Let's Explore
HUMAYUN'S TOMB

Aga Khan Trust for Culture
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written by Narayani Gupta
illustrated by Anitha Balachandran

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In collaboration with
Aga Khan Trust for Culture
ON THE OCCASION of Children’s Day 2011, it gives me great pleasure to offer this book to the children of Delhi, and indeed the children visiting this World Heritage Site from the world over.

We estimate that over 300,000 school children visit Humayun’s Tomb every year, who, we hope will enjoy this beautifully illustrated publication that brings alive the site that represents several centuries of history. We believe this book not only gives a better understanding of this wonderful site, but will also inspire children to become associated with the preservation of our country’s heritage as architects, artists, engineers, archaeologists, garden designers, and historians.

This year also marks 150 years of the Archaeological Survey of India, and what better way to celebrate this anniversary than by launching this first in a series of planned children books.

Humayun’s Tomb has been the site of a long-standing partnership between the Archaeological Survey of India and the Aga Khan Trust for Culture, which has resulted in the restoration of the gardens and the monuments. I would like to record our appreciation to the Aga Khan Trust for Culture for preparing this publication with support from the Ford Foundation. A special thanks to Ms. Anitha Balachandran for the illustrations, and Dr. Narayani Gupta for conceptualizing and writing the text.

To all children and their families – happy reading!
The tomb of Emperor Humayun was built more than 450 years ago. It is one of the most beautiful buildings in India, and is set in a large garden. At one time, it was near the Yamuna river. Thousands of skilled craftsmen worked tirelessly to create magic out of stone brought from great distances.

Leeal and Samir are 11 and her brother. They are at Humayun’s Tomb on Sunday morning. Leeal has come by bus, and Samir by the metro with his uncle. They live in Khairi Village. Samir is spending the weekend at his uncle’s house in Pahar Ganj. Today, these places are inside Delhi city, but were once outside Humayun’s city, which he named Dinpanah. Its palace was within the Purana Qila.

In this book, Leeal and Samir will hear the story of how Humayun’s Tomb was built. As they hear the story, they learn many other things too.
It is a story of how the hot dry Delhi region was magically changed by channeling water and planting trees and flowers.

They find out about individuals whose teachings, songs, poems, and sense of beauty have inspired others for centuries; and of people who have changed the way places look, through their skills as engineers and craftsmen.

This is a story about our country, where people, ideas, arts, and skills are in constant movement, and creating ever-new surprises…
HAZRAT NIZAMUDDIN was a Sufi saint who lived here in early 14th century AD.

It is hard to believe, but 100,000 years ago, most of Delhi was a forest. The people who lived here used small stone implements (microliths) as tools and weapons.

Much later, parts of the forest were cleared, and the land was levelled for agriculture. Towns were built. In the last thousand years, some of the towns here had over 50,000 inhabitants. The areas of these towns are now within the large modern Delhi region, where over 14,000,000 people now live.

This entire area still has sections of walls and buildings surviving from the 11th century AD. The rulers lived in fort-palaces, and other people in houses nearby. Some towns had enclosing walls, outside which were orchards, fields, gardens, and tanks to collect rainwater.

The triangle between the hilly Ridge and the Yamuna river was called Delhi. Each time a ruler built a fort here, it quickly grew into a small town, which was known by the name or a title of the ruler. Only Siri and British New Delhi were not named after the rulers (if they had been, the first would have been Khiljiabad, and the second Georgetown!)
GHIYAS UD-DIN BALBAN built his palace on the bank of the Yamuna during the reign of Sultan Ilutmish, and the area came to be called Ghiyaspur. Lal Mahal, which is built of red sandstone, is the oldest surviving Islamic palace building in India. Today, it is used as a private house, and is not open to the public.

Later, Balban became Sultan of Delhi, and shifted to the fort Lalkot in Mehrauli.

Many people from other parts of India, and from West and Central Asia, came to Delhi. One of them was a lady called Bibi Zulekha. She came from the town of Badayun, with her five-year old son Nizamuddin (born in AD 1238).

Later, when Hazrat Nizamuddin was 20, he became a disciple of the famous Sufi saint Hazrat Farid-ud-din Ganj-i-Shakkar, also known as Baba Farid, who lived in Ajodhan (now called Pakpattan, in Pakistan).
Hazrat Nizamuddin began to construct a baoli (step well) to ensure year-long water supply for the villagers and pilgrims. In the same year, Sultan Ghiyasuddin Tughlaq ordered the construction of his capital, Tughlaqabad. The craftsmen would work on building the baoli at night. This angered the Sultan, and he ordered that no one should sell oil for chirkhs (earthen lamps) that were needed for working at night.

In response, Hazrat Nizamuddin is said to have asked his pupil Nasiruddin to fill the chirkhs with water that gushed out in a spring from the ground. By his special power, the wicks caught flame. The baoli was built, and Nasiruddin was given the title ‘Chiragh e Dilli’ (the Light of Delhi).

When Hazrat Nizamuddin passed away in 1325, he was buried near the baoli, and the name of Ghiyaspur was changed to Nizamuddin.
THE POET Amir Khusrau was Hazrat Nizamuddin’s favourite disciple.

Hazrat Nizamuddin and Khusrau were sitting one morning on the banks of the Yamuna, looking at the people bathing and worshipping the sun. Hazrat Nizamuddin said to Khusrau:

Har yaum raast raah-e, dene-e wa qibla gaah-e.
All people have their paths and focus of worship.

Like Hazrat Nizamuddin, Khusrau (born in 1253) had lost his father when he was a child, and was raised at the Sultan’s court. He knew many languages, and wrote in Persian and Hindawi. He is said to have designed the sitar and the tabla. He also created the tradition of qawwali — songs of devotion sung in honour of Hazrat Nizamuddin.

Khusrau is said to have grieved so deeply at the death of Hazrat Nizamuddin, that he died soon after, and was buried near the dargah (shrine) of his beloved Saint.

Hazrat Nizamuddin and Amir Khusrau’s passing left an emptiness, but the spirit of the Saint was still very real to people. Century after century, hundreds of followers continued to come throughout the year to the dargah in Nizamuddin Basti. His descendants and followers have kept up the tradition of hospitality, and the songs of the qawwals still ring out on Thursday evenings.