UNIT 25 PRIMATE CITIES: AGRA-FATHPUR SIKRI-SHAHJAHANABAD*

Structure
25.1 Introduction
25.2 Agra
25.3 Fathpur/Fatehpur Sikri
25.4 Shahjahanabad
25.5 Pattern of the Cityscape
25.6 Mobility of the Mughal Capital Cities
25.7 Symbolism in Mughal Primate Cities
25.8 Summary
25.9 Exercises
25.10 References

25.1 INTRODUCTION

The idea to discuss Agra, Fathpur Sikri and Shahjahanabad, the primate capital cities of the Mughal empire, is to present before you what purpose did these cities serve? How did they look like? What was their morphology? Why did Mughals shift their capital cities at all? What happened when they ceased to be the capitals?

Rapaport has articulated two types of capitals – dispersed and compact. Dispersed capitals were those ‘where the political/ideological center(s) is isolated from other settings of social and economic life’ while in compact capitals ‘political, residential, and economic activities are nucleated’ (Rapaport cited in Sinopoli, 1994: 293). Mughal primate cities can be representative of the dispersed capitals. ‘The Mughals constructed multiple capitals, used sequentially and simultaneously, and also conducted much of the business of empire in mobile imperial camps’ (Sinopoli, 1994: 294). Agra, Fathpur Sikri, Delhi, Lahore all at one point or the other enjoyed the status of the capital cities. Both Agra and Fathpur shared almost the adjacent spaces, situated within the distance of twelve miles. Agra emerged into prominence in the early 16th century when Sikandar Lodi decided to make it his capital and continued to enjoy this status (interregnum of 16 years when Fathpur overpowers Agra) till the mid-17th century; while Delhi occupied its primacy from very early on assimilating within herself a number of capital cities (for details see Unit 21, Block 4 (2) of this Course) before finally occupying almost a permanent place as a capital town in 1648, when Shahjahan shifted his capital to Shahjahanabad (except an interregnum of almost fifty years when Calcutta was the colonial capital) till date.

25.2 AGRA

Among the Mughal primate cities Agra occupied distinct place for being the exclusive capital city of the Mughals. In 1506 Sultan Sikandar Shah Lodi (r. 1489-1517) decided

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Urbanisation in Medieval India - 2

to shift his capital from Delhi to Agra, perhaps to keep watch over the developments in Rajputana and the surrounding areas of Mewat and constructed a fort there. Presently the only monument of Sikandar that survived is Baradwari near Sikandara which is said to be a mint of Sikandar. It remained the capital of the Mughal ruling house for about more than a century with the exception of an interregnum of a decade and half later when Akbar decided to move to Fathpur Sikri (1571-1586). After which Shahjahan once again decided to shift to Delhi (Shahjahanabad) in 1648. Trivedi (2014: 114) argues that, ‘The selection of the site of Agra to act as the centre of political authority, relegating Delhi to a subordinate position, appears to be a well deliberated political decision. With the progress of time, Agra grew into a vibrant economic hub of north India, which Delhi could not attain, though political authority was brought back to it.’ The strategic location and the commercial vibrancy of the city are uncontested “situated at the vast expanse of the Ganges-Yamuna Doab, with commercial navigational advantage (connected to Bengal via riverine route) and its strategic location, situating within the controlling distance of Kalpi-Chanderi-Gujarat and the Deccan route. Ralph Fitch (1583-1591) mentions his journey from Agra to Bengal accompanied with 104 boats. Similarly, John Jourdain (1608-1617) records that every year approximately 10000 tons of salt was transported to Bengal via boats, clearly speaks of the importance of the Agra riverine route. The barges as huge as 100 tons carried the load of 5000-7000 tons at a time. Pelsaert (2009: 4) mentions about the innumerable merchandises being transported in and outside Agra/Sikri through the riverine route, ‘the merchandise brought from Porop [East], and Bengalen purop [East] and the Bhutan mountains, namely, cotton goods from Bengal, raw silk from Patna, spikenard, borax, verdigris, ginger, fennel, and thousands of sorts of drugs, too numerous to detail in this place…and also…innumerable kinds of grain, butter, and other provisions, which are produced in the Eastern provinces, and imported thence.’ It truly emerged as a commercially vibrant city and an important centre of exchange across north India. The city life bustled with activities of the merchants, mahajans, and sarrafs. There thronged the merchants not only from all parts of India but across Europe. The most coveted item among the Europeans was indigo. In 1643 Dutch alone ordered 7000 maunds of indigo from Agra. The brisk riverine trading activities added another beautiful landscape to the city – its ghats (quays):

There were ghats (quays) of brick, and red and white sandstone masonry…almost entirely built up into series of broad stairs, with chowkis (pedestals) and multi-storied octagonal burjs between them; spacious chabutaras (platforms), covered corridors, closed chambers (for ladies) and dalans (pillar verandahs) overlooking them, and ramps (for cattle), which were characteristic features of a medieval ghat. The chhatris which crowned the towers gorgeously outlined the ghats on the water-way and presented a beautiful river-front (Nath, 1997: 162).

Among the ghats, Hathi-Ghat was a beautiful structure, built of white-yellowish Gwalior stone and had two elephant statues at the entrance, thus so named. However, presently none of the medieval ghats survive and the river bank lies completely desolate.

Humayun’s coronation took place in the Jama Masjid of Agra and he is also said to have constructed a palace, a garden and a mosque. Sher Shah is also reported to have repaired the fort of Badalgarh. Prior to the construction of Agra fort, Akbar founded town of Nagari Chain in 1563, 11 kms south of Agra. The order of the construction of Agra fort by demolishing the existing one was given in 1564-65 under the supervision of Qasim Khan. Abul Fazl mentions building of five hundred masonry structures inside the fort after Bengal and Gujarat styles and named it Dar-ul Khilafat Akbarabad. However, hardly any structure of Akbar’s time is extant now with the exception of Jahangiri Mahal as a result of Shahjahan’s alterations around Delhi gate. Later, in 1654
Shahjahan also added Moti Mahal and Moti Masjid (Pearl Mosque) in white marble for his wife Moti Begum to the south of Itimaduddaula’s tomb. Akbar started construction of his future tomb, Sikandara, which, in 1607, when Jahangir visited the site, he deliberately departed from traditional domed architectural plan in deference to Akbar’s cultural ideas. Itimaduddaula’s tomb by the Yamuna built by Nur Jahan, her daughter, in 1628 is another imposing royal edifice in Agra built during Jahangir’s reign. Among other important surviving structures of the later period are tomb of Firuz Khan Khwajasara (c. 1647), incharge of harem under Shahjahan and the Jami Mosque commissioned by Jahanara Begum in 1648; its eastern side and the main gateway was destroyed by the British in 1857. However, the most imposing structure added to the cityscape by Shahjahan was Taj Mahal (mausoleum of Mumtaz Mahal; 1631-1643) – a monument that still stands out among all structures of the city.

