

# Hazrat Nizamuddin Basti

DELHI, INDIA

Located in the heart of New Delhi, adjacent to Humayun's Tomb complex and Sunder Nursery, Hazrat Nizamuddin Basti is named after the revered saint Hazrat Nizamuddin Auliya, who lived here in the early fourteenth century. A settlement developed at this location during the saint's lifetime and it has been continuously inhabited.

Following the successful restoration of Humayun's Tomb Garden in 2004, the urban renewal project commenced with the signature of a public-private partnership 'Memorandum of Understanding' on 11 July 2007. The non-profit partnership includes the Archaeological Survey of India, the Central Public Works Department, the Municipal Corporation of Delhi (MCD), the Aga Khan Foundation (AKF) and the Aga Khan Trust for Culture (AKTC).

Nizamuddin Basti comprises a resident population of approximately 20,000. A synergistic, community centred and collaborative approach has been adopted to improve the quality of life for residents through a series of multi-input projects that aims to improve the urban environment, conserve monuments, develop public parks, strengthen basic services through interventions in the three core areas of health, education and environmental sanitation and engage community participation through a regular series of cultural activities and performances. In so doing, the project seeks to integrate conservation, socio-economic development and urban and environmental development objectives in consultation with local communities and relevant stakeholders. All programmes commenced following a quality of life assessment study.

In 2009 a physical mapping/survey of the Basti was undertaken to document the area with the intention of planning sensitive urban improvements. The survey has led to the preparation of street improvement plans which will be implemented by the Municipal Corporation of Delhi. Small public parks are being planned along the western edge of the Basti in areas that are deteriorating and are no longer safe and clean. These spaces will be landscaped to fulfil the needs expressed by the resident community. These parks will bring much needed community space and nodes of civic life back to the area and improve pedestrian circulation through the Basti, and there will be parks earmarked for women, children, cricket, community functions and weddings.



Craftsmen are fitting sandstone *jali* screens at the Baoli.

Opposite page:  
Children are being taught at the refurbished Municipal Corporation of Delhi Primary School.



- |                                     |   |                     |                                       |
|-------------------------------------|---|---------------------|---------------------------------------|
| 1 School                            | 5 Conservation of Hazrat Nizamuddin Baoli | 7 Barah Khamba      | 10 Dargah of Hazrat Nizamuddin Auliya |
| 2 Open Space Restoration            | 6 Conservation of Chaunsath Khamba        | 8 Lal Mahal         | 11 Tilangani's Tomb                   |
| 3 Construction of Community Toilets |   | 9 Atgah Khan's Tomb | 12 Kali Mosque                        |
| 4 Street Redevelopment              |   |                     |                                       |
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100m

## Project Scope/Objectives

The project combines conservation with a major socio-economic development effort that is being implemented through a community-centred, collaborative approach. The objective is to improve environmental conditions and strengthen essential urban services with interventions in the core areas of education, health and sanitation.







Above, noted poet Mirza Ghalib's tomb setting was enhanced by landscaping the court and creating an enclosure with stone *jali* screens to be used for *mushairas* (poetry readings) and other performances.

Below left, conservation works on the Baoli were initiated following the collapse of portions of this 13th-century stepped well; right, a view of the Baoli after the work.

The conservation of monuments and the rehabilitation of open spaces in the Basti aim to restore their intrinsic cultural, historical and spiritual significance. Using state-of-the-art technology, including ground-penetrating radar survey, high-definition 3D laser scanning and geotechnical assessments, conservation started on the fourteenth-century Baoli (step-well).

At the eastern edge of the Basti stand two important tombs: the Chaunsath Khamba, a Mughal tomb, and the tomb of Mirza Ghalib, South Asia's most renowned poet. Together, they form one of the largest open spaces in the Basti. Landscape works at both tombs have enhanced the historic character, restored dignity to these monuments and provided much needed community gathering spaces in this dense setting.

