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## Material Culture in Shahjahanabad<sup>1</sup>

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### ABSTRACT

Material culture refers to the physical objects, artifacts, and structures created and used by humans as a part of their cultural expression. The study of material culture within cultural geography often involves collaboration with experts in archaeology, anthropology, history, and other fields to provide a comprehensive understanding of how culture is expressed and experienced through physical objects and spaces. Knowing the material culture of Shahjahanabad is essential to the co-relate how living in Shahjahanabad catalyses the act and quality of writing. Not only is this essential for preserving its rich heritage, understanding its historical significance, and fostering its continued cultural and economic vitality, but also for understanding the literature that in based in/ on Shahjahanabad. The paper attempts to study Shahjahanabad through the lens of material culture. It is commonplace to invoke the syncretic 'Ganga-Jamuni' tahzeeb of Shahjahanabad. However, as this study affirms, it is imperative for Delhi scholars and enthusiasts to delve into the complexity and diversity of its material culture as a defining component of its urban anthropology, sociology, geography and literature.

**Key Words:** *Material Culture, Shahjahanabad, Composite Culture, Education, Ceremony*

### INTRODUCTION

Material culture refers to the physical objects, artifacts, and structures created and used by humans as a part of their cultural expression. These objects can include tools, architecture, clothing, art, technology, and everyday items. Material culture is the tangible aspect of culture that can be studied to gain insights into social practices, identity, history, and values. The term 'material Culture' emerged in the English language in the nineteenth century and has undergone many interpretations and applications ever since. The term "material culture" has a rich intellectual history that encompasses various disciplines, including anthropology, archaeology, history, sociology, and cultural studies. The concept of material culture can be traced back to the early work of anthropologists and ethnographers who studied and documented the physical objects, artifacts, and tools used by different cultures. These scholars recognized that material objects held cultural significance and were essential for understanding the life ways and beliefs of societies around the world. Franz Boas, often considered the father of modern anthropology, played a crucial role in developing the study of material culture. Boas emphasized the importance of cultural context and historical understanding when analyzing material artifacts. His approach laid the foundation for a more holistic and culturally sensitive examination of objects. Material culture is a central concept in archaeology, where researchers study the physical remains of past societies to reconstruct their history and culture. Archaeologists analyze artifacts, pottery, architecture, and other tangible objects to gain insights into the daily lives, technologies, and beliefs of ancient civilizations. Material culture became a prominent focus in the field of cultural history. Cultural historians explore how material objects reflect and shape cultural practices, values, and identities. They investigate how changes in material culture over time can illuminate broader cultural shifts. In the 20th century, scholars began to formalize the study of material culture as an interdisciplinary field. Material culture studies examine the relationship between objects and society, emphasizing the cultural and social meanings embedded in material artifacts. This field draws on insights from anthropology, history, sociology, art history, and other disciplines. As societies became more consumer-oriented, scholars in the late 20th and early 21st centuries focused on the study of consumer culture. Material culture studies expanded to explore how consumer goods, advertising, and mass production shape identities, values, and lifestyles. Postmodern theorists, influenced by semiotics, analyzed material culture as a form of communication and signification. They examined how objects, brands, and commodities convey messages and contribute to the construction of meaning in contemporary society. In the context of globalization, scholars have explored

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how material culture is transformed by global flows of goods, ideas, and media. This perspective considers how objects and symbols from different cultures interact and influence each other. With the rise of digital technologies and online culture, material culture studies have extended to include virtual and digital objects. Scholars investigate how digital artifacts, such as memes, emojis, and digital platforms, shape contemporary culture. The concept of material culture continues to evolve and adapt as scholars from various disciplines engage with it. It remains a valuable tool for understanding the intersections of culture, society, and objects in both historical and contemporary contexts. As Victor Buchli [1] states.

Material Culture as we understand it is a direct consequence of the collecting traditions of the nineteenth century, liberal enlightenment era notions of universality, colonial expansion, industrialization and the birth of consumerism. ... these collections were the primary means by which we studied other societies in distant time and space.

Despite absorbing these influences and purposes, “The nineteenth century idea that culture change could be evinced from our relationship to objects and thereby coped with more effectively has not really shifted much” [1].

Cultural geography is a subfield of geography that explores the ways in which culture influences and is influenced by the spatial distribution of people, places, and landscapes. It seeks to understand how human culture, including beliefs, practices, traditions, and values, is expressed in and shapes the physical environment. The study of material culture within cultural geography often involves collaboration with experts in archaeology, anthropology, history, and other fields to provide a comprehensive understanding of how culture is expressed and experienced through physical objects and spaces. Cultural geography and material culture are closely intertwined disciplines that investigate the relationship between human culture and the physical world. By examining the ways in which culture shapes landscapes and is reflected in material objects, scholars in these fields gain insights into the complex interplay between society, culture, and the environment. There is a realization in cultural geography that the relationship between people and objects cannot be disregarded in a world where identity seems to fall apart in the absence of objects of desire and dependence. First and foremost, contact zones which are engendered by mobility and which, in turn, engender hybridity are fleshed out by ‘entangled objects’ – a term used by anthropologist Nicholas Thomas [2] to denote those traditional objects which have been recast culturally in the contact processes. Objects, however, are significant not only in cross-cultural situations but everyday objects and their ‘biographies’ can also generate valuable cultural data when read backwards to particular socio-cultural contexts of commencement, transformation or discontinuation of their usage. Usage of particular objects may be a matter of personal or symbolic choice but that choice is made in the backdrop of economic, social and political circumstances [3]. Technology and transportation are together responsible for ‘commodity fetish’ existing in societies today as geographical, industrial and commercial distance suffered by objects in the process of getting converted from materials to products obliterates all other dimensions of the vast network of which the object and its user are a part except the inane relation of the commodity and consumer. The meaning which the object carries for many people in the assembly line of its commodification is rendered invisible not only by its perception as yet another item on the supermarket shelves but even further by the glitzy packaging and advertising jingoism. The idea behind studying objects as part of cultural geography is to reinforce those connections which have been obscured by commodification. Cultural geography reiterates the significance of the natural and ‘man-made’ objects in our social and cultural lives. The centrality of the objects in cementing socio-cultural orders has been interestingly magnified by sociologists like Bruno Latour [4] who believe that it is high time we extend the notion of agency from humans to objects for objects qualify human agency in known as well as unknown ways. On the other hand, knowledge frameworks like sciences and educational and research institutions and socio-political frameworks like class, gender, ‘elite’ and ‘intellectuals’ intervene on the meaning making processes regarding objects. Landscape Analysis: Cultural geographers often analyze landscapes to understand how human activities and cultural processes have shaped the physical environment. They study how cultural values and practices are reflected in the built environment, including urban planning, architecture, and land use patterns. Cultural geographers examine cultural landscapes which can be shaped by materialities like religious practices, performative politics, urban infrastructure, domestic and communal ethos, agriculture, industry etc. Analyzing cultural landscapes helps reveal the relationship between people and their surroundings. Cultural geography explores how culture varies across different regions and how this variation is manifested in material culture. For example, the architectural styles, food preferences, and clothing choices in one region may differ significantly from those in another, reflecting local cultural norms and practices. Material culture plays a significant role in shaping individual and group identities, as well as a sense of place. Cultural geographers investigate how people use material objects to express their cultural identity and attachment to a particular place. This can include the use of symbols, flags, and monuments. Cultural geographers also study the diffusion of material culture, or the spread of cultural elements and artifacts from one region to another. They examine how globalization and migration influence the exchange of ideas, technologies, and consumer goods, leading to the adoption of new material culture practices. Cultural geographers are often involved in heritage preservation efforts. They work to document and protect cultural sites, traditional practices, and historic buildings to ensure that material culture with cultural significance is preserved for future generations.

