



## Lodi Garden-A Historical Detour

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Lodi Garden, as a closed complex comprises of several architectural accomplishments such as tombs of Muhammad Shah and Sikandar Lodi, Bara Gumbad, Shish Gumbad (which is actually tomb of Bahlul Lodi), Athpula and many nameless mosque, however my field work primarily focuses upon the monuments constructed during the Lodi period. This term paper attempts to situate these monuments in the context of their socio-economic and political scenario through assistance of Waqiat-i-Mushtaqi and tries to traverse beyond the debate of sovereignty, which they have been confined within all these years.

Village of Khairpur was the location of some of the tombs, mosques and other structures associated with the Lodi period, however in 1936; villagers were deported out of this space to lay the foundation of a closed campus named as Lady Willingdon Park, in the commemoration of erstwhile viceroy's wife; later which was redesigned by eminent architect, J A Stein and was renamed as Lodi Garden in 1968. Its proximity to the Dargah of Shaykh Nizamuddin Auliya delineated Sufi jurisdiction over this space however, in due course of time it came under the Shia influence as Aliganj located nearby to it, houses monuments subscribing to this sect, such as Gateway of Old Karbala and Imambara; even the tomb of a powerful Shia Mughal governor i.e. - Safdar Jung later came to stationed in this locality.

The tomb of Muhannad Shah Sayyid situated in the Lodi Garden complex is a testimony to this Shia predominance, which is an octagonal chambered tomb, who's each face contains three arched openings<sup>1</sup>, which is further emphasized by eight pillared pavilion on the top<sup>2</sup>. Coming out of the constraints of closed garden, when we relocate these monuments in separate spaces, this tomb appears separated and insular, situated far away from the Lodi monuments. Here, utility of same space by Lodi rulers may be assumed as a marker of 'continuity' of Sultanate dynamics whereas this 'distance' actually acted as the visual representation of their distinction from Sayyid prototype since they were the ones to usurp them, which we would discuss in detail later on.

Before focusing upon Lodi monuments, there lays a need to ponder upon Afghan ethno genesis; they have been portrayed as descendants of Jewish patriarch Jacob, who were incorporated into the Islamic fold via conversion of their primogenitor as notes Tarikh-e-Khan Jahani.<sup>3</sup> Among them, chief was hardly more than one among the equals and blood relationship held the tribe together<sup>4</sup>. When they migrated to subcontinent, they attempted to adapt themselves to the Muslim aristocratic lifestyle<sup>5</sup>, however emergence of Afghan diaspora led to the crystallization of their historical identity and resultant self-identification with tribal system<sup>6</sup>.

<sup>1</sup> Delhi: The Built Heritage, INTACH Delhi Chapter, p. 249

<sup>2</sup> Maulavi Zafar Hasan, J A Page, "Monuments of Delhi" Vol. 2, p. 32

<sup>3</sup> Nile Green, "Tribe, Diaspora and Sainthood in Afghan History", p. 184

<sup>4</sup> Iqtidar Hussain Siddiqui, "The Afghans and Their Emergence in India as Ruling Elite", p. 247

<sup>5</sup> Ibid, p. 250

<sup>6</sup> Nile Green, pp. 172-73

Few scholars validate the existence of several Lodi monuments across Delhi, Agra, Tejara and Sirhind<sup>7</sup>, however the ones located in the Lodi Garden are unparalleled in their grandeur and artistic excellence. Among them, almost equidistant between the tombs of Muhammad Shah and Sikandar Lodi, two buildings of note lie together, to the North, there is square domed tomb, called Shish Gumbad on account of its blue gazed tiles and even a larger square domed structure faces it, resembling a tomb but devoid of cenotaphs i.e. - Bara Gumbad, whose lofty dome springs from a round enclosure having sixteen faces of niche shaped panels.<sup>8</sup>

The external treatment of Shish Gumbad is close imitation of Bara Gumbad, however its ceiling is decorated with quotations from Quran and a Mehrab projects from its West wall, which testifies its religious significance. Though Shish Gumbad is depicted as the tomb of Abu Amjad, however Simon Digby calls it a historical fallacy based on the statement of Sir Sayyid Ahmad Khan, who designated a tomb attached to the Dargah of Shaykh Nasiruddin Chirag-i-Delhi as that of Bahlul Lodi.<sup>9</sup> With the help of local traditions prevalent in the village of khairpur, Sir Henry Sharp came to the conclusion that Shish Gumbad was actually the tomb of Bahlul Lodi<sup>10</sup>, moreover Tarikh-i-Daudi written during the reign of Jahangir attests to the fact that Bahlul Lodi was buried in a tomb, which has fine building in Jor Bagh.

