Chapter- I
The Settlement Pattern & Urban Plan
CHAPTER 1

THE SETTLEMENT PATTERN & URBAN PLAN

The early history of Agra is shrouded in mystery as there is a complete lack of literary and material sources for the period prior to the twelfth century A.D. Several theories were also propounded regarding its nomenclature: according to some the name was derived from āga (fire) or agwāra (enclosure for fire). To others it was derived from such terms as agara (a salt pit), agra (first/prior), agara (house of habitation), agala (bar for keeping a deer closed), agravana (one of the twelve forests of Brajmandala), agrawal (a sub-caste of the Vaisyas) or āgē-rau (the site that is ahead on the way). However according to some stray numismatic and archaeological findings, it appears that there was an earlier town at the site known as Yamapraṣṭha.

It is further held that the foundation of Agra was laid during the reign of Ugrasen and being the scene of incarnation of Lord Visnu it emerged as a severed town. According to yet another folklore alluded to by the author of Tarikh-i Daudi:

“The Hindus assert that Agra was a stronghold in the days of Raja Kans, who ruled at Mathura and who confined everyone that

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displeased him in the fort at the former place, so that in course of time it became an established state prison.”

It is from the tenth century onwards that the haze shrouding the history of Agra begins to clear. According to Jahangir even before the Lodi Sultans made it their capital, Agra was a big city (Ma’mura-i Kalān) with a fortress which was mentioned with high praise by the Ghaznavide poet Mas’ud Sa’ad Salman. From the Tarikh-i Khan Jahan Lodi also we come to know of the existence of a fort at Agra (the ‘state prison’ of Tarikh-i Daudi?). In 1491 A.D, Sultan Sikandar Lodi is reported to have stayed there during his visit to the city. The emergence of Agra as a viable city probably coincided with the decline in the fortunes of Delhi after its sack by the forces of Timur. One of the factors responsible for this was is the strategic importance of the site- it being located on the route to Rajasthan, Malwa and Bengal.

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5 Tuzuk, p. 2
7 For this line of argument see K. K. Trivedi, “The Emergence of Agra as a Capital and a City: A Note on its Spatial and Historical Background during the Sixteenth and Seventeenth Centuries”, Journal of the Economic and Social History of the Orient, Vol. 37, No. 2, 1994, pp. 147-70
Sultan Sikandar Lodi (1489-1517) on realizing its geographical strategic made it his military headquarters. Ni’matullah Harawi in his *Tarikh* alludes to this when he writes:

“...to curb the violence in the *sarkar* of Bayana, the Sultan commissioned, in the year 911 A.H (1505 A.D), some men of judicious intellect to explore the banks of the river (Jamuna) and report upon any locality which might be considered the most eligible.”

Accordingly, we are told, the ‘exploring party’ left Delhi by boats and continued to examine both the banks of the river till they arrived at the spot where the present city of Agra stands. The team short listed two sites and the decision was communicated to the Sultan who subsequently personally visited the spots along with one of his officials Naik Mihtar Mulla Khan, the in charge of the Royal barges. According the Ni’matullah Harawi opined that ‘that which is Agre or in advance is the preferred one,’ the Sultan decided ‘the name of this city then shall be Agra’.

It appears that the site of the Pre-Lodi period fort and settlement was different from the city founded by the Lodis: the city of Lodi Agra was founded on a new ‘chosen’ location in 1506 which the Pre-Lodi town was the place where the Sultan, Sikandar Lodi, allegedly stayed when he visited the city in 1491. From the extant remains of Lodi monuments and traces of their

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8 *Tarikh-i Khan Jahan Lodi*, op. cit., p. 172
9 *Tarikh-i Khan Jahan Lodi*, op. cit., pp. 194-95
foundations, it appears that the city of Sikandar Lodi was generally populated on the left bank of the river.\footnote{See A. Cunningham, \textit{Archaeological Survey of India Report, Agra}, Vol. IV, 1871-72, Varanasi, (reprint 1966).}