The paper attempts to study Shahjahanabad through the lens of material culture. Not only is this essential for preserving its rich heritage, understanding its historical significance, and fostering its continued cultural and economic

vitality, but also for understanding the literature that is based in/ on Shahjahanabad. Material culture constitutes an affective “web of significance” and is an integral part of the act as well as the fact of a literary creation. A literary text, too, is traditionally known to interweave the many “webs of significances” in which human life remains suspended [5]. Borrowing from Gilbert Ryle’s philosophy of “thick description”, Clifford Geertz introduced the method in anthropological and cultural studies. This method entails explaining with as much detail as possible the reason behind human actions. Since human actions can be construed variously, so Geertz insists that all codas of meaning creation along with the variety of meanings created should be foregrounded in research and inquiry of human social behaviour. Literary texts embody this kind of “thick description” which Geertz calls into play for anthropological and cultural analysis. Also, as Geertz points out, material culture of a people is “an ensemble of texts” and can be best decoded through practices of close literary reading and writing [6]. While there is this conceptual reciprocity between material culture and literary text, there is an additional merit in retrieving material culture from literary texts. A literary text not only helps us navigate the “disparate but interlinked” areas of human life but it also enables us to put into perspective the limitations of a simple sociological, anthropological or disciplinary approach to what Berkovitch refers to as the “game of culture” which is as complex and maverick as a game of chess [7]. The game of material culture requires to be reconceived and reset often, beyond and across systemic or disciplinary barriers- a possibility which distinctly exists in literary texts. The lens of material culture helps us appreciate the multifaceted relationship between people, culture, and their physical environment in a dynamic and historically significant urban setting. Knowing the material culture of Shahjahanabad is essential to the co-relate how living in Shahjahanabad catalyses the act and quality of writing. The conditions of living in the city in general and Shahjahanabad in particular shapes many narratives which partly or wholly, explicitly or implicitly, constitute an imaginative and cognitive document on the give and take between the city and the city-zen. In the words of Rohma Javed Rashid [8],

From contemporary sources we get two images of life in the city. In the first we are introduced to a citizenry utterly exasperated and disillusioned with the political turmoil and consequent economic hardships. Fear, violence and rebellion appear to have become a part of everyday life in the city and rumors played their part in instigating violence on more than one occasion. In the second image, life in Shahjahanabad appears to be constant entertainment. Festivities, celebrations and joyous revelry happening in the bazaars of the city would give the impression that life not only continued as before but also that the sub culture of the city that thrived in the lanes and bylanes of Shahjahanabad - that often acted as a counter culture to its elite, chaste cultural traditions - seems to have found greater acceptance in the elite circles (p. 35).

The paper compiles glimpses into the material culture of Shahjahanabad to highlight its vibrance as well as melancholy, composite as well as polarized nature and urban as well as political dimensions.

### **Luxury and Plenty in Shahjahanabad**

The material culture of the Mughal times was a highly refined one cashing on indigenous traditions, Islamic influence and availability of luxury goods from foreign lands. Hindus as well as Muslim upper classes spent lavishly on dress. The glorious garbs of the royalty have caught attention of Indian writers as well as foreign travelers. Humayun invented the *ulbagcha* (*achkan* like overcoat) worn over *qaba* or the coat. Akbar’s refined tastes extended to his sartorial choices and Father Monserrate and Father Rudolf describe him as clad in exquisite garments and ornaments. Humayun and Akbar selected the hue of their attire based on the dominant color associated with the ruling celestial body for that day. Jahangir was known to be even more opulent in his tastes. He wore English gloves on his palms and buskins on his feet. He patented a style which others were forbidden from emulating consisting of *nadiri*, *tus* shawl, *batugiriban*, *qaba*, *chera* and waist belt. Shahjahan’s dress was almost the same except that it was more garish but Aurangzeb favored simplicity in his dress. The *Ain-i-Akbari* describes eleven types of coats viz. *Takauchiyah* (with round skirt gathered on the side), *Shah-ajidah* (royal coat with sixty fancy stitches), *Peshwaj* (open and tied in front), *Gadar* and *Fargi* (overcoats) and *Chakman* and *Fargul* (raincoats). *Shalwars* or breeches constituted the lower clothing and came in three different varieties viz. single, double and wadded. The upper and middle classes wore long open shirts on *shalwars*. The rich wore embroidered velvet or brocade bejeweled shoes and Spanish, Turkish or Moroccan leather shoes while the middle class used raw red leather shoes. Women wore embroidered shoes or open heeled slippers. Hindus were also known to wear *Khadauns* and *Alpracas* (wooden sandals). Muhammadan women, royalty as well as middle class, wore shirts with half or full sleeves going up to their knees on their *shalwars*. They wore *wollenqabas* and shawls in winters. Nurjahan is famous for having invented many dresses, fashions and ornaments. Several varieties of brocades and laces also owe their origin to her. The Hindu women wore the *angiya* and the *sari*. Both Hindu and Muslim women covered their heads with *dupattas*. *Lachaq*-the head dress- was only for princess and daughters of noble households.

