

# Description of Mughal Tents as a Temporary Capital

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## I. INTRODUCTION

The Mughals grandeur has been affirmatively accepted by contemporary historians of all the time. This was expressed in both private as well as in their public life. In order to run the administration efficiently, it was necessary to keep a vigil eyeing on the public affairs, for this the Mughal emperors used to travel long distances. The estimated journey they travelled with their large camps was about 16 km per day. And at the end of the day, they rested in the place like tents, though temporary. Mughal emperors spent nearly forty percent of their time in the camps while on tours and the duration of such tours often lasting a year or longer. One occasion Emperor Jahangir was away from his capital Agra for 5 years and 7 months.<sup>1</sup> The political relevance of Mughal imperial cities continued to be very limited; it was physical mobility which remained at the centre of Mughal imperial court life and, for much of the Mughal period, the imperial court was encapsulated in the physical presence of the king. Mughals introduced the several aspects of Central Asian culture to India. Monika Gronke argued that the mobility of Timur's court, and that of his immediate successors, can be attributed to their ancestry and even be considered a 'transitional phase' between true nomadism and the sedentary life.<sup>2</sup>

The journey was travelled in intervals. Mughals followed different traditions of Persia. Among these, we can see their following in gardens and large and beautiful tents also. The Persian texts such as Epic of Gilgamesh, the Enuma Elish, the Code of Hammurabi, Zoroastrian texts (e.g. Vendidad and Yasna), and the Book of Genesis do not directly discuss the pavilion structure in gardens, they clearly reflect the development of the prevailing cultural view on gardens in the region. The English word pavilion is used here as a cover term for a variety of terms used in Persian literature and historical documents. For example, in Persian the following terms have been used to describe a pavilion in a natural setting: *kushk*, *emarat*, *khaneh*, *qasr*, *talar*, *kakh*, *Khaimeh*, *sardaq*, and *khargah*. Depending on the context, these words refer to the use of the pavilions as kiosks, palaces, houses, or simply as places for relaxation. While some of these terms (*emarat*, *khaneh*, *qasr*, *moshkuy*, *sarai*, *shabistan*, *tagh*, *iwan*, and *kakh*) refer to the pavilion as a permanent structure, the other terms (*kushk*, *khaimeh*, *sardaq*, and *khargah*) refer to temporary structures in

gardens.<sup>3</sup> In contrast to the discussed terms for pavilions, all of which refer to permanent structures, *khaimeh*, *khargah*, and *sardagh*, refer to tents with different sizes. In contrast to *khaimeh*, which is quite simple and easy to erect, *khargah* and *sardagh* refer to huge and complex tents which may even contain smaller tents inside them.<sup>4</sup> The mobile nature of pavilion has been so dominant that its equal term in Persian, *paloon*, means "packsaddle."<sup>5</sup> A perfect pavilion should be huge in height.

We can imagine the difficulty of carrying all these tents and the court's furniture between gardens. This phenomenon is observed by Anthony Jenkinson (1529–1610/1611 AD), the British traveller who records his observations of a mobile ordu (a camp) in Central Asia in the 16th century: "by estimation about a thousand camels drawing of carts with houses upon them like tents, of a strange fashion, seeming to be far from a town."<sup>6</sup> Clavijo, whose notes clarify the social life in tents, tent structure and ornamentation, and even their placement in gardens, records his observations of the Timurid encampments outside the city of Nishapur.<sup>7</sup>

The Mughals were exceedingly partial to camp life and therefore a good deal of time was spent in travel. The Mughal camp was like a moving city.<sup>8</sup> When the king travels in the military pomp he has always two private camps; one of these campus being a day advance of the other, the king is sure to find at the end of journey a camp fully prepared for his reception. It is for this reason that these separate bodies of tents are called *piche-kanesor* houses which proceed. During the march a camel with white cloths preceded the king, so as to cover over any dead animal or

<sup>3</sup> Mohammad Gharipour, *pavilion Structure in Persian-ate Gardens, Reflections in The Textual and Visual Media*, May 2009, Thesis from Georgia Institute of Technology, p.51.

