

USE OF IMPRECATORY VERSES ESPECIAL REFERENCES IN THE MUSLIM INSCRIPTIONS OF BENGAL

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Epigraphic records and written documents are very much momentous source for understanding and reconstructing the history of the then period of Bengal. Almost 500 Muslim inscriptions have been discovered from different parts of Bengal. Most of them have been deciphered and published in journals. These inscriptions are widely used for reconstructing the socio-political and dynastic history of Muslim period of Bengal. It is very much interesting that these epigraphic records contain data related to the different historical aspects of the then society and imprecatory verses too. Imprecatory verses are significant sources to reconstruct the social history of Bengal. It seems that imprecatory verses have not received much attention by the scholars. In this paper, therefore, it would be an attempt to focus on the imprecatory part of the inscriptions.

However, inscriptions sometimes are accompanied by imprecatory verses which have an effect on the people to be cognizant of the property of Mosque, Madrasah and Khanqah and especially endowed property and to be paid the taxes of the government. In the pre-Muslim epigraphic records, contain the imprecatory verses along with theriomorphic ([especially of a deity] having an animal form) and anthropomorphic figures of imprecatory nature such as images with coital scene of a woman and an ass, coital scene of an ass, pig and camel, coital scene of an ass and a pig etc. inscribed in the ancient epigraphs of Bengal and outside of Bengal to protect the embezzlement of endowed properties (**Plates 36.1 & 36.1a**).¹ Most probably these inscriptions were placed in public places to be seen and understood by the common people, the imagery probably being for the benefit of those who were not literate, to highlight the punishment for transgressors.

The *waqf* (endowment) is the most important donation from the government, royal and affluent persons for providing food and daily necessities to needy people, saints, poor pedestrians, and one who is engaged with Mosques, Madrasahs, Mausoleums and Khanqahs. Most of the new Muslims were needy. They were generally sheltered in Khanqahs and Mausoleums. Many endowment inscriptions have been found in the ancient epigraphs to sustain the Hindu Temples, Buddhist and Jaina Monasteries etc. Thus, it may be said that it was not a new system for maintaining the religious institutions. The land could have been donated for any temple it was called *Debottara Bhumi* (property endowed to the service of *deva* or god/goddesses).² According to this endowment system, many well-off persons donated their

lands to maintain the religious institutions related to the Muslims, it was called *Madad-i-Maash*. But these endowed properties were not immune from the immoral persons.

Ancient donated inscriptions usually give details of grants made by a ruler or wealthy person, and with imprecatory verses that indicate the punishment any transgressor of the grant must face. Such verses were popularly engraved in stone as well as copper-plate inscriptions:

“*Svadattam paradattam va yo haret vasudharam / Shashthim varsh sahasrani vishthayam krumi*”³ (One who seizes the land donated by him or by others will suffer as a worm in the faces for six thousand years). “*Svadattam paradattam va yo hareta vasundharam / Svavistayam krimi bhurtva pitribhih pacyate*”⁴ (He who takes away land either given by himself or by others in this earth, rots with his ancestors as a worm in dirt).

Most of the ancient inscriptions in Bengal like Rampal Copper-plate, Kedarpur Copper-plate etc. contain the following imprecatory verses: “the giver of land rejoices in Heaven for sixty thousand years and the transgressor (of a gift) as well as he who approves (of transgression) dwells in Hell for the same number of years. He who takes away land given either by himself or by others rots along with his forefathers as a worm in dirt”.⁵

Aforementioned discussion it may easily understand that the tendency of confiscation and embezzlement of the endowment property by the immoral is not new and it is continued till to days. Therefore, these damnation verses devoid of coital figures were largely used in the Muslim *waqf* (endowment) inscriptions of Bengal. It is very much interesting that imprecatory verses were also used in the Muslim inscription to protect the coercion of government employee on the mass people for paying the government revenue on grains and several *farmans*.