The *Ain-i-Akbari* provides an elaborate description of the morning grooming routine that both men and women were expected to perform. It included brushing teeth, use of eye and mouth washes, bathing, giving oneself a rubbing and kneading massage, shampooing hair, anointing the body with perfume, using mirror for putting collyrium in the eye, powder on face and hair dressing and finally, betel chewing. Hindus also applied *tilak*. Women stained their palms and feet with henna or *alta*. The use of *gulguna* or *ghaza* (red colour) for adding colour to the cheeks also noted. Malik Muhammad Jayasi, in his *Padmavat*, gives a detailed account of women’s toilette, stating that, “They go in for bathing,

application of sandal, and vermilion on parting of hair, a spangle on the forehead, collyrium, ear rings, nose studs, betel to redden the lips, necklaces, armlets, a girdle and anklets. Then there are sixteen graces four long, four short, four stout and four thin". Where toilette products are concerned, soap was the foremost among them. The historical records extensively mention the utilization of soap, known as sabun, as well as homemade cleansing agents such as soap-berry, bark-ash, gram flour, turmeric powder, rice powder, kusama flower paste, oil-cakes, and sandalwood paste. Additionally, beauty treatments called "Obtanah" containing ingredients like sandalwood, medicated camphor, and other aromatic components were employed to enhance one's complexion. *Wazma* or *khizab* were used as hair dyes or hair was combed with lead combs to impart it blackness. Women dried their hair with fragrant smoking and dressed it with pomatum. Kautilya's Arthashastra and Ain-i-Akbari list in detail the use of fragrances like sandal wood, saffron, *araq-i-sewti*, *araq-i-chameli*, *mosseri*, and *amber-i-ashab*. Akbar crated a perfumery called *Khushbu Khana*. According to Pelsaert, "They studied night and day how to make exciting perfumes and efficacious preserves, such as *mosseri* or *falroj* containing amber, pearls, gold, amboa, opium and other stimulants" [9]. Nur jahan's mother is known to have concocted the *Itr-i-Jahangiri* from roses which surpassed all *itrs* in its aromatic strength. Sweet scented essential oils were part and parcel of the bathing ritual, often exported from Bengal. Talc made from sandal wood to ward off sweat and cooling deodorizers like rose water, *santak* and *argajah* completed the ritual. Bathing houses were popular in all cities of the Mughal empire where the clients could luxuriate in the elaborate bathing process. Barbers did not have fixed shops but were free wheelers going from house to house with their equipments.

The beauty routine was not considered complete without the inclusion of accessories. In the Ain-i-Akbari, Abul Fazl enumerates 37 various types of adornments, which encompassed items like chauk, siphul, maangtika, kotbiladar, sekra, and binduli for adorning the forehead, karnaphul, mor bhanwar, baali, and champakali for the ears, nath, besar, and laung for the nose, haar and guluband for the neck, Baazuband and Tad for the upper arms, Gajrah, kangan, churi, jawe, and bahu for the wrists, rings and arsi for the fingers, jehar and payal for the ankles, bhank, anwat, and bichhwah for the toes, and chhudra, khantika, and katimekhala for the waist. Muslim men wore no ornaments except amulets while Hindu men wore ear and finger rings and bracelets. Mughal kings, however, adorned themselves with a lot of finery. Akbar spent three gharis (around one hour) on his toilette. Sir Thomas Roe was mesmerized by the huge ruby and diamond glittering on his turban and many more jewels on his staff, neckpiece, armlets, wristbands and rings. Men carried walking sticks, swords or other weapons, wore turbans, diadems or tiaras, trimmed beards, moustaches and hair. Spectacles called *upalocanagolaca orupnetra* in Sanskrit and later, *chashma* or *chasima* after the Persian word "chashm" or eye was commonly available through Persian and Arab traders selling European merchandise.

