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## Mughal Sarāis in the vicinity of Tajganj at Agra

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### Abstract

Apart from the tomb of Mumtaz Mahal (Taj Mahal) at Agra, large number of tombs of Emperor and Noble's men and women were constructed in the vicinity of Agra. The architectural features of these tombs not only imitate the significant features, but it also reflects the cultural relationship between Iranian and Hindustani art of style.

Every one of the auxiliary designs of the Taj complex is confronted with red sandstone; exceptional highlights, like arches, might be clad in white marble. The lesser known tombs have the form of single-storey regular octagons surrounded either by pillared verandahs or by eight pishtāqs of equal size. Both versions are surmounted by pronounced bulbous domes. A massive version of the subsidiary tombs, showing in each of its eight faces a pishtāqs with a deep arched niche. This form of art appears in the many funereal buildings of the Mughal period.

**Keywords:** Various Tombs, Sarais, Residential complex, Map's & Plan's and Architectural features etc

### Introduction

In this paper, I have taken a detail study of few tombs, which surrounded the Taj complex, such as Tomb's of Fatehpuri *Begum* (wife of Shah Jahan), Satti-al-Nisa Khānum, Sirhindi *Begum*, Diwanji Begum and an unidentified tomb (probably Mahabat Khan's tomb). I have taken these tombs to highlights the architectural features which were constructed during the Mughal period. Also, I would like to coordinate the relationship between the craftsmanship of the larger monument and smaller ones.

### Contents

It is vital to take note of that by eighteenth century many commercial centers were likewise changed into local location. We have the declaration of Bernier claims that throughout the Mughal era, a common practice among merchants was to build their residences on top of their businesses. He says that this was common practice <sup>[1]</sup>.

In the region of Agra known as Mumtazbad, a phenomenon called as "the transformation from merely non-private and commerce into private zones" may be seen. During Shahjahan's reign, this neighbourhood sprang up around the tomb of Mumtaz Mahal, which was constructed during his reign <sup>[2]</sup>.

The design of the Taj Mahal, also known as the catacomb of Mumtaz Mahal, contained the burial chamber in addition to a number of intricate auxiliary features that Shahjahan undoubtedly asked to be worked on (see Plan 1.1, Mumtazabad). Subsequently, a bewildering array of mosques, sarāis, and other buildings were constructed beside the catacomb under the direction of Abdul Karim and Makramat Khan at an estimated cost of 50 lakh rupees <sup>[3]</sup>. Mumtazbad's four katrās are not mentioned in any of these texts, nor are the

<sup>1</sup>Francois Bernier. *Travels in the Mogul Empire* (A.D. 1656-68), sec. rev. ed. VA Smith, Delhi, 1934, 245-246".

<sup>2</sup>Javed Hasan's M. Phil. dissertation, CAS in History, AMU, 1987, provides an in-depth look of the settlement pattern and locality names in the Tajganj.

<sup>3</sup>Abdul Hamid Lahori, *Badshahnamah*, 1872;2:324-330.

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region's habitation patterns. Contrary to what is often the case, there is a reference to four sarāis that were most likely converted into marketplaces at a later point in time. On the other hand, Lahori tells that these regal sarāis, "rich merchants" built their homes as well as other buildings, therefore transforming the whole territory into vast private enclaves <sup>[4]</sup>.

Abdul Hamid Lahori, Shahjahan's official historian, provided a description of the Taj Ganj <sup>[5]</sup> complex's layout in his book *Badshahnama*. He referred to the Taj Ganj as he spoke about the Taj Mahal:

"To the south of the area of the Jalukhana (Front of the Taj) is a four-laned bazaar. The width of the (lanes of the) eastern and western bazaar is 90 yards <sup>[6]</sup> and of the northern and southern 30 yards. On all the four sides of this four-laned bazaar are four *sarai*. These two sarāis have been built with *pucca bricks* and lime out of (funds of) the royal exchequer. Each is 160 yards long and broad. Each has an octagonal courtyard of the Baghdadai shape with 136 cells lining it, each cell fronted by a verandah with a three-angled arch (*dar*). Each of these two sarāis contains at three corners three *chauks* (markets). Each of those courtyards is 14 yards by 14 yards. On the fourth corner of each *sarai*, there is the gate used for entry and exit of the people and opens into the octagon of a market (*Chauk*) 150 yards long, 100 yards broad, set in the middle the four-laned bazaar. The other two sarāis are on the same pattern. In these sarāis valuable goods from different countries of the world are brought for sale. Behind these royal sarāis merchants have built a large number of *pucca* houses and established Sarāis. And this place which became a large town came to be known as Mumtazabad <sup>[7]</sup>".

