From Qila Mubarak to The Red fort: A Constant Presence in Delhi History

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Abstract

Evolution of cities since the earliest times can be attributed to the dynamic interplay of socio-economic and technological developments giving rise to urban settlements. The urban centres not only acted as hubs of commerce and governance, but signified cultural, artistic and intellectual endeavours that influenced contemporary urban landscapes in times to come.Many cities have distinctive cultural codes and symbols which need to be recognized which is reflected through its religious buildings, statues or streets conveying cultural beliefs and values. The paper, through an application of the above-mentioned frameworks, traces the changing meanings of the Red Fort as the epicentre of the city, through changes in urban ethos and power regimes. Through its journey, the Red Fort has been closely associated with watershed events in Delhi history like the zenith of the Mughal empire, the Mughal twilight and debacle, British occupation of Delhi, the mutiny of 1857, the partition and independence of India. It bears witness to both the hope and the challenges that accompanied these historic events and continues to remind people of the complexities of India's history.

Keywords: Qila Mubarak, Red Fort,Lal Qila, Shahjahanabad, Old Delhi.

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History of ancient and medieval cities

Evolution of cities since the earliest times can be attributed to the dynamic interplay of socio-economic and technological developments giving rise to urban settlements.Early urban centres gave way to sprawling metropolises of the Middle Ages which set the foundations of modern urban life and today's cities reflect all-round development and modernization fuelled by the socio-economic and political needs as well as an urge for a better life. The first urban cities appeared around 3500 BCE in Mesopotamia. The characteristic features of these settlements were dense population, centralised government system and extensive infrastructures and a lot of architectural activities. Similarly, other river valley cultures like the Nile, Indus and the establishment of Greek and Roman city states played pivotal roles in the civilization's cultural and political landscape. For example, the Roman Empire revolutionized the extent of urban planning and cities like Rome could house over a million population at its peak and its urban setting was dotted with grid layouts, aqueducts and monuments like Colosseum reflected an unprecedented scale of urban sophistication. Athens boasted of an Agora, a meeting place for the public and civic life while in Sparta military and the community lived together within the city state framework. The City States of Athens and Sparta signified urban epitome of urban forms in ancient Greece.

Medieval cities were influenced by factors like feudalism, trade and the rise of religious institutions. Typical features of the medieval cities included walls, narrow winding streets, central market places like what we see in the cities of London, Paris, Florence as well as in the Islamic cities of Baghdad, Cordoba and Cairo. These cities exuberated rich cultural exchange and intellectual advancement. The cities of ancient and medieval periods acted as crucibles of innovation, development of commerce, craft guilds, establishment of religious centres, marketplaces and harbinger of intellectual growth seen through the establishment of universities. All these signified the multifaceted nature of urban life. The urban centres not only acted as hubs of commerce and governance, but signified cultural, artistic and intellectual endeavours that influenced contemporary urban landscapes in times to come.

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City and Centre

In words of Mumford (1961), the noted American historian, sociologist and philosopher of technology and urban life, 'cities are the greatest creations of humanity'.He believed that a city should be conceived as a dynamic and organic entity, rather than simply a collection of buildings and infrastructure.The city and its various elements have a strong connection with its past and a projection for its future. Human endeavour has shaped the cities they are today and it requires a detailed understanding of its nuances for its better understanding. One such area of studying the city is to read it as a text in order to interpret the city's physical, social and cultural aspects like a written or symbolic text. The city can be interpreted in terms of its semiotics - signs and symbols in order to understand its streets, buildings, graffiti, public art and people. As a narrative or a story, the city has a lot to tell in terms of its history, developments and the lives and times of its people creating a unique urban idiom. One can explore various layers of a city's past in terms of its architecture, culture and society. Each layer has a story to tell and can be read to uncover different aspects of city's identity. City also interacts with its surroundings and neighbourhood as different neighbourhoods represent urban typologies with their own characteristics, rules and meanings. Interaction with its neighbourhood throws up varied interpretations of its relationship with them. Urban planning decisions and zoning laws for settlement patterns reflect the shape of power dynamics of a city. It makes an interesting study as a site of power struggles and political expressions. Amultimodal analysis of the city combining texts, images and other modes of communication through architecture, public spaces, transportation systems etc. brings forth different narratives a city. At the same time, the text of a city is context dependent and depends on situation for different interest groups.In a nutshell, it offers entirely different meaning for different people at different times. Hence it is imperative to have an interdisciplinary approach for reading the city as a text.Urban planners, architects, historians, sociologists and cultural theorists all can contribute significantly and throw valuable insights about the city. However, reading the city can also be subjective depending on the experiences, backgrounds and perspectives of the person interpreting it. Therefore, it is important to engage the local community in interpreting the city as they stand as forces of cohesion in urban development and reflect the aspirations for the city.Many cities have distinctive cultural codes and symbols which need to be recognized which is reflected through its religious buildings, statues or streets conveying cultural beliefs and values.The paper, through an application of the above-

mentioned frameworks, traces the changing meanings of the Red Fort as the epicentre of the city, through changes in urban ethos and power regimes.

