

*“Documentation of Unexplored Indo-Islamic Monuments in the Hinterland of Grand Trunk Road in Haryana and Punjab”*

**A Project Funded by U.S. Ambassadors Fund Cultural Preservation Grant (AFCP)**

Report for January – July, December 2009

**Introduction:**

This project on *Documentation of Unexplored Indo-Islamic Monuments in the Hinterland of Grand Trunk Road in Haryana and Punjab* made possible by a generous grant from the US Ambassador’s Cultural Preservation Fund means to shed light on surviving Indo-Islamic monuments as one of the significant strands of the built environment of the region as well as highlight the process of identifying cultural heritage. The project directly speaks to the importance of continuing to look for traces of the past while on other fronts developing an awareness of the past. While such documentation will aid preservation of the monuments themselves by providing critical information for future decisions, the project also underscores the importance of understanding the layers of the “landscape” in which communities live. Further knowledge of these monuments allows reflection on the shared nature of the Indo-Islamic traditions in South Asia that have been diminished or lost due to time as well as the consequences of partition.

**Phase I documentation of Haryana Monuments: Off the field data processing:**

The project commenced on September 25, 2008 upon receipt of first installment of the Grant to the Center for South Asian Art & Archaeology. Until December 2008 photographic and architectural documentation of 47 monuments from seventeen sites located particularly in two regions of Haryana was completed. The information collected from the field as well as photographs were processed under the review period of this report. The Project Director and documentation in charge Dr. Vandana Sinha entered the information collected from the field in the database and started researching the primary and secondary textual reference available on the monuments to gather necessary historical data about them. The photographer Mr. Nanda shortlisted the best shots from

over 1000 digital photographs of the sites and adjusted them according to the preset standards of the Center and Mr. Pandian and Mr. Ravi, the draftsmen finalized some architectural drawings out of 30 drawn in the field. Most of these drawings are ground plans of the structures, for which draftsmen collected measurements from the field during Phase I documentation trip of Haryana.

### **Phase II documentation of Punjab monuments:**

The same team of professionals resumed field documentation, this time with focus on Punjab in March of 2009 and documented 60 Indo-Islamic monuments from 16 sites. A short note describing the professional qualification of the documentation team members is as follows –

#### **The Team:**

The personnel who participated in the second phase of documentation were the same who participated in the phase I also such as Dr. Vandana Sinha, Honorary Director of the Centre for South Asian Art and Archaeology, also the Project-Director and in charge of the overall implementation of the fieldwork. Being a documentation specialist, she was responsible for recording all relevant data in the field and making sure that all data entered into the Centre's digital archives is accurate. With the aim to create awareness among tourists, locals, and other visitors about the monuments, she conducted onsite demonstrations for school children and teachers and also carried out discussions with local people and tourists alike to know their own perceptions of these sites. Mr. Nanda, one of the professional photographers in the team, took all of the nearly 900 photographs which will be a part of the Centre's digital archives. Mr. Nanda is an expert on documenting monuments in photography media and has the experience of field documentation of over 40 years. The second photographer of the team Mr. Omprakash is not only an expert in monument photography he also has astute sense of editing the photographs on the computer to allow for the highest quality possible. We have included a few photographs which will allow you to view these two photographers' excellent work. Mr. N. Ravi and Mr. S. Pandyan, skillful draftsmen of the team, produced to the scale plans of a number of the buildings which had never before documented in this

manner. Just as we used modern modes of photography in the field so too the plans were produced using Autocad on laptop computers in the field. What usually takes months to draw by hand could be done in a much shorter time. They were able to prepare 28 plans and maps. The team worked intensively in various sites in Punjab from March 13th to April 17th 2008.

### **Sites Chosen for Documentation:**

In the second phase of documentation we chose sites located along the old Agra – Lahore route in Punjab which runs almost parallel to the modern Grand Trunk Road up to Phillaur in Jalandhar District. From Phillaur onwards the old Agra – Lahore route and the modern Grand Trunk Road divert to two different directions. We followed the old route which leads to Raja Taal, our last site located at the border of India-Pakistan, via Nurmahal (Jalandhar District), Nakodar (Jalandhar District), Mahlian Kalan (Jalandhar District), Sultanpur Lodhi (Kapurthala District), Fatehabad (Tarantaran District), Khawaspur (Tarantaran District) and Amanat Khan (Amritsar District), all of them important Mughal sites consisting of significant Islamic monuments. The monuments documented in this region are largely datable to 16th through 18th centuries. A number of these monuments were caravan-sarais (Inn/Rest House), a type which is typically found on the travel routes. While documenting the monuments on G.T. Road within the boundaries of Haryana State, we had already documented examples of sarais.