The area near Katras Phulail (south-east of the *Jilaukhn*) has been populated by individuals who purchased or manufactured aromas, according to the customs of the area. (See Plates)

As a result, the Qazi family of Tajganj bought the octagonal open area among 4 distinct sarāis, today famous as katras, and renamed it Muhallā Qazian. According to another tradition, during the seventeenth century, the region was overrun by papermakers; hence Muhallā Kaghaziant has been entirely recognized. Katras Resham was mostly

inhabited by fabric shippers and other merchants engaged in the trade of raw silk coming from Bengal. A mosque and Jain temple built during Aurangzeb's reign may be found in this katras, indicating that the area had a distinct character in the 1700s.

Katras Jogidas has been (and still is) populated mostly by Hindus, most prominently Brahmins, with the exception of the Baniyas and few Jains. This region is located to the east of the Katras Resham.

In this way we realize that the region, which presumably has been the last for creating after the construction of Taj Mahal along with shift of capital to Shahjahanabad, a region has been thickly populated with a cross-segment of individuals having a place with different callings and beliefs. Experts, merchants, as well as men of high rank and status have been kept inside the boundaries of an enormous 'suburb' that was then divided between them on professional and caste lines. According to Peter Mundy, These details are supported not just by the depiction of a substantial population on the Jaipur City Palace Museum Map from the 1720s, but also by the fact that.

"He (Shahjahan) intends, as same think, to remove all the citty higher causing hills to be made level because they might not hinder the prospect of it, places appointed for streets, shops etc. dwelling commanding merchants, shopkeepers, artificers to inhabited (it) where they began to repair and called by her name Tage Gunj".<sup>8</sup>

The majority of the *cār-wānsarāys* consisted of a big square that was surrounded on its inside boundaries by arcades and smaller square chambers. This exhibit, which wraps around the arcades, has the same amount of loading bays as those below it. In the words of F. Bernier, saris offered lodging for travellers:

"This place is the rendezvous of the rich *Persian, Usbek* and other foreign merchants, who in general may be accommodated with empty chambers, in which they remain with perfect security, the gate being closed at night. If in *Paris* we had a score of similar structures, distributed in different part of the city, strangers on their first arrival would be less embarrassed than at present to find a safe and reasonable lodging. They might remain in them a few days until they had seen their acquaintance, and looked out at leisure for more convenient apartments. Such place would become warehouses for all kinds of merchandise, and the general resort of foreign merchants" <sup>[9]</sup>.

At a typical period of time, Sarāis operated along the Mughal shipping lanes, which provided a safe shelter for merchants and foreign travellers who went from one place to another for selling as well as getting their products. Mughal shipping channels on both sides have been lined with many shady trees and excavated at regular intervals for the caravans (merchants who moved in a gathering). According to William Finch, this is further supported.

<sup>4</sup> Abdul Hamid Lahori, *ibid*, 329.

<sup>5</sup>For information on the Taj Ganj area in the foreign traveler accounts see, Peter Mundy, *op. cit*, II, 213"; "The English Factories in India (1646-50; VIII, 220 & 299; *The English Factories in India*" (1651-54), Vol. IX, p. 122; H. R. Nevill (ed.), *District Gazetteers of the United Provinces Agra*, Vol. VIII, 217-218; Esha Basanti Joshi (ed.), *U.P. District Gazetteers, Agra*, 1965, p. 362; S. M. Latif, *Agra: Historical and Descriptive*, Calcutta, 1896, 106.