After the Lodis, the Mughals adopted Agra as their capital city and consecutively constructed many of their structures in that city. We are informed by Babur that he was not greatly impressed by the town of Agra as he found it when he went there. He in fact goes on to castigate the Indian towns in general (and Agra in particular) for being charmless and the more towns in their plan:

“…The towns and country of Hindustan are greatly wanting in charm. Its towns and lands are all of one sort; there are no walls to the orchards and most places are on dead level plain…..”\footnote{Baburnama, tr. A. S. Beveridge, New Delhi, 1989, Vol. II, p. 48}

Subsequently Babur added a member of edifices to the town after 1526, when included a number of \textit{Chahār baghs}, mosques step wells and residential structures.\footnote{Ibid, pp. 531, 532, 533} These structures built by Babur were quite different in their built and layout as compared to the earlier structures. Thus Babur comments:

“The people of Hind who had never seen grounds planned so symmetrically and thus laid out, called the side of the Jūn (Yamuna) where (our) residences were, Kābul.”\footnote{Ibid, p. 532}

Further, it also appears that most of these new buildings of Babur were constructed on the opposite bank of the river over looking the Lodi palaces.
Referring to his attempts to redesign the urban landscape at Agra, Babur thus informs us:

“… grounds should be laid out in an orderly and symmetrical way. With this object in view, we crossed the Jûn water to look at garden-grounds a few days after entering Agra. Those grounds were so bad and unattractive that we traversed them with a hundred disgusts and repulsions. So ugly and displeasing were they, that the idea of making a Char-bagh in them passed from my mind, but needs must! as there was no other land near Agra, that same ground was taken in hand a few days later…”

It appears that by Humayun’s reign, Agra was a thriving city comprising smart streets lined with shops. By Akbar’s period, if we believe Fr. Monserrate, the city was ‘four miles long and two broad’. It was, according to him, ‘a magnificent city, both for to size and its antiquity’ and comprised a palace and citadel ‘as big as a great city’ with mansions of his nobles, bureaucratic establishments as well as ‘shops and huts of drug-sellers, barbers and all manner of common workmen.’ The grandeur of the new city which developed under Akbar can well be ascertained from the accounts of the

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14 Ibid, p. 531
15 Khwand Amir, Qanun-i Humayûni or Humayun Nama, tr. Baini Prasad, Royal Asiatic Society of Bengal, Calcutta, 1940, p. 26
various travellers who came to the town during the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries.\textsuperscript{17}

Akbar’s fort at Agra, which replaced the earlier brick fort was commenced in the beginning of the tenth regnal year, that is in 1565.\textsuperscript{18} The foundations of the city itself had been laid on 30\textsuperscript{th} October 1558 when it was also declared as the capital city of new dispensation.\textsuperscript{19}

The shape and form which Agra had taken as a city during the reign of Akbar (and by the beginning of his own) is remarked upon by Jahangir, during whose reign the city was continued as the capital of the empire:

“… The habitable part of the city extends on both sides of the river. On its west side, which has the greater population, its circumference is seven kos [17 ½ miles] and its breadth is one kos [2 ½ miles]. The circumference of the inhabited part on the other side of the river, the side towards the east, is 2 ½ kos, its length being one kos and its breadth half a kos. But in the number of its buildings it is equal to several cities of ‘Iraq, Khurasan and Mawra-un Nahr (Tran-Oxiana) put together. Many persons have erected buildings of three or four storeys in it. The mass of people is so great, that moving about in the lanes and bazars is difficult.”\textsuperscript{20}

From this description of Jahangir it appears that the growth of the city was (a) not confined to one bank of the river and (b) the city developed along

\textsuperscript{17} See for example, W. Foster, \textit{Early Travels in India (1583-1619)}, Oxford, 1921, p. 17
\textsuperscript{19} \textit{Ibid}, pp. 76-77
\textsuperscript{20} \textit{Tuzuk-i Jahangiri}, ed. Saiyid Ahmad, Ghazipur & Aligarh, 1863-64, p. 2
the river so that it was almost shaped as a crescent with the river acting as its backbone. This character of the city-plan is further emphasised by William Finch who goes on add that this city had no city fortifications but was defended only through a ditch:

“… the citie hath no walls, but a ditch round about, no broad, and dry also; adjoyning to the ditch without the citie are very large suburbs.

