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The Text and Subtext of Shah Jahan's Capital City: A Study of the Imperial Iconography of Shahjahanabad

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Abstract

Shah Jahan's interest in architecture is well known. Shahjahanabad, was perhaps the most ambitious of his projects. He orchestrated the urban structures and had his historians and poets create literary images of a city that was a physical manifestation of Shah Jahan's ideas about the greatness of his empire. The structures of the city were to establish him as the greatest, with their grandeur, of all rulers who sought to rule from here. His city was also to speak to his rivals in distant realms and challenge their authority as leaders of the world. These ideas coalesced together to give Shah Jahan a city that was truly reflective of his ideology of empire.

Keywords : *Shahjahanabad-Capital city-Imperial Iconography-Urban Structures-Architecture*

Cities occupied a central place in the political, social and cultural landscape of the Mughal empire. The number of cities and towns in an empire were the parameters through which its economic vibrancy was measured. Cities were also seen as safe havens of civilization as opposed to the lawlessness that was typical of wastelands. Emperors therefore insisted on founding of new townships in order to limit lawlessness. The accession *farman* of Jahangir for instance ordered for the construction of Qasbahs and townships in isolated places to prevent disorder.[1] Cities scattered throughout the empire, were not only safe havens of commerce and culture but also visible symbols that enforced the dominance of the Mughals in the expansive locales of the empire. The center of gravity in the empire however was the imperial capital, where the emperor and his court resided. It was the central node in the movement of men, goods and ideas across the empire.

Three Mughal emperors, Humayun, Akbar and Shah Jahan built new capital cities for themselves of these only Akbar chose to locate his capital out of Delhi. Delhi had an important presence in the Mughal psyche. Even before it was made the imperial capital by Shah Jahan, it was designated by the supreme epithet of "*Dar ul Mulk*", or seat of government. It was also chosen in the sixteenth century to be the resting place for emperor Humayun even though the court had moved to Agra. With this move Akbar intricately tied Delhi to Mughal memory of the second coming of the Mughal empire. This move of Akbar, gave Delhi an important place in Mughal memory as the site for the second coming of the Mughal empire.

It was no surprise therefore that when Shah Jahan decided to build himself a new capital city, he chose Delhi. Shah Jahan's capital city Shahjahanabad has garnered a lot of attention from historians. This is due in part to the fact Shahjahanabad or old Delhi as it is known today continues to be the most alluring and fascinating presence in a city that is dotted with remnants of numerous

urban conglomerations. The other reason perhaps is that of all the famed cities that existed here in the past, Shahjahanabad is the most well preserved and its sights and sounds are still capable of transporting one back to medieval times. perhaps the earliest study of the city was by Stephen B Blake, who applied to the city the Weberian formulation of 'Patrimonial Bureaucratic Empire'. Blake argued convincingly that Shahjahanabad was the urban conclusion of the patrimonial bureaucratic premise of the Mughal empire.[2] Shama Mitra Chenoy's study of the city on the other hand concludes that nature of the city was constantly changing. The city was constantly evolving in its structures as well as function. Although it was conceived of as an administrative capital, it acquired a life independent of the court as time progressed. Chenoy's study in fact focuses on the economic and cultural role of the city as opposed to its political role that takes center stage in Blake's work.[3] While both these works provide extensively details on the architecture, markets and social and political role the capital played, they do not address the ways in which Shah Jahan sought to achieve his imperial goals by giving form and substance to the new city. This paper argues that Shah Jahan orchestrated the urban structures and had his historians and poets create literary images of a city that was a physical manifestation of his ideas about the greatness of his empire. The structures of the city with their grandeur were to establish him as the greatest of all rulers who sought to rule from Delhi. His city was also to speak to his rivals in distant realms and challenge their authority as leaders of the world. These ideas coalesced together to give Shah Jahan a city that was truly reflective of his ideology of empire.