<sup>6</sup>The Mughal yard, also known as the gaz, is said to have been 31.464 inches in length. See, Col. A. Hodgson, *Memoire on the length of the Illahee Guz or Imperial Land Measure of Hindostan*, *JRAS*, 1843. pp.45-53.

<sup>7</sup>Abdul Hamid Lahori, *op. cit.*, II, p.329.

<sup>8</sup>Peter Mundy, *The Travels of Peter Mundy in Europe and Asia, 1608-1667*, ed. by Sir RC Temple, London, 1914; 2:213.

<sup>9</sup>"Francois Bernier, *Travels in the Mogul Empire* (AD 1656-68), *op. cit.*, 281".

“From Agra to Lahor six hundred miles <sup>[10]</sup>. The way is set on both sides with mulberry-trees” <sup>[11]</sup>.

Although they paid reasonable prices for meals and accommodation, most of the *cār wānsarāys* facilities operated by the state as well as by private persons or corporations were intended for the general public <sup>[12]</sup>. Individuals or groups that established these *cār wānsarāys* provided financial support in the form of endowments, which helped keep them going. A portion of the *cār wānsarāys* operating expenses were covered by endowment revenue, while the remainder was used to feed the various administrative groups and their attendants/cooks, the *bhatiyārins* <sup>[13]</sup>.

Bhatiyārins took care of travelers' needs and completed other household chores in saris throughout the seventeenth century, while men worked in other occupations or in the fields.

Nicholas Withington's travels in 1612-16 are detailed in the following passages from his book, *Travels*:

“Between Adgemere (Ajmere) and Agra, at every ten courses (which is an ordinary day's journey) there is a

<sup>10</sup> An overstatement: By road, the distance is approximately 440 miles. For example, See William Finch, “Early Travels in India”, “ed. W. Foster, 186, foot note-1”.

<sup>11</sup> “Ibid, pp. 185-186”.

“See Ravindra Kumar, *Sarais in Mughal India*, (p. 20), M. Phil. Dissertation accessible at Maulana Azad Library, Aligarh Muslim University”, Aligarh, for the establishment of saris in Mughal India. It is evident from the tabular that out of the total number of Saris he has listed, “36 were established by the kings, 23 by the zamandaers, 9 by the nobles, 16 by the petty officials, 8” by the mashikhs, 1 by the commercial establishments and “3 by the religious institutions, and 6 by the caste groups. He unfortunately does not clearly demarcate the *krwnsarys* from the *dak chaukas-cum-inns* of Sur and the Mughal periods.” These *krwnsarys*, circa AD 1634, paid travellers 1 to 2 “pice” (dms?) a day for a lodging. Peter Mundy's *Travels*, volume II, page 121. “In *Early Travels in India, 1583-1619*, ed. William Foster (OUP, 1921), p. 225, Nicholas Withington (1615) specifies the fee of 3 dms a day as payment for room for horses and cooking of food. Note 3: Cf. Iqtidar Alam Khan's 'The *Krwnsarys* of Mughal India,' page 113, footnote 3:

<sup>13</sup> “Peter Mundy, op. cit., II, p. 121, foot note- 2; also see Iqtidar Alam Khan”, ‘The *Kār wānsarāys* of Mughal India: A Study of Surviving Structures’, Published in *Indian Historical Review*, Biannual Journal of the ICHR, Vol. XIV, No. 1-2, July 1987-Jan 1988, pp. 113-114.”

*serralia* or place of lodging booth for man and horse, and hostesses <sup>[14]</sup> to dresse our victuals if we please, paying a matter of 3d. Both for horse and meate dressing” <sup>[15]</sup>.

