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SHÂHJAHÂNÂBÂD/
OLD DELHI

TRADITION
AND COLONIAL CHANGE



MANOHAR

The Indomitable City

Narayani Gupta (Delhi)

The area called Delhi has been the site of many villages and many towns over the centuries. In the angle created by the outcrop of the Aravalli Hills which is locally known as the Pahārī (hill) or the Ridge, and the river Yamuna there have been cities which became known in other parts of the world, known because they were associated with great emperors and because of their magnificent monuments and ambience of opulence. Rulers have come and gone, but the basic features of Delhi have not changed. It was the hinge between the Punjab and the Doab (the land of the Five Rivers of the Indus, and the land of the Two Rivers, the Ganga and Yamuna) and was an ideal central place for empires which extended from Afghanistan to Bengal, and from Kashmir to the Deccan. It has always been a major entrepôt of long-distance trade as well as a centre of consumption. Characterised by extreme wealth as well as poverty, it has been an open city, very cosmopolitan. The sense of urbanism in Delhi has been one which has been imposed from above, not crystallised slowly out of local communities. Lâl Kot in the 12th century, Sirī in the 13th, Ferozâbâd in the 14th and Dîn Panâh in the 16th were some of the cities in the Delhi area which were the forerunners of the city of the Emperor Shâhjahân built in the 17th century. Many settlements did not last long. The first Mughal Emperor, Babur, had remarked that "In Hindustan (north India) the populousness and the decay or total destruction of cities is almost instantaneous"¹. Shâhjahânâbâd, however, despite invasion and change of sovereign, has not become depopulated, and there are families living there today who can trace their ancestry to the seventeenth century.

Emperor Shâhjahân (1592-1666) had a passion for building. All the Mughal rulers (who were sovereigns of north India from the 16th to the 19th century) are remembered for their creativity and love of beautiful things, ranging from wild flowers to great palaces. Shâhjahân had inherited the elegant cities of Lahore and Agra, but soon after his accession "the thought came to his mind that he should select some pleasant site on the banks of the river, distinguished by its genial climate, where he might found a splendid fort and delightful edifices.... He envisioned that streams of water should be made to flow through the proposed fort and that its terraces should overlook the river"². After a long survey, he decided that Delhi was the ideal place; he chose a site

1 The word Mughal (Mongol) indicate the antecedents of the dynasty, but since they had become part of the Chagatai tribe of Turks, Babur's family is called Turkish and not Mongol.

2 W.E. BEGLEY and Z.A. DESAI (eds.) *Shahjahannama* of Inayat Khan (Delhi, 1990), p. 406.

on the right bank of the Yamuna, north of Dīnpanāh and Ferozābād, and extending to Salimgarh (a small island-fort which had been built in 1546). As with earlier cities in the Delhi region, *Shāhjahānābād* came to incorporate sections of older settlements. The city of *Sher Shāh* Sur (1540s) had included that of Feroze *Shāh* (1350s); the northern gate of *Sher Shāh*'s city was some yards to the south of *Shāhjahān*'s southern gate (the Delhi Gate). The highway leading out from Feroze *Shāh*'s citadel to his hunting-lodge on the northern Ridge became one of the two main avenues of *Shāhjahānābād* (Faiz Bazaar). One of the mosques built by the prime minister of Feroze *Shāh* in 1387 (the Masjid Kalan) was skilfully incorporated into the streetscape of the new city.

At the outset *Shāhjahān*, like modern town-planning agencies, 'acquired' a large area around his fort, much of it agricultural land interspersed with the monumental remains of older towns. Over time, sections of these were given away as gifts or rewards, what remained as royal properties being called 'nuzūl'. Many holdings were cultivated as gardens or orchards (which were accordingly exempted from paying land-revenue) and effectively created a green belt around the built area. To keep these fields and gardens green a hydraulic strategy was necessary. Near and in *Shāhjahānābād* were wells, springs, step-wells and tanks of earlier days. But what, over time, had modified the parched dry climate of Delhi was the vast canal network which had been inspired in the 13th century by the ruler's love of verdure and of sparkling water. Engineers had diverted part of the Yamuna from a point many miles north of Delhi and coaxed it into an interlaced system of channels. These were repaired in 1561. *Shāhjahān*'s able military commander *Alī Mardān Khān*, who had completed a canal to Lahore the same year as the Emperor took the decision to build his capital at Delhi, repaired the old canal and cut a new channel which ran through the chief streets, gardens and palace buildings. It was this that "gave the greatest lustre and splendour to the new city"³. That section of the canal which was within the city walls was called *Nahar-e-Bihisht* (Canal of Paradise)⁴. It was somehow fitting that *Shāhjahān* should have nursed back to prosperity the Delhi area which in 1398 his ancestor *Timūr* laid waste.

Once the area of the new capital was earmarked and the supply of water assured, the built landscape developed. The magnificent skyline of the citadel and of the Jama Masjid, outlined in red sandstone and white marble, softened by the outlines of trees, had taken shape in nine years. Delhi had earlier been a rival and a counter-magnet to Baghdad. For *Shāhjahān*, the rival to his city was the Isfahan of *Shāh Abbās*⁵. The implicit competition was in terms of size, design and grandeur. The Emperor spurred

3 Major POLIER, Extract of Letters, 22 May 1776 Asiatic Annual Register 1800, p. 37.

4 The family name of India's first prime minister, Jawaharlal NEHRU, is derived from nahar (Canal); one of his ancestors had, as an officail at Delhi, been in charge of the canal department.

