

JAHANPANA



दिल्ली विरासत
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Jahanpanah — literally, ‘Refuge of the World’ — often known as the fourth city of Delhi, came to be established when Muhammad bin Tughlaq, the second Tughlaq sultan set out to establish a new city for himself in about AD 1326. It is said that the sultan wished to unify the scattered urban settlements in the area, including the old city of Lal Kot, the military cantonment of Siri, and the citadel of Tughlaqabad into one city by enclosing them within a single walled area. Such an ambitious project is quite conceivable if one considers Muhammad bin Tughlaq’s reputation for being a megalomaniac, with a fascination for projects of massive scale. He is known to have ordered the entire population of Delhi, especially the courtiers and their families, to relocate to the new capital he established at Daulatabad in the Deccan, and then having them recalled when the move failed to achieve the desired result.

Jahanpanah was created by linking the older cities of Siri and Lal Kot by a set of two extensive walled sections with a total of thirteen gates. This was no doubt a massive area but it is not clear as to how urban it was. Historians believe that the fortified city was set aside for the residence of the sultan himself and his royal household and therefore must have contained the citadel with the sultan’s palace complex and the main mosque for the use of the royal family and others while the majority of city’s population continued to live within the walls of Lal Kot. It is also quite possible that large parts of the area within the Jahanpanah walls continued to be rural or forested during and long after Muhammad bin Tughlaq’s reign. Today, the fortifications have only survived in certain small sections, mostly parts of the wall that connected Siri to Lal Kot from the south. The compulsions of urban

expansion of Delhi after Independence have led to most of what was once Jahanpanah being engulfed by modern residential neighbourhoods while large parts of the walls were demolished to lay modern infrastructure such as roads.

Other than the parts of the original wall, very little survives of what can be dated to Muhammad bin Tughlaq’s reign with certainty. The most prominent building in this area, the elegant and impressive Begumpuri Mosque, located within the Begumpur village, could have been the main mosque of Jahanpanah though some believe that it was built a little later, during the reign of Firoz Shah Tughlaq. Nearby, the Bijay Mandal group of buildings would almost certainly have been part of the royal residence but the origins of this building too are sometimes traced to the reign of Alauddin Khalji. Today modern housing enclaves surround these two prominent monuments, but these are dotted with many ruins from later periods. Not far from the Begumpuri Mosque, is the village of Sarai Shahji. The Sarai Shahji Mahal was an inn with a mosque attached dating from the Mughal period. Further still, the late fourteenth century Lal Gumbad, its surrounding ruins, and the tiny but fascinating Kharbuze ka Gumbad are associated with the saint Kabir-ud-din Auliya who is buried here. Numerous other ruins including tombs, mosques, and gateways lie hidden away in the lanes and bylanes of Malviya Nagar, Shivalik, and Greater Kailash that originally came within the old city of Jahanpanah. The monuments of Jahanpanah have a real sense of mystery and wonder about them!

Timings: Sunrise–Sunset

Entry: Free



1. BEGUMPURI MOSQUE

Located in the village of Begumpur, just off the main Ring Road near the Hauz Khas Metro Station, this mosque comes as a pleasant surprise to many first time visitors. The building is vast and historically one of the most important surviving remnants of the Tughlaq era, yet it is probably one of the most under-visited of Delhi's ancient monuments. Raised high above the surrounding ground, the imposing structure stands out in stark contrast to the urban buildings of surrounding Begumpur, a village that probably came up when the area around the mosque was cleared for conservation purposes in the early twentieth century.

