

# The Delhi Landscape Programme

*"Can a political nerve centre, so close to the political skin of the state and so far from its sustaining social heart, be considered in the long run either viable or permanent?"*<sup>1</sup>

In the recent paper cited above, Professor Spear cogently argues that Delhi's intermittant growth over the past 3000 years was essentially the result of strategic and political factors which lead to its being repeatedly chosen as a capital. His conclusion is that Delhi remains India's post-colonial, but frontier, capital partly for reasons of prestige and of habit, but also because of the expense involved in removing it elsewhere, and the lack of consensus at present on an alternative. "It is then", he states, "with no positive case for continuance, that we may find that the glory of Delhi will depart almost as suddenly as it was thrust upon her in 1912".<sup>2</sup>

It would seem almost imperative that one keep in mind this historico-political framework when appraising the remarkable efforts of the Delhi Development Authority since 1969 to create a total system of landscaped areas within metropolitan Delhi. Three aspects of this vast operation, which has yielded 4800 hectares of reforestation and landscaping in the region, are particularly important:

- 1) the functional objectives (improved hygiene, rational urban land development, ecological balance, etc),
- 2) aesthetic and cultural motives and
- 3) the political concerns.

The DDA from its creation in 1961 has focussed its energies on developing a Master Plan for the city, whose population has grown from 500,000 inhabitants in 1950 to 6 million in 1980, and also on pursuing a policy of preservation, improvement and coordination of a variety of dispersed areas to form a green belt around Delhi. This broad-scale approach, which began with 870 hectares in 1969, has sought to integrate plots of land along two main axes, the ridge to the west of the city and the Jamuna river on the east, into a continuous urban infrastructure. It was a matter of improving and linking together free land, particularly around existing ruins of the seven previous city-sites or else it involved slum clearance around monuments, such as the Jama Masjid, which continue also to play a role in the daily lives of inhabitants and visitors alike.

While garden design has a long history in India, including the marvellous heritage of the Mughal Empire, the present scheme nonetheless clearly has affinities with the planning principles incorporated by Sir Edwin Lutyens in his conception of New Delhi after 1912. Coming to India fresh

from the contemporary debates in Great Britain concerning the garden city planning theories of Howard and Unwin, and inspired by the historical dimension of the site, Lutyens paid considerable attention to integrating his new imperial capital with the architectural and archeological remains of the previous capitals. A curious blend of monumentality (in his building designs and his boulevards) with rurality characterised New Delhi from the beginning, seeking to project an image of cohesiveness between the present and the past. It goes without further reiteration that Lutyens' goals at the time were as much political as social and cultural.

The DDA project continues this tradition of using the archeological vestiges in the landscape as a focus for new park design, the purpose being to establish recreation areas for old Delhi's densely-concentrated population, while preserving and promoting appreciation of India's cultural heritage. Over seventy operations have been undertaken since the programme began, such as the Mehrauli complex with the celebrated Qutb Minar, Tughlaqabad, Eidgah, Purana Qila, the Lodhi gardens and the Haus Khas.

The labour force has been domestic, 90% of which is unskilled. Total expenditures have been on the order of US\$35 million, of which nearly 68% was for land and 28% in labour.