Babur in his autobiography mentions that he visited tombs and gardens of Sultan Sikandar and Sultan Bahlul and several other monuments but he makes no reference to the Dargah of Shaykh, which he would have surely toured if it was adjoined to the tomb, and being fond of gardens, he could never identify small compound near the Dargah as a garden, all of which testify to the fact that Bahlul's tomb is Shish Gumbad.<sup>11</sup> Moreover, Digby points towards the probable spelling error in the inscription of Shish Gumbad, since there is no attestation in any of the account of Lodi period of any person called as Abu Amjad<sup>12</sup>, moreover date of completion of Shish Gumbad in 1494 points towards its construction six years after the death of Sultan by his successor.<sup>13</sup> In the context of tradition among Sultanate royal houses to bury their family members in a series of tombs<sup>14</sup>, it seems highly unlikely that such a grand monument was associated with a non-entity, whereas an unimpressive building was associated with a Lodi dynast.

Thus, royal paraphernalia of this complex attributed by a grand entrance i.e.- Bara Gumbad ascertains to the fact that Shish Gumbad must have been tomb of Bahlul Lodi, however was denied this status due to inaccuracies committed by few scholars. Catherine Asher argues that construction of these grand tombs by Afghans was directed towards elevating their lineage<sup>15</sup>, since Bahlul Lodi was earlier a horse trader<sup>16</sup>. Many Afghan tombs and other monuments like Moth ki Masjid have been gradually identified by scholars like Matsua Ara<sup>17</sup>; that were constructed by their nobles and Percy Brown attributes this proliferation of tombs to their tribal polity<sup>18</sup>.

<sup>7</sup> Hameed Ud Din, "The Afghan Architecture of India", pp. 149-53, Rajeev Bargoti, "New Light on Architectural Activities of Lodi Period: A Report On Bayana", pp. 925-32

<sup>8</sup> Simon Digby, "The Tomb of Bahlul Lodi", p. 551

<sup>9</sup> Sayyid Ahmad Khan, "Athar-al-sanadid", p. 42

<sup>10</sup> Sir Henry Sharp, "Delhi: its story and buildings", p. 65

<sup>11</sup> Simon Digby, pp. 556-557

<sup>12</sup> Ibid, pp. 56-61

<sup>13</sup> Ibid, pp. 559-560

<sup>14</sup> Ibid, p. 553

<sup>15</sup> Catherine Asher, "Legacy and Legitimacy", pp. 88-91

<sup>16</sup> I H Siddiqui, "The Afghans and Their Emergence as Ruling Elites During Delhi Sultanate Period", p. 248

<sup>17</sup> Matsua Ara has prepared a map of scattered Afghan monuments in Delhi,

<sup>18</sup> Percy Brown, "The Influence of Sher Shah on Islamic Architecture", p. 638

Such arguments have attempted to demean the sovereignty of Lodis and overall Afghans, without taking into account the fact that such grand monuments could be built only through sound treasury and under the aegis of an overarching state. The mosque and the guesthouse built on the sides of courtyard of Bara Gumbad point towards this 'royal privilege', as similar design was developed by Shah Jahan in Mughal waterfront gardens of Agra according to Eba Koch<sup>19</sup>.

Scholars like R P Tripathi branded Bahlul Lodi with tribal kingship on the basis of their fallacious understanding of the portion of Tarikh-i-shershahi, where Bahlul's call for help towards his Afghan kinsmen has been discussed<sup>20</sup>. J F Richards committed the same blunder by associating the debasement of coinage under Lodis with their failure to restore centralized economy and their administrative mechanism based on tribal allegiances<sup>21</sup>. Though I H Siddiqui rejected this characterization of Afghan polity as tribal, however his notion of Afghan despotism based upon few instances of brutal oppression of nobles is nothing but another folly in this series<sup>22</sup>.

