

Paradise on Earth

The British Treatment of Mughal Gardens in Delhi

by

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From the mid-nineteenth century many of the great gardens of the Mughal empire gradually came under the control of local British authorities. Following the events of the Mutiny, or the First War of Independence, in 1857 the British authorities in Delhi assumed control of the royal estates of Bahadur Shah II, the deposed emperor or 'King of Delhi'. These properties included the Red Fort and its palace complex together with a collection of royal gardens both in and beyond the city. This article looks at the way in which these gardens and their associated buildings and features, most dating from the founding of the city by the Emperor Shahjahan, were treated and managed by the British over a period of about ninety years. The article examines the ways in which the British in Delhi dealt with these historic spaces and the way in which the approach to their conservation changed in the decades following the Mutiny. The awareness of historic gardens together with approaches to their study and conservation is a relatively recent area of conservation activity in this country and the treatment of this collection of sites in nineteenth-century Delhi anticipates many of the issues which now face those conserving or restoring historic gardens in an urban environment.

The title of this essay is taken from the inscription on the walls of the Diwan-i-Khas (Hall of Public Audience) in the Red Fort: 'If there be paradise on earth, it is here, it is here, it is here.'

Historic gardens are very much more than horticultural showcases; they are complex constructions co-ordinating landform, buildings, water and structural planting into a designed whole. Historic gardens evolve and change over time acquiring, like an archaeological site, layers or strata of development from which the history and development of the site can be read and interpreted.

In the United Kingdom, recognition of the importance of historic gardens as cultural objects, as works of art and as important contributors to the fabric of the rural and urban landscape, has developed rapidly over the past forty years. Recognition has led to conservation and, more recently, reconstruction which in

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turn has generated a greater demand for accurate historical and archaeological information as an aid to informed decision making or authentic rebuilding. Availability of public funding for the conservation of historic gardens and parks in both the public and private sectors has focused professional attention on appropriate approaches to the repair and treatment of historic and dynamic fabric. Experiments in reconstruction have raised questions about the merits and ethical problems of restoring a site to a single period in its past history and growing awareness of the role of public parks as historic spaces in the urban environment has raised the debate about the adaptation of historic design to modern use. Many of these issues, now very much the subject of debate between conservation professionals, were anticipated by the British response to the collection of royal Mughal gardens in Delhi which came into their care in the second half of the nineteenth century.

THE CONTEXT

The emperor Shahjahan entered his new walled city on 19th April 1648 and, showered with gold by his son Dara Shukoh, followed the processional route to the palace complex of the Red Fort overlooking the banks of the Jumna. The city, then known as Shahjahanabad¹ and now known to us as Old Delhi, was in a strategically important area which was for centuries the key to controlling political power throughout the sub-continent. In the plain to the south of Shahjahanabad were the ruins of earlier cities built by various ruling dynasties over a number of historical periods. The overriding factor governing their siting was the supply of water and earlier sites had migrated eastwards partly in response to changes in the course of the river Jumna and partly as the result of changes in the supply of water from the Aravalli hills to the west. Shahjahan's Delhi depended to a great extent for its water supply and the quality of its environment on the *Nahr-i-Bihisht*, the great canal which, utilising and extending earlier constructions, brought water from the Jumna in the north via Panipat and Sonipat to irrigate the hinterland of Delhi and the gardens of the city and the palace fortress.

Shahjahanabad was a planned and integrated royal undertaking. At its core was the palace fortress of Lal Qila, the Red Fort, an intricate collection of gardens and buildings on which the mansions and gardens of the court and nobility were modelled. To the north and south of the Fort within the walls of the city were the *havelis* or mansions of the royal princes and the nawabs. Dominating Chandni Chowk, the most important of the two main streets, was the huge sarai and garden built by Shahjahan's daughter, Jahanara. This string of palaces and gardens spread out beyond the city to the north west along the Grand Trunk Road, the processional route to Lahore and Kashmir. Here there was a network of gardens, the most important of which were the Shalimar Bagh, modelled on the much larger garden of the same name in Lahore and completed around 1650 either by Shahjahan himself or one of his wives, and the Roshanara Bagh made by Shahjahan's youngest daughter who died in 1672 and was then buried there.

These sites belong to the great period of garden building of the seventeenth century but as the city continued to develop, existing sites were remodelled and

new ones were added. For example, at the Red Fort, Aurangzeb, the last of the Great Mughals, added a small mosque and Bahadur Shah II, the last emperor, created pavilions and enhanced the water systems; he also made new gardens following the traditional plan and design, to the south of Delhi at Mehrauli. In the first half of the eighteenth century the Nawab Qudsia Begum, the mother of the emperor Adham Shah, created Qudsia Bagh, an extensive pleasure ground with a mosque and a large two storied mansion overlooking the banks of the Jumna. The tomb and tomb garden of Safdar Jang, Wazir and Nawab of Oudh, also dates from this time. Built by Safdar Jang's son partly reusing materials from neighbouring monuments, this tomb and its garden, like Qudsia Bagh, mark a decline in the quality of material and design of Mughal architecture but, even so, they illustrate the continuation of the tradition of garden making and use in the city.

The characteristic design and layout of these Mughal gardens can be illustrated by the gardens of the Red Fort. By the time Shahjahan came to create his new city he was already himself an accomplished architect and designer, drawing on a long tradition of Mughal garden art. Frequently working closely with the brilliant engineer, Ali Marden Khan, Shahjahan had, by the 1640s, already embellished and remodelled gardens in Kashmir and created the grand Shalimar gardens at Lahore. At Agra Fort he had swept away existing buildings and replaced them with marble palaces and pavilions and formal gardens. Most spectacularly of all, he had created the Taj Mahal, the tomb and memorial garden of his wife Arjumand Banu Begum or Mumtaz Mahal, 'Elect of the Palace'.