Shahjahanbad: Urban Design

Mughal Emperor Shahjahan, in the early part of the 17th century, constructed the city of Shahjahanabad, encompassing the Red Fort, or the Qila Mubarak as it was known then, and the surrounding walled city. This urban endeavor served as a grand symbol of Mughal authority and splendor. The Red Fort, in particular, represented the pinnacle of architectural brilliance and doubled as a formidable defensive structure with its robust red sandstone walls and imposing gates, capable of withstanding any potential invasion.Positioned on the banks of the Yamuna River, the Red Fort occupied a strategic central location in Delhi, naturally fortifying the city against external threats. Additionally, it sat along important trade routes, making it a vital hub for trade, commerce, and governance. Shah Jahan's decision to return to Delhi was largely driven by the challenge of creating a majestic ceremonial pathway amid the congested and disorganized city of Agra.Renowned as an astute builder often referred to as the "engineer king," Shah Jahan had a profound understanding of architecture. His preference for marble over sandstone was evident in his constructions. In Agra, he had already made significant modifications to the Fort and erected the Taj Mahal, perhaps his greatest masterpiece. Nevertheless, these individual structures failed to satisfy his refined architectural sensibilities.Following the emotional turmoil caused by the loss of Mumtaz Mahal and hindered by the limitations of Agra, Shah Jahan sought a new site for Shahjahanabad. Delhi proved ideal for this purpose, boasting a more favorable climate, ample water sources, and access to construction materials from nearby ruins. The establishment of this new capital served twin objectives: it showcased Shah Jahan's sophisticated taste and also displayed the opulence of an empire at its zenith.In this venture, Shah Jahan enjoyed abundant resources, both in terms of finances and labor, within his thriving realm. On April 29 1639, at an astrologically auspicious moment, Ghairat Khan, the Subahadar of Delhi, entrusted the renowned builders Ustad Hamid and Ustad Ahmad with the task of constructing the new capital, a testament to Shah Jahan's commitment to architectural excellence.

According to the assessment made by Samual V Noe, it is probable that Shah Jahan's vision for his capital was influenced by reports of the splendid capital of Shah Abbas in Isfahan. Noe suggests that given the Persian orientation of the Mughal court in general, and Shah Jahan in particular, Isfahan's excellence would have presented an intriguing challenge

(Noe, 1986, 2002, p. 237). Despite several existing obstacles such as two rocky hills in an otherwise flat landscape, a winding river, the remnants of two prior cities, the presence of the Salimgarh fortress nearby, and an extensive network of frequently used long-distance roads, the architects managed to achieve a nearly flawless symmetry in accordance with Persian formalism.Stephen P. Blake identifies another potential influence that might have played a role in the planning of Shahjahanabad.

> "The plan of Shahjahanabad appears to have been based on a design from the ancient Hindu texts on architecture. These texts, the *vastu sastras* (rules for architecture), were part of a larger body of Sanskrit texts called the *silpa sastras* (rules for manual arts) … The *Manasara*, a *vastu sastra* dating c. A.D. 400-600 listed a semi-elliptical design called *karmuka* (bow) as one of the shapes a settlement might take. Such a plan was especially appropriate for a site fronting a river or sea-shore." (Blake, 1986, 2002, p. 71)

In Hindu towns following the Karmuka plan, the holiest location was the point where two perpendicular streets intersected, and at that junction stood a temple dedicated to either Shiva or Vishnu. However, in Islamic Shahjahanbad, this central point was occupied by the Palace Fortress.The Islamic city, as described in detail by Thomas Krafft, adheres to a formal pattern featuring a centrally situated Friday Mosque, a surrounding marketplace, clear social and economic distinctions from the city center to its outskirts, an irregular street layout, city walls and a citadel, inner urban districts, and narrow dead-end streets as typical elements. This layout establishes specific urban-hinterland relationships characterized by a rent-capitalist nature (Ehlers-Krafft, 1993). Notes Krafft,

> Unlike other cities of the Islamic world, the bazaars of the Islamic Indian cities do not have any differentiations. On the contrary, retailing, manufacturing and living form a close symbiosis...Bazaars are by no means spatially extended complexes, but are characterized by linear patterns, thus excluding and preventing the development of central-peripheral gradients (Ehlers-Krafft, 1993, p. 22)

Highlighting another essential aspect of the city, Jamal Malik suggests that the creators of Shahjahanabad crafted the architectural representation of what has frequently been referred to as the "patrimonial system" at its zenith (Malik, 1993). However, as Narayani Gupta clarifies, while Shahjahanabad may exhibit the predominant form of a Mughal city, "its way of life was predominantly shaped by its residents. The influx of people, both individuals and

communities, over many centuries, contributed to its distinctive ambiance and character" (Gupta, 1993, p. 31).