Imprecatory Verses, used in Muslim inscriptions:

The first *waqf* inscription of a Khanqah in Sitalmat, dated 652 A.H. (1254 C.E.),⁶ indicates a formal procedures and contains the Quranic verse. The person in charge, Ahmad ibn Mas’ud al-Maraghi al-Husayn Sadr al-Milla (the leader of the nation), built it for the sake of Allah and left a bequest on his behalf and on behalf of his parents, and he himself subjected it to an office of trustees for a fixed period. Whoever accepts [this responsibility of trusteeship], must follow the teaching of the verse: “Whoever changes it (the will) after he has heard (known) it, the sin of this (act) will be on those who make such changes; indeed Allah is all-hearing and all-knowing (*al-Qur’an-2:181*)”.

The mosque inscription bearing 28 lines Arabic text with *naskh* style dated 27 Ramadan 662 A.H. (23 July 1264 A.D.). Among them 24th to 27th lines contain imprecatory verses like “As for those who will seek to nullify this good deed or try to defeat its purpose either by word or deed or intention or demonstration, Allah the Exalted will know it from the sanctity of his heart and the weakness of his belief, and he will be liable the curse of Allah, and also the curse of the cursers, of

the angels, of the people and, in short, of everybody, will be on him. ‘Then whoever alters it after he has heard of it, the sin of it then is only upon those who alter it; surely, Allah is hearing and knowing’ and Relenting and Merciful”⁷

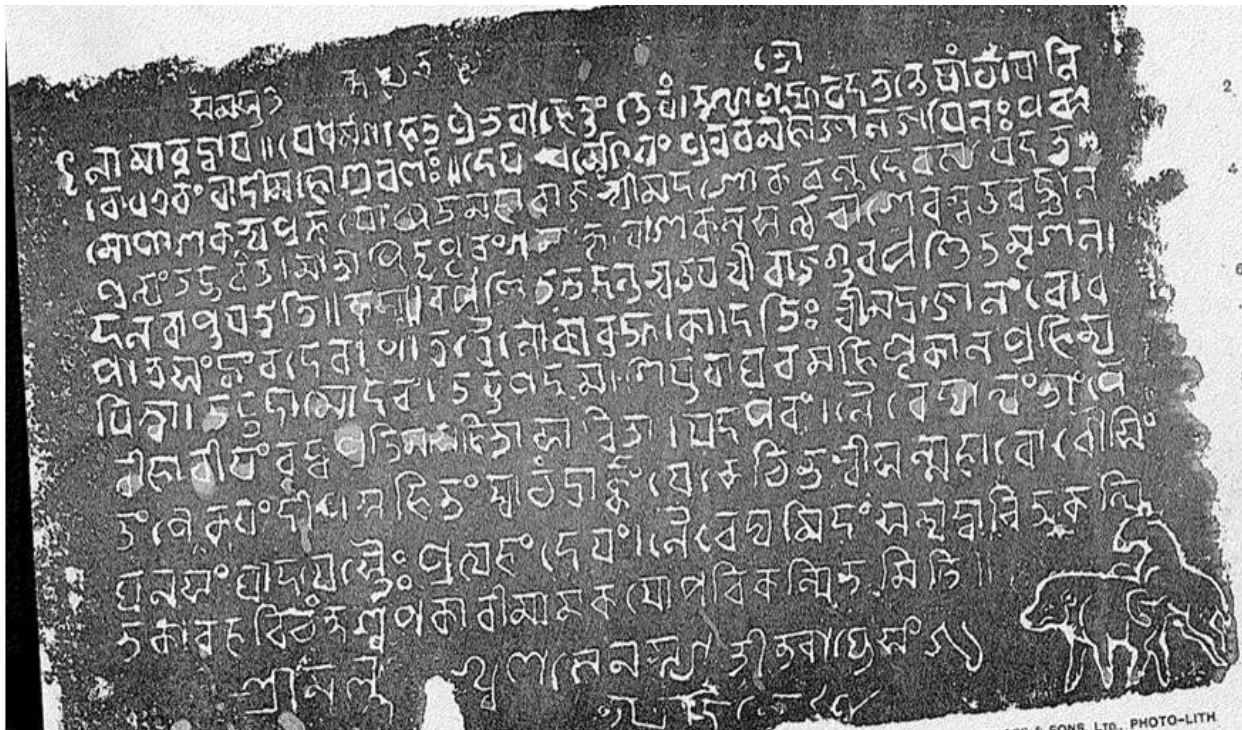


Plate 36.1: Bodhgaya Stone Inscription [after *Epigraphia Indica*, XII], Plate between pages 28 and 29, Photo courtesy: Sudipa Ray Bandapaddhyay, Some Imprecatory Scenes in Early Medieval Inscriptions of Eastern India, *Journal of Bengal Art*, Vol. 18, 2013, pp. 47-53].



