

Documenting Unexplored Indo-Islamic Built Heritage in the Haryana and Punjab Regions

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Report on Phase I Documentation conducted in Haryana by the Centre for South Asian Art & Archaeology (CSAAA) October 13-November 17, 2008

Introduction

Thanks to a generous grant from the US Ambassador's Fund the Centre for South Asian Art & Archaeology was able to undertake a project documenting through photography and the drawing of measured building plans of significant Islamic monuments in Haryana and Punjab. The phase I documentation of monuments in Haryana has helped to identify an impressive range of architectural heritage lying unnoticed in different regions of the State that surrounds Delhi on three sides. In addition several of these important Islamic monuments are in need of repair so documenting them now, before they fall further into ruin or in some cases before they are destroyed altogether, is a significant service to scholars, town planners, departments of tourism and conservationists.

The Team

The project's team consisted of the following people each with particular skills pertinent to the documentation of these Islamic monuments. Dr. Vandana Sinha, Honorary Director of the Centre for South Asian Art and Archaeology, is 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, the professional photographer in the team, took all of the nearly 1000 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. He also has astute sense of editing the photographs on the computer to allow for the highest quality possible. We have included a small Power Point presentation of the monuments which will allow you to view his excellent work. Mr. N. Ravi and Mr. S. Pandyan, skillful draftsmen of the team, produced 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 30 plans and maps. The team worked intensively in various sites in Haryana from October 13th to November 17th 2008. The rest of the review period was used for entering the data, editing of the images and

preparations for creation of online programs for the proposed website that would make available the documentation for world wide access and use.

The Sites Chosen for Documentation

We decided to focus our work on seventeen sites each of which has multiple monuments within a single complex or many individual ones within a single town. In order to make best use of time and money, we chose sites from two regions of the State. One that lay on a major trade route the Grand Trunk Road (G.T.Road) which ran from Agra to Lahore (today in Pakistan) in the period of Islamic political domination in north India. Even today this is popularly known as the G.T.Road though officially designated as National Highway 1. The sites of the second region are located in southern side of Delhi in the radius of 60 to 70 km from the Grand Trunk Road. Our goal was to include a wide range of materials both in terms of chronology as well as typology. While we covered a wide chronological and typological range of materials the main thrust was on identifying and documenting those historical buildings which are less known.

In the southern region we documented sites from two districts Gurgaon and Mewat. A large number of monuments documented from this region pre-date Mughal (c. 16th – 19th century) period. Though, at the same time existence of variety of late Mughal period monuments especially in northwestern region of Gurgaon district suggests the region's importance in the Mughal period due to its proximity with the Capital. Especially, the local Mughal Governors took interest in developing this area and had their settlements. The latest material documented from this region included a step-well (locally called *baori*) built around 1905 when the British ruled much of the subcontinent. This step – well is an interesting example of Indian's growing interest in Colonial architectural traditions which is demonstrated through the incorporation of colonial building elements in this originally Hindu architecture type. The sites documented alongside the Grand Trunk Road lie in five major districts of Haryana - Faridabad, Sonapat, Panipat, Karnal and Kurukshetra. Being a major highway during Mughal period the monuments constructed in this region had a character fitting to the environment of a travel route. And, thus the building that we documented here, a large group consisted of rest - houses called "*sarai*", distance markers known as "*Kos – Minars*" and bridges in addition to a large 18th century *madrasa* and a palace patronized by a non-Islamic ruler; needless to mention mosques and tombs which essentially exist in all regions without any exception.

Thus in an attempt to document a large variety of building types we included mosques, Muslim religious shrines, tombs, elaborate stepped wells, forts, rest houses, palaces, distance markers, schools and bridges. One aspect of this documentation tour was covering reused materials. Some was in the form of the type of reuse which was visible in monuments in form of use of pre-Mughal building materials but in other cases we saw buildings such as mosques and tombs which had been abandoned in 1947 as the Muslims of Punjab (now divided into the states of Haryana and Punjab) migrated to the new nation state of Pakistan. Some of these buildings have now been transformed into Sikh *Gurdwaras* and Hindu or Jain temples, while

others cited in old accounts have been completely demolished or are slated for demolition thus making this documentation project all the more relevant.

