Chapter- IV
Residential Structures at Agra
CHAPTER 4

RESIDENTIAL STRUCTURES AT AGRA

With the victory of Babur at the battle of Khanwa down to the reign of Shahjahan Agra remained the nerve centre of the Mughal Empire. Throughout this period the city witnessed hectic building activity, a fact time and again testified by our sources. There was a proliferation of the residential population, as a result of which all kinds of people, nobles and merchants, professional and wage earners, craftsmen and artisans, built their mansions and houses. As a result of this, within a short period the city reportedly expanded ‘over three times’; and around 1626 came to cover an area of about 60 square kilometres.¹ Its population increased from 5,00,000 in 1609 to 8,00,000 in 1666 or an increase of around sixty percent.²

The process of constructing residential structures by the Mughal Nobility appears to have started in 1526 when Babur informs us that nobles like Mir Khalifa, Shaikh Zain Khawafi Yunus: ‘Ali and ‘Whoever got land on that other (i.e. eastern) bank of the river’ got their residential gardens constructed.³ This tradition of building attractive and imposing residential

¹ Francisco Pelsaert, Jahangir’s India or The Remonstrantie of Francisco Pelsaert, tr. by W.H. Moreland & P. Geyl, Delhi, 1972, p. 2
structures—*manāzil, imārat* and *haveli* at Agra continued during the reign of Akbar. Thus we hear of the imposing residential structures of Zain Khan Koka, Shaikh Farid Bukhari, Muhammad Khan Niyazi, Sadiq Muhammad Khan, Shah Quli Khan Mahram, Mir Ma’sum Bhakkari being constructed in Agra.⁴ From a reference in *Zakhirat-ul Khawanīn* it appears that Shaikh Abul Fazl had a complex of residential structures (*manāzil-i dilkusha*, the ‘pleasant houses’) at Agra which were later attached to the *havelis* of Itimad-ud Daula’s family.⁵

Zain Khan Koka’s mansion appears to have been quite commodious. He reportedly once entertained Akbar therein. It contained a very large and spacious podium which faced three water tanks so large as to accommodate one thousand dancing girls and singers (*ahl-i tawaif*) into them.⁶

It appears that from the time of Babur, most of the grandees chose the riverfront as the site of their residences. But it also is true that within this elite group no ethnic religious or sectarian segregation was followed. The house of an Iranian could be next to that of a Rajput, a Hindu next to a Muslim, a Shia next to a Sunni. This fact is distinctly brought out in a passage of Pelsaert

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⁵ Ibid., I, p. 75
⁶ Ibid, I, pp. 123-24. The dancing girls were made to dip in the three tanks, one of which was filled with ‘rose water of yazd’, the other with saffron color and the third with perfumed water. When the dancing girls emerged from these tanks, their spotlessly white tunics were coloured and they were drenched with fragrance which was then spinkled through their movements all over.
where he goes on to ‘record the chief of these Palaces (noble’s houses) in order’ of sequence on the right bank of the river on both sides of the fort.⁷

To the north of the fort he mentions the mansions of twenty one nobles. (see Map VI).

To quote:


⁷ Pelsaert, op. cit., pp. 2-3
⁸ Ibid, pp. 2-4; For number given in parenthesis see Map VI
A similar list of noble’s and their houses is provided by De Laet. The only difference between the two lists is the inclusion of the names of ‘Prince Sultan Khrom (Khurram) and ‘Chan Sian leader of 5000’ (Khan Jahan Lodi?) between those of Asaf Khan and Khwaja Abul Hasan.

Some of there above mentioned persons were well-known personalities of Jahangir’s reign; others are difficult to trace. Bahadur Khan possibly was Abul Bey Uzbek Bahadur Khan, a Turani who had been the governor of Qandhar and then transferred to sarkar Chandwar in the vicinity of Agra at the time of his death. Probably it was during his posting near Agra that he had his mansion built. Raja Bhoj of Pelsaert was Rai Bhoj, the father of Rai Ratan Hada, the watandar of Bundi. Both the father and the son were amongst the few Rajput chieftains of Akbar’s period who had not forged a maintained alliance with the Mughals, for which they were highly respected. Ibrahim Khan of Pelsaert and De Laet was probably Fathjung Khan Ibrahim Khan, the maternal uncle of Asaf Khan. But then he was, according to Shaikh Farid Bhakkari, initially was posted in Gujarat and had held the jagirs of Jais and Amethi. He had also held the charge of Bengal and Orissa during his career. He held the high mansab of 5000 zat but then according to Pelsaert, Ibrahim Khan was a master of only 3000 horse. Was he then a different noble?