The daily diet of Hindus as well as Muslims comprised of the same staples except that the majority of Hindus did not consume meat. Muslims ate beef, fish, mutton, chicken, fowl and birds and animals of prey except the forbidden flesh of swine. Mughal kings abstained from eating flesh on campaigns, holy days or during periods of penance. Hindu diet was rich in dairy products as Hindus were vegetarians. Pickles, spices and condiments were used by both the communities. While Hindus made *puris* or fried bread on special occasions, Muslims preferred their breads baked. Mughal cities had food sellers, bakers, sweetmeat shops and fruit sellers selling home grown seasonal fruits and imported ones in abundance. The rich could afford fruit treats from overseas like melons from Karez, Badakshan and Kabul, grapes, apples and pears from Samarkand, pomegranates from Yazd, pineapples from Europe and cherries and dry fruits from Kabul. Sherbets and juices were also available to quench thirst. Elaborate feasts were presented on regal dining tables and in aristocratic residences. Best of grains from Bharaj, Gwalior and Rajouri were cooked in Mughal kitchens with *nimlah ghee* (clarified butter) from Hisaar and meat and poultry from various places. Expert cooks were hired to prepare various delicacies. Meat soups were also regular items on the menu. *Khichri* was a popular dish with both the rich and the poor. Similarly, *birinj* was a dish made from mixing rice, pulses, vegetables, herbs and spices which bith Hindus and Muslims relished, but Muslims added meat to their versions called *qabuli*, *duzdbiryani* or *qimah-pulao*. As against the rest of the rice eating subcontinent, north India ate wheat along with *jowar* and *bajra*. Sweet dishes came in infinite variety. So did fruit conserves and comfits. Water was the only drink accompanying meals. Ganges water known for its purity was preferred. Saltpetre was used to make ice during summers. Muslims partook and cooked food in earthen and copper utensils while Hindus had more of brass and bronze utensils. Hindus also had an iron girdle to roast *chappatis*. Rich used gold and silver crockery and cutlery along with china and glassware. Hindus were puritanical about the cleanliness of their food and *chauka* (kitchen). The kitchen was sanitized regularly by being plastered with cow dung, where the Hindu women cooked and the families ate squatting on the floor. Ordinary people ate in *pattals* or tree leaves. The Muslims spread a *dastarkhwan* on the floor on which the spread was arranged. They consumed neither food sold in the market, nor touched by a lower caste or cooked in unhygiene. Wine or *araq* was forbidden to Muslims by religion and hence prohibition was part of the administrative policy but Kings as well as nobles indulged in drinking. Babur and Jahangir were heavy drinkers while Akbar and Shah Jahan indulged more in social drinking. Humayun was given more to opium while Aurangzeb abstained completely from alcohol. Local varieties of wine like *tari*, *nira*, *mahwa*, *jagre*, *kherra*, *bhadwar*, *kajang* were distilled. Persian and Portuguese wines distilled from grapes were also available. Opium or *afim* was another intoxicant which was widely favoured by the aristocracy, Mughal as well as Rajput. The Rajputs, as devotees of Shiva, indulged in it in excess, especially before a battle. Tobacco was introduced in India in 1605 by the Portuguese and its addiction spread like wildfire all over India. Jahangir had to order its prohibition in 1617 as it was becoming a dangerous addiction. The *huqqa* or smoking pipe, however, became a favourite pastime and entertainment in

all quarters in no time despite the royal decree. Manucci mentions Rs. 5000 collected as tobacco duty in Delhi in a day. Chewing betel leaf with areca nut, spread with *kattha*, camphor, musk or other fragrant stimulants, remained a favourite habit. Jaiswas, *Bilhari*, *kapurkant*, *kakar*, *kapuri*, *keruah*, *banglah*, and *makhistood* out as among the most favored selections of betel leaves. Tea and Coffee were consumed less as beverages and more to invigorate the mind and body, preferred more by Hindus, especially *banias* and *brahmins*, and less by Muslims.

There was an abundance of entertainment options accessible to both the royalty and nobility, as well as to the middle and lower classes. Chess, *chaupar* (a game of dice) and playing cards were the most popular indoor pastimes. The account which follows amply demonstrates that there was a well-developed culture of playing sedentary games. Playing cards was known to pre-Mughal India. A pack of cards consisted of 12 suits of 12 cards totaling 144 cards in all. The names of these suits were in Sanskrit like *ashwapati*, *gajapati*, *narpati* etc. though Akbar changed the names of some of these suits as reported in *Ain-i-Akbari*. The cards were pictorial with King, Wazir and 10 followers. The first 6 suits were considered *bishbar* (powerful) while the latter six were *kambar* (weak). All Mughal emperors except Aurangzeb indulged in this diversion. Chess is referred to in the accounts of Hasan Nizami, Amir Khusrau, Malik Muhammad Jayasi as a game of wits which the rich as well as poor tried their hand at. Mughal aristocrats regarded it as a game that served the purpose of refining skills related “to place and displace, give and take” [9]. The chessboard was divided in 64 squares, eight on each of the four sides. The game of *chaupar* became the court favourite after receiving Akbar’s patronage. There were no specialized tables. People used to draw by hand on the floor or on paper two parallel lines with two other bisecting them at right angles, then moving the *gutis* (counters) at the cast of the dice. Some variations of the game like *Chandal Mandal* and *Bisai-i-Nishat* were also played. An ancient Hindu game, particularly dear to Akbar, was the game of *Pachisi*, the board of which is laid out in marble flooring in Agra Fort. Akbar used slave girls to move them as pawns in the game. *Nard* or Backgammon was brought to India by the Muslims. *Guti* games like *doguti*, *treguti*, *nauguti*, *baraguti* and their innumerable regional variations have been enjoyed by people since times immemorial. Tiger and goat games had the *gutis* representing these animals in games like *baghchaal*, *bagh chakar*, *baghbandi*, *golekuish* etc.

The gardens of Shahjahanabad wove sensuous as well as symbolic patterns in the urban design. A garden had a dual purpose: it functioned as a summer escape in the dry climate and simultaneously represented the earthly embodiment of its idealized counterpart described in the Quran. In Mughal India, therefore, the inspiration for garden landscaping came from the royal pleasure gardens of Central Asia as well as from the depictions of Paradise in Quran. The gardens were rectangular in shape, enclosed by high walls, having intersecting waterways, a central pool and fountain with a summerhouse (*barahdari*), heavily laden fruit trees along with trees of flowers and foliage, birds as well as fishes. The most prominent examples of Shahjahanabad’s penchant for gardens were Jahanara’s Garden (called Sahibabad) north of Chandni Chowk and Raushanara’s garden near Lahori Gate. The two daughters of Shah Jahan laid out exquisite, sprawling gardens while Shah Jahan himself planted the Tis Hazari Bagh in a central location in the city. Nawab Sirhindi Begum’s Garden was in the same area as Raushnara Garden while Nawab Akbarabadi Begum’s Shalimar Bagh was beyond Lahori Gate. Other members of the royal household and gentry nurtured their gardens outside city limits along the banks of the Yamuna or populous highways. Frequently, these gardens also served the role of being the final resting places for their creators. The *nahar-i-bihisht*, the long circuitous canal from the Yamuna to the city, was the main source of water and was responsible for the lush greenery of the city. Firuz Shah’s canal, which entered the city by the Kabuli Gate and then split into two parts- one flowing through Chandni Chowk and the other flowing through the gardens of Chandni Chowk before entering the Fort via Shah Burz- was restored, the main canal of which reopened in 1821. There was an abundance of wells, springs, step wells and tanks. In 1846, a large tank constructed called Laal Diggi was linked to the main canal between Fort and Khaas Bazaar.