5 "One day *Shāhjahān* stated after looking at maps of Baghdad and Isfahan, where the bazaars were octagonal and covered, and which had appealed to his fancy, that those in the new city had not been constructed accordingly". Maathir-ul-Umara by Nawab Shah Nawaz Khan, translated by H. BEVERIDGE, Vol. II, Part I (Patna, 1979) p. 270.

his engineers and craftsmen on to greater feats; the best testimony to the superb quality of their work is that today those *Shāhjahānī* buildings which have escaped destruction or vandalization look far stronger than many buildings of later date, and in aesthetic terms are unsurpassed. Once "the auspicious fort.... was completed, all the exalted princes and the honoured Amirs arranged to build on its right and left and along the river bank grand and imposing buildings and pleasant houses. These were constructed by the poor and rich and great men according to their limited or ample means"⁶. When Francois Bernier lived in the city in the 1660s, he commented on the colonies of mud- and thatch houses in the interstices of the nobles' palaces⁷. Over the decades, these houses were strengthened into or replaced by brick houses, and the network of streets and lanes took shape. The built area was modified not by official decree but because of distress or augmented wealth.

A 14th-century poet of Delhi, *Amīr Khusro*, had written of the city, "If on earth there be Paradise/ It is here, it is here, it is here". *Shāhjahān* has this verse inscribed at the entrance of one of the halls in his palace. To his, as to all the Mughals, Paradise was not just a walled garden (*Para daeza*) but a beautiful city. His great-grandfather Babur had been sharply disappointed when he first saw what was to be his kingdom. The country and towns of India were extremely unattractive, he had remarked. Its people had no idea of the charms of friendly society, there were "no good horses, no good meat, no grapes or muskmelons, no good fruits, no ice or cold water, no good food or bread in the bazaars, no baths or colleges, no candles or torches, not a candlestick."⁸ How Babur would have rejoiced to see the horses paraded in the maidan (open area) outside the Fort, the grapes cultivated in the gardens north of the Fort, the melons sweetening on the banks of the Yamuna as the hot summer winds ripened them, the icepits south of the city, the fragrance of excellent bread in the Palace kitchens, the public baths, the well-endowed colleges, where theological debate in the morning gave place to poetry recitals in the evenings.

Shāhjahānābād was pre-eminently a Mughal city, but its lifestyle was delineated largely by its inhabitants. There were to be occasions when political crises led to the city being forcibly or voluntarily emptied of people, but what was more remarkable was the immigration, by individuals and communities, over the following centuries. An old saying that Delhi has many gates of entry but none for departure has always been valid. It was very cosmopolitan, with a mix of people from all parts of the Empire and beyond.⁹ When state power was strong, houses used to be resumed by the government when the incumbent died, since they were not meant to be conferred in perpetuity.

6 Ibid., p. 271.

7 F. BERNIER, Travels in the Mogul Empire, A.D. 1656-1668 (Delhi, 1968), p. 241.

8 H.M. ELLIOT and J. DOWSON, The History of India as told by its own Historian, Vol. IV (Allahabad, n.d.), p. 222.

9 "There was no ward in which there was not the house of some Iranian Officer", Maathir, Vol. II, Part I, p. 177.

Many large hawêlis (mansions) were built by rajas and nawabs who were in alliance with or in a state of subservience to the sovereign; by officials and bankers, and by members of the royal family. Places of worship, charitable institutions, shopping precincts and public baths were built by individuals¹⁰; the best known endowment (waqf) of this kind was the spacious caravanserai and gardens commissioned by the daughter of *Shâh Jahân*, Princess *Jahânârâ*, in *Chândnî Chawk* (= Moonlight Place). Till the mid-19th century there was a harmonious mix of open space and built up area in *Shâhjahânâbâd*. Shops and homes shared buildings fronting on to the streets. There was a hierarchy of markets, ranging from all-purpose neighbourhood ones to specialised clusters, like the *Darîbâ Kalân* (the Great Street of the Jewellers) distinguished from *Darîbâ Khurd* (the small Street of the Jewellers) and *Kinârî Bazaar* (Tinsel Street). Bishop Wilson in 1836 wrote that the distant view of the city, with its dreaming spires resembled "that of Oxford from the Banbury Road"; the simile vanished when he entered, and saw "the wide streets, the ample bazaars, the shops with every kind of elegant wares, the prodigious elephants used for all purposes, the numerous native carriages drawn by noble oxen, the children bedizened with finery, the vast elevation of the mosque, fountains and caravanserais for travellers, the canals full of running water raised in the middle"¹¹.

The reason why a large number of people could live together in this compact area, and accomodate newcomers without social tension being generated was that urban society was a highly regulated one, and everyone knew the rules. It was a hierarchy of Chinese boxes, ranging from the city wall to the curtained private quarters of the house. The city was formally entered through one of the gateways ("the most magnificent which the world can boast")¹², of which there had been eight in 1657¹³ and fourteen, together with another fourteen *khirkîs* (wicket-gates) by the nineteenth century¹⁴. The wall had been initially made of mud, but was later reinforced by stone. The writ of the city *Kotwâl* (magistrate) was circumscribed by the wall. The city was divided into 12 *thânâs* (wards) each in the charge of a *thânâdâr*; each *thânâ* was a honeycomb of mahallahs (neighbourhoods) under the responsibility of mahallahdars. It was in the mahallah that the visitor came up against his second formal entry-point, since each mahallah was sealed off from its neighbours and could be entered only by one gate¹⁵. The names of newcomers to the city were maintained by the *thânâdârs*, who

10 "Mohammad Yâr *Khân* was the owner of many houses and shops in Delhi and exaggerated accounts were current regarding the high rents he used to realize for them", *ibid.*, p. 218.

11 Society for the Propagation of the Gospel, *Historical Sketches*, Missionary Series, No. 1, 'Delhi', London 1891, p. 4.

12 'Mofussil Stations No. XI, Delhi, Asiatic Journal, May/August 1834, p. 2. The phrase is not Urdu hyperbole, but English understatement!

