

# SIRI

and its surroundings



दिल्ली विरासत  
DELHI HERITAGE



The focal point of this historically rich area is the ancient city of Siri, established by Alauddin Khalji in the early fourteenth century as a military camp to protect the capital of his empire from the attack of the Mongol army. Little did Alauddin know that his newly founded city would, in the following centuries become the backdrop for buzzing construction activity undertaken by every subsequent dynasty that established itself in Delhi. Since Siri was established primarily for defence purposes, there are very few remains of any major buildings from this period within or outside the fortifications except perhaps, the Tuhfewala Gumbad, a ruined mosque. Alauddin is said to have built a vast palace, 'the palace of thousand pillars' but it is not certain where this was located. Certainly no remains of it are in evidence. Closer to the fortifications, stand the ruins of the Chor Minar, an intriguing and mysterious tower thought to have been used by Alauddin Khalji to bring to justice those proven guilty of theft and robbery.

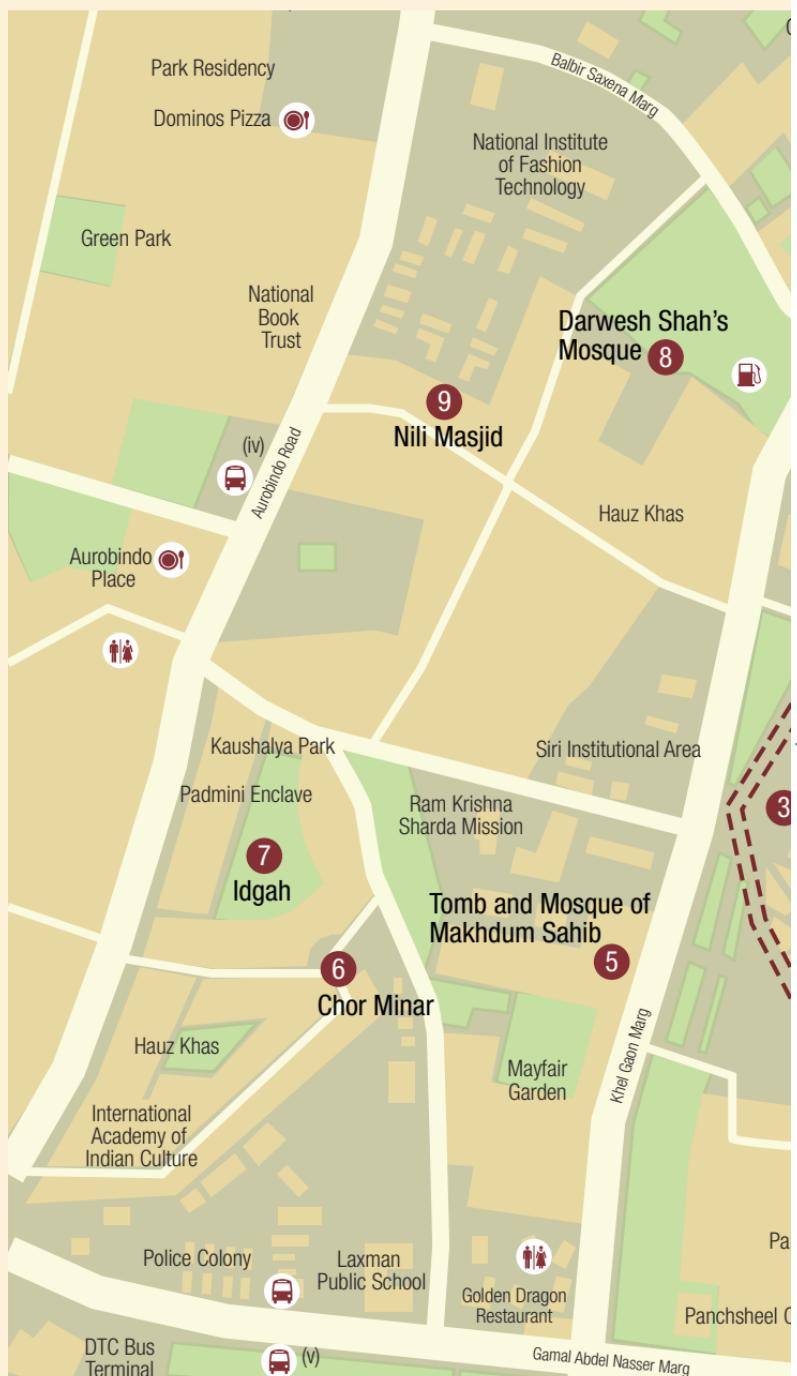
Building activity outside the Siri walls continued to take place in the later centuries making the area home to many tombs and mosques in the subsequent Tughlaq and Lodi periods. The Muhammadi Wali Masjid, the mosque of Darwesh Shah, the Nili Masjid, and the Idgah, all located in close proximity to each other, testify to the fact that the vicinity of Siri remained an important location for religious and other structures. Till the recent extravagant burst of urbanization in Delhi, the landscape here remained predominantly rural and pastoral, dotted with many ancient buildings. Some of these rural communities had even developed protective



© Archaeological Survey of India

walls around their settlements in order to provide security during periods of anarchy. Of these, the wall of the Kharera village is the only one that has survived in its entirety. More recently, the vicinity of Siri has become a very active institutional area, with sports complexes and auditoria. Due to their fascinating historical backdrop, many of the rural settlements here have also attracted artists and designers to live and work, turning it into a fashionable shopping area for traditional and modern crafts and textiles. Extending in all directions from Siri, especially to the north and east are the remains of many more buildings from the Lodi period that are tucked within modern residential neighbourhoods and are reminders of a glorious past. Located a little north of the mosque of Darwesh Shah, the Moth ki Masjid is perhaps one of the most elegant mosques in Delhi. Further north, the village of Kotla Mubarakpur developed around the tomb of the second Sayyid sultan, Mubarak Shah, and many more Lodi tombs are to be found within and around its narrow lanes including the architecturally perfect, Chhote Khan ka Gumbad. In Defence Colony, to the east of Siri and in Zamrudpur further south, there are many more tombs and mosques belonging to known and unknown individuals from the Lodi period. Thus for those truly interested in the ancient buildings of Delhi, many layers of history lie heaped on top of each other in this fascinating area, only waiting to be uncovered. The monuments have a real element of discovery about them!