At Delhi, the Red Fort was the key to the structure of the city and made dramatic and efficient use of its site overlooking the Jumna to catch the breezes from the river. Within the Fort a hierarchical arrangement of spaces culminated in the splendour and privacy of the royal apartments and gardens. In the tradition of Mughal gardens, these were highly articulated compositions of pavilions, water channels, fountain and water chutes arranged in a sequence of hierarchical spaces full of religious and political symbolism representing paradise on earth and the authority of the Mughal emperor, as well as affording shelter and repose from the searing heat of the plains. The Mehtab Bagh (Moon Garden) and the Hayat Bakhsh Bagh (Life Giving Garden) were the two main gardens within the palace complex. These, together with a number of subsidiary gardens around the zenana or harem, the most private area of the palace, were laid out in the tradition of the char bagh, or four centred, design. The *Nahr-i-Bihisht* (Stream of Paradise), the canal which ran through the gardens and buildings, was the key to the whole composition, linking gardens and buildings together. The water of the *Nahr-i-Bihisht* was manipulated in sheets or plumes over chaddars (water chutes) and through fountains to create decorative and dramatic effect, and directed through the gardens in a network of water channels to irrigate and create a variety of micro environments. This was a wonderfully flexible and sophisticated sequence of buildings and spaces combining plants, the marble of buildings and moving water, and was enhanced by the permanent decorative motifs and the temporary awnings and furnishings. This model and these traditions of garden making followed in the palace gardens of the

Red Fort, were echoed in those created by members of the court and nobles in the mansions or *havelis* of the city.²

THE SITUATION IN 1857

Maintenance of the gardens at the Red Fort had not been uniformly good; parts of the main gardens were semi derelict and rough buildings covered part of the zenana gardens. However, the framework of channels and marble water features along with a good deal of structural planting survived at the Red Fort and at gardens in the city, into the early decades of the nineteenth century.³ There had been a permanent British presence in Delhi since 1803. From the 1820s there had been some British concern with the maintenance and conservation of the important buildings in the city and from time to time the Mughal emperors made attempts at restoration work, particularly at the Red Fort,⁴ but on the whole the early decades of the nineteenth century were periods of decline characterised by the 'dull, desolate and forlorn' appearance of the palace buildings and gardens and of the city.⁵ Politically the British, in these early years, maintained the fiction of Mughal power but this relationship was shattered in 1857 by the Mutiny and by the events which followed the capture and sack of Delhi and the exile and death of Bahadur Shah II.

Fragmentary and damaged though it was, the old royal Mughal sites which came under British control after 1857 represented an important collection of historic urban gardens, many with substantial survivals of seventeenth-century buildings and design. These gardens had been part of a city which was constructed to reflect the dynamics of Mughal rule and the authority of the emperor and as such they were part of an intelligible framework of urban spaces. Right up to 1857 the garden palaces, even if reduced and decayed, had continued to function as part of a circle of court ceremonial in which Bahadur Shah II spent whole days composing poetry in the pleasure grounds of the Roshanara Bagh outside the city walls.⁶ After 1857 Delhi became a British city and its old spatial organisation gave way to a new one. What is more, since the garden sites were extensive, any attempt at remodelling the city in the commercial and administrative interests of the expanding British population would necessitate radical intervention and reorganisation of their historic fabric.

THE BRITISH RESPONSE

The attitude of the British to the monuments and to Delhi itself when the city was recaptured after 1857 was governed by fear, revenge and the desire to establish military supremacy. In these extreme circumstances, the initial burst of looting gave way to a programme of systematic destruction of much of the city including many of its gardens and large areas of the palace fortress. As the situation calmed and the British established control over Delhi, the city was rebuilt and large areas were substantially redesigned along European lines. The British response to the treatment of Mughal gardens and monuments developed within the context of this changing approach to the city itself and although it cannot be called a conscious exercise in the management of a collection of historic gardens as such, in retrospect

the British intervention does highlight many of the practical and cultural issues which today have to be addressed in the conservation and adaptation of historic gardens in developing urban centres. Similarly, the British response to the gardens of Mughal Delhi also draws attention to the threshold between the conservation of a living historic site and the management of a garden site as a monument.

The fate of the gardens and the nature of their treatment depended very much on each site's location within and around the walled city and, to a great extent, on its association with the events of the Mutiny. The exile of Bahadur Shah II signalled the beginning of British control and the establishment of British administrative practices in Delhi, expressed first by destruction, then followed by the reordering of substantial areas to suit the requirements of an increasing number of British civil residents. This change did not happen at once but was spread over a number of decades up to the building of New Delhi after 1911. Following the recovery after 1857, the Civil Lines to the north of the old city expanded rapidly as a residential and administrative area and it was here, away from the congested centre of the city, that the temporary capital was sited after 1911. In effect, this changed the axis of the city and fractured the relationship between the palace complex of the Red Fort and the network of gardens throughout and beyond to the north west of the city. The collective structural meaning of these gardens, Sahibabad, Shalimar and Roshanara Bagh, was either unrecognised or ignored and they were developed or changed to fit in with the context of the surrounding neighbourhood. The gardens close to the Red Fort were destroyed together with those areas of the city blown up to create a clear line of fire from its ramparts.

Areas and structures of some of the gardens already had been deliberately destroyed either to prevent their being used as cover by the 'rebels' and snipers preying on the British forces encamped on the Ridge during the siege in the summer months of 1857, or as a result of bombardment in the push to recapture the city. The remains of the sites were absorbed into the memorial and leisure landscape of the British city, acquiring new cultural and physical overlays, and being reshaped as public parks for the benefit and pleasure of the British community. Sections of the city walls and gates were destroyed, although that around the Kashmir Gate, where the fighting had been fiercest, was preserved and passed into British mythology. Here the western gateway, a mosque and fragments of other structures, all that was left of the Qudsia Bagh, were conserved as monuments, but what was left of its boundary walls and structures was demolished and the landform remodelled for use as a public park (Figs. 1 & 2).