The Mughal Court established a culture of performance and extravagant displays to justify its political authority. Visiting the King was an arduous and costly endeavor. It wasn't just the King who expected gifts; his officials also required offerings known as "*nazranas*." While the gifts presented to the King were valuable items, he accepted only a select few and returned the rest. The King bestowed "*khilats*" or robes upon visiting ambassadors, nobles, or rulers, who were expected to present themselves dressed in these robes. Visitors were received with elaborate ceremonies, and they, in turn, were expected to adhere to the intricate court etiquettes.Every noble was obligated to attend the King's Darbar (court) twice daily. Both nobles and Court visitors were prohibited from sitting and had to stand in their designated positions within the hierarchical structure until the King had concluded his affairs for the day. Any form of misconduct was severely penalized. The King was addressed with honorific titles such as *Alam Panah, Qibla-i-Din-i-Jahan, Qibla-Din-wa-Duniya, and Hazrat Salaamat*. Greetings to the King could take the form of *Kornish, Taslim, Sijdah and Paibos*. However, Aurangzeb prohibited all these forms of salutation as they were considered forms of idolatry, allowing only the simple Islamic greeting of saying "*al-salaam-aleikum*."The formalities of the Court extended to ordinary people, and the same meticulous procedures were observed in the microcosm of homes and in everyday interactions on the streets. Social gatherings were limited to men, as women typically remained within the confines of their homes. Customs such as salutations, gift-giving, the manner of receiving guests, showing respect based on status and age, polite conduct in personal and public settings, and proper etiquette were all influenced by the courtly setting.While political legitimacy in the Sultanate was rooted in Islam, in the Mughal realm, if a single principle is to be identified, it would be that of the patrimonial bureaucratic state. Some scholars, like Ebba Koch (1991) and Amina Okada (2010), have emphasized the role of Mughal art in securing legitimacy, while others, like Urvashi Dalal, see the pursuit of legitimacy ingrained in the design of Shahjahanabad. In the 20th century, Francis William Buckler's theory of corporate kingship had a significant influence, attributing Mughal sovereignty to practices like the bestowing of "*khilats*," which integrated the nobles into the distinct folds of the "court society." As demonstrated by Harbans Mukhia, Islam was just one of several enduring sources of legitimacy operating at intellectual, political, and popular levels (Harbans Mukhia, 2004, p. 16).Writes Mukhia:

> If the intellectual and cultural ambience at the court bore the impress of Islam’s considerable presence, the rulers themselves frequently invoked Islamic idiom and

> jargon to legitimize their actions. With some of them it might have been merely a political maneuver; with some others of conviction, even vehemence, shaded a part of the exigency. (Mukhia, 2004, p.17)

The Twin Foci of Shahjahanabad

The city of Shahjahanabad had two central focal points: the Palace Fort and the Jama Masjid. This walled city was enclosed by a stone wall that stood 27 feet high, 12 feet thick, and stretched approximately 3.8 miles in length. It was constructed between 1651 and 1658 and featured 27 towers and multiple gates (Also see Safvi, 2019). Among the main entrances to the city were the Kashmiri Gate, Mori Gate, Kabuli Gate, Lahori Gate, Ajmeri Gate, Turkomani Gate, and Akbarabadi Gate. On the riverfront side, there were access points to the river through Nigambodh Ghat, Qila Ghat, and Raj Ghat. In addition to these major gates, there were numerous smaller entrances located near significant mansions, markets, or mosques.The most prominent public thoroughfare in the city was Chandni Chowk, extending from Lahori Gate to Fatehpuri Masjid. This boulevard featured a central canal (*Nahar-i-bihisht*), tree-lined streets, and shops in Ashrafi Bazaar, Urdu Bazaar, and Fatehpuri Bazaar. Along this street, you could find coffee houses, gardens, bathhouses, and inns. Another market area developed near Akbarabadi Gate, which over time became known as Faiz Bazar. Khas Bazar was situated on the street connecting the Palace Fort to the Jama Masjid. Secondary roads also had their own special bazaars, often associated with nearby workshops. The various neighborhoods (*mohallas*) had their local bazaars as well.The Fort, constructed primarily from red sandstone sourced from the vicinity of Fatehpur Sikri, had an octagonal shape with a perimeter of nearly two miles, measuring 3,100 feet by 1,650 feet. Its axes were aligned with the cardinal points of the compass. On the landward side, a moat, 75 feet wide and 30 feet deep, provided protection. The Fort was divided into two sections: the river-facing half was the center of domestic and official activity. The southern portion of this area contained the harim (women's mansions), accessible only to sons and husbands. The Imtiaz or Mumtaz Mahal, later known as the Rang Mahal, was the largest building and served as a venue for daily activities of the Fort's residents. Shah Jahan retired to this space after his daily schedule in the Diwan-i-aam. Adjacent to this area were the Aramgah or Khwabgah (sleeping quarters) and the emperor's jharokha (balcony) in the Mussaman Burj (Octagonal Tower), where petitioners and subjects gathered for daily darshan (audience).The northern half of the river-facing section contained the more public buildings of the court. The Diwan-i-aam (Hall of Public Audience) was a large open pavilion with forty pillars divided into two sections. One section was for princes, distinguished *amirs*, ambassadors, and dignitaries, while the

