

**Architectural Legacy of the Mughal Kingdom in Shahdara: An In-Depth Exploration  
and Preservation Imperative**

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**Abstract**

This article constitutes an in-depth research endeavour focusing on the architectural development within the Mughal Kingdom, specifically examining several prominent landmarks in the Shahdara region. The key subjects of this study are the tombs of Nur Jahan, Asif Khan, Kamran Baradari, and Jahangir. Within the historical context of Punjab, these Mughal monuments hold great significance, characterized by their captivating and innovative designs. The research aims to offer a descriptive and comprehensive analysis of these architectural masterpieces, with particular emphasis on their structural elements and ornamental features. By doing so, it sheds light on how the distinctive Mughal architectural designs have endured, even long after the Mughal kingdom itself. This study not only uncovers the early stages crucial to architectural development but also provides a highly detailed and useful resource for future analytical studies. Unfortunately, in the present era, these historical landmarks have suffered from neglect and inadequate preservation efforts. As a result, they are on the path to gradual deterioration. Given their historical importance, these monuments hold a significant place in the history of Lahore and the wider region. Therefore, there is an urgent need for proper maintenance and rehabilitation of these structures to preserve the nation's heritage.

**Keywords:** architectural legacy, Mughal kingdom, Shahdara, architectural masterpieces, innovative designs, nation's heritage etc.

**Introduction**

In 1526, Mughal Emperor Babur established a significant empire in the Indian subcontinent. The emergence of the Mughal Empire in the 16th century marked the rise of a powerful Islamic force that challenged contemporaneous powers like the Safavids and Ottomans. Within the Islamic civilization, the Mughal Empire was regarded as a precious gem, akin to the glorious periods of Islamic civilization under the Abbasids in Baghdad, the Umayyads in Al-Andalus, and the Ottomans in Turkey. (1) The hallmark of Mughal architecture lay in its seamless integration with the natural landscape, as well as the incorporation of local and regional cultural trends. This approach resulted in architectural

marvels that beautifully represented both heavenly and earthly realms, shaping the worldly and spiritual aspirations of humanity.

Lahore, one of the pivotal capitals of the Mughal Empire, served as the empire's second capital for almost two centuries, spanning 185 years. It played a vital role as the administrative epicenter from which Mughal rulers could vigilantly monitor potential threats emanating from the Uzbeks in Kabul. From the dynasty's founder, Babur, to the illustrious Shah Jahan, each Mughal monarch made dedicated efforts to imbue Mughal architecture with stunning designs and create magnificent gardens throughout the Indian subcontinent. This architectural legacy undeniably held a dominant position in the subcontinent's architectural history, leaving an enduring impact on the region's ideals, arts, and Islamic culture.

In geographical terms, Shahdara is located along the banks of the Ravi River and served as a significant stop for Mughal rulers during the 16th century. While the Lahore Fort retained its status as the primary administrative hub during that period, Shahdara assumed the role of a place for leisure and respite on the urban periphery. The very name "Shahdara" encapsulates its significance, translating to "King's Gateway" or "King's Area." The initial Shahdara gardens were integral to a distinct Mughal pattern of landscape development, emerging shortly after the conquest of the city. (2) Over the years, Shahdara became a cherished retreat for prominent Mughal figures, including Humayun, Kamran, Akbar, and Jahangir. It primarily served two key functions for the burgeoning Mughal Empire: first, it provided a link via the Grand Trunk Road to Sheikhpura after crossing the Ravi River, and second, it served as a route to Kashmir from Lahore.

The Grand Trunk Road, an ancient and historically significant thoroughfare stretching from Kabul in the west to Bengal in the east, played a defining role in shaping the northern and southern boundaries of the Shahdara region. Within this region, the Mughals had established a well-organized settlement system that encompassed not only towns and cities but also lush gardens, serais (inns), and a network of roads. It is noteworthy that despite their technological limitations in bridging major rivers like the Ravi, the Mughals displayed remarkable engineering prowess in constructing robust structures over smaller water bodies like Degh and Nalas. Impressively, these structures endured long after the primary roadway alignment was abandoned. (3)

The transformation of Shahdara between the years 1526 and 1645 is nothing short of remarkable. The Mughals, known for their refined sense of beauty, art, attire, and

architecture, made a lasting impact not only on Lahore but on the entire subcontinent. Their architectural legacy seamlessly merged Persian and indigenous Indian design elements with the natural environment, creating an aesthetic that was both harmonious and grand.