At Sahibabad the gardens made by Jahanara, Shahjahan's eldest daughter, which together with the serai, reputedly were modelled on Isfahan, survived into the nineteenth century, although there had already been substantial encroachment at the eastern end.⁷ The serai, described by Bernier,⁸ was a large, square, two storied building offering chambers and security for the rich Persian and Usbec merchants visiting the city. Linked with this were extensive walled gardens through which ran the *Nahir-i Bihisht*. The overall size and shape of the gardens were retained after 1857 although the walls and the serai were razed, and the site renamed 'Queen's



Fig. 1

The surviving gateway of the Qudsia Bagh in 1997, now incorporated as a central feature in the path system of the public park

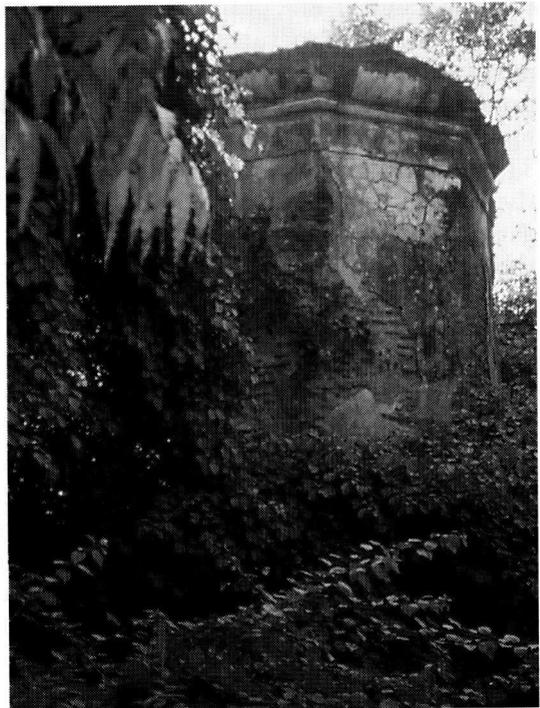


Fig. 2

Fragments of the original garden structures are still to be found at Qudsia Bagh. This structure, photographed in 1997, is slightly to the north of the main surviving gateway. Its date is uncertain but it may have been a small turret or part of a summer house overlooking the garden layout

Garden'. In 1876 four of the pavilions which had once adorned the walls were still standing. Within the garden, only fragments of the 'small pleasure houses' which had once stood near the *Nahir-i Bihisht* remained by the late 1870s, their site then being marked by a menagerie.⁹ It was to this site that the stone elephants from the Red Fort, together with the large marble basin which had stood in the garden before the Rang Mahal there, were moved, to be used as ornaments for the new park and to complement the statue of the Queen-Empress which was destined for the site at the beginning of the next century.¹⁰ Part of the site had already been chosen for the erection of a new Town Hall¹¹ and this, together with the Queen's Garden, the Library and embellishments such as clock towers and fountains¹² had, by the end of the century, transformed this area of Chandni Chowk from one of private imperial to public civic space, in the best tradition of Victorian municipal improvement.



Fig. 3

Gateway of Roshanara Bagh with the tomb of Roshanara in the background. Fanshaw, writing in 1902, comments on the survival of the beautiful encaustic work on the gateway. The Roshanara Gardens of the British period were made by landscaping together Roshanara Bagh and several smaller neighbouring Mughal gardens

ASI, Photographic Library, Delhi, Vol. 6, 1922-23



Fig. 4

The Gateway of the Roshanara Bagh showing its condition in 1997 with some loss of encaustic work

After 1857 the tomb and one of the gateways at the Roshanara Bagh were conserved but the surrounding garden was similarly completely remodelled to a British plan. Most of this work seems to have been carried out in the 1870s by Colonel Cracroft, Commissioner of the Delhi Division, who removed a series of 'old ruined buildings' while conserving the tomb, the eastern gateway and one of the tanks within a garden which no longer maintained 'any of its peculiar oriental features'¹³ (Figs. 3, 4 & 5).

The change in pattern which these sites underwent was much more than a simple reuse of an existing private garden as a public park; rather they sustained a complete cultural transformation. Mughal gardens are private, inward looking spaces defined by boundary walls which separate them socially from their surroundings and physically from a frequently inhospitable landscape and climate to enable the creation of a cool and private micro-environment. Within its boundary, the layout and design of the garden is dictated, in part by topography and location, but also to a great extent by the manipulation of the water supply for irrigation and by the requirements of decoration and design. The removal of boundary walls altered the whole nature of these gardens, changing them from private to public spaces and integrating them physically and culturally into the pattern of the surrounding British environment.

Similarly, the internal arrangement of the gardens was re-ordered to suit the

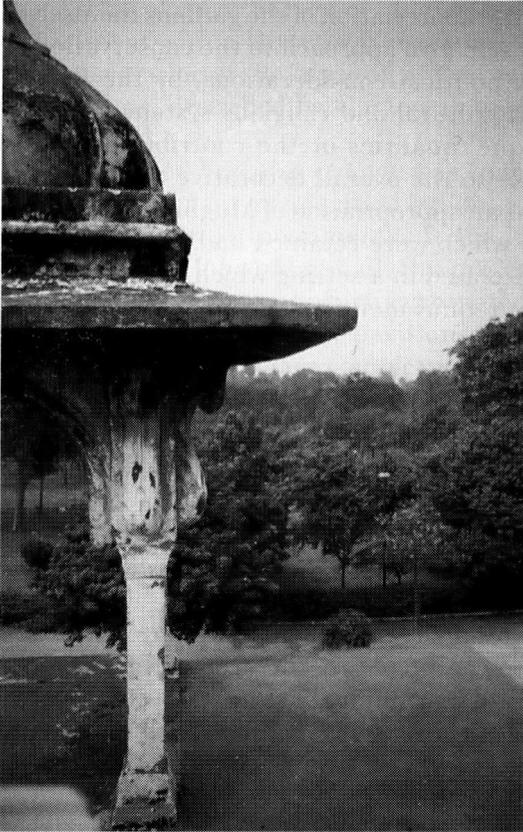


Fig. 5
View from the tomb of Roshanara in 1997
looking across what is now a heavily wooded
park. The gardens were described by
Fanshaw in 1902 as being 'extremely pretty'

