

INDIAN ARCHITECTURAL INFLUENCE ON AL-MASHUN MOSQUE IN NORTH SUMATRA

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Abstract

The Al-Mashun Grand Mosque in Medan is one of the most prominent examples of religious architecture in the Indonesian archipelago, reflecting a rich process of cross-cultural acculturation. Although studies on architectural acculturation in Indonesian mosques have been widely conducted, research specifically examining the depth of Indian architectural influence on the Al-Mashun Grand Mosque remains limited. This study aims to identify and analyze the manifestations of Indian, particularly Mughal, architecture in the physical elements of the Al-Mashun Grand Mosque and to trace the historical and genealogical background underlying such influences. A descriptive qualitative method was employed through field observation, visual documentation, literature review, and semi-structured interviews with historians, architects, mosque administrators, and local community members. The findings reveal that Indian-Mughal architectural influence is prominently manifested in the use of bulbous domes supported by drum structures, a symmetrical octagonal main prayer hall, arches, and decorative elements such as stained-glass windows imported directly from India. These elements are harmoniously integrated with Italian marble, Moorish-Spanish arabesque ornamentation, and Egyptian-style minarets. Historically, the adoption of Mughal architectural features was not merely intended to accommodate the colonial-Islamic aesthetic envisioned by Dutch architects Van Erp and J. A. Tingdeman, but also represented a form of homage to the collective genealogical memory of the founder of the Deli Sultanate, Tuanku Sri Paduka Gocah Pahlawan (Mohammad Dalik Khan), who was of Indian descent. Thus, the Al-Mashun Grand Mosque stands as a monumental symbol of architectural acculturation as well as a representation of the historical ties between Deli and Islamic civilization in the Indian subcontinent.

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1. INTRODUCTION

Mosque architecture in Indonesia is a historical product shaped through processes of encounter, adaptation, and acculturation among diverse cultural traditions. Its development did not follow a single uniform architectural pattern; rather, it reflects the ability of Indonesian societies to absorb external influences and adapt them to local social, cultural, and environmental contexts. In its early development, mosque architecture interacted extensively with Hindu-Buddhist traditions and indigenous building forms, and later evolved through the incorporation of influences from the Middle East, India, Europe, and modern architectural styles (Hilmy & Respati, 2024; Lingga & Achiriah, 2024). One of the significant influences in this development is Indo-Islamic or Mughal architecture, which is



commonly characterized by prominent domes, arches, geometric compositions, and the principle of symmetry in monumental buildings (Hildayanti & Wasilah, 2023). This condition demonstrates that mosques function not only as spaces of worship but also as cultural artifacts that record the history of interactions among societies and civilizations.

Within the context of this study, architectural acculturation is understood not as the wholesale imitation of a particular architectural style, but as a process of selecting, adapting, and integrating architectural elements from different traditions into a single building. This framework is important because physical resemblance alone does not automatically indicate that an architectural element originated from a specific tradition. Therefore, identifying Indian-Mughal influence requires consideration of a combination of architectural morphology, spatial organization, decorative elements, the historical context of construction, and the cultural networks that developed during the period. Such an approach enables architectural attribution to be conducted more cautiously, particularly because domes, arches, and geometric patterns are also found in various other Islamic architectural traditions. Accordingly, the interpretation of Mughal influence should not be based solely on visual similarity, but should also be situated within the historical context and the processes of cultural exchange that underpinned its development.

Traces of such architectural acculturation can be identified in various historic mosques across Indonesia. The Saka Tunggal Cikakak Mosque in Banyumas demonstrates the integration of architectural elements with local traditions (Safa'at & Firdhos, 2024), while the Jami Pekojan Mosque in Semarang represents cultural encounters within a pluralistic society (Damanik, 2025). A similar phenomenon appears in a more complex form in Medan, a city historically shaped by trade networks and multicultural interactions. The Lama Gang Bengkok Mosque, for example, exhibits a combination of Chinese, Malay, and Persian architectural elements (Ardiansyah et al., 2024), whereas the Al-Osmani Mosque incorporates Indian, European, Middle Eastern, Chinese, and Malay influences (Purba et al., 2025). This diversity indicates that mosque architecture in North Sumatra constitutes an important arena for understanding processes of cultural transfer and negotiation.