Recently, scholar Raziuddin Aquil attempted to relate Afghan sovereignty to their issuance of royal orders, availability of currency, adoption of royal epithets and appropriation of wide range of symbols of sovereignty<sup>23</sup>, however his thesis is highly imaginative and is devoid of evidences. This whole debate about the sovereignty of Afghans completely lets us down since it has treated the sources as "authentic" and "authoritative" without any source criticism; moreover these scholars never included the imperatives transmitted by these monuments into their research.

In such a scenario, we need to traverse beyond this debate and analyze their dynamics with a 'critical understanding' of what their source wants to us to believe. Sunil Kumar's thesis on Ignored Elites can be applied in case of Afghans, since they were also treated as 'rustics' on the ground of their frontier origins.<sup>24</sup> Further Kumar narrates Mushtaqi's account of abduction of Sayyid Wazir by Bahlul Lodi, where his kinsmen used rustic innocence to convince Wazir to let them enter into the private meeting since they were also his Naukar and once they entered, latter was imprisoned and Bahlul was declared as new Sultan<sup>25</sup>.

Here, Mushtaqi tries to portray astute and pragmatism of Afghans via this narrative and further emphasizes upon equality and fraternity existent among Afghans as he states that Sultan sat with nobles on carpet and could take off his turban to solicit pardon from a displeased noble<sup>26</sup>. On the basis of his text, few scholars concluded that they treated nobles as equals of Sultan<sup>27</sup> and even choice of succession was subject to noble approval<sup>28</sup>, which is nothing but exaggeration of egalitarianism. Certain notable institutional changes were witnessed during Afghan period since there was attempt to diminish the sense of Naukari by ascribing to it the elements of Bandagi and it led to blurring of distinctions between these two<sup>29</sup>, which may have led to demolition of hierarchies, but only to a certain extent.

<sup>19</sup> Eba Koch, "The Mughal Waterfront Garden", pp. 190-94

<sup>20</sup> R P Tripathi, "The Muslim Administration"

<sup>21</sup> J F Richards, "The Economic History of The Lodi Period", p. 62

<sup>22</sup> I H Siddiqui, "Some Aspects of Afghan Despotism in India", pp. 29-60

<sup>23</sup> Raziuddin Aquil, "Sufism, Culture and Politics: Afghans and Islam in North India", pp. 17-36

<sup>24</sup> Sunil Kumar, "The Ignored Elites: Turks, Mongols And A Persian Secretarial Class In The Early Delhi Sultanate" p.6

<sup>25</sup> Sunil Kumar, "Bandagi and Naukari", pp. 98-100

<sup>26</sup> Rizquallah Mushtaqi, "Waqiat-e-Mushtaqi", translated by IH Siddiqui, p. 9

<sup>27</sup> Abdul Halim, "History of The Lodi Sultans of Delhi and Agra", p. 51

<sup>28</sup> Hameed Ud Din, "The Organization of the Government Under Lodi Sultans Of India", p. 339

<sup>29</sup> Sunil Kumar, "Bandagi and Naukari", pp. 97-104

This slight trend towards egalitarianism and brotherhood can also be exemplified in Lodi Garden, where the Eastern boundary of the courtyard of Bara Gumbad has a line of arched apartments, which was actually a Mehman Khana (Guest House) constructed by Sikandar Lodi. A guesthouse in the complex of royal tomb substantiates the fact that the distance between royal family and subject populace had certainly reduced during this period.

Another renowned monument of this complex, tomb of Sikandar Lodi, which was constructed by local grey stone, is similar in design to that of Muhammad Shah, however is devoid of pavilions on the top<sup>30</sup>; it is based on the same octagonal plan, which was continuation to the tradition of Telangani tomb<sup>31</sup> and glazed tiles appear as its significant features, which is a continuation from the tomb of Mawlana Jamali<sup>32</sup>. Enclosure wall surrounding the tomb is its unique feature, which has two entrances and also a wall mosque on the western side, though this pattern was replaced by garden- enclosed tombs during the Mughal period<sup>33</sup>.

This magnificent mausoleum built by Ibrahim Lodi as a memoir of his late father acted as the connecting link between the architectural styles of Turkish and Timurid periods<sup>34</sup>, since its deployment of double dome in due course became cornerstone of Mughal architecture and wall-enclosed tomb was replaced by garden-enclosed tomb. Antecedent to this wall-enclosed tomb can be traced back to the tomb of Ghiyasuddin Tughlaq and this may appear as the 'symbol' of his imperial authority and may uphold his titular claims of world conqueror i.e.- Sikandar. This was further ornamented by turrets on its top and a stream running beside it, on which Athpula Bridge (eight piers) was later built by a Mughal general.

