



AGA KHAN TRUST FOR CULTURE

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



ABDUR RAHIM KHAN I KHANAN

CONSERVATION & CULTURAL REVIVAL

in partnership with
Archaeological Survey of India

and





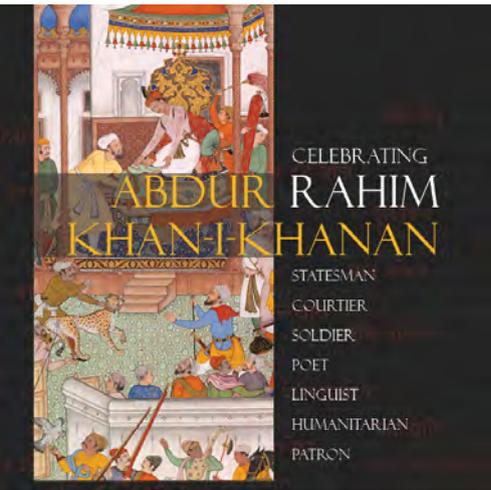
ABDUR RAHIM KHAN-I-KHANAN

Abdur Rahim Khan-i-Khanan (1556-1627) was the son of Bairam Khan-i-Khanan. His father was a close associate of Emperor Humayun and the regent of the young Akbar. His mother, Raj Gusain, was the daughter of the chief of Mewat and thus Rahim's mother tongue was Hindavi and he was also proficient in Persian, Arabic and Turki.

Rahim, Commander-in-Chief of the Mughal army, was also the greatest of Akbar's nobles; a Statesman, Courtier, Linguist, Humanitarian, Patron and above all, Poet. In the pluralistic environment of Akbar's court, he developed a refined taste and sensibility for poetry. His own atelier produced beautifully illustrated translations of the Ramayan and Mahabharata into Persian and a set of Ragamala paintings.

On account of his poetry and *Doha's* –drawing from the Hindu religious narratives and customs of veneration, Rahim is often compared with the *Bhakti* poets – Surdas, Tulsidas, Kabir. The sheer simplicity and felicity of the verses and the pragmatic wisdom which they express, makes him one of the most widely popular poets in all of Hindi literature. Though his Hindavi poems made him a legend, Rahim's Persian poems are also said to be comparable to the masters in Persian poetry.

Rahim, prodigious with the pen as with the sword, became legendary for his generosity and patronage in his own time with great poets composing uncounted verses in praise of him. His library is said to have been the grandest in the Mughal empire. There can be no doubt from the readings of Rahim's poems/ *dohas* and his use of metaphors that he had the deep knowledge and appreciation of Hinduism, a vital ingredient of plurality in society.



CULTURAL SIGNIFICANCE

Rahim also patronised the construction of monumental buildings - canals, tanks, enclosed gardens in Agra, Lahore, Delhi and Burhanpur, among other Indian cities. However, it is the mausoleum he built in AD 1598 for his wife, Mah Banu, that is the grandest of his surviving buildings – inspired by the Architectural style of Humayun's Tomb and, in turn, inspiring the Taj Mahal. On his death, Rahim was also buried in this mausoleum.

Located not far from Mah Banu's father, Atgah Khan's mausoleum, Rahim's mausoleum also stands within the sacred landscape associated with the Dargah of Hazrat Nizamuddin Auliya, the revered 14th century Sufi saint. Today, with over 60 important monuments standing here, this is a significant archaeological zone and a buffer zone of the UNESCO World Heritage Site.

As with Humayun's mausoleum, Rahim built this building on the banks on the river as well. Today's 'Barahpullah Nallah' – including a recent elevated road – was, in the 16th century, seen to be part of River Yamuna's spiritual landscape. In a notable innovation, the mausoleum was built on the riverside terrace -

The conservation effort on the monument has included celebrating Rahim's cultural legacy. (Above) Abdur Rahim Khan-i-Khanan praying to Lord Vishnu, Dated 19th century CE from the Delhi Red Fort Museum Collection, ASI (Middle and Below) Two major publications, 'Celebrating Rahim' (Mapin) and, 'Abdur Rahim Khan-i-Khanan – Kavya, Saundarya, Sarthakta' (Vani Prakashan) have been produced. Both include new research by several scholars on the multi-faceted Rahim and his literary achievements.

not in the centre of the garden. This allowed Rahim to create an incredible water lifting mechanism - sadly no longer surviving - that would have fed the fountains on the terrace of the mausoleum and those of the garden.