The fort was situated on the western bank of the river Yamuna on a high ground. It had high walls, gateways and bastions surrounded by a ditch all around the fort-wall. In the fort were housed palaces, harem, gardens, chowks and mosques. Such was the huge establishment that Father Manrique calls it a city within a city. There were three separate palaces of the emperor and separate ones were of Nur Jahan and Mariam Makani, records Pelsaert. The harem, where women of different countries resided, was known as Bangla Mahal. Across the fort was Nakkas. Further outside the fort were houses of Khurram, Man Singh, etc. Dara Shikoh’s palace was towards the north of the fort. Sikandara, where housed the tomb of Akbar was situated on the opposite side bank of the river. Pelsaert mentions it the chief centre of trading activities. Commodities across India used to come here and thence taken inside the city by crossing the river (Ray, 2015: 245-258).

Petruccioli argues that Agra was in no way different from the pre-Mughal cities like Gwalior. He states that it was based on ‘anti-urban concept which sets up the palace/fortress of the Rajah against the city/ghetto of the populace’ (Petruccioli, 2015: 545). Both Agra and Gwalior were placed at a high point with imposing walls and bastions. Pelsaert (c. 1626) found the city ‘exceedingly large’, but ‘unwalled’ and ‘without a regular plan’. Pelsaert (2009: 2) comments on its overgrowing expanse that by Jahangir’s reign it expanded to such an extent that the city of Akbar with its security gates ‘now stand in the middle of the city, and the area of buildings outside them is fully three times greater in extent’. Thus, ‘The city of Agra grew haphazardly and gradually over the centuries from an ancient habitat and, except for the fact that all its principal roads sloped towards, and led to, the river Jamuna (Yamuna), it had no town-planning’ (Nath, 1997: 159). The region where the city developed was the Jamuna ravines (khar/tilas/mounds) leaving the city plan to be laid on uneven grounds – Manpada is higher by 30 feet than Hing ki Mandi; similarly Gali Hakiman is higher than Zin-Khanah. The city had three main axis/broadways of the city: a) Ghatia – Dhuliaganj – Pathwari – Jamuna; b) Sarafa – Kashmiri Bazar – Malika Bazar – Kachehri Ghat – Jamuna; c) Rawatpara – Daresi – Jamuna (Nath, 1997: 159).

The city was constantly expanding. Ralph Fitch (1583-91) compares it with London. Father Monserrate has estimated it 4 miles long and 2 miles broad; while Abul Fazl calculates it to be 10 miles long. Jahangir provides its circumference equal to 17.5 miles (7 kos) long and approximately 2 miles broad. During Shahjahan’s period Peter Mundy estimated that the city was 15 miles long. Manucci assessed its extent around 24 miles. These are no doubt rough estimates nonetheless suggests the vibrancy of the city which was constantly expanding. Such vitality is evident from the population estimates as well. Ralph Fitch assessed that the population of Agra was greater than England which approximates to over 2 lakh inhabitants.
Father Manrique assessed an exaggerated figure of the population to around 6,60,000. Jourdain (1608-1617) boasts that Agra was the biggest city in the world, bigger than Cairo; while Mandelso (1638) found it ‘at least twice as big as Ispahan’. I.P. Gupta (1986) has estimated that the population of Agra was two lakhs in the sixteenth century which swelled to seven lakhs by the mid-seventeenth century with a radius of the city expanding to 20-30 miles. These estimates may again be rough and at times exaggerated but no doubt reflect the prominence of the city.

Agra is highly praised by European travellers for its havelis/palaces of the nobles. Pelsaert (2009: 2) records that around 6 kos [15 miles] of the area along the ‘waterfront is occupied by the costly palaces of all the famous lords [i.e. on the western/right bank of the river Yamuna].’ Thevenot mentions thirty palaces of big grandees along the river. These tastefully built red sandstone havelis were provided with arched portals (pols/polis) at the entrance; brackets and chhajja supported by latticed (jali) balcony (gaukh), along with chhatris and chaukhandas and chhaparkhats (Nath, 1997: 160). However, travellers equally disdained its ‘narrow’ and ‘congested’ lanes.

Agra city was provided with a simple nonetheless extremely efficient drainage system which was a great contribution of Akbar. ‘All main roads and streets were paved with red sandstone slabs, with the middle portion sloping towards the sides where *pucci* masonry *nalis* (water channels) were built, so as to drain off the rain-water into them. These *nalis* were, in turn, connected with large, underground, stone masonry *nalas* (*drains*) which were all diverted to two main drains, on either side of the city, which fell into the river’ (Nath, 1997:160). A number of tanks were constructed in the city to provide water all the year round. It is recorded that among them four – Hauz-i Kalan, Hauz of Dehra Bagh and tomb of Itibar Khan and Guru ka Tal were in operation till the eighteenth century. The city is well provided with wells and step-wells (*baolis*). Ladli Bagh and Dehra Bagh (Kuan Kamal Khan) wells were so huge that as much as 32 *purs* were drawn by bullocks in one go. *Baoli* in front of the Diwan-i Am, in Agra fort survives to day. The *baoli* attached to Akbari Mahal to the south of the fort is another huge six storey structure built entirely of red sandstone.

Being the chief trading entrepôt, *caravan sarais* were the added feature of the cityscape of Agra. It is recorded that more than sixty *sarais* were in Agra in the seventeenth century, with lofty gates, commodious apartments which provided not only the shelter and food, as well as space for storage of the goods, but also enough shades were there for the bullock-carts, horses and other retinues. There were a number of important *sarais* (Arab ki Sarai, Bhore ki Sarai, Jalal Khan ki Sarai), but the riverine *sarai* of Nur Jahan, which still survives and built exclusively to cater to riverine traffic, stands out. Thevenot records the presence of eighty *sarais* around the *chowk* in front of the fort and also the similar number of *hammams* (public baths) in the city.

Gardens formed the ‘core’ of the cityscape. Garden structures were the chief spaces where the Mughals resided in Central Asia. Ebba Koch (2008: 555-556) views the Mughal city of Agra as a truly garden city where, ‘The Timurid concept of a formally planned garden was creatively adapted to a riverfront situation.’ Babur built two of his gardens Mehtab Bagh and Achanak Bagh in the *charbagh* and terraced style. Another garden of Babur, Bagh-i Gul Afshan which was later renovated by Nur Jahan and renamed Bagh-i Nur Afshan (now known as Ram Bagh), built in *chaharbagh* style with network of canals, tanks and water chutes (descending in three terraces) where water was supplied through Persian wheel. It served as a typical pleasure garden of the Mughals. But among his choicest gardens was Bagh-i Zar Afshan or Bagh-i Hasht Bihisht, built in the *chaharbagh* style. It is here that Babur was initially laid to rest before being finally taken to Kabul by Haji Begum. Presently only a few traces of it are visible, rest of the garden is completely destroyed. Itimaduddaula’s tomb contains a huge layout of a garden. Taj Mahal was constructed in the garden of Man Singh. Jahangir also built his palace within a garden to the southwest of the city. Besides these exclusive pleasure gardens and tomb gardens, *havelis* of the nobles stood amidst gardens. The presence of gardens all over makes Pelsaert (2008: 1) to comment: ‘The luxuriance of the groves all round makes it resemble a royal park rather than a city.’

