

Mughal Architecture II - Babar to Akbar

Born in Uzbekistan, the Timurid Babur inherited the throne of a small principality known as Ferghana in 1494. He made several attempts to capture Samarkand but was able to gain control very briefly. While Babur's tenure in Samarkand had been short, the city's impact upon him was profound, shaping his attitude toward architecture and, even more significantly, toward landscape. Samarkand had splendid *char bagh*, gardens, mosques, madrasas and tombs and was one of the wonders of the fifteenth century. Babur was also deeply impressed by Herat, the seat of most cultured Timurid princes, which he had visited in 1507. Its many gardens and magnificent buildings have found a place in his memoirs. It is not surprising therefore that Babur after his victory in the first battle of Panipat built gardens or *charbagh* that is gardens divided by running water through canals.

Even before the battle of Panipat, Babur considered the Punjab, that is, the north-western territory between Delhi and Kabul, rightfully his since earlier it had been conquered by his ancestor, Timur. Even before the battle of Panipat, Babur discovered a site near the Ghaggar river that he deemed ideal for a *char bagh*. The garden, which he designed himself, was finished in 1528-29. Although it no longer survives, literary reports indicate that Babur's first Indian garden was built around a natural spring and that the garden itself was situated in a narrow mountain valley, a terrain close to that of Babur's own Kabul. After his victory at Panipat, Babur himself detested the heat, dust, flies and violent winds of the Indian summers but he was determined to stay, rallying the support of his followers. He responded to the climate by building gardens - *charbaghs* and *baolis*, and baths. Only two of Babur's Indian gardens can be identified with any certainty. One is in Agra, today called the Ram Bagh or the Gul Afshan garden, which served as Babur's burial site until his body was transferred to a garden in Kabul in accordance with his final wishes. The second of Babur's gardens that can be identified is at Dholpur, today in Bharatpur District, Rajasthan. It is his Bagh-i Nilufar, or Lotus garden, described in his memoirs. Located atop the red sandstone ridge that looms high above the Chambal river, the Lotus garden is situated some 50 km south of Agra.

Babur's memoirs indicate that the construction of permanent buildings assumed less importance for him than the construction of gardens. Just as he camped in gardens in Kabul when moving from site to site, so too in India the garden served

as his camp. Moreover, his precarious financial situation - where the payment of troops had to be his first priority - left fewer resources for large stone monuments. Nevertheless he did undertake the construction of a few mosques.

Babur's view of indigenous Indian architecture is only partially reflected in his comment about a mosque within his Agra fort garden. He considered the building unattractive. But Babur did not dislike all Indian architecture, for he describes favorably at some length the palaces of the Gwalior fort, praising especially Man Mandir in Gwalior constructed under Man Singh Tomar.

Among the buildings of Babur's time that survive are one imperially patronized mosque and two others constructed by nobles on Babur's orders. These were all built in the final years of his reign. Of the three mosques he directly supervised the Qabuli Bagh Mosque in Panipat (1527). This had a rectangular prayer chamber, measuring 53.75 by 16.50 meters, with a large central domed bay flanked on either side by three-bayed triple-aisled side wings. The other two mosques were Sambhal Mosque (1526) which was supervised by Mir Hindu Beg, an important noble in the court of both Babur and Humayun. Built a year before Babur's Kabuli Bagh mosque in Panipat, the Sambhal mosque is the first example Mughal building in India. The prayer chamber, like the one of the Panipat mosque, is rectangular with a large square central bay flanked on either side by three-bayed double-aisled side wings. A third mosque stands at Ayodhya on the banks of the Ghaghara river constructed by Mir Baqi, a noble, in 1528-29. Unlike the other mosques built under Babur's patronage, this one at Ayodhya is a single-aisled three-bayed type.

Humayun and after : With the exception of a single mosque in Agra, no other surviving structure survives from Humayun's patronage. However some hold that the Delhi Purana Qilla, its mosque and octagonal pavilion also are his.