The city and suburbs are one way seven miles in length, three in breadth. The noble men’s houses and merchants built with brick and stone, flat roofed; the common sort, of muddle walls, covered with thatch, which cause often terrible fires. The cittie hath sixe gates. The adjoyning river Gemini being broader then the Thames at London…”

The fact that the city was semi-circular in appearance, stretching length-wise along the river Yamuna is stressed by other contemporary writers like Father Monserrate and others. The fact that the city had no city walls mentioned by Finch is also corroborated by Pelsaert, the Dutch merchant who visited the city during the reign of Jahangir. His description of the city is quite insightful as it gives us not only an idea of its planning but also some information on its morphology. To quote:

“The city is exceedingly large, but decayed, open and unwalled. The streets and houses are built without any regular plan. There are, indeed, many palaces belonging to great princes and lords, but they are hidden

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21 William Finch, _Early Travels in India, 1583-1619_, ed. W. Foster, New Delhi, 1968, p. 185; See also _Purchas His Pilgrimes_, ed. Samuel Purchas, Vol. IV, Glasgow, p. 75

away in alleys and corners…the luxuriance of the groves all round makes it resemble a royal park rather than a city, and everyone acquired and purchased the plot of land which suited or pleased him best. Consequently there are no remarkable market-places or bazars, as there are in Lahore, Burhanpur, Ahmadabad or other cities, but the whole place is closely built over and inhabited, Hindus mingled with Moslems, the rich with the poor…”²³

By the time of Shahjahan with the building of a new suburb of Mumtazabad to the south of the tomb of Mumtaz Mahal the city is said to have been ‘at least twice as big as Ispahan’.²⁴

What then, was the Plan of the Mughal Agra as it developed under Akbar and Jahangir? We know that the students of town planning have put forward some ‘Models’ before us. One set of ‘Models’ put forward towns which could be identified as (a) European, (b) Islamic and (c) Hindu. But then at the heart of each is the place of worship, the Cathedral, the Jami’ Mosque or the temple. None of the authorities quoted above point out any feature of the city of Agra which might show it to be distinctly ‘Islamic’ or ‘Oriental’. There are on the other hands parallels drawn between it and other European cities.

The authors of Ancient Indian texts known as shilpa-śastras categorize the urban centres on the basis of their physical appearance and pattern. Thus we

²³ Francisco Pelsaert, *Jahangir’s India* or *The Remonstrantie of Francisco Pelsaert*, tr. by W.H. Moreland & P. Geyl, Delhi, 1972, pp. 1-2

have (a) circular, (b) crescent or half-moon, (c) cross, (d) square and / or (e) rectangular town-models.  

In each of these models, the citadel along with the public buildings and the main place of worship is places at the centre with roads from around leading towards it. The attention in all these models is drawn towards the ‘citadel’ which was the seat of political and administration power. Being the ‘centre’ of all authority, it was heavily fortified. The rest of the city was generally left un-fortified and defenceless. In most of the pre-Mughal towns we find that the ‘city’ or the portions inhabited by the masses grew fairly freely although following, by and large, the logic of caste and professional hierarchy: The priestly and warrior classes being closer to the seat of power or the main source of lively-hood, the water. The menial and labouring classes were thrown to the peripheral areas or districts which were most distant from the source of water, the river, lake or stream. We see this both at Tughluqabad in Delhi and the Vijayanagar capital at Hampi in Karnataka.

Further, Attilio Petruccioli, has tried to argue that during the Pre-Mughal period, if a city was to be built on a river bank, it was always to be on the right bank of the river. To build on the left bank was considered a taboo and an ill-omen. The pre-Mughal Indian towns were thus basically garrison towns, with

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26 See for example, Ibid.

civic populations living outside the fortified areas but settled in an hierarchical order reflecting their social divisions. In case of these towns being situated besides a source of water, say a river, they were generally populated on the right banks, as was the case with Lodi Agra.