Apart from the imperial structure, the nobility was also involved in the constructions in the city. Itimaduddaula built Itimadpura. A number of other puras built by nobles were Vazirpura, Jaisinghpura and Pratappura. The city also appears to have earliest Christian enclaves where housed the earliest Christian cemetery of northern India containing tombstones of Christians – Armenians, European travellers, missionaries, adventurers, traders, and soldiers. The Dutch also had their permanent factory at Agra. The Christians settled down in Agra in Padritzola and built a church and a college here as early as 1599 encouraged by Akbar’s catholic outlook. Akbar even granted annual maintenance to the church which was continued even under Jahangir’s patronage. However, the support was withdrawn by Shahjahan. He even destroyed the clock atop the church in 1635 whose gong could be heard far off. However, when 160 years later French aristocrat Count de Modave visited Agra he found descendents of the Jesuit families still living there.

Another feature marked the city was that there was no physical or spatial segregation on the basis of religion or class. Pelsaert records (2009: 1) that ‘the whole place is closely built over and inhabited, Hindus mingled with Moslems, the rich with the poor.’ Though in the inns segregation of Hindu and Muslims was visible as well as certain inns were reserved for the Christians, Arabs and the Armenians.

When French aristocrat Count de Modave visited Agra in 1775 he found the city in a dilapidated state. He records that both Sikandara and the Taj were in bad conditions owing to lack of proper maintenance (Ray, 2015: 257-258); no doubt the city succumbed to the brunt of Ahmad Shah Abdali’s plunder (1757) and the Jat onslaught (1761). However, he still found presence of merchant houses, often two storeyed, in the city.

25.3 FATHPUR/FATEHPUR SIKRI

The building of Sikri was not Akbar’s first project, prior to that Akbar had already founded Nagar Chain and had also constructed a fort at Agra. The chief point of contention among the historians is whether Fathpur Sikri planned by Akbar was primarily his residential headquarter or else it was a fulfledged town? R. Nath believes that it was Akbar’s residential headquarter, without unsettling the capital status of Agra, where he planned to move in 1571 which he finally abandoned in 1586 during his lifetime. However, Nadeem Rezavi (2013: 6, 56, 91) believes that it was very much ‘Akbar’s capital’; ‘the official city’. It not only housed the imperial household but the mansions of the amirs, and houses of bureaucracy were scattered all over (Rezavi, 2013: Chapter 5). Aniruddha Ray (2015: 284) argues, ‘when the durbar was being held at Fatehpur, Agra had not been abandoned. The principal treasury was located at Agra in 1577-8 and had not been transferred there.’ Irfan Habib also believes that ‘both these towns were jointly acting as capitals of the empire’(Habib cited in Ray, 2015: 284).

Pre-Akbar Sikri

Sikri derives its name from its inhabitants Sikarwar Rajputs. Under the Saiyyids the pargana Sikri fell under Bayana shiq. The area around Nagar (surrounding Akbar’s fortification wall) does indicate presence of a flourishing township during the Sultanate period. There survived six mosques and a tomb of that period (Rezavi, 2013: 10-11). The first encounter of the Mughals with Sikri occurred during the battle of Khanwa (1527), an area lying 16 kms west of Sikri. Babur built a garden here after his victory and named Bagh-i Fath from which Akbar’s city derived its name. Babur also built a water pavilion in the middle of the lake. It is interesting that these structures were situated across the river bank and Akbar built his new enterprise on the other side, the western section of the river front.
Akbar’s Sikri

Petruccioli argues that Sikri was a ‘planned city’. However, Rezavi (1998:107) thinks that the construction of various structures suggests that ‘it did not develop at one point of time, nor does it appear to have followed a single plan’. ‘Not all the buildings in the town of Fathpur Sikri were designed or planned right from the beginning’, comments Rezavi (1998:46). This is very much clear from Arif Qandhari’s account about three major stages of constructions:

1571

A compulsory decree was issued that nobody should obstruct anyone who wants to build a house (khana) within the expanse of the said circuit and it should be entered without any fear of dispute in the lands so that it is duly populated…

1573-74

Its court (sahn) has been raised on steps (paya); and subterranean reservoirs sardabha where tops have been covered and made level (with surface of the courtyard) with stone and lime. In some places they are latticed (mushabbak) so that whenever it rains the water collected in the courtyard pours through those lattices and collected in the subterranean tanks. Thus the general public has its need for water fulfilled…

1576-77

…five shops (dakakin) of red stone, mortar, and lime should be constructed from the royal court to the gate which faces towards the dar al-khilafat Agra, and close to the darbar a chaharsuq comprising of well-decorated shops was built. A Tripoliya (three arched structure) of red stone has been built towards the bazaar…

(Rezavi, 1998: 107)

The city structures were thus constructed in phased manner. Maryam Zamani shifted to Sikri [Rang Mahal] in 1568-69 near the hospice of Shaikh Salim Chishti. By 1580 almost the entire palace complex and major city constructions were completed.

### Chronology of Constructions at Fathpur Sikri

<table>
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<tr>
<th>Year of Construction</th>
<th>Structure</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1571-72</td>
<td>Central Archway</td>
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<tr>
<td>1572</td>
<td>Birbal’s Palace</td>
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<tr>
<td>1572-73</td>
<td>Haramsara (‘Jodhbai Palace’)</td>
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<tr>
<td>1573-74</td>
<td>Jama Masjid</td>
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<tr>
<td>1574-75</td>
<td>Buland Darwaza</td>
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<tr>
<td>1575</td>
<td>Ibadatkhana</td>
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<tr>
<td>1576-77</td>
<td>Chaharsuq</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1580</td>
<td>Palace Complex completed</td>
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The palace complex was planned from the scratch. Khari Nadi’s water was dammed and thirteen sluices (terah mori) were built to create a vast lake to ensure the water supply all the year round. At the main ridge were built the royal mansions, while the sides below the ridges were allotted for commoners and the nobles enjoyed a living
along Yamuna bank; similarly traders’ establishments and warehouses were also along the river front. The lake area at Sikri was exclusively reserved for the pleasure gardens and pavilions of the royal household and the nobility; their mansions and gardens remained largely outside the city. The city was provided with eight gateways – Ajmeri Darwaza, Tehra Darwaza, Gwalior Darwaza, Chandra Pol, Birbal Pol, Agra Darwaza, Lal Darwaza, and Delhi Darwaza.

