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The Buildings of the Tughlaqs

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The Buildings of the Tughlaqs.

I have been urged to read a paper on Delhi. I felt much hesitation in doing so. I am not the best fitted here to do so; nor have I for years possessed the leisure which research into the antiquities of this place demands. Nor is such a paper quite congruous with the intentions of this Commission. However, I have yielded—reluctantly, be it said. Records inscribed on paper are not the only ones worth studying; and we have here, in the monuments that strew the plain, as noble and as speaking a record of this ancient seat of Empire as could be desired. Not only the structure of the buildings, but the thousands of inscriptions with which they abound afford a narrative both of Delhi and also of the vast territories ruled by her Emperors. From the Kutb to the buildings now rising at Raisina they trace the story of India, or at least of much of India, through over seven hundred years.

But the story is a long one and cannot be even indicated within the compass of a brief paper. I have therefore chosen one era—that of the Tughlaqs. Their buildings are unique in style and peculiar to Delhi. They are extremely numerous. Some of them, standing at a distance from the beaten tracks, are seldom visited. The intrusion of this peculiar style between the splendours that went before and came afterwards puzzles the visitor. Their rugged and massive walls tell of an age of iron, of stern wills and of fierce conquerors. No less than the victorious pride of old Delhi, or than the dreamy creations of the Mughals, they speak the lessons of their time and bring home to us the picture of a century that witnessed struggles against cruel invaders, a reign of unexampled tyranny, another of peace and progress achieved amidst intolerance and surrounding danger and finally the flames and bloodshed attendant on the sack of a vast capital.

The Tughlaq dynasty occupied nearly a hundred years—from 1321 to 1414. It was thus contemporary with the Plantagenets in England—the earlier part of the 100 years' war and the battles of Crecy and Poitiers. The Tughlaq period commenced and ended with tragedy. The dynasty was founded as the result of the confusion and misrule following on the death of the great Sultan Ala-ud-din Khilji, when Tughlaq Ghazi Khan (afterwards known as Ghiyas-ud-din Tughlaq), the warden of the marches against the Mongol inroads, was called in to restore order. Its greatness ended with the death of Firoz Shah in 1388, after which confusion reasserted itself, culminating in the capture of Delhi by Timur the Tartar in 1398.

Thus, though the family struggled on, with diminished power, till 1414, the house of Tughlaq really exerted influence for only 67 years, all but four of which are occupied by two long reigns—that of Muhammad-ibn-Tughlaq, or Muhammad Shah Tughlaq as he is commonly called, and that of Firoz Shah Tughlaq. The former was a scholar, a powerful ruler, but an eccentric and cruel despot. The latter, a quiet and peace-loving monarch who nevertheless tried his hand unsuccessfully at the then fashionable game of conquest, settled down to consolidate his Empire and to erect or restore buildings. It is to this propensity that we owe the fact that the Tughlaq



dynasty, short as it was, has contributed to Delhi a larger number of what may be called major monuments than any other of the Muhammadan dynasties. Its efforts in this direction are eclipsed, in point of magnificence, by the Mughal Emperors. But the Tughlaq buildings are found all over the far-flung site of Delhi and include three of the so-called cities, and four important mosques, to say nothing of lesser ones. The period is less rich in tombs than are others; but among those that are left, two, each in a different way, are noble monuments.

The character of these buildings is distinctly demarcated from that of the preceding and of the succeeding times. The earlier Tughlaq style, indeed, adopted some of the features found in the buildings of the Khiljis; and the later bequeathed some of its own features to the Sayyids and Lodis. But the essential features are peculiar. Massive, strong and often almost repellent in their plainness, these buildings utterly belie the term Saracenic, which is often applied to them in common with the other Islamic styles prevalent at various times in India. Their massive strength is characteristic of a race of stern rulers and of an age harsh and fraught with tumult and ever-threatening danger. Their unadorned plainness is probably significant of a revolt against the unconventionality of some of the Slave and Khilji monuments and against the utilisation of Hindu craftsmen and occasionally Hindu structure and design. The imminence of danger from the Mongols, who had, in previous reigns, carried their inroads to the very walls of Delhi and who continued to harry neighbouring countries, though the strong Tughlaq rule kept external foes at bay till the fatal Tartar incursion of 1398, may, as dangers often do, have turned the minds of the builders to a stricter observance of religious injunctions. They may have considered that their predecessors had indulged the lust of the eye more than was permitted by the tenets of their faith. Howbeit, a sombre puritanism is the prevailing note and there is a stricter adherence than before to Islamic forms and methods of construction.