taste and leisure requirements and the preoccupation with health and hygiene of the British civil community. The public park movement had been gathering pace in England since the 1830s principally, though not exclusively, in the industrial towns, as part of the drive to improve public health, morals and education. The new public parks drew heavily for design inspiration on the example of the eighteenth-century designed landscapes with their serpentine lakes, undulating ground, curved walks and internal views constructed around tree cover and shrub planting. Public parks were intended to be both ideal and practical landscapes which offered spiritual and physical refreshment and they were very much part of the reforming evangelical and philanthropic movements of the time.

It was these developing ideas of the design and use of urban space which were transferred to Delhi and which informed the restructuring of the Mughal gardens. The new functions which the gardens were now to perform required a very substantial remodelling of the physical fabric which could include either the removal of structures and features, actual reshaping of the landform or a drastic spatial reordering as the result of extensive replanting programmes. Inherent in these changes was an approach to the conservation of Mughal gardens and architecture

as cultural and historic sites. There was little appreciation of the gardens themselves as being historic and there was clearly a selective approach to the conservation of their structures. This was governed by political considerations, by the British response to the structures of a different cultural and religious system and, to a large extent, by ideas of the 'picturesque' qualities or the contribution which surviving Mughal structures could make to the overall decorative design of the new park or landscape. In a sense this was an appropriation of Mughal architecture as garden ornament and those features which were retained had, in effect, been separated from their context and were isolated in a setting which now had a new dynamic which was evolving to suit the requirements of a completely different culture.

In terms of historic garden conservation, this treatment of the Mughal gardens in Delhi parallels and highlights many of the problems and conflicts faced by historic garden conservation today. Changes in the pattern of the city, changes in leisure pursuits and changes in the cultural context of the park are all issues which have an immediate effect on attitudes to the conservation of historic fabric. However, what the British treatment of the Mughal gardens also illustrates is the importance of historic gardens and spaces in structuring the image and character of the urban environment.

Qudsia Bagh, Sahibabad and the Roshanara Bagh were integrated into the civil landscape of Delhi while the gardens and palace structures of the Red Fort became, and substantially still remain part of the military landscape. It was, however, at the Red Fort that a different approach to garden conservation began to develop and where there was a gradual move towards garden archaeology and the rehabilitation of Mughal gardens as historic sites.

The Red Fort had been the focus of the Mutiny in Delhi and it was there that British women and children had been murdered, so it was a site of particular loathing and destruction in the days after the capture of the city. The Red Fort, including the palace complex, then became an important strategic site, a military garrison was established, areas were cleared to secure firing lines, buildings were demolished and barrack blocks built over gardens. Only those marble pavilions along the terrace overlooking the river considered to be of particular historic or architectural merit were preserved. Even these buildings were modified, and disfigured, for use as officers' quarters and a sergeants' mess; gun batteries were set up between them, site levels were changed and access roads were built across the gardens. The site lost all its function as a palace and cultural centre and became simply the 'Fort'. This lack of understanding and the failure either to recognise or respect the interrelationship of garden and buildings set up a tension between the military and the archaeological authorities which continues to this day.

More damage was done by the British than at any other time in the Red Fort's history and piecemeal cultural vandalism continued from time to time with the removal of artefacts for decorative use in the public parks. This attitude lasted for over twenty years until the major turning point came in 1899 with the appointment of Lord Curzon as Viceroy. It was through Curzon's vision and determination that

the Archaeological Survey of India (ASI) became established as a government department with a Director General who for the first time had responsibility for the conservation of the fabric of, as well as the recording and cataloguing of, India's monuments, described by Curzon as the 'most glorious galaxy of monuments in the world'.¹⁴

At the Red Fort this change was characterised by the gradual transfer of the most important surviving palace buildings from military use to the care of the ASI, for conservation as monuments. At the instigation of the new Director General, John (later Sir John) Marshall, the process of conservation began in 1903 with a sequence of excavations which eventually led to the restoration or reconstruction of water features, garden pavilions and garden layouts. Reconstruction and conservation at the palace complex was given added impetus as the Red Fort began to be reused as ceremonial space in the Delhi Durbars, particularly that of 1911. In a sense the stabilisation and reconstruction of the royal pavilions and gardens here were linked with political circumstances and with changes in the perception of Delhi's role in the character and government of British India. The Durbar ceremonies and the social occasions which went with them and were played out in the gardens of the Red Fort created an association with the Imperial power of the Mughals and sent signals, at least to the British community, of political and cultural continuity. By the time of the 1911 Durbar, the palace gardens were again part of the hierarchy of imperial space within the Fort if only, and rather sadly, as the setting for a tea party.

The social requirements of the 1911 Durbar may have set the pace, but that temporary use should not detract from the achievements, over a number of years, of what must be one of the earliest exercises in garden archaeology and historic garden reconstruction. Although supported by excavation, this was not intended to be an exercise in the accurate reconstruction of a Mughal garden nor was the programme of excavation planned as garden archaeology as such. There was little awareness of the evidence of planting patterns from features such as planting pits, for example, or for the evidence which can now be retrieved from careful excavation of the surface soil and, in any case, much of this might well have already been lost as the result of the operations of the military.¹⁵ However, the treatment of the layout, buildings and features of the palace complex does illustrate the evolution of an awareness of the garden as an integral part of the historic site and design and the need to interpret and conserve it as such.