The ridge comprised of three major complexes. In the north-east, the highest point, housed the ‘sacred’ buildings (sahn-i Ibadat) – stonecutter’s mosque, Jami Masjid and the tomb of Shaikh Salim Chishti. At the second level situated the royal mansions (sahn-i Khass) – Raniwas (Jodhbai’s Palace), Mahl-i Ilahi (Birbal’s house) and the Baithak (Maryam’s House) accompanied with Shahi Bazaar (horse stables) and Mina Bazaar (camel stables) and the garden. The third (further down the ridge) comprised of public buildings (sahn-i Rayyat) – the Panch Mahal, Khwabgah, Shahi Kutubkhana (Turkish Sultana’s House adjunct), and the Diwan-i Khass (Ekstambha Prasada; the private audience chamber) where the government business was transacted (Nath, 2015: 570). Some of the structures, like Buland Darwaza, were mere symbolic (symbolised Akbar’s victory of Gujarat); while others were ceremonial and functional, like Mahali Ilahi was associated with Akbar’s Tauhid-i Ilahi; Baithak was the place where Akbar used to meet people (musicians, painters and poets and spent his cultural evenings; Shahi Kutubkhana served as royal library; while its top floor was chitrashala (Nath, 2015: 570). Thus the palace complex had two separate sections – public spaces (diwan-i am; hall of public audience and diwan-i khas; hall of private chamber) leading to private quarters (haramsara). The entry gate was Hathipol in front of which stood the Hiran Minar – a milestone as well as akash diya. The entire city of Sikri followed the grid plan based on chaharbagh tradition which Rezavi (1998: 38-39) and Petruccioli argues ‘that the whole township was divided into eight functional zones by the roads passing through its eight gates’, ‘of which the central was reserved for the imperial establishments and bureaucrat offices’. Another central point in the city that Satish Davar identifies (cited in Rezavi, 1998: 39) was a small mosque situated in the city market along with mosque of Sangatarashan (Stonecutter’s) near Akbar’s Jami Mosque.

There were as many as five Akbari markets and four sarais at Sikri. ‘The main shopping complex and commercial area was situated at a distance towards the east within the city walls... “Industrial area and artisans” dwellings were located at the farthest point from the imperial quarters: the bulk of this area in fact was situated outside the city walls’ (Rezavi, 1998: 105). Rezavi’s excavations suggest that indigo cultivation, leatherworkers, meat sellers all either situated close to the city wall or else were located outside the walls; iron smith’s cottage was located at Delhi gate. Similarly, jogipura and brothels (shaitanpura) were also got settled outside the city walls. As for residential quarters, Rezavi (1998: 40) identifies, were mainly two “ one around Shaikhupura, ‘area of Salim Chishti’; and the other neighbourhood of Khwaja-i Jahan where Abdul Qadir Badauni used to live. The nobility occupied northern ridge between the Tansen Baradari and sarai near Agra Darwaza where were located probably the residences of Iranian nobles for in this area a Shi’ites praying marble tablet has been discovered (see Map 6). Similarly in the Indrawali Ghati, Rezavi believes that Rajputs had their residences; another area where nobles had their residential quarters was at the top of the southern ridge (Rezavi, 1998: 40-41, 105). Rezavi’s archeological finds suggests that houses of the nobility were generally made of ‘rubble stones bound with lime mortar, sometimes ashlared with red sandstone but generally covered with a thick veneer of lime plaster’ as against the official enclave where buildings ‘were all built of the locally-quarried red sandstone’ (Rezavi, 1998: 97-98).

The geological terrain was exploited to store rain water to be collected in a jhalra (lit. a step well; a submerged water storage structure), two underground birkas (covered water tanks) and numerous tanks, kundas and reservoirs. On the two sides of the palace two waterworks were created to ensure regular water supply (Nath, 2015: 567). It is interesting that Sikri’s roofs were invariably covered by semispherical cupolas and dome structures are rare (except in Jami Masjid and Shaikh Salim Chishti’s tomb).
'The ladao or wagon vaulted ceilings made of stone ribs and panels in which beams have been used as ribs' and chhappar ceilings (Faizi’s House and Raniwas), a typical local village and folk structure are hallmark styles, used most effectively at Sikri.

The fort entrance was Hathi-Pol which had eight hundred metres long porticoed street flanked by shops on both sides and at halfway mark was crossed at charsuq. Its width itself speaks of its functional utility for the royal procession.

However, Fathpur was not the industrial town rather was more a commercial city. This is attested to by the presence of mint here. The only industry developed here was that of carpet manufacturing to cater to urban elites. Pelsaert informs us that the industry was largely set up by immigrant Iranian artisans (Ray, 2015: 285). It is estimated that approximately 10,000 artisans were employed in the construction activities only. The population of the city is estimated to be around 2,20,000 people which was even higher than the then city of London (Ray, 2015: 287).

**Fathpur Sikri and Indigenous Traditions**

Sikri was just not the symbol of Islamic ideas, instead it was a fine blend of *local* and *Islamic* traditions. Equally important for Akbar were pre-existing traditions. He expressed this connect by imbibing numerous pre-Islamic traditions in built-forms. Thus, Akbar and his artisans derived heavily from local and indigenous traditions with artistic innovations to construct Sikri which reflects Akbar’s cosmopolitan outlook and his extremely liberal personality traits. Its main sources of inspiration came from Jamuna-Chambal region (comprised of Delhi, Agra, Dholpur, Gwalior and Malwa-Gujarat-Rajasthan) from where most of his men and material for the construction were drawn. The architects and the artisans heavily derived from the traditional *silpashastras* in which they were experts. Most of the buildings in the complex were housed in the most favoured *silpashastric* directions the north and the east. Astrology and astronomy equally determined the auspicious and inauspicious effects (Nath, 2015: 568-570).

The *poli* (porch), *tibara* (a room with three doors) and *duchhatis* (garret), best represented in Abul Fazl’s House, Rang Mahal and Raniwas used to ensure the ‘maximum seclusion and security’ were the incorporations of the architect builders of Jamuna-Chambal. The ‘Jodhbai Palace’ (*shabistan-i Iqbal*) was inspired by Hindu and Jain Gujarat architectural forms. However, Rezavi believes that both ‘Jodhbai Palace’ and ‘Jahangiri Mahal’ were constructed in *chatuhshala* plan on which Buddhist *Viharas* were constructed.

Another feature of the city was its inspiration from the layout of the Mughal camps ‘the canvas, wood and cloth were transformed into stone at large. Scholars are almost in unison that Sikri was the translation of ‘camp’ into stone. S.A.A. Rizvi (cited from Nath, 2015: 580 fn. 24) argues that Fathpur Sikri was ‘identical’ to an imperial Mughal camp. R. Nath also agrees with Rizvi that there was impact of Mughal camps in its execution. Rezavi (1998: 28) also acknowledges that ‘the Mughal encampment appears to have been the principal inspiration for town planning’. Nath comments that Sikri ‘had their prototypes in the wooden *raotis* and cloth *chandovas* of the Mughal camp. The enclosed and covered passages from the Kutubkhana to Khwabgah on the ground floor, or from the Sahni Rayyat to the Sahni-i Khass, and to the Panch Mahal are stone translations of canvas-and carpet *sarpadas* [or *qanat*]. Similarly, the *khaprel* (tile) roofs of the Khwabgah resemble the fine awning *chandova* of the Mughal camp. The oblong *chhaparkhats* (lit. a bedstead with curtains), that constitute the super structure for a number of buildings, are stone replicas of wooden *raotis* described by Abul Fazl’ (Nath, 2015: 568). As per the encampment where centre was occupied by the Emperor, surrounded by the princes and nobles followed by the service area; while markets were placed at the corners; thus the camp, so was the city, was arranged in ‘hierarchical
progression from the public to the private areas’ (Rezavi, 1998: 31). Sikri’s *akashdiya* (poles bearing lamps), the Hiran Minar, situated in front of the main entrance gate Hathipol was in tune with the *Akashdiya* stood beyond *diwankhana* in the camps. Petruccioli (2015: 544) also argues that ‘the garden and the encampment were the only forms available to the Mughals.’ So when they transformed the court into ‘built in architecture’ it was ‘a camp in stone’. Petruccioli calls Fathpur Sikri a ‘city frozen in time’ and ‘a unique case’ in the town planning.