Among these architectural legacies, the Al-Mashun Grand Mosque occupies a significant position because it was constructed during the Deli Sultanate period between 1906 and 1909 and displays a distinctive combination of cross-cultural architectural influences. The mosque was designed within the context of the economic prosperity of the Deli Sultanate and incorporates elements associated with Indian-Mughal traditions alongside European, Moorish, Middle Eastern, and Malay influences. These architectural features should also be situated within the historical relationship between North Sumatra and Indian Muslim communities. Asari et al. (2023) demonstrate the historical presence of Indian Muslim communities in North Sumatra, indicating that India's cultural relationship with the region was not merely aesthetic in nature but formed part of broader social and historical dynamics. Therefore, the Al-Mashun Grand Mosque provides a relevant case for examining how foreign architectural elements were translated, adapted, and repositioned within the political and cultural context of the Deli Sultanate.

Although studies of mosque architectural acculturation have continued to develop, much of the existing literature still discusses foreign architectural influence in broad terms or focuses primarily on other mosque sites. Studies by Hilmy and Respati (2024) and Hildayanti and Wasilah (2023), for instance, provide broader accounts of architectural hybridity, while studies conducted in Medan have focused on sites such as the Lama Gang Bengkok Mosque and the Al-Osmani Mosque (Ardiansyah et al., 2024; Purba et al., 2025). Consequently, there remains a research gap concerning the specific manifestation of architectural elements associated with the Indian-Mughal tradition in the structure, spatial organization, and ornamentation of the Al-Mashun Grand Mosque, as well as the extent to which such attribution can be explained through its historical context. Addressing this gap is important to ensure that Mughal influence is not identified merely on the basis of visual resemblance, but is examined through the relationship between architectural evidence and cultural history.

Based on this research gap, the present study aims to identify and analyze the manifestation of Indian-Mughal architectural influence in the Al-Mashun Grand Mosque and to explain the historical context underlying the process of acculturation. The novelty of this study lies in its attempt to connect the analysis of the mosque's physical architectural elements with the historical context of interactions involving India, the Deli Sultanate, and the mosque's design process, thereby interpreting Mughal influence as part of a broader process of cultural transfer and negotiation rather than as mere formal resemblance. Academically, this study is expected to strengthen scholarship on the history of Islamic architecture in North Sumatra. Practically, the findings may provide a basis for documenting the

mosque's architectural and historical values in support of the preservation of the Al-Mashun Grand Mosque as a multicultural cultural heritage site.

2. RESEARCH METHOD

This study employed a descriptive qualitative approach with an architectural-historical orientation to obtain an in-depth understanding of the forms, characteristics, and historical context of Indian-Mughal architectural influence on the Al-Mashun Grand Mosque in Medan. A qualitative approach was selected because the study not only identifies the physical forms of the building but also interprets the relationships among architectural elements, processes of cultural acculturation, and the historical background underlying its construction. Qualitative research enables an object to be understood within its natural context by emphasizing the interpretation of meaning, processes, and interrelationships among data (Creswell & Poth, 2018). Research informants were selected purposively based on their knowledge of and involvement with the history and architectural characteristics of the Al-Mashun Grand Mosque. They included historians, local architects, mosque administrators, and members of the surrounding community. The inclusion of different groups of informants was intended to obtain diverse perspectives on the mosque's physical characteristics, construction history, and interpretations of the cultural elements embodied in the building. The number of informants was determined on the basis of information adequacy in relation to the research focus.

Data were collected through direct observation, visual documentation, semi-structured interviews, and literature review. Observations focused on physical elements of the building relevant to the research objectives, particularly the form of the domes, arch systems, spatial configuration and octagonal floor plan, columns, ornamentation, windows, and geometric composition of the building. Visual documentation was conducted by photographing these elements to support the process of architectural identification and comparison. Semi-structured interviews were used to obtain information regarding the history of the mosque's construction, physical alterations to the building, its cultural background, and informants' understanding of the presence of Indian architectural elements in the Al-Mashun Grand Mosque. Meanwhile, the literature review examined books, scholarly articles, historical documentation, and other relevant sources concerning the architecture of the Al-Mashun Grand Mosque, the Deli Sultanate, Indian Muslim communities in North Sumatra, and the characteristics of Mughal architecture. The use of multiple data sources enabled triangulation among physical evidence, historical information, and informant accounts, thereby ensuring that the interpretation was not based solely on visual similarities in architectural form (Creswell & Poth, 2018).