<sup>4</sup> Mohammad Gharipour, *pavilion Structure in Persian-ate Gardens, Reflections in The Textual and Visual Media*, May 2009, Thesis from Georgia Institute of Technology, p.53.

<sup>5</sup> *Dehkhoda Encyclopedia of Persian Language* (electronic version)

<sup>6</sup> Anthony Jenkinson, *Early Voyages and Travels to Russia and Persia*, edited by Edward Delmar Morgan and Charles Henry Coote, The Hakluyt Society, 1886, p.55

<sup>7</sup> Clavijo, Ruy González de. *Narrative of the Embassy of Ruy Gonzalez de Clavijo to the Court of Timour*, translated by Clements Robert Markham, London: Hakluyt Society, 1859, p.107.

<sup>8</sup> H.K.Naqvi, *History of Mughal Government and Administration*, Delhi, 1990, p.57.

<sup>1</sup> Lisa Balabanlilar, *The Emperor Jahangir and the Pursuit of Pleasure*, Journal of the Royal Asiatic Society, Third Series, Vol. 19, No. 2, April 2009, p. 178.

<sup>2</sup> Monika Gronke, *The Persian Court Between Palace and Tent: From Timur to 'Abbas I, Timurid Art and Culture*, ed. by Lisa Golombek and Maria Subtelney, Leiden, 1992 pp. 18-22

human being found on the road<sup>9</sup> and water carriers ran in front sprinkling the road to prevent the dust from rising.<sup>10</sup> The transport needed for one camp to move is more than sixty elephants, two hundred camels, one hundred mules and one hundred men porters. The heavenly tents with their heavy poles were carried by elephants. The larger tents were made of timber and in fact were portable buildings. The smaller tents are borne by camels and the luggage and kitchen utensils by the mules. Porters were responsible for safe carriage of valuable articles like porcelain, the painted and gilt beds and *karguais* (folding tents, some with one, others with two doors and made in various ways).<sup>11</sup>

As soon as *thepeiche* - *kane* reach the new place for encampment, the Grand Quarter Master with other engineers selects the appropriate site where the royal tents were to be unloaded. The camp is divided in such a way that on arrival of the army there may be no confusion.<sup>12</sup> He then marked a square on which tent was to be pitched. The whole square is then encompassed with *kanates* or screens, seven or eight feet in height, secured by cords attached to pegs and by poles fixed two by two in the ground. These *kanates* were made of strong cloth with printed Indian calico representing large vases of flowers. The spacious royal entrance in one of the sides of square is of much finer texture richer than rest.<sup>13</sup>

The first and largest tent erected in the camp is named as *Am-kas* for king and the nobles, where they assemble for deliberation on state affairs and for administering justice, but the tents of Rajahs and nobles must not be so high as that of king; otherwise their tent would be knocked down<sup>14</sup>. The second tent, little inferior in size is called *gosle-kane* or the place for bathing. It is here that the nobles meet the king at evening. Still deeper in the square is the third tent called *Kaluet - kane* (place of Privy Council) smaller than the above two tents. To this tent none but the principal ministers of state have access.<sup>15</sup>

Beyond the *kaluet-kane* there are Kings private tents surrounded by small *kanates* of the height of man, painted over with flowers of hundred different kinds. Adjoining the royal tents are those of the princesses and principal female attendants of seraglio. In the midst of them are the tents of inferior female domestics, generally placed in order according to their occupation.<sup>16</sup> On the

top of very high mast was alighted lantern, which served as a guide to those who arrived late at night.<sup>17</sup>

The principal tents including *Am-kas* were elevated above the rest so that they may be distinguished at a distance. The outsider is covered with strong coarse red cloth and variegated stripes; but the inside is ornamented with brocade and velvet and lined with beautiful hand painted chintz. Thick Cotton mats were spread over the whole of floor and these again are covered with splendid carpets, on which are placed large square brocade cushions to lean upon.<sup>18</sup>