From the centre of the southern, river facing façade, a vaulted passage leads to the crypt chamber, with a unique circumambulatory path around the grave platform. Above this stands the lofty tomb chamber roofed by a double dome. Stone medallions of numerous designs, incised plaster patterns - including the sacred Swastika, floral motifs on the wall surfaces adorn the structure.

CONSERVATION

Despite the immense historical, architectural and archaeological significance of the structure and its prominent location on two of Delhi's major transport arteries, Rahim's mausoleum stood in a ruinous condition with a risk of collapse. In 2014, following the completion of conservation works on the Humayun's Tomb World Heritage Site, the inter-disciplinary Aga Khan Trust for Culture team - with the support and partnership of InterGlobe Foundation and the Archaeological Survey of India - commenced a six-year conservation effort. With 175000 man-days of work by master craftsmen, this has been the largest conservation effort ever undertaken at any monument of national importance in India and also the first ever privately undertaken conservation effort under the 'Corporate Social Responsibility'.

A conservation effort of this magnitude and complexity required to benefit from a wide spectrum of advice and over 60 independent peer reviews have been carried out since 2015.

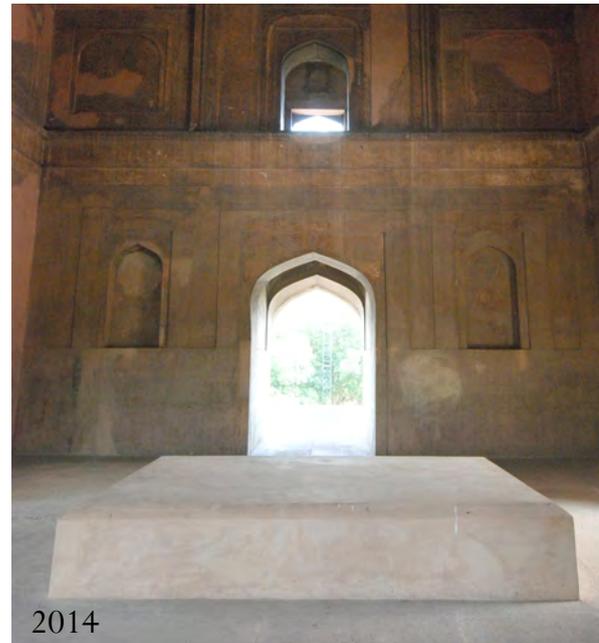
Structural Repairs

Conservation works were preceded with architectural documentation and condition assessment based on a high-definition survey using 3D Laser Scanning technology. Coupled with an intense archival research effort, it was determined that repairing the deep, wide cracks also required underpinning the shallow foundations of portions of the crypt. Carried out under expert supervision, structural repairs by master craftsmen only employed traditional materials and building crafts – giving the structure a lease of life.

Restoration of the ornamentation

Rahim ornamented his wife's mausoleum with diverse motifs – in plaster and stone. As with his poetry, these patterns include both geometric and floral patterns commonly seen in mausoleums but also patterns seen in Hindu buildings – Swastika and Peacock amongst these. Each of the arches of the ground level arcade boast of medallions of varying designs in the spandrels of the arches. Where these was evidence of original design, the medallions were restored, carefully matching the quality of the 16th century craftsmen.

On cleaning layers of soot and 20th century paint layers, the principal tomb chamber and five arched bays on each façade of the ground level arcade were found to be ornamented with breath-taking incised plaster patterns. Careful cleaning, using soft brushes, revealed that much of the ornamentation of the



2014



2019

(Above & Middle) The scientific removal of accumulated layers of paint from the principal chamber revealed breathtaking incised plaster patterns. Where found missing, the floral and geometric patterns were restored. (Bottom) Dangerous structural cracks had developed in the crypt chamber and needed urgent repairs.

principal tomb chamber had survived; its revelation led Prof Ebba Koch to comment, ‘... *the cleaning of the amazing decoration of the inner hall. We can now see again and marvel about the wonderful patterns which decorate the walls and the dome. Your work changes our perception of Mughal monuments*’. Where minor portions of decorative plaster had been replaced with cement-surkhi plaster during past repairs, the modern layers were carefully removed, and the patterns restored.

The sandstone terrace together with the sandstone parapet has also been restored, as has building’s plinth to its original levels and material – thus stabilising the exposed foundations.