Much confusion surrounds the date of the construction of this magnificent building. Some say that it was the main mosque of Muhammad bin Tughlaq's newly founded city of Jahanpanah. Unfortunately, there are very few historical references to the mosque from the reign of the Tughlaq sultan to prove this. Even Ibn Battutah, the famous Moroccan traveller who lived in Delhi from 1333 to 1341 and chronicled in detail the reign of Muhammad bin Tughlaq, fails to mention it, leading some scholars to believe that it was built slightly later (in about mid-fourteenth century) and is one of the seven great mosques built by Firoz Shah's Prime Minister Khan Junan Jahan Shah. It must have been an impressive structure at the time of its construction and it is said that when Timur attacked Delhi in 1398, he was so impressed by the mosque that he took with him to Persia, Indian craftsmen and artisans to build a similar mosque for him in Samarkand. The building continued to be used as a mosque

well into the seventeenth century, till increasing anarchy led many of Jahanpanah's residents to either escape to Shahjahanabad or take shelter even within the mosque itself.

A flight of steps lead to a domed gateway through which is accessed the large courtyard of the mosque. The courtyard is surrounded on all sides with colonnaded arcades that have square domed chambers in their centre. Each bay of the arcade is topped with a flat dome. Originally these domes, now weathered black like the rest of the mosque structure, must have once been covered in lime plaster and paint, creating a spectacular sight. As with all mosques, to the west of the courtyard is the prayer hall. The large central chamber of the prayer hall is entered through a tall elegantly proportioned structure gateway with tapering minarets on both its visible corners, and is the most prominent feature of the mosque. The tall *iwān* (a rectangular hall walled on three sides with one side entirely open) of the gateway has three arched doorways, the central one being considerably larger and more dominating than the two flanking it. Within the southern structure of this gateway is a narrow winding staircase, as wide as a grown man's shoulders, that takes you to the top of the structure from where one can get a fantastic view of the village and open area around the mosque and the city beyond. The rest of the prayer hall takes the form of two eight bay by three bay halls flanking it on both sides. The entire roof of the hall to the north of the prayer chamber has collapsed over the years. The interior of the mosque is only scantily decorated and some carving can be seen in the main prayer hall. The main *mihrab* or prayer arch is clad in red sandstone and white marble.



As one walks to the north arcade from the prayer hall, it is difficult not to notice a very low doorway within the arcade leading to an attached structure. The almost square structure entered through the gateway was probably the *zenana* (ladies) mosque presumably used by the emperor's family and must have had a direct access from the outside.

2. BIJAY MANDAL COMPLEX AND THE DOMED BUILDING

Not far from the Begumpuri Mosque, lie the ruins of the Bijay Mandal or 'Victory Pavilion' building complex. This is perhaps the only building within central Jahanpanah, of which at least certain parts can definitely be associated with the reign of Muhammad bin Tughlaq. As is the case with many other buildings in this era, this lofty complex of buildings has been built over several centuries and therefore its history and structure are quite difficult to understand at first. This was the site of Muhammad bin Tughlaq's palace, the Hazar Sutun or the 'Thousand-pillared Palace'. Some historians believe that this was also the site of the palace with a similar name built by Alauddin Khalji half a century earlier.

We get most of our information about the reign of Muhammad bin Tughlaq from the travelogues of Ibn Battutah, who gives us a detailed account of the court proceedings as well as the emperor's living quarters. From his descriptions we know that that main structure of the palace was an audience hall, referred to as Hazar Sutun. It is quite possible that this vast structure was constructed of wood. We also know that the interior of this palace was very grand and ornamented with paintings and an exquisitely carved wooden ceiling. Unfortunately, no remains of this wooden structure survive today.