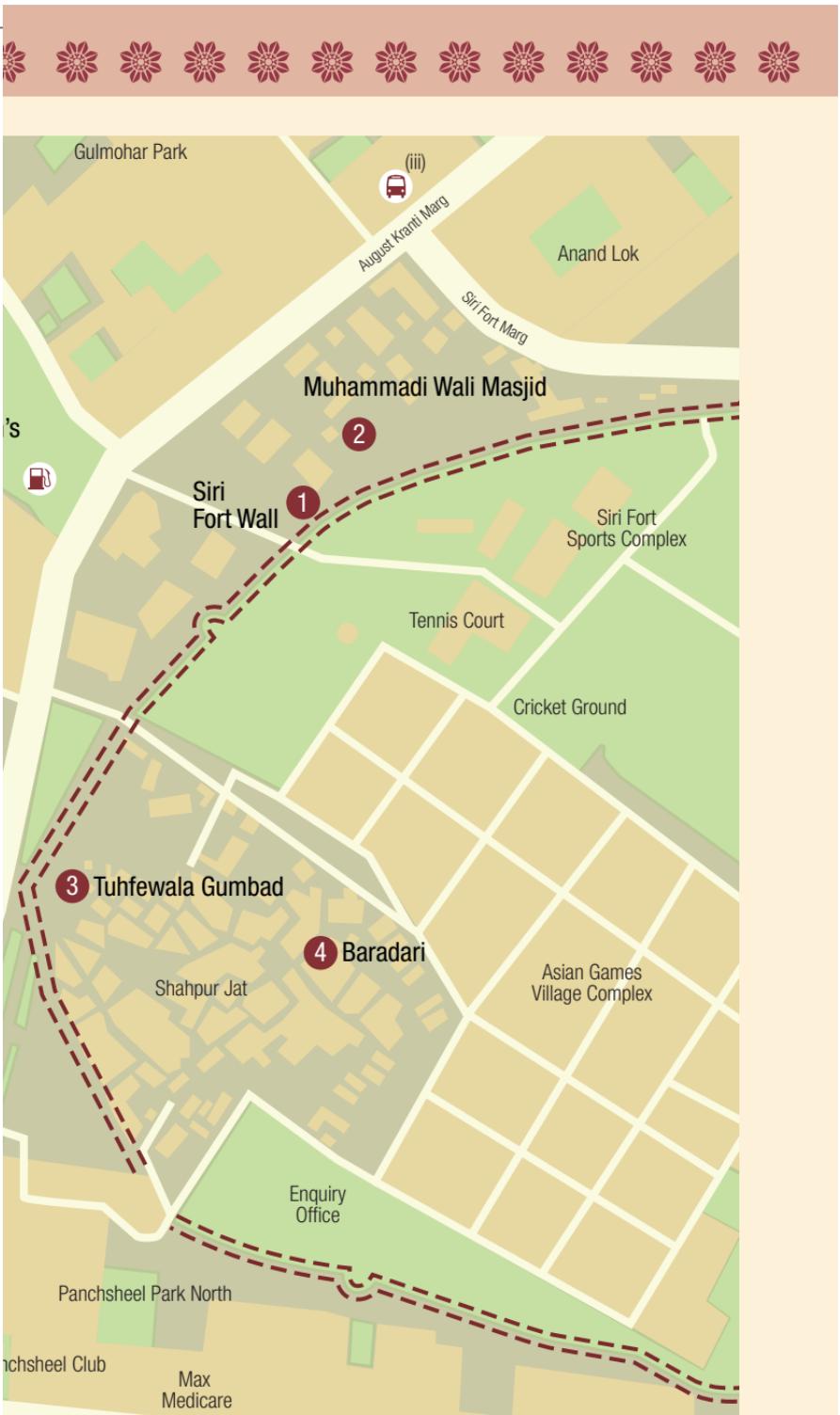
-Timings: Sunrise–Sunset, Entry: Free



### Nearest Bus Stops

(iii) **Niti Bagh:** 413, 419 extra, 465 extra, 500, 522 A, 532, 540, 544, 580

(iv) **Hauz Khas:** 043, 052, 335, 465, 501, 502, 503, 505, 506, 507, 508,



509, 512, 513, 514, 516, 517, 519, 520, 533, 536, 548, 558, 581, 590,  
605, 618, 622, 725

(v) Sadhna Enclave: 465, 467, 481, 511, 540, 541, 764



## 1. SIRI FORT WALLS

Alauddin Khalji, the second ruler of the Khalji Dynasty was a very powerful emperor and a military commander par excellence. He came to power in 1297 after assassinating his uncle, Jalal-ud-din and is known to have extended the limits of the Delhi Sultanate into the Deccan and also into parts of Afghanistan and is thus credited for having created the first true Indian empire after the Maurya Dynasty. Due to his far reaching military ambitions, Delhi came to be under constant threat from the Mongol armies from Central Asia.

During his reign Mongols came right up to Delhi and Alauddin's armies engaged with them on the plain of Siri. Soon after, the sultan decided to build a fortification at this place, and thus Siri was founded, north-east of the existing city of Lal Kot, in 1304. In this way, Siri became the second city of Delhi and the first to be built by any Muslim ruler. The strategy of establishing Siri seems to have worked for Alauddin, as he was able to defeat the invading Mongol armies from this military camp. In fact, legend has it that Siri gets its name from the word 'sir' which in Hindi means head, as Alauddin Khalji is supposed to have had the soldiers of the defeated Mongol armies trampled under the feet of elephants and their severed heads displayed by hanging them from the fort walls.

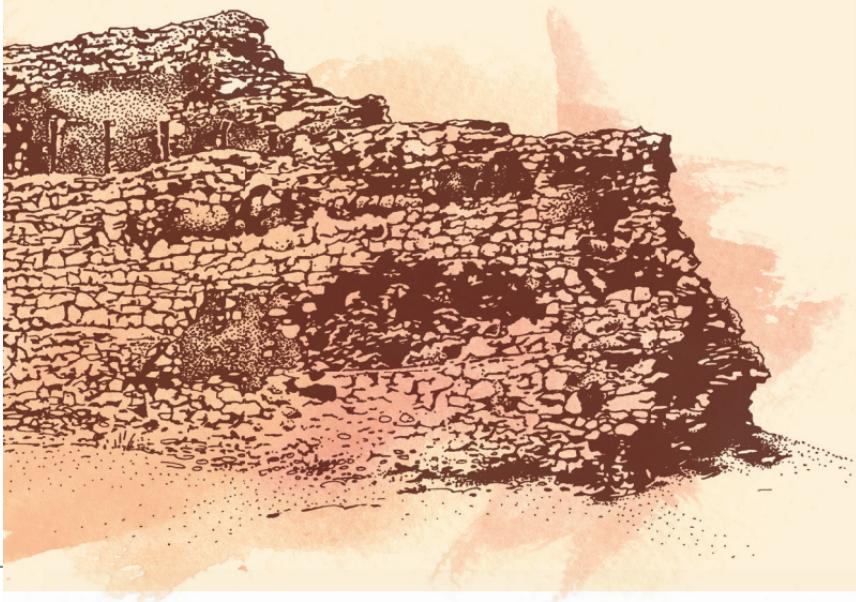
The original fort of Siri was oval in shape. The total length of the fort wall was about 5 km and it enclosed an area of about 1.7 sq km within it. Today, there are only scant remains of the original buildings of Alauddin's reign within the fort and certainly no remains of any palaces or other lofty buildings as described by Timur (also popularly known as Tamerlane) when he invaded Delhi in 1398. Just outside of the fort walls, Alauddin undertook





the construction of the Chor Minar, a tower presumably built to hang the heads of executed thieves. It is situated just off the Aurobindo Marg in Hauz Khas area. He also commissioned the Hauz-e-Alai tank nearby to supply water to his new city.

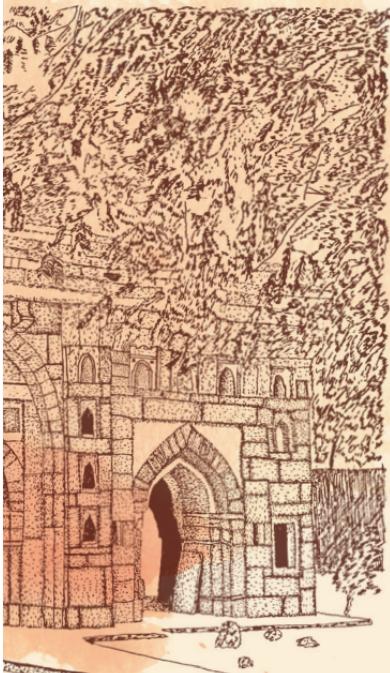
Today, the fortifications of Siri are visible only in fragments here and there. While some sections of the wall have not been excavated by archaeologists and remain buried under the forest cover that took hold of the area in the centuries subsequent to its abandonment, large parts of the fortifications were also dismantled by later emperors who used it as a quarry for material to build their own cities. A particular mention may be made of Sher Shah Suri who plundered material from Siri for the construction of his city of Shergarh. Large parts of the original walls have also been lost to the modern expansion of the city. The most prominently visible section is set within a protected park right on the main August Kranti Marg. Here, the fortifications are quite substantial and they are built in a typical style, with battered walls and a passage within the wall at its base. Remains of bastions, flame-shaped battlements, and loopholes for arrows are seen here for the very first time. There are also remnants of a bridge that must have been used to cross a stream that flowed just outside the wall to the west. The other large protected section, especially the remains of the foundations of bastions can be seen by taking the road that leads to the Siri Fort Sports Complex and turning left onto a protected piece of land clearly demarcated with signs visible from outside of a small entrance gate. Yet another small section can be seen to the south of Shahpurjat village abutting the Panchsheel Park residential neighbourhood. This section of the walls of Siri is probably the most threatened by modern development.





