



INTACH

DELHI CHAPTER

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### **Editor's Note**

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### **A MONUMENTAL ERROR**

What is it about this photograph of parallel brick walls in a setting somewhat reminiscent of the visuals in Lara Croft: Tomb Raider that is worth contemplating? Why is a man walking through the passage? And why should Hindustan Times readers, who know nothing about this place, to be asked to think about it? The masses of bricks are found near Junagadh, a town in Gujarat famous for reasons that have little to do with the relict walls in the photograph. For one, Junagadh is located close to the majestic Girnar, the highest mountain in Gujarat in whose vicinity stands the historic rock where three ancient monarchs, starting with Asoka, got their edicts inscribed. For another, from the medieval centuries onwards, Junagadh became a centre of worship for Hindu and Jaina pilgrims. The parikrama around Girnar, which such pilgrims undertake from November onwards, remains the most important event in the sacred calendar of the town. Much before its medieval fame as a centre of Jaina and Hindu worship, the hills of Girnar and the area of Junagadh was sacred to the Buddhists. There are several ancient rock hewn caves in and around it with dwelling chambers and water tanks for monks. Impressive foundations of brick built monasteries have also survived and one of these, at Intwa, was set up by the Saka ruler Rudrasena (c. 2nd century AD) for the bhikshu samgha there. These are monuments that are protected and conserved by the Archaeological Survey of India (ASI). What have been practically forgotten, however, are a couple of Buddhist stupas that still stand in the Girnar forest. The walls in the photograph form part of the most impressive of them, known locally as Lakha Medi. The Lakha Medi stupa is built on a rocky knoll, about seven kilometres to the east of Junagadh, in a delightfully secluded valley from where the rugged Girnar and the Datar hill, the highest after Girnar, can be seen. The valley is visited by those who come to pay obeisance at the Bhor Devi temple there. Hardly anyone, though, remembers the presence of a colossal stupa in the jungle adjacent to the temple, originally as large as the great stupa at Sanchi, and one which was excavated in 1889 by JM Campbell of the Bombay Civil Service. Campbell is generally remembered as the compiler of the Bombay District Gazetteers. Less known is the massive cutting that Campbell left behind at Lakha Medi as a consequence of his excavations at the stupa. From the available account of that excavation, it seems that first, the top of Lakha Medi was sliced off to a depth of 22 feet, then a trench 20 feet wide was driven across the stupa (seen in this photograph), followed by further digging, which revealed a stone coffer containing a stone pot in which was found a little copper pot, then a silver box and finally a little gold box. In the gold box were an aquamarine bead, a ruby, a sapphire, an emerald, some coaly grit and a 'relic' described as a flake of burnt stone ware. No inscription was found, but from the still standing solid mass of brick work in herring-bone bond, this seems to be a late centuries BC stupa. No further excavations took place at Lakha Medi. But nor was it repaired. Now its ancient bricks are being used to expand the modern Bhor Devi temple.

In the Girnar jungles, incidentally, it is state foresters and freelance naturalists who know more about the location and state of ancient monuments than archaeologists. My own tryst with the Lakha Medi stupa was made possible because Junagadh's well known nature man, Rasik Bhatt (who can be seen in the photograph) had roamed these forests looking for medicinal herbs and plants. Of course, Lakha Medi's fate — where those who discovered and explored it did it in a way that disfigured and half-ruined it — is not an isolated one. This is true for many stupas across India, including those at Sanchi where the extent of damage was so considerable that a British officer in the 19th century, in discussing the work of the archaeologist Alexander Cunningham, is known to have commented that “a thousand years of time and weather have not done so much injury to the invaluable Topes at Sanchi as was caused by the action of major-general Cunningham.....who years ago mined deep into the Topes in the vain search for coins or inscriptions, and never filled in his excavations.” The difference, though is, that by the time Lakha Medi was dug into, repairs at the Sanchi monuments had begun and, what we see there today — large exposed and conserved stupas and shrines — had been more or less completed by 1919 or so. Sultan Jahan Begum, the ruler of the Bhopal Darbar, was Sanchi's main benefactor. The conservation work undertaken there by John Marshall, director general of the ASI, the construction of the Sanchi museum and the publication of the Sanchi volumes were largely financed by her Darbar. Sanchi is now a World Heritage site but Lakha Medi still remains forgotten. Surely, with so many programmes that speak of adopting monuments, can an archaeological saviour for this forgotten stupa step forward? Such a saviour is urgently required if future generations are to remember Girnar not only for the wildlife that thrives in its beautiful forests but also for the historic heritage that these forests have protected. Nayanjot Lahiri is professor at the Department of History, University of Delhi. The views expressed by the author are personal.