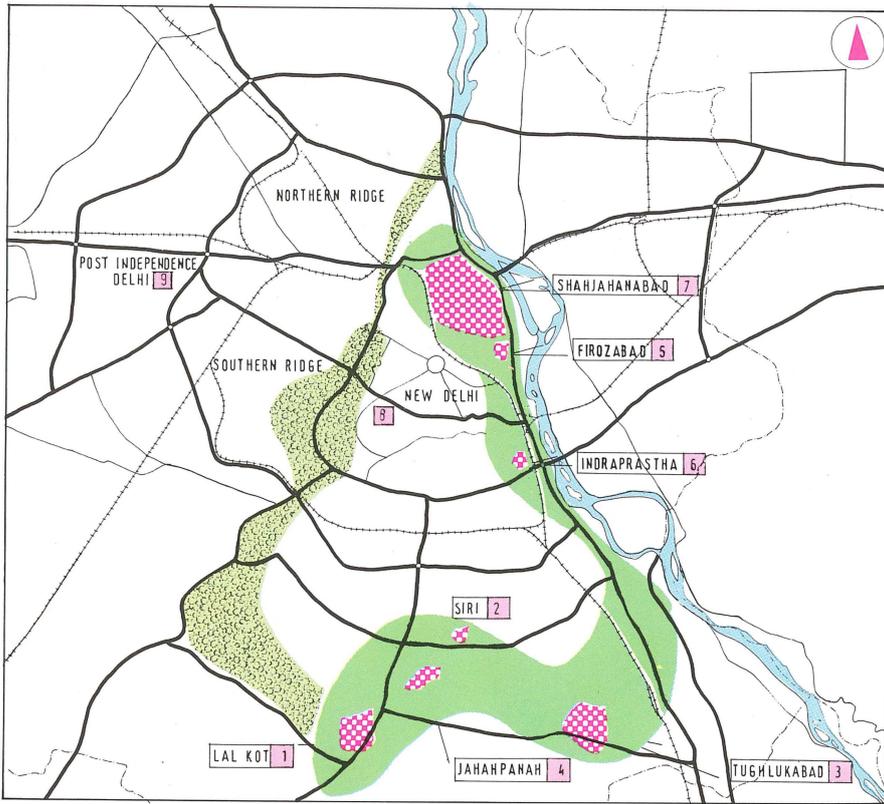
In some instances, urban wasteland or undeveloped wilderness areas were transformed into natural rock gardens or into fruit orchards and flower gardens. The emphasis wherever possible has been to create natural entities which would require a minimum of subsequent financial outlay for maintenance. Picnic areas and playgrounds have been set up on selected sites as part of the policy to rejuvenate zones around monuments. This comprehensive land-use policy, in which wildlife preserves, archeological monuments, and recreation facilities have been linked in continuous green belts, has produced a significant model of what can be accomplished by a regional development authority.

A more controversial tactic adopted by the DDA is that of slum clearance. Until 1974 this problem was the responsibility of the Municipal Corporation of Delhi. This responsibility was transferred at that time to the DDA, which is ultimately answerable to the central government. The same policy of beautification implemented on a regional basis was applied to certain key monuments in densely populated and built-up neighbourhoods of inner Shahjahanabad (the original name of old Delhi), such as the Jama Masjid, principal mosque of the city. A radical surgical operation was executed to remove structures abutting the mosque which were considered unsanitary, dilapidated and unsightly.

*This article is based upon data and original drawings by the Delhi Development Authority. Photographs by D. Sareen.*

<sup>1</sup>Percival Spear, "Delhi: Interrupted Growth", in *The City in South Asia*, London, 1980

<sup>2</sup>ibid p. 66



Left: The Cities of Delhi: The present urban area dates back to the 12th century A.D. Before India was colonised by the British, there were seven sites of previous cities (numbers 1 to 7). New Delhi was planned by Lutyens (number 8) and since Independence in 1947 the city has expanded greatly to the north-west (number 9).

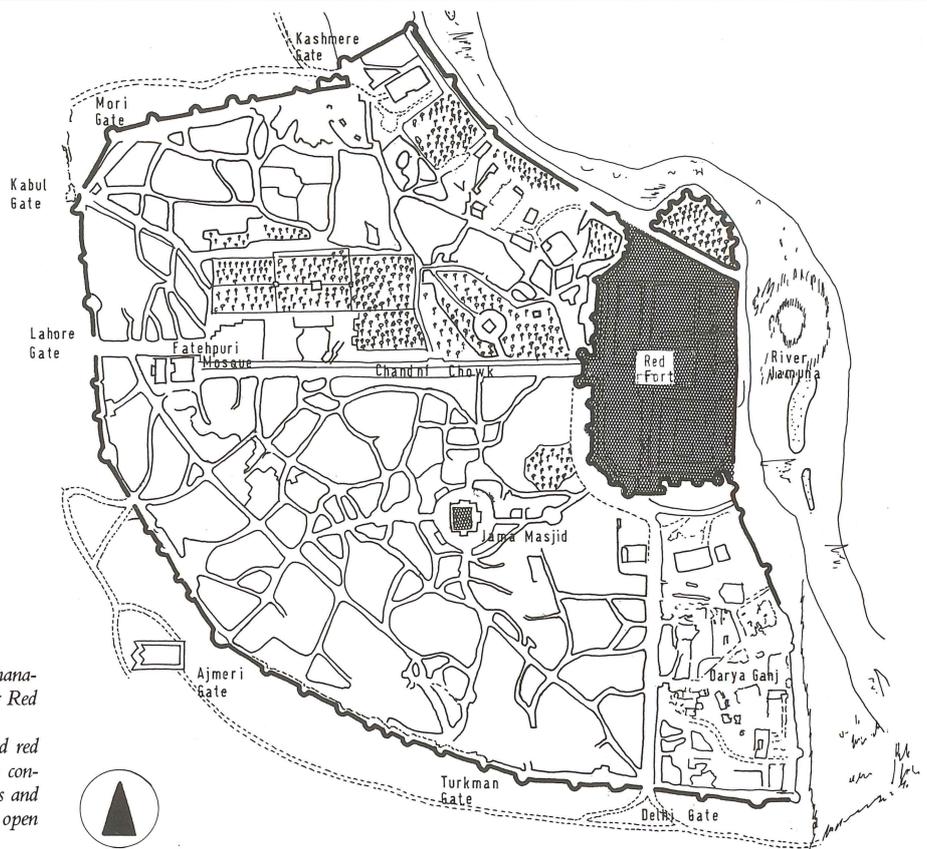
The Delhi Development Authority's landscape programme links the cities, monuments and existing open spaces in two green belts. One of these belts runs along the Jamuna River and the other along the ridge west of the city.