About the Sites:

Our search for unexplored materials of 12th -19th centuries through this project led us to Sohna, Tauru and Bhondsi which have a large range of pre-Mughal monuments but locating them was a real challenge for us as there is a serious lack of awareness about their existence even among the locals. Literally no information on them is found on the Internet nor do they form part of the listing of tourism or archaeology departments. Only a handful of scholarly publications throw light on their existence and historical background. In Sohna however we documented a hot-water spring, elaborate tombs and mosques decorated with exquisite calligraphy and painting which may have been once outstanding examples of local building traditions. Seeing the range of monuments in this region it appears that some major local Muslim ruling family took lot of interest once in construction activity in this area but about whom not much is known. Mosque and Tomb of Holi Saint *Hazrat Shah Najm-al-Haq*, Later Mughal Fort, *Lal Gumbad* (Red Tomb) Complex, *Barakhambha* (twelve pillared) Mosque and tomb (Shahi Jama (congregational) *Masjid* (mosque) and tomb complex), Five Bayed Mosque that our teams documented in this area have close similarity in building style. Inscriptions found in those as well as fragment of pre-Islamic Indic building materials are sign of their antiquity. While the Mosque and Tomb complex of *Hazrat Shah Najm-al-Haq* is now being maintained by a primary school, and the *Barakhambha* Mosque has been made functional by a Muslim caretaker for worship and as a *madrassa*, the other monuments are left abandoned and have now become ideal storage space for the villagers to keep fodder and cow dung fuel throughout the year.

Tauru is located about 10 km towards west of Sohna where there is a vast pre-Mughal tomb complex appearing to have been the royal graveyard for the local ruling family/families who could have been probably contemporary of Sohna rulers. Quite a few open mosques and *Idgah* complexes built inside and near the tomb complex suggest this area to be an active Islamic center in those days. Traces of beautiful painting can still be found on the walls of these tastefully built tombs which have been largely ruined by the dirt created by bats residing in them. The site is in a grave state of ruins due to years of neglect. At some point some of the graves in open courtyards of the great tombs became highly revered *dargahs* (Muslim religious shrines) visited now by a lot of locals, both Muslim and Hindu devotees. They seem little impressed by the antiquity or grandeur of the tombs in the complex though, however these are their favourite shelter for cattle and fuel.

Nuh is another town in Sohna – Tauru belt consisting of grand pre-Mughal structures. We selected a sixteenth century *Dargah* of Sheikh Musa for documentation that still is in good condition. The *dargah* was although built by the grandson and follower of Sheikh Musa but the large fortified complex containing a mosque, residential quarters of Sheikh Musa and a giant Gateway including many other related structures pre-dates the *dargah*, built probably in 14th century. This we learnt while talking to the religious Islamic teacher (*mawlvi*) who runs a residential *madrassa* in the complex. Many structures of the complex have been repaired or spaces altered by the existing *madrassa* authorities in order to make it habitable. Another

adjacent structure called “*Uton-vali masjid*” drew our attention for its architectural affinity with the Sheikh Musa’s. It was a mosque and tomb complex built probably by a tribal chief on request of his daughter to construct a comparable mosque like Sheikh Musa’s, according to the popular story told to us by the *mawlvi*. In addition, Nuh has an exquisite nineteenth century cenotaph called “*Chattri*” and an adjacent tank that we documented during this trip. The cenotaph was constructed by the son of a wealthy local businessman Seth Chuhimal in his memory, a custom originally associated with only Muslims. Intricately carved in stone following late Mughal style of ornamentation, this cenotaph is one of those handful of examples that survive today in this region. However, despite being in an unprotected state for a long time the cenotaph is in an excellent condition. The tank in the vicinity of the cenotaph was constructed by Seth Chuhimal himself to store water brought from far off rivulets through a network of tunnels for the village chores. This obviously dates before the cenotaph.