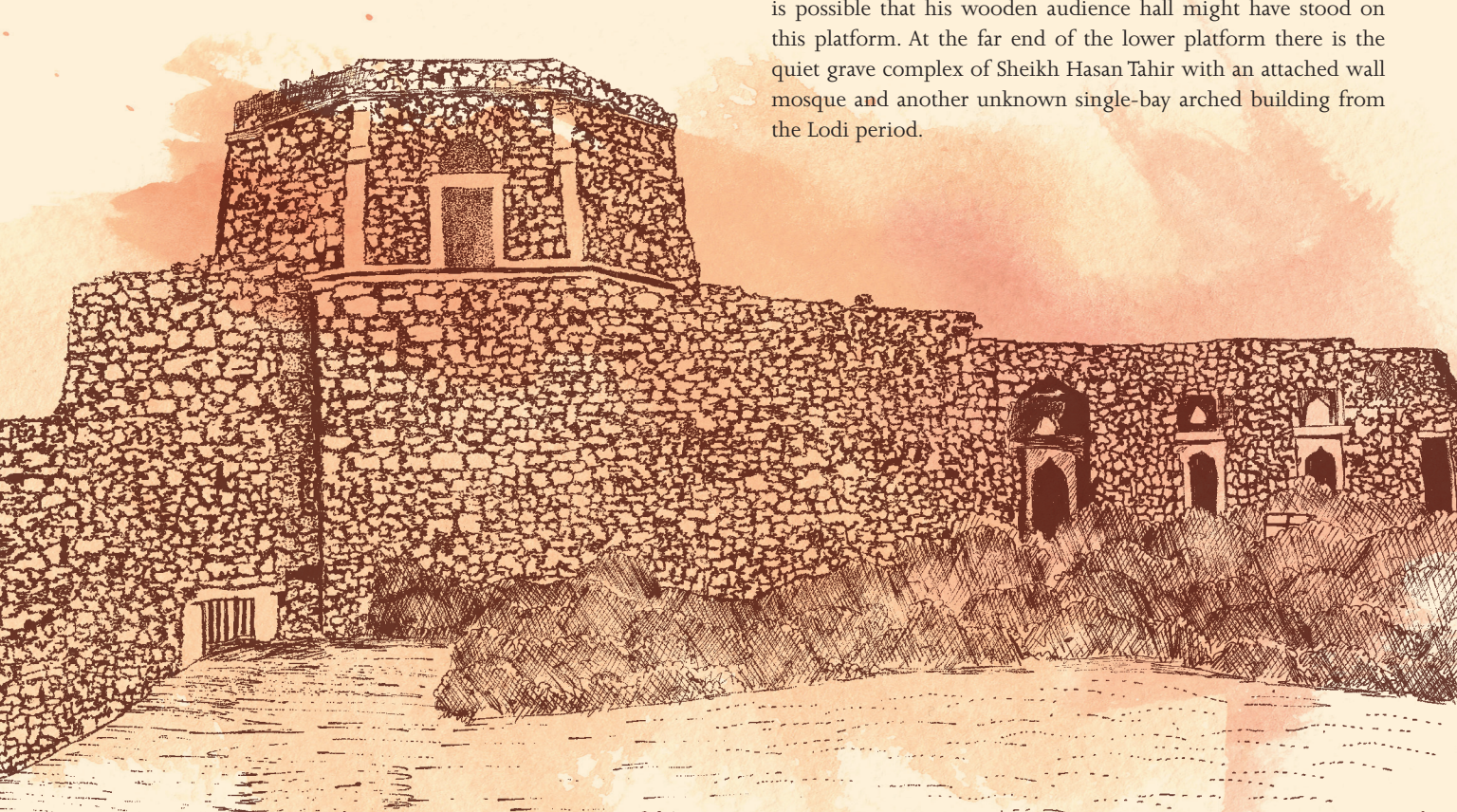
What does survive however, is the stone masonry buildings that must have surrounded this wooden structure. Today this complex of buildings is best approached from the Kalu Sarai



DDA housing, but it is possible that the original entrance might have faced the Begumpuri Mosque. The edifice is built on two successive platforms. As you approach, you see a high solid wall which is the retaining wall on the west side of the upper platform, with a domed building on its left. The first platform, the higher one, might have been built first during the Khalji period, if indeed the building dates from Khalji times. On top of this platform are the remains of a hypostyle hall, the roof of which has completely collapsed. This single-bay hall has doorways leading into another hall that might have contained living quarters. Just outside the hypostyle hall towards the south, one can see remains of some very large square column bases of a verandah that must have wrapped the south and east of this hypostyle hall and the apartments behind. Stepping down a few steps into the apartments behind, one cannot fail to notice two large pits with sandstone rims towards the western end. These are in fact treasure pits excavated in the early twentieth century and from which many precious objects were found, indicating that these were indeed royal apartments.