Plate 36.1a: Coital scene of an ass and a pig; Coital scene of an ass, pig and camel; Coital scene of a woman and an ass, [Photo courtesy: Sudipa Ray Bandyopadhyay, Some Imprecatory Scenes in Early Medieval Inscriptions of Eastern India, *Journal of Bengal Art*, Vol. 18, 2013, pp. 47-53].

Inscription on the wall to the left of the southern *mihrab*, Zafar Khan’s Mosque at Tribeni, contains a imprecation verse such as “Whoever repairs this mosque may the Most High Allah bless him! And should any one, may Allah defend us from them (the wicked), profane the mosque, may Allah disgrace him!” (Plate 36.2).⁸

The *waqf* inscription of a Masjid in Tilapara, Sylhet, dated 884 A.H. (1479 C.E),⁹ refers to an imprecatory verse (والذي يضرّ هذا الوقف او يحاول امتلاكه فسوف يكون مردودا او مثل ولد الحمار عند الله) ‘Anyone who herms the endowed property of this mosque or usurps it, in the sight of Allah, he would be like the one rejected of like the progeny of a donkey’ which was the most similar word in previously used in the ancient inscriptions of Bengal. But it was tremendously different with the characteristic of Islam. It is interesting to note that it was used in the mosque inscription of the Muslim period of Bengal. Thus, it may be easily realised that at that time the condition of embezzlement had gone to the inferior quality.

The *waqf* inscription of a tomb in Budaun, dated 893 (1478-79),¹⁰ it was donated by Bibi Mughali, wife of the great and generous sultan Ala-ud-Dunya wad-Din Alam Shah, son of Sultan Muhammad Shah (**Plate 36.3**). The inscription contains verses such as “Whoever revives the dead land, that land will belong to him, became the reclaimed property of Her Majesty Bibi Mughali. She, the (new) owner of the above mentioned village, endowed (it) for the tomb of the said King..... who will interfere with the said endowment or will alter any of its conditions, will be held in the eye of Allah. Responsible and guilty, and in this world a sinner. Allah the Exalted, has said “If anyone changes the donation after hearing it, the guilt shall be on those who make the change, for Allah hears and knows all things” (*al-Qur’an* 2:181).

The *waqf* inscription of a Jami‘ Masjid at Satgaon, dated 936 (1530)¹¹ indicates that *waqf* property was sporadically usurped by powerful person such as landlords, administrators and even *mullas* and caretakers. *Waqf* property is never to be taken in private possession. The Prophet (peace be on Him) said, (وقال عليه السلام من تصرف بالغصب مال المسجد والأوقاف كالزنا (كأنه زنى) [بـ]ابنته وأمه وأخته) “Whoever takes illegal possession of the property of a mosque, that would be as if he had brought disgrace on his own daughter and mother and sister”. The *hadith* quoted in the inscription, is not an authentic one, and cannot be found in any collection of *hadiths* like *Sihah Sittah*.¹² Though incised with a pious purpose of discouraging misappropriation by the people, the text is considered to be in bad taste as it curses the usurpers of the *waqf* property with its derogatory expression and indecent phrase.

The epigraphic record contains the text of an interesting *farman* issued on the authority of Ali Adil Shah I in the year 978 A.H. (1570-1571 A.D.) (**Plate 36.4**).¹³ It prohibits the evil practice hitherto prevalent in the mu‘amala of Guva (i.e., Goa) by which the property of a *niputrick* described as a person who left behind him daughters, brothers, sisters etc., no male issue reverted to the state to the deprivation of the above mentioned relations. The order is stated to have been issued following a representation made by Maliku’sh Sharq Malik Zahid Baig, who is not known to history, the *naib-i-ghaibat* of the mu‘amala. The *farman* refers to the trait of the people of the Kokan (i.e., Konkan) region of accusing and quarrelling with each of the for considering of paltry amount. It exhorts them to refrain from this habit, failing which, it says, they would be required to pay a fine of four silver *tankas* to escape arrest. It contains curse verses in