Existence of an elaborate *baoli* (step-well) in Badshahpur town located between Gurgaon and Sohna surprises us for its inscribed date of construction which says it was patronized by a local businessman in 1905. The superstructure of the step-well indeed has Colonial elements that justifies its inscribed date of construction to some extent and also makes it appear a unique structure as such elaborate step-wells of this dating have not been commonly found in this region.

As we moved towards north and western regions of Gurgaon we encountered primarily late Mughal establishments and structures. The Sarai Ali Vardi Khan Mosque, now located in Gurgaon city, as suggested by the name might have been part of a late Mughal *Sarai* built probably by a local Governor Ali Vardi Khan nothing of which survives now. The only structure of that time that lives today is the *jami* (congregational) mosque that we were able to document and our draftsmen were able to measure to prepare architectural drawings. The mosque was made functional many years after the 1947 partition which has kept it in a good shape though only one of its four minarets now survive. We were informed by the locals that there used to be a tank in front of the mosque which had to be filled in because due to many years of neglect it had lost its original shape and had become a dangerous pit. So just to avoid mishaps it was filled in and now it serves as a large front yard useful for big gatherings. Many other mosques and tombs that we earlier had planned to cover in Gurgaon couldn’t be located as those have either already disappeared or have been completely re-built.

The next late eighteenth century Mughal establishment in this area is Farrukhnagar located about 15 km west of the Gurgaon city. This appears to have been a fortified city many remnants of which still survive today. It has two gateways, a palace called shish-mahal (palace), a *jami* (congregational) mosque, a step-well among many other structures; except shish *mahal* (palace) we documented all the four from here. The Shish Mahal which is a State protected monument was being renovated when we visited the site so it was full of scaffoldings that made it difficult for us to photograph the monument or take measurements for the architectural drawings. We however proceeded to document the *jami*-mosque located near the palace that is an interesting example of reuse reported above, especially due to the migration of Haryana’s Muslims to Pakistan. The former *jami* (congregational) mosque is known today as Ram *mandir* (temple). However, in its transformation neither the interior nor exterior have been changed much except to add an altar at the place of original prayer niche to

keep statues of gods and goddesses. Stylistically this mosque appears to be a contemporary of the Gurgaon's Ali Vardi Khan Mosque. Among the two surviving gateways, we documented the western one that is crumbling fast. Interestingly, the two portions of the Gateway are now occupied by two families, one of which has renovated their portion that has strengthened it but the other side is almost in ruins. The entrance ceiling still has some remains of the beautiful floral design that might have been painted initially. The intriguing design of the nearby octagonal *baoli* (step-well) Ghaus Ali Shah made it very interesting for us to document. Built by local elite Ghaus Ali Shah, this step well appears remarkable for its curious approach ways. The step-well was designed in such a way that it accommodated even a road passing through it that divided the step-well and its underpass approach at the ground level. The underpass was probably created for women folks of royal or elite families to reach the step-well. Now this earlier road has become a very busy state highway passing that at one point caused the supporting walls of the underpass to crumble and two of the underground passages had to be filled in to stop it from falling down. Now one passage is left which is the main approach to the step-well. At level one, again a terrace is constructed over the highway that overlooks the step-well. Thus it makes a gateway like passage in the middle of the step-well complex making the design unusual. This documentation trip enabled us to record these two notable examples of local architectural traditions of constructing step-wells that was not encountered before and this way making it an important action.