For this reason, it appears at first sight that the Tughlaq style marks a retrogression in architecture. Nothing could be greater than the contrast between the simple grace of the tomb of Altamsh (about 1235 A.D.) or the ornate beauty of the Alai Darwaza (1310), and, let us say, the Begumpuri Masjid, said to have been built in 1387, with its unadorned gloom and meaningless crowd of ill-proportioned domes. Yet this strange style has its appointed place in the development of Indo-Saracenic art at Delhi. It checked the threat of effeminacy visible in the Alai Darwaza. It thrust ornamentation into obscurity just when ornamentation seemed about to pass beyond its proper bounds and become an object rather than an incident. It reasserted the unadorned simplicity which is the key-note of the best Islamic designs. Yet it borrowed something from Hindu models; and it developed new effects by massing of the component parts, in contrast with the fortuitous isolation of the Slave and Khilji buildings, and by the very size and spaciousness to which its solid structures attained.

The structural features of the buildings are distinctly Islamic. The true arch predominates. The dome, which had only just come into use at Delhi, as in the

Alai Darwaza, forms an invariable part. One of the earliest monuments of the period possesses the first marble dome at Delhi—and, so far as one knows, the last for many years to come. Ordinarily the domes are hemispherical and often extremely numerous on a single building, the Khirki mosque having no less than 89 on its roof. But they are generally small and unimposing and bear neither proportion to, nor any close association with, the mass of the building. Far other is the beautiful dome of Firoz Shah's tomb, which forms the inevitable and perfect superstructure to the body of the tomb. The minaret, like the dome, is no essential part of a mosque, though both are characteristic and symbolic elements in Islamic architecture. The minaret (if we except the Kutb Minar) does not appear at Delhi till Mughal times. But the Tughlaqs introduced flanking columns or pilasters suggesting the minaret and generally copying the angular and rounded flutings of the Kutb. The interiors of the mosques are often colonnaded, the colonnades developing in some cases into roofing which covers most of the superficial area. The only Hindu features are the heavy dripstones which generally surmount these colonnades and the brackets and architrave set within the span of the arch of certain buildings, *e.g.*, the doors of Firoz Shah's tomb. Ornamentation is absent—though some Hindu rosettes in red sandstone are to be seen on the gateway of the Begumpuri mosque. The structure, save in some of the earliest buildings, is extremely rough, undressed masses of the local schist being embedded in a remarkably hard cement, the whole covered over with a thick coating of chunam. This chunam is now black with age and adds to the prevailing gloom. In some buildings it was perhaps always black, mixed with gur and charcoal of cocoanuts. But, sometimes at least, it was white and resembled marble. The general impression conveyed is that of massive roughness. The walls are the principal feature in the building and in this respect and in their marked slope recall Egyptian designs. The slope or batter is a strong characteristic of the time, reflecting the love of durable solidity. It was certainly not, in the first instance at least, dictated by the rough conglomerate material; for Ghiyas-ud-din's tomb, a noble achievement of masonry, has walls over eleven feet thick at the base and only four feet thick at the top.

