

The different meanings the site of the PuranaQila has held for colonial and contemporary historians, archaeologists, administrators and the public

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National capital 'Delhi' has witnessed various historical events and dynastic formation. From ancient to medieval and from medieval to modern all the phases were flourishing in this region. The Indian capital city of Delhi has a long history and has been an important political centre of India as the capital of several empires. Extensive coverage of Delhi's history begins with the establishment of Delhi sultanate in the 12th century. After the establishment of Delhi sultanate, it became the centre of succession of empires and powerful kingdoms. It has been built, destroyed and rebuilt from time to time. The conquerors and invaders who came to Delhi impressed by the location of city and make it their capital and rebuild it in their own way. Delhi's tangible heritage has ancient, medieval and modern era architecture.

As mentioned in Epic the *Mahabharata*, Indraprastha, "city of the God Indra" was the capital of the Pandavas.¹ *Mahabharata* depicts Yudhishtira and his brothers founded the city Indraprastha on the banks of the Yamuna. During 8th century Tomars founded settlement of Anangpur and later the citadel of Lalkot. We have enough available evidences to connect account of Delhi's history. Evidence reveals that the history of Delhi is not simply a story of cities built at different sites at different times but a history of many settlements, some urban, many more rural in nature. Many monuments have been build from ancient to modern period which have a very emphatic historical importance in Indian history. Puranaqila is one of these monument.

PuranaQila is one of the oldest forts in Delhi. It lies on the western bank of the river Yamuna.² It is situated on the Delhi-Mathura Road. It was build over the ancient mounds, which is traditionally associated with Indraprastha, the city of *Mahabharata* story.³ It was constructed by Sher Shah Suri (1540-1545) and Humayun. Sher Shah demolished the city of Dinpanah built by Humayun and raised this citadel. It is irregular oblong on plan with bastions on corners and three gates, opening on the north, south and west.⁴ It is difficult to say as to how much of the citadel is the work of Humayun and how much of it is that of Sher Shah, for there is not much difference in the architecture of the two periods. So, it is believed that Sher Shah left PuranaQila incomplete and Humayun completed it. Humayun built a great city as well. He wanted to build a new capital for the Mughal dynasty. One of the gates of the city is still left. It is called the **KhuniDarwaza**.⁵ In the middle of the Qila, a very deep well. This was built for the water storage purpose. Beyond the well we can see a mosque,

called as Sher Shah's mosque. This is one of the most beautiful mosques built in Delhi before the time of the Mughals.⁶

The other building inside the PuranaQila is the **SherMandal**. It is an octagonal (eight-sided) building, and has very steep steps leading up to the roof.⁷ Sher Shah built this like a mosque but after he had died, Humayun came back to India and used this building as a library. Different kinds of stone are used with different colours for the construction of these buildings. Outside the PuranaQila and the other side of the road is a mosque and college or madarsa. This was built by MahamAnaga, the foster-mother of Akbar, who ruled the empire for some time when Akbar was a boy.⁸

Excavation at PuranaQila has yielded the evidence of a continuous habitation from pre-Mauryan times, through Sunga, Saka-Kushan period (1100 B.C.- A.D. 300), Gupta (*circa* A.D. 400-600), post-Gupta (*circa* A.D. 700-800), Rajput (A.D. 1206-1526) to early Mughal period (A.D. 1526-1556). Other finds of the different periods are a gold-plated Gupta coin, inscribed sealings, coins of Samantadeva and of some Delhi Sultans and Chinese porcelain fragment bearing an inscription of the Ming period (A.D. 1465-87). Among structural remains exposed may be mentioned a *hammam* of the Mughal period.⁹

During 1954-55 excavations was carried by Shri B.B. Lal at PuranaQila. It was a trial excavation mainly aiming on how old the site was and could it be identified as Indraprastha of the *Mahabharata* legend. Northern black polished ware (NBPW) have been excavated and pieces of Painted Grey Ware were found on the surface at this site, it suggests an old settlement, possibly going back to 1000 BC.¹⁰ Apart from pottery, other artefacts (mostly of copper) were also unearthed like sickles and nail-parers. It indicates site was occupied till early centuries AD.