Our next route took us to near the Grand Trunk Road beginning from documentation of Palwal, Ballabgarh, Faridabad, Sonapat, Panipat, Gharunda, Madhuban, Taraori, Thanesar, and Shahabad monuments. In this region, for our emphasis on recording the Mughal rest-houses (*sarais*), bridges and distance markers (*kos minars*) in Haryana district, we began our journey from Palwal. Based on the early accounts, we searched for a Mughal rest-house, Sarai Pukhta that is said to have been patronized by founder of Faridabad, Shaikh Farid Bukhari, during Jahangir's reign. What we found were two hardly visible Gateways due to extensive encroachment in and around it and the *sarai* complex that has become a densely populated colony and a busy market area, though it is still known as *sarai* area. We succeeded in tracing remains of the rooms which are generally part of those modern houses which were built over it when these areas were occupied later on by current residents of the colony. We learnt, during the partition of 1947 most of these sarais were used for accommodating migrants coming from Pakistan and later on each room were assigned to the families living in it for permanent stay. We however still found some rooms in their original shape because the owners had either didn't disturb it and were using them as it is for example like a shop or some didn't have enough money to demolish or alter them according to their taste, so they survived. A distance – marker (*kos-minar*) was also photographed that now lies within the city indicating the old route of the GT road. We noted later that the new route doesn't necessarily follow the old GT road route at many places. The monograph on the Grand Trunk Road in the Punjab -1849-1886 by K.M.Sarkar that we acquired during the review period, gives detailed account of the construction of the new GT Road by British and fortunately mentions the reason for this deviation which was primarily creating a straight route. In Palwal we also had plans to document an *Idgah*, a *Jama* masjid and two tombs one of pre-Mughal and the other of Mughal period but we didn't find traces of the *Idgah* or the *Jama* masjid. The red sandstone Roshan Chirag *Maqbara* (tomb) and Sheikh Shah Baz's tomb were photographed and architectural drawings made. While the seventeenth century Roshan Chirag *Maqbara* is

well cared for by the Muslims living in the same compound, the pre-Mughal Sheikh Shah Baz's tomb stands aloof in a residential society park of the city. Yet the Sheikh Shah Baz's tomb is kept neat and clean because of the efforts of the residents of the society who call it a "*Kila*" (fort) and believe there were tunnels which connected it with some palace in Delhi. The surviving traces of beautiful floral painting on the walls and ceilings provide evidence of its earlier grandeur. An interesting story about the Roshan Chirag Maqbara tells that the patron, who was probably an ascetic, collected one stone from each cart carrying stone for palace at Delhi (built 1638) from Bharatpur that passed through Palwal for building this tomb. However, this small tomb is beautifully ornamented and is covered by intricately carved screens on three sides (one of them missing now) which show a close affinity with contemporary examples of Mughal red sandstone buildings. The next site on the G.T.Road documented by us was

Ballabgarh in Faridabad district that had totally different types of monuments having no relevance with the travel route built environment. These were an early nineteenth century fort and a cenotaph and a kund of the same date. Patronized by non – Muslim rulers these two structures are remarkable examples of melding of Hindu and Muslim traditions that had become a major characteristic in general of the architecture of this time.

In Faridabad city we were again hoping to find the entire set of travel route architecture including a *sarai*, a bridge, a *kos-minar* and also a fort and some religious shrines. But, this didn't happen as unfortunately the mid seventeenth century Sarai Khwaja built by probably Khawajah Bakhtawar Khan a noble in Aurangzeb's court had met with the same fate of Sarai Pukhta in Palwal. All we found there was a piece of the fortification wall and some rooms which are now completely covered by the modern facades of the houses built by the current dwellers. Luckily, the *kos-minar* and the Sarai Khwaja Bridge of the same date were preserved in time by the Archaeological Survey of India that we could document. The Mughal fort and the Dargah of Ahmed Chisti have also completely disappeared. Upon making enquiry at the Dargah site we learnt that a series of renovations done by the caretakers of the Dargah has resulted in a new modern building where the old structure survives probably only in the foundation stones.