In the *sarāis*, Manrique paints a vivid picture of the serving personnel:

“They are usually built in a square, like cloisters in a Monastery, and are divided up into dwelling rooms and chambers, with a male or female Regent: for women “can also carry on this occupation. These attendants are called respectively *Metres*” and *Meteranis*. Their business is to keep these rooms (of the *sarāi*) free from rubbish and clean and provided with cot. Those servants are also entrusted with the preparation of the food for guests, as well as doing all the other duties essential to comfort within the house, even to providing hot water for washing feet. Hence on reaching a *Caramossora* all that one has to do is to send out and purchase food in the Bazar or market and leave other matters to these attentive servants. Besides these duties, if the Guests have horses, they are required also to cook *mung* or chick-pea, which is given instead of the barley we feed such animals on in Europe..... To return to the *Metres* and *Meteranis*, who, as I have remarked, are the stewards of these inns or *Caramossoras*. They are so obliging that they are content with one *debua*, or at the most two, which is so small a coin that a half real of eight contains fifty-six *debuas*, or *paisas*” <sup>[16]</sup>.

About the *Sarāis* at Agra, Thevenot argued that:

“But that which makes the Beauty of Agra besides the Palaces I have mentioned, are the *Quervansarāis* which are above three-score in number; and some of them have six large courts with their portico's, that give entry to very commodious apartments, where stranger merchants have their lodging...” <sup>[17]</sup>.

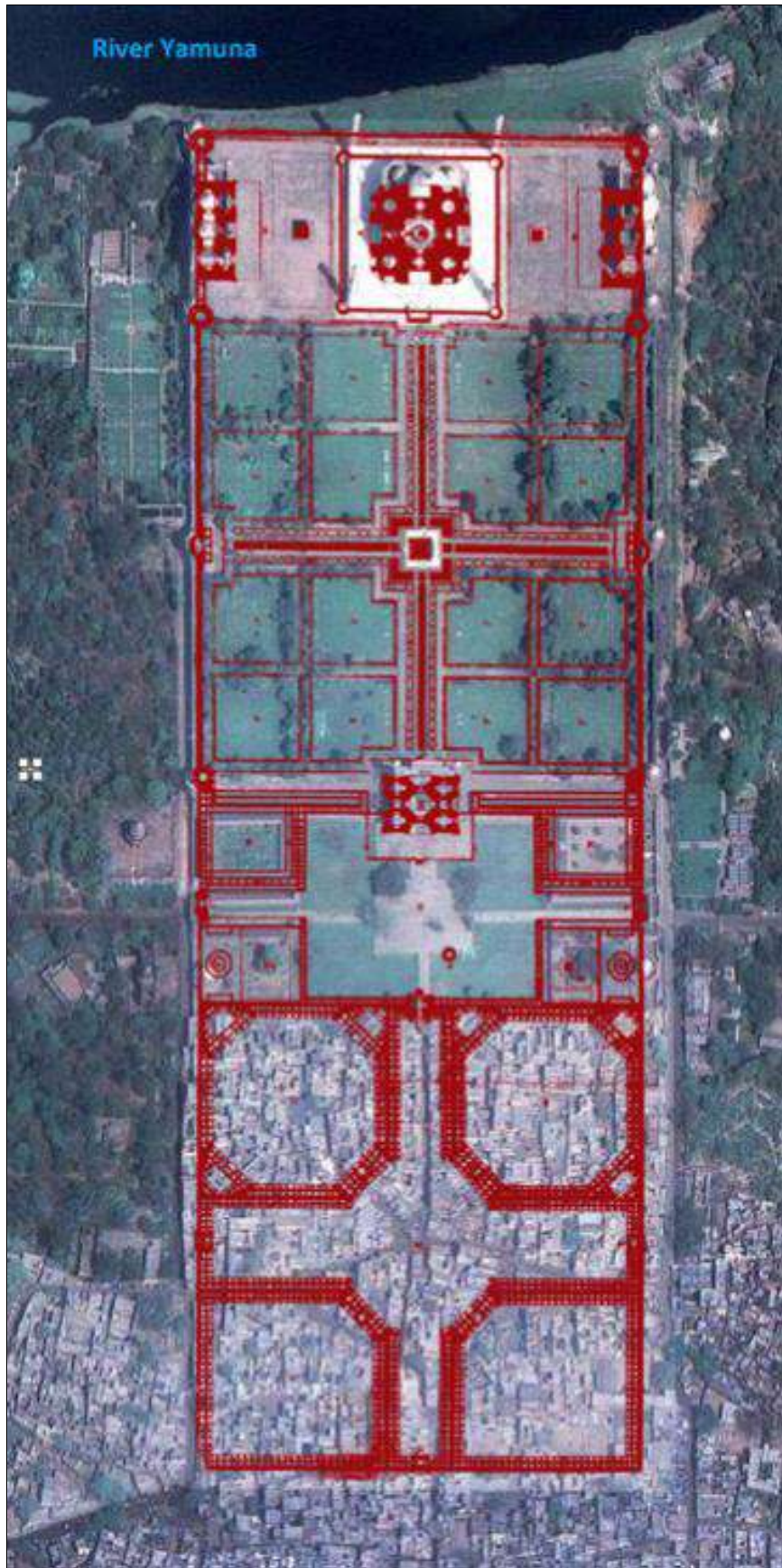
<sup>14</sup> See Peter Mundy's *The Travels of Peter Mundy*, Vol. II, p. 121 for the female attendants in the saris. Referring to Nicholas Withington Ibid, p. 225, foot note 1.