However, Nath believes, in spite of the borrowings, ‘the occupation of a temporary level site of wood, canvas, and cloth tents and the construction of a permanent level stone buildings on a hilltop are two altogether different ventures governed by altogether different principles and techniques’ (Nath, 2015: 581). A number of pillar styles were used in Sikri ‘*ruchaka* (in Khwabgah), *bhadraka* (in stonecutter’s mosque) and *misraka*. Out of these *misraka* was typical of Sikri created by Akbar’s own artisans; while *bhadraka* ‘with *ghanta-mala* and *srivatsa* motifs’ was typical of Malwa-Gujarat-Rajasthan temple art (Nath, 2015: 573). It is interesting that arches were sparingly used that too only in the sacred complex which are ‘mostly used ornamentally and without voissiers’ (Nath, 2015: 573). Instead bracket-and-eave combination is the most copiously used form at Sikri to cover spaces. *Jharokha* windows and *chhatris* were other indigenous styles used amply at Sikri. Another indigenous, nonetheless distinctive style profusely used at Sikri (largely to cover verandahs and pavilions – Elephant Gate) was sloping *khaprel* or tile roof. Similarly, ‘the bulbous onion-shaped double-dome type with a high neck universally used in Mughal paintings and inspired by the Central Asian circular dome tent, the *yurt*, known in India as *qubba*…was purely academic, for his architects did not use it’ (Nath, 2015: 577). Instead they used local *bitaura* (locally used to keep fodder and cow-dungcakes) ‘in a grand, dignified and perfectly stylized way’ (Nath, 2015: 577).

Gardens were another form with which the Mughals were acquainted with. Mughal urban designs followed *chaharbagh* symmetry. ‘The axes, joints, and nodules of a garden were turned architectually into pavilions, the *chabutaras*, waterfalls, pools, *karwan sarais* (travellers’ inns), and symmetrical roads’ (Rezavi, 1998: 33). (For details see Unit 22, Section 22.7 of this Block).

### 25.4 SHAHAJAHANABAD

Delhi was a city of great antiquity and was the seat of many kings and Sultans in the past (see Unit 21, Block 4 (2) of this Course). It had situational advantage too – located in the Aravalli Hills on the banks of the mighty river Yamuna, with moderate climate and thick vegetation, provided a picturesque landscape. In contrast to Agra, Shahjahanabad set on a wide plain against the background of Yamuna on its one side. It was also centrally located with a vast hinterland, providing security vis-a-vis commercial vibrancy. It was also blessed by the religious divines – being the chief centre of the Chishti *sufi* activities, popularly known as *bais khwaja ki chaaukhart* (abode of 22 saints). In 1639 Shahjahan decided to move his capital to Shahjahanabad where he finally shifts in 1648. Amal-i Salih and Abdul Hamid Lahori mention that Shahjahan decided to move his capital on account of hot climate of the city (Agra), water shortage and above all congestion and overcrowding made it untenable for king’s processions and army movements. The principal gateways were too small to ensure free movement of people, particularly during special ceremonies and festivals.

The site selected for the new capital town was between Nurpur and Firuz Shah Kotla. The chief architect of the city were *mi’mar* Ustad Ahmad and Ustad Lahori who draw the plan (*tarh*). The boundary of the city and the Qila-i Mubarak was provided with a
mud wall (the wall collapsed in 1650 due to excessive rains and later in the 26th regnal year Shahjahan started construction of stone and mortar wall) beginning from Kashmiri gate to Mori gate consisted of 11 monumental gates (later in 1658 another gate (Turkaman) was added) along with a few Khirkis (posterns; Khirki Farrashkhana, Khirki Buland Bagh, etc.) for the easy access of the residents with a circumference of five and half miles. The fort had 21 bastions, four gates (Lahori, west; Akbarabadi, southwest; Salimgarh, north and Khizr, east) and two windows – Musamman Burj, the jharokha Darshan (place for public audience). The fort was provided with aesthetically built buildings – Naqqar Khana, Diwan-i Am-o Khas, Zenana (Rang Mahal/Shish Mahal). Manucci (2010: I, 177) describes the city 'in the shape of an imperfect half-moon'. The fort was octagonal, built in the Baghdad style at the centre of the eastern quarter of the city, almost double the size of Agra fort. The fort was defended by a 10 yards deep and 20 yards wide moat. Outside the Lahori gate was an open space, a royal square where ‘the tents of such Rajas as are in the King’s pay, and whose weekly turn it is to mount guard, are pitched in this square’ (Bernier, 1916: 243). Besides this and towards the river front, the fort was surrounded by gardens (Anguri Bagh, north; Buland Bagh, south; and Gulabi Bagh, west). Another important bagh in the city was Bagh-i Sahibabad, laid out in 1650 and presented by Shahjahan to his daughter Jahanara Begum who built another garden next to it. Another towering structure built across the fort was Jama Masjid. Jama Masjid, Fathpuri Masjid and Akbarabadi Masjid (no more extant now) were the three prominent religious structures that dominated the skyline of the city.

The city planning of Shahjahanabad was influenced by Indo-Islamic ideas. Its city plan was governed by ancient shilpashastra text Mansara, “the bowstring format of the city plan (the semi-circular plan of the city on the banks of river Yamuna was bow); while its streets were the strings, the two side streets (eastwards and north-east) were the bent parts of the bow and the two meeting points ‘Chandni Chowk …to the Lahori Gate of the city …was the hand of the bowman…the most important place was the connecting point of two streets. Here the palace fortress was built’ (Ray, 2015: 293). In the Islamic thought city symbolised human body – ‘the four limbs [hands and feet] compared to four gates of the city…The palace-fort faced Mecca in the west. Chandni Chowk was going towards west and face of the Jami Masjid was also towards west. The eight gateways of the city could be compared to the four gates of paradise’ (Ray, 2015: 294).

The city was provided with beautiful bazaars and havelis of the princes and the nobles. The princes and nobles built their houses along the banks of river Yamuna. However, Bernier (1916: 247) comments: ‘The dwellings of the Omrahs, though mostly situated on the banks of the river and in the suburbs, are yet scattered in every direction’. Among such prominent constructions were the havelis of Dara Shikoh (present Dara Shikoh’s library), Ali Mardan Khan (northeast of the fort facing the river), Shaista Khan (opposite Lahori gate), Saadullah Khan (south of the fort), Ustad Ahmad and Ustad Hamid (the architects; towards northern gate of the Jama Masjid), Khalilullah Khan (near Ajmeri gate), Mir Jumla (Chawri Bazar), and of Rao Rayan Raghunath Das (in Dariba Kalan). Apart from havelis the city was provided with the houses of Hindu and Armenian merchants which were even six to seven storey high, comments Salih Kambo. Thus the houses of Princes and higher nobles were generally towards the riverfront; while lower class nobles resided around Jama Masjid.
Bernier (1916: 245) also provides a vivid description of these houses:

The houses of the merchants are built over these warehouses, at the back of the arcades: they look handsome enough from the street, and appear tolerably commodious within; they are airy, at a distance from the dust, and communicate with the terrace-roofs over the shops, on which the inhabitants sleep at night…A few, and only a few, other parts of the city have good houses raised on terraces, the buildings over the shops being often too low to be seen from the street. The rich merchants have their dwellings elsewhere, to which they retire after the hours of business.
In the city there were magnificent sarais for travellers. While two were attached to Akbarabadi and Fathpuri mosques, the Begum ki Sarai (the caravan sarai) was independent and built by Jahanara Begum, Shahjahan’s daughter. It was built between the fort and the chowk and was a double storeyed square structure with two monumental gateways one opened towards Sahibabad Bagh (northern gate) and the southern gate opened towards Chandni Chowk. Praising Jahanara’s sarai Bernier (1916: 281) comments: ‘The Karuansara is in the form of a large square with arcades, like our Palace Royale,…This place is the rendezvous of the rich Persian, Uzbek, and other foreign merchants, who in general may be accommodated with empty chambers in which they remain with perfect security, the gate being closed at night.’

The city was provided with two major streets: one between Lahori Gate to Fathpuri Masjid and the other between Lahori Gate to the Akbarabadi Gate. The nahr-i Bihisht passed through from the middle of the former street, provided with trees and arched openings where shops and warehouses were housed. The section from Lahori Gate to the Kotwali was known as Urdu Bazar, served largely the imperial household; from Chabutara Kotwali to Chandni Chowk was Jauhari (jewellers’) market thence was the Chandni Chowk market with shops on both sides. There were in all 440 double storeyed shops in this section. On the northern side of the Chowk was Begum’s Sarai (which was destroyed and where presently housed the Town Hall). The last leg of the road was known as Bazaar-i Kalan or Fathpuri Bazaar. Faiz Bazaar was located between the Akbarabadi Masjid and Akbarabadi Gate of the city. The Chowk Sadullah Khan situated between the eastern gate of the Jama Masjid towards the fort. Bernier (1916: 243) comments that, ‘Here…is held a bazaar or market for an endless variety of things; which like the Pont-neuf at Paris, is the rendezvous for all sorts of mountebanks and jugglers…astrologers…’ The city water supply was provided with nahr-i Bihisht. Shahjahan re-excavated Firuz’s Shah’s Rajabwah using the alignment of the Shekhu-ni and extended it further 30 kos (approximately 75 miles) towards Delhi. Its one branch enters Chandni Chowk near Fathpuri Masjid flowing from the middle of the bazaar to Faiz Bazaar; the other entered from Sahibabad and along the northeast it flowed into the Qila-i Mubarak, the stream was lifted up to the Shah Burj thence the water was distributed to various sections of the fort via channels.

The gardens were embedded into the landscape of Shahjahan’s city. The layout of one of the earliest garden was to the south-west of Idgah, the Karol Bagh garden built by Firuz Shah Tughluq. Towards the northwest of Shahjahanabad, near Sabzi Mandi Raushanara Begum (daughter of Shahjahan) and Sirhindi Begum (wife of Shahjahan) built two gardens in 1653. In the same year Akbarabadi Begum built Shalimar garden to the northwest of the above gardens which Bernier calls ‘King’s country house’. It was Shahjahan’s pleasure garden where several pleasure pavilions including Shish Mahal were built, along with a tank and received canal water. It had rare varieties of fruit trees. It was here Prince Aurangzeb was crowned in 1659. Bagh Sihezari (Tis Hazari Bagh) was built between the Kashmiri and Kabuli gates, where lies the tomb of Jinat-al Nisa, daughter of Aurangzeb. Bagh-i Jawahar Khan was built between Sabzi Mandi and Shalimar Bagh in 1665. During Muhammad Shah’s reign towards Sabzi Mandi two more gardens, Bagh-i Fidai Khan and Bagh Karre Khan, were built. Later, Bagh Chak Bakram was also built in the vicinity.
Urbanisation in Medieval India - 2

Map 8: Plan of Shahjahanabad
https://upload.wikimedia.org/wikipedia/commons/0/0d/1863_Dispatch_Atlas_Map_of_Delhi%2C_India_-_Geographicus_-_Delhi-dispatch-1867.jpg
In the suburbs were spread royal hunting grounds/lodges (shikargah). Firuz Shah Tughluq’s hunting lodge was Kushak-i Shikar, northwest of Bagh Sihezari. Shahjahan’s hunting preserves were Nangloi Zail, which had a shikargah, a hashtsal and a filkhana. Another was at Janti in Kanjhola Zail; next to it was situated Dara Shikoh’s country house. In 1748 towards Kashmiri Gate Qudsiya Begum built Qudsiya Bagh, a palace and a mosque. These shikargahs and gardens surrounding the suburbs made Delhi environmentally much greener than Agra and Lahore.

The suburbs were the arteries of the city, on the one hand these suburbs were vibrant commercial centres and chief points of supply to the city, on the other hand were points of religious cityscapes. In 1820 Fortescue reports that there were as many as 52 bazaars and 36 mandis in and around Shahjahanabad (Chenoy, 2015: 114). The suburbs of Shahjahanabad were dotted with a number of mandis and marts. The grain mandis were located at Paharganj, Patparganj, Shah Dara and Kotla Mubarakpur. To the northwest of Shahjahanabad was sabzi mandi (vegetable market) and next to it was a horse market (nakkhas); Salimgarh, east of Yamuna, across the fort was resting and alighting point of grains for the Banjaras. Jaisinghpura, southeast of Paharganj appears to be an important centre of transit goods. The revenue records of Amber rulers shows that substantial income was received to the state exchequer of Sawai Jai Singh through custom dues passing through Jaisinghpura. It is clearly suggestive of the fact that the suburb was chief centre of brisk trading activities. In 1771-81 Najaf Khan, regent of Shah Alam II, built a settlement towards southwest of Naraina, and named after him Najafgarh, being served his country retreat (with a garden and a palace). The suburbs had magnificent sarais for the travellers/merchants. Most lofty structure was Arab ki Sarai built by Abdul Rahim Khan-i Khanan near Humayun’s tomb. Writing in 1820 William Hamilton (cited in Chenoy, 2015: 133) praised the chain of Delhi entrepôt: ‘Delhi had a chain of entrepot markets around it, namely, Pulwul, Balamghur, Rewary, Sonepat, Baghpat, Tilpat, Bernaver, Shamlee, Panipat, Jygr, Kurnal, Kunjpoora, Indree, Secundra and Shahzada.’ These entrepot markets were largely hinterlands connected with trade centres where exchanged the bulk goods before entering the city markets.