During this period, several exemplary monuments were constructed, reflecting the zenith of Mughal architectural excellence. Notable among these is the tomb of Jahangir, the fourth Mughal emperor, who was interred in the Dilkhusa Cantonment in 1627. Additionally, Asif Khan's tomb, the brother-in-law of the beloved Nur Jahan, was erected in 1641, and Nur Jahan's tomb followed in 1645. These tombs, situated in close proximity to one another, offer a splendid blend of architectural finesse. Their spatial relationship with the serais creates a unique perspective on the overall design and purpose of these structures.

While Shahdara town lies to the north of Jahangir's tomb, historical clues suggest that additional gardens may have once existed to the east of these surviving monuments. Unfortunately, extensive encroachments and urbanization have made it challenging to confirm this speculation definitively. (4) However, it's during Jahangir's reign that this particular architectural style gained immense popularity and was extensively employed in various construction projects. The exquisite ornamentation and the precision with which it was executed reached its pinnacle during the reign of Shah Jahan. Notably, red stone was the primary construction material used during this era, contributing to the opulent and enduring monuments that graced the Shahdara landscape.

### **The Akbar Sarai**

The Akbari Serai stands as a central focal point within the Shahdara area, bearing a grand and imposing appearance that captures the essence of Mughal architectural splendor. It unveils a comprehensive layout that adheres to a 5-guzz grid, closely resembling depictions found in the Babernama. The serai encompasses a total of six rooms, numbered from 20 to 30. Each room boasts an open area ranging from 200 to 270 guzz. (6) These open spaces are thoughtfully enclosed by 5-guzz wide walkways that intricately connect to the Serai rooms. The exterior wall of the Serai carries a depth of 10 guzz. Interestingly, the size and utilization of a 32-guzz grid in the construction of the Serai and the adjacent mosque raise questions about the prior attribution of their construction to Salim Shah Suri, as had been previously suggested.

The Suri dynasty's ruler is often credited with pioneering various advancements in highway infrastructure, with purported use of a standardized unit of measurement known as the Guzz-iSikandri, measuring approximately 30.36 in length. The presence of 32-unit wide

walls separating the rooms in the Serai alludes to the consistent use of the 32-module throughout the structure's construction. This observation provides compelling evidence supporting the notion that serai and mosque structures were indeed prevalent in Mughal architecture. However, it is worth noting that this does not conclusively establish that the Akbari Serai was constructed post-1586-7.(5) Notably, the entrance to Jahangir's tomb somewhat obstructs the pathway to the serai, resulting in a less than elegant arrangement. Additionally, the outer Eastern Serai wall is thinly covered with an ornamental veneer and serves as the internal wall for Jahangir's tomb garden, revealing a complex interplay of architectural elements in this historically significant site.

Kamran's Baradari, an architectural marvel, holds particular significance within the Mughal Empire. It served as a summer "cupola" and was commonly referred to as the "twelve doors" in English translation. The Baradari, constructed by Prince Kamran, is located approximately two kilometers to the south of the royal tomb gardens, situated on an island within the river Ravi. The garden in which it is located is one of the oldest among Mughal gardens and holds the distinction of being the sole remaining pleasure garden in Shahdara that has not been transformed into a burial structure. (7)

Historically, the site was positioned on the Shahdara side of the river and played a pivotal role within the region. The westward expansion of the river led to a redirection of traffic from the Grand Trunk Road and Akbar Serai, now directed towards the southern route that ultimately led to Kamran's Baradari. This location coincided with the intersection of the Sheikhupura road and the river. The garden's original placement on the western bank of the River Ravi, in the midst of the garden, has experienced significant reduction due to the river's continuous impact over time. The Baradari, which was constructed around 1527, is recognized as one of the earliest examples of its kind and was originally 30 by 30 guzz wide, which, in terms of area, is equivalent to one fourth bigha. (8)