KEY

- Landscaped programme areas
- Landscaped and restored monuments

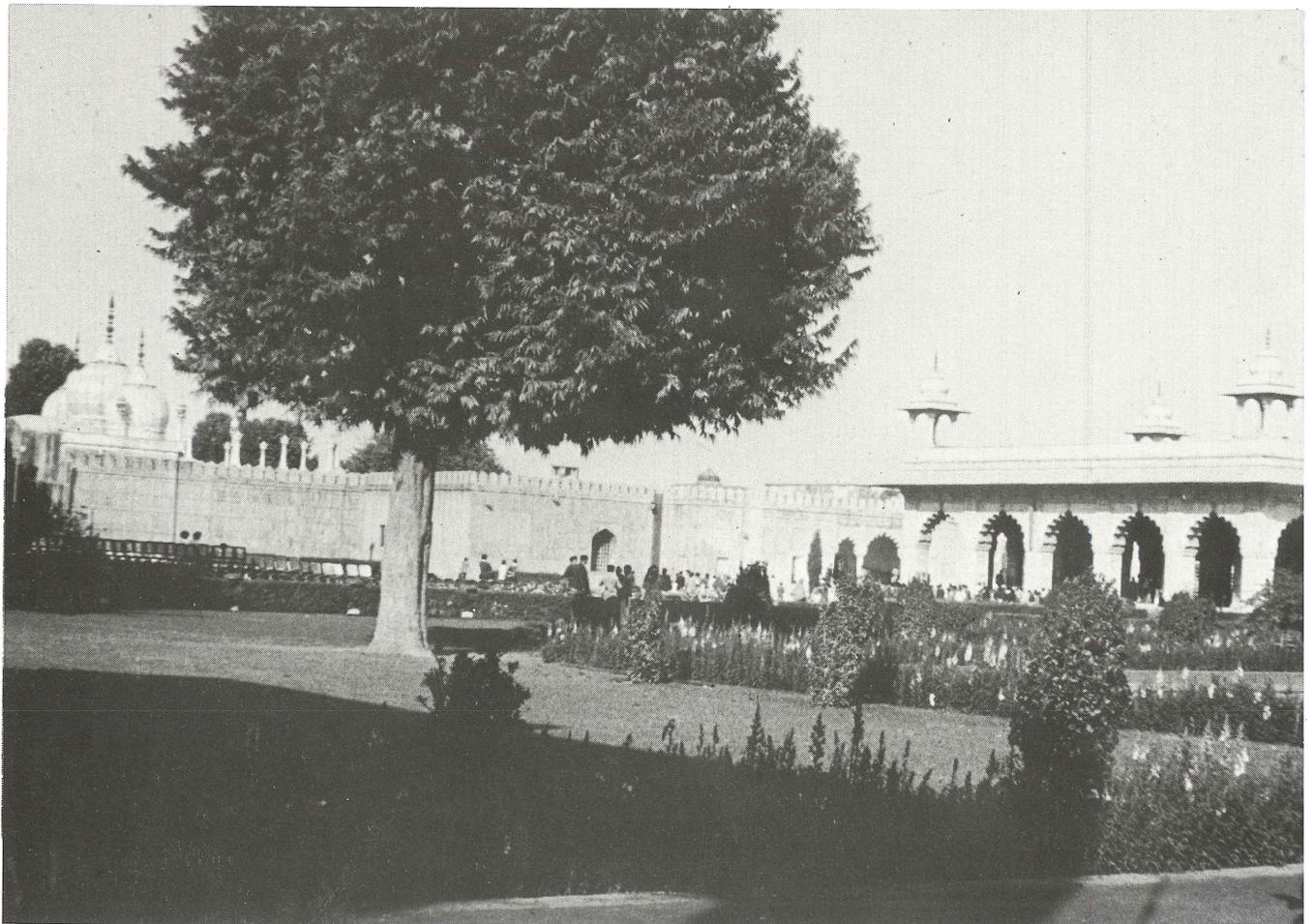
Below: Tomb of Khan Khana, a Mogul nobleman who died in 1627. This mausoleum, erected only a few years before the Taj Mahal, reflects a revival of the architectural style used in the tomb of Humayun, also near Delhi.