13 Begley and Desai, *op.cit.*, p. 537

14 J.A. PAGE (ed.) *List of Mohammedan and Hindu Monuments*, Delhi Province Vol. 1, *Shâhjahânâbâd* Zail (London 1913), p. 35

15 This was known as the *Kûchâ-bandî* system (*Kûchâ* = lane, *bandî* = closure)

also had up-to-date details of vital statistics and tax collections; cleanliness was maintained by *chowkidârs* in each mahallah paid by the residents. Mahallahs were known by the name of the individual whose hawêli dominated it, or of the vocation of the people who lived there (the Lane of the Carpenters, the Leatherworkers, the Quarters of the Cloth-printers). Hawêlis were often minitowns, accommodating not only the family of the owners, but also their retainers, and craftsmen and artisans with their *kârkhânâs* (workshops). The hawêli was entered by crossing the *deorhî* (thresh-old): indoors, space was divided into public and private, the private in turn into the *zenânâ* (women's quarters) and *mardana* (men's rooms). Formality increased as one proceeded from street to neighbourhood to house. The same strict distinction could be found in the palace-complex.

The citadel was open to the riverfront, but set at a height above the level of the water; it was separated from the city by a *purdah* (curtain) of red sandstone. For two centuries it was a Vatican within the Rome of *Shâhjahânâbâd*. The Emperor who supervised its design was able to enjoy its ambience for only ten years before his throne was usurped by his son Aurangzeb, and *Shâhjahân* himself was kept confined in the fort of Agra. The citadel remained as *Shâhjahân* had left it, except that Aurangzeb constructed an outwork at the western gateway, so that the Hall of Public Audience was not in the direct view of the *Chândnî Chawk* avenue; this was intended to give some respite to the people who happened to be in the avenue, since custom demanded that anyone in the view of the Emperor had to bow. An exquisite marble mosque, the *Motî Masjid* (Pearl Mosque) in the fort was also his contribution. Within the citadel lived the Emperor's family and dependants (one estimate puts their strength at 10,000)¹⁶ and staff. The southern section of the citadel was the private area, the central and northern the public halls and offices. The buildings were embedded in gardens and separated by channels of water, creating a congenial microclimate "L'interior est orné des édifices, des beaux appartements, de lieux des promenades délicieux et des jardins entièrement agréables"¹⁷.

The Palace faced east as well as west, east to the Doab and west towards Afghanistan, away from the city as well as towards it. The visitor entering the city from the west, through the Lahori Gate, entered the palace through its corresponding Lahori Gate. The palace could also be entered by the river-gate to the southeast¹⁸. The city slopes down to the river-bank as can be experienced in the areas to the north and south of the citadel. In the case of the palace itself, the contrast is more dramatic. From the riverfront windows of the palace the bank is far below, and the architecture of the complex becomes intelligible if one remembers that below the building is a layer

16 A. PETRUCCIOLI, 'Delhi the old city', *The India Magazine*, No. 7, January 1987, p. 10

17 Notes by Legendre for writing the History of India, F. 346, *Nouvelles Acquisitions*, Bibliothèque Nationale, France

18 (In 1669) Husain Pasha Shah of Turkey "received from the Emperor a lofty mansion on the bank of the Yamuna...and a boat so that he might come by river to the court" Maathir, Vol. 1, p. 699

of *tahkhânâs* (basement rooms) which were cool and dark in summer. During the months of the monsoon, the water of the river would have lapped the walls of the Fort. In the arid summer months it would retreat, leaving a marshy tract. It is here that the people of the city would gather in the mornings when the Emperor was in residence, to catch a glimpse of him through a trellis window. This practice of *jharokhâ-darshan* (window-viewing) was an old Indian ritual, symbolic of the fact that the rulers were at a higher level than their subjects, but also accessible to them. The view of the citadel from the riverfront was spectacular. In 1833, an English visitor catching his first glimpse of the Mughal palace from the river was to rhapsodize "With the rising sun glittering on its numerous marble minarets and gilded domes it was a most gorgeous spectacle"¹⁹.

Accounts of the palace and of the city at their most opulent must have been even after making allowance for verbal embellishment. The city seemed to glitter at the centre of the great Mughal empire as the Koh-i-noor diamond given to Bâbur glittered at the centre of the jewel-encrusted Peacock Throne that stood in *Shâhjahân's* Hall of Private Audience.

A near-contemporary account vividly describes the Palace. "The lofty fort, which is octagonal according to the Baghdad style, is 1,000 royal yards long, and 300 yards broad. Its walls are built of the red stone of Fathpur. Its height including the battlements, from the foot of the wall is 12 1/2 yards. Its area is six lac yards, which is double that of the great fort of Akbarabad (Agra) and its perimeter is one thousand six hundred and fifty yards. It has twenty one bastions, seven circular and fourteen octagonal; four gates and two windows. Round it is a moat twenty yards wide and ten yards deep; this is supplied with water from a canal connected on two sides with the river Yamuna—except on the east side where the wall of the fort abuts directly on to the river—it was built at a cost of twenty one lacs of rupees. The royal mansions, consisting of the *Shâh Mahal* with a silver roof, *Imtiyaz Mahal* with the bedroom known as the *Burj-Tâlâ* (The Golden Chamber), and the private and public *Daulat Khânâ* (Palace), and the *Hayât Bakhsh* garden cost twenty eight lacs of rupees. The palaces of the Begum Sahiba and other chaste inmates of the Harem cost seven lacs, and other buildings, such as the bazar and the guard-houses inside the mighty fort, which were designed to serve for the royal manufactories, were completed at a cost of four lacs.