The extreme development of Tughlaq architecture is not visible at the beginning of the era. The first efforts are an adaptation of the style prevalent in Khilji times. Apart from the city of Tughlaqabad, the first three monuments are built of, or at least faced with, good dressed sandstone, and by no means devoid of ornament. The first which must be mentioned is the Jamaat Khana Mosque at Nizamuddin's dargah. It is doubtful whether it should be classed as a Tughlaq building at all. The central compartment was probably built in Khilji times by Khizr Khan, the son of Ala-ud-din, as a tomb for the saint, who, however, did not desire to be buried there. The two side compartments were then built and the place converted into a mosque, possibly by Muhammad-ibn-Tughlaq. It is of red sandstone, with three engrailed arches of the type used by the Khiljis. The depth of the compartments and their five domes are peculiar features. The second is the tomb of Ghiyas-ud-din Tughlaq and is the best known of these early buildings. It stands in a small fortress enclosure to the south of Tughlaqabad and connected with one of the gates

of the city by a causeway which runs across what was once a lake. The strongly sloping walls are of finely dressed red sandstone, with no mortar apparent, ornamented on the upper portion with white marble. The dome is of white marble, the first of its kind in Delhi. The last is a comparatively modest tomb, built of rough stone and mortar, faced with red sandstone, and surmounted by a plaster-covered dome. It stands in Jahanpanah, the city of Muhammad-ibn-Tughlaq, and holds the remains of a person called Kabir-ud-din Aulia.

It has been necessary to mention these three buildings first, because their style marks them off from the later monuments of the Tughlaqs. The next deserving of mention are the three cities built by the Tughlaqs. These are Tughlaqabad, rather more than four miles east of the eastern gate of Old Delhi, built by Ghiyas-ud-din Tughlaq. The second, Jahanpanah, was built by Muhammad-ibn-Tughlaq with a view to joining Old Delhi with the fortified suburb of Siri, as a protection against freebooters. The third, Firozabad, was built by Firoz Shah about eight miles north of Old Delhi, on the bank of the Jumna. One doubts how far it is justifiable to call these places cities. The wall of Tughlaqabad has indeed a circuit of four miles and encloses a goodly area. But much of this was taken up by the inner citadel and the palace; and, anyway, the place appears to have been inhabited only for a few years, if at all. Jahanpanah was clearly a suburb of Old Delhi. Of Firozabad, only the palace buildings remain. Though the proximity of the Kalan Masjid clearly shows that there were other habitations in the neighbourhood, one cannot help feeling suspicious about Shams-i-Siraj's account of the city's great size, stretching from Indrapat to the Kushk-i-Shikar. It has been termed the Windsor of Old Delhi, and Timur's account clearly seems to place the main city still far to the south—with Jahanpanah as its centre.

Tughlaqabad, standing on its rocky platform, with scarped sides, sloping bastions and upper line of battlements, to a height of 90 feet, is one of the most striking ruins at Delhi. Ghiyas-ud-din Tughlaq appears to have built it as soon as he became Sultan, probably as a safe refuge against the Mongols, more easily defended than Old Delhi. The story of his struggle with the Saint, Nizam-ud-din, over the question of labour is well known. To the south are the fortress tomb of Ghiyas-ud-din and the detached citadel of Adilabad, built by Muhammad-ibn-Tughlaq and connected, like the tomb, by a causeway with the city. Further to the south is a rocky expanse of low hill. The water from this and other sources was held up in the plain to the south of Tughlaqabad and surrounding Adilabad by a dam to the east and formed a lake.

Little remains of the extensive walls of Jahanpanah save some portions of the eastern and southern lines. It contains numerous buildings—the tomb of Kabir-ud-din already mentioned, the Begumpuri and Khirki mosques, presently to be mentioned, and the following three. Just to the east of Khirki, in the line of the southern wall, is a large sluice, called Sath Palah. This curious construction, over 250 feet in length, was primarily a regulator for the flow of water in the stream which comes from the highland to the south, traverses part of Jahan-