## 2. MUHAMMADI WALI MASJID

The Lodi era mosque is among the many buildings dating from the Lodi period that are located in the vicinity of the Siri Fort walls. This relatively hidden structure can be approached by taking the road leading to the Siri Fort Sports Complex and entering an enclosure to the left that houses a protected section of the Siri walls and the large enclosure for this mosque, containing a number of unknown graves. In terms of its construction this elegant mosque follows the typical Lodi-style mosque pattern. It is a three-bay mosque constructed from large blocks of dressed local stone. The size of the three arched openings is the same while the central entrance arch is set within a much taller arched niche and this bay is topped by a dome. There are decorative niches, with calligraphic inscriptions and floral decorations placed throughout the front façade. There are also faint traces of sandstone and blue tile decorations on the outside. On the south end there is a narrow flight of steps that takes you to the roof level. The mosque also has a very well preserved interior. The prayer wall has carved arches made out of sandstone and medallions carved with Quranic verses are prominently displayed on all walls. The ceiling also has decorations made with intersecting bands of red sandstone. Below this, the dome is supported on pendentives beautifully ornamented with carved niches.



### 3. TUHFEWALA GUMBAD

This is the only Khalji era building located within the walls of the Siri

Fort towards its western corner.

Although prominently visible from the main road, the enclosure for the building is now surrounded by the Shahpurjat village and its compound

is entered through a narrow lane accessed from within the village.

Very little is known about why the building came to be known as such,

its name literally meaning,

'the Gifted Dome'.

From the outside this building has the appearance of a tomb, but in reality this was a mosque. The structure

that now stands is the central chamber of the main prayer hall of this mosque. The chamber is

entered through a large iwan (a rectangular hall walled on three sides with one side entirely open) that contains three smaller and narrower arched openings. Above the central arch is yet another but smaller arched opening for light. There are similar openings on the north and south and these must have led to the rest of the prayer chamber on either side extending to the corner of the enclosure, but unfortunately these have been mostly destroyed and only the foundations remain now.





#### 4. BARADARI

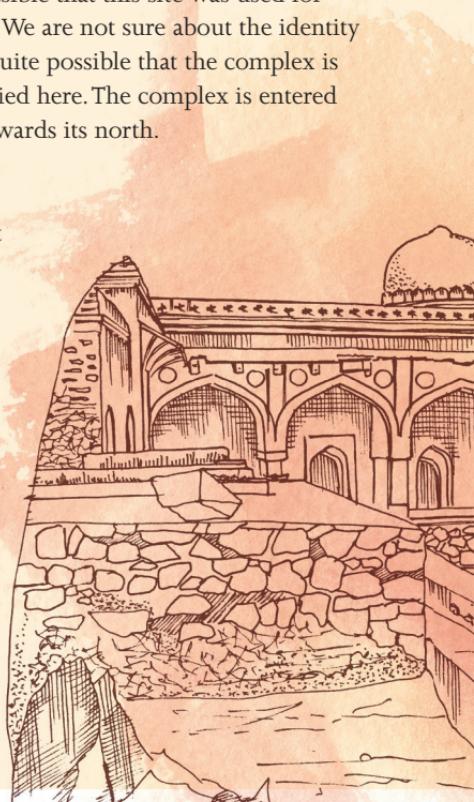
Located in the middle of the urban sprawl of Shahpurjat village, within the original limits of what was once Siri Fort, is a large structure known as the Baradari (a twelve-pillared pavilion). The random rubble masonry structure measuring 112 ft by 59 ft has a central hall flanked by chambers to its north and the south. The central hall itself has three arched openings to the east and three similar openings to the west and is three bays deep. The side chambers are accessed through arched doorways on the north and the south. On the east, on either side of the arched openings of the central hall are staircases leading up to the roof. The roof of the northern side chamber is vaulted.

While it is assumed that this is a Khalji-era building, plaster remains visible on the structure, indicating that it could have Tughlaq origins. What was once a reasonably grand structure is today barely visible because of the dense construction and development around the Baradari. Parts of the structure have been encroached upon and some of it has been buried underground.

#### 5. TOMB AND MOSQUE OF MAKHDUM SAHIB

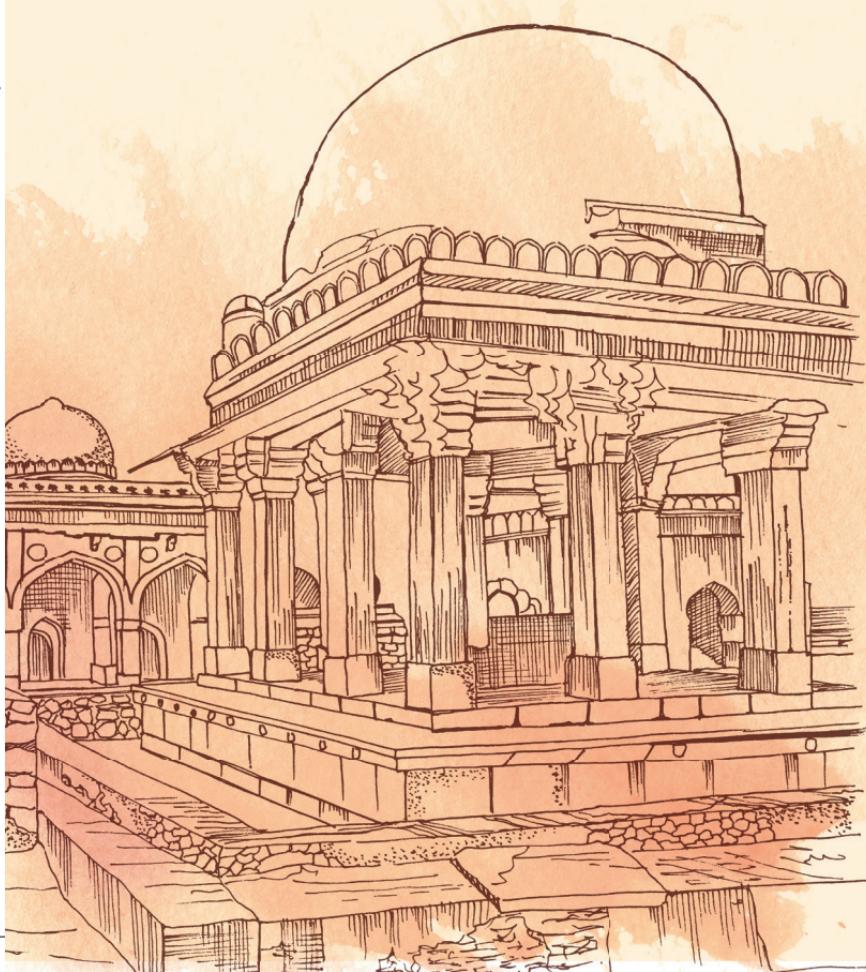
Surrounded by the residential neighbourhood of Mayfair Garden, this small complex of a mosque and grave enclosures is a set within a peaceful park. The buildings in this complex are from different periods and it is possible that this site was used for burials over a period of time. We are not sure about the identity of Makhdum Sahib but it is quite possible that the complex is devoted to a saint who is buried here. The complex is entered through a gateway located towards its north.

This gateway appears to have been built in the Tughlaq period and is constructed out of rubble masonry. There are four small niches flanking a large entrance arch. Under the arch is a beautiful carved corbelled gateway. The noteworthy feature of the gateway is the unusual, melon-like fluted dome. Although the gateway and another subsidiary arched structure are both attached to the complex's mosque, neither gives access to it.





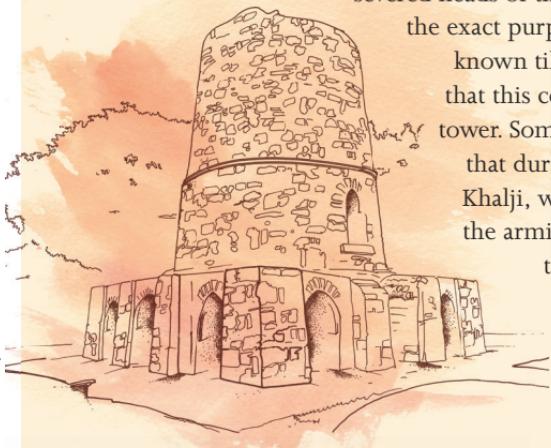
The mosque of Makhdum Sahib is a Lodi period structure. This is a C-shaped building, forming an open courtyard in front. It is a seven-bay mosque and has domes over the central and the corner bays. As you enter through the gateway, visible are circular buttresses on the corners of the western wall. In the centre of the open courtyard formed by the mosque is a raised pavilion which is probably the tomb of Makhdum Sahib. This is a twelve-pillared structure and must have originally had jali (screen with ornamental patterns) screens held between the pillars. The pillars are so arranged as to support a set of beams that in turn support an octagonal drum, on which sits a dome. At the corners formed between the square and the octagonal drum on the roof are four decorative minarets. A chhajja (projecting cover supported on brackets) runs all along the outer periphery of the pavilion. The most interesting feature of the tomb are the remains of intricate painting work done on the underside of the dome and lintels for which both incised and painted plaster has been used.