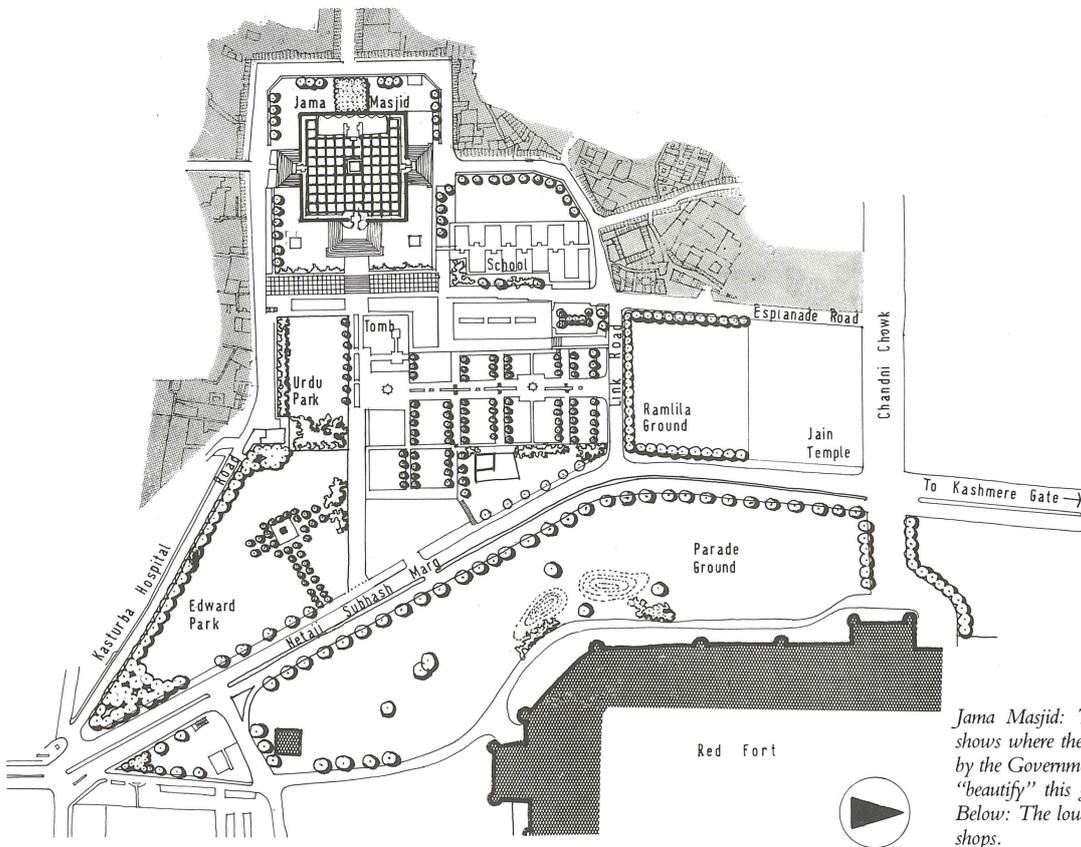




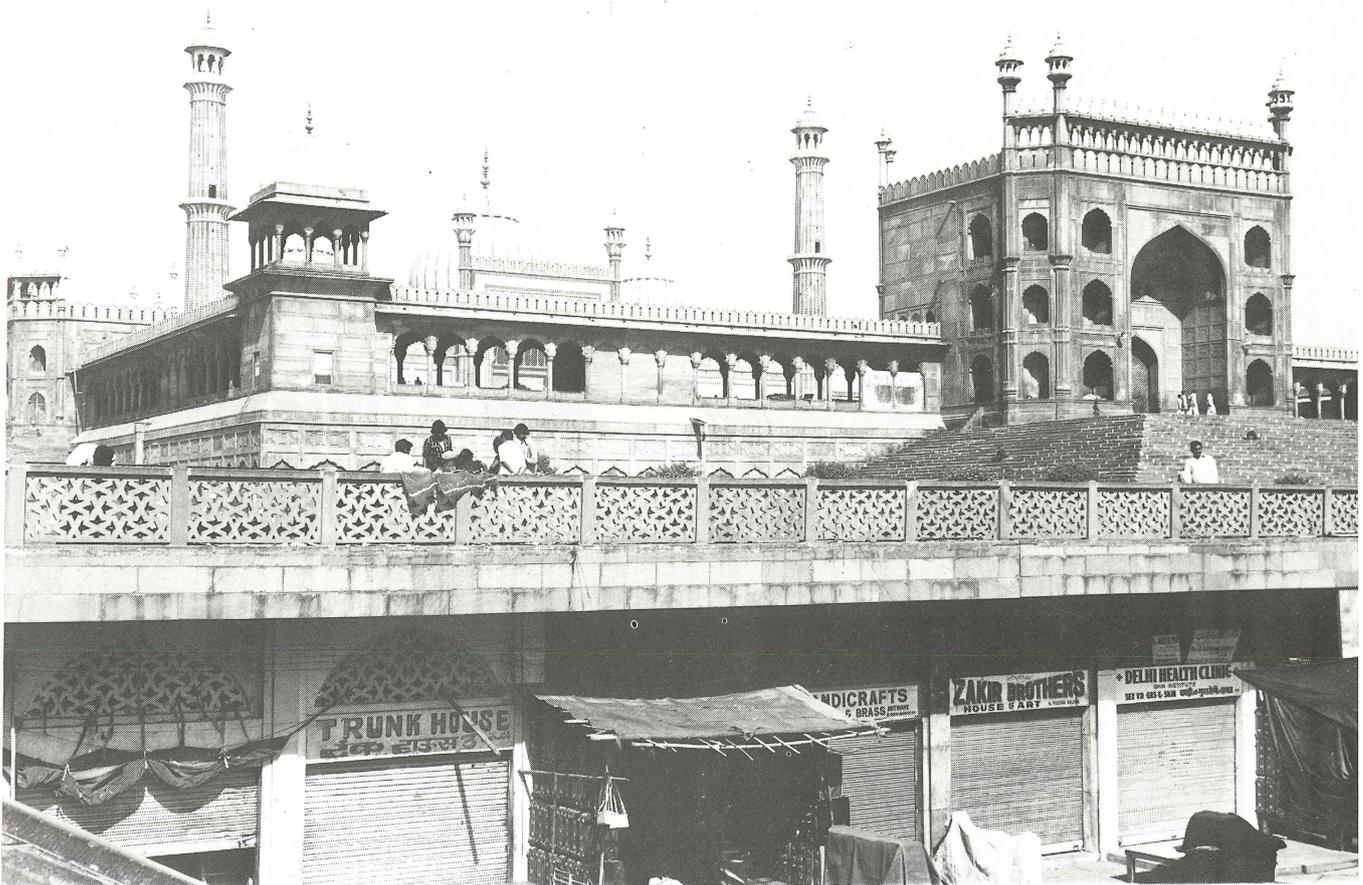
*Shahjahanabad: To many people Delhi is Shahjahanabad; the walled city with its famous Lal Quila (or Red Fort) and the Jama Masjid.*

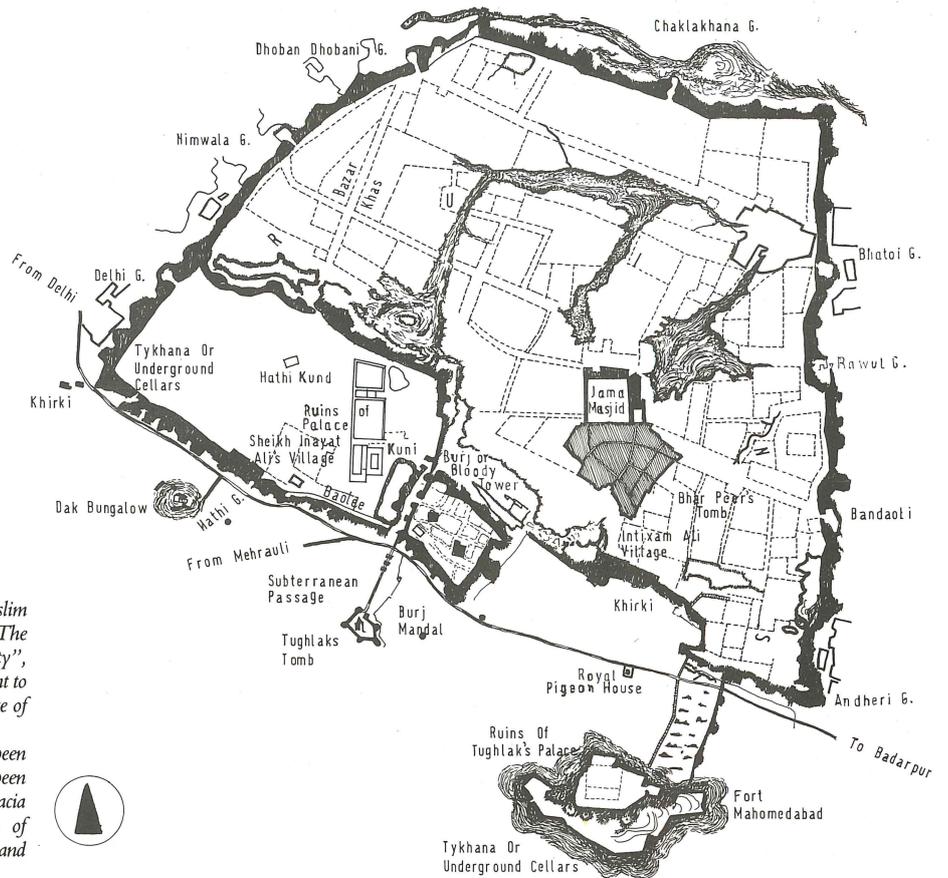
*Below: Grassy greens with flag-stone squares and red sand-stone pathways and buildings form pleasing contrasts in the sunlight. The formal Mughal gardens and water courses give way to more informal green open spaces.*