Being inspired by the Timurid towns like Samarqand and Bukhara, the Mughal towns were different in nature than their predecessors of the Sultanate period. At Samarqand and Bukhara as well as towns like Balkh fortifications and defences surrounded not only the *shahristan*, the town and the citadel, but also the *rabaz*, the suburbs when the civic population generally lived. Further, the markets were generally located between these two distinct portions of the urban area.28 This feature would mark the close symbiotic relations between the political authority and the commercial classes during the Mughal period.

Although there were no ‘city walls’ around the city of Agra from the time of its inception under Akbar down to the beginning of the 18th century. We have seen that care to protect the civic population and the mercantile classes were taken by digging ditches and moats around the city.

Further, unlike the previous models, the Mughal towns did not necessarily have a centrally located citadel. The citadel at Agra, for example was located in a corner of the semi-circular plan and not at the centre (See Map I). This is true for a number of other Mughal cities as well: citadels or forts in

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cities like Surat, Cambay, Ahmadabad, Baroda and later on at Shahjahanabad were all located in a corner of the towns. The problem of security arising out of this peripheral location of the citadel was taken care of by locating it near some natural defence like a river, lake or precipice. Thus at Agra, the fort was located besides the river which provided it protection from any sudden attack or onslaught.

The Mughal towns like Agra represent a highly centralized basis. Their colossal hydraulic works for irrigation, the efficiently planned radial road networks, with their peripheral streets and bye-lanes and the presence of a large number of monumental gardens point towards the desire of the Mughal architects to redesign the urban landscape. We have already noted how Babur tried to redesign the landscape at Agra when he planned his buildings and gardens there. It was this endeavour of Babur which resulted in the creation of a large number of gardens, both on the right and left bank of the Yamuna at Agra. A look at the appended (Map I) would show the uninterrupted sequence of gardens which once lined the river and distinguished the Mughal city of Agra from its predecessor.

Further help in understanding the garden as an instrument of urban design is got from an old Map of Agra dating back to 1720’s ordered to be made by Sawai Jai Singh and preserved today at the City Palace Museum at Jaipur (Map IA).29 The Map, for example, depicts sixteen gardens on the left

29 This Map was first reproduced by Susan Gole, Indian Maps and Plans, New Delhi, 1989, pp. 200-201. It has been used by many others subsequently. The most recent scholar to use
bank of the river which include the Zahra Bagh, Moti Bagh, Buland Bagh, Mahtab Bagh and the Aram Bagh (the later Bagh-i Nur Afshan). This Map also depicts a large number of gardens, tombs and *havelis* of the nobles on the right bank of the river. It also depicts gardens located between the Taj Mahal and the Fort. Between the burning *ghats* and the Taj lies an extensive garden with a red sandstone structure towards the river. This is known as the Bagh Khan-i Alam. Yet another garden nearby is called Taliyar ka Baghicha, which according to Fuhrer was the garden of Mahabat Khan.\(^{30}\)

The garden was not only an instrument of redesigning the urban landscape but also an important tool for urban planning. A number of recent researches have tried to argue that the *Chahar bagh* or the Timurid garden with its four-quartered divisions was one of the major sources of Mughal town planning in India. In the hands of the Mughal architects the centrepetal symmetry of the *Chahar bagh*, its axes, joints and modules were turned architecturally into pavilions, *chabutaras*, a water fall, a *caravansarai*, and symmetrical streets. The grids and proportions of a garden were enlarged into the planning of a Mughal town. Like the *Chahar bagh* the town was divided into various distinct divisions revolving around a localised central structure on the one hand and aligned symmetrically with the actual centre.