"On 24th Rabe I, 1058 A.H. (8th April, 1648 A.D.) in the 21st year of the reign, the day which had been selected by the astrologers for royal entry, orders were issued for arranging the paraphernalia of a royal feast and a convivial entertainment. In all the royal apartments were spread beautiful carpets, which had been prepared in Kashmir and Lahore out of selected wool with great skill and taste, while on the doors of the courtyards and porticoes were hung curtains embroidered, worked in gold, and velvet

brocades prepared by the skilled workers of Gujarat. In every apartment were placed jewelled, gold enamelled, and plainly worked thrones, and after arranging high seats and cushions with covers of brilliant pearls, gold embroidered cloths were spread over the thrones. The three sides of the great portico of the private and public palaces were embellished with a silver enclosure, and opposite the *Jharoka* was a golden enclosure, while golden stars with golden chains were hung in all alcoves, and these made the palace resemble the heavens. In the middle of that portico was placed a square throne surrounded by a golden enclosure; the heavenly jewelled throne was left exposed to the sky whence the splendour of the world-illuminating sun radiated. In front of the throne was erected a canopy embroidered with gold and pearl strings, and raised on jewelled poles; and on the two sides of the throne were placed two parasols (*chattr*) decorated with pearl strings, while on the other two sides of the throne octagonal frames were erected. Behind the throne were placed jewelled and golden tables on which was displayed the *Qur Khânâ*—which consisted of the jewelled swords with worked scabbards, quivers and gem-bedecked arms, and jewelled spears for the making of which full use had been made of all the resources of the sea and the mines. The roof, the pillars, the doors and walls of this heavenly portico, and the porticoes all round the private and public palaces were covered up and decorated with embroidered canopies, golden curtains from Europe and China, gold and silver embroidered velvets from Gujarat and gold and silver thread screens. In front of the great central portico was erected an awning of gold embroidered velvet, and in front of the lateral porticoes canopies of embroidered velvet with silvered poles, and having spread coloured carpets on the floor of this canopy a silver enclosure was erected round it. This great canopy, which in its height and extent resembled the heavens, was, according to royal orders, woven in the imperial factory at Ahmadabad, and took a long time to complete at a cost of nearly one lac of rupees. Its length was 70 royal cubits and width 45 cubits. It was erected on four silver poles, each of which was two yards and a quarter in circumference and 22 yards high. It covered an area of 32,000 (square) yards and 10,000 people could be accommodated under it. It took trained *farashes* and 3,000 additional men working hard for a month to erect it and it was generally known as *Dalbadal*. In short, such a canopy—which resembled the heavens—had never been erected before and such a building—which was a counterpart of the heavens—had never been decorated so elaborately. From the date of the auspicious entry of the Emperor into this heavenly building there was a continuous, grand feast lasting ten days. Every day a hundred people were exalted with the grants of suitable *Khilats*, many were gratified by an increase in their ranks and the granting of titles, while others received grants in cash, horses and elephants."

After the death of Emperor Aurangzeb (in 1707) the rulers were less able and the treasury less replete than earlier. Advantage was taken of this by other rulers. The Mughal Empire suffered invasion for the first time in 1739, from the forces of the Persian Emperor Nâdir *Shâh*. Like Timûr in 1398, he attacked not to conquer but only to loot. He carried away many camelloads of wealth from Delhi, the Peacock Throne

crowning it all. He also ordered a massacre, which filled *Chândnî Chawk* with corpses and made his name in north India comparable with that of Wallenstein in central Europe in the 17th century. Once Nâdir Shâh showed that Delhi was vulnerable, others were not slow to join in. Delhi was ravaged successively by the rebellious governor of Awadh (east of Delhi), by the Afghans from the northwest, by the chiefs of Rohilkhand (to the northeast), the Marathas (from the southwest) and the Jats (from the region immediately south). Emperor Shâh Âlam II reigned as long as Emperor Aurangzeb had done (1759-1806), but for some years he deemed it wise to escape from Delhi and live in Allahabad. The Marathas were defeated by the troops of the British East India Company in 1803 at the battle of Patparganj (across the river from the palace) but the Mughals found that they had only exchanged one master for another. Delhi, with Agra, formed part of the British booty²⁰.

It is only by appreciating the very fraught history of the city in the 18th century that we can reconcile the highly divergent pen-portraits that have been drawn of it. Behind the accounts of wealth and beauty, or of dilapidation and demoralization, we can see the silhouettes of a harrassed citizenry living in dread of the unknown, constantly renovating and rebuilding, hiding their treasures, suffering the anguish of seeing lovely facades vandalised, carefully-collected libraries ransacked, the life-giving canal choked up, trade paralysed. Cruelty, greed and injustice are as much embedded in the city's collective memory as are camaraderie, joie de vivre, courtoisie and a sense of the beautiful and appropriate. The essence of the Delhiwala's spirit was nostalgia, a sense of fatalism and also a will to survive. After each crisis, there were many who fled the city, and began life anew at the courts of Lucknow, Jaipur, Bhopal or Hyderabad. But some, like the poet Mîr, felt homesick and returned. And once the natural flow of trade was resumed, and prosperity returned to the markets of Delhi, the students, the merchants and the artisans also returned, and life went on again...