*Jama Masjid: The shaded area around the mosque shows where the urban squatters were forcibly removed by the Government, in a controversial action, in order to "beautify" this great building.  
Below: The lower level of the Masjid is surrounded by shops.*

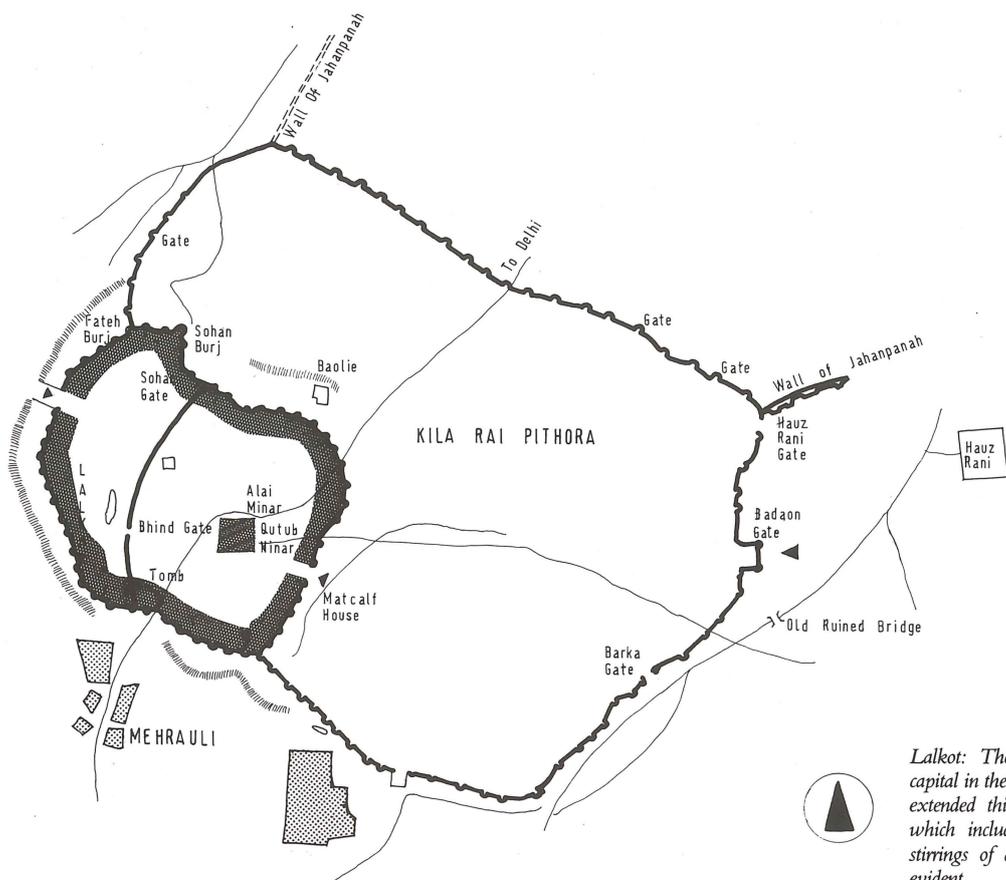




