Chapter- VII
The Religious Structures at Agra
CHAPTER 7

THE RELIGIOUS STRUCTURES AT AGRA

No urban settlement could be considered complete without its share of buildings of religious nature: mosques, temples, tombs and cemeteries were an essential part of any medieval township.

As has been pointed out in the first chapter that some historians of urban history have in fact categorized the towns on the basis of the position enjoyed by the most prominent place of worship in the urban milieu: An Islamic town would thus be a town where, amongst other factors, the main congregational mosque would be situated in the core area along with the citadel and the palace of the royalty.

Even a cursory look at the map of Mughal Agra (see Maps I, IA, and Map IX) would demonstrate that the main mosque, the Jami’ Masjid, was located almost in the middle of the plan in the area fronting the main entrance gate of the Mughal Fort. Laxmi Chand, while composing his ode to Agra in 1722-23 also points out to the prominent position of the Imperial mosque, where, according to him there was ‘the good tradition’ of holding frequent prayers.

We also know that from the very early days of Islam, the Mosque was considered as the centre of political, religious and social authority. Unless proclaimed from the pulpit of the mosque (the khutba) in a congregation
(generally weekly Friday prayers) no person would be presumed to the king or the emperor.

One of the first buildings to be constructed in North India by the early Turkish rulers was thus the Jami’ Masjid at the site of the palace of vanquished: the Quwwat-ul Islam mosque at Qila Rai Pithor.

When Babur won against Sultan Ibrahim Lodi at Panipat, the first structure to be constructed, probably only as a thanks giving but also as a proclamation of his rule was the Kabuli Bagh Mosque near the battle field.¹

It is however interesting to note that when Babur decided to make Agra his capital and build some structures, there is not mention of the construction of any mosque there. We have cited the Baburnama to show that what was constructed was a garden, the Hasht Bihist, a step well and a hammam. In fact Babur refers to no mosque having been built by him or anyone else at Agra. A number of gardens were laid out by him and his nobles but no religious edifice is credited to have been built by him.

Thus at the time when the foundations of the Mughal City of Agra were laid by Babur it probably was visualized as a secular town with no pre-dominant or prominent mosque as its back drop.

¹ See Ebba Koch, Outlines of Mughal Architecture, op. cit. p. 38.
It is also interesting to note that although more than a dozen Medieval mosques survive, none of them date from a period before Akbar. The only mosque (Plan 7.1) dateable to Humayun’s reign is situated in the area situated on the left bank of the river, which proper speaking was not the part of the main city, but its suburb. We have already seen that the concern area was nomenclated as Sikandara by Pelsaert (as against the city: Agra) and the *pura* of Agra (as against the *shahr Akbarabad*) by Laxmi Chand.²

The area where this mosque is presently located is known as *Kachhpura*. Thus the mosque is also popularly known as the *Kachhpur Mosque*.

According to one of its two inscriptions, this mosque was constructed under ‘the powerful decree and command of Muhammad Humayun’ in the year 937AH/1530 AD.³ Thus its construction appears to have taken place soon after the death of Babur and the accession of Humayun to the throne. Then according to the second inscription, the building was ‘completed by the labours of this *Khawāfī’⁴.*

Five mosques, viz, The Akbari Masjid, Khoja Masjid, Masjid of Qasim Khan, Kalan Masjid and the *masjid-i Mukhannisan* (the Eunuch’s Mosque) were constructed during the reign of Akbar. All the three Akbar’s mosques are located

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² See Pelsaert, op. cit., p. 4; B. L. Bhadani, op. cit., p. 166
⁴ Ibid.
to the north-west of the *Jami’ Masjid* in the heart of the Imperial city. Further, all three of them lie in the area which is shown screened with walls in the 1720’s Map (see Map IA & Map X). This was the area where, according to the Ode of Laxmi Chand the great markets and residential areas were located. However Map IA (Jaipur City Palace Map of Agra) depicts only one of them (see Map IA). It is probably the *Kalān* (great) Mosque which is depicted.

The somewhat smaller *Akbari Masjid* (Plan 7.2) is located south-east of *Kalan Masjid* and is situated in a market traditionally known as *Kinārī Bazar* (Plate 7.1). It is, according to the estimates of Cunningham 84.6 feet in length and 25 feet in breadth,\(^5\) and is surmounted by a single dome (Plate 7.2). As other Akbari buildings, this mosque is also built of the locally available red sand stone (Plate 7.3).