A care in point may be, for instance, the Mumtazabad or the Tajganj area. Or for that matter, the individual noble’s houses vis-à-vis the palace and the peripheral areas. In its zone, the residence of the noble worked as a module on the larger grid around which the plan of that area rotated.

A glance of this Map of 1720 also goes to prove the assertion of Monserrate, Finch and others regarded the peculiar shape of the city. It also goes to prove the assertion of Pelsaert regarding the placement of the noble’s structures along the river. To quote Pelsaert:

“The breadth of the city is by no means so great as the length, because every one has tried to be close to the river bank, and consequently the water front is occupied by the costly palaces of all the famous lords, which make it appear gay and magnificent, and extend for a distance of 6 kos or 3 ½ Holland miles.”

Among some of the palaces mentioned by Pelsaert which were situated on the river bank were those of Bahadur Khan, Ibrah im Khan, Rustam Qandhari, Itiqad Khan, Wazir Khan, Baqar Khan and others.

The said Map depicts around nineteen such havelis or mansions some of which are identified as those belonging to Asalat Khan, Mahabat Khan, Hoshdar Khan, Azam Khan, Mughal Khan, Islam Khan, Khan-i Jahan Lodi,
Hafiz Khidmatgar, Asaf Khan, Shaista Khan, Jafar Khan, Wazir Khan, Muqim Khan, and Khalil Khan.\(^3^3\)

The Map also depicts around eight radial roods starting from various directions and converging towards the fort. On these one arterial rood winds its way from the fort to a city gate situated on the south-western corner of the town. The main imperial road however appears to be the one which emanates from the northern gate (Delhi *Darwaza*) of the Fort and opens into an octagonal bazar labelled as *Chahārṣūq* from the front of the Jami’ Masjid winds its way towards the north west. It is interesting to note that between the Jami’ Masjid and the gate of the city labelled *Chahārṣūq Darwaza*, the wide road is flanked by shops on both its sides. Another market is located on a road near the first road described towards the south-western corner of the town.

It also appears that sometime around 1720’s the city was surrounded with fortification walls, the south-eastern section of which (depicted in yellow) was still under construction. It is also interesting to note that within the outer walls towards the north and west that is the area around *Chahārṣūq*, there is a second but thinner screen wall which is again pierced by eight gateways. It was probably an area reserved for the higher echelons of the society.

The outer red sandstone and rubble wall portions of which survive till date had eight main gates apart from 25 smaller gateways. Around seven gates

\(^{33}\) For exact location of some of these mansions which survive, see Fuhrer, op. cit., II; Neville, *District Gazetteer of the United Provinces of Agra and Oudh*, 1905, III, pp. 217-18; Syed Ahmad Mahrarvi, *Muraqqa-i Akbarabad*, 1930. See also the Chapter on Noble’s houses below.
are seen in the portion which was still under construction. A look at the appended Map I depicting the surviving structures at Agra shows that many of these ‘city-gates’ of the outer and inner walls survive till date. In the outer boundary, starting from the river side in the north and proceeding anti-clockwise, the still extant city gates are the Purbi Gate, Tazian Gate, Kashmiri Gate, Delhi Gate (Plate 1.1), Alamganj Gate, Fateh Muhammad Gate, Changa Modi Gate (Plate 1.2), Fota Phatak, Gungam Gate, Kans Gate (Plate 1.3), Chhota Gwalior Gate, Ajmeri Gate, Bada Gwalior Gate, Amar Singh Gate, Dakhini Gate, Qalandar Gate and Lal Diwar Gate. Amongst these the Gates from Amar Singh Gate to Lal Diwar Gate are those which were part of the wall which was still under construction when the City Palace Museum Map of Agra was prepared.

The Gates from the inner city walls which still survive are (anti clockwise): Sadar Gate, Nim Gate, Chaharsu Gate and Nuri Gate. None of the gates from the south portions of the wall survives.