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10 *Zakhiratl Khawanîn*, op. cit., II, p. 315
11 Ibid., II, p. 295
Similarly the identity of Khwaja Bansi is not clear. However we do hear of Khwaja Jahan Kabuli Bakhshi who ‘whenever His Majesty (Jahangir) went towards Janger and Rupbas for hunting and sightseeing, he would leave Khwaja Jahan in charge of Akbarabad and its government.’\(^{13}\) It is quite important to note that writing about him Shaikh Farid Bhakkari very significantly mentions about him:

> “He was the first to start the construction of stately buildings in Akbarabad…”\(^{14}\)

All the other names mentioned by Pelsaert and De Laet owning riverfront mansions were well-known and do not need any introduction, except perhaps the name of Gulzar Begum, ‘this kings mother’ by Pelsaert followed by De Laet. If this is correct then we do get the name of Jahangir’s mother and also an indication as to where she resided in Agra.

Pelsaert then goes on to mention the mansions of the nobles which were situated on the other side of the imperial fort. His list for this side included nine mansions, the last of which is not mentioned in the identical list of De Laet:\(^{15}\)


\(^{13}\) Zakhiratl Khawanîn, op. cit., II, p. 244

\(^{14}\) Ibid.

\(^{15}\) De Laet, op. cit., pp. 40-41

\(^{16}\) Pelsaert, op. cit., p. 4
Mirza Abdullah, we know was the fourth son of Khan-i Azam and was known by his title Inayat Khan. Mirza Khurram was his younger brother and was known to have founded a suburb (pura) named after himself in Burhanpur where he was ultimately buried.

Agha Nur between 1616-17 was the kotwal of Agra, and in 1617 he had been in charge of Nauroz celebrations. We are not sure who is meant by Jahan Khan. De Laet notes his name as “Zehenna Khan leader of 2000”. According to J. S. Hoyland what is meant is Zain Khan Koka, the famous noble of Akbar’s period. But we know that Zain Khan Koka at the time of his death in 1601-2 held the high mansab of 5000/5000 and not “2000 horse”. Probably Pelsaert is mentioning Jahangir Quli Beg Turkman Jan Sipur Khan, a holder of 2000/2000 who is being mentioned by Jahangir in his memoirs. Raja Bet Singh could be Raja Bhao Singh who held the rank of 5000/3000 when he died in 1620-21. Raja Madho Singh was the son of Raja Basu who was bestowed the title of Raja by Jahangir in 1622-23. Raja Basu had joined service in

18 Ibid, II, p. 327
20 Ibid, p. 356
21 De Laet, op. cit., p. 41
22 Pelsaert, op. cit., p. 40, note, 53
23 Ma’asir-ul Umara, op. cit., II, pp. 362-70
24 Tuzuk-i Jahangir, op. cit., p. 344
25 Tuzuk, op. cit., p. 337
26 Ibid, p. 376
1605-6 and had died in 1613-14. Raja Man Singh whom Pelsaert mentions as the holder of ‘5000 horse’ in fact enjoyed the rank of 7000/7000 when he died in 1614-15.

Apart from these, there were a large number of other noble’s mansions which have been mentioned in our sources. For example Khwaja Waisi, an Iranian noble who was the *diwan* of Sultan Parvaiz had built his *haveli* on the banks of the river which had been appreciated by one and all. The mansion of Raja Raisal Darbari was also at Agra. His neighbours were Shaikh Farid Bhakari, the author of *Zakhirat-ul Khawanin*, and Miyān Rup Khawās, a *chela* of Jahangir. Whether these *havelis* were also on the riverfront, we are not informed. From the way Shaikh Farid gives this information, it appears that probably these buildings were somewhere within the city away from the river. Another of their neighbours was Kesudas, a Maru Rajput who had also constructed ‘a beautiful *manzil* near (that of) Raisal Darbari’.