It would be interesting to mention here Jahangir's order of 1607 that has reference in his memoirs in which he instructs landowners obviously those living in the vicinity of the Agra – Lahore highway to construct *sarais*-

*"they (zamindars or Landlords) should plant at every town and village and at every stage and halting place, all the way from Lahour (Lahor) to Agra, mulberry, and other large and lofty trees affording shade.. spacious serrais, choultries or places of rest and refreshment, substantially built of brick or stone, so as to be secure against early decay, should be created at the termination of every eight kosse, for the whole distance, all provided with baths, and to everyone a tank or reservoir of fresh water...*

*("Memoires of Emperor Jahangueir" , trans. Major David Price)*

What *sarais* we find today are not all the ones which might have been constructed during Jahangir's time but some of them do survive that testify to his above order.

In addition to caravan sarais, a large variety of contemporaneous building types including bridges, distance markers, stepped wells, tanks, gardens, mosques, Muslim religious shrines, and tombs were also documented from the G.T. Road and also from nearby regions such as Batala and Kalanaur in Gurdaspur District which have some very important monuments built during the Mughal Emperor Akbar's reign, in the second half of the 16th century or early 17th century.

**About the sites:**

The first site where we resumed field documentation was in Punjab at Shambhu, located near the State boundary of Haryana. This was the next site on the G.T. Road after "Shahabad" in Ambala District of Haryana where we had stopped field documentation during phase I. Both Shahabad and Shambhu have Mughal caravan-sarais. But while the sarai at "Shahabad" has been converted into a residential society, the Sarai at Shambhu is extremely well preserved and is maintained in its original shape. This is one of those very few surviving sarais on this old travel route which are still intact. In fact, none of the Mughal caravan sarais documented during the first phase of documentation in Haryana was found intact as most of them have either demolished or being reused as residential housing societies. This gave our draftsmen a perfect opportunity to completely map the building and prepare to-the-scale plans of the ground and first levels. Such drawings are essential for learning many historical and structural details associated with such buildings such as the period of construction, plan of the building and size etcetera important also in those cases when no dated inscription is available, such as in the present case.

Besides Sarai Shambhu (Patiala District), we documented seven other sarai complexes lying on the old Agra – Lahore route in Punjab such as at Rajpura (Patiala District), Kot Panech (Ludhiana District), Doraha (Ludhiana District), Nurmahal (Jalandhar District), Sultanpur-Lodhi (Kapurthala District), Fatehabad (Tarantaran District) and Sarai Amanat Khan (Amritsar District). In addition to the Sarai Shambhu at least two sarai complexes, one at Doraha and other at Nurmahal were found well maintained and to a large extent in their original shape. These two important sarais are under the protection of Central and

State Archaeology Departments. In our discussions with the conservator at Sarai Nurmahal we learnt that previously this was occupied by government offices; remains of modern additions can still be seen.

The sarai was built under the patronage of Mughal Empress Nur Jahan as is inscribed on the stone panel embedded on the eastern Gateway of it. The finely carved decoration on the stone gateways of the sarai shows close resemblance with the intricate stone carvings on royal buildings built in Mughal capital city of Agra that again testifies its royal patronage. A mosque and a Hammam (public bathhouse) still survive inside the complex although reuse of the Hammam as an office space earlier has altered its original shape a little bit. *Hammams* were often constructed inside sarais for providing the travelers and other visitors, a freshening place either for a hot steam or soothing cold water bath. In addition to doing detailed photo documentation of the every architectural component of the entire structure of the *sarai*, the team of draftsmen measured the whole complex and also prepared a several plans of the multi-leveled Gateways of the *sarai*.

Sarai Doraha is the second sarai documented by us which is as elaborate in size as the sarai Nurmahal. The builder of the Sarai Doraha is not known as no dated inscription is found from there. Yet, because of the complex's large size, number of rooms of various sizes and facilities provided for sarai guests such as a public bath or Hammam and a beautifully painted mosque in addition to a number of wells inside the complex it appears to be a venture of a royal family member or some high ranking officer of the Mughal court. In addition to Sarai Nurmahal, this is the only sarai where we also found a Hammam (public bathhouse). Lying for many years in uncared state and for human vandalism some parts of the sarai have damaged and which has of course affected the interior of the Hammam too, yet, enough remains to understand the design of this structure. A carefully measured ground plan of the Hammam was drawn by our draftsmen along with a general plan of the complex.