Façade

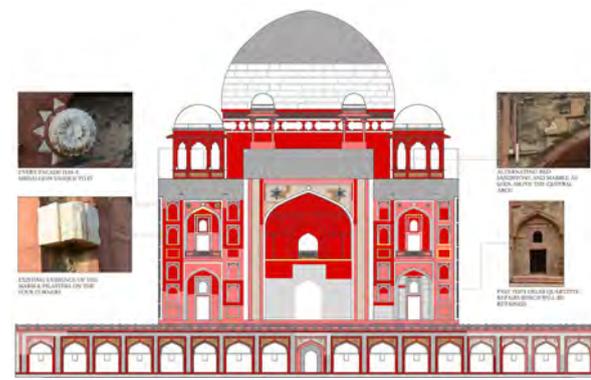
As with Humayun’s Tomb, Rahim’s mausoleum is defined by the red-white contrast. Though built on a grand scale, with quartzite stone masonry walls clad with sandstone and marble, Rahim’s mausoleum had some structurally weak elements such as the four lofty central arches. Possibly, by the 18th century, stone cladding fell away in parts leading to stone – such as on the dome quarried from here. Up till the late 20th century there is evidence of stone from here – from both walls and floors – taken away for use elsewhere.

The red-white contrast created by the use of red sandstone and white marble is considered to be a significant architectural element at Rahim’s mausoleum and its restoration was considered necessary not only to ensure structural stability but also the cultural significance. This was possible as patterns could be discerned on the basis of remaining fragments of stone and archival images. Some of the stone blocks were voluminous, weighing over 3000 kilos, and required innovative measures for craftsmen to restore to the monument.

In the 1920’s, the Archaeological Survey of India provided masonry support to overhanging sandstone blocks on the façade – saving the structure from sure collapse. These 1920’s repair, using Delhi Quartzite stone have been retained during the present conservation effort. No evidence had remained of the facing treatment to the roof level masonry parapet and as such conservation works on this were limited to stitching of cracks.

Dome

The lofty double dome was originally clad with marble – said to have been quarried from here – as older buildings tended to be – for use of Safdarjung’s tomb in the mid-18th century. Though several peer reviews suggested completing the marble cladding on the dome, on the advice of the Archaeological Survey of India, restoration of marble cladding was limited to the base. This served the dual purpose of strengthening the base as well as to indicate to visitors the original finish of the dome. In view of the several opinions expressed on this matter, it is possible that sometime in the future opinion will veer towards completing the marble cladding on the grand dome of Rahim’s mausoleum. On the roof, anastylosis of four canopies was possible with stone elements found at site.



(Above) 3 D laser scanning data was used to make stone-by-stone architectural drawings prior to the conservation effort. (Below) Where intricate plaster patterns were discovered, these could be restored. (Middle) Much of the stone from the facade was removed in the 19th / 20th centuries. Where evidence of original patterns could be discerned, stone cladding was restored. (Bottom) Marble blocks, weighing over 1000 kilos each were partially restored to strengthen the base of the dome.



LANDSCAPE

Built on the riverbanks, Rahim's garden mausoleum stood within an enclosed garden stretching to the Arab Serai in the Humayun's Tomb complex to the north. Sadly, much of this was lost in the 20th century when residential neighbourhoods were built here. More recently, a road to the southern side of the mausoleum disrupted the historic link with the river – now, Nallah.

The terrace water tanks, with a fountain mechanism - incredible feat of hydraulic engineering – give an indication of how important flowing water would have been in these tomb gardens. Within the area available a char-bagh has been created and planted with a citrus orchard. Larger trees have been planted on the periphery to serve as view cutters to the modern buildings beyond. The landscape scheme was able to create a new entry to the garden with a small parking space and permanent exhibition.

ILLUMINATION

Bound by Mathura Road and the Barahpullah elevated road, Rahim's mausoleum has a major impact on the Delhi skyline. The illumination design by **Fifth Dimension Technologies** is accordingly limited to the southern and western facades of the mausoleum.



(Above) Stone blocks were restored to the spandrels of the lofty arches; (Below) A char bagh was created in the available space, planted with citrus orchards; (Right) The variety and diversity of stone motifs on the ground level arcade speaks volumes on Rahim's personality.