other was for lesser *amirs*, nobles, and officers. The emperor himself sat in an eastern wall balcony six feet above the ground, with officers conducting routine financial, military, and administrative affairs below on a marble platform. Surrounding the three sides of the Diwan-i-aam was a courtyard with rooms designated for the seating of the standing guard's *amirs*. Adjacent to this was a *naqqarkhana* (Place of Drums), where musicians played martial music.On the riverfront side of the Diwan-i-aam was the most opulent building of the Fort, the Diwan-i-khaas (Hall of Private Audience) or the Shah Mahal (Emperor's Palace). This chamber was adorned with bejeweled marble decor featuring extensive use of precious metals and glass, making it a dazzling space. It also housed the world's most expensive throne, the Peacock throne. The Royal Hamam or *Ghusal Khana* (Bath) was situated nearby and was lavishly furnished with three stories, each serving different functions such as dressing, hot water, and cold water. The Shah Burj (King's Tower) marked the northeastern corner of the river-facing landmarks within the Fort.To the west of the imperial quarters lay another densely populated area known as the *jilau Khana*, adjacent to the *naqqarkhana*. This area was where members of the royal family, *amirs*, officers, and petitioners gathered while awaiting entry. An unusual feature of the Fort was the covered Bazaar-i-mussaqaf, a market not commonly found in India at the time but prevalent in West Asia.A significant portion of the palace grounds was dedicated to gardens, including the Mahtab Gardens and Hayat Bakhsh Gardens. Beyond the Fort, past the moat that separated it from the rest of the city, stretched beautiful gardens like the Anguri, Buland, and Gulabi gardens. Since Shah Jahan attended the Jama Masjid, which he had built, there was no mosque within the Fort itself. The Moti Masjid in the Fort was later constructed by his son, Aurangzeb. The road connecting the Akbarabadi Gate to the Salimgarh Gate within the Fort was lined with residences, offices, stables, workshops, and other facilities to cater to the needs of the royal household. Younger and less established princes resided within the Fort, while more established ones lived outside in mansions assigned to them.

Shahjahan issued a decree calling for the construction of mosques in every corner of his capital. Accordingly, in addition to other Islamic places of worship such as Dargahs, Khanqahs, Imambarahs, and Idgahs, the city featured Masjids of various sizes and significance, ranging from those of *begumi-amiri* stature to neighborhood mosques.The Jama Masjid, also known as the Masjid-i-Jami (Friday Mosque), was the grand central congregational mosque where the principal weekly religious service was held. Construction of the mosque began in 1650 under the supervision of Fazil Khan, the khan saman and Sadullah Khan, the wazirand it took six years and one million rupees to complete. Perched

atop one of the cliffs, the Bhujalal Pahari, within the plains of Shahjahanabad, the mosque's grandeur was enhanced by a steep flight of steps leading to its massive doorways on three sides. The Masjid served as the religious and vertical counterpart to the political and horizontal prominence of the Fort in Shahjahanabad's symbolism.Bazaars selling various goods sprawled out on the steps flanking the Masjid on its three sides, creating a bustling atmosphere. On the western side, where the flight of steps was absent, a dawakhana (hospital) and a madrasa (Islamic school) funded by the emperor were situated. Shah Jahan used the eastern side for his own entry. The royal procession enroute to the Jama Masjid passed through Khass Bazaar, inhabited byDancers, Astrologers, Storytellers and Healers.The Masjid itself was situated on the second floor, following the common practice in multistoried mosques. The prayer hall was a spacious square with three large domes above it. The mosque featured mihrabs (recesses indicating the direction of Mecca), minarets, and a central fountain, highlighting its elegant simplicity. Due to its size and magnificence, the Jama Masjid attracted worshipers from all parts of the city and was regarded as the most significant or Padshahi (Sovereign) mosque of Shahjahanabad.

Mohallas, Katrahs and Koochas in Shahjahanabad

The area just outside the Fort was designated for the residence of members of the royalty and nobility. Similarly, the vicinity around Chandni Chowk was later utilized for this purpose. This concentration of wealth and power within this region became evident. While the Fort was meticulously planned to avoid the urban chaos seen in cities like Agra and Lahore, town planning gradually became more disorganized and arbitrary as one moved away from the Fort. This was primarily because most effort was focused on developing the central axis that symbolized the emperor's glory, while the rest of the city followed the social and economic dynamics of its inhabitants.The most crucial aspect was the location of mansions belonging to royalty and nobility, which served as microcosms of the Fort itself. These mansions, often referred to as *qasrs* (fortresses), replicated not only the design but also the political and economic influence of the Fort. *havelis or nashimans* (large mansions) contained architectural features similar to those in the Fort, including massive walls, *idgah* (prayer ground), *hamam* (bathhouse), *mehalsarai* (family quarters), *diwankhana* (hall for audiences), **sardkhana** (cool chambers for summer retreat), *tehkhana* (underground chambers), *karkhana*(workshops), *naqqarkhana*(musical hall), *jilaukhana* (waiting area)and *khanahbagh* (garden). The dependents and workers of these mansions began residing in thatched huts outside, giving rise to the mohalla system of population distribution. As Stephen P. Blake

suggests, other principles of organization such as caste, origin, and trade also came to influence the formation of mohallas (Blake, 1986, 2002).