<sup>15</sup> Nicholas Withington, Ibid, p. 225.

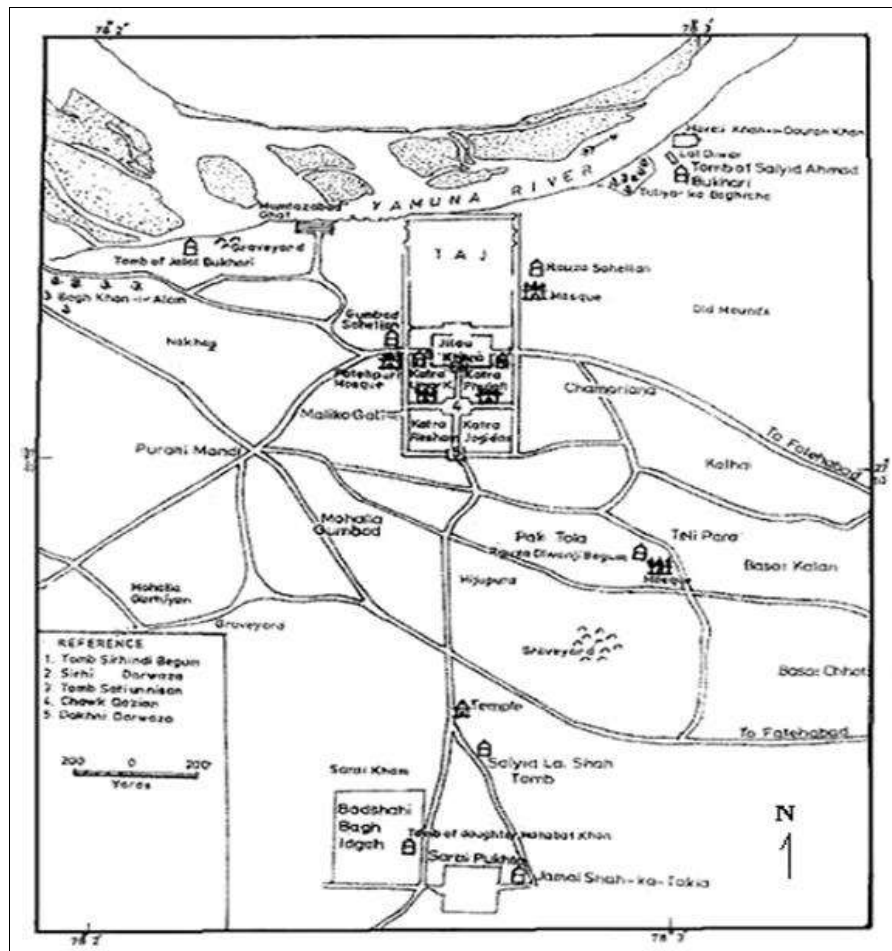
<sup>16</sup> “Manrique, *Travels of F. S. Manrique, 1629-1643*, tr. Luard and Hosten, Vol. II, Hakluyt Society, 2<sup>nd</sup> series, LXI, Oxford, 1927, pp. 100-102”.