The Mughals had used a number of tools to legitimize and articulate their authority over their subjects. The most popular of these tools in the initial years of Mughal rule was history writing. History writing in pre-modern societies was not merely an exercise in recording events, it rather served a much greater purpose, that of legitimizing the emperor's rule. While Akbar relied heavily on this source of legitimizing his rule, by the time of Jahangir and Shahjahan other cultural forms began to be put into use extensively to achieve this goal. While history writing continued unabated none of the texts produced after Akbar match the grandiose of the Akbar Nama of Abul Fazal. The text is not a mere history but documents the life and times of a man who possessed, according to the author, both spiritual and royal qualities. It presents Akbar as the quintessential *Insan-i- Kamil* of Ibn Al Arabi, who was fit to be the master and spiritual guide of all humanity irrespective of their religious affiliation. This text went a long way in solidifying the semi-divine status of the Mughal emperor, which in turn contributed in no small measure to the persistence of the myth of Mughal infallibility even in the darkest periods of their history. From the time of Jahangir however focus shifts to the art of painting. Jahangir's official history is the very informally written autobiography called the Tuzuk-i-Jahangiri. Jahangir relied extensively on the allegorical portraits that innovatively portray the emperor as a spiritual master, the just ruler, slayer of poverty and a wonder worker.[4]

With Shahjahan the Mughal arts entered a new phase. The emperor was especially astute in using architecture to glorify himself. He was almost obsessed with portraying the image of an ordered and opulent realm where he presided over a deeply hierarchical society with the emperor at its head. This obsession with order required not only a strict regulation of the arts but also

involved putting in place an elaborate set of ceremonials that reinforced the image of the emperor as the "ruler of the world". The arts no longer served an aesthetic purpose but were visual representations of the emperor's magnificence. This was true of both painting and architecture. While the paintings became repetitive and rigid representations of the elaborate court ceremonials, portraying the emperor in a semi-divine image, architecture incorporated motifs and forms from other cultures to symbolise the emperor's majesty and place him alongside some of the most powerful kings of the world. He therefore provided in the many forts across the empire, large audience halls fashioned on the pillared halls of Persepolis.[5] He also made the use of marble for the first time to construct palace pavilions meant exclusively for the royalty, while those meant for others were built in stone. This reinforced the hierarchy in society in the built form.

By far the most ambitious project undertaken by Shah Jahan was the construction of a new city in Delhi. As already referred to above, Delhi had an important presence in Mughal memory, but that could not have been the only reason why the site was chosen to rest the foundations of imperium. Shah Jahan's historians claim that the moderate climate of the area was the chief reason why it was chosen. Kambo claims that the air of Delhi could cure old ailments, and bestow youth on the old.[6] However, it is difficult to imagine that Delhi's past had no role to play in the decision. Shah Jahan and his historians were well aware of the fact that Delhi had served as home to some of the most illustrious Sufi saints and capital to some of the most powerful kings of the past. Although Kambo makes no reference to Delhi's past inhabitants or buildings with the grand exception of the Nur Garh (Salim Garh) and a passing reference to Firuz Shah Tughlaq and his canal that was repaired to provide water to the new city, Chander Bhan Brahman evinces a keen awareness of *Dehli-i-Kuhna* as "one of the most famous cities of ancient times" and mentions the Sufi saints who were laid to rest there.[7] Even as late as the eighteenth century, Rai Chaturman, refers to the many cities Delhi including Siri, Tughlaqabad, Firozabad and Din Panah.[8] Even for Shah Jahan, therefore it was difficult to imagine Delhi divorced from its old and not so old habitations and inhabitants. When he moved his capital here, Shah Jahan automatically inherited a long and revered heritage, of which he claimed to be the rightful successor.