panah and, after joining various other streams, passes under the Mughal bridge called Barah Palah into the Jumna. Secondly, it formed part of the wall and made a bridge over the stream. Next, there is a building called the Bijaya or Bedi Mandal, just to the north of Begumpur. It is stated to have been part of the palace of Muhammad-ibn-Tughlaq or to have been a grandstand from which the royal family watched *tamashas* on gala days. The villagers will tell you it was built by Prithvi Raja. According to another theory it was a watch-tower behind the western wall of Jahanpanah. The palace of a thousand pillars, it may be observed, is one of the baffling mysteries of Delhi. It is said by some to have been built by Ala-ud-din either inside or just to the south of Siri. Others say it was built in Jahanpanah (which might well be just to the south of Siri) by Muhammad-ibn-Tughlaq. That monarch is also stated to have built a similar palace, with the same name as, but differing in identity from, the palace of Ala-ud-din, inside the citadel of Adilabad. What most concerns us here is that no vestige, so far as is known, of any of these palaces remains, save possibly the Bijaya Mandal. The third building is the tomb of Nasir-ud-din Mahmud Chiragh Delhi, the last of the great Chishti saints of Delhi, who was murdered by a fanatic in 1356. It stands in the eastern part of Jahanpanah, in the middle of what is now a flourishing village, surrounded by walls built in 1729. The most interesting building in the village belongs to the next period and is the reputed tomb of Bahlol Lodi.

Little is left of Firozabad save some of the palace walls, some remains of the great mosque and the platform on which stands one of the two Asoka pillars brought to Delhi by the Emperor. The lay-out of the mosque has been dictated by the proximity of the river to its eastern side. Consequently the main entrance is in the northern wall, others leading up from the *takkhana*s below. It seems certain that, like Khan Jahan's mosques, it had colonnades or cloisters along the inside of the walls. In the centre of the court is a pit, now filled up, which may have been a *baoli* of some form connected with the river front, or a sunk chamber like that of Sultan Ghari, or a shaft for the foundation of a chhattri bearing a record of the Emperor's achievements, to which reference is made in the annals of the time. Even from what is left of this mosque it is clear that it was a building of impressive size and design. The chunam with which it is covered is said to have been as white as marble. Timur, who visited it, marching three *kos* from Delhi to do so, is said to have been much struck with its grandeur. The Asoka pillar, of surpassing interest by reason of its particularly fine inscription, belongs to a far remoter age. Its chief interest in connection with the time of the Tughlaqs is the illustration it affords of the Emperor's love of antiquities and of the ingenuity which enabled its transport from the Ambala district and its placing in upright position on a lofty pyramid of rooms.

In connection with Firozabad may be mentioned the curious buildings which compose the Kushk-i-Shikar to the north of Delhi on the Ridge. One doubts if this was really enclosed within Firozabad. Had it been, some indications of the walls indispensable to cities of the time would surely have been spared. More

likely it was a country retreat of the Emperor, where he could indulge in hunting. The story says that he was persuaded to this pastime as a solace for his grief at the loss of his son, Fatah Khan. The most interesting building is an extraordinary mass of masonry, known as Pir Ghaib and containing the cenotaph of the vanished saint and a mosque on the upper floor. Other indications have led to the idea that it was used as an observatory. Possibly it was a freakish building intended for various purposes, and incidentally a watch-tower from which the movements of game could be seen. On the western side of the Ridge is a *baoli*, with the remains of an underground passage. The construction of such passages is supposed to have been, like canals and water-works, a favourite occupation of Firoz Shah; and the Kushk-i-Shikar is said to have been connected by such passages with the palace of Firozabad. Close to the Pir Ghaib is the second Asoka pillar brought to Delhi by Firoz Shah. Further to the north is the mausoleum called Chauburji.