About 40 km towards north of Delhi, Sonipat has a Kos-Minar indicating this town's association with the Grand Trunk Road. But, little is known about the pre-Mughal Abdullah and Nasir-ud-din's tombs and adjacent mosque built probably in Humayun's time. As we noticed earlier, most of these mosques and tombs have been repaired later using modern construction material, and these were not an exception. Yet, efforts have been made to keep the original structure intact. We also documented another example of reuse, the grand Jami (congregational) mosque of later Mughal period that can be located today only as a Durga mandir. This could be one reason that we didn't find any mention of this in old or recent accounts and hence it was not included even in our listing. However, we noticed it only because of its bulbous domes and tall minarets that make its presence prominent in the cityscape. The mosque's current use as a temple has caused many changes to the interior such as many altars for placing statues of gods and goddesses has been installed on the West wall of the monument and tiles have been fixed on the walls for the convenience of maintenance. But, the temple authority is trying their best to save the beautiful painted ceilings under the

three domes of the structure, therefore, despite the fact that the other parts of the interior have been whitewashed, the ceilings were never touched.

While proceeding towards north on the G.T.Road we reached Panipat. Historically, Panipat has been a very important place which has not only witnessed some of the greatest battles of the India history, but has also been home for distinguished sufi saints of pre-Mughal era. At least four religious shrines built here between thirteenth to fourteenth century (*dargah*) of famous Sufi Saints Hazrat Sharafuddin Bu-Ali-Shah Qualandar, Shaikh Jalalludding, Khwaja Shamsuddin and Imam Saheb Badruddin Badre-e-alam that we documented during this trip clearly indicate the popularity of the town as a great religious center. Many later Mughal additions in the compounds of the shrines suggests that these continued to receive lot of attention by Mughal ruling class also, for instance, the exquisitely painted porch in front of the Bu-Ali-Shah Qualandar's *dargah* is said to have been added by a high ranking Mughal officer of the Aurangzeb's court. Built by Mukarrab Khan himself probably around mid seventeenth century, his tomb placed in the same *dargah* complex is another remarkable example of Mughal period architecture Existence of a Sarai of Saint Salarjung in Panipat was also been reported in old accounts but unfortunately no remains of it were traceable. As a matter of fact, none of the other four *sarais* documented by us from Gharunda, Taraori, Thanesar and Shahabad are intact today.

The Gharunda sarai built probably in the second quarter of the seventeenth century during Shahjahan's reign was demolished by British in order to dislodge rebels of 1857 revolt. The two main gateways on northern and southern direction were only left, it seems, in almost ruined condition. Yet, these are enough to demonstrate the scale and grandeur of the sarai architecture. Between the two gateways no remains of the old structure survive; the whole area is filled with houses and lanes. Between Gharunda and Taraori in Madhuban (Karnal District) a Mughal bridge, possibly late 16th century, still survives. It might have been on the old Grant Trunk Road earlier but now on the new G.T. Road has found place on one side of the road. Because the canal on which it was constructed has dried up, the area has been converted into a pleasant part and the spaces between mighty pillars of the bridge have been converted into rooms.

Among all the *sarais* documented by us along the GT Road, exterior of the Taraori sarai still remains more or less intact though from inside it is hardly recognizable. The *sarai* cells including Gateways are inhabited by the refugee families who migrated to these parts during the partition of India in 1947. The residents have obviously added more rooms and altered the original spaces changing the original look of the *sarai*. The *sarai* mosque houses a *Gurudwara* and a temple. The residents believe the *sarai* to be the fort of the 12th century Delhi king Prithviraj Chauhan who fought his famous battles with Muslim ruler Muhammad Ghuri in the planes of Taraori. The fort's possible association with the Rajput king might have been one reason to inspire the residents to preserve the monument to its original appearance.

Although Thanesar is such a site that was active from circa 1st century A.D.to 18th century A.D., here we focused only on the Indo-Islamic material. The site contains an interesting variety of monuments including a *sarai* (Rest-House), a *madrassa* (Islamic school for religious teaching), a tomb, a mosque and some structures resembling a water system with both

covered and open drainage and a well in the compound. The *sarai*, *madrassa* and the tomb of Shaikh Chilli is believed to have been built during middle of the seventeenth century under the patronage of Dara Shikoh. The elaborate *madrassa* documented here was the only independent school building of its kind that we encountered during our entire tour of the region. Mostly *madrassas* were run inside mosques.