This could not have been an easy inheritance, for Shah Jahan hoped to create his own legacy in a place already identified with great personages of the past. He had to contend with not only representatives of temporal but also of spiritual power. It was therefore necessary to acknowledge and appropriate this greatness of the past but at the same time to impress upon his subjects the greater power and superiority of the present monarch. His poets had already drawn on the rich repertoire of well established poetic idioms to portray Shah Jahan as the king of the world. Thus the poet Saida-i-Gilani wrote:

The One incomparable God has
Caused the world o appear for the sake of Shah Jahan, the king of the world.
By his justice, bounty and benevolence,
The emperor of the globe

Learned, exalted patron of scholars and conqueror
May he be king for a thousand years
Since he makes in the circuit of the globe,
A hundred thousand lives happy.[9]

Shah Jahan is presented here as the ruler of the world. His pretensions to royalty are global and not confined to Hindustan. Along with the usual attributes of justice and benevolence associated with all great rulers, Shah Jahan also possessed an intellect and was a patron of scholars. His influence extended all over the globe and he was the reason for the happiness of a hundred thousand lives across the world.

It is this Shah Jahan that we come across when we examine the way his capital city was executed. Any study of a city must begin with an examination of the official discourse on it, in this case, with an examination of the way Shah Jahan wanted his capital portrayed to his audience. This enabled him reify the city in a way that would allow the emperor to fulfill his imperial goals. This discourse however had to be backed by concrete steps that ensured that the imperial capital was truly the center of the world. First step in the process was of course choosing the site for the capital, which as we have already seen Shahjahan did tactfully. The next step was to monumentalize the chosen space by constructing royal buildings that spoke of the greatness of the emperor. The first building to be commissioned was the Palace-fortress. The foundation of the fort was laid at an opportune time decided by the royal astrologers, on the 27th of April, 1639.[10]

Spread over an area of 125 acres the fort was a befitting representation of a man who claimed to be Shah Jahan or ruler of the world. Situated at the edge of the city, the Qila was the most visible manifestation of Mughal power in the city, along with the Jami Masjid. And its creator willed it to be so. Double the size of the formidable fort at Agra, the Delhi fort boasts of walls which are almost 35 meters high. It has two imposing gateways known as the Delhi and Lahori gate. The latter was the most common entry point of the fort and stood at 41 feet high and 24 feet wide, an imposing presence indeed.[11] Around the fort was a moat almost 70 feet deep.

The fort not only represented the emperor's power but also sought to separate the emperor from the city proper and the bulk of the urban population. Its placement at the edge of the city was important too. It distances the emperor and his court from the urban population while at the same time makes it an authoritative symbol visible from all corners of the city.

As one enters the Qila from the formidable Lahori gate the first thing that one encounters is a covered arcade with shops on both sides that served as a bazaar. The fort has often been described as "a city within a city"[12], with 57000 inhabitants living within its precincts to serve the emperor and his court.[13] From Bernier's description of this portion of the fort, the image of a city within a city becomes palpable. Multiple alcoves and tents housing offices for public dealings, the Umarah and their troops mounting guard and rows of Karkhanas where goods required by the emperor and his court were produced by highly skilled artisans.[14] It would be difficult to distinguish this portion of the fort from the busy bazaars of the city.

Further up one proceeds into the more formal setting which is announced by the existence of the Naqar Khana, where the royal band played loud music at a fixed time every morning and evening.[15] This led to the *Diwan-i- khass-o-aam*. This building is constructed of red sandstone except for the grandiose white marble *Jharokha* where the emperor displayed himself to the public. Supported by baluster columns and a curved roof, the *Jharokha* is reminiscent of European symbols of royalty.[16] While the emperor sat in his *Jharokha* royal animals viz., horses, elephants, antelopes etc were paraded before the emperor for inspection.[17] Huge crowds gathered here to witness the spectacle and make presentations to the emperor.