The data were analyzed interpretatively through the stages of data reduction, categorization, comparison, interpretation, and conclusion drawing (Miles et al., 2014). Data obtained from observations, documentation, interviews, and literature review were first selected according to the research focus and then grouped into structural, spatial, and ornamental categories. The identification of Indian-Mughal elements was conducted by comparing the physical characteristics of the Al-Mashun Grand Mosque with documented features of Mughal architecture in the literature, including bulbous domes, arch structures, symmetrical compositions, and geometric patterns. Attribution to Mughal influence was not determined solely on the basis of formal resemblance, but was strengthened through consideration of the mosque's construction history, Indian-Muslim cultural networks, and relevant documentary sources. The trustworthiness of the findings was enhanced through source triangulation and methodological triangulation by comparing information across informants and cross-checking interview data against observations, visual documentation, and historical sources. These procedures were undertaken to strengthen the credibility of the interpretation and to distinguish elements that could reasonably be associated with the Indian-Mughal tradition from those originating in European, Moorish, Middle Eastern, or other architectural traditions.

3. RESULT AND ANALYSIS

Architectural Characteristics of the Al-Mashun Grand Mosque in North Sumatra

The observational findings indicate that the Al-Mashun Grand Mosque possesses a complex architectural character and does not represent a single stylistic tradition. Constructed during the Deli Sultanate between 1906 and 1909, the mosque displays a combination of Middle Eastern, Indian, European, and Moorish elements within an integrated architectural composition. Physically, the main

prayer hall has an irregular octagonal plan and is surrounded by semi-open corridors. This spatial configuration creates a strong central focus while also supporting natural ventilation and daylighting. The upper section of the building is dominated by a main dome characterized by a rounded form and segmented profile, while the interior structure is supported by eight cylindrical columns positioned at the corners of the central space. Visual documentation further shows that the arrangement of the spatial layout, dome, columns, and arches forms a relatively symmetrical and monumental composition. These characteristics suggest that the Al-Mashun Grand Mosque was designed not only to accommodate religious functions but also to create a visual expression that conveyed the grandeur and political prestige of the Deli Sultanate.



Figure 1. Al Mashun Mosque

Observations of the materials and ornamentation reveal a diversity of cultural origins that further reinforces the eclectic character of the building. The main columns are constructed from ivory-yellow marble originating from Italy, while the arches are decorated with Moorish and arabesque patterns. Multicolored stained-glass windows constitute an important decorative element that shapes the character of the interior, whereas the detached minaret displays architectural features associated with Egyptian traditions. These findings demonstrate that the architectural character of the Al-Mashun Grand Mosque cannot be explained solely through the category of “Indian architecture,” as its physical elements represent a combination of multiple architectural traditions. Gani and Nasution (2023) similarly demonstrate that the spatial organization, corridors, and decorative elements of the Al-Mashun Grand Mosque form part of a cross-stylistic composition that simultaneously supports spatial functionality and architectural aesthetics. Thus, the findings indicate that the acculturation process embodied in the Al-Mashun Grand Mosque operates through the integration of structural, spatial, material, and ornamental elements derived from several architectural traditions.

Analytically, these characteristics can be understood through the concept of architectural acculturation. Acculturation does not imply that one cultural tradition replaces another; rather, it refers to a process of selecting, adapting, and combining cultural elements into a new configuration without completely eliminating the original identities of the respective elements. Hilmy and Respati (2024) explain that the development of mosque architecture in Indonesia has been shaped by continuous interaction between local traditions and external influences. In the case of the Al-Mashun Grand Mosque, the presence of domes, an octagonal plan, marble columns, arches, Moorish ornamentation, and stained glass demonstrates how mosque architecture can function as a medium of cultural negotiation. Therefore, the architectural character of the building is more appropriately understood as a product of acculturation rather than as a pure representation of a single architectural tradition. This perspective also helps avoid the generalization that every arch or dome found in mosque architecture should automatically be categorized as a Mughal element.