The situation to be dealt with was essentially that of the repair of war damage. The intention to open the site to the public determined the character of the restoration which was to follow and also emphasised the importance of site interpretation to aid public understanding.¹⁶ Conservation of major structures and the royal pavilions included the removal of additions made by the army and the stabilisation and reinstatement of structural and decorative features. In the garden the work began with the restoration of the levels of the site so that the buildings could be viewed and the spatial qualities of the site properly interpreted.

The Zafar Mahal and the tank at the centre of the surviving area of the Hayat

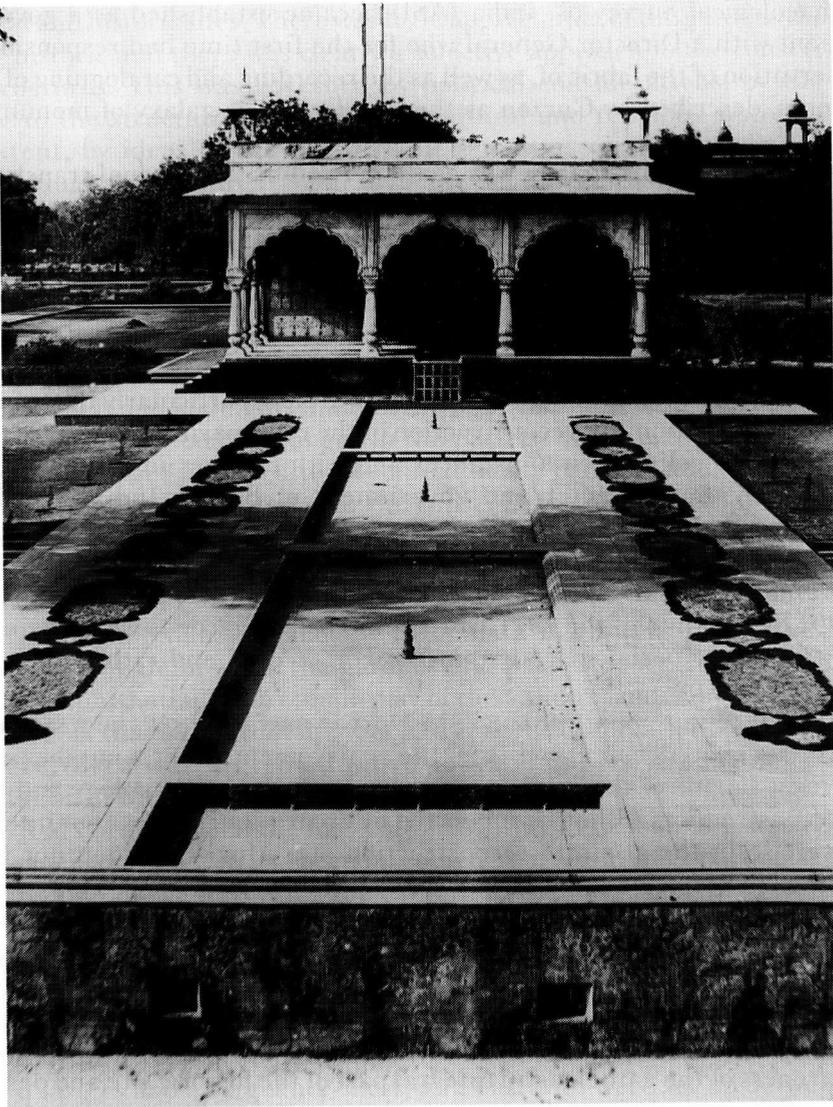


Fig. 6

View from the Zafar Mahal to the restored Sawan pavilion in the Hayat Baksh Garden at the Red Fort. The shape of the planting beds to either side of the central water channel were established from evidence recovered during excavation. Note the planting in the lawns at the side of the terrace walks. The Zafar Mahal takes its name from the *nom de plume* of the poet-Emperor Bahadur Shah II who built the pavilion in 1842. The Sawan pavilion together with the Bhaduaun pavilion facing it, take their names from the monsoon months of the Hindu year. Sawan is the fourth month, Bhaduaun is the fifth month

ASI, Photographic Library, Delhi, Vol. 7, 1923-24



Fig. 7
Cleaning the marble of the Sawan Pavilion, 1997

Baksh Bagh was restored first, followed by a programme of excavating and reinstatement of the main and the intersecting water channels of the garden.¹⁷ The restoration of the course of the *Nahir-i Bihisht* along the terrace connecting the main royal pavilions was the next phase in the programme, followed by the reconstruction of missing features such as the new chaddar in the restored Shah Burj.¹⁸ The aim was to restore water to the gardens and recreate the atmosphere of a royal palace and garden complex.¹⁹ This did not extend to an attempt at accurate replanting, the parterres between the water channels being grassed over as lawn in true English fashion, but it did include an imaginative use of shrubs and trees to create a three dimensional sense of mass, space and texture (Figs 6, 7 & 8).