In 1969-70, an excavation was undertaken by a team of archaeologists B.B. Lal, B.K. Thapar and M.C Joshi. This excavation gave some more information on the cultural sequence of the site. Excavation highlighted on the remains of periods ranging from the Northern Black Polished Ware levels of around the fourth/third centuries BC up to the medieval period.¹¹

Another excavation was done at PuranaQila in 1970-71 and it was aiming on exposing various strata of historical period since ancient period. The excavation confirmed the already established cultural sequence from the Northern Black Polished ware levels up to the Mughal period. Excavations at

¹ U. Singh, *Ancient Delhi*, OUP, New Delhi, 1999, p.29

² B.R. Mani, *Threshold of the orient*, Aryan books, Delhi, 1998, p.74

³ Ibid

⁴ Ibid

⁵ Percival Spear, *Delhi: its Historic Monuments*, updated and annotated by Narayani Gupta and Laura Sykes, OUP, 3rd edition, 1999, p. 29

⁶ Ibid, p. 30

⁷ Ibid

⁸ Ibid, p. 31

⁹ B.R. Mani, *Threshold of the orient*, Aryan books, Delhi, 1998, p. 74

¹⁰ U. Singh, *Delhi: Ancient history*, Social Science Press, New Delhi, 2006, p.53

¹¹ U. Singh, *Ancient Delhi*, OUP, New Delhi, 1999, p.36

this site and other sites connected with the *Mahabharata* story—such as Hastinapur, Panipat, Baghpat, Kurukshetra etc. where PGW were found and its neither prove nor disprove the historicity of the *Mahabharata* events.¹²

If there is connection of the *Mahabharata* events with PuranaQila then it can be seen in local traditions, the earliest written accounts which belong to the medieval period. AbulFazl during the reign of the Mughal emperor Akbar, in his *Ain-i-Akbari* gives an outline of the *Mahabharata* events. He states that Delhi, one of the greatest cities of antiquity, was first called Indrapat. He also mentions that the emperor Humayun restored the citadel of Indrapat and named it Dinpanah (literally, 'Asylum of the Faith').¹³ Shams SirajAfif, a fourteenth century work, the *Tarikh-i Firuzshahi* maintains Indraprastha being the headquarter of a *pargana* (district).¹⁴ These also statements indicate that and connects Pandava capital of Indraprastha with the site PuranaQila. Furthermore as Upindersingh mentions that till the end of the nineteenth century there was actually a village called Indrapat located within the walls of the old fort.¹⁵

The establishment of the Delhi Sultanate in the early thirteenth century brought a new phase of urbanisation in northern India. Historians and archaeologists wrote about the cities of Delhi but they missed the second city of Delhi or a lost city of Delhi. The ruins of this city have not survived yet. We can trace the city with the help of textual sources.

On the basis of architectural and epigraphic sources many have written about important cities of medieval India known as *Shahr*, *Dihli*, *ḤazratDihli*, and finally *Dihli I Buzurg*, the modern day *Qutb-Delhi*.¹⁶ This city was the residence of Sultan Mu'izzuddinKaiqubād (1286-89), the last of the early Turkish Sultans, at a place called, then and now, Kilokhri, on the left bank of the river Yamuna. The description of the city is given in books of history (*tārīkh*), a long poem (*maṣnavī*) and conversations of two Chishtī mystics and their disciples (*mafūzāt*)—all composed in Delhi during the fourteenth century.

ZiyāuddīnBaranī in a book of history, *Tārīkh-i Firūzshāhī*, composed in 1357, gives detail account of a fresh founding of the city at Kilokhri.¹⁷ Barani get the information about the city from the oral testimonies of members of his family and other officials of the state. As Kaiqubād was the founder this city. He constructed a grand palace (*Kaushik-i-be-naẓīr*)¹⁸ here and later then settlements were started near the palace. Festive gatherings were happening in the city as mentioned in a poem of Amir Khusrau in 1289. He mentions about the celebration of *Nau Roz* (a festival celebrated to mark the beginning of the Iranian solar year).¹⁹ Later, Kilokhri became the capital city of the Sultanate. After the murder of Kaiqubād in 1289, the throne of Sultanate passed into hands of the Khaljis.

