



C.S.H.JHABVALA

C.S.H. Jhabvala, a renowned architect, is also a remarkably gifted artist. His unrivalled knowledge of Delhi's history is evident in this book, as is his eye for the city's quirky corners, its chaos and colour. For his Delhi is a city not just of palaces, mosques and tombs but also of obscure streets and squares, of overgrown gardens, crumbling bungalows and urban villages.

Successive dynasties, rulers and epochs have created their own Delhis, and though much has been demolished, uprooted or hemmed in by new construction in the process, the remains of all these different Delhis still survive. In his wanderings around Delhi, the author has stumbled upon them and recorded his discoveries in informative and entertaining words, as well as wonderfully evocative pencil sketches. Together, these constitute an invaluable record of the many 'ineradicable' Delhis that co-exist with the modern metropolis-from the remains of ancient Hindu temples used to construct the 12th-century monuments of the Sultanate to the buildings, villages and neighbourhoods created by the Tughlaqs, the Lodis, the Mughals and the British Raj.

This is a book that will not only delight those who love Delhi's historic monuments, it will also awaken in many others a desire to explore and rediscover the city's lesser-known treasures.

# PHOENIX CITY

MAHARAJA AGRASEN COLLEGE ICSSR Major Research Project Delhi Diver-City, 2022-2024







PENGUIN STUDIO
Published by the Penguin Group
Penguin Books India Pvt. Ltd, 11 Community Centre, Panchsheel Park, New Delhi 110 017, India
Penguin Books India Pvt. Ltd, 11 Community Centre, Panchsheel Park, New Pork 10014, USA
Penguin Group (USA) Inc., 375 Hudson Street, New York, New York 10014, USA
Penguin Group (Canada), 90 Eglinton Avenue East, Suite 700, Toronto, Ontario, M4P 2Y3, Canada (a division of Pearson Penguin Cenguin Books Ltd, 80 Strand, London WC2R 0RL, England
Penguin Books Ltd, 80 Strand, London WC2R 0RL, England
Penguin Group (Australia), 250 Camberwell Road, Camberwell, Victoria 3124, Australia (a division of Pearson Australia Group Pty Ltd)
Penguin Group (Australia), 250 Camberwell Road, Camberwell, Victoria 3124, Australia (a division of Pearson New Zealand Ltd)
Penguin Group (NZ), 67 Apollo Drive, Rosedale, Auckland 0632, New Zealand (a division of Pearson New Zealand Ltd)
Penguin Group (South Africa) (Pty) Ltd, 24 Sturdee Avenue, Rosebank, Johannesburg 2196, South Africa

 $Penguin \, Books \, Ltd, Registered \, Offices; 80 \, Strand, London \, WC2R \, ORL, England$ 

First published in Penguin Studio by Penguin Books India and Ravi Dayal Publisher 2012

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Book design by Saurav Das

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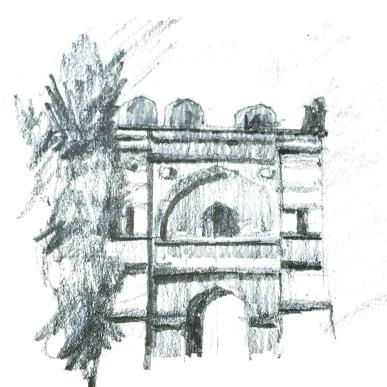
10987654321

ISBN 9780670085651

For sale in India only

Typeset in Sentinel by Eleven Arts, Delhi Printed at Thomson Press India Ltd, New Delhi

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# Introduction

Delhi, the heart of India, has had more sorrows, more conquests, more invasions, more rulers, more dynasties than any other Indian city. And each dynasty has created its own Delhi, so that kingdoms are scattered everywhere. Beyond the legendary city of Indraprastha and the Hindu kingdom of Rai Pithora, over a period of nine centuries a succession of Muslim rulers continuously fought over and remade the city. The 11th century conquests of Qutb-ud-din Aibak were continued by the Khiljis, the Tughlaqs, the Sayyads, the Afghan Lodhis, and finally the Moghuls from the powerful Babar to the powerless Bahadur Shah Zaffar deposed in 1857. They were followed by the British who imposed their own Delhi, culminating in the Imperial city built in 1930 to perpetuate their rule.