The small *Khoja Masjid* in *Loha Mandi*, somewhat to the south-west of the above mentioned mosques also dates to Akbar’s period. According to both Abul Fazl and Baduani this mosque was built by Khwaja Muinuddin Farrān Khudi.\(^6\)

The author of *Ma’asir-ul Umara* informs us that Qasim Khan ordered the construction of a *Jami’ Masjid* in the *Bazār-i Atka Khan*.\(^7\)

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\(^5\) Cunningham, *ASIAR*, (1871-72), PP. 119-20

\(^6\) *Ain-i Akbari*, op. cit., pp. 480 and 610; *Badauni*, op. cit., III, pp. 156-57

\(^7\) Shahnawaz Khan, *Ma’asir-ul Umara*, op. cit., III, pt.i, pp. 81-82
The Masjid-i Mukhannisan (the Eunuch’s Mosque) which is 51 feet by 19.9 feet and comprises of an octagonal bastion on each of its corners. The mosque is surmounted with three domes, a large central dome flanked by two smaller ones. Cunningham considered this mosque as the most beautiful mosque at Agra. Like its contemporary Khoja Masjid, it is situated in the Loha Mandi area.⁸

The Kalān Masjid, (Plan 7.3) now popularly as the Kali Masjid, (Plate 7.4) located near the Akbari Masjid, was built by Nawab Muzaffar Khan (d. 1580). Referring to this mosque as the ‘chief mosque’ of Agra, Shah Nawaz Khan notes:

“The Masjid Jami’ of Agra near katra Miyān Rafiq was built by Muzaffar Khan.”⁹

During the reign of Jahangir, Mu’tamad Khan built a mosque (Plan 7.4 and Plate 7.5) which now stands in the Kashmiri Bazar, at a little distance to the north-east of the Kalan Masjid. This 53.6×20 feet mosque is against constructed with the help of red sand stones. It comprises of three domes (Plate 7.6) and an octagonal tower (Plate 7.7) at each front and corner.¹⁰

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⁸ Cunningham, ASIAR, (1871-72), p. 178-79
⁹ Shahnawaz Khan, op. cit., III, p.227
¹⁰ Cunningham, ASIAR 1871-72), PP. 136-37; See also S. M. Latif, op. cit., p. 197
A number of mosques survive till date from the reign of Shahjahan. The *Jami’ Masjid* of Agra measuring 335’ 7” by 282’ 3” was built by Jahanara Begum in 1648.\(^\text{11}\)

Four mosques, one in each of the four *katras* of *Mumtazabad* were also constructed during the reign of Shahjahan. *Masjid Moti Bagh* (*Plan 7.5*) and *Nawab* Lashkar Khan’s Mosque were also constructed during the reign of Shahjahan. The mosque of *Moti Bagh* (*Plate 7.8*) is located east of the tomb of I’timad-ud Daulah on the east bank of the river in the area which was a suburb of the Mughal city. Lashkar Khan’s mosque (*Plate 7.9*) on the other hand is located in the main city area, west of the Jahanar’s Mosque.

Aurangzeb’s reign is represented by the ‘*Alamgiri Masjid*’ (*Plate 7.10*) which was situated in the north-western corner of the city. The area where this mosque situated is known as Alamganj. During the nineteenth century it was converted into the Collector’s Office. According to an inscription seen by Latif, it was constructed in 1671 at a time when Aurangzeb was engaged in a war with Shivaji.\(^\text{12}\)

The Second type of religious structures which we encountered at Agra are the Tombs (See *Map X*).


\(^{12}\) Latif, *Agra*, op. cit, pp. 200-02
A perusal of Map X reveals that although the tombs circled the city from all around, there were however three major areas which can be considered as the ‘necro-polis’ of the Mughals at Agra: (a) the area on the left bank of the river; (b) the Sikandara or the area around the tomb of Akbar; (Plate 7.11) and (c) the Mumtazabad.

Starting from the right bank of the river in the north and moving anti-clockwise the tombs at Agra were/are:

1. Chhatri Raja Jaswant Singh (Plan 7.6 & Plate 7.12)
2. Tomb of Jafar Khan (Plate 7.13)
3. Tomb of Shaista Khan (Plate 7.14)
4. Tomb of Qandhari Begum
5. Tomb of Qazi Nurullah Shustari
6. Tomb of Ladli Begum
7. Tomb of Sadiq Khan
8. Tomb of Salabat Khan
9. Tomb of Kafur
10. Tomb of Akbar
11. Tomb of Mariam uz Zamani (Plan 7.7)
12. ‘Gumbad Do-Manzila’ (un-identified Tomb) (Plate 7.15)

13. ‘Dhakri ka Mahal’ (Plate 7.16)

14. Barah Khamba (Plate 7.17)

15. Tomb of ‘Jodhbai’

16. Tomb of Kamal Khan

17. Tomb of Firuz Khan

18. Tomb of Pahalwān

19. Tomb of Mohabat Khan’s daughter

20. Tomb of Diwanji Begum

21. Tomb of Mumtaz Mahal

22. Tomb of Fatehpur Begum

23. Tomb of Shah Jalal Bukhari

24. Tomb of Shah Ahmad Bukhari

25. Tomb of Itmad ud Daulah

26. Tomb of Sultan Parvez (Plate 7.18)

27. Tomb of Afzal Khan (Plan 7.8)
The tomb of Lashkar Khan, on the other hand happens to be located within the city limits near his mosque.