The elite engaged in outdoor leisure activities such as hunting, animal fights, and *chaugan* to enjoy their leisure time. *Chaugan*, or polo as it is called today, was of immense interest to men as well as women of aristocratic families. Ordinary people could only be spectators. Akbar was exceedingly fond of the game. *Chaugan* fields were included in every palace and fort complex, and the game had widespread popularity. Hunting was an expensive as well as adventurous obsession of the royalty. Mughals hunted elephants, lions, tigers, leopards, asses, antelopes, deer, roes, buffaloes, wild goats, hares, water fowls etc. but not wild boars as that went against their religion. Birds were shot with bows made of buffalo horns and arrows of reed or trained Hawks were let loose to swoop upon wild birds. Dogs, deer, elephants, hawks etc. were used in the expeditions. Fishing was a profession as well as a sport. Jehangir was very fond of it enjoying the Rohu fish a lot. The Mughals also liked to fill their pools and canals with tame fish. Animal fights were staged for amusement by ordinary people as well as the nobles. While the ordinary people enjoyed encounters between goats, rams, cocks, quads, stags, antelopes, dogs, bulls, the kings revelled more in the fights of elephants, tigers, deer, leopards, boars, bulls, camels etc. Combats between men and wild beasts were also common. While ordinary people enjoyed animal fights in streets or compounds, the palaces and forts had amphitheatres specially earmarked for animal fights. Pigeon flying was also in vogue with rich as well as poor, leading to a wholesale purchase of birds from Iran and Turan. Royal pigeons were trained to perform *charkah* and *bazi* for regaling the public. Hockey originated as *Dhophari* in Bengal and there are paintings which depict Jahangir watching the game with keen interest. The less privileged contented themselves with wrestling, *kabaddi* etc. Wrestling or *kushti* was considered to be ideal for fitness and body building. Kings as well as subjects took it up as a daily form of exercise and *kushti* tournaments were extremely popular.

Sports like boxing, stone throwing, horse racing, dog racing, archery and swordsmanship all elicited keen patronage and participation. Other recreational activities included kite flying, boating, horse, camel and elephant riding. In addition, “Jugglers, mountebanks, dancers, conjurers and magicians were all a source of recreation for the people” [9]. As described by Bernier, all such performers, including *nats* (rope walkers), monkey and bearwallahs and snake charmers, would gather in the great royal square in Delhi to display their skills.

About the entertainments at young princess’s disposal, Manucci writes, “They have the permission to enjoy the pleasure of the comedy and the dance, to listen to tales and stories of love, to recline upon beds of flowers, to walk about in gardens, to listen to the murmuring of the running waters, to hear singing or other similar pastimes [9].

Dancing girls performed for the gratification of the rich. Singing, however, gave respite to the laboring classes as well. Peasants, seamen, women- all contributed to folk music. Court music was more refined including genres like “*dhrupad, chind, chruva, bangula, qawl, chutkalahi, taranah, lahchhari, chhand, sadara and desakha*” [9]. All Mughal kings except Aurangzeb encouraged musicians producing virtuosos like Bairam Khan, Tansen, Ram Das, Lal Khan, Sawad Khan, Kabir and Rauza Qawwaal. Enactment of scenes from *Mahabharata* and *Ramayana* constituted the earliest and simplest attempts at theatre. Scenes from *Parshwanath Charitra* and *Harish Charitra* were popular in Rajasthan. More formalized and stylized, however, were the *Mushairas*, where renowned poets enthralled the audience with poetry compositions. Story reading or listening and storytelling were thought to be instructive as well as entertaining. Riddle solving, jesting and witty repartees were all sources of great pleasure in leisure hours. Planting and visiting gardens were other activities which gave people delight. Visiting fairs and pilgrim places was the most favoured touristy activity with Hindus visiting Mathura, Allahabad, Banaras, Nasik and Madurai and the Muslims visiting Ajmer, Gulbarga, Delhi and Burhanpur.

### Ceremonies and festivities in Shahjahanabad

The ceremonies in Shahjahanabad were an extension of the above-mentioned abundance but also served to consolidate social, political and administrative cohesion and control. The lavishness of Hindu as well as Muslim wedding ceremonies has invited much description. Hindu marriage ceremonies continued to adhere to Vedic *samskaras* as mentioned in *Smritis* adopting the *Brahmaya* form of wedding as the predominant model. It comprised of the tilak (betrothal) ceremony, mehndi (henna) or haldi (turmeric) ceremony, which were followed by a plethora of rituals on the Wedding Day, leading finally to the wedding procession to the bride’s house, where in an elegantly decorated *mandapa*, the feasting and the nuptials or *varmaala* (exchange of garlands), *kanyadaan* (giving away the daughter) and *paanigrahan* (linking together) *samskaras* would take place. Exchange of gifts, playing wedding games and finally the *vidai* (departure) of the bride would complete the ceremony. Muslim weddings commenced with the *sachaq* ceremony in which the bridegroom’s relatives carried four precious gifts, red dye, fruits, sweetmeats and cash to the bride’s house. After a few months from *sachaq*, the *nikah* (wedding) would take place comprising of *hennabandi*, seeking formal consent of the bride and bridegroom to the marriage in presence of the *qazi* and witnesses, recitation of *Astagh-farullah, Quls, Kalma* and *Sifat-i-Imam* prayers, the fixing of the *mahr* (marriage settlement) amount and finally, reading of a chapter from the Quran to bless the newlyweds. The last rites were equally long drawn in both the communities. *Antyesti* (last rites) in the Hindu families consisted of *Udakakarma* (giving holy unction and bath to the deceased), *Abhishinchana* (purificatory ceremonies and dressing up the corpse), *Antima yatra* (carrying the dead body on a bier for cremation to the cremation ground, generally on *ghats* of rivers), *Agnisamskara* (lighting the pyre by nearest male relative), *Asaucha* (observation of uncleanliness or continence period by the deceased’s family), *AsthiSanchayana* (gathering remnants of the dead body from the ashes to be immersed in holy waters), *Santikarma* (yagna for the peace of the soul) and *Sapindikaran* (food ceremony to mark the transition from the world to the heaven, or *mukti* (freedom) of the soul). Mourning for 10-13 days varying from caste to caste, wearing white, shaving off the head and doing charity were some other customs enjoined upon the bereaved family. Muslims follow the practice of *fal* and read the *Yasin* chapter of Quran by the bed of the dying person with his face in the direction of *qibla*. Holy water from the zamzam well at Mecca, if available, was regarded an auspicious offering to a dying person. After washing the dead body in cold water, passing it through an opening in the wall to keep ill-omen at bay, it was carried to the graveyard on a bed plank by four members of the family, and in case of rich men and nobles, the procession was accompanied by a lot of fanfare. The prayers of benediction were recited for men but not for women enroute to the graveyard as per the Islamic belief that heaven was out of bounds for women. The funeral service was conducted in the Mosque where the Imam read out prayers with the bier lying facing the Mecca. During internment or lowering the body into the grave, the face was kept towards Mecca and the Quran was recited as the grave was closed. The *fiqih* (theologian) would repeat the five correct answers of the *Lailat al wagha* (the night of desolation), the mourners would recite the *Fatihe*, return home and bathe and wash their clothes. Though there was weeping and wailing which is forbidden in the Quran, the correct method of announcing death, especially in the case of great men, was also followed where death was announced by a *Waqil* who would tie a blue cloth to his arm to convey the bad news. Mourning was observed for forty days with abstinence from eating or dressing extravagantly, shaving heads and widows covering their palanquins in green. On *Ziarat* (third day of mourning), *sharbat*, betel leaves and food were distributed and on the last day, alms were given to the needy. Relatives visited the grave on third, tenth and nineteenth day to read *Fatihe* and offer prayers. The Hindus observed anniversaries of the dead in the form of *shraadhhs*. The Muslims had the practice of building tombs or graves for the dead which were illuminated on the