But the biggest change and the greatest expansion of all came with Independence in 1947. This final invasion came not from outside but from within the country itself when the partition of India brought a tide of refugees, mainly Hindu and Sikh, driven from their homes which were now in Pakistan. Vastly swelling the existing population, they flooded every possible empty space in the city as well as the villages surrounding it. Shanty towns sprang up on open lots and roadsides, and many of the old monuments were occupied by desperate families seeking shelter. The new government struggled to solve the overwhelming problems of housing and sought more and more land on which to build and to provide rudimentary civic necessities—water, drainage, sewage, electricity, public transport—for this new population of citizens reduced overnight to paupers. Nothing was ever enough.

It was not until the refugees themselves, mostly Punjabis, a proud and hardy people, pulled themselves out of their despair that the new, the newest, Delhi began to be born. They generated businesses and enterprises, bringing a prosperity that attracted more and more migrants from the surrounding rural areas. New and larger shanty towns sprang up under the shadow of the new residential and commercial buildings; and with its rapid expansion and growth, the city began to bulge out on all sides and to grab available land from its own outer boundaries and the states of Rajasthan, Uttar Pradesh and Haryana.

And that too was not enough. When there was no more land to build on, expansion became vertical with many-storeyed buildings reaching upwards.

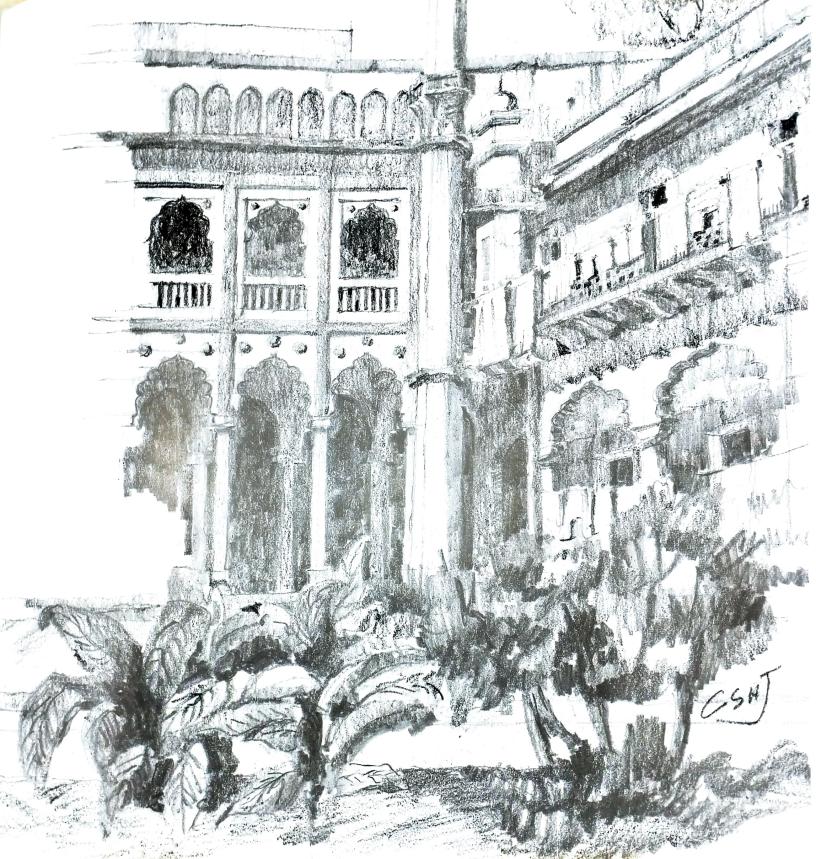
Not to waste any piece of horizontal space, even constructions of no more than two generations ago were pulled down to make way for these ever-taller towers. Yet paradoxically, in spite of all this demolition and uprooting, it is not only the comparatively recent city that has survived but remnants of all of them, right back to the legendary city of Indraprastha, which is said to be buried under the sixteenth-century fort of Sher Shah Sur.