Large portions of the early 17th century sarai at Fatehabad and the sarai Amanat Khan (1640-41), built by the calligrapher of Taj Mahal, have fallen down but fortunately

leaving behind their Gateways with outstanding glazed tile work in relatively better condition. The sarais at Sultanpur Lodi and Rajpura seem to have been used as Government offices since the British period and it continues to be so. Remains of Colonial architecture in both the sarais were documented by the CSAAA team. While the sarai Lashkar Khan at Kot Paneh is an unprotected monument so far, it is a fairly well preserved structure except for some parts which are deteriorating due to the effects of time. The land inside the complex is used for cultivation by the nearby villagers.

Except at Fatehabad, all the 7 sarais still retain the mosque which is noticed to have been an essential part of these sarai complexes. In addition we also found wells inside the sarai complexes. As described above, Sarai Doraha and Nurmahal house public – baths or Hammam inside the complex which we didn't find in any other sarai.

Besides sarais, many distance pillars (*kos* – minars), which dot the entire length of the Agra – Lahore route were documented both photographically and architecturally. *Kos* Minars or distance pillars were raised to mark the distance travelled; the minars (pillars) were placed at intervals of a *kos* (a distance of approximately 4.17 km). Those surviving along the Agra Lahore highway were mostly erected during the 16-18th centuries when Mughal rulers vastly improved this important route. Although not individually especially impressive, they become so when we consider the large territory they once marked. Even today the surviving *kos* minars (distance pillars) greatly help us to follow the old Agra Lahore highway which doesn't necessarily runs parallel to the modern G.T.Road. The last distance pillar was documented by us at Raja Taal which is right within the boundary of India at the Indo – Pak border.

Many bridges were built by the Mughals when improving the Agra-Lahore road. We documented 7 bridges from Sirhind (Fatehgarh Sahib District), Sultanpur Lodhi (Kapurthala District) and Malhian Kalan (Jalandhar District). While the stream on which the bridge at Malhian Kalan was built has changed its path and the area nearby is being used for farming, one of the bridges at Sultanpur Lodhi also seemed to have met with the same fate. Only some remains of this bridge are left. The second bridge at this site which

was probably constructed at a later date around late seventeenth century has crumbled though a substantial portion of both ends still exist. The three bridges documented by our teams at Sirhind however still form part of the District road network and are well maintained.

Availability of water for caravans travelling on highways was made sure by digging wells, baolis or stepped wells and tank at short distances. We documented two stepped wells both located near two major sarais at Doraha and Amanat Khan and three large tanks at Nakodar, Raja Taal and Batala. The significance of the Tank (*taal*) in Raja Taal can be understood from the fact that this town itself is named after it. The tank was probably constructed by Raja Todarmal, a high ranking officer of the Mughal court during early seventeenth century. This gave the tank its present name Raja Taal which literally means Raja's Tank. The tank has dried completely and is being used for farming. About 3 km away from Raja Taal which is the last site in India on the old Agra-Lahore highway, is located the sarai Amanat Khan built by Amanat Khan the calligrapher of Taj Mahal. While the sarai is a well known tourist spot near Amritsar, the multistoried elaborate stepped well near the sarai that our team documented has hardly found mention in contemporary accounts. Also the name of its patron is not known but, indeed in view of its refined architecture it appears to have been built by a high ranking officer of the Mughal court. The façade of the two storied entrance gateway of this step well still erect high though falling from many places. The debris and overgrowth of vegetation on the steps of the tank didn't allow us to enter the step-well but we succeeded in shooting its interior using our tele-lenses.

The second step –well documented by us at Doraha is also a little known monument although it is located near the southwest Gateway of the caravan sarai at Doraha. A local farmer informed us that it was a four storied step-well (baoli) but now only an arched pavilion between the tank and the well and steps of the top level is visible. The reason, they say, is the nearby canal because of which the water level of the step-well went high. The water of the step well is still used for irrigating nearby farms.

Building such multi-storied step-wells (*Baoli*) especially in arid regions of the subcontinent was a common practice even before Muslims arrived in India. Mostly placed on travel routes, these not only served to quench thirst of the travelers, the spaces created several levels below the surface of these elaborate wells provided cool resting places. Besides a well, these used to have additional tanks for bathing and washing purposes.

Although during this trip we primarily focused on highway specific monuments such as caravan sarais, bridges and step wells, but we also documented many mosques and tombs built either in the vicinity of the G.T. Road monuments or in nearby districts. While travelling to Amritsar District, we made a detour of the G.T. Road to go to Batala and Kalanaur which have some very important monuments of the Mughal Emperor Akbar's period. The site of Kalanaur is mentioned in Jahangir's memoirs - "*On Wednesday, the 2nd of the Divine month of Bahman, the garden of Kalanaur was honoured by my halting there. At this place my father has ascended the throne.*" No garden however exists at Kalanaur today but farmers report that when they work in the fields here, they still encounter the remains of the water channels that once shaped and irrigated this Mughal garden. At the site of Akbar's coronation, a seat was built on a high platform to mark the occasion that we saw during our visit to the site. In the middle of the platform, in front of the seat, a tank was constructed which was connected with three finely carved water-chutes (*chaadar*) placed on three sides of the platform. The seat, platform and few feet of the surrounding land is maintained by the Archaeological Survey of India. Beyond this what land might have been covered by a vast garden in the Mughal period as reported by Jahangir, now serves as fertile farm lands.