As one moves further, the Fort, subtly transforms into a palace with increasingly private spaces. The intense movement and activity of the fort gave way to the calm and serenity of the palace. One leaves behind the red sandstone structures of commoners and encounters elegant marble buildings framed by the Yamuna. These included the imperial residence, royal offices, the royal bath (*hammam*), viewing towers, the famous *Jharokha* from where the emperor displayed himself to the public every morning and the *Diwan-i-Khas*, where stood the famous *Takht-i-Taus* or the peacock throne. Beautifully embellished with inlay work of semiprecious stones, intricate carvings and a profusion of silver and gold, these buildings stand in sharp contrast to the red sandstone structures of the fort. Hidden completely from the public view, access to these portions was severely restricted. Here only the select few gathered with the emperor to discuss matters of state.

In the literary and poetic representations of the fort, we find a celebration of its might and power. Chander Bhan Brahman proudly refers to the towering height and sturdy fortifications that surround the fort.[18] In his Padshahnama, Muhammad Waris refers to the Qila as the Haim Gardun or the mighty defensive fort.[19] Abu Talib Kalim, similarly compares the walls of the fort to the gates of Alexander (Sadd-e-Sikandari).[20] It is interesting to ask why the impregnability and defensive nature of the fort is emphasized in these texts. When the fort was constructed the Mughal Empire was at its zenith. It had managed to subdue most opposition and was in no real danger from within or outside the empire. For the answer we need to go back to the larger Islamic world of the thirteenth century, where Islamicate empires spread to areas with alien populations who were often hostile, the norm of placing the emperor and his court in the citadel was set.[21] This pattern was followed in Hindustan too first by Delhi Sultans and later by Mughals where citadels were chosen over palaces to house royal courts. The Red fort was therefore conceived of as a defensive citadel and also the abode of the emperor. Its representations therefore are as such. Convention demanded that it be defensive, fortified and daunting, while at the same time exuding the beauty and elegance of Shahjahani buildings and the opulence of the palace of the Mughal emperor. Kambo claims that no other ruler in the world could even conceive something as grand a structure as this fort and such a building could never be constructed by ay monarch till the day of reckoning.[22] Shah Jahan's feat therefore would remain unparalleled for all eternity.

Other important structures within the fort were the beautiful gardens laid out exclusively for the royalty. Besides the many pavilions and small green enclosure there were two large gardens

placed within the precincts of the fort. These were called the Hayat Baksh and the Mahtab Bagh. These lush green spaces with profusion of fruits and flowers were a proud possession of the Mughal court. Gardens had a special place in the high Persianate culture of the Islamic world. In the conventional understanding of the use of gardens scholars frequently invoke the the Quranic concepts of paradise. The architectural, artistic and iconographic expressions of gardens are thus interpreted as a metaphor for paradise. By laying out gardens within the precincts of his palace Shahjahan was therefore trying to create the image of a paradisiacal world. In her study of the Mughal palace gardens, Ebba Koch concludes that the gardens laid out within the Mughal palaces did not serve an aesthetic purpose alone but had a definite political significance. Shah Jahan's Hayat Baksh, the largest of all palace gardens, was also a political statement. Its lush greens and the everlasting waters were meant to solidify the image of the Quranic paradise with an "unending spring"[23] for the realm under the aegis of Shahjahan. Although this paradisiacal imagery may be associated with the Quranic conceptions of paradise, the paradise that Shah Jahan wanted created was this worldly. His fort was to be celebrated as the veritable paradise on earth. Poets and writers frequently evoke the metaphor of paradise to extol its beauty. This evocation was also cast in stone by the emperor himself when he ordered Amir khusro's now famous verse be inscribed on the wall of the Diwa-i-Khas- *Gar Firdaus Bar ru i zamin ast hami ast hamin ast hamin ast*- if there is paradise on earth it is here, it is here it is here.

Chander Bhan Brahman also breaks into poetry while describing the beautiful buildings of the fort:

Every house is like a sublime heaven
And every building has a paradisiacal garden
Its avenues are so utterly delightful
You might say they are bylanes off the road to paradise.[24]

An important part of the process of monumentalization of his power that Shahjahan was attempting to achieve in the city was its sacrilization. Besides the evocation of the idea of a divine emperor residing in a paradisiacal setting, achieved in the fort, the emperor also established religious symbols in the form of mosques, madrasas, tombs and relics. These symbols not only gave the poets and writers entrusted with the task of celebrating the majesty of the emperor, interesting subjects for their compositions but also allowed them to glorify the personal piety and religious zeal of the emperor. They also infused the city with a scared character. In pre modern times this was a necessity to give a firmer foundation to imperial pretensions.