## 6. CHOR MINAR

Much mystery and confusion surrounds the origins of this tower, thought to have been constructed by Alauddin Khalji in the early fourteenth century outside his newly found citadel of Siri. Located on a traffic roundabout in the modern residential neighbourhood of Hauz Khas, the tower is now locally known as Chor Minar or 'Tower of Thieves'. The minaret stands on its own platform and each of the four sides of this platform has three arched recesses. Owing to the 225 holes that mark the surface of this tower, local legend has it that it was used as a 'tower of beheading', where the severed heads of thieves were displayed. But the exact purpose of the minaret is not known till date. It is quite possible that this could have been a hunting tower. Some historians even suggest that during the reign of Alauddin Khalji, wars were fought between the armies of Alauddin Khalji and the Mongols from Central Asia, and some 8,000 Mongol prisoners were executed and their heads displayed in the towers around Siri.



## 7. IDGAH

An idgah is a type of mosque constructed without an enclosure so that large number of people can gather for prayer, especially to celebrate the festival of Eid. This particular structure is located north of the Chor Minar in the middle of Padmini Enclave in Hauz Khas. This building, built in about AD 1405 dates from the very volatile period of Delhi's history between the Tughlaq and Sayyid dynasties when the city had recently been devastated by the invasion of the armies of Timur, the Turk-Mongol ruler with his base in Central Asia. In this interlude, a powerful noble from the court of the exiled Sultan Mahmud Shah, known as Mallu Khan, ruled over Delhi. We know this fact because an inscription on the building describes, rather boastfully, who the building was commissioned by and also the circumstances in which it was built.

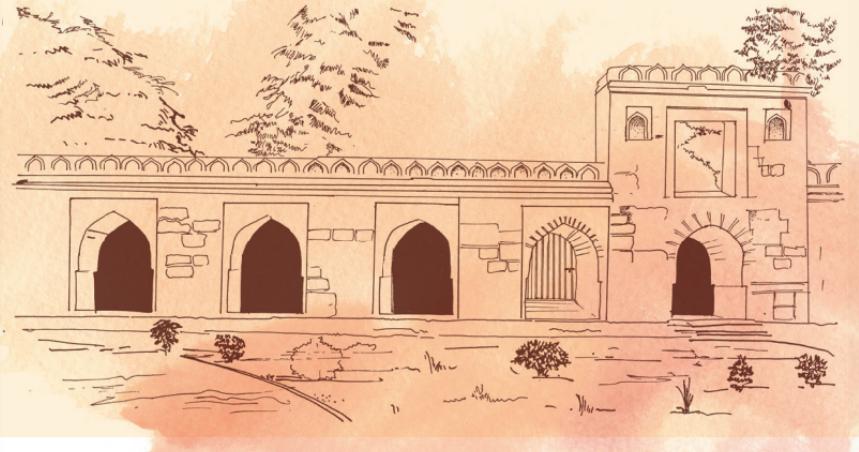
The long, prayer-wall like building, built out of rubble masonry and covered with plaster, consists of a western wall, with battlements and a total of eleven arched recesses or mihrabs (decorative arches on the wall facing the direction of prayer). On one end of the wall is a circular bastion topped



by a turret-like structure. At the north of the central mihrab of the wall is located a high pulpit that is reached by a flight of eleven steps.

## 8. DARWESH SHAH'S MOSQUE

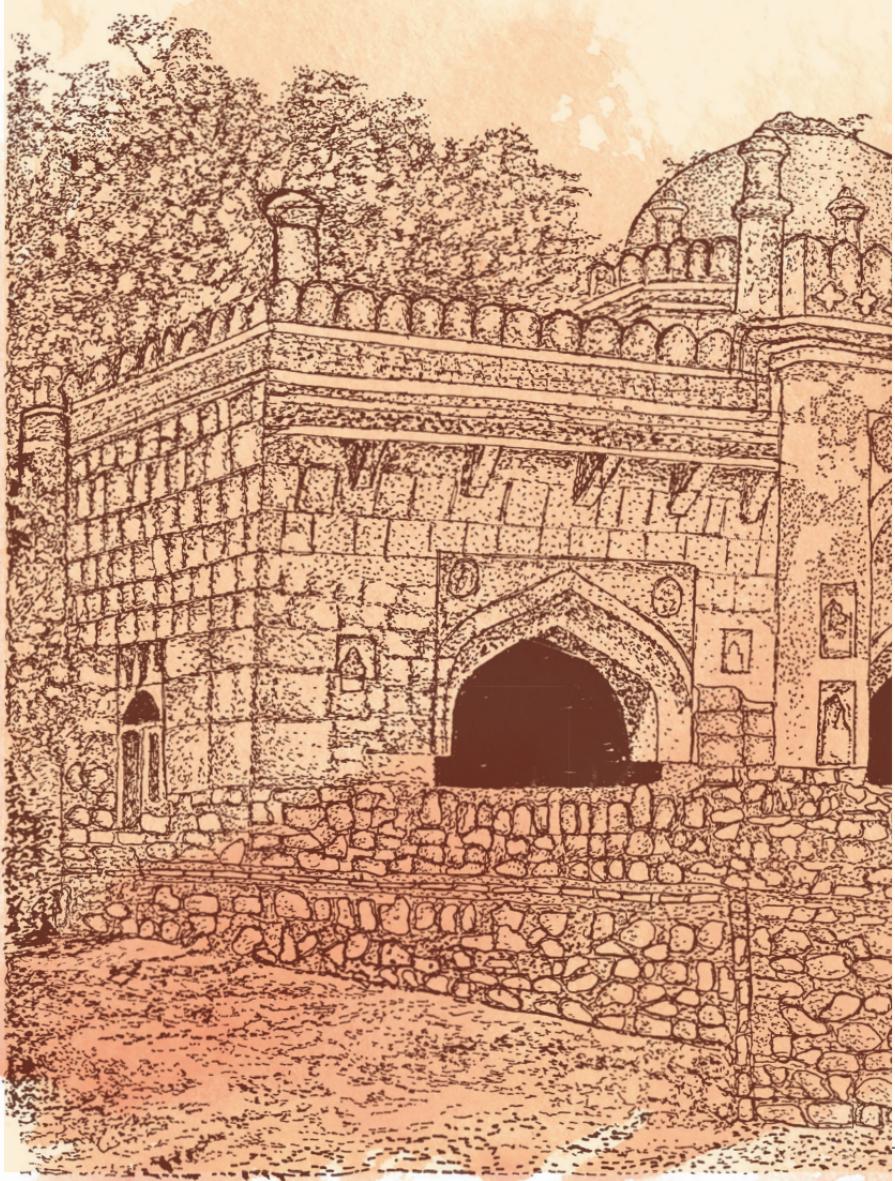
This Lodi-period mosque is located within the pretty surroundings of the vast Gulmohar Park, just outside the walls of the Siri Fort. The building is near the small entrance gate used by morning joggers coming to the park. There is no definite information about who Darwesh Shah was and when the mosque was built. Going by its location close to the Siri Fort walls, it can be assumed that this must have been a significant building. Strictly speaking, this is a wall mosque, with a rectangular enclosure for graves that stands on a high platform. There is a doorway and stairs at the north-east corner that lead to this raised platform. The prayer wall on the west has a set of seven recessed mihrab arches of which the central one is emphasized with raised battlements. This mihrab is also slightly projected from outside and is flanked by two tall minarets till the parapet level. Until recently, the mosque was nothing but a mound of rubble but it has been recently conserved to make its original form apparent.