The new planting was coded and related to the position of buildings and features buried when the site was filled after excavation. Open courts were represented by lawns, the mass of buildings by blocks of shrubs including Inga hedges and banks of, for example, Acalephan, Duranta, Hibiscus, Tecoma and Bougainvillea. The lines of colonnades running between buildings, courts and gardens were recreated using grevilleas and conifers. This use of plant material to aid interpretation must be one of the earliest attempts at three dimensional reconstruction as well as one of the earliest experiments in the reconstruction of the 'spirit' of an historic garden.²⁰ Conservation and reconstruction continued up to the time of the First World War. There then followed a period of consolidation and latterly, with the exception of remedial work to individual buildings, a period of decline marked by what appears



Fig. 8

Marble tank removed and used as an ornament in the Queen's Garden and returned to the Red Fort on the orders of Lord Curzon. The tank stands to the front of the Rang Mahal; photographed in 1997

to be an almost total neglect of the garden areas.²¹

The palace complex of the Red Fort was undoubtedly the most important site in Delhi as well as being the best documented and most well known, but the approach to gardens and garden architecture which was developed there was part of a portfolio of archaeological and conservation activity which extended to other major Mughal garden sites in Lahore and Agra, including the Taj Mahal. In Delhi, this approach was echoed, though on a smaller scale, by the work undertaken at the Shalimar Bagh. This was originally an extensive royal garden which included a large number of garden structures with a complex system of reservoirs and water channels throughout its three terraces. Shalimar Bagh had continued to be used as a royal garden until the early decades of the eighteenth century when it had fallen into disuse. The garden had been partially revived in the early nineteenth century when British residents, particularly Charles Metcalfe, had adapted it as a country retreat and a number of brick additions had been made to the main surviving garden pavilion; however, it was already much reduced by the time of the Mutiny (Figs. 9 & 10).

Shalimar Bagh was first surveyed by the ASI around 1903 when the main tanks, pavilions and subsidiary water channels were recorded. Although ruinous, evidence

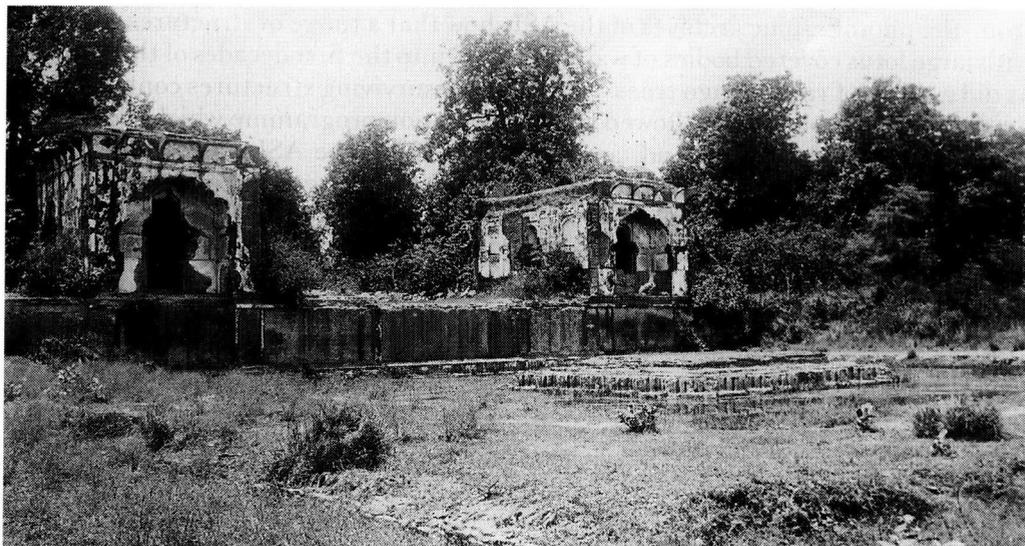


Fig. 9

Pavilions at the Shalimar Bagh before restoration. The overgrown tank in the foreground of this photograph survived until the 1940s but has now been filled in and lost

ASI, Photographic Library, Delhi, 1914 -15



Fig. 10

Pavilions at the Shalimar Bagh photographed in 1998 showing recent excavations to locate the position of fountains in the main tank between these pavilions and the main one to the east.

from the photographic archives of the ASI show that a range of structures together with large lotus covered bodies of water survived into the first decades of this century as did a grove of rare mango trees. Recording of surviving structures continued for a number of seasons to be followed by a conservation programme which focused on the main, central pavilion and, as late as the 1940s the ASI was establishing a boundary around the core of the site and laying out a garden as a setting and protective cordon for the garden monuments.

The approach adopted at the Shalimar Bagh seems to have been a simple one of stabilisation and consolidation of the fabric of the main pavilions and tank. There does not seem to have been any excavation programme designed to establish the nature of the garden layout or to identify the location of structural elements of the site, such as tanks and water channels, beyond those associated most directly with the main pavilion. This policy may well have been dictated not simply by the nature of the site but also in response to its location – approximately six miles to the north-west of the city – and the fact that it had to be approached on foot; even now it is not easy to find. The garden had thus been saved from incorporation into the leisure circuit of the British residential areas and, although it had sustained damage during the Mutiny, it had then simply become overgrown and slowly decayed until the stabilisation programme of the early years of this century. As such the Shalimar Bagh may very well be the best preserved Mughal garden site in Delhi.²²

CONCLUSION

There does not seem to have been any marked appreciation of the Mughal garden sites as a coherent collection nor of their contribution to the structure of the city when they came into British hands in the mid-nineteenth century. Their treatment as historic gardens and monuments seems to have depended very much on their location within the city, their political associations and, at least initially, on the role each site played in the drama of the Mutiny. In a sense, the violence of the British response at some of the sites is a measure of how powerful they were as cultural and political symbols.²³ After 1857 the elaborate court etiquette which had given the gardens structure and meaning within the city, even in decline, had ceased to exist. The gardens were no longer part of a living tradition and their status and role was suddenly changed to that of ‘monument’ or public park.

The treatment of the gardens over a number of decades illustrates the gradual development of an awareness within the minds and professional competence, particularly of the British archaeologists, of the importance not only of the conservation of built fabric but also of the setting and context of a monument and of the value of a garden as an historic site in its own right. This more responsive and responsible approach, resulting not least from the impact of Lord Curzon²⁴ led to the reconstruction of many of the great Mughal gardens of northern India but was also, to a great extent, responsible for what might be called the ‘British style’ of these gardens which has endured to the present day.