anniversaries. These were visited by relatives, or devotees in the case of holy men, revered and charity was performed on these occasions.

While ceremonies were performances to enhance the political and social relationships, they played no less a role in constituting and reproducing the communal and caste identity. The Hindus observed the ceremonies of *Jatakarma* (birth ceremony), *Namakarana* (naming ceremony), *Chudakarana* (hair-cutting ceremony), *Upnayana* (initiation), *Vivaha* (marriage) and *Antima sansakara* (last rites), the Muslims followed along with cord cutting, whispering the *azan* in the ear, naming, *chhathi*, *aqiqah*, *bismillah* (initiation) and *sunnat* (circumcision) ceremonies at the time of birth. Marriage was the most elaborate ritual in both the Hindu and Muslim communities. Early marriages were the norm in this society. Inter-caste marriages were forbidden in Hindus and Muslims avoided Shia-Sunni alliances. As against Hindus, Muslims allowed a younger man to marry an older woman though Akbar passed an edict that the age gap should not be of more than 12 years. Widow remarriage was frowned upon in Hindu society. Monogamy prevailed in Hindu society except when owing to poor health or sterility of first wife, a man was compelled to marry again. Despite the freedom granted in Islam for polygamy, it was thought advisable for a man of ordinary means to have one wife. Hindus as well as Muslims selected a bride or a bridegroom for their children on the basis of general hearsay about the family and the boy/girl. In Hindu circles, *Purohits* or *Purohitains* worked as match makers. Muslim nobles had to seek royal sanction before marrying their children. Mughal Kings generally did not marry off their daughters to avoid multiplying claimants to the throne except Aurangzeb who married off Mihr-un-nissa and Zubdat-un-nissa. Religiosity and leisure combined here as most of these pilgrimages ended with leisurely strolls in the nearby garden. Writes Rana Safvi [10], "The enthusiastic participation of the Muslims in the Hindu religious festivities celebrated under the patronage of the Mughal kings reflected the prevalence of a composite culture in medieval India, where social and cultural interaction between the two communities flourished at various levels, enriching both" (p. 328). Festivals that Shahjahanabad celebrated included Diwali (Jashn-e Chiragha'n), Dussehra, Holi, Rakshabandhan. Eid-ul Fitr, Eid-ul Zuha and Nauroz. The Basant celebrations extended over a week, during which singers and musicians paid visits to the Dargahs of Saints. Urs of famous saints became occasions for celebrations. The city was lighted with candles and chandeliers and Mehfil of Sama were organised. One of Muhammad Shah's nobles Khan-e-Zaman Bahadur organised a Majlis in his courtyard where he displayed the belongings of the Prophet.

### **Education and religion in Shahajahanbad**

Education in Shahajahanbad was another factor that contributed to the city's cultural richness and its status as a center of learning during the Mughal era. It's important to note that access to education in Shahjahanabad was not equal, and educational opportunities varied based on social status, gender, and religious affiliation. The elite and those in positions of power had greater access to formal education, while the common population relied more on informal learning and traditional vocational skills. Education in Shahjahanabad was primarily centered around Islamic and Persian studies, reflecting the Mughal Empire's cultural and intellectual orientation. Delhi, being the Imperial city, was of course the greatest center of Muslim learning for past many dynasties and it kept up its tradition in the Mughal times as well. Humayun built a school on honour of Zain-ud-Din Khafi on the banks of the Yamuna. Maham Anga built a residential *madarasa*, Khair-ul-Manzil, opposite the western gate of Purana Qila. Sheikh Abdullah from Talna was another renowned educator. Humayun's Tomb housed a school, and Shahjahan constructed an impressive royal educational institution, known as Dar-ul-Baqa, on the southern edge of Jami Masjid. Madarsa-i-Rahimyya, named after Abdur Rahim, Shah Waliullah's father, came up during Aurangzeb's times. For further studies, dedicated scholars went to places like Mecca, Medina, Basra, Damascus, Cairo, Kifa, Yemen, Iran, Baghdad, Hijaz, Khurasan etc. Where the curriculum of study is concerned, Abul Fazl categorizes it into *Ilahi* or divine sciences, *Riyazi* or quantitative sciences and *Tabiqi* or rest of physical sciences. So, overall, the main subjects of study in Islamic institutions were grammar, rhetoric, logic, theology, metaphysics, literature and jurisprudence. Astronomy, mathematics and medicine gradually made inroads into the curriculum but here Hindu influence and authority was unavoidable. Muslims made better surgeons (*jarrachs*) than Hindus as they did not have any abhorrence in cutting the flesh. Muslims had a greater interest in history producing historians par excellence like Abul Fazl, Badaoni, Nizamm uddin Ahmad, Abdul Hamid Lahori and Khafi Khan. Geography, however, remained an overlooked subject in both Hindu and Islamic schools, leading to Aurangzeb expressing his frustration towards his tutor for this significant omission.