#### **SOURCE**

**20th April 2011, Hindustan Times**

#### **FINALLY, ASI BEGINS WORK ON RED FORT FACELIFT**

Years after the comprehensive conservation plan for Red Fort was outsourced by the Archaeological Survey of India (ASI), the work for giving the 17th century monument a makeover seems to be taking off finally. It's not just the Mughal-era structures inside the Fort that are getting a facelift, the colonial-era barracks are also being repaired so that the existing museums inside the Fort can be shifted to them. For the first time ASI is working on a plan to recreate the intrinsic Mughal inlay works in the two Sawan Bhadon pavilions, for which specially trained craftsmen have been engaged. Historians claim the inlay works were typically Shah Jahan style but they had gone missing during the British rule. “For years the inlay work was missing in several patches in the pavilions; only the groves were left. The original design of the inlay work was traced through archival images and it took months for the preparatory work to start recreating the designs,” said an ASI official. Structural conservation work on two major structures inside the Fort – Naubad Khana and Rang Mahal – has also been taken up in phases, though ASI officials admit that it will take at least two years for them to complete the work. “We are concerned about funds for the project. Our budget for the next financial year is Rs 5 crore, and with 173 monuments to look after, we need to see how much can be allocated to each monument. While Naubad Khana required some plaster work urgent repair was needed in Rang Mahal. We also plan to soon take up the makeover work on the shops inside the Fort but for that we will need to talk to the market association first,” said officials. Two of the British-built barracks were given a facelift about two years ago and by the end of this year two more barracks will don a new look. “These barracks are a part of the Fort's history, and for years they remained in a state of neglect. We are planning to shift all the three museums inside the Fort to these barracks. The tourism department wanted one of the barracks for opening another museum but that plan did not work out. We are yet to decide on how to utilize the fourth barrack which is undergoing renovation,” said an ASI official. While the structures inside the Fort are getting the much-needed attention, ASI's new circulation plan for visitors inside the Fort is yet to take off.

The plan linking the various monuments inside the Fort was first proposed more than two years ago and it was to be implemented in phases. In phase-I, visitors will enter through Naubad Khana, walk towards Diwane-Aam and then move left towards the main palace area from where they will be able to see the Moti Masjid, Hamam, Rang Mahal one after the another. Visitors will then go towards the Mumtaz Mahal museum and walk alongside it towards the new publication counter set up by ASI.