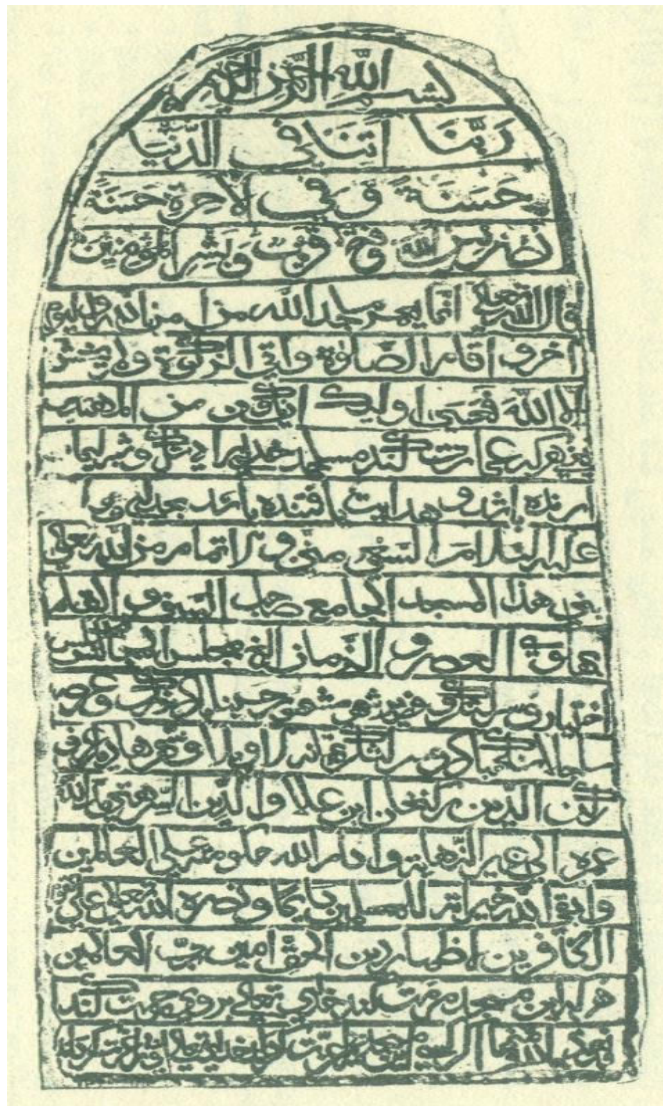


Plate 36.2: Inscription on the west wall to the right of the central *mehrab*, Zafar Khan’s Mosque inscription, Trebeni, dated 698 A.H./1298 C.E. [Photo courtesy: *Epigraphia Indica*, 1915-1916, pl. VI, a].

the 20th-23th lines of the inscription such as “any one violates (the term of) this (*farman*), he will become the forbidder of good, transgressor and sinful (al Qur’an LXVIII, verse 12) and the curse of God and of the Prophet (may Allah peace be upon him). Also the people o Kokan (Konkan) on account of the hatred and enmity, in consideration of a paltry sum, flung accusation against one another, and on account of this, both used to be ruined; hence in this *farman*, it is stipulated that nobody should hurl accusations against one another. if anyone displayed enmity and slander and accused someone, the official should make him pay four white (i.e., silver) *tankas* (as a fine) and not put him under arrest on that account.

The tablet on which this Persian *mahdar* is carved is broken into two fragments which are now lying in a dried up ruined step-well called *Kattebhavi* situated in a field locally known as *Pir-ka-Mala* about a Kilometre and a half to the east of the town (**Plate 36.5**). The inscription containing the text of the Persian *mahdar* four lines text in prose carved in relief in *Naskh*. The Persian version is undated. The Assembly must