According to Sharia values, the city was divided into private spaces (*havelis* or mansions), public spaces (thoroughfares, secondary roads, bazaars), and semi-private spaces (alleys within *mohallas*, which were enclosed and homogenous units with entry through city gates). This hierarchical urban organization allowed for a diverse population to coexist. The internal hierarchy was an integral part of the city, as evidenced by land allocation to the *shurafa*(elite) and the construction of mosques from east to west in alignment with the royal perspective.By the 18th century, the spatial order in Shahjahanabad had led to its segregation into three rough categories. To the north of Chandni Chowk, the gentry resided in palaces mansions, and gardens. Moving closer to Chandni Chowk, one found traders dealing in huqqa makers, fabrics, meats, fish, luxury goods, and in proximity to the imperial house. Along Chandni Chowk, luxury shops selling the finest ready-made goods lined the street. In the *mohallas*around Khari Baoli, one could find specialists in products such as pomegranates, butter oil, perfumes, flowers and tobacco. This region was economically prosperous. North of this area was the Punjabi Katrah, inhabited by ambitious workers and traders. From the city's outskirts toward the center, specialization was evident, reflecting consumption patterns and the availability of raw materials and labor.

Christian missionaries and Europeans settled in Daryaganj to the southeast. The majority of the working-class population resided south of Chandni Chowk, including areas like Gali Rodgaran (home to gut workers). The poorest strata, such asoil extractors, cobblers, washer men, butchers and potterspredominantly lived close to city gates, with some exceptions like the Kashmiri Gate, Lahori Gate, the Kabuli Gate, as well as the eastern entrances of the city, or even outside the city walls. Dancing girls lived in a neighborhood known as Gali Kanchne ki.Professions like barbers and tanners did not have dedicated *mohallas*, as they were situated on the outskirts of various *mohallas*. There was a total of 91 *mohalla* mosques, with many located inside *amiri* mansions. Islamic law mandated public access to these mosques. Lower-ranking tradesmen settled along the southern and southwestern perimeter of the city walls, and they too had mosques associated with their professions, such ascoalers', masons', potters', metalworkers', shepherds', and washermen'smosques. Closer to the city's core, there were mosques for oil extractors, weavers, horse traders, and wool producers, as these were socially respected professions concentrated in that area. Along the primary streets, mosques were designated for the muhtasib (censor of public morality)and *karori*(collector of taxes). Professional groups

located north of the axis Kucha–e Sayyid Qasim Khan and Sitaram Bazar includedhairdressers, basket weavers, spinners, bangle makers, money changers, potters, shoemakers, gardeners, dyers and carpenters, each having its own mosque. Constructing mosques was considered virtuous, and mohalla mosques were built, maintained, and promoted with*amiri* (aristocratic) patronage. These mosques were sustained through income generated from *waqf* (dedications for mosque management by the builder), donations, or rent from rooms within the mosques used as *musafirkhanas* (lodges).To support his argument that within the city, each Islamic tradition could be linked to specific areas of origin and development, Jamal Malik provides the following evidence:

> By establishing a closed unit with its variety of social groups, complementing each other, with schools, stores for essential goods, etc., each mohalla gave an incentive for a life in seclusion and devotion to God, thereby forming a moral community. Trans-mohalla movement was thus not necessary in this strictly demarcated cultural framework. ... The identity of the quarter was thus marked out by its economic and social contacts as well as religious affiliations and therefore often served as a first port of call for new arrivals to the city. (p. 87)

The religious scholars embodied the tradition of spiritual and vocational purity by adhering to the practice of not leaving their designated *mohallas*. Consequently, they played a central role in the spiritual life of their respective *mohallas*. This role involved facilitating and presiding over recurring religious ceremonies and celebrations, serving as a unifying force within the *mohalla*. Their presence and guidance helped forge a shared social and ritual identity among the *mohalla's* inhabitants, fostering a sense of belonging and connection to a common spiritual and ceremonial realm (Jamal Malik, p. 73).

The city could also be roughly divided along religious lines, with distinct neighborhoods inhabited predominantly by Hindus and Muslims. Hindus predominantly resided in Chhipiwara (the home of cloth printers) located to the west of the Jama Masjid and in North Ballimaran, situated southeast of Fatehpuri Masjid. On the other hand, the majority of Muslims settled in Haweli Haider Quli Khan, South Ballimaran, and Lal Quan, and in close proximity to the large mosques.Shahjahanabad had one central police station or Kotwali located in Chandni Chowk, which oversaw the administration of the city. There were twelve *thanas* (police precincts) under *thanadars* (police officers) responsible for collecting taxes and duties, maintaining population registers, policing the area, and controlling the markets. The *thanas* were further subdivided into *mohallas*, which were distinct residential quarters within the city.The *mohallas* were typically named after prominent or dominant residents or