Several English historians and tourists have extensively described the splendour of these gardens, particularly William Barr and Colonel Wade. Their accounts vividly portray the remarkable beauty of these gardens, which served as significant gathering places for royalty. This garden exemplifies its inspiration from Persian architecture, specifically drawing upon the concept of the four gardens found in Heaven. There were three primary tiers. The Baradari is situated at the uppermost level, while the lower floors are occupied by gardens. During the summer season, the prevailing wind direction is from the west to the east. Similarly, in the winter season, the prevailing wind direction also originates from the west

and moves towards the east. (9). Water exhibits a higher heat capacity, resulting in its ability to retain colder temperatures during the summer season and warmer temperatures during the winter season. The presence of the expansive five water channels was a distinguishing feature more commonly observed in garden designs of the mid-17th century rather than the mid-16th century. Therefore, certain sections of the garden are believed to have originated in the early or mid-16th century, as often assumed. However, there is a growing likelihood that the entire structure was reconstructed no earlier than the late 16th or early 17th century. Mud bricks and plaster are employed extensively in the construction of the edifice. (10).

The strategic use of thicker walls in the construction of these architectural marvels served a dual purpose – to mitigate excessive penetration of sunlight into the structures, thereby enhancing their thermal properties and facilitating efficient heat retention. This architectural innovation reflects the Mughals' ingenuity in creating structures that were both aesthetically pleasing and functionally sound. The tomb of Emperor Jahangir, nestled within the Shahdara region, stands as a remarkable architectural gem erected in 1630 under the patronage of Shahjahan, Jahangir's son and successor. Jahangir's passing on his return from Kashmir to Lahore marked the genesis of this splendid edifice. In comparison to the Serai, the tomb boasts a doubled length, demonstrating the meticulous attention to proportions in Mughal architecture. The garden surrounding the tomb is a visual delight, adorned with marble stones and arched pathways, reflecting an exceptional sense of symmetry.

The garden is thoughtfully divided into four distinct quadrants, each further subdivided into sixteen sections, which are evenly separated by paved walkways. Each of these garden sections features its own fountain and pool, providing a tranquil and harmonious setting. Notably, the number eleven holds significant symbolic value in this context, and its recurring presence is testament to the meticulous planning and design of the garden. The architectural style of Jahangir's tomb is quintessentially Mughal, characterized by a rectangular construction with a flat roof instead of a dome. The four towering minarets, gracing each of the structure's corners, are a striking feature. Adorned with elegant terraces and crowned by marble domes, they add grandeur to the monument. The main structure is accessed through a central corridor, which serves as a connecting point to a row of rooms situated externally. These compartments are designed to house Jahangir's cenotaph, and they are embellished with intricate Farsi calligraphic motifs bearing the ninety-nine names of Allah. Jahangir's name is elegantly inscribed on the cenotaph, adding a personal touch to the

monument. The tomb's water system is remarkable, involving eight sizable wells that feed smaller channels, which, in turn, supply water to the fountains and pools.

The significance of this location is underscored by the fact that it held a special place in Jahangir and Nur Jahan's hearts, serving as their favoured destination for quality time together. Subsequently, their son Shahjahan decided to preserve his father's remains at this cherished site. Nur Jahan played a pivotal role in overseeing the construction, dedicating a decade of meticulous effort to complete the tomb at a cost of 10 lakh. The thirteen tombs within the garden are encompassed by a Persian-style paradise garden, offering a delightful and serene setting for visitors. The central veranda, linked to the burial chamber, stands out as a crucial element of the tomb's design. The architectural ornamentation is a visual feast, characterized by the use of multi-coloured marble, including white, black, and yellow. The exterior surface of the tomb features predominantly crimson panels adorned with intricate floral motifs.<sup>(11)</sup> Regrettably, the tombs endured significant damage during the reign of Ranjit Singh. The directive to transfer valuables to Amritsar for embellishing Sikh shrines resulted in losses to the site. Furthermore, the residences of army officials were heavily utilized by the Sikh army. Following Jahangir's demise, Nur Jahan dedicated a substantial portion of her time to the upkeep of the tomb, engaging in Quran recitation and personally overseeing its maintenance.