Despite its eclectic character, several elements of the Al-Mashun Grand Mosque demonstrate morphological affinities with Indo-Islamic or Mughal architectural traditions. These are particularly evident in the use of prominent rounded or bulbous domes, arches, a strong tendency toward symmetry, and a centralized spatial composition. Mughal architecture is widely recognized as a synthesis of Persian, Islamic, and Indian influences that produced monumental architectural forms characterized by domes, arches, and strong geometric compositions (Hussain & Juan, 2023). Nevertheless, the attribution of Mughal influence to the Al-Mashun Grand Mosque must be approached cautiously, since domes and arches also developed within various other Islamic architectural traditions. For this reason, the present study does not rely solely on visual resemblance but also considers the historical relationships among the Deli Sultanate, Indian Muslim communities, and the development of colonial architecture during the period in which the mosque was constructed. This approach strengthens the argument that Mughal

influence on the Al-Mashun Grand Mosque formed part of a broader process of cultural transfer that was subsequently adapted to the local context.

A comparison of the mosque's physical elements further reveals that different architectural influences are distributed across different parts of the building. Elements exhibiting closer affinities with Indian-Mughal architecture are particularly visible in the form of the domes, arches, and octagonal spatial configuration, whereas Moorish ornamentation is more closely associated with the Spanish-Islamic tradition and the use of marble reflects connections with Europe, particularly Italy. This finding is important because it demonstrates that the architectural identity of the Al-Mashun Grand Mosque is layered rather than homogeneous. Roswandi et al. (2024) identify the octagonal plan and column system as important components of the mosque's spatial organization, while Asari et al. (2023) situate the presence of Indian Muslim communities within the broader history of cultural relations between India and North Sumatra. Accordingly, the building should be interpreted through a specific classification of its individual architectural elements in order to avoid oversimplifying the origins of its stylistic features.

The architectural characteristics of the Al-Mashun Grand Mosque demonstrate that the principal strength of the building lies in its ability to integrate diverse architectural traditions into a coherent composition. Indian-Mughal influences are indeed discernible in several structural and spatial elements, yet these features consistently interact with European, Middle Eastern, and Moorish elements. These findings reinforce the understanding of the Al-Mashun Grand Mosque as a product of acculturation shaped by the social, political, and cultural context of the Deli Sultanate in the early twentieth century. Consequently, the architectural significance of the Al-Mashun Grand Mosque lies not only in the distinctiveness of its physical form but also in its capacity to embody and record networks of cross-regional cultural exchange. Such an interpretation is more consistent with an acculturation-based approach because it understands architectural elements as outcomes of complex cultural interactions rather than as the simple reproduction of a single foreign architectural style.

Indian Elements in the Architecture of the Al-Mashun Grand Mosque in North Sumatra

The findings indicate that Indian influences in the architecture of the Al-Mashun Grand Mosque are primarily evident in structural and spatial elements that display affinities with Indo-Islamic or Mughal architectural traditions. The most prominent features include the use of a rounded and projecting bulbous dome, arch structures, and an octagonal main prayer hall. These three elements create a strong visual character that distinguishes the Al-Mashun Grand Mosque from earlier mosque traditions in the Indonesian archipelago, which commonly employed multi-tiered roofs. Observations further show that the dome is positioned above a supporting base structure that creates an impression of verticality and monumentality, while the interior arches visually connect the columns, the main prayer space, and the upper sections of the building. The octagonal plan also produces a symmetrical and centralized spatial configuration. These findings suggest that Indian-Mughal influence in the Al-Mashun Grand Mosque does not exist in isolation, but rather forms part of a broader architectural composition that integrates elements derived from multiple cultural traditions.



Figure 2. The Dome of the Al-Mashun Grand Mosque

Theoretically, these characteristics correspond with the features of Mughal architecture that developed in the Indian subcontinent. The Mughal tradition emerged from a synthesis of Persian, Islamic, and Indian elements, which subsequently produced monumental architectural forms characterized by prominent domes, arches, geometric symmetry, and an emphasis on balanced visual composition (Hussain & Juan, 2023). In the context of the Al-Mashun Grand Mosque, the rounded dome

and arch structures demonstrate morphological affinities with these characteristics. Juwono et al. (2023) likewise identify prominent domes and arch systems as architectural elements widely employed in Indo-Islamic traditions. However, this relationship must be interpreted cautiously because domes and arches are also found in other Islamic architectural traditions. Therefore, the identification of Mughal elements in the Al-Mashun Grand Mosque should not be based solely on physical form, but rather on a combination of morphological similarities, spatial structure, and the historical context of its construction.