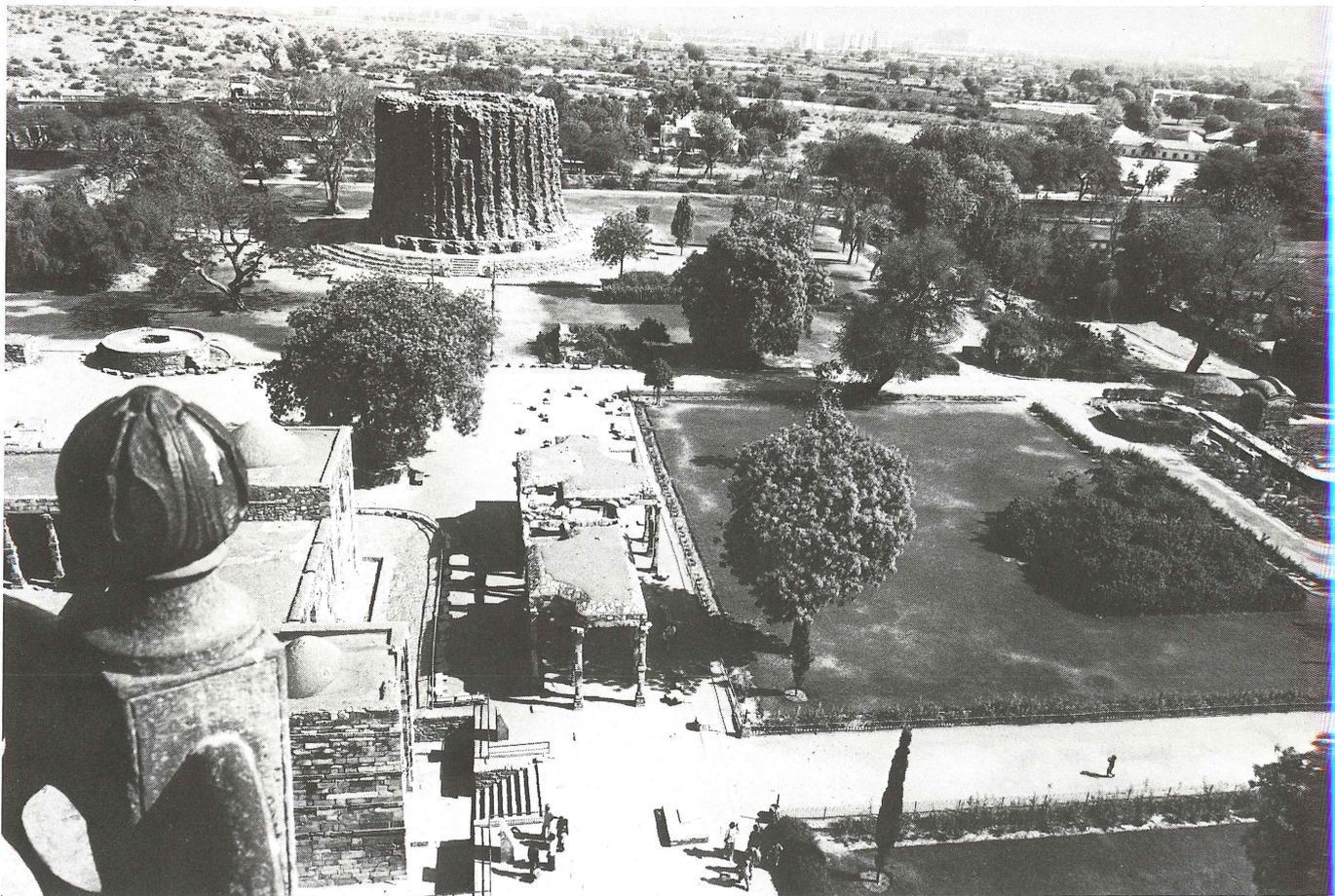
Tughlakabad: The Tughlaqs formed the first Muslim dynasty in India with truly national ambitions. The Tughlaqs, often referred to as the "Slave Dynasty", were great builders and the massive fort is a monument to their reign. Over the centuries the city fell into a state of disrepair.