have obviously met on the date saka 1505, Subhanu Jyestha Su. 12 (11 Jamada I 991 A.H./ 23 May 1583 CE), mentioned in the Marathi version. The record represents the text of an agreement deposition given in writing by the *Mahajan* and *Balutas* of the town of Hukeri to the effect that one *chawar* (according to HH Wilson 1855, 120 square Bighas) land belonging to Joy Sethi near the *Karanja* (i.e., water-Storage tank or fountain) was endowed for (the maintenance of) the *Karanja* and the *Mihman Khana* constructed by Mansur Khan for public use. The inscription also contains imprecatory verse such as “The Assemble abjures that if a Muslim

violates (lit. turns away from) this Assembly-Decision-by-Agreement, he would (be deemed to) have turned a Christian and if an Unbeliever (i.e., a Hindu) annuls it, he would (be considered to) have killed a cow and eaten it in Banaras (Varanasi) and Kashi and committed fornication”.¹⁴



Plate 36.3: Endowment inscription of a tomb by Bibi Mughali, wife of Alam Shah, [Photo courtesy: *Epigraphia Indica*, 1965, pl. VII, b].

The *waqf* inscription for a Jami‘ Masjid, Dohar, dated 1000 A.H. (1591),¹⁵ is one of the three mosque inscriptions those bear the name of Hajji Bhagal Khan (Bahaghal Khan) (Plates 36.6 & 36.7). According to reading Enamul Haque Bahaghal Khan which is proved by the 10th line of the Sanskrit inscription incised in the same tablet.¹⁶ The warning to the future usurper of the mosque property compares the sin of vandalizing masjid property with the eating of prohibited meats for the Hindu and the Muslim alike. This is the earliest epigraphic record of *madad-i-ma‘ash* (lit., support for living), an important institution of the official grant system in Bengal, which also existed in other regions of South and Central Asia during the medieval period. The inscription contains an alarming verse such as ([هر که مخرب] شد این مسجد بنار برطرف سازد اگر مسلمان باشد حرام می خورد - اگر هندو باشد گاو می خورد) “Whoever damages] this mosque and causes injury to the building, if he happens to be a Muslim, then it will be as if he partakes of proscribed food. If he be a Hindu, then it will be as if he devours a sacred cow”.

The *waqf* inscription of Twenty Two Shops for Barakatra Caravanserai in Dhaka, dated 1055 (1645),¹⁷ is one of the few Islamic inscriptions that record an endowment usually known as *madad-i-ma‘ash*. There is some exceptional information that the clerks in charge of the endowment would spend its income only for the repair of the building and for the poor and that no

rent would be charged to those who deserved to stay for free (**Plate 36.8**). Alarming verses are also here which are follows:- قال الله تعالى [و]من جاء بالسيئة فلا يجزى إلا بما عملها > مثلها < - من جاء بالحسنة فله عشر أمثالها - قال النبي صَلَّى اللهُ عَلَيْهِ وَسَلَّمَ من كسّر عمارة الإسلام فقد كفر محى الله عنه ألف ألف حسنة > حسنة < وكتب الله عنه ألف ألف سيئة > سيئة < وفتح الله له باب النار

“Whosoever accomplishes a good deed will be rewarded ten times over, and whosoever does an evil deed will be recompensed according to his evil [Qur’ān 6:160].” The Prophet, peace and the blessings of Allah be upon him, said, “One who destroys any edifice of Islam becomes an infidel. Allah effaces thousands and thousands of his virtues and enters thousands and thousands of sins against him. Allah also opens for him the door to hellfire. He who protects this structure will receive [his] reward in both habitations”.

