Built in the style developed in the early 15th century in Delhi for royal tombs of the Sayyid and Lodi dynasties, Isa Khan’s Tomb pre-dates the building of Emperor Humayun’s tomb by two decades. The structure is considered significant for the high level of ornamentation – glazed tiles, plasterwork, stone elements such as finials and lattice screens – much of which had sadly been lost, either removed for the antique market in the 20th century or left to deteriorate.
Emperor Humayun’s garden-tomb was built by Indian and Persian craftsmen on a scale far grander than any tombs. The monumental scale achieved here was to become the defining feature of Mughal architecture.

Adjoining Humayun’s Tomb are several Mughal-era garden-tombs - Nila Gumbad, Isa Khan’s enclosure, Bu Halima’s tomb, Batashewala Complex, among others. In the larger Nizamuddin area, there are over 100 monuments, dating from the 13th century onwards, making it one of the densest ensembles of medieval Islamic buildings in the world. The area also represents over seven centuries of living heritage and associated music, food, rituals and performance culture.
Isa Khan’s Tomb is of an architectural style that was used for royal tombs through the 15th century rule of the Sayyid and Lodi dynasty. Marked by deep arcaded verandahs, the significance of the structure lies in the profuse ornamentation and its original setting remaining intact.

The striking Mosque within the garden-tomb has a sandstone façade and a lofty central dome. The three bay wide structure has a large plinth with a contemporary well.

The gateway would have had a lofty entrance arch and the interior side has three vaulted bays. Past repairs have obliterated all original details on the façade.

The octagonal internal retaining wall allowed the outer garden to serve as a typical Persian sunken garden, irrigated with flooding.

Isa Khan’s Tomb - Garden in 2010
The highly ornamental ceiling of Isa Khan’s Tomb had suffered severe decay due to neglect and water ingress. Also with the dome white-washed and cement plastered, it was too dark for the ceiling to be visible. Careful restoration of the ornamentation has been carried out by master craftsmen and the cement plaster replaced with lime plaster thereby significantly enhancing the historic character of the tomb chamber.
Ground Penetrating Radar Survey

3-D High Definition Survey using laser scanning technology

Humayun’s Tomb - Sunder Nursery - Nizamuddin Basti

Preparatory groundwork for conservation combined archival research, condition assessment, documentation and structural assessment with state-of-the-art technologies.

An exhaustive documentation of tile patterns on the canopies was carried out
Prior to the commencement of conservation works, over 500 drawings including condition assessment were prepared, documenting each detail, including ornamental plasterwork and ceramic tilework in detail.
This tomb and its enclosure was crowded with village huts before it was taken in hand and repaired by the Archaeological Department in 1905... Rs.3,900/- were spent on its acquisition and the subsequent works of conservation.

- Zafar Hasan
Volume 2, No 179, ASI; description of Isa Khan’s Tomb enclosure

Early 19th century photograph of Isa Khan’s Tomb depicting a complete finial on both the dome and the canopies, and the garden retaining wall.
The Isa Khan and Bu Halima enclosures stand at the western end of the Humayun’s Tomb complex. Significantly in 1914 portions of the Bu Halima enclosure wall were demolished to allow entry to the Humayun’s Tomb enclosure from this area. The wall on the west side has latterly been removed to open up the approach to Humayun’s tomb on the east from the Subz burj at the junction of the Delhi-Muttra Road with that leading to Safdar Jang.

- Zafar Hasan,
  Volume 2, No 179, ASI; description of Isa Khan’s Tomb enclosure
LANDSCAPE RESTORATION

Removal of earth revealed terracotta toys and stone fragments such as finials, columns, that had been lost from the buildings.

Isa Khan’s Tomb - Garden after restoration in 2013

Restoration of the earliest known/surviving sunken garden and in turn the original/historic setting of the mausoleum.

11,440 Sq.m of Garden restored

3,250,000 Cu.ft. of earth removed
The discovery that the outer garden was originally four feet below the levels of the garden that surrounds the tomb required 125,000 cubic feet of earth to be manually removed to restore historic levels. This revealed several hundred terracotta objects, in addition to architectural elements, as well as the arcade of the enclosure wall, which is now once again visible as intended.
De-Silting of Well

At least a dozen wells within the project area have been discovered and desilted to their original depth. These wells were filled-in in the 20th century when rubbish had made these useless to draw water.

A combination of traditional techniques of lowering skilled craftsmen into the well with buckets and use of modern technology such as use of pumps have been employed, as well as structural repairs which followed after the clearance of rubble and earth which were dumped into the well in the 20th century.
CONSERVATION PROCESS

PROCESS

DOCUMENTATION CONDITION ASSESSMENT ARCHIVAL RESEARCH

FUNDING

CONSERVATION PLAN

The Conservation Plan prepared jointly by the ASI – AKTC team was submitted for peer review prior to commencing conservation works.

CRAFTSMANSHIP SUPERVISION TRAINING
On the northern end of the complex is a gateway which allows entry to visitors. The outer façade of the gateway has suffered from inappropriate past repairs to an extent that the original details have been obliterated. The internal portion had mostly collapsed with the western bay still standing. Conservation works aimed at structural repairs and restoring the architectural integrity to the extent possible.

Following structural repairs to the domed ceiling, the battlemented parapet wall was re-built using traditional materials, tools and building techniques.
During the earth removal the missing column supporting the collapsed central and eastern bays of the internal verandah was discovered as was the decorative DQ stone capital. Following reconstructing the collapsed central and eastern bays in 2011, the conservation works on the gateway in 2012 included restoring the eaves as well as the battlemented parapet.
Within the tomb-garden stands an imposing mosque on a raised plinth. As with the other structures in the complex, the mosque suffered on account of inappropriate repairs as well as loss of architectural elements such as the tile-work on the canopies.

Lime punning being applied to the dome surface

Remnants of tilework on the façade and the canopies
Bu-Halima’s Garden

Early 20th century British-era carriageway disfigured the historic character of Bu Halima’s Tomb - Garden and the entrance zone of the World Heritage Site.

Various stages of landscape works

Orchard plantation will be carried out in Bu Halima’s Tomb - Garden during monsoon 2013.