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
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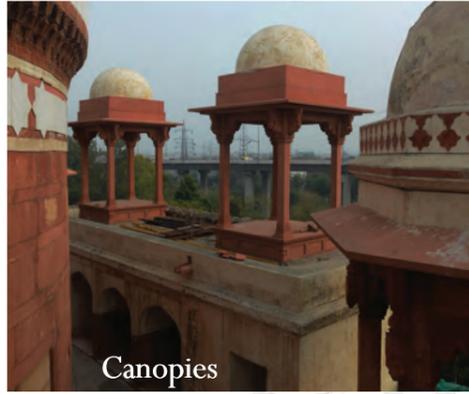
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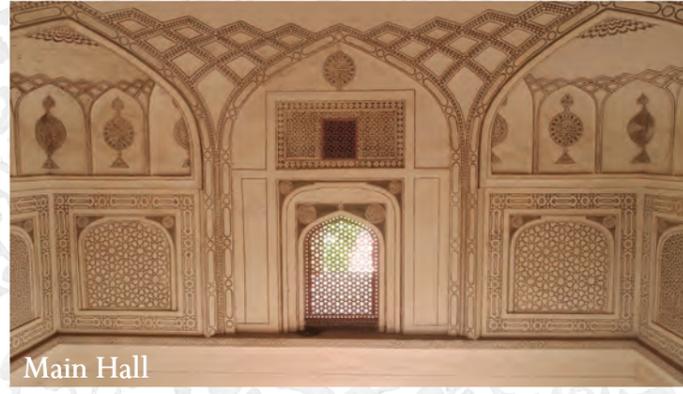
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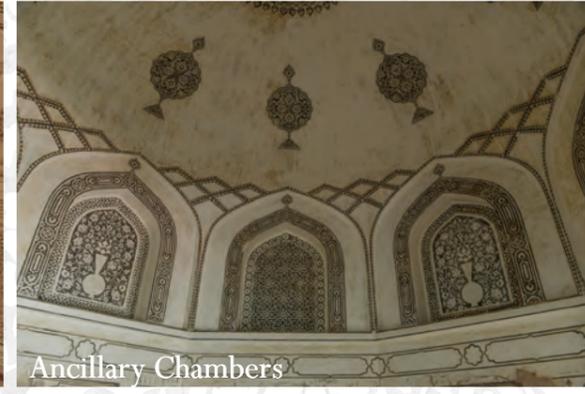
Canopies