When Indians wrote about Delhi, they did so in terms very different from those used by Europeans. For the latter, the yardstick for comparison was Versailles, Paris, London or Moscow. For Indians the artefacts mattered less than the urban way of life and the individuals whose learning, art or wit commanded respect or affection. The court patronised artists and poets, and many of the emperors were multilingual, with a taste for reading and even for versifying. *Chândnî Chawk* was, like the Italian Piazzas, less a place than a way of life. Its qahwâ-khânâs (coffee-houses), its shops, the canal, made it the natural centre of the city. "The nobles, irrespective of their status, are unable to suppress their desire of taking a stroll here... The paths of the chowk are broad as a wide forehead and bountiful like the blessings of God"²¹. In Muraqqa-e-Delhi, a Persian work written just after Nâdir Shâh's devastation, what comes across most vividly is the people's sense of living for the moment, their eagerness to find

20 P. SPEAR, *Twilight of the Mughuls* (Cambridge 1951)

21 Dargah Quli Khan, *Muraqqa-e-Delhi*, translated by C. SHEKHAR and S.M. CHENOY (Delhi 1989), p. 25

pleasure by patronising dancers, musicians and sufi poets, and fulfilment by visiting shrines. His descriptions of women artists and their followers would be the equivalent of the diary of a visitor to contemporary Paris, writing of the salons of Mme Maintenon or Mme Pompadour. "Music was the most popular form of entertainment... It was patronised at the Imperial Court, in the establishments of the nobility, in the Khânqahs (shrines) of the living sufis, in the houses of the musicians and on the streets. Its votaries included Hindus and Muslims, sufis, saints, sultans, rich and poor. Men and women from different backgrounds and social situations."²² Poetry was also a great leveller. In times of plenty, they wrote elegant verse; in times of sorrow, they wrote even more memorably, in the genre called *shahr ashob* (lament for the city) which described, sometimes with anguish and sometimes with a wry detachment, the travails of a city overtaken by political misfortune.

These who once rode elephants now go barefoot
And for want of a pair of shoes wander about disconsolately.
Those who yearned for parched gram once
Are today owners of property, palace and elephants as
marks of rank.²³

Hâtim's sarcasm finds no echo in the sorrow of Mîr, whose poem is also the product of the same situation.

Delhi, which was counted among the great cities of the world
Where lived the elite,
Circumstances have looted and destroyed it.
It is to that desolate city that I belong.²⁴

The sense of order and of hierarchy in the city was upset after political crises. Major Polier, writing in 1776, admitted candidly that a few decades earlier "the furthest I could have pretended to go would have been about the gate" of the very hawâli (the house of the minister Qamaruddîn) which he was living in²⁵. In these situations it was misleading to judge by appearances, because many owners deliberately kept the facades of their houses in a shabby condition so as to deflect the attention of marauders. Invariably the great scourges were followed by the lesser; the Gûjars and Mewâtis of some of the villages near Delhi used to take advantage of the distress in the city to make their own quick forays through the gateways which in times of peace were well-guarded and which kept them at bay.

22 Ibid., p. xxxii

23 Ibid., p. xxxix

24 S. Nurul HASAN, 'The Morphology of a Medieval Indian City, a Case-Study of Shâhjahânâbâd' in I. BANGA (ed.) *The City in Indian History* (Delhi, 1991), p. 96

25 Major POLIER, loc. cit., p. 29

26 N. GUPTA, 'Delhi and its Hinterland' in R.E. FRYKENBERG, *Delhi Through the Ages* (Delhi, 1986), pp. 250-269

Shāhjahānābād had an organic relationship and a complementarity with its shrines and monuments, as well as with its groves and gardens²⁶. The visitors who filled the serais (inns) within the city and beyond the walls were drawn not just by the court and the salons. Shāhjahānābād was not a cultcentre, though the major mosques—the Jama, Fatahpurī, Akbarābādī and others formed part of all tourist circuits. The city was within easy reach of some historic shrines—those of Nizāmuddīn Auliya, Roshan Chirāgh Delhi, Bakhtiyār Kākī and Hazrat Bāqibillah; and the temples of Kālka-Devī and Jogmāyā. Both shrines and temples had special feast-days, which constituted a familiar calendar. The royal family regularly visited the mausoleum of Humāyūn, near the Nizāmuddīn shrine, and the palaces of Mehrauli, near the shrine of Bakhtiyār Kākī. Clusters of markets expanded outside the western wall of the city, to avoid the time-consuming payment of town-duties. If the repeated crises had not driven the inhabitants firmly into the shelter of the city walls, Shāhjahānābād would probably have grown as an extended open city as Ferozābād had in the 14th century, stretching from the southern Ridge to the river. Between the hamlet of Mughalpurā and the city was the Sabzī Mandī (vegetable market). Tanners and dyers had their colonies at the base of the Ridge to the south-west. In the 18th century a spacious college was built adjacent to the tomb of Ghāziuddīn, a nobleman of Awadh, outside the Ajmeri Gate of the city.

From 1803 to 1857 Delhi was part of the territories under the East India Company on the same terms as governed the Company's relations with states which had accepted political subservience and military dependence. The Company struck coins in the name of the Mughal Emperor, but referred to him pointedly as the 'King of Delhi'. It became increasingly evident that he was not even king of Delhi, but only within the walls of his palace. The city was virtually ruled by the British Resident, living in the palace of Dārā Shikoh, inside Kashmiri Gate. The Mughal royal family resigned themselves to the position of 'Pensioners'; they occasionally murmured that their allowances were very meagre, but on the whole they were content to fill out their days flying kites, composing verses and keeping up a sad mockery of the ceremonies which earlier had symbolized such great power. The Resident played his part, scrupulously adhering to ritual (always riding behind the Emperor and not before him) while creating an alternative centre of power, where Mughal princes, Maratha chieftains and neighbouring rajas shared a common style of leisure pursuits with the British officials.²⁷

This 'Pax Britannica' (as the officials described the years of armed peace till 1857) saw Delhi acquiring a vigorous new lease of life, its location giving it a major role as an entrepôt for subcontinental trade, and its traditions helping to create an atmosphere congenial to scholarship and artistic creativity. The old-established banking and merchant families were augmented by others from Punjab and Rajasthan. Delhi became a busy distributing centre for Indian wheat and British textiles. The steady, if indiscriminating, patronage of British tourists and of buyers for European markets

meant a boom for local crafts and skills, particularly in ivoryware and in miniatures which were very convincing lookalikes of Mughal master-artists. Local shopkeepers benefited from the stationing of British soldiers and civilians north of Kashmiri Gate, in the shadow of the Ridge, and a market developed along the stretch of road which was nicknamed 'Khyber Pass'.