Islam was therefore a pronounced presence in the city of Shahjahanabad. Although it is far from being an Islamic City as conceived of by many modern writers yet it was created by and remained the capital of an empire which used Islam as one of the many sources of legitimacy. They built Islamic places of worship and patronised its holy men. One can see in the built environments of their cities expressions of loyalty to the Islamic faith. The ruling elite and their families (particularly royal women), made contributions to the built spaces of these cities by providing Mosques, Sarais

and Shrines. The emperor's Islamic allegiance was firmly conveyed to the world by the placing of a large congregational mosque in the centre of the city, whose dome dominated its skyline. Built on a high hillock at the cost of a million rupees, the *Jami' Masjid* was indeed a sight to behold. And behold it the people did, as it rested on a hillock called the Pahari Bhojla, visible from a distance.

Chander Bhan Brahman begins a discussion of the city with Amir Khusro's famous couplet cited above that celebrates the city as paradise. He writes further:

> In the center as well as in all directions of this city that is a foundation of blessing there are many mosques, the most important is the grand mosque that is the climax of sublimity (and) rests its head on the firmament, and all the vastness of the world is contained in it, and contained in its high patios with elevated pillars and pleasant chambers and prayer halls and roofs and porches and domes that raise their heads to the sky….[25]

In a couplet that follows this description, Brahman claims that the Qibla had shifted to this mosque. The Jami Masjid therefore was an important symbol of the empire. It was placed opposite the fort, the two facing each other proclaiming their creator to be master of both Din and Dunya- the spiritual and temporal world. The mosque took six years to complete and was the largest mosque in the subcontinent at the time of construction. It was called Masjid-i-Jahanuma. Most contemporary historians of Shah Jahan would attribute the creation of the mosques and other religious structures to the emperor's personal piety. He was after all Badshah Ghazi, a warrior of faith. A title he proved himself worthy of by lavishly spending in the name of God in his realm as well as the holy cities, making lavish grants to shrines and establishing waqfs or religious endowments.

Kambo begins his account of the Masjid-i-Jami with the statement that the construction of religious edifices is the most beneficial form of everlasting charity (*Nafetareen Khairaat-i-Jaria*), this he says is particularly true of shrines, mausoleums and mosques which according to the letter of the book and the injunctions of the sunnat are the causes for attaining highest levels in paradise. The emperor also decreed that all cities with a Muslim population must have mosques in every neighbourhood.[26]

Other members of the royalty and the nobles took cue from their emperor and put up mosques throughout the city. Chief among these were the Fatehpuri Masjid, Akbarabadi Masjid and the Sunehri and Roshan ud Daulah Masajid.

The other important religious institution in the city was the Madrasa. The Madrasa was essentially an educational institution where students were educated in the Islamic religious sciences including Quranic exegesis, the study of Hadith or traditions of the prophet and of Fiqh or jurisprudence. While some Madrasas like the Darul Baqa near the Jami' Masjid were provided by the state, most others were provided by individuals as acts of personal piety. We come across a number of Madrasas in Shahjahanabad, the Madrasa Rahimiah belonging to Shah Abdul Rahim, Shah Waliullah's father built with the active support of Muhammad Shah, Madrasa Ghaziuddin Khan near the Ajmeri Gate, Madrasa Raushan ud Daulah associated with the mosque of the same

name, near the Kotwali Chabutra and many more.[27] The Madrasas provided Islamic education to those interested, the *Taliban-i-Ilm*.[28] From Maulvi Abdul Hayyi's account we get a glimpse of daily lessons in the Madrasa. Lessons began at sunrise after the obligatory prayer. These consisted of lessons in the *Sahih Bukhari*, the *Sahih Muslim*, and Quranic exegesis. People also visited the Madrasas to hear the *Dars* and seek counsel from the scholar. The teacher also discussed with his pupils questions addressed to him. At the end of the *Dars*, *Hikayat* or life stories of the great scholars of the past were also narrated to the pupils.[29]