Education typically commenced around the age of 4 or 5 for both Hindus and Muslims, marked by the *Upnayana samskara* for Hindus and the *Maktab* for Muslims. Hindu children attended pathshalas, which were essentially simple huts where Brahmin teachers instructed groups of 5 to 15 students. These teachers didn't charge fees, as taking money for teaching was considered a sin within the Brahmin community. Pathshalas were private institutions driven by familial relationships between teachers and students, as well as among peers. They relied on grants and donations for sustenance. These pathshalas allowed for specialization, with some focusing on poetry, Puranas, and Smritis, while others taught law and Puranas, and some concentrated on Nyaya Darshan and logic. During the Mughal Period, Sanskrit teaching and Vedic commentaries declined, and older authoritative texts like Panini's grammar were replaced by more contemporary adaptations. Mathematics was definitely the forte of Hindus. So were astronomy and astrology. These disciplines, however, elicited equal interest in the Muslim world as well. Jotika Rai, Kanjar Beg, Nuruddin Muhammad Tarkhan, Imam Abul Muhammad of Ghazni and Mulla Farid Munnajam were some veterans of this field. Ayurvedic as well as

Unani systems flourished in Mughal India and medicine was generally a hereditary profession. Hindus were also masters in Metrology. Hindus continued to perfect their ancient heritage of philosophy and Abul Fazl notes that there were 9 schools of Hindu philosophy. When several schools offering different specializations sprang up in a given place, it came to resemble a university as in the case of Banaras where there were schools teaching *Vedas*, grammar, poetry, logic, law and astronomy. These Hindu centres of Higher Learning sprang up in holy cities like Nadia or Navapada in Bengal, Mithila, Prayag, Ayodhya, Srinagar, Tirhut, Thatta, Madura, Multan, Sirhind etc. With Mughal rule, Banaras regained its lost glory and reputed families like Dharmadhikari, Sesa, Bhatta and Mouni took up the cause of education. The city nurtured Kabir and Tulsidas. Following Banaras, Nadia emerged as a center that revitalized Brahmanical education during the Mughal era, with a particular focus on Nyaya and Smriti studies. The typical length of time for completing a bachelor's degree was ten to twelve years, and it could extend further if a student aspired to pursue a doctorate under the guidance of a respected teacher. Formal examinations were absent from the educational system, as the teacher held the sole authority to assess the students' progress. When the teacher deemed the education to be complete, certificates, letters of appreciation, or titles were awarded, and in a ceremonial event akin to a convocation (known as "chhurikabandhanam"), a dagger was affixed to the student's attire to signify graduation. Hindu families displayed a greater enthusiasm for education compared to their Muslim counterparts. This difference in attitude might be attributed to the fact that Hindus often pursued careers in trade and the service sector, while Muslims, as a ruling class, saw more potential in the fields of the military and governance. In Islamic schools (maktab), the curriculum progressed from learning the alphabet to rote memorization and understanding of the Quran, as well as instruction in calligraphy and the study of literature such as Gulistan, Bostan, and the poetry of Firdausi. For Higher Learning, generally in the field of theology, the Muslims students graduated to the madarsa, most often attached to a mosque. Places like Agra, Lahore, Jaunpur, Gujarat, Sialkot, Ahmedabad were chosen by Islamic men of letters as these abounded in Muslim population and ambitious disciples were easily found here.

Writing was typically conducted on paper, which was often procured from places renowned for their high-quality varieties such as Man Singhi and silk paper, sourced from locations like Sialkot and Shuhzudpur. In primary schools and among those with limited resources, wooden tablets or palm leaves were commonly utilized. Official correspondence, on the other hand, was documented on metal plates. Printing technology was virtually non-existent, and writing materials like the Persian Qalm (reed quill) and Qalm-i-sarab (lead pencil) were the available options. Inks, with the finest types often originating from Kashmir, were stored in metallic or porcelain inkpots. Calligraphy was a respected and lucrative art form, with eight different schools of calligraphy practiced, among which Naskh and Nastaliq were the most popular. Books were priced possessions both on account of cost of production as well as being rare commodities. As reported by Manrique and De Laet, the Mughal Imperial Library boasted of 24,000 books costing approximately 65 lakh rupees. However, apart from the expensive ornate and illustrated versions, ordinary editions of popular books were also available on the streets of the Imperial Capital. The majority of individuals obtained books from libraries, which were abundant in Mughal cities. Almost every madarasa had an associated library. Likewise, Hindu educational institutions preserved extensive libraries containing ancient manuscripts that were carefully safeguarded. Knowledgeable scholars also maintained personal libraries and employed individuals such as librarians, khushnavis (copyists), artists, bookbinders, scribes, and warraqshaf (proofreaders) on a permanent basis. Among these, the Imperial Library was the most remarkable. It continually expanded its collection under each emperor's reign, with Akbar introducing an advanced system for categorizing books. The Librarian was called the *nizam* who was in-charge of purchase of books and upkeep of library with a *muhatim* and a *darogha* under him along with several assistants for cataloguing and accession. The Library also employed translators and Jadwalsaz (artists specialized in creating ornate page borders) as part of its staff.