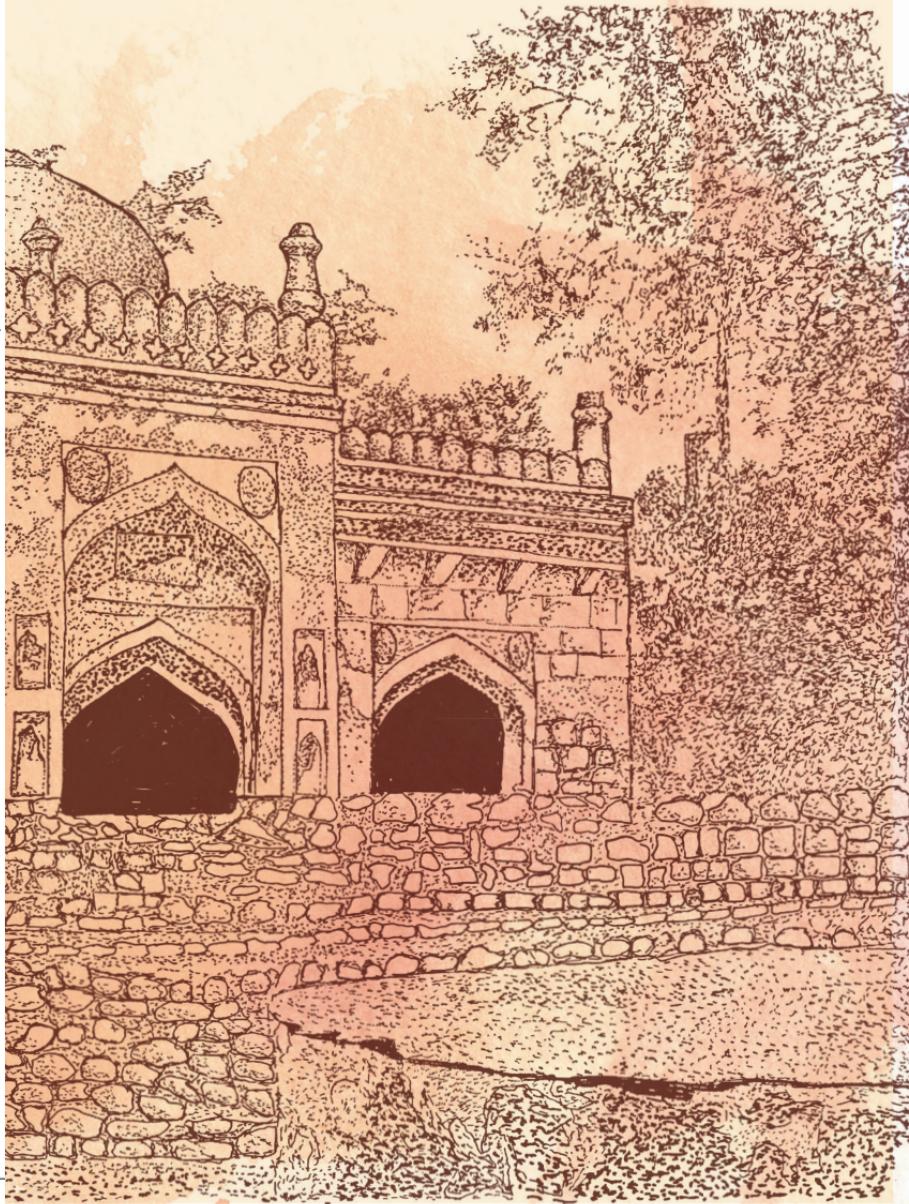
## 9. NILI MASJID

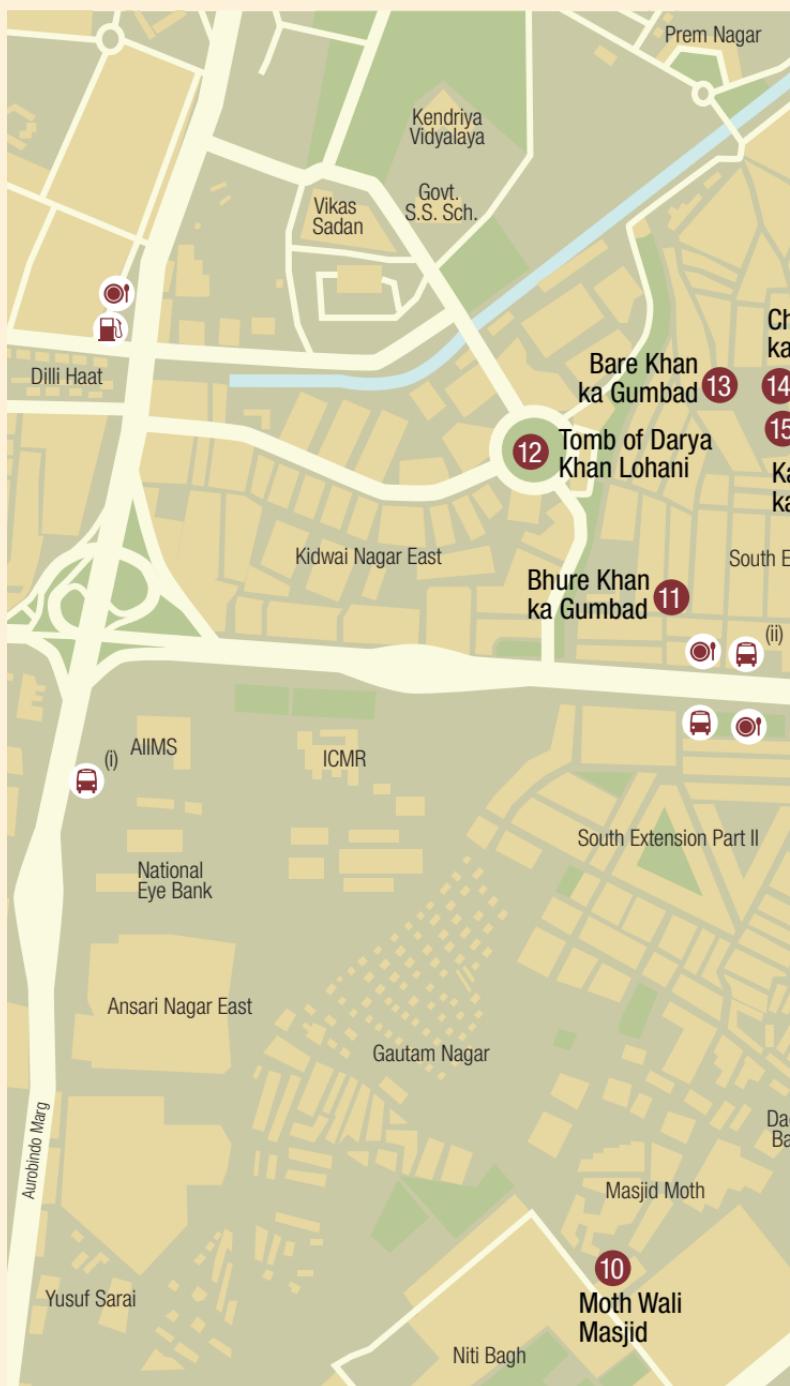
This small but elegant Lodi-era mosque is located not far from the main Aurobindo Marg in Hauz Khas. It is placed on its own raised platform within a fenced enclosure that also has an old well. The low wall that surrounds the enclosure is made in rubble masonry out of local stone and has flame shaped battlements. The mosque is itself built of dressed stone, yet traces of plaster decoration can be seen. This is a three-bay mosque that has equal sized arched entrances but is otherwise of quite atypical proportions. The central arch is set within a much taller iwan, raising the central portion of the mosque above the rest of the structure. This central