Although it is tempting to believe that the construction of mosques was merely to derive religious benefits in the after world, we know that these also served worldly causes. The first of these of course is to make public statements of their religious affiliation. This was particularly true of the Jami Masjid. It was here at the mosque that the khutba was read in the name of the emperor. It was therefore a significant political institution for the royalty. The Second and more important becomes palpable once we see that almost all of these mosques were not isolated structures but parts of large religious complexes. While the Jami Masjid ad the Dar-ul-Baqa and Dar-ul-Shifa, the Akbarabadi and Fatehpuri Masajid were parts of complex that had serais and Hammams. All of these institutions served commercial and political functions rather than religious. These buildings of public welfare underscore the paternal aspect of Mughal kingship. Although these buildings with their grand structures appear overwhelming, they must have stood in sharp contrast to the mighty palace-fortress. These were inclusive spaces that allowed the ordinary inhabitants of the city to not only benefit from the largess of the state but also provided as Farhat Hassan points out a public sphere.[30]

At Jami Masjid the performance of prayer was only one part of the Friday rituals and was followed by exhortations or *Wa'az* and the mosque provided the ideal setting for it. Although the Waaz is supposed to be a religious sermon, they must have engaged with the ongoing debates in the religious world of the city. Maulana Hakim Sayyid Abdul Hayyi who visited Delhi in 1894 compares the Jami' Masjid after the obligatory prayers to a wrestling arena. He tells us that there were four people in different parts of the mosque preaching simultaneously. One of them Maulvi Muhammad Akbar was furiously disparaging the followers of the Hanafi Fiqh, while another sitting by the Hauz reciting Munajat and Ghazals was desperately trying to gather a crowd.[31] Very often these dialogues debates turned violent and allowed people to build social solidarity at least momentarily. We hear of a commotion at the Mosque when a group of young men belonging to the Shia sect, wearing amulets and beads of Karbala clay, barged into the mosque and threatened a preacher Shah Abdullah who in his last sermon had attacked the beliefs of the Shii sect claiming the concept of *Panch Tan Pak* (the five holy bodies, i.e. the Prophet, Ali, Fatima, Hussain and Hassan), was contrary to the teachings of the Sunni sect. The supporters of the Wa'iz then intervened and forced the men out of the mosque.[32]

Beyond the palace-fortress, the Jami Masjid and all structures associated with the elite lived the ordinary city of Shahjahanabad. It was made of a bewildering number of lanes and bylanes, where people jostled for space. The lack of space in the city is a constant occurrence in the

writings of Bernier.

These people who crowded the streets of the city were supposed to be the more immediate consumers of all the ideas and symbolisms the emperor and his court tried to put out there, besides distant empires who were to be impressed by the glitz and glamour of these rituals. It is therefore necessary to examine the relationship between the court and the city. How then did the Emperor and his court interact with the city and on what occasions? What form did this interaction take? What purpose this interaction serve? Did it hold any meaning for the ordinary inhabitants?

For the city proper the emperor and his court were a distant but important presence. Our sources are not forthcoming with information on how the ordinary people "read" the emperor's abode but it is not difficult to speculate that the fortress with its high walls must have conveyed the image of a closed and daunting system. The emperor and his court interacted with the city in highly structured and often theatrical events. The most conspicuous of these were the royal processions through which the court not only displayed power but also established its presence over the city's spaces. The Royal processions were an important part of the political culture of the pre-modern world, allowing the ordinary people to come face to face with their social superiors. They were the means of visual and symbolic communication with the subjects and strengthening their hold over the city. These royal spectacles included ceremonial entries of the new monarchs into the city where the emperor entered at an auspicious time, wedding processions that traversed the city on a grand scale with the royalty in all its finery and then there were the ones in which the emperor came into the city on fixed days for the performance of some rituals.

