



AGA KHAN TRUST FOR CULTURE

**Humayun's Tomb - Sundar Nursery - Hazrat Nizamuddin Basti  
URBAN RENEWAL INITIATIVE**



**CULTURE AS A TOOL FOR URBAN DEVELOPMENT**

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## CULTURE LED URBAN DEVELOPMENT

Urban development is synonymous with planned interventions and policy frameworks designed to tackle urban growth, distribution of land and mobility. In India, the cultural context of resident communities has rarely played a pivotal role in city development though it has significant potential in improving the quality of life.

The Humayun's Tomb – Nizamuddin area in Delhi has continuously evolved and inhabited since the 13<sup>th</sup> century. Over the past 700 years a profusion of monumental tomb building occurred in close proximity to the Dargah of Hazrat Nizamuddin Auliya, a revered Sufi saint. Here, the Aga Khan Trust for Culture commenced a major Urban Renewal Initiative spread across 224 acres following a 2007 MoU with the Archaeological Survey of India, Central Public Works Department and the Municipal Corporation.

Many of the monuments that stand within the World Heritage Site and its setting were in a poor state of preservation. The open space comprising of Sunder Nursery and neighbourhood parks were in a state of neglect and the historic neighbourhood of Nizamuddin was counted amongst many of the 'slums' of Delhi that had outgrown available resources; its living culture and historic past struggling for space, sanitation and opportunity.

To address the needs of a distinctive urban area, the Nizamuddin Urban Renewal Initiative commenced with the triple objectives of conservation of built urban heritage, environmental development of water features and open spaces and improving the quality of life for the resident communities – whose most significant asset remained their built and living cultural heritage.

Since 2007, a multi-disciplinary team has worked with local communities to fulfil these objectives. Work is underway on the development of a 90 acre city park, conservation of over 30 monuments dating from the 14<sup>th</sup> century onwards but the project's principal focus remains leveraging cultural assets for the communities benefit. With a density of 70,000/ sq. km. this was to be achieved by providing health and education infrastructure, creation of economic opportunities, improved urban setting, neighbourhood parks landscaped for community needs, improved sanitation infrastructure, creating performance venues, holding festivals to promote seven centuries of food, music, craft traditions and the restoration of significant monuments.

### STAKEHOLDER ENGAGEMENT: *Structured from the community upwards*

Since 2007, dialogue with several government agencies coupled with sustained community engagement with local leaders, religious heads, men & women, youth, vendors & commercial establishments has ensured that many facilities have been created and today, many of these are managed by residents themselves after receiving required training.



Detailed documentation of the monuments, historic buildings and graves with the urban setting (Top) Installing computer kiosks 'hole-in-the-wall' in key locations where they can be accessed by a large section of children (Bottom) Apni Basti Mela in the Basti attracts both basti residents and visitors from across the city

At the onset, a group of local youth was trained to undertake the cultural mapping of tangible and intangible resources of the entire project area. In addition to the monumental heritage, the mapping exercise listed out some of unique yet neglected built heritage, significant Sufi shrines and also brought out the intangible cultural resources of music, local crafts, and pluralistic cultural practices such as the celebration of *Basant* and *Urs*, amongst others. This exercise led to an improved understanding of neighbourhoods and the sociological parameters that govern their growth.

The cultural mapping exercise led to several project components, principal amongst which were the conservation of Nizamuddin's built heritage, documentation and dissemination of musical traditions, creating performance venues, institutionalizing annual festivals, training of youth to become heritage guides and interpret their heritage for others – especially school children amongst others. Women's self help groups were created and strengthened to produce and market products inspired from the built-heritage of the area.

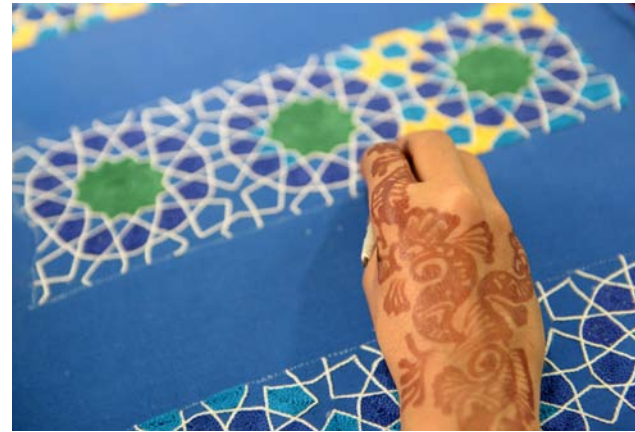
### RECLAIMING COMMUNITY PLACES: *Enabling recreation & reviving arts*

Though densely populated and built up, the Nizamuddin Basti still retained segregated open spaces along the periphery. These were however, poorly kept and neglected becoming unusable. A baseline survey conducted by the project in 2009 revealed that less than 2% of the local population accessed parks. A prolonged dialogue with community groups led to design inputs for the parks that have since been landscaped for specific functions ranging from a '*pardah bagh*' for exclusive use by women to spaces for sports and community gatherings.