Two tents were most pompously adorned where stages were built, used by the king and nobles for deliberation and the king gives audience under a spacious canopy of velvet. The other tents also contain *karguais* or cabinets, the little door of which was secured with silver padlocks.<sup>19</sup>

On either side of the royal gate usually on the eastern end, there were two handsome tents, holding each nine choicest horses, saddled for different purposes. Besides the stirrup artillery is composed which fire a salute when the king enters into the camp.<sup>20</sup> On the front gate, on its extremity was a tent called *Nagar-kane* (*Nakarah* a drum and *khanaha* room, it was a monster kettledrum four feet high resting on the ground and played upon by one man with a pair of sticks).<sup>21</sup> Close to this tent is another large size, called *chauki-khanah*, where the nobles in rotation mount guard for twenty - four hours, once every week. Most of them, pitch their tents in its vicinity to get more ease and privacy.<sup>22</sup>

The other three sides of large square of camp were covered by tents used for arms of king, rich harnesses, and vest of brocades, fruits, sweetmeats and Ganges water. There were fifteen or sixteen other tents which serve for kitchens and in the midst of all these are the tents of great number of officers and eunuchs. Six other tents of large size were for horses and other tents for elephants and animals for hunting; for the birds of prey that accompany the court; for the dogs; the leopards for catching antelopes.<sup>23</sup>

It was the duty of Quarter Master to mark out the royal bazars, from which all the troops were supplied the necessities. The principal bazaar is laid out in the form of Wide Street with the tents belonging to the followers of the army who offer their subsistence, running through the whole extent of the army. A pole is planted at both ends of bazars and distinguished by a particular standard. It was a matter of privilege that the red colour was exclusively for royal tents and as a mark of respect all tents has to front the *Am-kas*.<sup>24</sup> Nobles provide watchmen to

<sup>9</sup> Niccolao Manucci, *Storia Do Mogor*, tr. William Irvine, Calcutta, 1965, Vol, 1, p. 65.

<sup>10</sup> H.K.Naqvi, *History of Mughal Government and Administration*, Delhi, 1990, p.58.

<sup>11</sup> Francious Bernier *Travels in the Mughal Empire 1656-58* Westminster London, 1891, p.359.

<sup>12</sup> Niccolao Manucci, *Storia Do Mogor*, tr. William Irvine, Calcutta, 1965, Vol, 1, p. 67.

<sup>13</sup> Francious Bernier *Travels in the Mughal Empire 1656-58* Westminster London, 1891, p.360.

<sup>14</sup> Niccolao Manucci, *Storia Do Mogor*, tr. William Irvine, Calcutta, 1965, Vol, 1, p. 68.

<sup>15</sup> Francious Bernier *Travels in the Mughal Empire 1656-58* Westminster London, 1891, p.361.

<sup>16</sup> Ibid.

<sup>17</sup> Niccolao Manucci, *Storia Do Mogor*, tr. William Irvine, Calcutta, 1965, Vol, 1, p. 68.

<sup>18</sup> Francious Bernier *Travels in the Mughal Empire 1656-58* Westminster London, 1891, p.362.

<sup>19</sup> Ibid.

<sup>20</sup> Ibid, p.363.

<sup>21</sup> Ibid, p.362.

<sup>22</sup> Ibid, p. 363.

<sup>23</sup> Ibid, p. 364.

<sup>24</sup> Ibid, p.366.

prevent robberies that keep crying *outkhaber-dar* or have a care all the night.<sup>25</sup>