The spiritual landscape which was largely dominated by sufi khanqahs, dargahs and mazars was occupied towards the suburbs. The chief centres of sufi activities was Ghayaspur where lay the dargah of Shaikh Nizamuddin Auliya. Further south of the Kotla was dargah of Nasiruddin Chirag and its further south was the Qutb Complex, the chief centre of Chishti Sufis which housed the dargah of Shaikh Bakhtiyar Kaki. Sufis, being the patron saints, also occupied an important place within the cityscape of Shahjahanabad – Shah Bula (Chawri Bazaar), Hazrat Miran Shah Nanu (Fathpuri), Sarmad and Hare Bhare Shah Sahib (Jama Masjid). Similarly, a number of temples also formed part of the morphology of the city of Shahjahanabad. As many as seven temples were constructed within the city by the Khatris, Kayasths, Banias and Jains – in Kucha-i Pati Ram, in Muhalla Naya Bans (a Shivalaya), in Katra Nil (Ladliji’s temple), near Lahori Gate (Jain idol), in Maliwara (Jauhri’s Jain temple), in Dariba Kalan (Jain Tirthankars’ temple). Since Shahjahan ordered mosques to be built everywhere, where Muslims lived, the city of Shahjahanabad had as many as 200 mosques built within the city complex during 1639-1739; while 99 mosques were built in the suburbs.

Aurangzeb introduced some changes in the layout of the fort as well as the city. To keep the proceedings of Diwan-i Aam-o Khas away from the public gaze Aurangzeb ordered to construct barbicans outside the Lahori and Delhi gates. He also widened the Lahori gate for the smooth movement of the cavalry. Shahjahan placed two elephants on the Lahori and Akbarabadi gates that were brought down by Aurangzeb (Ray, 2015: 294).
Manucci (2010: II, 110) reported: ‘Frequently horsemen were obliged to wait a long time at the gate; and several times the king himself, on his way to hunt, was forced to retrace his steps, not being able to pass. He issued an order for three gates to be made at this place. To carry this out it was necessary to knock down several mansions, the cost of which was paid for by the king without hesitation.’ Aurangzeb’s noble Bakhtawar Khan built a suburb, Bakhtawar Nagar near Shahjahanabad which was provided with a sarai along with a garden, a well, and a public bath along with a mosque. During Aurangzeb’s reign his daughter Zinatunnisa Begum built Zinat Bari, southwest old Nasir Ganj where lies the princess buried. Bhagwa Bari is another garden south of the chowk Saadullah Khan where lies buried Muhammad Shah’s daughter (1748). In the eighteenth century a number of sarais were also built within the city and in the suburbs – Sarai Bangash in Khari Baoli was one such structure.

Shahjahanabad enjoyed importance not just being the capital city of the empire, but was also the commercial hub, well connected with the hinterland. Shahjahanabad was full of impromptu elementary bazaars (nakhas). Almost every gateway was provided with a market. Daryaganj, as the name itself suggests was the market along the darya (river Yamuna); Next to Idgah was the horse market; the four corners of Jama Masjid provided with four local markets. Further along both sides of the major streets of Shahjahanabad retail shopping arcades (dakakin) were there. Faiz Bazaar was the central market provided with goods of high aesthetics, charm and beauty, records Dargah Quli Khan. The market between the fort gate towards Lahori gate was Urdu bazaar, Jauhari bazaar, Chandni Chowk, Fatehpuri bazaar and Khari Baoli catering to the needs of the elites.

Shahjahanabad also emerged as the major centre of learning where flocked together scholars not only from different parts of India but also central Asia and Iran. The imperial college was Dar-ul Baqa. During Shahjahan’s reign Maulana Sadruddin Khan was the principal of the college. Besides this main centre of learning every mosque had the madrasa attached to it. In 1710 Nawab Ghaziuddin Firuz Jung established a madrasa outside the Ajmeri gate and Nawab Raushan-ud Daulah in Sunehri Masjid in 1721-22. In 1722 Nawab Sharaufuddaula Idratmand Khan established two madrasas in Dariba Kalan and Muhallah Rudgaran. The famous Delhi College was established in 1792.

The city bustled with innumerable people in the streets. Though it is difficult to assess the exact multitude of population in the city, almost all European travellers and Persian chroniclers speak about the crowded streets and myriad population. Salih Kombo has compared Shahjahanabad with Baghdad; while Bernier estimates it to the size of Paris. However, European travellers generally speak about the floating population of the city. Thevenot mentions when the Emperor was in town the population of the city swells to around 400,000, otherwise it reduces to one sixth. Stephen Blake (2017: 67) has estimated population of the city in 1659 around 500,000 but believes that imperial household constituted eighty per cent of it. Writing in 1850 Emily Metcalfe (cited in Chenoy, 2015: 142) records presence of approximately 246 mosques, 147 Hindu temples and 23462 households in Delhi.

25.5 PATTERN OF THE CITIESCAPE

There appear common threads in the spatial patterns of the Mughal primate cities. The urban space was integrated to the riverfront scheme, even for Taj no separate site was chosen instead it was integrated to riverfront. All the three primate capital cities were situated on the banks of river Yamuna. The eastern banks of the river were generally open spaces reserved for elephant fights, festivals, fireworks and other royal spectacles.
The fort was a huge structure covered with a high wall, gateways and a moat. It was a city within a city, marked by a central square (chowk) and gardens apart from the palaces and administrative buildings.

The centre of the city was the palace; both sides of the palace, flanking the river banks, were generally occupied by the nobles and the elites. Away from the palace were the houses of the commoners. The houses of commoners were small and of thatched roofs, comment Thevenot and Bernier.

Interestingly, leaving Shahjahanabad, which was constructed through a proper plan, one does not find such planning neither at Agra nor at Fathpur Sikri. While Fathpur and Shahjahanabad were walled cities, this does not hold good for Agra. The city of Agra expanded beyond its walls.

The chowks were the chief centres of commercial activities where flocked the merchants, artisans and the shopkeepers. Shops were all along both sides of the streets.

Bernier, though he comments that the city of Agra was much bigger than Delhi, laments that as a capital it was inferior to Shahjahanabad. He brands Agra as a ‘rural’ town with narrow and small streets, and praises the straight and broad streets of Shahjahanabad.

Generally the houses of the nobles and elites were situated amidst the gardens (forests, comments Pelsaert).

25.6 MOBILITY OF THE MUGHAL CAPITAL CITIES

The Mughal capitals present a contrast – there was no capital city, instead there were capital cities. The mobility was the key element of the Mughal capitals. A ‘peripatetic pattern’ is evident in terms of Mughal capital cities. Though for Babur Agra was the capital city, he spent most of his time in imperial camps which remained his mobile capital all through. Humayun shifted his capital to Delhi (Dinpanah; 1530-1540). However, his political compulsions pushed him towards Lahore (1540-1554) and once again Humayun occupies Delhi and makes it his seat of imperial power till his death in 1556. Akbar begins his capital seat from Delhi (1556-1560). Again he decides to move the imperial centre little away from Agra, nonetheless, adjacent, to Fathpur Sikri which he abandons in 1586 to move towards Lahore and remains there till 1596. Thence instead of re-occupying Fathpur Sikri, he resides at Agra till his death (1605). For Jahangir Agra remained more or less a static capital city. Shahjahan begins his seat from Agra but abandons it in 1648, though during 1639 to 1648 (when he finally shifted to Shahjahanabad) he shuttles between Agra and Delhi. For Aurangzeb for initial twenty years Delhi served the imperial seat, but finally was abandoned in favour of Aurangabad till his death. Interestingly even when it were the capitals Mughal emperors hardly stayed there for long. Agra was Akbar’s capital for approximately 36 years out of which 22 years he remained outside the city. Similarly during his 22 years reign Jahangir was at Agra only for 14 years (Sinopoli, 1994: 295-296).