Asaf Khan's tomb, located in his personal garden within the western section of the Akbar Serai, is another architectural masterpiece within Shahdara. Asaf Khan, Jahangir's brother-in-law, found his final resting place in this burial site. Notably, there are two distinctive features that set Asif Khan's tomb apart from the aforementioned architectural structures. Up to this point, it becomes evident that the tomb and its platform follow an octagonal layout. However, a notable departure in dimensions is observed in the walkways, pools, and channels in comparison to Jahangir's tomb and Akbar's Serai. The platform of Asif Khan's tomb measures 60 guzz in width, aligning with the overarching design principles. The octagonal platform, enclosed within a square with an area equivalent to one bigha (or 60 guzz), provides a fascinating geometric relationship. This relationship is consistent with the proportion of the platform to the garden seen in Jahangir's tomb. The interior chamber's width within Asif Khan's tomb varies, measuring either 40 or 15 guzz. Nonetheless, the overall diameter, spanning 85 units, necessitates further geometric exploration to fully comprehend its architectural significance.

The presence of domed octagonal tombs is a recurring feature in Mughal Lahore, with these structures primarily serving as the final resting places for individuals closely associated with the royal family, including Ali Mardan Khan, Prince Pervez, and the enigmatic figure known as Anarkali. Asif Khan's tomb is characterized by an octagonal foundation, with each side measuring 35 feet in length. The module with a length of approximately 34 feet projected into the garden to establish a standardized unit for paths, walls, and waterworks. This consistency is also observed in the dimensions of axial pathways and water canals, which are 34 feet wide. The proportional harmony extends to pools, fences, and paved areas, creating a sense of order and balance within the garden.

Notably, the width of the mosque platform in the Akbari Serai measures 30 guzz, while in Asif Khan's burial garden, it spans 85 feet. The water system in the tomb echoes that of Jahangir's tomb, and the number 15 plays a pivotal role in the layout. A remarkable observation arises concerning the existence of a Southern well, suggesting its presence prior to the garden's establishment. An intriguing aspect emerges in the form of a location situated south of Nur Jahan's tomb, equidistant from the tomb's centre and spanning 200 guzz. This feature prompts speculation that a preceding garden, measuring 400 by 400 guzz and potentially concurrent with the Akbari Serai, preceded the establishment of Asif Khan's tomb. The architectural history of Shahdara, as exemplified by these magnificent structures, offers a fascinating glimpse into the meticulous planning, geometric precision, and cultural significance that underpin Mughal architecture in the region. Each monument tells a unique story of design, purpose, and historical evolution. (12)

### **The Tomb of Nur Jahan.**

The demise of Nur Jahan, the widow of Emperor Jahangir, occurred in the year 1645. Nur Jahan, the widow of Jahangir, passed away in the year 1645 and was laid to rest in the mausoleum belonging to her brother, Asif Khan. Nur Jahan led a highly significant life, as she maintained a strong relationship with the Emperor and held a prominent position within his era. She not only actively engaged in the promotion of traditional and cultural activities, but also exerted significant influence in financial matters. The individual in question derived her name, which signifies "light of the World," from her Persian heritage. Her father, Mirza Ghiyas Baig, relocated from Iran to India along with his family and held a position of nobility. Subsequently, he was designated as an advisor to Jahangir. The mausoleum was adorned with exquisitely crafted stones and crimson marble. The notable aspect of the tomb lies in its isolated position at the centre of the garden, with its walls and gates lacking any



discernible relationship to the neighbouring monuments. The primary aspects of physical evidence are as follows: firstly, the measurements of Nur Jahan's burial platform are precisely 60 by 60 guzz, which aligns with the octagonal plinth of Asif Khan. The dimensions of Nur Jahan's construction measure 50 guzz by 50 guzz, constituting a fifth of the size of Jahangir's plinth. Considering the existing relationships among plinth sizes. The Nur Jahan Garden exhibited identical dimensions and configuration to the garden surrounding Asif Khan's mausoleum. The proposed garden for Nur Jahan's tomb is 300 by 300 guzz. This theoretical plan is coherent and logical from a functional perspective. The passageway between the walls of Nur Jahan and Asif Khan's tomb not only serves as a 20 guzz pathway, but also implies a convenient connection between the entrance to Nur Jahan's tomb and those of Asaf Khan and Jahangir. The spatial organization of the entire Shahdara complex is likewise preserved in this captivating layout. However, it might be argued that the size of her tomb is very minor in comparison to the significant role she played in history.