Kalanaur also has a couple of old domed structures which according to the villagers were built during Akbar's time. One such interesting structure is a famous Shiva temple that folklores say was built by the Emperor Akbar is located inside the town. There are many individual square domed shrines in this complex which enshrine various Hindu deities, but the main shrine is dedicated to Shiva. We documented a similar temple in Khawaspur (Tarantaran District) that was also a domed building and architecturally

similar to an Islamic structure. Despite the fact that this temple or two other mosques that we documented from Khawaspur site were not the part of our list, we chose to document these because we considered them significant Islamic buildings which are often not even noticed. The nearby Mughal Sarai at Fatehabad located at the distance of only one km from Khawaspur is however a relatively better known monument.

Sirhind, which is located near the modern G.T.Road was a large and a very important town of the Mughal period. Mughal accounts often talk about the grandeur of the town and especially the pleasure garden which exists even now. A complete destruction of the town in later periods is also mentioned in later accounts. Beyond our expectations, we found a large number of mosques and tombs in Sirhind and nearby villages. Some notable structures among them are two magnificent tombs called tombs of Shagird and Ustad, a massive mosque building datable to Humayun's period, built by some Sadna Qasai, a large complex of dargarh, mosques and tombs that is known as Rauza Sharif. Sirhind also has some tombs built before the Mughal period those have survived the massive destruction of this city. We tried to document most of them during this trip but due to cloudy weather and sudden showers we had to stop field work and return. Although, we documented both photographically and architecturally 19 monuments only from Sirhind, many of them consisting of multiple structures, yet a lot is left that needs to be documented.

### **Launch Ceremony of the AFCP project at Pinjore: Documentation of the Mughal Garden and outreach:**

On the occasion of the Launch of the project that the U.S. Embassy announced for the last week of May, 2009, we organized an exhibition of the documented monuments and planned field documentation of Mughal Garden at Pinjore. All the team members of the documentation team worked intensively for many weeks to put together the exhibition that demonstrates the whole documentation procedure followed by the CSAAA team members as well as those high quality photographs and architectural documentation of the monuments that have been created by us. The exhibition included a map of the

regions and sites covered through this project in addition to showing some selected examples of various building types of different periods shot during the field work.

Although due to some unavoidable circumstances the launch had to be cancelled but, we conducted an onsite workshop and displayed the exhibition in the Pinjore Garden for general visitors and some of the invited guests such as Dr. Ausif Ali, President, Jamia Hamdard University, New Delhi, Secretary Culture, Haryana and officers of the State Archaeology Department of Haryana and Punjab. A few photographs recording some of these visits are attached with this report. The workshop and the exhibition not only gave us an opportunity to interact with variety of people the visitors also found these events immensely informative as we learnt from their messages received later. Their messages confirmed that how much they benefited from this program; they felt that not only the exhibition has informed them about these new types of monuments about which they were never aware of, the onsite interaction with the documentation team has also sensitized them about the built heritage of the country that dots the entire length and breadth of the subcontinent and that they had never ever noticed. Many visitors reported that they found this inspiring as they now understand the importance of making documentation and feel encouraged to record the artistic and cultural traditions of their regions.

We have displayed this exhibition several times since then in the campus of the Centre for the visitors of the Center. The Center is also planning direct engagements with various groups in the local communities including schools in order to raise public awareness about such monuments. Carrying this exhibition, for instance, to local schools and colleges in Gurgaon and Delhi is a part of our plan to interest students towards this material which will enable students to use and evaluate documents of primary evidence of the past.

The rest of the review period was used for entering the data, editing of the images and preparations for creation of online catalogue for the web that would make available the documentation for world wide access and use.

### **Further Documentation ((December 2009): Phase-III**

The architectural documentation team left for Pinjore to resume documentation of the 7 leveled Mughal Terrace Garden. The work initially undertaken in May had to be stopped due to unfavorable weather condition. By that time the team was able to complete measurement of three levels. The remaining four levels had to be measured and floor plan of the entire garden had to be undertaken.

The architectural documentation team spent about a week in the field and measured the remaining levels. A complete floor plan of the entire garden including all the seven levels as well as the enclosure wall and attached structures was completed.

Vandana Sinha