It was during the reign of Jahangir that a new pattern for these mansions was introduced in Agra. In this regard we have already mentioned the ‘stately’ mansion of Khwaja Jahan Kabuli. Mentioning the innovators who introduced the new style Shaikh Farid Bhakkari mentioned:

> “The first ones who laid the foundation of mansions of a new pattern in Akbarabad are three: Khwaja Jahan Kabuli the *bakhshi*, Khwaja Waisi and Itiqād Khan [Mirza Shapur, son of Itimad ud Daulah]. Of these, the most

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27 *Tuzuk*, op. cit., p. 123; for is joining service see ibid, p. 23
28 Ibid, p. 130
29 *Zakhiratul Khawanīn*, II, p. 377
30 Ibid, II, p. 393
31 Ibid, II, p. 381
pleasing mansion with unique (lit. unrepeated) design was that last one. Afterwards, thousand mansions of new type were built by Amirs…”

The *haveli* of Itiqad Khan Mirza Shapur was presented to Shahjahan who is said to have immensely admired it. Later in his 16th Regnal Year (i.e. 1643) Shahjahan bestowed it upon Ali Mardan Khan who himself was a great architect. Praising the house of Itiqad Khan and mentioning the mansion of Itimad ud Daula Jahangir in his memoirs mentions:

“I went back to the city in a boat. As the house of Itimad ud Daulah was on the bank of the river Jun (Yamuna), I alighted there until the end of the next day. Having accepted what pleased me of his offerings, I went towards the palace; Itiqad Khan’s house was also on the bank of the river Jun. At his request I disembarked there with the ladies, and walked around the houses he had lately built there. This delightful place please me greatly…”

Hakim Alimuddin Wazir Khan, Khan-i-Dauran Nasri Khan and Kartalab Khan are some others who are said to have constructed their mansions. Bebadal Khan and Purdil Khan constructed ‘excellent *manāzil* (mansions) near the Dhobighat Gate of Akbarabad’ during the reign of Shahjahan.

It appears that a substantial part of their wealth was spent by the nobility on their mansions. Thus according to Pelsaert:

“Their (nobles) *mahals* are adorned internally with lascivious sensuality, wanton and reckless festivity, superfluous pomp….they have three or four wives ……Each wife has separate apartments for herself and her slaves, of whom there may be 10, or 20, or 100.”

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33 *Ma’asirul Umara*, op. cit, I, p. 182
34 *Zakhiratul Khawanin*, III, p. 28
35 Tuzuk, op.cit. p. 121-22
36 *Zakhiratul Khawanin*, III, p. 130
37 Pelsaert, pp. 2-3
From their description it appears that all these houses of nobles generally had a garden and a tank and were surrounded by enclosure walls. In fact Bernier went on to explain that:

“they consider that a house to be greatly admired ought to be situated in the middle of a large flower garden and should have four large Diwan apartments raised to the height of a man from the ground and exposed to the four winds, so that the coolness may be felt from any quarter.”

Describing the lavish construction of noble’s house Monserrate had mentioned as early as 1580’s:

“... the houses are purposely built without windows on account of the filth of the streets. None the less the rich adorn the roofs and arched ceilings of their houses with carvings and paintings: Plant ornamental gardens in their courtyards: make tanks and fish-ponds, which are lined with tiles of various colours: construct artificial springs and fountains, which fling showers of water far into the air: and where of are many goodly houses of the nobility, pleasantly overlooking Gemini…”

A typical noble’s mansion had a ground plan which rotated around a centralized courtyard. Further, the structure was internally divided into two at least two distinct portions: a mardāna khāna (male quarters) and a shielded zanankhāna (female quarters). Each portion would have its own courtyard.

The main door of the male quarters would be an imposing gateway opening into an ante-room (deorhi) which would in turn open into the first courtyard, surrounded with a peristyle (aiwan) and a series of porticos (dalans)

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38 Ibid, p. 66; Bernier, op.cit, p. 247
39 Bernier, op. cit, p. 247
40 Monserrate, op. cit., p. 219
and chambers. The service structures like the kitchen and water store would be afflicted with the inner female quarters.\textsuperscript{41}

The diwankhāna or reception house was invariably in the male section and would be well decorated with brocade curtains, flower carpets and hangings.\textsuperscript{42} Chinese porcelain was also used to decorate the interiors.\textsuperscript{43} The personal library, kitabkhana, would also be a part of the male quarters. It also appears that the houses of the aristocracy at Agra were three or four storeys in height.\textsuperscript{44} Sometimes these mansions could boast of a large number of chowks: The mansion of Asaf Khan at Agra, we are informed, had fifty two chowks and many bazars within its limits.\textsuperscript{45}

But then in cities like Agra intermixed with these large mansions were immense smaller ones. We have already cited Pelsaert that Agra was a city where the poor lived next to a noble.\textsuperscript{46} William Finch, writing about Agra also mentions that:

\textsuperscript{41} For a detailed study of urban residential structures in the Mughal Empire, see S. Ali Nadeem Rezavi, \textit{Urban Middle Classes in Mughal India}, Ph. D. thesis, AMU, Aligarh, 2006, pp. 337-68
\textsuperscript{42} Pelsaert, p. 67
\textsuperscript{43} Bernier, p. 247-48
\textsuperscript{44} Tuzuk, op. cit., p. 2; Sujan Rai Bhandari, \textit{Khulasat ut Tawarikh}, tr. J. N. Sarkar, 1901, p. 112
\textsuperscript{45} Manik Chand, \textit{Ahwal}, op. cit., p. 41; see also H. K Naqvi, \textit{Urban Centres and Industries in Upper India}, Bombay, 1968, p. 78
\textsuperscript{46} For Delhi, see Bernier, op. cit. p. 246
“The noble men’s houses and merchants built with brick and stone, flat roofed; the common sort, of mudde walls, covered with thatch, which cause often terrible fires…”

According to Bernier, at Agra, the merchant houses were ‘tolerably good’ in four of fire streets where trade was “the principle occupation”. They were, like in the other towns, built of brick and stone and had a flat terraced roof. Although these residential structures of the ‘banyas’ and ‘handicraftsmen’. According to Finch, were not only far and high, but had carved windows and doors. However these buildings at Agra (as well as in Delhi) were lower than those at Lahore. In 1610 Finch found the city inhabited mostly with merchants and handicraftsmen living in ‘faire and high’ brick structures having ‘carved windows and doors’. Manucci however found ‘lofty’ buildings, ‘some having eight storeys’.  

Unfortunately none of the mercantile and common man’s residential structures survive. A number of dilapidated remains, sections and parts of some the riverfront havelis are still extant. They can be identified to some extent through their placement in the Jaipur City Palace Map of 1720s (Map IA). The said map depicts nine havelis beyond the fort [i.e 18-27 on the map] and eleven

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47 Finch, op. cit., p. 185; See also Purchase His Pilgrims, ed. Samuel Purchas, vol. IV, Glasgow, p. 75
48 Bernier, op. cit., p. 285
49 Finch, op. cit., p. 75
50 Finch, op. cit., p. 75
51 Tavernier, op. cit., I, p. 77; Monserrate, op. cit., p. 160
52 Finch, op. cit., p. 52
53 Manucci, II, p. 173
havelis to the north and the fort (i.e. 29-41 on the said map). According to the labels in devanagiri these mansions were:\(^{54}\)

1. \textit{Haveli} Khan-i Dauran [no. 18]
2. \textit{Haveli} Agha Khan [? Agha Noor] [no. 19]
3. \textit{Haveli} Khan-i Alam [no. 21]
5. \textit{Haveli} Mahabat Khan [no. 23]
6. \textit{Haveli} Hoshdar Khan [no. 24]
7. \textit{Haveli} Azam Khan [no. 25]
8. \textit{Haveli} Mughal Khan [no. 26]
9. \textit{Haveli} Islam Khan [no. 27]
10. \textit{Haveli} Dara Shukoh [no. 29]
11. \textit{Haveli} Khan-i Jahan Lodi [no. 30]
12. \textit{Haveli} Hafiz Khidmatgar [no. 31]
13. \textit{Haveli} Asaf Khan [no. 32]
14. \textit{Haveli} Alamgir [no. 33 \textbf{Plate 4.1}]
15. \textit{Haveli} Alamgir [no. 34]
17. \textit{Haveli} Jafar Khan
18. \textit{Haveli} Wazir Khan
19. \textit{Haveli} Muqim Khan
20. \textit{Haveli} Khalil Khan

\(^{54}\) For a detailed analysis of these mansions of their surviving ruins see Ebba Koch, \textit{The Complete Taj}, op. cit., pp. 30-81.
Some of the names attribute to in this list tally with the lists of Pelsaert and De Laet. Thus the *havelis* of Agha Noor Khwajasara, Khan-i Alam, Wazir Khan, Khan-i Jahan Lodi and Mahabat Khan are found in all the three lists. The 1720’s list shows two enclosures [no. 13, 14] as *havelis* of Aurangzeb: Was it that the *havelis* of Prince Khurram and Itimad ud Daulah [nos. 17 & 18 on the list of Pelsaert & De Laet] were later on taken up by Aurangzeb. After all one was the mansion of his father, the other his maternal grandfather.