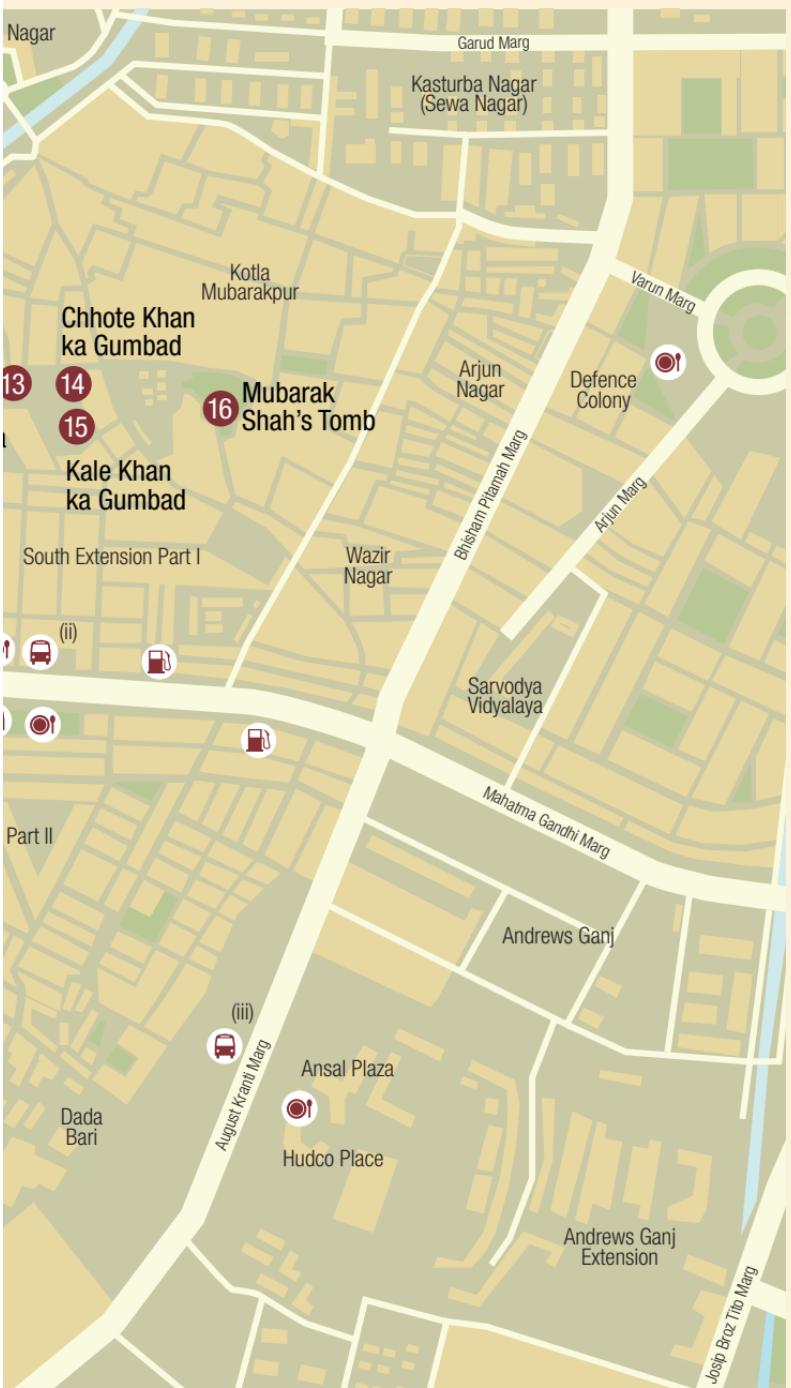
bay is crowned by a single dome raised on an octagonal drum whose angles are marked by small minarets. The corners of the western wall are strengthened by flanking circular buttresses on both sides. A chhajja, placed on very heavy looking brackets runs above the two sided arched entrances. The mosque gets its name from the blue tile decoration, some of which is still visible on the front of the mosque and must have covered a band running all along the front above this chhajja. A slab on the entrance of the mosque dates the building to 1505–06 and credits its construction to Kasumbhil, nurse of Fateh Khan, son of Khawas Khan, the governor of the area around this time.





### Nearest Bus Stops

(i) **AIIMS:** 400, 433, 437, 451, 460, 464, 470, 480, 483, 500, 524, 531, 532, 540, 543, 544, 606, 711, 724, 727, 864, 865, GL540



**(ii) South Extension:** 303, 392 extra, 442, 479, 507, 518, 529, 544, 567, 611, 623, 724, 727, 769, 864, 865

**(iii) Niti Bagh:** 413, 419 extra, 465 extra, 500, 522 A, 532, 540, 544, 580



## TRAVELLERS' ACCOUNTS OF SIRI

Alauddin Khalji (r. AD 1296–1316) became the Sultan of Delhi after having killed his uncle (and father-in-law), Jalal-ud-din Khalji. Although popular tradition tends to allot Alauddin Khalji the role of a bloodthirsty and ambitious ruler with few scruples, but he also was the founder of Siri, a city which, with its fort, palaces, and markets, was a flourishing settlement. Several mentions and descriptions of Siri can be found in the accounts of travellers who passed through Delhi. Siri also finds mention in the writings of historians and chroniclers of Alauddin's period and for some time beyond.

Zia-ud-din Barni (AD 1285–1357), a historian who was a resident of Delhi, provides a glimpse of how Siri came into being. Delhi had come under the threat of the Mongols, and:

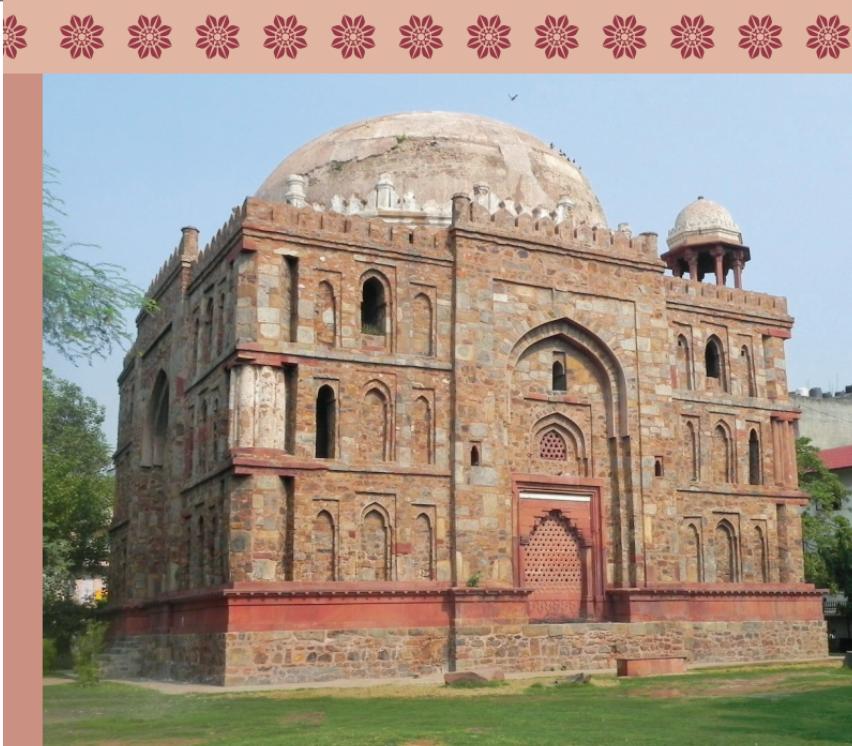
"After this very serious danger, Alauddin awoke from his sleep of neglect. He gave up his [sic] ideas of campaigning and fort-taking, and built a palace at Siri. He took up his residence there, and made it his capital, so that it became a flourishing palace. He ordered the fort of Delhi to be repaired, and he also ordered the restoration of the old forts which lay in the track of the Mughals"

The Moroccan traveller, Ibn Battutah (AD 1304–68) adds: "... In it was the residence of the Sultan Ala al-Din and his son Qutb al-Din ... Ala al-Din then entered the royal palace and enjoyed undisturbed rule for twenty years ...."