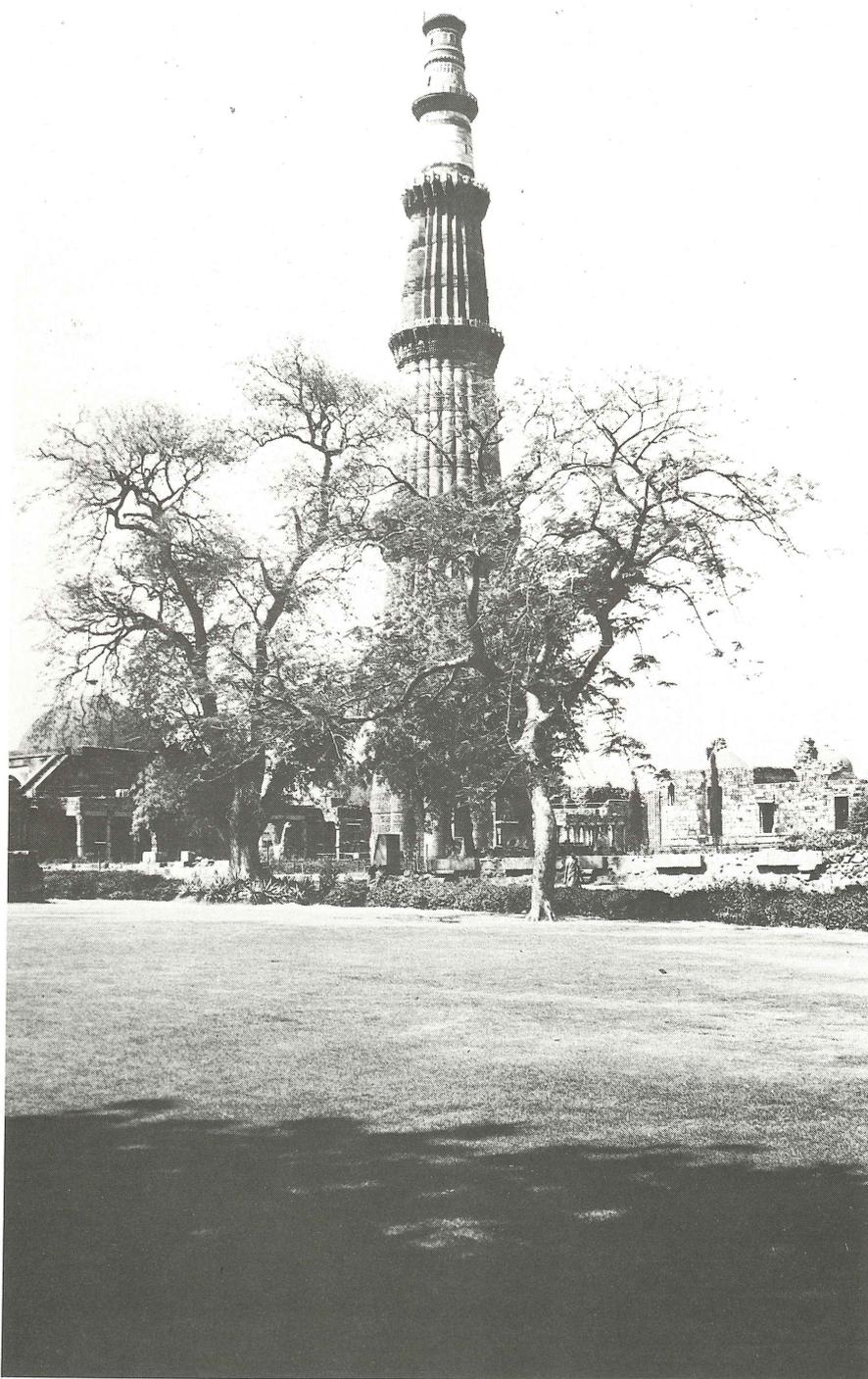
Two thousand acres around the Fort have been landscaped and developed into forest. The land has been planted with a wide variety of trees, such as the *Acacia Arabica*, *Eugenia Jambolana*, and several kinds of *Ficus*. Other more exotic *Cassia*, *Eucalyptus* and bamboo lend the area its colour.





*Lalkot: The early Rajas of Delhi established their capital in the south of the present city. The Slave Kings extended this area into what is known as Lalkot, which includes the famous Qutb Minar. The first stirrings of an Islamic architectural style in India is evident.*





Redistribution of the population and the consequent dismantling of the economic structure of the neighbourhood (only half of the residents were relocated in the new bazaar) in the cause of beautifying the area around one of Shahjahanabad's major monuments was, among other things, a highly political matter, the repercussions of which still warrant further analysis. In any case, from an urban development point of view, the strategy of conservation of monuments (be they of Hindu or Muslim origin)

*The Qutb Minar*

for recreation and tourist activities and of beautification of surrounding open lands is strongly conditioned by Delhi's present role as political and administrative capital, and decisions are without doubt made as a function of this role. Institutionalised governmental prerogatives, such as image-making, often overshadow immediate social needs which have lower 'visibility'.