The Mughals also had a well established tradition of royal processions. From the Akbarnama we hear of Akbar's triumphant return from Kabul in 1581. Abul Fazl writes:

> On this day of joy the great officers, the loyal servants and others were drawn up in two sides of the way for a distance of four kos from the city. The mountain like elephants stood there in their majesty. The Khedive of the world proceeded on his way on a heaven like elephant, attended by the "avaunt" of the divine halo. The obedient princes moved on in their order. Many grandees proceeded in front of the mace bearers. The panoply was there in its splendor and was followed by various officers. The noise of drums and melodies of the magician like musicians gave forth news of joy. Crowds of men were gathered in astonishment on the roofs and at the doors. [33]

Jahangir also records his entry into Agra on his way back from a royal hunt:

> ….I mounted an elephant and went to the city. From the garden of Abdur Razzaq to the palace, the distance is 2 Kos and 20 tanab. I scattered 1500 rupees to the crowd. At the fixed hour I entered the palace. The bazaars were decorated with cloths after the manner of the New Year's feast.[34]

Considering that Shah Jahan was the most deeply invested in ceremonial and imperial spectacles among all Mughal monarchs it is no surprise that his processions are far more grandiose and frequent than those of the others. Shahjahanabad in fact had been designed keeping movement and

mobility in mind. Wide streets radiated out from the fort, connecting it to the city. The first was the street that ran from the Lahori Gate of the fort to the Fatehpuri Mosque, later called the Chandni Chowk. It was 40 Shahi Gaz (yards) wide and contained 1560 shops with rooms and verandahs. At a distance of 485 yards from the beginning of the bazaar was the Kotwali Chabutra. To the north of this Chowk Jahanara Begum had built a sarai, which measured 186X180 yards. This Sarai had ninety rooms. The princess also provided near here a garden called Sahibabad. This beautiful garden had four bastions, and four quarters with verandahs. [35]

The other main artery of the city extended from the Akbarabadi gate of the fort to the Akbarabadi gate of the city. At the head of this street sat the mighty Akbarabadi Mosque and a Sarai and Hammam water to which was provided by the Nahr-i-Behisht. This street also connected the fort to the Jami Masjid via the Chowk Sadullah Khan.

When the emperor made his way into the city, these wide streets allowed his grand entourage the space and visibility that Agra could not provide. Shah Jahan's historian leave us wanting in their descriptions of the emperor's entries and processions, fortunately for us that gap is filled by his painters and Francoise Bernier. The illustrations of Lahori and Waris' Padshahnama unlike the illustrated manuscripts of Akbar's court barely leave the confines of the court. On the other hand the paintings of the court itself are so grand and full of people that even court scenes very often appear as processional.

The most frequent appearance the emperor made in the city was his ride to the Jami Masjid every Friday to offer prayers, on a richly caparisoned elephant. The street he rode was watered and cleared and three hundred soldiers lined the street from the fort to the mosque. The emperor was followed by the grand umarah on horsebacks and palkis.[36]

On the occasion of festivals, marriages and coronations, the emperor's elephants were ceremoniously paraded in the streets. The streets were decorated every time the king passed in procession or a noble triumphant from a campaign. Manucci offers a vivid description of the welcome received by Mir Jumla after his triumphant return from the Deccan campaigns. He tells us that all the streets and shops in the city were decorated as Mir Jumla marched in.[37] Huge crowds gathered in the streets to witness these events. These modes were used both to display power and forge bonds with the subjects.