Contemporary accounts indicate that students from many of the smaller towns in north India went to Delhi to study general courses, or skills like calligraphy and medicine from the well-known savants of the city²⁸. The madrasah (school) attached to the mausoleum of Ghāziuddīn (founded in 1792 and located in a large campus beyond Ajmeri Gate) overtook all the other educational institutions, and was chosen as the local beneficiary for a share in the small sum of money the East India Company set aside for encouraging education, in 1824. It is significant that while Bombay, Madras and Calcutta accorded an enthusiastic reception to European learning and to the English language the people of Delhi were adamant that they wanted to learn European science and philosophy, but in Urdu rather than English. The principals of Delhi College, who included a German and a Frenchman, acceded to this, and English classes formed an optional course of studies. In the three decades before the Rising of 1857 the staff and students of the College formed a dedicated community who translated many European works into Urdu, and showed a great enthusiasm for science. Its alumni included mathematicians, novelists, poets, educationists and civil servants²⁹. Their efforts at the time were helped by the fact that in the 1840s a printing press was set up in Delhi which published newspapers and books. One of the greatest Urdu and Persian poets, Ghālīb, was writing at this time, and also seeking ways of making enough of an income to live in reasonable security. 'Delhi was an Indian Weimar', Percival Spear was to write, "with Ghālīb for its Goethe"³⁰.

The camaraderie between Europeans and Indians, both social and academic, was expressed in the formation of the Delhi Archaeological Society in 1847.³¹ Its members discussed various aspects of Delhi's historic architecture, discussions which spurred one of the members, a young man called Syed Ahmad Khān, to write a comprehensive account of Delhi's monuments, *Āsār-al-Sanādīd*³². When in 1870 the newly-estab-

28 Shāh Abdul Qādir, Syed Mohammed Amīr Rizvī, Muftī Sadruddīn Āzurdā, Shāh Abdul Ghānī and Shāh Mohammad Ishāq were well-known scholars of Delhi. I am indebted to Mr. Rizvī of the Anglo-Arabic School, Delhi, for this information.

29 N. GUPTA, *Delhi Between Two Empires 1803-1931* (Delhi, 1981). Chapter One.

30 P. SPEAR, *op.cit.*, p. 73

31 N. GUPTA, *op.cit.*, p. 8

32 The first edition of *Āsār-al-Sanādīd* was published in 1847; a considerably abridged and modified edition was printed in 1854. Syed Ahmad Khān later achieved distinction (and was knighted) for founding the Aligarh University. In 1829 was published Sangin Beg's *Sair-ul-Marazil*, a Persian travelogue which described Delhi's historic monuments and also provided what can be called a street directory for Shāhjahānābād. This was translated into Urdu only in 1980, by Naim Ahmed (Aligarh 1980). Surprisingly enough, Syed Ahmed Khān makes no reference to this book.

lished Archaeological Survey of India prepared a report on Delhi, this was based largely on Syed Ahmed *Khân*'s work. His book was interesting on two counts—first, its content: it described not only the buildings but also the well-known personalities of Delhi, making it not an archaeological treatise but an account of a living city and its past. Secondly, the book was remarkable in being dedicated not to the Mughal Emperor, as convention would have dictated, but to Thomas Metcalfe. This person, who spent the best years of his life in Delhi (1813 to 1853) was the brother of Charles Metcalfe, Resident at the Delhi Court. Thomas succeeded him in this post, and his son, in turn, was to be Chief Magistrate at Delhi. In other words, a Metcalfe dynasty was ruling Delhi along with the Mughal: Thomas Metcalfe was to compile his notes on Delhi in 1844 as “Reminiscences of Imperial Delhie”, at the same time as Syed Ahmad *Khân* was completing his book³³. The latter was illustrated with competent line-drawings, but Metcalfe's manuscript, dedicated to his daughters, was a more lavish affair, with beautiful paintings by some of Delhi's best artists. Together the work of these two Delhiwalas constitutes a discovery of Delhi which was also indicated in the interest in Delhi's older monuments by the engineers of the garrison stationed there.³⁴

The city was also changing. The Metcalfes, the city Surgeon Dr. Ludlow, and other Englishmen were quite happy to live in the city, but some of them chose to build substantial homes for themselves in the area between the Kashmiri Gate and the cantonment on the Ridge. Of these Metcalfe House was the most opulent, a stately home set in spacious gardens sloping down to the river, a fascinating mixture of European and Indian architecture and lifestyle with large rooms, surrounded by long verandahs and provided with basement rooms; with formal English dining-table and equally formal Indian hookah. Metcalfe, like most well-off people of Delhi, liked to spend some weeks at the little town of Mehrauli, near to Qutab Minar; unlike them, he did not build a house or palace for his own use, but converted an old Muslim mausoleum into a weekend resort. He also used to take friends to Shalimar Gardens, a Mughal garden north of the city, where nearly two centuries earlier Emperor Aurangzeb had been crowned. Charles Trevelyan, an enterprising young civilian, did not build a house himself but bought land west of *Shâhjahânâbâd* and laid out a ‘suburb’ with plots neatly squared off for shops and houses. His Trevelyananj survived for a long time before it was merged into the more crowded extensions that developed there. Near this was another area laid out by *Dîwân Kishan Lal*, a wealthy Indian, and named after him as *Kishanganj*. Within *Shâhjahânâbâd*, one of the major modifications was the addition of a large house and garden on the *Chândnî Chawk* avenue near the Palace, by the Indian widow of Walter Reinhardt ‘le Sombre’, popularly known as Begum Samru. Another large estate was carved out within the wall near Kashmiri Gate by Colonel Skinner, a gentleman of mixed birth, who also built near

and facing the entrance of his house the beautiful St. James' Church where, among many others, the daughter of Thomas Metcalfe, Emily, was married. European architectural details, colonnades and tympana and grills, in freestanding houses, began to appear in the Indian areas too. *Shâhjahânâbâd* was becoming an Indo-Anglian town