<sup>17</sup> “Thevenot, *Indian Travels of Thevenot and Careri*, ed. S. N. Sen, New Delhi, 1949, p. 48.”

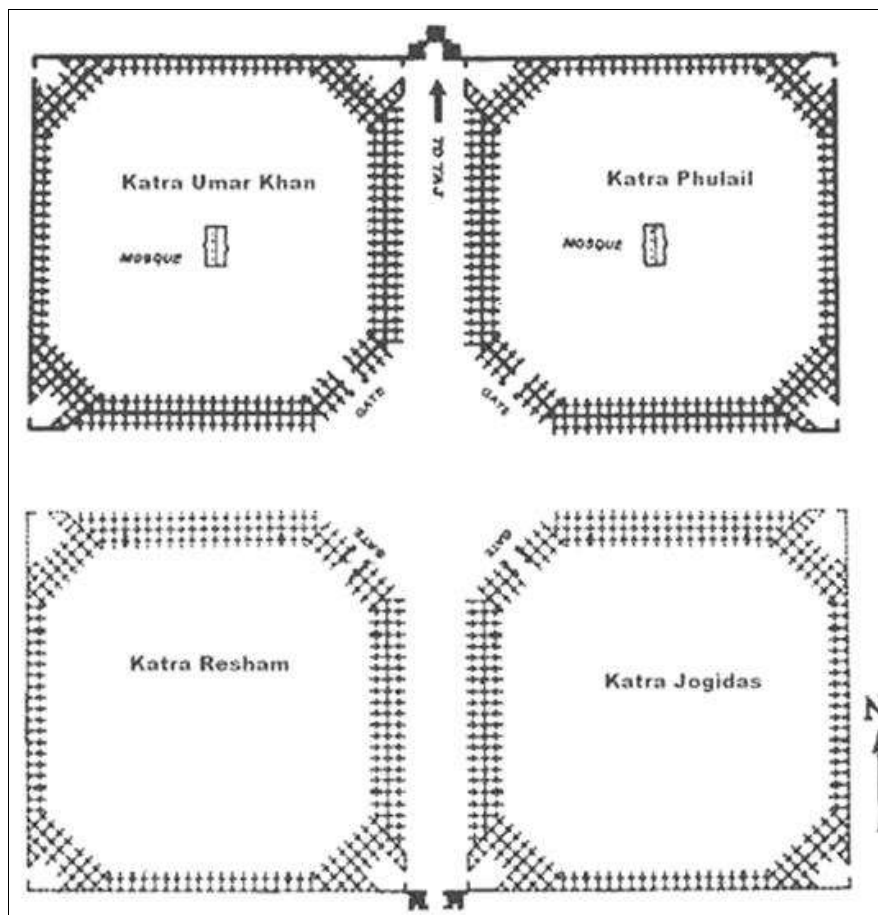




**Fig 1:** Mumtazābad, (Tajganj) Arial view at Agra



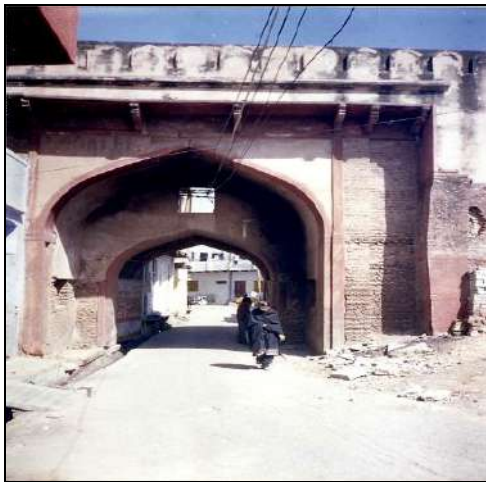
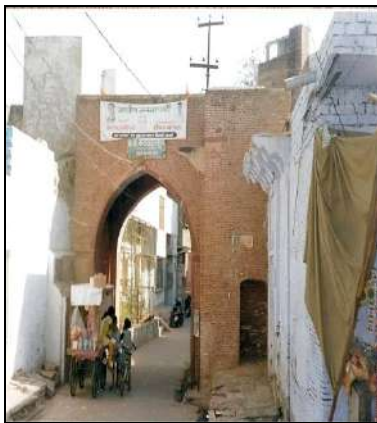
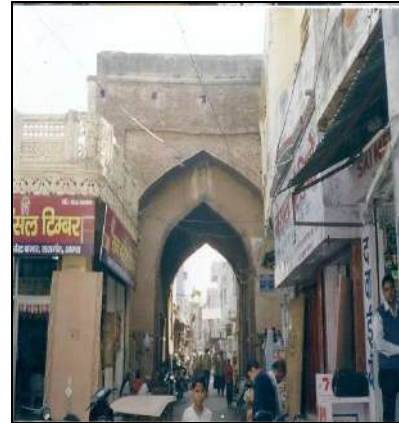
Plan 1.1: Mumtazabad, (Tajganj)