But there is no need to look for buried cities. In my quite desultory amblings around Delhi, I have not so much discovered as stumbled upon the remains of all our known kingdoms, some remarkably intact, others a pile of stones and masonry. Every dynasty has left its imprint in the form of tombs, mosques, palaces, forts, hunting lodges, gardens, gateways, and of course road patterns scattered throughout the twin cities of Old and New Delhi. In this book I have tried to record and hopefully to transmit some of the pleasure these ineradicable Delhis have given me, and the surprise of seeing their ancient and not-so-ancient roots still alive and living within the technologies of our modern metropolis.

### CHAPTER 1

# Beyond the City Walls and Kashmere Gate

Drawings 1–11





# Pir Ghaib

Drawing 1

On one of the high points of what is known as the Ridge—an offshoot of the Aravalli Hills in Delhi—William Fraser, agent of the Governor General, built his house in 1830. He included within his estate the ruins of what was most probably one of the hunting lodges of the Emperor Feroze Shah Tughlaq (1351–1388).

Fraser was involved in one of those mysterious scandals common at that time and was duly murdered in some gruesome manner. The house was later used as a sanatorium for soldiers and, after Independence, was greatly expanded as a public hospital. The ruins now form a part of the Hindu Rao Hospital and are surrounded by houses for hospital staff, water tanks, and a low fence mainly used as a clothes line.

Oral tradition claims that at some stage of their existence the ruins were used as a place of meditation by a Sufi saint—who, much to the embarrassment of his disciples, disappeared one day without trace. After a fruitless search, the disappointed disciples proceeded to make up a fake grave, laying it out east to west as opposed to the usual orientation of north to south. Bemoaning their loss, they named the place Pir Ghaib—the Absconding Saint.

# The Tomb of Roshanara

Drawing 2

Roshanara Begum was one of the daughters of the Emperor Shahjahan and a sister of Aurangzeb. In 1650, many years before her death, she decided to build her own tomb. It was placed in the middle of a large garden, designed after the formal Moghul pattern and surrounded by a shallow water tank with fountains and niches to hold lights. However, the gardens have seen many alterations, especially after a big chunk of them were handed over to a club that was once the centre of cricket in Delhi. The tomb itself fell into a dilapidated state, but now rescue is at hand and hopefully the building will be restored to its original, pristine state.

But the gardens? Some years ago an enthusiastic bureaucrat decided that they would greatly benefit from the art of a wandering expert on Japanese gardens. Japan began to manifest itself in small areas, but these too fell into disuse as the fierce Delhi summers took their toll and undid the Japanese effort. But still, thanks to Roshanara, the gardens, overgrown or not, form the only delightful sanctuary amid the surrounding dense city buildings that tightly encircle its boundaries.







## Cottage: Relic of Cantonment

Drawing 3

The British built their Delhi cantonment, containing their army base of officers and soldiers, on what is known as the Ridge, an offshoot of the Aravalli Hills. In this area, out of bounds at that time to the general populace, the army erected many bungalows for their officers. When the place was handed over to establish Delhi University, some of these residences were still in use, although many of them were dilapidated and some derelict. Nothing daunted, the colleges refurbished them and, astonishingly, some of them remain habitable to the present day.

Their style and construction were peculiar to the army and were in sharp contrast to the flat roofs of the buildings in Delhi. Probably both the occupants and the army engineers were stirred by half-remembered shadows of their own cottages (or almshouses) in Blighty. Thus, the steep shingled roofs and gables, the sash windows, the winding drives and surrounding gardens.