Bahâdur *Shâh*, better known by his poetic pen-name ‘Zafar’ (Victory) succeeded to the Mughal throne in 1837. Viceroy Dalhousie decided that he should be the last king, and that his successor should be asked to retire to Mehrauli. But the Mughal line ended in a way different from what had been planned. On a very hot day in the summer of 1857 a contingent of rebellious soldiers from the cantonment-town of Meerut, across the Yamuna, reached the palace of Delhi and urged the startled old Emperor to lead their revolt to remove the British³⁵. His reluctance was brushed aside, and a council of soldiers was installed in the palace to conduct operations in his name. A large number of mutinying regiments converged on the city. They did not have the advantage of gunpowder, because very soon after the revolt began, two British soldiers in Delhi had performed a courageous act of self-sacrifice by blowing up the powder-magazine, located near Kashmiri Gate, and themselves with it. The city was in a state of siege, with the British troops encamped on the northern Ridge. It was four months before the city was captured, and the long wait and the heat had left the British with little inclination for mercy. When their soldiers stormed the Kashmiri Gate, they opened the floodgates of a reign of cruelty and terror which the dazed inhabitants compared to that of *Nâdir Shâh*. The happy camaraderie of the foregoing years had evaporated like a dream.

The officials' obsession with security, with averting any repetition of 1857, affected not only the ethos but also the morphology of *Shâhjahânâbâd*. The Palace-complex (hereafter called the Red Fort) was emptied of its inhabitants. The aged Emperor, after a long drawn-out trial, was exiled to Burma. The thousands of dependents were turned out, and they sought refuge in the back alleys of the city, and near the Qutab and Humâyûn's mausoleum. The army moved into the Fort, bulldozed most of the palaces and erected tall dreary barracks. They cleared an arch 500' wide in front of the Fort and another around the city wall, to provide a shooting-range, on the pattern of the Maidan around Fort William in Calcutta. Many houses, shops, public buildings and the beautiful Akbarâbâd Mosque were destroyed in the process, and the organic link between the palace and the city was broken. The major mosques were confiscated, and desecrated by being used for secular purposes, one of them as a bakery. All the royal properties in the city and beyond were appropriated by the Government³⁶.

33 M.M. KAYE (Ed.), *The Golden Calm - Reminiscences of Emily, Lady BAYLEY and by her father Sir Thomas METCALFE* (Exeter 1980)

34 J. KEAY, *India Discovered*, London 1981, pp. 177-187.

35 There is a copious literature on the Revolt of 1857, but to date there is no good scholarly work on Delhi in 1857.

36 N. GUPTA, *op.cit.*, pp. 31-32

Delhi was made to forget that it was a Mughal City. It was made part of the Punjab, the capital of which was Lahore. The office of Kotwâl was replaced by a Municipality, with British officials and 'loyal' Indians, and by a police-force for which the local people had to pay. The gates of the mahallahs were demolished, to make passage for soldiers or policemen easier. Premises for the Delhi College (where Jahânârâ Serai had been located on *Chândnî Chawk*) was built in the 1860s, but instead of housing the college, it became the municipal office, with the totem of a clocktower in front. The railway-line from Calcutta to the northwest frontier was constructed through Delhi, with the station within the city instead of being to the north, or east of the river, as originally planned. Less than twenty years after the Rising of 1857, Delhi was a changed city; entered from the railway-station rather than by boat from the northern Kashmiri Gate, the Italianate arches of the railway station and the wide avenue of Queens Road made it difficult to visualize the crowded mahallahs that they had displaced. The term 'Queens' Gardens' used for what was left of Jahânârâ's gardens made one think of Victoria and not the Mughals. Much of the western wall had been demolished, and the city overflowed into the jerrybuilt Sadar Bazaar, a whole sale shopping area which grew in response to the location of the railway-station. The Delhi College was reduced to a school, when the government chose to transfer its grant-in-aid to the missionary College of St. Stephen. This was located initially on *Chândnî Chawk* and then near St. James' Church. Though the churches that served the needs of the Europeans were all within the city, the houses of the civilians and the missionaries were all to the north, in the sprawling area called the 'Civil Lines' (the conventional term used for the British enclaves in all Indian towns). The bankers and merchants who had played safe during the Rising took advantage of the low prices to invest in real estate. Urban land acquired a market-value which it had never had under the Mughals. The *nouveaux-riches* as well as the *nouveaux-pauvres* were a feature of Delhi as a result of the crisis of 1857, though social status did not correspond to income levels; even impecunious aristocrats were treated with deference, and much of the new wealth was translated into donations to schools and hospitals rather than displayed in conspicuous consumption. Though the Court had been ended, the bond of the language, Urdu, united the people of Delhi, transcending religious and class difference.