The first necropolis which developed at Agra appears to the suburbs of Sikandara in the north-west of Agra. As we have mentioned elsewhere, this was the area where most of the Lodi ruins survive till date. It is also the area near which is located Baburpur. According to Carlylle, the Tomb of Kafur and the statue of the stone horse, the now extinct ‘Tomb of Itibar Khan and the Guru Ka Tal in its vicinity’ were actually Lodi remains.\(^{13}\) With the erection of the Tomb of Akbar nearby the area started developing as a necropolis. A number of small unknown graves and tombs abound in its vicinity. The tomb of Maryam Zamani (Plate 7.19) located almost in front across the modern road also appears to have belonged to the reign of Akbar or the early years of Jahangir. Nearby are situated two tombs belonging to the subsequent reigns.

The Tomb of ‘Sadiq Khan’ (Plate 7.20) is supposed to be the resting place of the son in law of Itimad ud Daulah who was Mir Bakshi in 1622 and died in 1633. His son built his tomb between 1633-35. Nearby is the tomb of ‘Salabat’ Khan. However on the basis of Architectural design it can be safely asserted that both these tombs are structures which were built during the reign of Jahangir and not Shahjahan.\(^{14}\)

\(^{13}\) ASIR (1871-72), iv, P. 183-84

\(^{14}\) See for this Ebba Koch, *Mughal Architecture*, pp. 82-83
The second cluster of tombs is in the area which Pelsaert called ‘Sikandara’ in the east and Laxmi Chand nomenclaed as ‘pura Agra’. Here we have important tombs like those of Afzal Khan (Plate 7.21) (popularly known as ‘Chini ka Rauza’), Sultan Parvez, Itimad ud Daulah and his wife.

The third cluster is that which grew around the tomb of Mumtaz Mahal. Here we find the resting places of Jalal Khan Bukhari, Shah Ahmad Bukhari, Fatehpuri Begum, Diwanji Begum, and the daughter of Mahabat Khan.

The other tombs, now appearing haphazard, were in fact located on various roads leading out of the city. If the Tomb of Firuz Khan (Plate 7.22 & Plate 7.23) was located on Agra-Gwalior road then the tomb of Itimad Khan (not on the Map) is located on the Agra-Allahabad road. Similarly the so-called Tomb of Jodhbai is said to have been located on the road connecting Agra with Sikri. The present Agra-Sikri road however passes it at a distance.

The location of these religious structures, both mosques and tombs thus mark for us the boundaries of the Mughal city. If the mosques are generally located in ‘inhabited areas’ and busy markets where people could easily go to pray, the tombs and chhatris marked the outer and peripheral areas of the Mughal town. It was seldom that a tomb was situated within the cities. With the exception of the Tomb of Lashkar Khan no other tomb is located within the city limits.
The size of the mosques would also indicate the level of population in the various quarters where they were built. Thus even without the help of Laxmi Chand’s Ode written in 1722-23 we may conclude that the concentration of the urban population in the city of Agra was in the area north and north-west of the fort. The second area of concentration, albeit during the reign of Shahjahan was in the Mumtazabad or Tajganj which during that reign emerged as the hub of economic activity.
Map IX

MOSQUES & IDGAH

TO DELHI

ALAMGIRI MOSQUE

SHAHI MOSQUE

FATEHPUR MOSQUE

MOSQUE IN BABA KI SABZ

SHAHI MOSQUE

HAJ ARIF MOSQUE

TO JAMA MASJID

IDGAH

SHAHI MOSQUE

SHAHI MOSQUE
Map X
Plan 7.1: Humayun Mosque

Plan 7.2: Akbari Mosque
Plan 7.3: Kalan or Kali Mosque

Plan 7.4: Mutamad Khan Mosque
Plan 7.5: Moti Bagh Mosque

Plan 7.6: Chhatri of Jaswant Singh
Plan 7.7: Tomb of Maryam-uz Zamani

Plan 7.8: Tomb of Afzal Khan
Plan 7.9: The octagonal plinth with mosque and a Chhatris

Plan 7.10: The Octagonal underground chamber
Plan 7.11: The octagonal upper storey of the tomb

Plan 7.12: Diwan Ji Begum Tomb and its surrounding area
Plan 7.13: Underground chamber

Plan 7.14: Octagonal bastions flank the plinth of the tomb