Mushtaqi eulogized his reign for pro-Muslim policies, benevolent measures, cheapness of food grains and narrated many anecdotes about justice dispensed by him<sup>35</sup> and conceived his account as the main theme of his text; this centrality of Sikandar among Lodis is reflected by most accomplished tomb to his credit. He embarked upon secularization of education by establishing many schools<sup>36</sup> and insisted on the use of Hindi in lower administration, apart from this, several vernacular languages were promoted by Afghans as notes Muzaffar Alam<sup>37</sup>. Apart from these policies for the welfare of the masses, he displayed strong imperial control by launching military operations against rebellious nobles.

However, few scholars like Hameed ud Din, V A Smith and Moreland painted negative picture of his reign marked by paucity of currency<sup>38</sup>, Afghanisation<sup>39</sup> of army, growing intervention of Ulama<sup>40</sup> and surplus appropriation by nobles. They neglected the fact that huge amount of bullion was at the discretion of Lodis due to booty captured through wars, tributes received from subordinates and taxation on trading operations<sup>41</sup>. This accumulated wealth might have been utilized by Lodis to accomplish such architectural achievements like that of Lodi Garden, also reminding the fact that

<sup>30</sup> Maulavi Zafar Hasan and J A Page, p. 39

<sup>31</sup> John-Burton Page, "Sultanate Architecture", pp. 8-9

<sup>32</sup> Simon Digby, "The Tomb of Bahlul Lodi", p. 550

<sup>33</sup> Maulavi Jafar Hasan, JA Page, p. 38

<sup>34</sup> Hameed Ud Din, "The Afghan Architecture", p. 152

<sup>35</sup> Rizqullah Mushtaqi, pp. 16-43

<sup>36</sup> Aziz Ahmad, "An Intellectual History of Islam in India", pp. 52-57

<sup>37</sup> Muzaffar Alam, "The Crisis of the Empire in Mughal North India", Introduction to the Second Edition

<sup>38</sup> They argued that Lodi rulers discontinued gold and silver coins and also debased them heavily, also see Simon Digby, "The Currency System" in the Cambridge Economic History of India".

<sup>39</sup> Now armed troops were directly under the control of nobles and emperor was dependent on them.

<sup>40</sup> Hameed Ud Din, p. 335

<sup>41</sup> J F Richards, pp. 56-61

Sikandar established three capitals at Agra, Bayana and Sambhal, which would have been impossible for an financially unsound kingdom that they try to attest.

Growing Sufi association with kingship was another significant development depicted by Mushtaqui, as he notes Bahlul could gain throne after buying blessing of a Sufi of Samana<sup>42</sup> and his prayer at the Dargah of Khwaja Bakhtiyar Kaki ensured his victory over Jaunpur<sup>43</sup> and prince Nizam, who was later known as Sikandar sought support and blessing of Shaykh Samauddin Suhrawardy before his accession.

Through such anecdotes Mushtaqui characterizes the emergence of Shaykh as the source for legitimacy of Sultan and thus may attempt to trace the origin of the notion of sacred kingship<sup>44</sup> to the Afghan period, which Akbar was vying for through several means. Similar ideas were propagated by these monuments, which competed with pre-existing Tughlaqs and later Mughals in terms of showcase of grandeur and prosperity. Moreover, these Sufi networks also acted as tools of social mediation among Afghans by transcending their ties of kinship and ethnicity.<sup>45</sup>

Hereby, it is concluded that Lodi Garden monuments should not only be studied as transitional phase between Turkish and Mughal architectural designs however, they must be revisited and reviewed in the context of sound state of treasury, strong imperial authority, ongoing social process of blurring distinction between Naukari & Bandagi and growing proximity between Sultan and Sufis. Apart from this, my field work has tried to justify Simon Digby's identification of Shish Gumbad as Bahlul's tomb with several arguments in its favor.

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<sup>42</sup> Rizqullah Mushtaqui, I H Siddiqui translated, pp. 1- 2

<sup>43</sup> Ibid, pp. 10-11

<sup>44</sup> Idea of sacred kingship was developed by Azfar Moin, where a king attempts to gain sacred status by deploying several Sufi motifs

<sup>45</sup> Nile Green, pp. 175-84



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