



AGA KHAN TRUST FOR CULTURE

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



BATASHEWALA MUGHAL GARDEN TOMB COMPLEX

Conservation & Landscape Restoration

*Conservation works funded by the
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(Top) Following the land transfer to the ASI, over 150 structures built in this complex over the last 25 years were demolished thus revealing enclosure walls and restoring the historic character; (Centre) Before & After conservation views of the internal chambers of Mirza Muzaffar Hussain's Tomb after the restoration of missing geometric patterns in incised plasterwork on the interior wall and roof surfaces; (Bottom) Restored Tomb of Mirza Muzaffar Hussain with its garden setting.

INTRODUCTION

Standing to the north of the Humayun's Tomb World Heritage Site, the 11 acre "Batashewala Complex" includes two Mughal era tomb-garden enclosures within which stand three tombs, of national importance, and protected by the Archaeological Survey of India (ASI). They are a significant part of the 16th century Mughal necropolis adjacent to the Dargah of Hazrat Nizamuddin Auliya, the 14th century Sufi saint who has been revered for seven centuries.

The tomb of Mirza Muzaffar Hussain, grand-nephew of Emperor Humayun and son-in-law of Emperor Akbar, is the principal tomb in the complex. The Chota Batashewala and the domed Mughal tomb can be considered contemporary because of their location in the complex and their architectural character. In addition to their historical significance, their association with the Mughal royal family and the architectural significance of the unique plan for all three structures, the tombs stand within a significant archaeological zone comprising of other 16th and 17th century garden-tombs.

The conservation effort, since 2011, has aimed at recovering the architectural integrity of the monuments. This has been achieved with the use of traditional materials and building techniques in order to replace 20th century alterations that were carried out with modern materials, such as cement. Portions of the structures and the enclosure walls – demolished in 1989 to create a camping ground – have been reconstructed. The landscape design of the two enclosed gardens is inspired by the Mughal *char-bagh* layout, and planted with trees favoured by the Mughals – mango, *neem*, and citrus, amongst others.

Restored linkages with other 16th century garden-tombs standing in the adjacent Sundar Nursery and the Humayun's Tomb Complex will also allow visitors an enhanced understanding of this Mughal necropolis.

BACKGROUND

In the 1950s, the ownership of this complex was given to the Bharat Scouts & Guides to serve as a camping ground. This led, in 1989, to the construction of 150 structures. Enclosure walls were demolished, disfiguring the landscape and the historic character. The levelling of land required to build the buildings also led to collapse of the Chota Batashewala – a protected monument – when its foundations were exposed.

Following twelve years of effort by the ASI and the Aga Khan Trust for Culture (AKTC), the ownership was restored to the ASI in 2010, allowing systematic conservation and landscape restoration to be undertaken by the AKTC.

A few decades of neglect combined with inappropriate development of the site almost led to the loss of two valuable 16th century garden-tombs. The discovery of a large portion of enclosure walls, on the demolition of the 150 modern structures that had been built over these, allowed the Mughal-era garden layout to be restored and, in turn, ensure the integrity of a most significant 16th century ensemble.

Urgent repairs were required on all three structures to ensure that no further loss of the architectural fabric takes place. The eastern wing of Mirza Muzaffar Hussain's tomb – the “fort like” enclosure of the domed Mughal tomb – and almost all of the Chota Batashewala – had been lost in less than three decades. Conservation efforts have thus focussed on reversing this damage through a scientific, multi-disciplinary effort aimed at restoring the historic architectural character.

MIRZA MUZAFFAR HUSSAIN'S TOMB

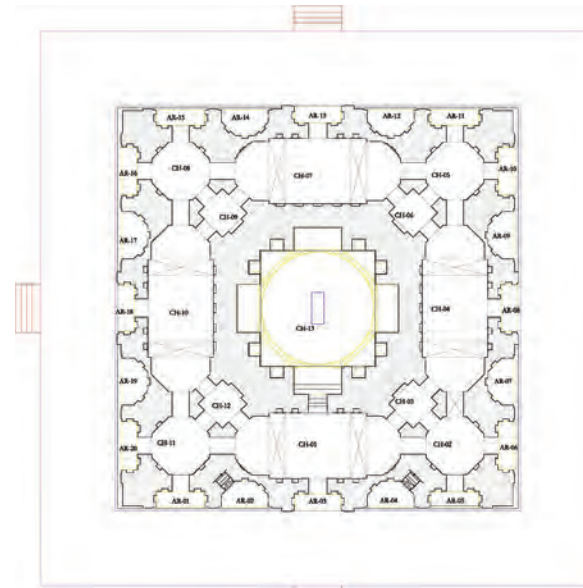
Popularly known as the Bada Batashewala Mahal and built in AD 1603, Mirza Muzaffar Hussain's square tomb stands on a raised platform with five half-domed arched entrance bays on each side. Parts of the striking plaster ornamentation have survived on some of the internal wall surfaces, providing the evidence required to restore missing portions. Ornamental plaster medallions and the intricate *muqarna* patterns on the half-domed arched entrance bays symbolise the highest craft traditions of the period. The central grave chamber, several feet below the ground, is surrounded by eight rooms, making this an interesting example of the “*hasht-bihist*” plan – which represents the eight spaces of paradise as described in the Holy Quran.