**SOURCE**

**20th April 2011, Times of India**

**PLANS AFOOT FOR REVIVAL OF QAWWALI TRADITION IN NIZAMUDDIN**

The Nizamuddin Basti, the centre of Hindustani culture for centuries, will soon come alive with qawwali performances in its authentic settings. In an effort to revive qawwali traditions and bring alive its roots in the Nizamuddin Basti, the Aga Khan Trust for Culture (AKTC) is documenting and archiving qawwali traditions, and now also handpicking children from traditional qawwal families to train them to carry the tradition forward. While preserving the dying qawwali tradition, the Trust hopes to simultaneously create spaces in the Nizamuddin Basti, like the Chaunsath Khamba, the Central Park opposite the MCD school and the Dargah, where regular performances can take place. As part of a cultural revival initiative called the 'Aalam-e-Khusrau', co-funded by the Ford Foundation, the Trust is facilitating public performances, discussions, research, archiving and documenting, research fellowships, scholarship programmes and multimedia exhibitions on Khusrau. Since its beginning in the 13th-14th Century by the Sufi Saint Hazrat Nizamuddin Auliya in Ghiyaspur, qawwali is said to have been adapted in many situations and variations, but all of them display the distinct musical style and structure of the present-day qawwali. Amir Khusrau, the most beloved disciple of Hazrat Nizamuddin Auliya, supposedly created this style of music as a form of veneration. Scholars, however, say the tradition is now dying out. Children in qawwal families are found to carry the tradition forward, but without any formal knowledge of music. To train them, AKTC is now in the process of hand-picking children from these families from the Nizamuddin Basti, Chitli Qabar in Old Delhi and Fatehpur Sikri. They will be sent to maestros in classical music for formal training. Last year, the 'Jashn-e-Khusrau' programme included khanaqahi qawwali performances, poetry-reading, lectures and discussions on qawwali and Amir Khusrau, exhibitions depicting the world of Dargah Hazrat Nizamuddin and the Basti area urban renewal projects, as well as heritage walks through the settlement of the Hazrat Nizamuddin Basti. A similar programme is being planned for 2012, when a travelling exhibition-cum-workshop will also travel to UP, Rajasthan, Punjab, and Jammu-Kashmir, where the AKTC is documenting and archiving the existing qawwali traditions. The AKTC has also put forth a suggestion to the Ministry of Culture to set up an Amir Khusrau Resource Centre that can house books, manuscripts, illustrations, recordings and artifacts pertaining to Khusrau's legacy. The AKTC has proposed that the centre be located in the Nizamuddin area, while regular events can be organised at central locations like the India International Centre and monuments such as Chaunsath Khamba that will create an interface between performers and scholars to ensure that Khusrau's legacy is carried on. "Qawwali traditions initiated by Hazrat Amir Khusrau here in the Nizamuddin area in the 14th Century are as much our contribution to the world's heritage as Humayun's Tomb. Hopefully this programme will lead to the revival of the pure art and generate greater interest amongst the younger generation while giving the qawwals new performance venues and greater recognition," Ratish Nanda, project director, AKTC, told Newslite. "Nizamuddin Basti has been the cradle of Hindustani culture for 700 years and we hope to revive it through these programmes."

**SOURCE**

## PERSIAN PATTERNS EMERGE IN BURJ REVIVAL

It was history lost in the vagaries of nature. But now it's being revived to its old grandeur. This 16th century tomb inside Sunder Nursery near the Humayun's Tomb complex may resemble just another monument, but once inside you will hold your breath in awe. The ornamental ceiling laden with exquisite floral patterns is awe-inspiring and gives you a glimpse of the exquisite architecture of the Persians. Heritage experts say this is comparable to a wall painting or reminiscent of Persian wooden ceilings and one of the most unique patterns found in the country. The Mughal-period Sunderwala Burj is one of the nearly dozen monuments dotting the Sunder Nursery, which has been taken up for conservation by the Aga Khan Trust for Culture (AKTC) in collaboration with the Archaeological Survey of India and the central public works department (CPWD). But its interiors laced with incised platter and bands of Quranic inscriptions is what sets this early 16th century monument apart. Skilled craftsmen took over eight months to reveal these patterns in floral and star-shaped designs on the ceiling and walls in the interiors of the burj. AKTC officials said while about 20% of the patterns had to be recreated by the craftsmen, the rest involved a massive cleaning job. This included removing centuries of soot deposits and dirt. The project, which has been co-funded by the American Ambassador's Fund for Cultural Preservation, commenced last September and is expected to take another few months. Officials said decades of water seepage from the dome and ceiling had led to some of the ornamentation being lost and remaining portions covered with deposits that require to be carefully cleaned to restore its glory. "The architectural homogeneity, disfigured by successive coats of 20th century cement plaster and modern paints, had to be restored with a traditional lime plaster mixed with traditional ingredients such as marble dust, egg white, molasses, lentil, fruit pulp and brick dust. The conservation works were preceded by several scientific studies over a year, including a 3D laser scan documentation, to record the detailed patterns and an analysis of mortar samples" said Sangeeta Bais, conservation architect, Aga Khan Trust. Added AKTC chief engineer Rajpal Singh: "It was important for us to save the ornamental ceiling from deterioration, the lime plaster on the dome forms a long lasting protective layer and since traditional materials such as gur and belgiri have been used, the patina will return with the monsoon." Besides the interior work, the exterior façade of the structure has also been given a makeover with the usage of lime plaster which, conservationists said. This will prevent further decay by limiting damage caused by water seepage. AKTC and CPWD are also working towards implementing a sensitive landscaping of the setting of the tomb and are planning to connect it via pathways with Sunderwala Mahal, located just a few feet away. Historians say these two monuments originally stood within an enclosure and entry was through a lofty gateway. **RESTORING THE PAST** The 16th century Sunderwala Burj is among the earliest buildings built during the Mughal period in Delhi. It is located in Sunder Nursery opposite Humayun's Tomb. It is known for its ornamental ceiling with star patterns and plant motifs. Reminiscent of Persian wooden ceilings. Seepage on dome disfigured ornamentation and some portions are covered with deposits that need to be carefully cleaned. Architectural homogeneity, disfigured by successive coats of cement plaster and modern paints, needed to be restored with traditional lime plaster mixed with traditional ingredients such as marble dust, egg white, molasses, lentil, fruit pulp and brick dust. Conservation work commenced in September and is expected to be completed before the arrival of monsoon.