These processions where the emperor and his procession moved beyond the spaces reserved for them and into the public spaces of the city, must breach the boundaries between the city and the court that it had itself strictly enforced. This breaching of the boundaries may have been a welcome sight for the lesser mortals for whom the textual and literal compositions of the emperor's majestic self were out of reach. These visuals of grandeur, power and largesse through the distribution of charity must have been welcomed by the people. From our sources we hear of huge crowds gathering in the streets to witness these spectacles. Even as late as 1719, when Muhammad Shah made his ceremonial entry into the city "enriching" the needy by "sprinkling his way with handfuls of gold", huge crowds gathered to witness the spectacular event.[38]

For his subjects therefore, Shah Jahan was the creator and sustainer of every structure they identified with the city, but Shah Jahan could not be satisfied with the reverence of his Hindustani subjects alone. It was imperative that his creation be acknowledged as *the* cultural node in the larger Islamic world. The city where ruler of the world Shah Jahan resided had to be the best in the world.

By the seventeenth century, the Mughal Empire had firmly taken its place among the greatest empires of the world. Far away in Safavid Persia and Ottoman Turkey, Mughal Hindustan was known as the fabled land of riches and culture. The Persian poet Abdul Razzaq Lahiji wrote:

Great is India, the Mecca for all in need
Particularly for those who seek safety
A journey to India is incumbent upon any man
Who has acquired adequate knowledge and skill[39]

Muhammad Ali Saib who had spent a few years at the court of Shahjahan wrote similarly:

There is no head wherein the desire for thee dances not
Even as the determination to visit India is in every heart[40]

We have plenty of evidence to support the claim that there was a widespread circulation/ movement of objects, skills, artists and even ideas in the vast cultural and economic zone that is Eurasia. This happened through networks of exchange created and fostered by the rulers of the great empires that existed here. These networks were created by the quest for both commercial and cultural artefacts. The fact that the three greatest empires in this region, the Mughals, Safavids and Ottomans not only shared a common cultural heritage that drew largely from Islam and that all of these three empires strove to achieve dominance over the others intensified this quest. Between the Safavids and the Mughals the competition was stiff, because of geographical proximity and competing claims over Kabul and Qandahar. From the year 1622 when their forces clashed with Shah Abbas and Jahangir at the head of the Safavid and Mughal empires respectively, to 1649 when Shah Jahan lost Qandahar to Shah Abbas II, the two empires shared a very complex relationship that oscillated between cautious friendship, quiet rivalry and active hostility.

It is against this background of rivalry and competition that we must examine Shah Jahan's claims to universal kingship. The most telling of these claims is his name itself. Shah Jahan, King of the World. This was followed by a title that none of the Mughal emperors before or after Shah Jahan used, Sahib Qiran-i-Sani or the Second Lord of Auspicious Conjunction. The title of Sahib Qiran was used before him by Timur, a much revered ancestor of the Mughals and a king of central Asia who was credited with unifying the warring kingdoms of the region and creating in its stead a powerful kingdom. The title of Sahib Qiran however had to compete with the Safavid Shah's the title of *Mahdi* or the Renewer of Islam and the Ottoman Sultan's *Hadim Al Harmain al Sharifayin* or the protector of the holy cities.

Besides claimimg to be the universal monarch through high sounding titles, Shah Jahan had to ensure that the city he created and inhabited served as a metaphor for his claims. Shahjahanabad

therefore had to surpass all other cities in its beauty and magnificence. Shah Jahan's poets and historians therefore explicitly claim that Shahjahanabad was superior to the other cities of the world. It was infact projected as the center of the Islamic world. We have already come across Chander Bhan Brahman's claim that with the construction of the *Masjid–i-Jami*, the qibla had shifted to Delhi. In an interesting couplet later Chander Bhan claims that Cairo would be just a part and Herat just a fable of one of Shahjahanabad's lane. A hundred Isfahans could be found in its kuchas and every shop was a mine of Badakhshan.[41]

Shah Jahan's city was thus the envy of some of the greatest cities and civilizations of the world, much like himself. The city was constituted by lavish structures and institutions that defined and celebrated Shah Jahan and his realm. It was the most fundamental reflection of his majesty and his claims to divine and universal kingship.

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