Shahjahanabad was a city where multiple religions thrived side by side, and religious pluralism was a defining characteristic. Despite the co-existence of Islam, Hinduism, Sikhism, Jainism, Christianity and Sufism, the material culture of Shahjahanabad displayed religious tolerance, interfaith interactions and fusion in architecture. Although Babur identified as a devout Muslim, he often disregarded Islamic principles when it came to indulging in worldly pleasures. Akbar's *Sulh-i-kul* placed Islam on equal footing with other religions while Jehangir's disregard of Islam is legendary. Shah Jahan did not overplay his Islamic identity which, in fact, was done overwhelmingly by his successor, Aurangzeb. Even during his reign, there wasn't any systematized or furious proselytizing or temple demolition. While Islam banned drinking and consumption of other narcotics, addiction of Babur, Humayun and their descendants to drugs is well known. Aurangzeb reiterated the taboo but he was challenged by his own sisters and wives. While the mosques were the material expressions of exclusive Islamic culture, Sufi dargahs and *khanqas*, exuded a "melting pot" kind of *weltanschauung*. These places were microcosms of the rich composite culture that thrived in Shahjahanabad. Inside the city, numerous dargahs could be found, including the dargah of Sayyid Bhure Shah (a Chishti Sufi also known as Sayyid Sabir Ali or Sabir Bakhsh, who passed away in 1821), the dargah of Shah Turkman of the Suhrawardi order (who lived until 1249), and the Shiite dargah known as Panjah Sharif. Additionally, other Islamic sects and orders were also present in Shahjahanabad. The Naqshbandiyya order had its representatives in Delhi, including figures like Shah Wali Ullah (who lived until 1763), Mir Dard (who passed away in 1785), and Mirza Mazhar Jan-e Jahan (who passed away in 1781). Furthermore, outside the city walls, Madarasa Rahimiyah was established by Abd ar-Rahim, the father of Wali Ullah, in Mahandiyan. On account of its reputed in disseminating knowledge of traditional sciences (*manqulat*), he was allotted Haveli Kalan Mahall in Daryaganj by emperor Muhammad Shah. Furthermore, in 1754, Alamgir II granted Wali Ullah

51 bighas of land outside Delhi as a reward for establishing his own madarsa. Shah Wali Ullah's sons - Shah Abd al-Aziz and Shah Abd al-Qadir -operated against the odds of colonial interference and Sunni influence. Wali Ullah's lands had been confiscated in 1774 but his sons managed to recover them on account of cultivating good relations with the British administrators. Shah Abd al-Aziz founded Madarsa Shah Abd al-Aziz at a location near Chitli Qabr and Tirahah Bairam Khan. Abd al-Qadir, on the other hand, provided instruction at the Akbarabadi Masjid. Unfortunately, both the Madarsa and the Masjid were demolished by the British following the events of the Indian Rebellion of 1857. A student of Shah Wali Ullah, Shah Ahmad Shahid (1786-1831), originating from Lucknow and a soldier by profession, went on to become a founder of the Mujahiddin militant movement whose theological epicentre were the Madarsa Shah Abd al-Aziz and the Akbarabadi Masjid. Mirza Mazhar Jan-e Jahan founded the Naqsbandiyya-Mujaddidiyya order in Delhi attempting to offer an alternative to the contemporary collapse in the court, religion and society in the sermons he offered in Bazaar ChitliQabr. Nevertheless, he was assassinated under the orders of Najaf Khan due to his accusations against the Shiites. His successor was Shah Ghulam Ali (Shah 'Abd Ullah Dehlavi) who built a *khanqah* at the grave of his mentor near Chitli Qabr which soon became the rallying point for Mujaddidi ideas. *Murids* of Shah Ghulam Ali who visited from other towns, cities and countries often chose to stay here because of the food and boarding facility available here. Following the tranquil traditions of his father, Shah Ghulam Ali also declined to rely on waqf (endowment) for his khanqah, sustaining it solely through zakat (charitable alms) and futuh (voluntary donations). This stood in stark contrast to the prosperous and influential Madarsa Shah Abd al-Aziz. Ghulam Ali's successor, Abu Sa'id, relocated to Medina in 1857. The *madarasa* attached to the mausoleum of Ghaziuddin (founded in 1792, located in a large Campus beyond Ajmeri Gate) overtook all the other educational institutions and went on to enjoy British aid 1824 onwards. It's worth noting that while Bombay, Madras, and Calcutta enthusiastically embraced European learning and the English language, the residents of Delhi showed a preference for studying European science and philosophy, but they opted to do so in Urdu rather than in English. Inter-Islamic disputes and discussions were expressed and embraced in Shahjahanabad as part of a long-standing tradition. However, the previously intellectual and harmonious tone of these discussions took on a acerbic and angry nature with the arrival of the British. Originating within the confines of local mosques, these debates frequently escalated to the point where they reached the Jami Masjid, where the arguments became highly intense, often calling for nothing less than a direct face-to-face confrontation.

## CONCLUSION

Though some of the most eloquent expressions of the distress at the fall of the city come from the poets of Shahjahanabad, for whom the events of the period were nothing short of catastrophic, yet as the above account elaborates, the material culture of Shahjahanabad was rooted in luxury and plenty. Starting from the early eighteenth century, the poets of Shahjahanabad began expressing their melancholy through their poetry, which eventually became known as "Shahr Ashob," meaning "City Lament" or "City Grief." It expressed the deep sorrow the poets felt at the passing of Mughal glory and the 'ruin' of their beloved city Shahjahanabad, which symbolised for them a cultural world they held dear. However, twilight of the Mughals in the eighteenth century of the and the British Shahjahanabad in the first half of the nineteenth century were witness to a cultural renaissance that continued to evolve despite political and economic debacles. The many upheavals and displacements only helped to disseminate this culture far and wide to wherever the uprooted denizens of Shahjahanabad relocated. We can see how religion, education and urbanity came together to cement the fabric of cohesion and control in this society. Despite revivalist Islamic voices in Shahjahanabad in the nineteenth century, the tolerant influences like Sufism and the Crown helped preserve an atmosphere of harmony. It is commonplace to invoke the syncretic 'Ganga-Jamuni' tahzeeb of Shahjahanabad. However, as this study affirms, it is imperative for Delhi scholars and enthusiasts to delve into the complexity and diversity of its material culture as a defining component of its urban anthropology, sociology, geography and literature.

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