The mosques of Tughlaq times are mainly the work of Khan Jahan, Firoz Shah's minister. He is said to have built seven mosques, four of which are conspicuous. The Begumpuri mosque, in Jahanpanah, is of great size and still contains a village. It appears to have become the Jama Masjid of the group of three walled areas which constituted the southern city of Delhi, thus probably superseding the old Kuwat-ul-Islam mosque at the Kutb. It is built in the severest style of the Tughlaqs and is impressive only by its great size. A second and a very noble specimen is the Kalan Masjid in Shahjahanabad. This is the most imposing of the mosques of the period, owing to its elevation above a ground-floor, its fine entrance, dome-surmounted and with high columns. The next two must be noticed together. The Kali or Sanjar Masjid stands in sad ruin to the south of Nizam-ud-din's dargah. It was built much earlier than the other mosques of Khan Jahan, and displays a novel feature. The colonnades characteristic of Tughlaq mosques are developed so as to extend in the form of arcades running out at right angles to the walls and meeting in the middle. This development would give shelter on rainy days and may have been intended to do so. Anyway, some years later Khan Jahan developed the idea still further in the great mosque of Khirki (in the southern part of Jahanpanah), where the arcades are so far widened as to convert the building into a roofed mosque with four small courtyards. These mosques generally have good inscriptions over the eastern gates in marble or plaster. The Khirki mosque has no inscription but was probably built about 1387, which, curiously enough, is also the date of the Kalan and Begumpuri mosques. The piety of their founder, who describes himself on these inscriptions as the son of the slave of the threshold, did not protect him from calamity in this world. The son of Firoz Shah, who became practically ruler in place of his father, disliked Khan Jahan, forced him to flee from Delhi and sent an army against him. The ex-minister was slain and his head sent to Delhi.

Finally there are the tombs and grave-yards of the period. The most famous is of course the dargah of Nizam-ud-din Aulia. But, save the Jamaat Khana mosque, already mentioned, nothing remains of the buildings of the time, the grave of the saint and the other graves around being of later date. The tombs of



Ghiyas-ud-din Tughlaq and Kabir-ud-din Aulia were described in dealing with the early Tughlaq style. The tomb of Nasir-ud-din Mahmud Chiragh Delhi has also been mentioned and is of no particular artistic merit. The Qadam Sharif is interesting mainly on account of the history of the sacred foot-print and of Fateh Khan, the son of Firoz Shah, who is buried beneath it. There is a charming dargah, of a little-known saint called Shah Alam, at Wazirabad to the north of Shahjahanabad and just where the Ridge disappears into the Jumna. To the west of the tomb is a three-domed mosque of the style of Firoz Shah's reign. Close to the dargah is a fine bridge, of the same period, together with a sluice. This spans the depression between the mosque and rocky land to the north, down which now runs the Najafgarh cut. It is surmised that the original intention of the sluice and the heavy piers of the bridge was to regulate the back flow of the Jumna up this depression during flood-time. The Tughlaqs appear to have delighted in water-works, as the artificial lake south of Tughlaqabad and the remains at Khirki indicate. Firoz Shah made the West Jumna Canal and was, moreover, a great restorer of the old buildings round Delhi. His tomb is the last building which will here be noticed. It stands about a mile to the west of the Kutb road, at the south-east corner of the Hauz Khas, an enormous tank, excavated by Ala-ud-din Khilji, and, when it had fallen into decay, re-excavated and repaired by Firoz Shah. The tomb is a simple square building, finely proportioned and carrying a noble dome. To the south is a small space surrounded by what resembles a miniature Buddhist rail. To the north and west are extensive remains of buildings, which included a madrasa.

This noble tomb forms a fitting close to a long list of buildings, mainly constructed by, or during the time of, the Emperor who lies beneath it. The Tughlaqs, like the other Turki dynasties in India, displayed the apparently, though not really, incongruous characteristics of a rude savagery in their conquests and their rule and of a passion for self-expression in artistic production. The middle ages in Europe, with their pitiless wars and their glorious cathedrals, manifest a like combination. The sternness of the time reacted on the features of the Tughlaq buildings and imprinted itself on their vast, unadorned walls and forbidding austerity. In the great battlements and bastions of Tughlaqabad we see the strong warden of the marches; in the far-stretching ruins of Jahanpanah the megalomania of the strange tyrant who transported the population of Delhi to Daulatabad and visited his subjects with reckless and fatal oppression; in the canals and many works of Firoz Shah, the attempt at reconstruction during a long and comparatively secure reign. The series is a fitting memorial of the middle ages in India. With the Sayyids and Lodis new and more elaborate forms and details borrowed from Hindu architecture came into use. The Mughals replaced the virile severity of preceding styles by the introduction of Persian models and more effeminate features. On each style is left the impress of its age; and on none more clearly than on this, which tells the stern tales and recalls the strong harsh rule of the fourteenth century.