From the attributed names of these gates what becomes apparent is that these nomenclatures reflect (a) the directions towards which the roads lead from the city: for example Delhi Gate, Gwalior Gate and the Ajmeri Gate; (b) the directions of their location, e.g. Purbi Gate and Dakhini Gate; (c) the markets, both commodity or in the name of prominent traders or nobles, e.g. Alamganj, Chaharsu Gate; or (d) in the name of individuals, e.g., Fateh Muhammad Gate, Changa Modi Gate, Amar Singh Gate or Qalandar Gate.
Were the last categories of Gates located in or near the noble’s mansions bearing those names?

The areas all around within the city walls is marked by other structures most of which have not been located or identified. This was the main area of the city where the civic population resided. Yet the city does not appear to be confined within the fortification walls, for a large number of structures can be discerned even beyond it. Though not shown on this map, the area of Sikandara was an important suburb which had existed since the very beginnings of the city.

Between the Octagonal Chaharsūq bazar and the eastern gate of the Jami’ Masjid is depicted the octagonal shaped Badshāhi Chowk.

Further information on the city planning and architectural components of the town at Agra is thrown by a versified bardic account of the city which was composed by a Rajasthani poet around 1720’s. This versified panygeric of the city known as ‘Agra ri Gajal’ was composed by Laxmi Chand in 1722-23.³⁴ Read along with the Map of Agra which was drawn around the same time, this short panygeric throws much light on the urban fabric of Agra.

Thus according to this gajal (ghazal, versified praise), there was a big market located in the Badshahi Chowk, where all kinds of goods were


I am thankful to my supervisor Dr. S. Ali Nadeem Rezavi for providing me a copy of the same from his personal collection. This verified ode was published by Agar Chand Nohta in Bhartiya Sahitya, Year 4, no. 3, July 1959, pp. 19-25. where in it is stated to have been first published by Muni Kanti Sagar in 1948 for the Hindi translation see B. L. Bhadani, “Agra Ki Ghazal”, Madhya Kalin Bharat, no. 4, pp. 162-66.
available. Beyond this grand bazar were other markets specializing in cloth, grain and sweat meat. The Muhallas of Jain merchants and Hindu traders were located nearby.\(^35\)

The Imperial mint was located near the Badshahi Chowk at the Pearl market.

Although not mentioned in the gajal and the Map, a large ferry was located between the fort and the Taj Mahal.

According to Pelsaert, the area on the left bank of Jamuna river was named Sikandara. It was well built and populated “but chiefly inhabited by banian (banya) merchants” and full of merchandise from far flung area.\(^36\) However according to Laxmi Chand, the area, as against the main city, which by this time was known as Akbarabad, was known as Agra.\(^37\)

From the above discussion it would be apparent that the Mughal town of Agra was a well laid out township: the citadel or the fort was surrounded all around with beautiful gardens and well layed out mansions of the nobles. Beyond the residential structures of nobility and gardens were the localities of the mercantile classes and markets. The commercial area, along with the central mosque and the citadel was initially protected with ditches and then subsequently by fortifications. The lesser-important classes of the merchants and the civilian population too were surrounded and protected by the same ditches and battlements. Most of the important roads led to the centrally located

\(^{35}\) For details of the markets mentioned in this poem see the Chapter on Bazars below.

\(^{36}\) Pelseart, 4

\(^{37}\) Laxmi Chand, Agra ri Gajal, op. cit.
administrative centre and a number of them were lived with shops or residences of various kinds of people. The left bank of the river was sparsely populated but instead was lived with pretty gardens and tombs of the nobility. However, writings of European travellers have left behind an impression that Agra’s settlement pattern followed no plan. But then probably these comments were due to Agra being a very populous city. According to Manrique, Agra was a have to ‘six hundred and sixty thousand excluding foreigners who after filling ninety caravansarais spread out into private houses’.  

Mughal Agra, nevertheless, as we have seen above was, a city based on a concept. It was a ‘river front garden city’, the planning and development of which, instead of chaos, reflects a conscious effort by the powers that be, to protect the commercial importance of the town. It was an endeavour to bring order into the visual chaos.

39 See Ebba Koch, The Complete Taj Mahal, op. cit., p. 29