Social programmes in conjunction with the AKF have focused on education, training, health and the environment. In the first place the major effort towards primary education improvement has included a refurbishment of the MCD primary school, interventions to improve quality of education through professional development of faculty, improved classroom processes/child centred to teaching-learning process, better school management and strengthened school community approaches interface. Secondly, vocational training programmes for young people include a career development centre (NIIT Institute of Technology), the teaching of the English language (British Council) and training of heritage guides to give tours of the Basti and its history, while learning support



to students in the age group of fourteen to sixteen years is given in Maths and English ('English Access Micro-Scholarship Programme' co-funded by the US Embassy).

In parallel with these procedures health interventions in the Basti include upgrading the MCD Polyclinic to ensure better diagnosis and treatment, reduce referrals and build the capacity of a community health outreach team for preventive health care, as well as the creation of a pathology laboratory. Finally, newly built public toilets – a key intervention for urban renewal in the Basti – have improved access to hygienic sanitation for residents.

As part of the urban renewal project there is a focus on cultural initiatives. A rich cultural vein, particularly in music and poetry, has existed in the Basti for centuries and drives the lifeblood of the community. This is where Amir Khusrau, musician, poet, scholar, Sufi mystic and spiritual disciple of Hazrat Nizamuddin Auliya, started Qawwali music traditions in the thirteenth century. This tradition continues to this day. The 'living culture' of the area is a unique and vibrant blend of secular and interfaith elements that encompass the performing arts, classical music, poetry and traditional crafts. Improvement in the life of the residents must also include initiatives that embrace the creativity and talent nurtured in this environment and that are core to its identity. Steps are being taken to revive and revitalize these components highlighted at festivals, performances, discussions and through recordings.

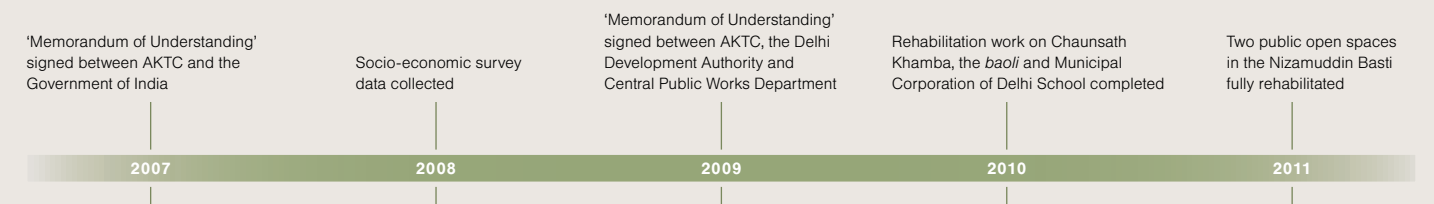
A series of initiatives are spurring a cultural revival in the Basti. Here, Chaunsath Khamba (right) is lit up at night during a concert of Qawwali music at the Jashn-e Khusrau festival.





The Basti's narrow streets are host to many shops and markets.

## Phasing 2007 → 2011



### Background

#### BRIEF HISTORY OF PROJECT SITE

Ghiyas-ud-din Balban, Sultan of Delhi in the 13th century, built the palace of Lal Mahal in what is now Hazrat Nizamuddin Basti. In the early 14th century, the revered saint, Hazrat Nizamuddin Auliya, lived and was also buried there, initiating seven centuries of tomb building in the area. During the building of New Delhi the agricultural lands attached to the Basti were acquired and the area declared an urban village. The area was declared a conservation area in the 2021 Master Plan of Delhi.

### Challenges

#### PROJECT RISKS

Low levels of literacy, high number of immigrants, rampant drug usage and peddling have led to high crime. Though there is a presence of several NGOs working in Hazrat Nizamuddin Basti, there are no active resident associations/youth groups or community groups.

#### DEMOGRAPHICS

Hazrat Nizamuddin Basti is one of the most densely populated areas in Delhi, especially when the floating pilgrimage population who reside there for short periods is taken into account. Approximately 64% of the populace is in the productive employment age group but only 41% participate.

#### HOUSEHOLD ECONOMY

Over 50% of families in Hazrat Nizamuddin Basti have a single wage earner – largely employed in petty trades or as casual workers. A similar number of men in the 15 to 25 age group are working and only 6% of women hold jobs. During community discussions, life skills, career counselling and vocational training opportunities emerged as key needs.

