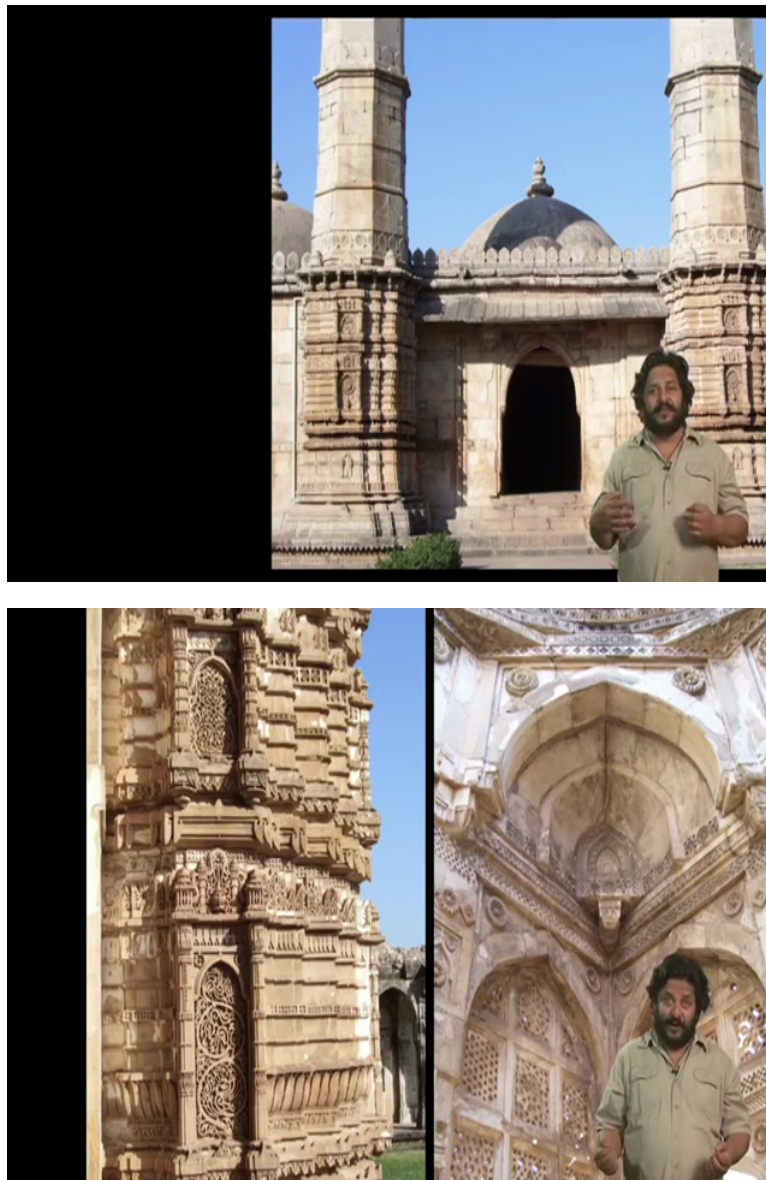
Note that the minarets are very slender and therefore have not survived so well in the case of most mosques in Gujarat. If you look at the side of this mosque, you again see a feature that is very unusual for a mosque, these two balconies which are more reminiscent of mediaeval temples than of mosques, also note the heavy brackets underneath very much part of the idiom of temple building in this part of India.

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A unique structure that you find in Gujarat in the city of Ahmedabad is the Teen Darvaza, a big processional arch that separates the royal quarter from the big congregational mosque.

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Under Mehmood Begada, the most successful of the Gujarat Sultans, Champaner becomes the place where a lot of innovation and experimentation and architecture takes place, but what is notable throughout whether its Ahmedabad, Champaner or elsewhere is that all buildings are built in stone and they borrow very heavily from traditions of temple architecture rooted in the region. This is completely unlike Gujarat, there is no brick being used, there is no terracotta being used.

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And even the shapes of the mosques are completely different from the Adina Mosque or the Baradwari mosque that we have seen in Bengal and here are the corbel domes supported by an octagon of columns, very similar to corbel domes you will find in the sabha mandapas of Hindu and Jain temples of the Solankhi Period.

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Further south in the Deccan you have a sultanate called the Bahamani Sultanate which does things very differently because a lot of times they borrowed designs directly from West Asian lands, notably Iran and so if you look at something like the Madrasa of Mahmud Gawan built sometime in the latter half of the 15th century, what you see is an Iranian design having a big courtyard and 4 massive portals on all sides.

Of course this building was repeatedly struck by lightning and is quite ruined right now. What you also see is decoration that you do not see commonly in India of blue glaze tiles, something one associates with Iran and central Asia and not really with India, the Deccan is the place where you will find this decoration on select buildings.

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The fort of Bidar, again built under the Bahamanis is also very unusual because though it is built of stone, the stone is all dressed and used as one would use brick, this is a very different idiom of building, the decoration a lot of times is in these blue glaze tiles, influences borrowed directly from Iran.

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You find this continuing into the 16th century when the fort is taken over by the Barid Shahs, this is the Rangeen Mahal of the Barid Shahs with its painted ceiling, its style in lay and other forms of decoration like mother of pearl in lay in black stone.

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You also have the magnificent Bahamani royal court with a design of a lion and the sun in the two spandrels of the arch, a design that was to be found in Timur in Samarkand but also with the cell jukes of room.

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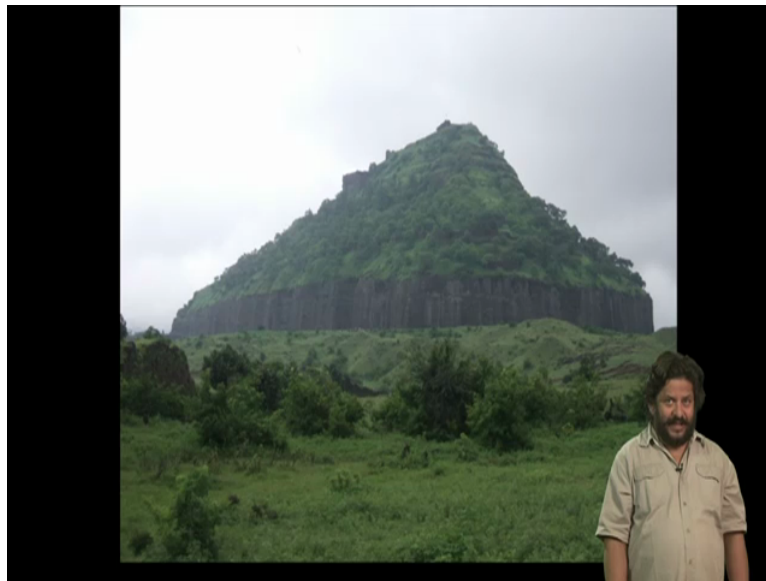
The Bahamanis moved their capital to Gulbarga where they built a mosque that is completely unique in that there is no courtyard it is completely covered and the rare of the mosque also looks unlike any other mosque that we know of in India.

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Inside you have a variety of spaces formed by arched base, the arches of a profile unlike arches found in this region.

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And the greatest legacy of the Bahamanis is their capital from where they rule for 2 years when they found themselves as a dynasty, Daultabad, the impregnable fortress which then will become their capital of multiple dynasties including the Nizam Shahs under Malik Amber.

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The Bahamanis will start building a great victory tower called the Chandminar at this place which again is unlike the Qutubminar, it is unlike a lot of towers, though elements of this tower are very Central Asian in design, the heavily corniced balconies are definitely something rooted in the region.