One of the more detailed descriptions of Siri comes, however, not from a traveller or a historian, but from an invader: Timur (or

Moth ki Masjid





Bare Khan ka Gumbad

Tamerlaine, AD 1336–1405). Although Timur invaded Delhi in AD 1398, well after Alauddin's time, he still describes the city in glowing terms:

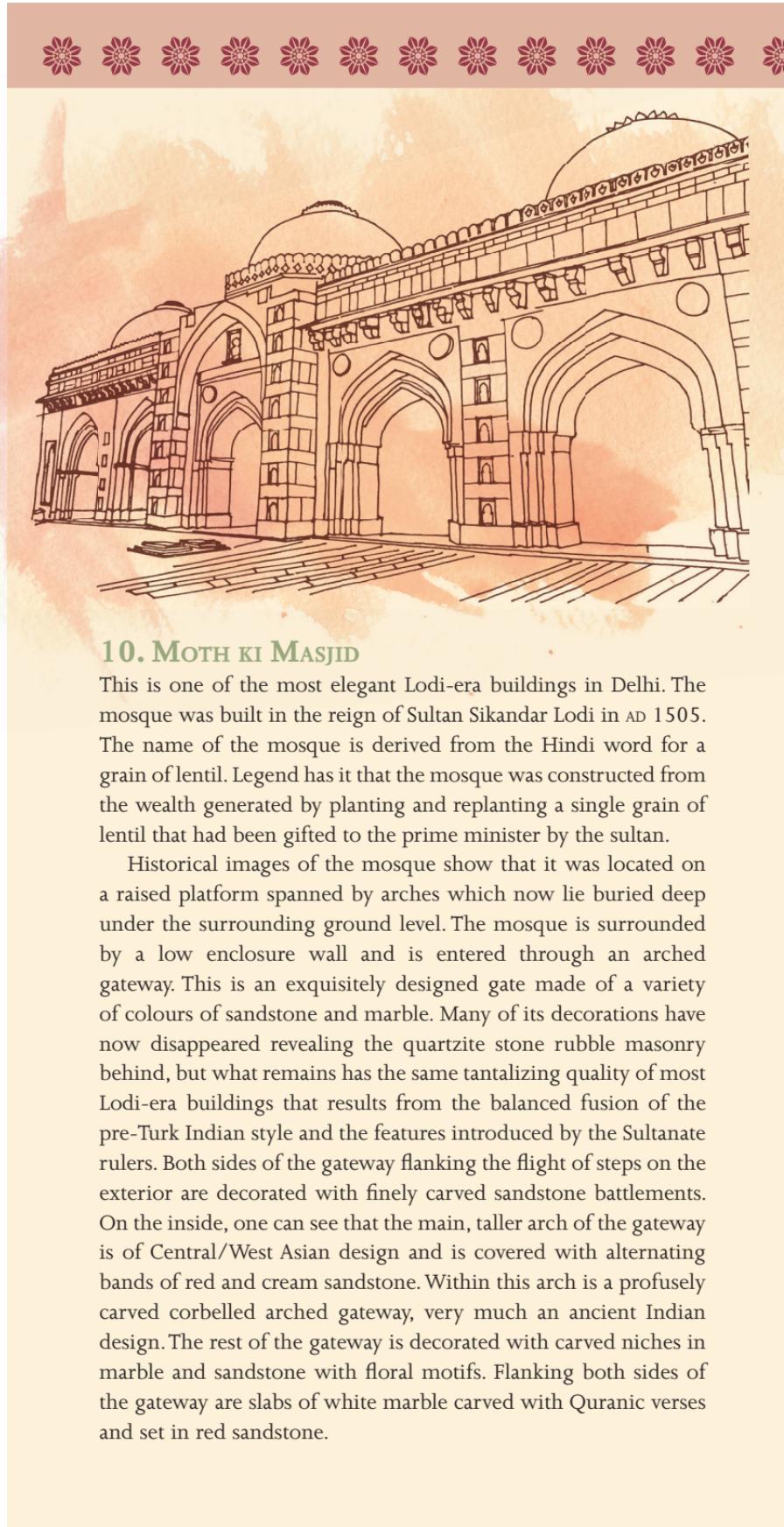
“... Siri is a round city (*shahr*). Its buildings are lofty. They are surrounded by fortifications (*kald’h*), built of stone and brick, and they are very strong ... from the fort of Siri to that of Old Delhi, which is a considerable distance, there runs a strong wall, built of stone and cement .... Siri has seven gates, four towards the outside and three on the inside towards Jahanpanah.”



Chhatri at Moth ki Masjid

Today, little remains of the Siri that Timur describes. Of the few structures that were within the city, those that exist (like the Tuhfewala Gumbad) are from a later period. But parts of the Siri Fort walls are still ‘very strong’, as Timur described them, and continue to stand erect oblivious of the passage of time.





## 10. MOTH KI MASJID

This is one of the most elegant Lodi-era buildings in Delhi. The mosque was built in the reign of Sultan Sikandar Lodi in AD 1505. The name of the mosque is derived from the Hindi word for a grain of lentil. Legend has it that the mosque was constructed from the wealth generated by planting and replanting a single grain of lentil that had been gifted to the prime minister by the sultan.

Historical images of the mosque show that it was located on a raised platform spanned by arches which now lie buried deep under the surrounding ground level. The mosque is surrounded by a low enclosure wall and is entered through an arched gateway. This is an exquisitely designed gate made of a variety of colours of sandstone and marble. Many of its decorations have now disappeared revealing the quartzite stone rubble masonry behind, but what remains has the same tantalizing quality of most Lodi-era buildings that results from the balanced fusion of the pre-Turk Indian style and the features introduced by the Sultanate rulers. Both sides of the gateway flanking the flight of steps on the exterior are decorated with finely carved sandstone battlements. On the inside, one can see that the main, taller arch of the gateway is of Central/West Asian design and is covered with alternating bands of red and cream sandstone. Within this arch is a profusely carved corbelled arched gateway, very much an ancient Indian design. The rest of the gateway is decorated with carved niches in marble and sandstone with floral motifs. Flanking both sides of the gateway are slabs of white marble carved with Quranic verses and set in red sandstone.



The entry leads into a large courtyard of 38.6 m width. On the western side of the courtyard is the main structure of the five-bay mosque. The design of the mosque is rather austere with no minarets, calligraphic decorations, and embellishments, that are otherwise traditional features of mosques. Other embellishments have been done using elegant niches on the columns that support the five arches. The external beauty of the mosque is enhanced by the use of better hues and colours for the materials, both for the building as well as the decorations on it.

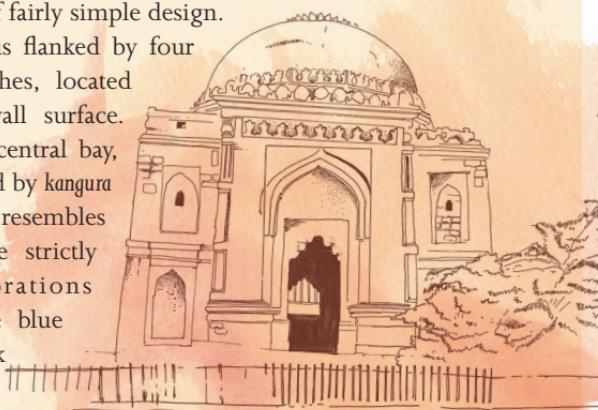
On the interior, the main prayer arch depicts Quranic inscriptions in floral designs. The central dome is supported on squinches and the domes on both flanks are borne on beautifully carved pendentives. The main prayer wall is decorated by panels of red sandstone and white marble and plaster. The corners of the main prayer hall are emphasized by very elaborately decorated double-storied towers that have arched openings. The true beauty of these turrets can only be appreciated by walking around the mosque to its back and viewing the raised turrets from here. Also visible from outside is a jharokha or overhanging balcony over an opening in the northern wall of the mosque. Overall, the mosque displays a bold diversity of design and an appreciation of contrasting light and shade that can easily be defined as epitomizing Lodi art.

## 11. BHURE KHAN KA GUMBAD

This tiny but elegant building must have been part of the group in which Chhote Khan ka Gumbad and Bare Khan ka Gumbad also belonged but it is now separated by a temple complex and parking lot. The identity of Bhure Khan is not known. Unfortunately, the tomb is now completely fenced and its interior cannot be accessed directly. The building is constructed out of random rubble masonry and is covered with lime plaster. It is raised on a high plinth and is of fairly simple design.

A tall central arch is flanked by four smaller arched niches, located on the adjacent wall surface.

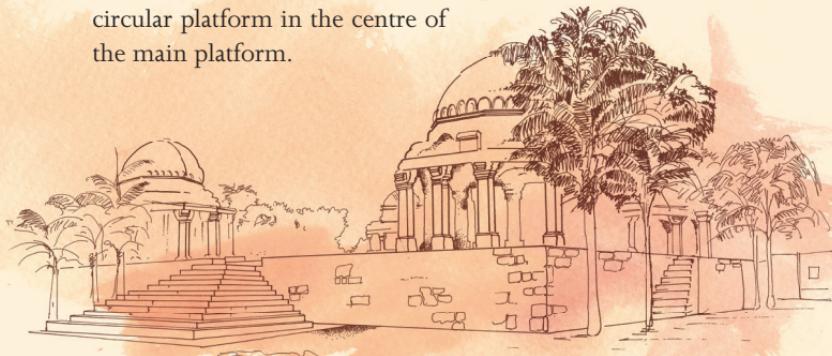
On the top of the central bay, battlements crowned by kangura (stylized motif that resembles battlements but are strictly ornamental) decorations covered with some blue and orange tile work can be seen.