#### STATUS OF HEALTH AND EDUCATION

Lack of access to quality clinical facilities has resulted in extremely poor health conditions. During baseline research, reported illness in the previous two weeks was 54% among females and 29% among males. The project continues to implement interventions to improve health care including both clinic-based and outreach activities, and plans to address health issues of the elderly and the disabled. While literacy rates remain high, raising the quality of education, and increasing enrolment and completion rates of existing programming are a project focus.

#### AVAILABILITY OF DRINKING WATER AND PROPER SANITATION FACILITIES

Household water connections are unreliable and 33% of households access water from public taps, which are in a poor condition. Public toilets are used by 11%

of households and 14% share toilets. In addition, the large floating population of pilgrims puts further strain on the system.

#### ENVIRONMENTAL CONCERNS

Rapid physical densification and population growth put enormous strain on the infrastructure at Hazrat Nizamuddin Basti, especially in terms of environmental sanitation and waste management. Frequent flooding and blockages in sewage lines are common and provide public health concerns.

#### INFRASTRUCTURE

Water supply and sewage disposal systems are present but well below required capacity.

#### ACCESS TO OPEN SPACE

Encroachment and misuse of open spaces and parks are widespread.

#### BUILDING CONDITIONS

In Hazrat Nizamuddin Basti limited living space per family, poor ventilation from densification, inadequate sewerage and water connections compounded by large numbers of pilgrims have increased the dependence on public utilities and building facilities.

### Significant Issues and Impact

#### DATA COLLECTION/SURVEYS

The project activities commenced following detailed physical mapping of the project area, documentation of the monuments and socio-economic surveys, which needed to be managed sensitively by senior programme staff to explain objectives. The physical surveys in the community were met with repeated resistance from the community. They could only be completed in 2009 after establishing confidence building programming in health, education, sanitation and vocational training.

#### PLANNING ISSUES

With the renovation of open spaces and landscaping of parks coupled with community mobilization, ownership and their involvement in management of these spaces, it is hoped that children, women and residents in Nizamuddin Basti will be able to safely access these spaces. The project has incorporated interventions such as connecting households to sewer lines and there are plans to improve housing stock in need of repairs, especially those surrounding significant monuments and public spaces such as the Baoli and the *nallah* respectively.

#### HISTORIC BUILDINGS/MONUMENTS CONSERVED

Several monuments dating from the 12th-century onwards are located within Nizamuddin Basti. Conservation works to date in the Basti have focused on a 13th-century

step-well or *baoli* that partially collapsed in July 2008 and on the conservation and landscaping of the tomb of the famous poet Mirza Ghalib. In 2011, conservation works will continue on the *baoli* and also expand to the 16th-century structures known as Chaunsath Khamba and Atgah Khan's Tomb.

#### NEW BUILDING FACILITIES

One block of community toilets has now been built and is in operation. Work on an additional, much larger toilet block is planned to commence in 2011.

#### COMMUNITY INVOLVEMENT/PROGRAMME

The project has begun to strengthen civil society, based on consultative planning and implementation, as well as the formation of interest and user groups. Self-help groups have been established and community management of public facilities such as toilets has commenced. The project continues to implement interventions to improve health care, including both clinic-based and outreach activities, and plans to address health issues of the elderly and the disabled.

#### VOCATIONAL TRAINING/CAPACITY BUILDING

With only 21% of youth having completed senior secondary education, the vocational training programmes being implemented are designed for improving employability. Market linkages with tourists arriving at Humayun's Tomb are being established for craft and embroidery products by local women. Whilst literacy rates are reasonably high, increasing enrolment and completion rates and the quality of education are a project focus.

#### CONTRACTING METHODS

All conservation works and renovations are implemented directly by master craftsmen employed by the project.

### Partners

#### PUBLIC PARTNERS

Archaeological Survey of India, Municipal Corporation of Delhi, Delhi Development Authority.

#### Donors

Ford Foundation, German Embassy, United States Embassy, Canadian International Development Agency.

### Authoritative Framework

'Memorandum of Understanding' signed on 11 July 2007. In 2009 additional 'Memorandums of Understanding' were signed with Delhi Development Authority and Delhi Government's Public Works Department to allow landscaping of parks and *nallah* respectively.