During the march the king was attended by eight mules carrying small tents for king's desire to rest or to eat a little something.<sup>26</sup> Each soldier seems to have had the shelter of a tent, even if it consisted only of a cotton cloth raised on two sticks. The kinds of tents were numerous, from the small, a mere low awning, up to the huge imperial tents. The *Ain-i-Akbari*, i, 54, names twelve different kinds of tents. I have just spoken of one of these, the *Uautl*, and of another, the *Gulallbar*, not a tent but an enclosure. The *sarapardah* was also a screen and not a tent. The *Shamiyanah* is still known and in common use in India; the name may be from sham, evening, that is an awning for use in the evening, or from *shamah* (Steingass, 725), a veil. The *khargah*, are spoken of by Bernier, where he says they were folding tents with one or two doors, and made in various ways; he calls them "cabinets", and leads us to infer that they were set up inside the large tents. The emperor and the great nobles were provided with tents in duplicate, one set being sent on to the next camping ground while the other set was in use.<sup>27</sup> The tents thus sent on were known as the *peshkhanah* (literally "advance-house").<sup>28</sup> Some of the tents were of an enormous size. There was one made by order of Shah Jahan which bore the name of *Dil'badil* (Generous Heart).<sup>29</sup> Similar type of tent was ordered by Bahadur Shah to be erected at Lahore in the year 1711, five hundred tent-pitchers and carpenters were employed for one month in putting it up, and in so doing several persons got killed. The total expenditure spent on it was about 50,000 rupees. A later writer Seir, says the emperor's camp was about one and a quarter miles in circuit, it contained one hundred and twenty tents, some of them big enough for several hundreds of men, and the largest might admit two thousand or three thousand.<sup>30</sup> The tents of the emperor, his sons, and grandsons were of a red cloth, called *kharwah*, a stout canvas-like cotton cloth, dyed red with the root of the *al* plant. Round the emperor's tents was the enclosure called the *gulalbar* (The name of screen which Bernier speaks of as being put up round the emperor's tent. *Gulal* in hindi means "red" and bar, "anything in the nature of a wall which prevents entrance or passage through it" Before Akbar's time the tents of the Gurgani kings were surrounded by a rope called the *tanab-i-quruq* (the rope of hindrance). Some of the great nobles such as the vice gerent (*loahl-i-mutlaq*) or the, chief minister (*Jamdat-ulumulk*) were allowed *patapati* or striped tents, one red stripe and one white stripe alternately. Outside the imperial tent, a ditch was dug, and red flags, attribute of sovereignty, were displayed on poles.

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<sup>25</sup> Ibid, p.369.

<sup>26</sup> Niccolao Manucci, *Storia Do Mogor*, tr. William Irvine, Calcutta, 1965, Vol, 1, p. 62.

<sup>27</sup> Francious Bernier *Travels in the Mughal Empire 1656-58* Westminster London, 1891, p.359.

<sup>28</sup> William Irvine, *The Army of the Indian Mughals: Its Organization and Administration*, London, 1903, p.195.

<sup>29</sup> Ibid, p.198.

<sup>30</sup> Ibid, p.198.

Akbar demanded a Hindu Prince to dismantle his tents, which were of scarlet colour. He imposed on the prince the command that he should never again use scarlet tents and made it law that the Mughal kings and the princes of royal blood should only be allowed to use tents of scarlet colour.<sup>31</sup> In 1607 Prince Khurram was granted the use of parasol (*aftabgir*) and red tent which was the special prerogative of royalty.<sup>32</sup>

Aurangzeb moved his entire imperial court to south, nearly emptying Delhi and condemning the vast royal household to a lengthy exile from the (then) imperial Capital.<sup>33</sup> Aurangzeb and his royal court moved into a tent city, complete with bazaars, cantonments, administrative offices and imperial quarters, from which the empire was ruled for 26 years. Thus it appears that Mughals were much concerned about their luxury and power to rule with all offices, in any place of their empire.

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<sup>31</sup> Niccolao Manucci, *Storia Do Mogor*, tr. William Irvine, Calcutta, 1965, Vol, 1, p. 134.

<sup>32</sup> Inayat Khan, *Shah Jahan Nama*, tr. A.R. Fuller, ed. And completed W.E. Begley and Z.A. Desai, Delhi, 1990, p.5.

<sup>33</sup> Hamid ud-Din Bahadur, *Ahkam-i Alamgir*, tr. by Jadunath Sarkar as *Anecdotes of Aurangzeb*, (London, 1988) (1st and 2nd ed. 1925; 3rd 1949), p. 74.)