One such bungalow, presently the residence of the Principal, stands in the grounds of Hindu College. It is strange to see this gabled cottage, its own private garden still in place, sitting smugly among the modern college buildings—the hostels for students, the cramped flats for the use of staff. It is good to think of the present occupants spreading themselves as comfortably as their predecessors within this old relic that I hope will survive well into the next century—patched up and bandaged, but still bravely holding up its sloping, shingled roof.

# Kashmere Gate

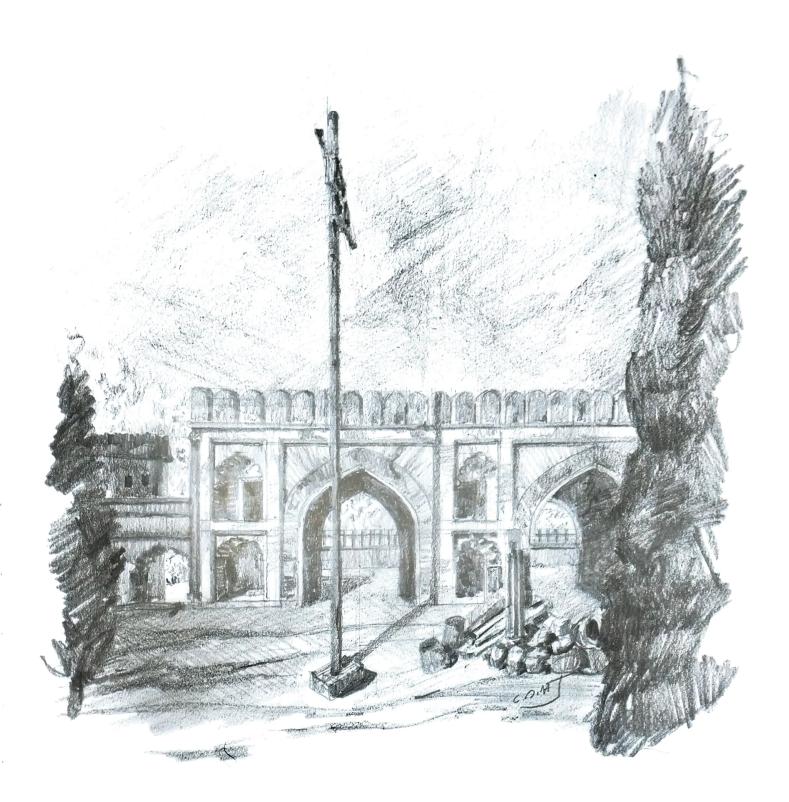
Drawing 4

The city built by the Emperor Shahjahan between 1639 and 1648 was encircled, on most of its periphery, by thick, high, arched stone walls topped by battlements and merlons. There was also an open passage overhead for patrolling guards, which was later used as a musketry parapet. The walls were separated at intervals by round towers, and pierced, mostly at the corners, by arched gates. These gates held thick timber doors secure within sturdy frames and were joined together with iron bolts and brass studs.

Situated on a north-east corner, the Kashmere Gate was originally a single gateway that was greatly enlarged and strengthened by British army engineers. In September 1857, during the Mutiny, the Kashmere Gate and its surrounds became the focus of the British onslaught to capture the city. After various failed attempts, the Gate was finally blown open by mines placed on and around it. In spite of the fierce determination of the defenders to contest each step of the enemy's advance, the British hordes were finally able to pour into the Kashmere Gate area.

The next few days were vital to the battles that ensued as the city was gradually occupied by the British army. Horrific revenge was let loose, with wholesale slaughter of everyone suspected to be remotely connected to the Mutiny. Gallows were raised throughout the streets, the populace banished beyond the walls and large parts of the city demolished or blown up. Through all this, the Kashmere Gate remained to gaze silently upon the invaders as they killed until their rage died away.