The last site documented in this trip was a *sarai* at Shahabad Markanda, believed to be constructed in early seventeenth century. The two unpretentious gateways are the only remains of that suggest this architecture's association with a *sarai* as from inside the whole complex is totally stuffed with the houses of a Sikh residential society "*Killa Sikhan*" (Sikh Fort) that is the address of this place today. Interestingly, one of the rooms of the southern Gateway has a small *Gurudwara* that we made sure to visit and also were kindly allowed by the caretaker to take pictures.

Outreach:

While documenting the sites we engaged verity of audiences visiting sites with discussions on their understanding of these monuments and also gave them information about our documentation efforts. In many cases we realized that people actually didn't know the functions of these ancient structures but also there was a great deal of curiosity and in many cases a sense of belongingness that made them conscious about their preservation. For instance, most of the residents living in the *sarais* didn't know the real function of these places but they all thought, probably because of their fort-like appearance, these were ancient forts. While talking to some of the residents at Taraori we were told that they have learnt from their History books that this was the fort of Prithviraj Chauhan. They also explained indicating the Islamic inscriptions that it is written so in "Urdu" that the builder of this fort was the Delhi King of Chauhan dynasty. The *sarais* can be located in this region only if those are mentioned as "*Kila*" the Hindi translation of a Fort. However, many were aware of the existence of the Grand Trunk Road constructed by the Afghan ruler, Sher Shah Suri and often we found it mentioned as Sher Shah Suri Road on signage. During many of our onsite discussions we were surprised to learn the level of awareness many visitors had about these old sites and also the aesthetic sensibility that has been the reason for existence of the Sonipat *Jami* – Mosque and its beautiful ceiling painting and the *chattris* in Nuh and Ballabgarh, all of them cared by private owners. In Thanesar we had an interesting experience of addressing a large group of school children visiting the site. These class six children of a private "Tagore International School" had come all the way from a village of Punjab especially to visit the site but with no clue to the monuments that they were visiting. Accompanied by an equally enthusiastic group of teachers, none of them having any information about the monuments they had thought to find a guide that was unfortunately not available. However, I offered to talk to them about the site and told them about the association of *madrassa* and the tomb and also about the *sarai* and the bridge located nearby. I observed a lot of enthusiasm among the children about the travel route signage and rest-houses which they could relate with contemporary road signs like milestone and signboards and inns and hotels. I was also impressed to see their minute observation of the tomb after they had a tour of the site post discussions, as they indeed found existence of the multiple graves in the underground room below the tomb questionable.

In general, during all our interactions an active interest of communities, tourists and general public about these monuments was noted. These field observations and interactions with the people at large make us believe that such programs may help create awareness and generate more interest in the cultural heritage of the geographical area that we document and study.

Surveys and Permissions:

Since inception of the Project on September 25 CSAAA Chairman, Dr. Pradeep Mehendiratta and Honorary Director, Dr. Vandana Sinha visited Chandigarh, Amritsar, Jalandhar, Nakodar, Nur Mahal, Philaur Sirhand and Ambala to survey some of the monuments in Punjab (Dr. Mehendiratta's travel costs will not be charged to Embassy grant). In the process they met with Superintending Archeologists and Museum Managers to ascertain the listing of the Islamic Monuments in Punjab and Haryana and to ensure that the permissions our teams had will be adequate to meet the need of local officers in the Directorates of Punjab and Haryana Archaeology and also the Archaeological Survey of India. We have established good contacts with all three major agencies for the documentation work.

CSAAA has also been able to procure the only copy of the publication "The Grand Trunk Road in Punjab 1849-1886" edited by a British that was published during the 19th century by erstwhile Punjab State Government.

This first Phase of documentation of Haryana's Indo-Islamic monuments was highly successful and we are grateful to the US Ambassadors fund for supporting this trip. It is gratifying that since many of these monuments were never ever documented in such detail before the CSAAA teams undertook documentation of them, this has ensured to preserve the traces of these unique architectural traditions for posterity in form of photographs and architectural drawings.

Vandana Sinha
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