An additional solid platform was built directly behind this set of early buildings, perhaps during the reign of Muhammad bin Tughlaq and an octagonal pavilion built on top of this base. This pavilion can now be accessed through a winding staircase. This is an unusual building with a cruciform plan, vaulted ceiling, and openings on all sides framed in slabs of quartzite stone. The roof of this pavilion is also accessible and it is believed that it might have contained provisions to install a temporary wooden structure.

Next to the Tughlaq building, there is another structure that dates to the Lodi period. Conspicuous due to its curious form and large dome, the exact purpose of this domed building is not known. It is possible that it was built to house Sheikh Hasan Tahir, a holy saint who lived here during the reign of Sikandar Lodi. While the eastern façade of this building is solid, there are arched openings in the other three sides. The dome rises from an octagonal drum that has eight arched niches. From the domed building it is easy to see the massive expanse of the lower platform that was built during the reign of Muhammad bin Tughlaq and it is possible that his wooden audience hall might have stood on this platform. At the far end of the lower platform there is the quiet grave complex of Sheikh Hasan Tahir with an attached wall mosque and another unknown single-bay arched building from the Lodi period.



3. SARAI SHAHJI MAHAL

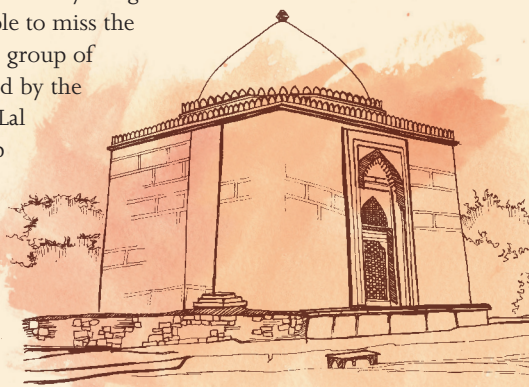
The Sarai Shahji Mahal is best approached from the main Geetanjali Road that cuts through Malviya Nagar rather than from the Begumpur village end. Although surrounded by a large garbage dump, the building is in a rather good state of preservation. The mahal and many surrounding buildings were part of the Sarai Shahji village and going by its name, it was probably a place for travellers to stay and rest. There are two buildings here, attached to each other but not connected internally. Both buildings belong to the Mughal period and are built in a very austere fashion, at least on the outside. The first is a rectangular building with a large courtyard in the centre. The courtyard contains a walled enclosure that houses several graves. On the west of this is a three bay *dalan* (verandah) with pyramidal roofs which could have been a mosque. The other three sides may have been residential apartments, the interior of which would have once been profusely decorated.

The second building is accessed from the terrace of the one on the ground floor. This is a slightly more elaborate apartment in the form of a tower that rises from the north-west corner of the complex. The single room is entered through a set of three doorways set within a large arch. The noticeable feature here is a balcony-like projection over the doorway which is supported by carved red sandstone brackets.



4. LAL GUMBAD

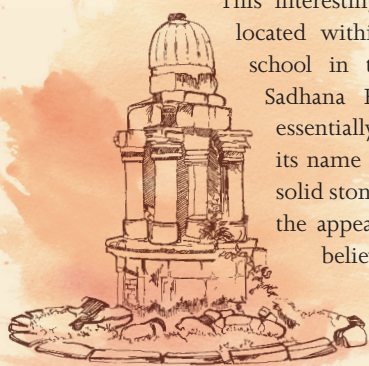
Located on the main Malviya Nagar Road, it is impossible to miss the park that contains a group of buildings dominated by the distinctive looking Lal Gumbad. The group of buildings includes ruins of several wall mosques, grave platforms, and gateways. The main building here is the tomb