When, soon after, the whole of India was incorporated into the British Empire, the two arches of the Kashmere Gate served as an entry and exit to the new Civil Lines—the luxurious and lavish spread where the civil servants and administrators of the Raj lived and entertained. This lasted until 1962 when the arches were found too narrow for military vehicles to pass through. A part of the wall facing Qudsia Gardens was then torn down to make a wider entry to the Civil Lines and the country beyond. Soon after, the Gate was enclosed by a railing and entry to it was entirely stopped. Feeble attempts were made to light it at night as a sop to tourism; but the poor, poor Kashmere Gate sank away, surrounded by and absorbed within the new and mighty creations that form the support of the new Metro.





# House in Civil Lines

Drawing 5

After the British took over the whole of India, beyond Delhi's city walls to the north there flourished a new area called the Civil Lines. That is where the administrators of the Raj lived, as well as prosperous Indians who wished to abandon their ancestral cramped homes in the crowded city. The entire area from Kashmere Gate to the Flagstaff Tower via Rajpur and Alipur Roads was enclosed by the hilly ridge on one side and the Jumna River on the other. Here houses were soon built, abutting on to broad sweeping roads and on plots of land of which the smallest stretched for one acre.

These houses, designed as they were by army engineers and civil draftsmen, were lavishly laid out with many rooms. They incorporated every variety of architectural style—Gothic, Roman, Greek, Egyptian (but somehow never Indian)—had towers, ample verandahs and porticos, shuttered windows and thick walls. The exteriors were built of brick or stone plastered over with thick coats of lime, and roofed with shallow arches supported by steel girders (which were imported). At the rear of the main house grew a huge sprawl of small rooms to contain the domestic staff and their families—cooks and bearers, ayahs and maids, sweepers and gardeners, dhobis and drivers, the stablers and the grooms—in fact, a whole army of servants, drawn from the villages around, all dependent on the majestic residence in front, which housed the lords of the estate.

These buildings now serve a different purpose, converted into hospitals, dispensaries or charity dwellings. But many of these enormous and remarkably ugly monsters have subsequently themselves been torn down and supplanted by rows of three-storeyed flats with small cramped interiors and built in a fashion even uglier than those they have replaced.

# The Coronation Pillar

Drawing 6

The time was December 1911. It was more than half a century after the great Indian  $mut_{iny}$  when Britain felt most secure within India—its largest colony, its jewel in the crown. No cloud on the horizon threatened the Raj as King George V ascended the throne. It was also the time to celebrate his coronation. A grand Durbar was ordered: a glittering show with elephants and camels to ride on, princes and maharajas bowing and scraping and swearing fealty, carved thrones on high platforms within pavilions of purple and gold, while viceroys, governors,  $a_{rmy}$  thrones on high platforms within pavilions of purple and gold, while viceroys. The might of the mother generals galore in their braid and solar topees thronged to pay homage. The might of the mother country controlling the Empire had to be stamped upon the populace, no matter what the cost,

And to commemorate the occasion a 50-foot-tall granite needle (the British were exceedingly fond of granite needles) was placed on a broad-based platform 25 feet high, comprising a series of receding steps and terraces. On it was placed a tablet that read:

Here on the 12th day of December 1911
His Imperial Majesty King George V
Emperor of India
Accompanied by the Queen Empress
In solemn Durbar
Announced in Person to the Governors
Princes & Peoples of India
His Coronation celebrated in England
On the 22nd day of June 1911
And received from them
Their Dutiful Homage and Allegiance

The surrounding area was laid out as a park and called the Coronation Garden.

Nobody knows how long the park survived, but everything soon turned to desolation. Shrubbery and wild kikkar trees took over the landscape as the earth burnt under the summer blaze. There was, however, a brief revival after Independence in 1947 when the uprooted statues of the British—monarchs, viceroys, army valiants and the general run of worthies—were laid to rest here. Some of the statues are still there, their marble and bronze overshadowed by wild grass and shrubbery. They stare stonily at each other, the tallest among them being King George V. It now appears that, for some odd reason, a makeover is in progress, and soon a park will once again blossom with the statues suitably dispersed over the whole area.