The findings further indicate that Indian influence does not encompass all architectural elements of the building. The cylindrical columns in the main prayer hall, for example, are constructed from ivory-yellow marble originating from Italy, while the ornamentation on the arches displays Moorish and arabesque motifs that are more closely associated with Spanish-Islamic traditions. Meanwhile, the multicolored stained-glass windows are reported to have originated from India and Spain, indicating that the mosque's materials and decorative elements reflect cross-regional cultural exchange. Roswandi et al. (2024) explain that the octagonal plan, columns, and arches constitute important components of the spatial composition of the Al-Mashun Grand Mosque. Accordingly, the Indian-Mughal elements of the mosque should be understood as one cultural layer within its overall architectural composition rather than as the sole source of its stylistic identity. This approach is important for avoiding an oversimplification of the building's architectural identity and for providing a more proportionate classification of its individual architectural elements.

Comparison of Foreign Architectural Elements in the Al-Mashun Grand Mosque

Element	Architectural Style	Physical Manifestation
Rounded dome	Indian-Mughal	Prominent dome with a segmented profile
Arches	Indian-Mughal	Arched column structures decorated with arabesque motifs
Octagonal plan	Indian-Mughal	Irregular octagonal main prayer hall
Moorish ornamentation	Spanish-Islamic	Decorative motifs applied to the arches of the marble columns
Marble material	European (Italian)	Cylindrical columns made of ivory-yellow marble

The comparison of these physical elements indicates that the Indian-Mughal identity of the Al-Mashun Grand Mosque is most strongly expressed through its form and spatial organization, whereas its materials and ornamentation reveal the influence of other cultural traditions. Architectural affinities with the Mughal tradition are particularly evident in the dome form, arch structures, and centralized spatial composition characterized by a symmetrical orientation. Asari et al. (2023) demonstrate that Indian Muslim communities have historically formed part of the social landscape of North Sumatra, suggesting that the presence of Indian elements in the Al-Mashun Grand Mosque can be understood within a broader context of cultural relations. This finding strengthens the argument that Indian influence was not merely the result of formal imitation but constituted part of a wider process of cultural interaction that developed in North Sumatra during the period of the Deli Sultanate. In this regard, architectural elements function as visual markers of cultural exchange that underwent processes of adaptation and integration within the local environment.

Overall, the findings show that Indian-Mughal elements in the Al-Mashun Grand Mosque are most clearly manifested in its rounded dome, arch structures, and octagonal spatial configuration. However, these elements interact with European, Middle Eastern, and Moorish influences, producing an eclectic and multicultural architectural character. This finding supports the view that the architecture of the Al-Mashun Grand Mosque is the result of acculturation rather than a direct or complete reproduction of Mughal architectural style. Purnamasari et al. (2026) emphasize that the building reflects a combination of Indian elements with Turkish, Spanish, and European styles, assembled by colonial architects within the context of the Deli Sultanate. Therefore, Indian influence in the Al-Mashun Grand Mosque is most appropriately understood as dominant in certain architectural aspects while remaining embedded within a more complex network of cultural influences. This perspective strengthens the validity of the analysis and addresses the need for a more critical, proportionate, and evidence-based identification of Indian architectural elements grounded in both architectural and historical evidence.

4. CONCLUSION

Based on the findings, the Al-Mashun Grand Mosque in North Sumatra represents an acculturative architectural form that brings together multiple cultural traditions within a coherent building composition. Indian-Mughal influence is most clearly reflected in the use of rounded domes, arch structures, and an octagonal spatial configuration that displays affinities with Indo-Islamic architectural characteristics. At the same time, other elements, including Italian marble, Moorish ornamentation, and Middle Eastern influences, demonstrate that the building cannot be categorized as a singular representation of Mughal architectural style. The findings indicate that the architectural character of the Al-Mashun Grand Mosque was shaped through processes of selection, adaptation, and integration of various foreign elements within the cultural context of the Deli Sultanate. Therefore, Indian influence is more appropriately understood as one dominant layer within a broader and more complex structure of architectural acculturation rather than as an independent stylistic source. Accordingly, the significance of the Al-Mashun Grand Mosque lies not only in the uniqueness of its physical form but also in its capacity to embody historical relationships, cultural exchange, and the multicultural identity of North Sumatran society.

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