In one sense these early exercises in garden reconstruction have been counter productive, fostering the perception, certainly in Delhi, that there was almost an

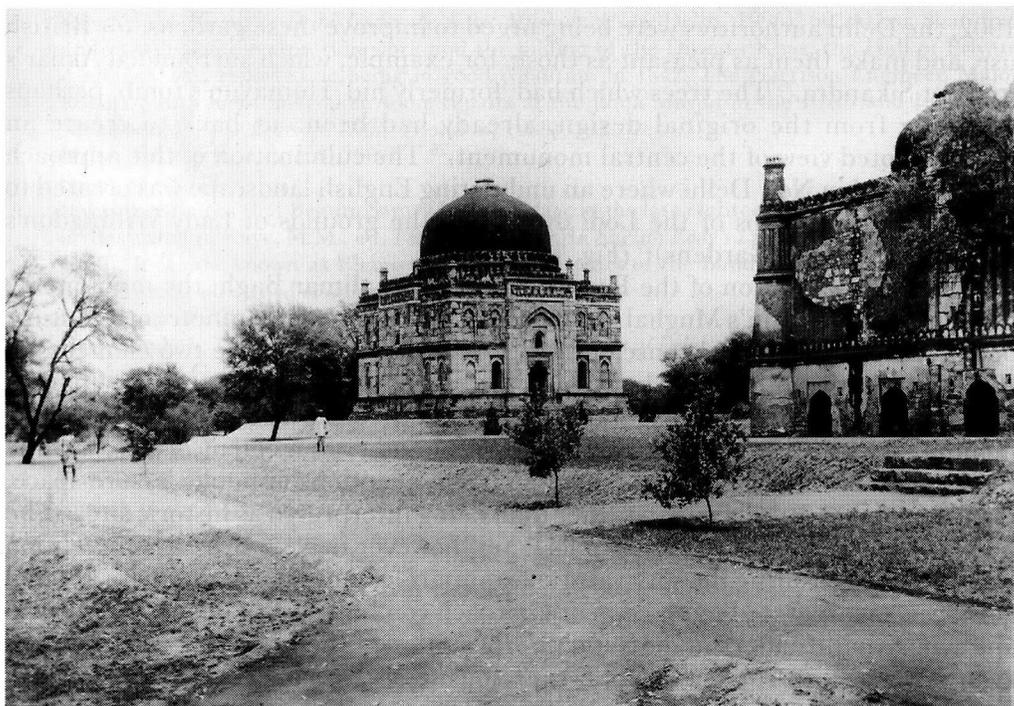


Fig. 11

Shish Gumbad, meaning 'glazed dome', a tomb dating from the time of Sikander Lodi's reign (1489 - 1517) incorporated into the design of Lady Willingdon's Park (now the Lodi Gardens). Note the extensive terracing undertaken to link this Shish Gumbad with the neighbouring Bara Gumbad tomb of the same date

ASI, Photographic Library, Vol. 14, 1935-41

abrupt stop to garden making after the death of Aurangzeb in 1707, when in fact, the gardens, though they may have been much reduced from their former glory, were used and added to for over a hundred years after that and new ones were made. The later additions were certainly not of the same high design and material quality as earlier Mughal phases, but they do have an importance as layers or overlays of historical material and evidence of site evolution. In a sense, the British experiments in historic garden reconstruction were a sort of 'scrape', an artificial exercise in 'restoring' a garden to one period in its history and evolution and destroying or removing all later accretions, an exercise which has the side effect of devaluing the gardens' later history and diminishing their historical integrity.

The nature of the remodelling of the Roshanara and Qudsia Baghs illustrates the way in which Mughal gardens were appropriated as British pleasure grounds and parks and their monuments used as focal points in a design in the same way that a bandstand might be. This was an attitude which was later to be reflected in the reconstruction of the gardens of Humayun's tomb and Safdarjung's tomb. In

1902, the Delhi authorities were being urged to improve these gardens, for British use, and make them as pleasant as those, for example, which surrounded Akbar's tomb at Sikandra.²⁵ The trees which had 'formerly hid' Humayun's tomb, perhaps surviving from the original design, already had been cut back to create an uninterrupted view of the central monument.²⁶ The culmination of this approach is to be found in New Delhi where an undulating English landscape was created to incorporate the tombs of the Lodi dynasty in the grounds of Lady Willingdon's Park (now the Lodi Gardens)²⁷ (Fig. 11).

With the exception of the Red Fort and the Shalimar Bagh, the monuments and buildings of Delhi's Mughal gardens had, by the end of the nineteenth century, been separated in official consciousness from their context. The two elements of the historic site, although both in some sense preserved, entered separate maintenance regimes. The buildings were, and continue to be, conserved as monuments with the emphasis on the control and management of decay, while their gardens were changed to accommodate perceptions of public leisure space, taste and horticultural fashion rather than being interpreted as historic sites. The 'memory' of these spaces had been lost. Yet, however flawed, British intervention was a factor in ensuring the survival of substantial elements of many of these Mughal gardens. An integrated management approach combined with a more widespread and sympathetic understanding and interpretation of them as historic sites could, even now, restore them to public consciousness as a collection and reinstate something of the historic resonance of their contribution to the pattern of the city.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Photographs from the Photographic Library of the Archaeological Survey of India are reproduced by kind permission of the Director General. All other photographs are by the author.