The new Sultan JalāluddīnKhaljī led the foundation of Kilokhri as a new city, *Shahr-i Nau*. He built stone walls and watch towers (*burj*) around the city and kept under the charge of an *amīr* or *amalīk*. Later medieval sources do not mention

about this city. Ibn Battuta mentions about Jahānpanāh i.e. founded by MuḥammadTughluq during 1334-42 AD. At the time of AlāuddīnKhaljī (1296-1316 AD), Siri was the capital (*Dāru' I Khilāfa*) of the Sultanate, situated between Qutb-Delhi ad Kilokhri-ShahrNau and Qutb-Delhi was the second major city.²⁰ That's why *Shahr-i Nau* only survives in Persian histories.

During modern times historical monuments and sites of Delhi became the centre for British Colonial activities. While the British government founded the Archaeological Survey of India that was responsible for archaeological research and the conservation and preservation of cultural monuments. Monuments and sites were often damaged by some British officials as there were using as their residences and sometime as British army cantonment. These sites were also attacked by the people sometimes as the Britisher were staying there.

In the year 1947, India partitioned into the two nation-states of India and Pakistan. This was followed by an unprecedented bloodbath which caused more than one million dead, and a two-way mass migration involving several million people. RamachandraGuha in his excellent work *India after Gandhi* mentions about various issues in the aftermath of August 1947 i.e., how and where refugee populations were rehabilitated, the mechanism that was adopted for land compensation, the partitioning of resources and departments, the emotional trauma because of displacement and death.²¹

The two nations were divided on the line of religion. Pakistan was with the known extent of the earliest civilization of India, that of the Indus valley. On the other hand all the Mohammadan monuments of the first importance remained in India. Islamic monuments in several parts of India were under siege in 1947, with archaeological survey of India.

Delhi was the capital of medieval rulers and impressive Islamic monuments widely scattered in the city. These sites were attacked on the line of communal violence. These sites also became the refugee camps and much needed for the people. GayendraPandey describes the condition of Delhi on that time and says Delhi was literally transformed into a 'refugeeistan' and the huge refugee camps that were set up in the PuranaQila and Humayun's tomb.²² ASI captured and protected these historical sites and monuments by law and in the background by extraordinary pressures from various quarters.

In PuranaQila area around five thousand people were living in the tents and colonnades. This is why the archaeological survey choose to ignore, for humanitarian reasons and forgot the act under which the monuments that were protected could not be occupied. But in the PuranaQila sites there were always occurring act of vandalism and tried to damage the sites. Few year later ASI stood strict against these acts and Started preserving historical sites under monuments acts.

At the end we come to know various historical ideas about PuranaQila as well as Delhi. The history of area is not only what the literary and archaeological sources reveal. We should not ignore what people remember of the past, how they interpret it and connect themselves with it. The story of any

¹² Ibid, p. 37

¹³ Ibid

¹⁴ Ibid

¹⁵ Ibid, p. 38

¹⁶ Najaf Haider, 'A lost city of Delhi through Persian histories', Studies in People's History, 2014, p. 163

¹⁷ Ibid, p.167

¹⁸ Ibid

¹⁹ Ibid, p. 168

²⁰ Ibid, p. 171

²¹ NayanjotLahiri, 'Partitioning the Past: India's Archaeological Heritage after Independence', in Geoffrey Scarre and Robin Coningham (ed.), *Appropriating the Past*, CUP, Cambridge, 2013, p. 295

²² Ibid, p. 299

area orally transmitted with legends and traditions. People remember and recreate the past in various ways and also transform it something that is meaningful in their lives and in the present.²³

Reference

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²³ U. Singh, *Ancient Delhi*, OUP, New Delhi, 1999, p.4