An often-repeated remark about the Delhiwala sees him as happily indifferent to anything beyond his immediate area. It certainly took many years for the leaders of the Indian Nationalist Movement to find any following in Delhi. The rising political temperature in Bengal persuaded the British to shift their capital from Calcutta to the more tranquil Delhi in 1912. On three occasions, in 1877, 1903 and 1911-12, the supremacy of the British sovereign in relation to the Indian princes, had been proclaimed at elaborate 'Durbars' an Indian word appropriated by the British to imply both imperial space and imperial ceremony.³⁷ The Durbars had been held in a large area

37 B. COHN, 'Representing Authority in Victorian India', *An Anthropologist Among the Historians* (Delhi 1987), pp. 632-682

northeast of *Shâhjahânâbâd*, with supplementary processions through the city, with all the trappings of a Mughal ceremonial. Since the British saw themselves as having Mughal mantle, Delhi seemed a natural choice for a new capital. The team of architects who finally designed New Delhi were as reluctant to recycle *Shâhjahânâbâd* as Emperor *Shâhjahân* had been to recycle the city of his grandfather and father at Agra. They wished to build a completely new city, adjacent to *Shâhjahânâbâd* but without any organic link with it; as it was designed, it faced the river and was backed by the Ridge, just as *Shâhjahânâbâd* was.³⁸ During the years that this new city was being built (1914-1931) the bureaucratic apparatus of the Government of India spent five months every year in 'temporary' quarters on the northern Ridge. *Shâhjahânâbâd* had a greatly enlarged population billeted on it, and had politics thrust upon it in the form of demagogues, political conferences and protest-meetings. *Chândnî Chawk* became a venue for these, and *Shâhjahânâbâd*—henceforward called 'Old Delhi'—constituted a pulsating central zone between two tranquil belts, the Temporary Capital and New Delhi. The people of the older city increasingly had a sense of being neglected or even drained in order to nurture the more privileged townships.

In the last half-century the morphology of Greater Delhi has become well-defined, and the successive stages of historical development are evident. The area of *Shâhjahânâbâd* and the adjacent Sadar Bazaar constitute the most densely populated central area; the New Delhi of Lutyens is the most sparsely inhabited. Both are surrounded by settlements which have developed in the short span of forty years. After India became independent in 1947, Delhi, like many other towns of north India and the new country of Pakistan, saw a population turnover; many thousands of Muslims migrated to Pakistan and many Sikhs and Hindus came to Delhi.³⁹ Many houses in *Shâhjahânâbâd* became emptied of occupants, while around the twin cities there grew the 'refugee colonies' most of them on the land that had been royal (*nuzûl*) property under the Mughals and had later been under Delhi Municipality. *Shâhjahânâbâd* remained the major wholesale and retail trade centre it had always been, but the quality of life became degraded by the invasion of motor cars and buses, by the proliferation of numerous industrial activities in sections of the buildings which had once been gracious *hawêlîs* or spacious *katrâs* (shopping precincts)⁴⁰. Today one can walk

38 R.G. IRVING, *Indian Summer-Lutyens, Baker and Imperial Delhi* (Yale 1981)

39 V.N. DATTA, 'Punjabi Refugees and the Urban Development of Greater Delhi', in R.E. FRYKENBERG op.cit., pp. 442-462

40 Since 1975 there have been repeated expressions of concern about the future as well as the past of *Shâhjahânâbâd*, about rehabilitation of those living in very congested mahallahs, as well as conservation of its cityscape. At least four workshops were held to discuss these issues between 1980 and 1988, the first of which was sponsored by the School of Planning, Delhi, and the Max-Mueller-Bhavan. This was later published as *Shâhjahânâbâd - Improvement of Living Conditions in Traditional Housing Areas* ed. by B. GHOSH (Delhi 1980)

through lanes and streets which are the veins on the leaf of the original city, but the leaf has become dessicated the green of the gardens, the sparkling water in the canal, the slow pace of the horse-drawn vehicles, the low decibel-level, the graciousness which grows in an old-established community, these are lost. The Taj Mahal still has much of the beauty that Emperor *Shâhjahân* gave it, but his city has died many deaths. *Nâdir Shâh* stripped it of its wealth, the British distorted its form with partition much of its cosmopolitan culture disappeared, but the city is alive, and has a more human face than many of the stately and spacious streets of New Delhi.

The Changing Perception of Space The History of the Red Fort, *Shâhjahânâbâd*

Anisha Shekhar Mukherji

And from space,
air,
From air
fire,
From fire
the waters,
And from the waters,
Earth.

(Brhmananda Valli of *Taittiriya Upanishad*)

The elements used to define space are universal—built fabric, landscape, water, light, and sound. However the manner in which these elements are combined to generate space differs from culture to culture and through time. In the Mughal era, especially during Akbar, Jahângîr and *Shâhjahân*'s time, external and internal space had specific functional and symbolic values. This use and articulation of space was generated both by the nature of the Empire and by past traditions of built form. In the "patrimonial-bureaucratic" Mughal empire¹, the Emperor was the centre of power as well as a participant in the life of the city. This called for a special relationship between the palace and the city. Architecturally, this relationship was expressed through elements that reflected Hindu traditions in India, inherited Timurid traditions of the Mughals, and Safavid influences from Persia. Such an architecture was the result of a process of deliberate integration started during Akbar's reign.

The experiment with assimilation developed into a more formal style under the reign of *Shâhjahân*. It was especially visible in his new palace, the Red Fort of *Shâhjahânâbâd*, one of the few instances of an urban Mughal palace to be conceived and executed as a complete entity. The Fort symbolized the relationship of the Emperor and his subjects and was the focus of the daily ritual of the Mughal Empire. The Fort took about nine years to build, from 1639-48 AD, and functioned and evolved on the basis of its original design for a period of about 200 years. However, most of the spaces in the Red Fort were destroyed in the middle of the 19th century. The present form of the Fort—a continuation of the conservation efforts towards the beginning of this century—is therefore very different from its original conception.

¹ Stephen Blake: *Shahjahanabad, the Sovereign City in Mughal India*, Delhi, 1993, pp. 17-21.

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