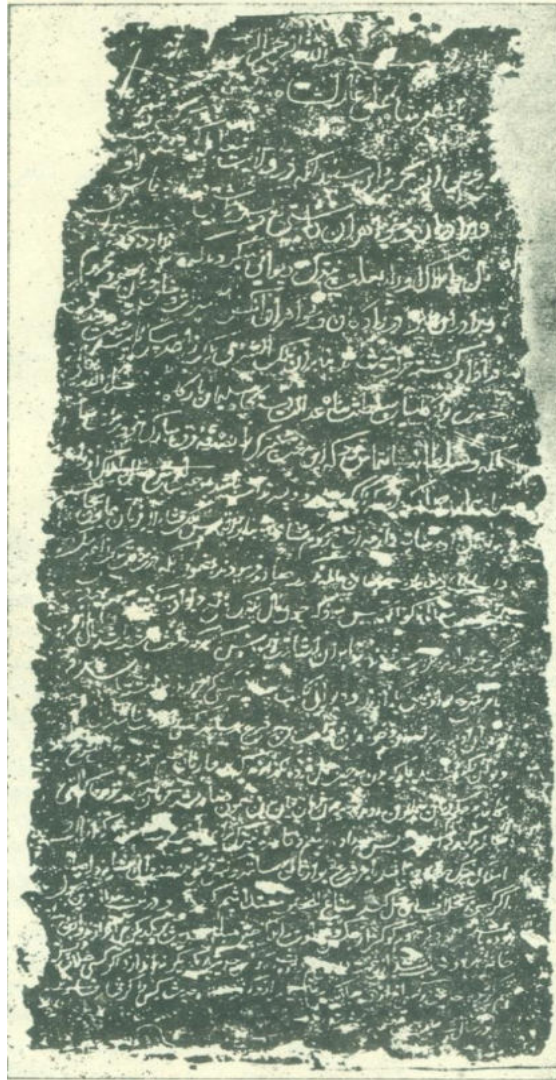


Plate 36.4: A *Farman* of Ali Adil Shah I, Goa, dated 978 A.H., [Photo courtesy: *Epigraphia Indica*, 1965, pl. XII].



Plate 36.5: A *Mahdar* from Hukeri in Karnataka, [Photo courtesy: *Epigraphia Indica*, 1962-63, pl. VI].



Plate 36.6: The *waqf* inscription for a *Jami' Masjid*, Dohar, dated 1000 A.H. (1591) [Photo courtesy: Yusuf Siddiq, 2017, *Arabic and Persian Inscriptions of Bengal*, ICSBA, pl. 11.288].

The *farman* inscription on the headstone of the tomb of Niknam Khan, situated in an enclosure on the plinth of the tomb of Ibrahim Qutb Shah, dated 12th Jamadius Sani 1084 A.H. (25 September

1673 A.D.), contains a curse verse like “if anybody should disobey this *farman*, which has equal force with the degrees of fate, he will be overtaken by the curse of Allah and the imprecation of the Messenger of Allah (رسول الله) [نفرین [نفرمان] فرماں از مضمون فرمان قضا جریان تخلف ورزد بلعنت خدا و نفرین [نفرمان] رسول الله)”.¹⁸



Plate 36.7: *Madad-i-Maash* inscription for Bhagal Khan (Bahagal Khan) Mosque, Nayabari in Manikganj, Arabic and Sanskrit version, [Photo courtesy: Yusuf Siddiq, 2017, *Arabic and Persian Inscriptions of Bengal*, ICSBA, pl. 11.289].



Plate 36.8: A *Waqf* inscription of Twenty two shops for Baraktra Caravanserai in Dhaka, dated 1055 A.H./1645 C.E. [Photo courtesy: Yusuf Siddiq, 2017, *Arabic and Persian Inscriptions of Bengal*, ICSBA, pl. 11.2309ab].