the primary vocation of the people living there. These *mohallas* followed a pattern of differentiated quarters and were socially cohesive, with no clear separation between areas of economic activity and residential spaces. As Jamal Malik notes, "The quarters are embedded in a complex texture with their norms relating not only to economic necessities but also to manifold social interweaving." This integration of various aspects of life within the *mohallas* made them socially and economically vibrant.The *mohallas* mostly bore the imprint of the chief service sector present there, such as traders, artisans,or specific ethnic groups. This is evident from the names of mohallas, which often included references to the predominant profession or ethnic identity, like jatwara, katrah-e marwari, punjabi, gadariyan (shepherds), suiwalan (needle makers), rikkab (stirrup holders/cupbearers), teliyan (oil extractors), muftiyan (religious scholars), sawdagar (traders), mohalla-e dhobiyan(washermen) and so on. These different social and ethnic groups coexisted in a symbiotic relationship, with their buildings and adjacent streets often aligned in a mutually beneficial manner.Within the *mohallas*, there were *katrahs*, which were commercial emporiums that also offered lodging facilities at their center. Radiating out from the*katrah* were small alleys known as *galis*or *kuchahs*, which could be categorized as primary, secondary, or tertiary streets depending on their distance from the *katrah*. Both *katrahs* and *kuchahs* often bore names corresponding to the professions or ethnic groups associated with them. The farther one moved from the *katrah*, the greater the diversity, but it also led to increased social anonymity.Narayani Gupta (1993) provides a compelling explanation as to why a large number of people could live together in this compact area without generating social tension. She suggests that urban society in Shahjahanabad was highly regulated, akin to a hierarchy of Chinese boxes, ranging from the city wall to the curtained private quarters of individual houses. This hierarchical organization and regulation helped maintain social harmony and cohesion within the city.

The Fort through the Mughal Twilight

The zenith of Mughal court and authority, as embodied in Shahjahanabad, could not sustain itself over the eighteenth century. This decline began when Aurangzeb had to leave Delhi in 1679 to remain stationed in the Deccan, where he battled the formidable Marathas until his death in 1707. During this period, the Mughal Empire faced internal and external challenges.The Mughal Empire experienced a 33-year period of relative stability after Aurangzeb's death. The era began with Bahadur Shah's successor, Jahandar Shah, entering Delhi in 1712. During this time, the empire's prestige had eroded, but it was not entirely lost,

and its army remained a formidable force. Although the administrative machinery was skeletal, it continued to operate. The Maratha threat was mainly confined to the South, and the Rajputs were not particularly troublesome.However, the decline of the Mughal Empire continued due to a lack of effective leadership. Muhammad Shah, popularly known as Muhammad Shah Rangila, ruled from 1719 to 1739 and remained engrossed in courtly pleasures, ignoring the impending challenges. This period of relative stability ended dramatically in 1739 when Nadir Shah invaded and sacked Delhi, leading to mass massacres and plunder. Nadir Shah took Muhammad Shah prisoner and looted the royal treasury, including the Koh-i-Noor diamond and the Peacock Throne.Shah Alam II fled from Delhi and proclaimed himself emperor in 1759, living under the protection of Shuja-ud-Daula of Awadh. In 1764, Suraj Mal attacked Delhi and plundered the Qila Mubarak for valuables. From 1785 onward, Delhi became an appendage to the domain of Sindia.In 1787, Ghulam Qadir, the grandson of Najib-ud-Daula, broke into Delhi in search of booty. Unable to find substantial riches, he vented his frustration by blinding Shah Alam II and digging up the palace floors of the already stripped Qila Mubarak. Shah Alam, despite his physical disability, was retained on the throne as a convenient pawn in Sindia's control.From 1679 to 1712, the Qila Mubarak sustained the symbolic presence and prestige of the Mughal Empire, which was exploited as a political strategy by clever rivals in eighteenth-century India. However, from 1712 to 1748, despite the continued presence of the Mughal emperor, power structures underwent change, an economic crisis prevailed, and social stability was disrupted due to internal and external upheavals.From 1751 to 1761, a period of great turmoil known as the "Great Anarchy" gripped Delhi and extended until 1772. Subsequently, from 1785 onward, the Maratha protectorship of Delhi provided some respite for the city, which had been greatly depleted and ravaged. Nevertheless, both the blinded emperor and the Qila Mubarak were inevitably heading toward their destiny, succumbing to the British onslaught that eventually occurred in 1803. This marked the end of Mughal rule in Delhi.Percival Spear narrates the dubious distinction of the period thereafter thus:

> Two military tidal waves, the Afghan and the Marathas, met in the Delhi plains and in the shock of collision the Mughal imperial power, as distinct from its name and moral authority, disappeared forever. (Spear, 1949, 2002: 14)

The seething tension between the Marathas and the British East India Company eventually erupted into the anticipated war of 1803. This conflict led to the Battle of Delhi, also known as the Battle of Patparganj, which occurred on September 11, 1803. During this battle, the

British East India Company, under the command of Lord Lake, defeated the army of Scindia on the left bank of the Yamuna River, just opposite Humayun's Tomb.Following this victory, Shah Alam II, the Mughal emperor, replaced the Marathas with the British East India Company for protection and a pension. In 1803, the Company occupied Delhi, and from that year until 1857, when the declining influence of the Mughal emperors was ultimately extinguished, the emperors in the Qila served as a namesake political center with little real power.