The collapsed eastern facade was restored while the southern facade – inappropriately reconstructed only a decade ago – required dismantling and reconstruction as per the original design. Similarly, the roof, which had deteriorated, was required to be re-laid with lime concrete to create an adequate slope.

Long stretches of the garden enclosure walls, visible in archival photographs, were demolished in 1989. The foundations of missing portions were excavated in order to guide the reconstruction of these sections. The building techniques, tools and materials employed by the original builders were also used. The bends in the wall indicate other garden enclosure walls – such as those of the adjacent domed Mughal tomb – which clearly pre-date this enclosure.

Within the enclosed garden and standing just east of the Mirza's tomb, the remnants of an octagonal tomb once stood. It is said to have been profusely ornamented and known as Chota Batashewala. Described in the 20th century texts as “...standing on a platform some 3' high. It consisted of a central octagonal chamber, with a surrounding arcade containing an arched opening on each of the eight sides. The central apartment was provided with four doorways, three of which were closed by stone jalli screens. The domed ceiling of the central chamber, as well as the walls inside, is ornamented by floral and geometrical patterns intermingled with Quranic inscriptions in incised plaster”.

Using archival images, the effort here has been to raise standing portions of the structure to complete just one portion of the facade in order to indicate to visitors the original scale and profile. A rubble masonry wall has been built all along the periphery to provide support to standing portions in lieu of the shallow foundations of the structure. A vaulted tomb chamber was also discovered and the earth in-fill that had been placed inside was removed.



(Top) Plan with Condition Assessment of the Tomb of Mirza Muzaffar Hussain; (Centre) Restoration works on Chota Batashewala Mahal as per the evidences, archival images found, and (Bottom) architectural models created to understand the structure in detail.



(Top) Finial elements found during conservation works were put back; (Centre) Restoration of ornamented interiors, in which much of the ornamentation had been lost due to neglect, water seepage and inappropriate past repairs wherein plain cement plaster was used on wall and ceiling surfaces that were originally decorated; (Bottom) Mughal Tomb after completion of conservation works and garden restored.

MUGHAL TOMB

This lofty domed Mughal-era tomb stands on an elevated stone masonry plinth, giving it a fort-like appearance. The domed, decorative tomb, which is visible from afar, affords spectacular views of, and from, Humayun’s Tomb.

The structure had suffered from inappropriate repairs in the 20th century. Careful interventions were required to restore the architectural intentions of the Mughal builders, including rebuilding the lower platform and removal of cement plaster, which was used here extensively.

Re-plastering with lime plaster included restoration of the intricate plasterwork on the parapet, interiors and facade. The sandstone lattice screens openings have been restored using Mirza Muzaffar Hussain’s tomb as a model.

Collapsed portions of the comparatively low enclosure wall were rebuilt on the original foundations. Because the north-eastern portion had suffered from damage caused by landslides in the past, these portions were raised six metres. A *neem* orchard has been planted within the garden enclosure.

OUTCOME

Conservation and landscape restoration works here have aimed at establishing a model conservation process. The process has been preceded by a systematic and scientific documentation, archival research and detailed condition mapping. Conservation works, implemented by master craftsmen, have been undertaken in accordance with the formal Conservation Plan. They have also been supervised by a multi-disciplinary team and reviewed at regular intervals.

India is fortunate in its building craft traditions, which have been passed down through many generations and over a number of centuries. Craftsmen here still take great pride in replicating the work of their forefathers, using tools and building techniques seen depicted in Mughal miniatures. Craftsmen clocked over 100,000 man-days of work to complete the conservation work here.

The use of traditional materials, especially lime plaster – even when prepared in a traditional manner – will appear “new” at the onset, but over time the patina comprising organic growth will return on account of the jaggery, lentils, egg whites, pulp of the *bael* fruit that has been used as additives in the lime mortar. At the same time, the traditional methods will ensure the long-term preservation of these sites.

With the completion of conservation works at this significant ensemble of sites, a proposal to UNESCO for inclusion of the Batashewala Complex in the expanded Humayun’s Tomb World Heritage Sites will be submitted in 2015.

For more information please visit www.akdn.org or contact the Aga Khan Trust for Culture, P.O. 3253, Hazrat Nizamuddin East, New Delhi 110013 Email: info@nizamuddinrenewal.org Follow on: www.nizamuddinrenewal.org or Facebook: www.facebook.com/NizamuddinRenewal