#### **Shrines in Close Proximity to Burial Sites.**

The Baradari road was bordered by numerous minor yet captivating remnants from the Mughal era. Mughal wells can still be seen in the vicinity of Turgor, Kot Abdulmalik, and Beghumkot.

Village Behumkot is occasionally recognized in popular discourse as being linked to the mother of Jahangir. However, the sole pre-colonial site present in the village is a shrine called baba sabz Pir, which is tied with the concept of naugazah, meaning "nine yards." In the case of the Naugaza Shrine in Punjab, it is noteworthy that there is a lack of specific information regarding the date of the individual's demise. Instead, the available accounts primarily consist of folklore that highlights his religious contributions and involvement in various battles. In close proximity to the royal tomb, there were a total of four shrines. The Mazar and well of Abdul Shah Mansouri are located to the south of the tomb of Asif Khan. Adjacent to the well situated outside the garden. This location is the burial site of another revered figure, Baba Nim Pir, also known as Sayyid Hussain Shah. The shrine of Sayyid Baba Ali is the third shrine located in this area. In 1592 AD, the individual in question was interred within the northern section of the tomb of Nur Jahan.

Another saint, known as Hazrat Hamu Shah, is buried in the garden of the tomb of Jahangir. His grave, albeit unidentified, can be observed within the tomb of Asif Khan. Another noteworthy axis is the pathway that traverses Government College, which almost aligns with Asaf Khan's East-West axis.



The Shahdara gardens, a testament to Mughal architectural brilliance, were meticulously designed with precision. What's remarkable is that they incorporated standardized measurement units that were prevalent during the late 16th and early 17th centuries. This observation underscores the meticulous planning and attention to detail that went into their creation. The gardens were laid out using a simple grid-based drawing system, a technique that could be easily replicated with basic field equipment. This not only facilitated the establishment of organized spatial connections within the garden but also within a larger network of roadways, serais, and waterworks that extended throughout the settlement system. The use of standardized units and the grid-based layout exemplify the Mughals' commitment to principles of harmony, balance, and symmetry, which are hallmarks of their architectural style.

The Shahdara region holds the distinction of being the sole repository of early Mughal tomb garden architecture. These gardens are characterized by square enclosures adorned with narrow water canals and central edifice complexes. This unique design is a precursor to the later royal gardens, whether designed for recreational enjoyment, as exemplified by the Shalimar Gardens, or for the solemn purpose of burial, as witnessed in the Taj Mahal. In both cases, the Mughals embraced rectilinear tiered shapes, positioning significant edifices at the garden's ends and incorporating elaborate interconnected systems. This architectural evolution reflects not only the Mughals' artistic and cultural sensibilities but also their ability to adapt and innovate over time. (13)

The craftsmanship and artistry involved in the process of brickmaking were truly exceptional. The Mughals, in their pursuit of architectural excellence, showcased their exquisite aesthetic sensibilities through the use of white marble, mirrors, and ornamental brickwork. The careful integration of these elements transformed their monuments into works of art, reinforcing the image they sought to project to their subjects. These structures were not merely utilitarian; they were symbols of majesty, power, and inspiration that were intended to exert a profound influence on the people.

The Mughal dynasty understood the critical role of infrastructure in sustaining their governance and asserting their power. However, it's regrettable that many of these invaluable artifacts have suffered due to rapid urbanization, uncontrolled expansion, illicit activities, and the general apathy of contemporary society. The urgency of implementing appropriate conservation and rehabilitation measures to restore and preserve these irreplaceable national heritage monuments is undeniable. These architectural wonders stand as a testament to the

rich history and cultural heritage of the region, and their preservation is essential for future generations to appreciate and learn from.

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