of Sheikh Kabir-ud-din Auliya who was a disciple of Sufi saint Roshan Chiragh-e-Dehli. The tomb, dating to AD 1397 is very similar in design to the tomb of Ghiasuddin Tughlaq located near the Tughlaqabad Fort. Externally the tomb has a pronounced batter to the walls that are covered with strips of dressed red sandstone. On the roof, a low octagonal drum carries a conical dome. It is said that the dome was originally surmounted with a gold finial which was stolen at some point. The roof level is edged by carved sandstone battlement decorations. The main access to the interior of the tomb is from its east. Here a tall pointed entrance arch with lotus bud fringe design contains a carved corbelled gateway surrounded by a band of white marble. Above the gateway is another arch, within which is set a red sandstone *jali* (screen with ornamental patterns). Similar patterns exist on the north and south except that the gateway is blocked by a *jali* of red sandstone. The solid western wall contains the *mihrab*.

To the east of Lal Gumbad stands a random rubble gateway which may have been the entrance to the grave enclosure. This is a domed structure with the dome mounted on a slightly raised octagonal drum. Elsewhere in the compound there are remains of as many as five wall mosques, all of them belonging to the Lodi period. The most prominent of these is located to the west of the Lal Gumbad. Here, there are three recessed arches on the western prayer wall and two short walls returning on the north and south that too contain arches. There is a platform in front of this wall containing a single grave. The corners of the western wall are strengthened by circular bastions. Remains of many more grave platforms and wall mosques lie scattered around the surrounding park area.

5. KHARBUZE KA GUMBAD



This interesting yet bizarre-looking structure is located within the premises of a Montessori school in the residential neighbourhood of Sadhana Enclave in Malviya Nagar. It is essentially a small pavilion structure that gets its name from the tiny dome, carved out of solid stone and placed at its very top, that has the appearance of a half-sliced melon. It is believed that Sheikh Kabir-ud-din Auliya who lies buried in Lal Gumbad nearby, spent his days under this dome and the night in the cave located below it. The pavilion has a small octagonal base with a diameter of 2 m. This platform is hollow and has an opening which is now blocked by bricks, and this is where the saint Kabir-ud-din must have spent his nights. The canopy, supported on four slender pillars, is roofed by the melon dome that in turn is precariously balanced on a pile of stones that rest on stone slabs spanning the columns. The building has been dated to the late fourteenth century AD and considering its size, it is quite surprising that it has survived to this date.

6. BARADARI AND TOMB

These two buildings are located in Sadhana Enclave and can be approached from the Ring Road by taking a road into the locality. As one approaches from the main road, the building on the right

is the Baradari. This structure is a seven bay wide and three bay deep open pavilion whose original use is unknown. Some scholars suggest that this could have been a mosque but very little remains of the western wall to conclusively prove this. The building belongs



to the Tughlaq period and probably dates to the late fourteenth or early fifteenth century. It is a fairly plain structure made out of rubble masonry that must have been covered with plaster. The front row of columns is made up of double columns and a *chhajja* (extending cover of a roof), supported by small brackets runs across the entire front above the arched openings.

The tomb opposite this building is a Lodi-era structure of fairly simple design. It is constructed of rubble masonry and is raised on a shallow plinth. There are arched entrances into the tomb from all sides except the west which contains the *mihrab*. The dome above the tomb is raised on an unusually tall, octagonal drum surrounded by battlement designs. The tomb once stood in its own walled enclosure which has now disappeared.





Nearest Bus Stops

- (i) **I.I.T. Gate:** 501, 502, 505, 506, 509, 511, 516, 517, 519, 533, 536, 581, 590, 60, 5, 618, 622, 725, 051
- (ii) **Sarvpriya Vihar:** 503, 512, 520, 548
- (iii) **Malviya Nagar:** 419, 503, 520, 522



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