Qila-mualla during Pax Britannica

The British occupation of Delhi in 1803 marked a significant turning point in the city's history. During this period, there were fundamental changes and realignments in various aspects, including urban development, politics, and society. Shah Alam II, the Mughal emperor, was now confined to the Qila, and the British East India Company established its own administration outside the fort.The early British Residents, including Sir David Ochterlony, Archibald Seton, and Charles Metcalf, followed a policy of showing respect to the Mughal emperor within the Qila while exerting their influence and authority outside. They treated the emperor with courtesy and offered tributes during their visits. There was no immediate need for radical measures in dealing with the Mughal emperor.Shah Alam II passed away in 1806 and was succeeded by Akbar Shah II, followed by Bahadur Shah in 1837. These three last Mughal emperors are often misunderstood in history. Percival Spear emphasizes their true character, stating that Shah Alam was a brave and cultured man, though an unsuccessful ruler; Akbar had the dignity and culture of his lineage but was of lesser significance than his father, and Bahadur Shah was a man of cultured and upright character.As described by Franklin, a surveyor for the East India Company in 1795, the surroundings of Delhi had deteriorated significantly. The once magnificent and celebrated city had turned into a shapeless heap of ruins, with remnants of *amiri* mansions, country houses,bazaars, streets and gardensscattered throughout the area.

Despite the challenging conditions in Delhi, particularly the reduced political influence of the Qila Mualla, it remained a centre for cultural patronage. The painting atelier in Delhi, originally established and nurtured by Shah Jahan, continued to produce remarkable artworks even during and after the rule of Aurangzeb.Emperors such as Farrukhsiyar,Jahandar Shah and Bahadur Shah Iactively supported and encouraged painters. These artists developed their distinctive styles, often characterized by intricate and expert techniques in miniature figural representation. Despite the shifting political landscape, the

artistic tradition in Delhi continued to flourish and create masterpieces.William Dalrymple makes the following remarks about the art produced during the reign of the Later Mughals:

> All empires fall, and by the beginning of the 18th century, the political power of the Mughals had begun to crumble. But for the following 150 years, Delhi remained a major artistic and cultural centre, and despite diminished resources, the later Emperors continued to patronize remarkable artists and poets with great discrimination. Scholars are only now coming to recognize that the work of this period is every bit as interesting and innovative as the art produced under their better-known predecessors. (www.sites.asiasociety.org)

Scholars like Percival Spear and C.F. Andrews have documented a flourishing intellectual, literary, and academic movement that unfolded through cultural patronage in Delhi. The city's cultural scene was vibrant, with art, music, poetry, and painting thriving under the support of the court, the nobility, and other emerging affluent groups.Delhi, once a centre of Persian learning, was now nurturing a new literary medium, Urdu (or Hindawi). The popularity of Urdu poetry symbolized the culmination of a liberal culture that had been developing since the reign of Akbar, transcending class and religious barriers. Poets such as Nazir Akbarabadi, Mir Dard, Mir Taqi Mir, Mirza Rafi Sauda, and Shah Hatim celebrated the city's beauty and lamented the pain it endured due to constant invasions. They explored the liberalism and humanism of the age, as well as its unpredictability and ingratitude.Mirza Farhatullah Baig's work *Dehli ki Aakhiri Shama* (The Last Mushaira of Delhi) recounted the final great poetry gathering in Zafar's Delhi, held in the haveli of Mubarak Begum, the widow of Ochterlony. Alongside many poet-princes from the royal house, forty other Delhi poets recited their compositions at this event. Prominent poets included Mir, Shefta, Sahbai, Dagh, Azad, Zauq (the poet laureate)and Ghalib – the latter becoming the poet laureate only after Zauq's death in 1854.Bahadur Shah Zafar was not only a devoted patron of the arts, supporting accomplished artists like the sitarist Himmat Khan and the ghazal singer Tanras Khan but he was also a prolific poet himself under the pen name 'Zafar.' He excelled in various fields, including marksmanship, archery, riding, linguistics and calligraphy. He was described as a Renaissance man known for his ascetic lifestyle, mysticism, and tolerance.While Urdu poetry reached new heights of artistic expression, Delhi College played a crucial role in fostering an interest in the physical and life sciences by disseminating Western learning. From the time of Mohammad Shah Rangila to that of Bahadur Shah Zafar, Delhi was home to notable teachers, scholars, mystics and theologians. Delhi held a prominent place in the Islamic context and was often referred to as Hazrat Dilli and Markaz-

i-daira-Islam (circle of Islam) due to the presence of revered pilgrimage Sufi shrines and grand mosques. The courtly life itself served as a cultural ideal observed, celebrated, and emulated not only in Delhi but also in other cultural centres like Hyderabad and Awadh. The court influenced various aspects of society, including forms of address, behaviour conventions, ceremonial dress, displays of affluence, merrymaking, wine drinking, festivals, fairs, marriage customs, and social rituals. Despite early 19th-century revivalist and puritanical voices, Delhi society overall exhibited eclecticism and synthesis.