After the death of Humayun, Mirak Mirza Ghiyas was brought from Bukhara by Hamida Banu, Humayun's widow to construct Humayun's tomb. It was indeed a magnum opus - the largest structure erected in Delhi during the early years of Akbar's reign. Situated just south of the Din-Panah citadel and in close proximity to the esteemed *dargah* of Nizam al-Din, the mausoleum even today dominates its surroundings. The centrally situated tomb and its *char bagh* setting stands out even today. Each of the four garden plots is further sub-divided by narrower waterways. The mausoleum is square in plan and is crowned with a white marble

bulbous dome and flanking *chattris*, the tomb sits on a high elevated plinth 99 meters per side. What is seen here is the construction of the first double dome. The dome was made of two separate shells - outer and inner with a vacant compartment between.

Akbar : While Humayun's Timurid-inspired tomb was still under construction, Akbar commenced a series of fort-palaces in a very different style at strategic locations across north India. The first of these was his great fort at Agra, which he commenced in 1565 and completed around 1571. Others that followed include Ajmer, the gate to Rajasthan, in 1570, and Lahore, traditionally guarding the northwestern portion of the subcontinent, in 1575. Later, in 1583, Akbar built a fort at Allahabad, situated east of Agra in the fertile Gangetic plain as a response to widespread uprisings throughout eastern India two years earlier.

Abul Fazl states that more than 500 stone buildings were constructed in the Agra fort's interior. That number may be exaggerated and very few buildings remain. The fort was commenced in 1565 and completed in eight years under the direction of Qasim Khan Mir Bahr o Bahr. The red sandstone facing inlaid with white marble detail gives a sense of majesty to the massive Delhi gate, the fort's main entrance. Within the fort the so-called Jahangiri Mahal closely resembles Jodh Bai's palace at Fatehpur Sikri. The main fabric of the exterior is intricately carved with red sandstone trimmed with white marble. The heavily carved surfaces recall the Khalji mosque or pre-Mughal monuments from Kanauj and Bari. The Jahangiri Mahal also has features borrowed Man Singh Tomar's Gwalior palace.

Fatehpur Sikri Akbar remained heirless until 1569 when his son, the future Jahangir, was born in the village of Sikri, 38 km west of Agra. That year Akbar commenced construction there of the religious compound as a sign of his respect for the Chishti saint, Shaikh Salim, his spiritual adviser who had predicted the birth of his son. After Jahangir's second birthday, Akbar commenced construction at Sikri of a walled city and imperial palace. He shifted his capital from Agra to this city, which came to be called Fatehpur Sikri. Just as Humayun's tomb earlier had been placed close to the Chishti *dargah*, Akbar situated his palace at a Chishti site. By constructing his capital at the *khanqah* of his spiritual adviser, Akbar associated himself with this popular sufi order and so brought further legitimacy to his reign through affiliation with popular yet orthodox Islam.

The city is surrounded by about 11 km of walls except on the south, where there was a lake. The numerous structures comprising this area are made from locally available red sandstone. Akbar ordered the construction of this great city which included nobles' dwellings, a great mosque, imperial palaces, baths, serais, a bazaar, gardens, schools, a *khanqah* and workshops. Thus Fatehpur Sikri was more than a royal residence - it had an economic, administrative and residential base.

1. Situated on the highest place on the ridge, the *khanqah* is the site's focal point. Within this religious compound, is an enormous Jami mosque. For a site which suffers from a poor water supply.
2. The Buland Darwaza was the complex's towering south entrance gate. The gate was probably built to commemorate Akbar's successful Gujarat campaign in 1573.
3. Shaikh Salim, Akbar's spiritual adviser who had predicted the birth of his son, died in 1572. His tomb was completed almost a decade later, in 1580-81. This white marble single-domed building measuring 15 meters square is rightfully considered a masterpiece. The outer walls are composed of intricately carved white marble screens (*jalis*).
4. The Hathiya Pol, or Elephant gate, situated at the southern end of the palace complex, was probably the imperial entrance. Other important buildings included quadrangular courtyard known as the Public Audience Hall or Diwan-i Aam, the Diwan-i Khass, Turkish Sultana's House, Panch Mahal, Jodh Bai's palace etc

Akbar built very little after leaving Fatehpur Sikri in 1585 but the *umra* carried forward Akbari style. Akbar's architecture was a refined blend of Timurid designs with indigenous forms. Akbar emphasized on forts and palaces rather than on religious buildings. There was also an extensive use of red sandstone as building material. Akbar's choice of a style appealed to all subjects regardless of sectarian affiliation. Akbar's style reflected his political and cultural ideology. A study of the different structures would suggest an appeal to all his subjects irrespective of the sectarian affiliation.