NOTES AND REFERENCES

1. Bernier, F., *Travels in the Mogul Empire A.D. 1656-1668* (London, 1891), 241.
2. For a description of the design and layout of a haveli garden see Blake, S. P., 'Cityscape of an Imperial Capital: Shahjahanabad in 1739' in Frykenberg, R.E., ed., *Delhi through the Ages, Selected Essays in Urban History, Culture and Society*, (Delhi, 1993), 89-93.
3. Bishop Heber describes the 'very old orange and fruit trees' in the garden together with many rose bushes and a few jonquils. Heber was a well travelled, reliable and sympathetic witness; his general impression of the Red Fort was that, 'It far surpasses the Kremlin, but I do not think that, except in the durability of its materials, it equals Windsor'. Heber, Bishop R., *Narrative of a Journey through the Upper Provinces of India*, I, (1844), 561. Heber also described the gardens of the Rang Mahal with the water jets all destroyed and the gardens covered with 'wretched houses' - quoted in Sanderson, G., *The Red Fort, Delhi. A Guide to the Buildings and Garden*, (Delhi, 1937), 20. This description is confirmed by a large and rather battered painting at the Museum in the Red Fort, c.1840, which shows a rare panorama of the palace complex from a point on the roof of the Diwan-i Am. The Hayat Baksh and Mehtab gardens are shown with a heavy tree cover and the garden before the Rang Mahal was at that date almost totally built over.

4. Spear, P., *A History of Delhi Under the Later Mughuls*, (New Delhi, 1995), 60. Akbar Shah had undertaken some restoration work and the gilding of the Diwan-i Khas, the Hall of Private Audience, was reported as being in good condition in 1812. The Garrison Engineer, Major Robert Smith had undertaken some repairs at the Jama Masjid in the 1820s and 1830s. See Nicholson, L., *The Red Fort, Delhi*, (London, 1989), 112.
5. Heber, Bishop R., *op. cit.*, I, 306-7.
6. Spear, *op. cit.*, 73.
7. It was in this area that Begum Samru built a palace in the late eighteenth century. The building is illustrated in Kaye, M.M., ed. *The Golden Calm: An English Lady's Life in Moghul Delhi* (Exeter, 1980). It is now known as Bhagirath Palace and parts of the building survive although now buried under electrical shops and stalls.
8. Bernier, *op. cit.*, 280-1.
9. Carr Stephen, *The Archaeological and Monumental Remains of Delhi*, (Calcutta, 1876) 256.
10. Fanshaw, H. C., *Delhi Past and Present*, (Delhi, 1991), 52.
11. A Town Hall had been planned before 1857 and was built between 1860-5; Gupta, N., *Delhi Between Two Empires, 1803-1931*, (Delhi and Calcutta, 1998), 84-5.
12. The original clock tower was later replaced by a cast iron fountain which survives.
13. Carr Stephen, *op. cit.*, 260.
14. Speech to the Asiatic Society, Calcutta, quoted Nicholson, *op. cit.*, 114.
15. The excavation of the Great Garden at Kirby Hall, Northamptonshire in 1931 was the earliest example of garden archaeology in England. Much evidence was lost in the damage to the archaeological levels of the Great Garden during excavation and the excavation was not necessarily well recorded. It led to the reconstruction of a design in the style of a mid-seventeenth century garden. The site was subsequently re-excavated between 1987-94; see Dix, B., 'Kirby Hall and its gardens: excavations in 1987-1994', *The Archaeological Journal*, 152, (1995).
16. Archaeological interest remained subservient to those of the army. The Battery on the terrace was not removed until 1914, a separate entry was provided for military use and the military authorities refused to allow the re-introduction of standing water in the tanks and channels unless covered with kerosene to prevent mosquitoes breeding. Sanderson, *op. cit.*
17. The Mehtab Bagh and part of the Hayat Baksh Bagh were lost beneath barrack blocks.
18. Archaeological Survey of India, *Annual Report*, 1904-5, 17. This approach to restoration was opposed to that supported by the Society for the Protection of Ancient Buildings. The Society sent representatives to view many of the works being undertaken in India and there appear to have been some sharp exchanges before the Society eventually reached the pragmatic view that a different approach to conservation was necessary in India since, unlike in the west, the traditional skills had not died out but were still part of a living tradition. For a discussion of Curzon's contribution to conservation in India see Linstrum, D., 'The Sacred Past: Lord Curzon and the Indian Monuments' in *South Asian Studies* 11, (1995), 1-17.
19. A new tank was installed to feed the water system. However, it took two weeks of continuous pumping to fill the tank. Initially the water features worked only on ceremonial occasions but there were plans to recycle the water so that the gardens could be supplied throughout the cold season. Sanderson, *op. cit.*, 56-7.
20. Sanderson, *op. cit.*, 55. Sanderson's guide book is based on the ASI *Annual Reports* and remains the best introduction to the buildings and gardens of the Red Fort. *The Guide*, supplemented by the *Reports*, has been used in this article as the basis for the description of the Red Fort and the excavation work undertaken there.
21. In February 1998 top soil was being removed from large areas of the garden fronting the Mumtaz Mahal.
22. An excavation locating the position of fountains in the main channel has recently been undertaken by the Delhi Circle of the ASI.
23. This attitude was not, however, universal. James Fergusson, author of the *History of Indian and Eastern Architecture* (1875), described the attitude of the military to the Red Fort as a 'fearful piece of Vandalism' and condemned the authorities for failing even to make a plan of what

they were destroying; quoted in Nicholson, *op. cit.*, 110.

24. Fanshaw, *op. cit.*, xiv. The main historic gardens in and around Agra came under British care in the mid-nineteenth century. That at the Taj was used to grow fruit for the British community and the gardens at Akbar's tomb were used as a prison garden. India Office Library, MSS F/4/1957, report of Mr H. Falconer, Superintendent of the Botanic Garden Saharanpur, April 1841.
25. Fanshaw, *op. cit.*
26. The Jantra Mantra, the early eighteenth-century observatory built by the Maharaja Jai Sing II has also been incorporated into a public park on the edge of Connaught Place.