The Fort and the Mutiny

The quaint setting of British peace (Mittal, 2013) was disrupted by the British terror that arrived in Delhi in 1857. When the soldiers from Meerut arrived in Delhi, first seen by Bahadur Shah through the window of his chamber, rampaging on the bridge of boats over the Yamuna, both he and the entire city were taken by surprise.The aftermath of the revolt is a harrowing tale of vengeful annihilation, not only of the people but also of the city and the fort. Princes and other royal offenders were executed at KhooniDarwaza near Delhi Gate, with the exception of Bahadur Shah. Although he was put on trial, his life was spared, and he was eventually sent into exile in Rangoon (modern-day Yangon) along with his wife, Zeenat Mahal, his son, Jivan Bakht, and a few more immediate family members.The British wrath sought nothing less than the complete eradication of the city as retribution for the suffering they endured on the Ridge, the indignity and agony faced by their women and children, the audacity of those who challenged their authority to establish a rival power, and the loss of many soldiers, including Nicholson and others whose memorial was erected near the Ridge in 1870.As Narayani Gupta aptly puts it, "Delhi was made to forget that it was a Mughal City." The pitched battles in the streets of Delhi had already caused irreparable damage. The magazine or arsenal in the walled city had exploded on May 11, 1857, and St. George's Church had been vandalized by the rebels. The third British column, as part of the four-pronged attack on Delhi on September 11, 1857, had blasted through the Kashmiri Gate.After the British reoccupation, houses were excavated in search of treasures. Initially, there was a call to raze the entire city in the euphoria of victory, but after the excitement had subsided, more measured steps were taken to assert control over the city.As Noe notes, “within a brief period the following devastations occurred”:

> About 80 percent of the interior of the fort was destroyed (an area of about 120 acres). This had been densely covered with elaborate royal pavilions, gardens, store-rooms, barracks, and quarters of artisans and other court functionaries.

> Displacing a substantial residential population, the British converted the fort into a military garrison. To help protect it from assault they cleared a field for artillery fire an area 300-400 yards broad around its western and southern perimeter. … The additional destruction resulted in the elimination of many of the more prestigious *mohallas* of the city, a number of the richest and most active bazaars, one of the largest mosques in the city, and several important charitable institutions. Assuming a population density of around 100 persons per acre…, the clearance around the fort resulted in the displacement of 10,000-12,000 residents. These figures do not include the seizure and, in some cases, demolition of the *havelis* of important officials … (Noe, 1986, 2002, p. 237-249)

The royal palace and the fort succumbed to the fervor of British conquest. Governor General Canning had initially ordered the "preservation of isolated buildings of architectural or historic interest," but as Percival Spear noted, "care was there, the taste lamentably lacking." In practice, only the Diwan-i-khas managed to escape significant British alterations.Mosques were viewed with suspicion as potential centres of conspiracy, and Jama Masjid was initially occupied by British troops but later handed back to a restoration committee under Maulvi Sayyid Ahmed, five years after its capture.Right after recapturing the city, British soldiers were accommodated in various buildings, including Colonel Skinner's house, Ahmad Ali Khan's haveli, Khan Mohammad's residence, Bara Hindu Rao, the Jama Masjid, the Delhi College, the Idgah, and the Fort.The Fort gradually lost its centrality as Delhi was declared the new capital of the British Empire during the 1911 Darbar (For details, see Mittal and Singh, 2023 a). The construction of New Delhi, which expanded in concentric circles around the Raisina Hill, the criss-crossing railway lines, the city's westward and northward expansion, and the general disregard for the civic conditions, historic value, and Indian character of the former Shahjahanabad, all contributed to relegating the Fort and the surrounding settlements to what eventually became known as the 'Old City’.

The Red Fort in Independent India

The Red Fort, also known as Lal Qila, though not geographically central in the capital of independent India, yet is significant to independent India for several reasons. On August 15, 1947, the first Prime Minister of India, Jawaharlal Nehru, delivered his famous speech from the Red Fort's ramparts, declaring India's independence. This event marked the end of British colonial rule in India and the beginning of a new era for the country. The Red Fort, with its

iconic architecture and historical significance, provided a powerful backdrop for this historic announcement.The partition of India was accompanied by widespread violence, communal riots, and the mass migration of millions of people between India and Pakistan (For details, see Mittal and Singh, 2023 b). The Radcliffe Line, named after the British lawyer Cyril Radcliffe, was the boundary demarcation line that separated the two newly formed nations. The Radcliffe Line was announced from the Red Fort on August 17, 1947, two days after independence.The Red Fort, as a symbol of India's unity and cultural heritage, witnessed the emotional and political turmoil of the partition. While it was a place of celebration on Independence Day, it also served as a reminder of the divisions and challenges that accompanied the partition. The partition led to the displacement and suffering of many people, and the Red Fort stands as a testament to the complexities and historical significance of this period.The partition of India resulted in the migration and displacement of millions of people, leading to one of the largest and most tragic population movements in history. The Red Fort was often a temporary shelter for refugees during this tumultuous time.The iconic moment of Indian Independence is celebrated every year as India's Independence Day on 15 August with the Red Fort as the focal point of celebrations. Apart from Independence Day, it is a venue for Republic Day celebrations, which include a grand parade showcasing India's military strength, cultural diversity, and achievements.The Red Fort is designated as a UNESCO World Heritage Site, and its preservation is a matter of national and international importance. Independent India has taken steps to protect and conserve this historical monument, ensuring that it continues to be a symbol of pride for the nation.The Red Fort is a major tourist attraction in Delhi and draws millions of visitors from across the globe every year. It serves as an educational site where people can learn about India's history and its struggle for independence. The fort's museums and exhibitions showcase artifacts and historical information related to India's journey to independence.The Red Fort hosts various cultural events and celebrations throughout the year. Thus, the Red Fort is closely associated with the partition and independence of India as it bears witness to both the hope and the challenges that accompanied this historic event and continues to remind people of the complexities of India's history.

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