Dome



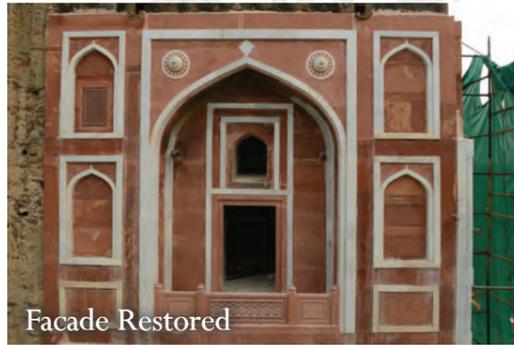
Main Hall



Ancillary Chambers



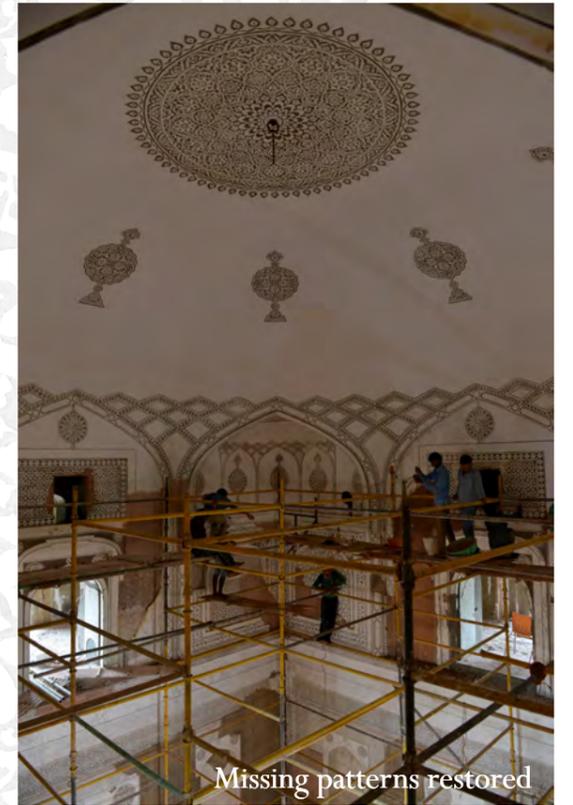
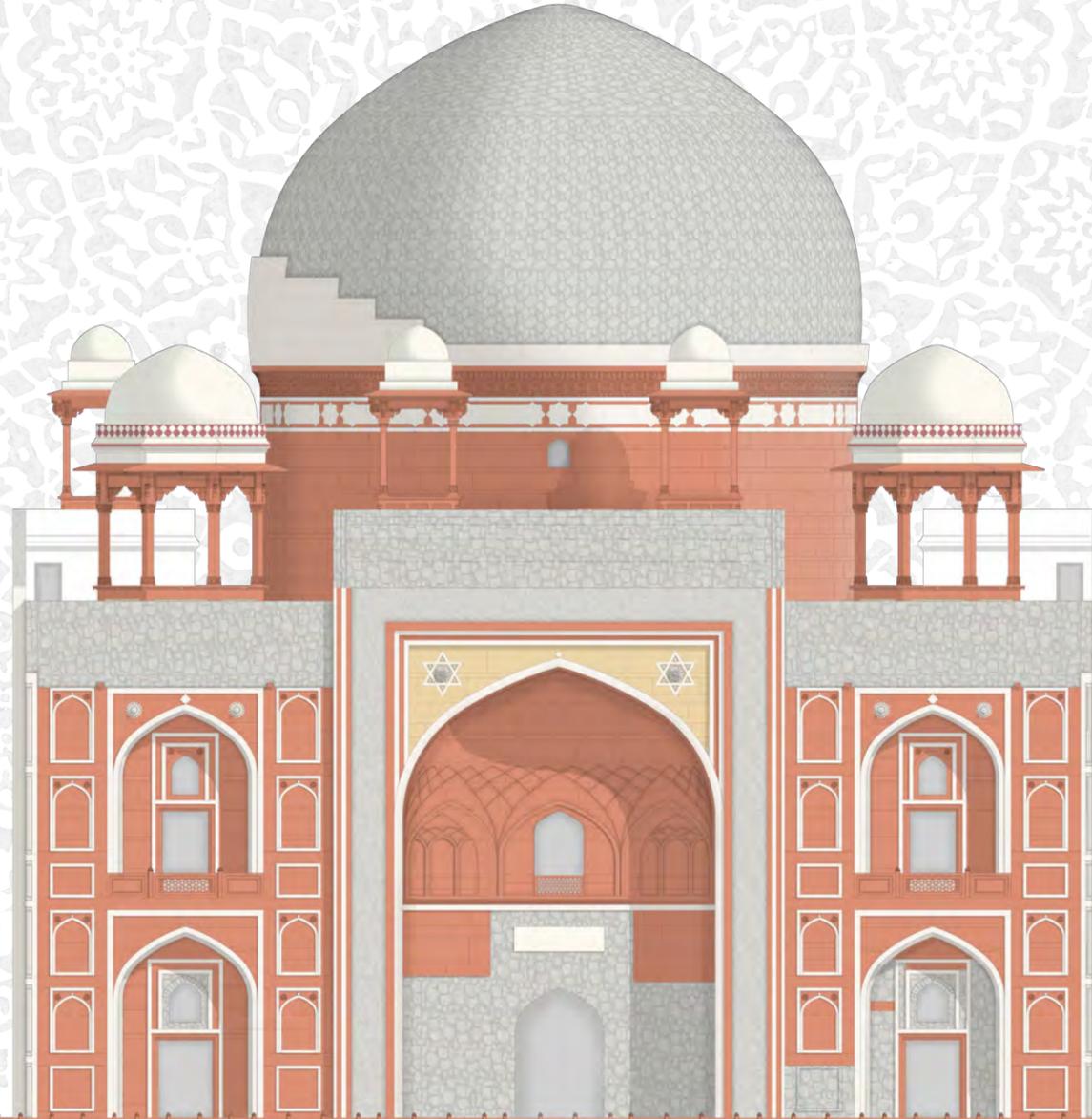
Ceilings Restored



Facade Restored



Lower Arcade



Missing patterns restored

Conservation works were spread across the monument, from Anastylis of the rooftop canopies, restoring the missing stone elements, scientifically cleaning the breathtaking plaster motifs - apart from the structural repairs such as underpinning the foundations.