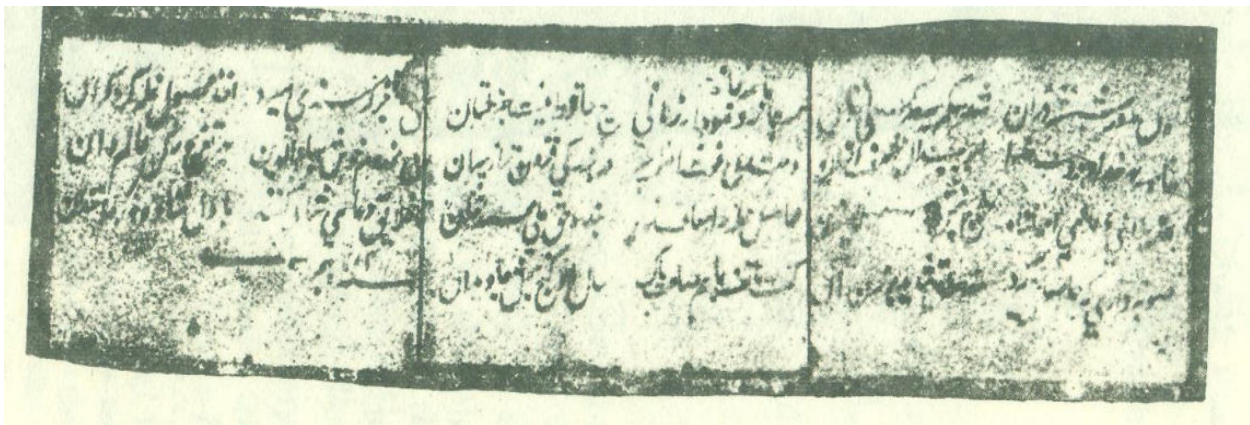


Plate 36.9: Inscription on the Gateway of Shah Baha-ul-Haqq's shrine, Multan, [Photo courtesy: *Epigraphia Indica*, 1927-28, pl. III(a)].

The inscription of the *Dargah* of Shah Baha-ul-Haqq, the patron saint of Multan and Sind, dated 1174 A.H. (1760-61 A.D.) consists of eleven lines of writings in Persian language with *nastaliq* characters along with a most important epigraphic record of imprecatory verse in the 10th line of the inscription such as (صوبہ دارے کہ حاصلش گیرد سه طلاق شديد بر زن آن) “any governor that takes any dues on grain, may his wife be thrice utterly divorced”! (Plate 36.9).¹⁹ It is very much interesting to note that the imprecatory verse had been used in the Muslim inscription which was very much alarming for them who takes any dues on grain.

Basically it was an inscription recorded the news of famine save in Multan and price of the article of food was cheap. But when governors start to collect tax on grain, then the price of grain rose up. For this reason Ali Muhammad Khan, acting governor of Multan remitted the grain dues so that people may pray for the king.

In conclusion, it seems that the imprecatory verses were widely used in the Muslim inscriptions of Bengal as like as the ancient inscriptions for protection from the embezzlement of the endowed property. It also used in the inscriptions to save from the vandalizing the religious institutions like Mosque, Madrasha etc. to ensure collecting revenue and several *farmans* also inscribed these malediction verses to prohibit the evil practice. It provides us essential data for reconstructing the socio-religious history of Bengal. The above mentioned imprecatory verses such as “like the offspring of a donkey; eating of prohibited meats for the Hindu and the Muslim alike, any governor that takes any dues on grain, may his wife be thrice utterly divorced, whoever takes illegal possession of the property of a mosque, that would be as if he had brought disgrace on his own daughter and mother and sister and they will be called to account on the Day of Judgment etc.” are very much alarming messages for everyone especially immoral. However, the use of imprecatory verses with bad taste in Muslim inscriptions is not proper way to secure the *waqf* (endowment) property. It should not use these imprecatory verses, particularly imprecatory verses with coital taste and use of the unauthentic *hadith* in Muslim inscription for protection from the embezzlement of the endowed property. One cannot support such wrongly presented saying of the Prophet (peace be up on him). Prophet (peace be up on him) warned: “Whoever willfully rejected me, he took his place in the fire” (*Bukhari* and *Muslim*). Therefore, everyone should be awarded to use any wrong *hadith*.

It may be seen in above discussion that in many inscriptions have been used the curse verses derived from the *Qur'an* and *Hadith* (the holy book from Allah and verses of the Messenger of Allah respectively) for the guideline of the Muslims to perform every parts of their lives. In a few inscriptions used such wrong *hadith* which did not include in the *Sahih al Sittah*²⁰ (Six authentic *Hadith* books). And there are some inscriptions have been used the malediction verses with coital taste, similar to pre-Muslim inscriptions which is not supported by Islamic rules and regulations. So, it should not use any verse with bad taste and vain talk. Allah has prohibited for using these words. Allah said about the successful Believers in the holy *Qur'an* in *Surah al-Mu'minun*, verses no. 1-3 (The Believers are successful indeed; those who humble in their prayers and who avoid vain talk).²¹

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12. *Sihah Sittah* that means six authentic *hadith* (saying of the Prophet of the Muslims) books likes *Sahih al-Bukhari*, *Sahih al-Muslim*, *Sunan al-Nasa'i*, *Sunan Abu Dawood*, *Jami al-Tirmidhi*, *Sunan ibn-Majah*.
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