**SOURCE**

**22nd April 2011, Times of India**

## NEGLECTED NEELA HAUZ IS CHOKING ON FILTH

Plans for its restoration were drawn up amid much fanfare, but without their implementation, south Delhi's Neela Hauz has got filled with weeds and the adjoining Sanjay Van jheel has become a haven for mosquitoes. Ironically, Sanjay Van was the site chosen by DDA to celebrate Earth Day this year. Schoolchildren, who were taken on nature trails, immediately asked why the water in the lake was so filthy and frothy, a question that officials hurried to dodge. However, the presence of pollutants in the water is hard to miss. Sources say that untreated sewage from nearby colonies is carried to the Yamuna through Sanjay Van and nearby Deer Park. "The sight of mosquito breeding in this area was scary. It is already quite hot and while the government will soon launch a drive against mosquito-related diseases, nobody will even think of Sanjay Van. Fish that could have eaten the mosquito larvae are not even present in the water due to its high toxic levels. The entire water body is full of sewage," said a resident of Vasant Kunj, who attended the Earth Day celebrations on Friday morning. Professor C R Babu, professor emeritus Delhi University, who had drawn up the plans for restoration of Neela Hauz, said: "Both Sanjay Van lakes and Neela Hauz are in a terrible condition. At Sanjay Van, the raw sewage has ensured that there is no wetland community left there that can kill off the mosquito larvae. Neela Hauz is populated with not just water hyacinth but a new weed of the Alternanthera family that indicates eutrophication – conversion of the site into a terrestrial eco-system. Neela Hauz restoration should be taken up before the monsoon season and it will take at least one year before any signs of improvement can be seen." Those who visit the area regularly say that Sanjay Van's condition can be improved much sooner if only the government directs the raw sewage to a sewage treatment plant. "An STP exists and all the government has to do is to ensure that sewage is treated before it is allowed to enter Sanjay Van. This will show immediate results and one need not wait for the restoration of Neela Hauz," said Dr Surya Prakash, a bird watcher. He added: "The poor quality of water and plastic and polythene waste that dots the water body is not just odious but also detrimental for birds. Barely any migratory birds come here since there is no food for them. The reed bed provides an ideal nesting ground for weaver birds but they also don't come here as there is no food for them. Black-Headed Ibises, again very rare, can be seen here but the habitat is not favourable for them and they could be lost too." While DDA gets the plan cleared, Delhiites have taken matters in their own hands. Retd Air Vice Marshal Vinod Rawat who has been campaigning for Sanjay Van for several years, has involved children in a drive to reintroduce native Aravali tree species in the area. "Over three months we have planted 3,000 saplings. On Friday, we specially arranged for a native variety called Khejri and planted about 50 of those. We are trying to sensitize people to the issue now and create awareness about the problems that plague it at present," he said.

[SOURCE](#)

**Should you have any comments or suggestions, you could reach us at**

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