Why was such a peripatetic attitude of the Mughals towards the capital cities? Sinopoli has argued that it was a result of ‘local political, military, and logistical conditions that affected imperial stability’. It was also meant to be a ‘conspicuous display of imperial wealth’. At ideological front it was ‘to symbolically equate king’s person with the empire and the desire of individual rulers to define and materially represent their centrality to imperial structure and stability’ (Sinopoli, 1994: 296). Akbar’s motive behind his shift from Delhi to Agra was ‘to dissociate himself from the power and interference of the
Urbanisation in Medieval India - 2

traditional elites of Delhi’ (Sinopoli, 1994: 300). She further views his shift to Fathpur Sikri was equally motivated to ‘isolate’ ‘potentially recalcitrant nobles’ ‘from the resources of wealth and power of Agra’ (Sinopoli, 1994: 300).

25.7 SYMBOLISM IN MUGHAL PRIMATE CITIES

Sinopoli (1994: 300) argues that ‘Fatehpur Sikri is the most dramatic physical expression of Akbar’s concept of kingship… it was in large part a political stage, utilized by the king and court, while the bulk of the economic and military facilities remained in nearby Agra.’ Abul Fazl, architect of penning down Akbar’s ideas, articulated that ‘architecture fulfilled a ceremonial function’ that reflected in Fatehpur Sikri constructions to its fullest. The palace complex at Agra, situated along the banks of Yamuna was a symbolic representation of the supreme divine power of the king (being situated at a high pedestal); while the nobles had to be stationed under the shadow of the royal palace. In between lay the open field, the royal square (maidan-i shah) on the banks of Yamuna where king was to inspect troops, royal ceremonies and processions were organised, also a place for royal spectacles, elephant fight, etc. It was also where people assembled for the divine glimpse of the emperor (jharokha darshan) (Petruccioli, 2015: 545).

The symbolism is best illustrated in Panch Mahal and Ekstambha Prasada (Diwan-i Khass). Panch Mahal was directly connected with Akbar’s jharokha darshan; while Ekstambha Prasada, a single pillar supporting a circular platform, represented ‘Akbar’s belief in sun worship and to symbolize the ancient Indian concept of world’s sustenance through the axis pillar of the cosmic order as daily measured out by the Surya-Purusha’ (Nath, 2015: 570). It was a ‘proto-type of unitary wooden pillar of Gujarat’. ‘It was inspired by, and is a reflection of, his [Akbar’s] thought and personality’ (Nath, 2015: 570).

Commenting on the symbolism of Fatehpur Sikri Petruccioli argues, ‘The sequence of enclosures of Diwan-i Amm, the Diwan-i Khass, from the Khwabgah to the so-called Palace of Jodhbai, made-up the setting for a theatrical scheme of arrangement, “an Aula Regis as a simulacrum of the Cosmos”, where a libretto of performances which take place simultaneously in space and time, like a fresco-sequence, reiterates the divine origin of the god-like prince. The Anup Talao fountain and the Diwan-i Khass, which embody complex symbols, make up at the same time an allegory of spiritual pilgrimage on the part of the Sufi Akbar from the terrestrial world towards Universal and Celestial Harmony, at the centre of which is placed Akbar in the role of Cosmocrat. A subtle play of equivocation between cult of the throne and the cult of the Divine spreads out from this strange building at Fatehpur Sikri across the entire Mughal domain’ (Petruccioli, 2015: 545). ‘This was the setting of the daily darbar, a sacred representation of the divine origin of the king…’ (Petruccioli, 2015: 545-546).

Similar symbolism is visible in the construction of the capital city of Shahjahanabad. The palace was placed symbolically at the centre of the city, empire and the Universe. ‘The Palace was the Theatre of the World. The two porticoed avenues [Faiz Bazaar and Chandni Chowk] project the movement of King of Kings into the heart of the Mughal city where on the occasion of the principal religious and civil feasts (particularly the New Year or the feast of Nauruz, and the emperor’s birthday), the population, amassed under the porticoes or on the terraces of the houses, participated in a baroque and theatrical ceremony: the slow progression of the Divine ‘Presence’ of the ruler which dominated the entire procession’ (Petruccioli, 2015: 547).

Shahjahan’s new capital city Shahjahanabad thus symbolised the centre of the world.
‘The king was himself the *axis mundi*, the center of the universe. The capital city was located at the centre of the kingdom, the palace-fortress at the center of the city, and the throne of the king at the centre of the universe’ (Blake, 2017: 29). Shahjahan completely dissociated religious authority from the political centre; unlike Akbar in whose Fathpur Sikri Salim Chishti’s tomb and the Jami mosque forms very much part of the centre, Shahjahan did not construct Jami mosque within the palace complex instead built outside thus exclusively placed the ‘royal palace’ the centre of the empire (later Aurangzeb constructed Moti Masjid as part of the palace complex). Thus Shahjahan’s new capital truly symbolises what Liverani argues, ‘the significance of the construction of a new capital was second in symbolic value only to the act of world creation by the gods’ (cited in Sinopoli, 1994: 304).

Thus ‘the Mughal capitals by individual rulers may be viewed as a physical extension of the political and symbolic authority of the ruler, as well as a means of distinguishing a ruler from its predecessors’; it can be looked in the ‘broader framework of imperial strategies for expressions of power and legitimation’ (Sinapoli, 1994: 304-305).

### 25.8 SUMMARY

The primate cities of Agra-Fatehpur Sikri-Shahjahanabad derived their strength for being the capital cities of the empire, nonetheless, they were vibrant trading and commercial centres as well as production centres. They flourished and survived even when they were no longer the capitals of the empire. In these primate cities riverine landscape occupied the centre in the spatial settings; the palace and the nobles’ houses occupied the riverine front. The fort, fortification walls, the central mosque and the *chowk* (*chaharsuq*) occupied the principal spaces in the scheme. While the principal mosque very much formed part of the fort structures, both at Agra and Fathpur Sikri, Shahjahan separated the two and kept the mosque outside the fort – symbolising the authority of the monarch above religious authority. Agra and Fathpur Sikri show lack of planning, but Shahjahanabad was perfectly planned. Early capital towns (Agra and Sikri) strongly suggest central Asian impact where camps were being transformed into the built in structures as is starkly evident in Akbar’s Sikri. Nonetheless, impact of indigenous artisans and provincial styles – Gujarat-Rajasthan (Yamuna-Chambal) – is also clearly evident.

### 25.9 EXERCISES

1) Discuss the growth of the city of Agra under the Mughals.

2) Why did Shahjahan decided to shift his capital city to Shahjahanabad? What were the characteristics of the city of Shahjahanabad?

3) Compare Agra, Fathpur Sikri and Shahjahanabad as Mughal capital towns.

4) Do you agree that Mughal capital Shahjahanabad was the planned city?

5) Mughal capitals so designed were *camps in stone*. Comment.

6) Mughal primate cities are the symbolic representation of the supreme divine power of the king. Comment.

### 25.10 REFERENCES

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