Plan 1.2: Bazars and Sarais at Mumtazabad, (Tajganj)



## Plates

**Gate 1.1:** *Katrā Umar Khan**Katrā Umar Khan: Vaulted Chamber***Gate 1.2:** *Katrā Phulail**Katrā Phulail: Vaulted Chambers***Gate 1.3:** *Katrā Jogidas***Gate 1.4:** *Katrā Resham***Gate 1.5:** *Dakhani Darwāja***Conclusion**

There were plenty of evidences relating to the construction of the sarāis by the Mughal Emperor as well as the nobles in the vicinity of the capital city of Agra. The sarāis constructed by other organizations, that may be presumed to represent smaller entities, the evidence relating to their organization and facilities is scanty and, therefore, insufficient for working out the organizational establishment. Thus, mainly the evidence related to the working of larger sarāis is taken

into account. All of the sarāis, especially the smallest units, should be taken into consideration when drawing inferences from this information.

However, the surveyed Sarāis in the vicinity of Tajganj (or Mumtazābad) are in dilapidated conditions and it is very difficult to get their accurate measurements. A more detailed study shed further light on the position of these sarāis in the Mughal city of Agra.

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7. The length of the Mughal yard or gaz has been estimated as 31.464 inches. See, Col. A.Hodgson, *Memoire on the length of the Illahee Guz or Imperial Land Measure of Hindostan*, JRAS, 1843m, 45-53.
8. Abdul Hamid Lahori, op. cit., II, p. 329.
9. Peter Mundy, *The Travels of Peter Mundy in Europe and Asia, 1608-1667*, ed. by Sir RC Temple, Vol. II, London, 1914, p. 213.
10. Francois Bernier, *Travels in the Mogul Empire* (AD 1656-68), op. cit., p. 281.
11. An overstatement: The distance is about 440 miles by road. See for example William Finch, *Early Travels in India*, ed. W. Foster, p. 186, Foot note-1.
12. *Ibid*, pp. 185-186.
13. For the agencies establishing sarāis (that is, kārwānsarāys) in Mughal India, see Ravindra Kumar, "Sarais in Mughal India", (p. 20), M. Phil. Dissertation available in Maulana Azad Library, Aligarh Muslim University, Aligarh. He has shown in a tabular form that out of the total 106 sarāis (he unfortunately does not clearly demarcate the kārwānsarāys from dāk chaukīs-cum-inns of the Sur and the Mughal periods) listed by him 36 were established by the kings, 23 by the nobles, 9 by the zamīndārs, 16 by the petty officials, 8 by the merchants, 4 by the mashāikh, 1 by commercial establishment, 3 by the religious institutions and 6 by the caste groups. In these kārwānsarāys, around A.D. 1634, the travellers were charged 1 to 2 "pice" (dāms?) per day for rooms, *Travels of Peter Mundy*, Vol. II, p. 121. Nicholas Withington (1615) in *Early Travels in India, 1583-1619*, ed. William Foster, (OUP, 1921), p. 225, mentions as payment for space for horse and cooking of food the rate of 3 dāms per day. Cf. Iqtidar Alam Khan, 'The Kārwānsarāys of Mughal India', p. 113, foot note-3.
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