An exploration of the right bank of the river Jamuna reveals the ruins of many of these *havelis* depicted on the Jaipur city Palace map.

The river front red sandstone wall of the *haveli* of the Khan-i Dauran along with its prominent western *burj* still survives (Plate 4.2). The site is now enclosed and is in private ownership and till sometimes earlier was the site of a tannery.

The river site plinth and the boundary of the *haveli* of Agha Noor is still visible and is presently called Dassahra Ghāt. Both these structures flank the Taj Mahal towards the east. Immediately towards the west of the Taj Mahal survive the ruins of the *haveli* of Khan-i Alam within his garden.

To the east of the modern *Shamshān ghāt* (cremation grounds) and at the place where a temple, Kala Bhairon today stands are the surviving remains of the mansion of Asalat Khan. The traces of other mansions on this side of Agra fort have completely disappeared. The sites are now taken up by the lands which are now being developed by the ADA and the government of VP as the
‘Taj Corridor’. Till same decades ago the haveli of Islam Khan constructed of red sand stone was surviving.\textsuperscript{55}

Beyond the Red fort, along the modern Yamuna road survives a part of the haveli of Aurangzeb. Presently known as ‘Tara Niwas’ or Mubarak Manzil (among the local Muslims) it basically survives as a largely renovated structure comprising a pillared hall with octagonal bastions surmounted with cupolas in its four corners. It comprises of Shahjahani columns and multi-foliated arches.\textsuperscript{56}

The remains of the only other haveli which survive till date are those of Wazir Khan (Plate 4.3). It is various nomenclated as ‘Sheron Wali Kothi’ or as the ‘Library of Dara Shukoh’. The prominent remains of this mansion become visible behind the modern shops as soon as one turns on the Yamuna road from the side of the British period ‘Water-Works’. It is marked by prominent octagonal bastions (\textit{musamman burj}) on its corners which are four-storeys high and pierced with arched and panneled openings on each side.

Some noble’s mansions survive within the city as well. Mention may be made of a mansion, now known as Kālā-Mahal (probably a corruption of Kalān (large) Mahal) situated in Pipal Mandi. It is attributed to Raja Gaj Singh, the son of Raja Suraj Singh of Jodhpur who lived during the reign of

\textsuperscript{55}Cunningham, \textit{Archaeological Survey of India, Report (1871-72)}, Vol. VI, P. 200; See also Saeed Ahmad Marahravi, \textit{Muraqqa-i Akbarabad}, Agra, 1931, p. 216

\textsuperscript{56}See Ebba Koch, \textit{The Complete Taj}, op. cit., p. 75
There are a number of other structures which once were part of Mughal *havelis* still surviving in the old *bazars*, lanes and bye-lanes of Agra. But now it is difficult to identify them or their antiquity.

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57 Saeed Ahmad Marahravi, op. cit., p. 215; See also *UP District Gazetteers, Agra*, ed. E. B. Joshi, 1965, p. 360
Map VI
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Key to Residential Structures mentioned by Pelsaert & De Laet

1. *Haveli* [Abul Bey Uzbek] Bahadur Khan
3. *Haveli* [Fathjung] Ibrahim Khan (?)
4. *Haveli* [Mirza] Rustam Kandahari
5. *Haveli* Raja Kishan Das
7. *Haveli* Shahzadi Khanam d/o Jahangir
8. *Haveli* Gulzar Begum m/o Jahangir
9. *Haveli* Khwaja Muhammad Tahir
10. *Haveli* Khwaja Bansi [Bakshi (?)]
12. *Suhāgpura*
13. *Haveli* Itibar Khan Khwajasara
14. *Haveli* Baqir Khan
15. *Haveli* Mirza Abu Saeed
16. *Haveli* Asaf Khan
17. *Haveli* Itimad ud Daula
18. *Haveli* Sultan Khurram
20. *Haveli* Khwaja Abul Hasan
21. *Haveli* Ruqaiya Sultan Begum
22. *Haveli* Mirza Abdullah s/o Khan-i Azam
23. *Haveli* Agha Noor
24. *Haveli* Jahan Khan (?)
25. *Haveli* Mirza Khurram s/o Khan-i Azam
26. *Haveli* Mahabat Khan
27. *Haveli* Khan-i Alam
28. *Haveli* Raja Bet [Bhao?] Singh
29. *Haveli* Raja Man Singh
30. *Haveli* Raja Madho Singh