The landscaped parks are today the pride of the community with 35% residents actively using them. Furthermore, since 2010, each year the 'Apni Basti Mela', an annual fair is held here which is an opportunity for the community to showcase the unique art, crafts, theatre, music and food of the area.

Coupled with conservation and landscaping works in 2010, Mirza Ghalib's tomb has now become a cultural venue hosting *mushairas* and poetry recitals. Similarly, the forecourt of the 16<sup>th</sup> century Chausath Khamba, which remains one of the largest open spaces in the Basti, has been landscaped to serve as a performance venue for the Jashn E Khusrau, an annual festival celebrating the legacy of Hazrat Amir Khusrau, who created *Qawwali* music traditions. Other events such as *Dastangoi*, exhibitions, theatre performances, workshops, book fairs have also been held here. These cultural events and *melas* attract many first time visitors to the Basti.

Other urban design interventions in the basti have been led by active partnerships with the community. Street corners, intersections and roundabouts that had become garbage dumps, have benefited from wall art by children, youth and street artists. Some as platforms for street theatre led by children of the community, have made a big impact in their lives. Interventions such as installing street computers have transformed abandoned spaces into learning spaces for children.



(Top) Women's self-help groups from the Basti producing and marketing products inspired from motifs and designs of the built-heritage of Nizamuddin; Creating performance venues for traditional music and poetry recitals in the forecourt of Chausath Khamba (Centre) and courtyard of Mazar E Ghalib (Bottom)



*(Top) Youth from the Basti learn the age-old craft of hand-made tiles used on the Humayun's Tomb and other monuments in the area (Centre & Bottom) Upgrading of streets and other urban infrastructures like restoring water points and roundabouts and providing better services not only enhance visitor experience but also provide cleaner environment for the residents*

### **STREET IMPROVEMENTS:** *Aesthetic, Sustainable and Participatory*

The historic character of the Basti had been severely undermined both by tarmac roads and an overwhelming presence of litter on the streets. In partnership with the Municipal Corporation, major street improvement and waste management programmes were initiated, preceded by a community supported physical survey of streets, and infrastructure mapping of water, electricity and sewerage systems. 100% of the street network has been suitably re-paved and a majority of the sewerage network replaced. The task required significant co-ordination between the Municipal Corporation undertaking the street improvements and the Delhi Jal Board replacing sewerage lines.

The revival of these 'common spaces' including streets and open spaces directly enhanced the cultural experience of the residents and visitors of the basti.

### **URBAN CONSERVATION:** *Rehabilitation of structures and communities*

In addition to the Dargah complex, several major monuments stand within Hazrat Nizamuddin Basti including the Baoli and Chausath Khamba – both of which have been the focus of a significant urban conservation effort. Portions of the Baoli collapsed in 2008 following which relocation of 18 families was undertaken to newly built houses. As part of rehabilitation, the affected families were provided with housing, support for livelihoods, and access to health care, education and pension schemes near their new homes. This effort required extensive dialogue over a three year period with both residents and officials.

Through a cost sharing arrangement major housing improvement along the *nallah*, Baoli, Chausath Khambha are being undertaken. Forty homes in the basti have been upgraded in addition to which, several training programmes on good and safe construction practices using modern and traditional materials have also been received well by the community.

With almost 25% of the local residents lacking in-house toilet facilities and millions of pilgrims visiting the Basti annually, two community toilet complexes have been built and as with the parks, health and education facilities, the toilets are now community managed.

### **MOVING FORWARD:** *Planning and Ground Level Action*

Even though several urban design interventions in the Nizamuddin Basti have made a visible positive change to pockets, indiscriminate development continues. The Master Plan of Delhi has articulated the need for 'special area plans' for heritage zones, including the Nizamuddin area. However, in the absence of clear boundaries defining heritage zones and lack of incentives, implementation of any laws is ineffective. Efforts are now underway to provide incentives as part of the heritage byelaws being developed for the National Monument Authority.