## 12. TOMB OF DARYA KHAN LOHANI

This is one of the most unusual of the Lodi tombs in Delhi. The semi-ruined building is located on a traffic island and approached by crossing a bridge over a drain from South Extension into the front of a small market building and then following the road to behind this market. This is the tomb of Darya Khan Lohani, who was the chief justice in the reign of Bahrol Lodi and a *vakil* (lawyer) in the reign of Sikandar Lodi. No definitive date about its construction is known but the tomb dates back to the early sixteenth century. The tomb is raised on a square platform that has corner bastions. There are traces of a colonnade and gateway on its eastern side. The four corners of the platform are marked by domed pavilions with domes resting on twelve square columns. Although all the four domes are in a semi-ruined state, there are remains of incised plaster decorations on their remaining interior surfaces. The white painted cenotaph is itself set on a raised circular platform in the centre of the main platform.



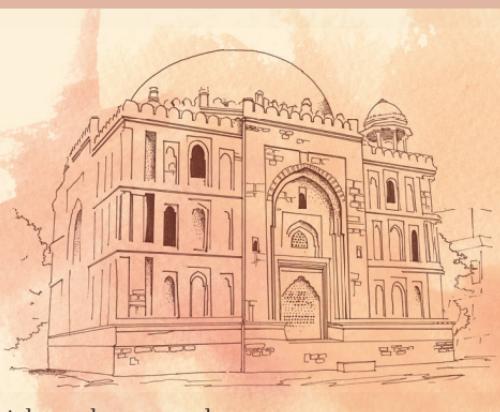
## 13. BARE KHAN KA GUMBAD

Although nothing about Bare Khan is known, the size of this tomb tells us that it must have been someone significant. True to its name, everything about this tomb is oversized. The large tomb is located in a park together with another smaller tomb on the land in between the village of Kotla Mubarakpur and the modern residential neighbourhood of South Extension. The building is constructed of rubble masonry that must have been covered with plaster. On a base of rubble stone masonry is another band faced with red sandstone. The main entrance is from the south and the central bay has a tall arch containing a corbelled gateway and two smaller arches above it. On both sides of this arch are three rows of arched niches, the central one of which is taller and is emphasized. This arrangement is repeated on all four facades except the west that contains a solid prayer wall. The east and north facades have carved sandstone jalis within the corbelled sandstone gateway. The unusual feature of the design are three





slender octagonal corner turrets, located one on top of the other, at each corner of the building and topped by sandstone corner stones. Above the structure is a large dome and around this must have been four chhatris (raised dome-shaped pavilions), only one of which can be seen today.

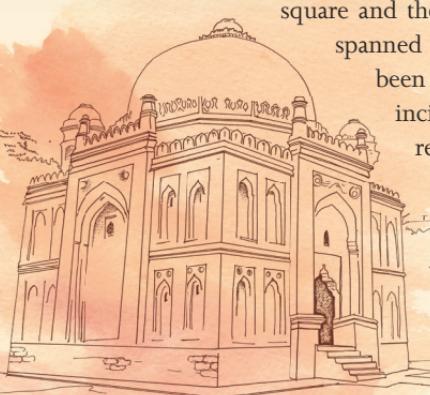


The interior of the tomb is equally grand and well lit. The corners of the tomb are spanned by half domes and the bottom surface of the dome has red bands in painted plaster.

#### 14. CHHOTE KHAN KA GUMBAD

This is one of the most elegant Lodi tombs in Delhi, very similar in style to the Sheesh Gumbad in Lodi Garden. What makes this tomb very charming are its classical proportions and the combination of incised plaster and blue tile decorations. The building is raised on a high plinth and the main entrance to the tomb faces south and is reached by a flight of steps where a tall arch contains a smaller corbelled gateway. On either side of this arched entrance are two rows of two-arched niches. There is incised plaster decorations in the form of bands of inscribed Quranic verses and medallions surrounding the arched entrance. Faint traces of blue tile decorations can also be seen in a band high above the central bay and on the two remaining chhatris on the corners of the roof. The eastern and northern façades also contain similar decorations but the corbelled entrance gateways are closed off using red sandstone jalis. Towards the west there is no opening but only a solid wall within the main arch. The basic plan of the tomb is

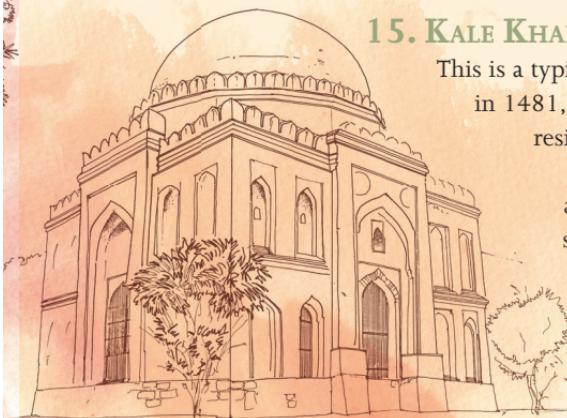
square and the corners of this square are spanned by half domes that have been profusely decorated with incised plaster. Above these rests a thirty-two sided drum that has arched niches on all its sides. The bottom of the dome surface is decorated by red bands of painted plaster and a painted circular design in the centre.





## 15. KALE KHAN KA GUMBAD

This is a typical Lodi-era tomb built in 1481, located in a park in the residential neighbourhood of South Extension. The area around the tomb is slightly raised above the surrounding ground level. The building, reached by a flight of steps is of simple design. The entrance gate is located beneath



a tall entrance arch. On the adjacent walls, there are four equal sized arched niches. One of these niches on either side contains a flight of steps that takes you up to the roof level. The dome of the tomb is raised on a visible octagonal drum. There are red sandstone bands on the interior surface of the dome and some decoration in the form of Quranic descriptions incised in plaster. The only distinguishing feature is the unusually tall cenotaph. Unlike many other tombs, this one has an inscription announcing who it was built for and its date of construction. From this inscription we know that the local name for the tomb is misleading as it belongs to Mubarak Khan Lohani, the father of Darya Khan Lohani, the chief justice of Lodi Sultan Bahlool Lodi.

## 16. MUBARAK SHAH'S TOMB

Located right in centre of the Kotla Mubarakpur village that derives its name from this building's enclosure, the octagonal tomb belongs to Mubarak Shah Sayyid, the second Sayyid sultan who died in 1434. This is a significant building being the second octagonal tomb in Delhi and the earliest that has survived in its entirety. This was probably also the earliest tomb to have its own enclosure containing a mosque to its west. It is not clear whether the enclosure itself was rectangular or octagonal in shape since all the surrounding walls have disappeared and only parts of the western and southern gates are now visible. The enclosure must have originally contained a garden but today the tomb is engulfed by residential buildings, some of which are built in traditional style.

The octagonal tomb sits on its own plinth and has a very solid and domineering appearance from outside. On the roof of the tomb, one can notice chhatris in the centre of all sides of the octagon. There are also tiny minarets surrounding the circular



dome. One feature that distinguishes this dome from others built during this period is that it is crowned by an unusual red sandstone lantern rather than the lotus finial. The tomb is constructed out of local stone that is dressed up to the column level and is plastered above it. The tomb itself is surrounded by a verandah with three bays on each side of the octagon, spanned by arches. Although the columns that support these arches are made from single blocks of stone they are carved in a manner that they appear as twin columns. The corners of the octagon are sloping buttresses that are a common feature of this type of tomb; domes that span the verandahs are of alternating simple and flower-petal design. There are also decorative medallions on the flat squinches that support these domes. The interior of the tomb is fairly dark despite the six cenotaphs being surrounded by lamps that have been installed by local residents who use the tomb as a living shrine. Some light is brought in by the sandstone jalis that are installed on most openings towards the verandah. The dome on the interior is covered by red sandstone bands. There are also remains of some incised plaster decoration on the inside surfaces.

Not far away from the tomb building and definitely part of the original enclosure of the tomb is a mosque. Today the mosque is approached by a very narrow lane, hardly 60 cm wide and is surrounded by modern constructions. It is a fairly simple yet elegant structure, divided into five equal bays and is two bays deep. The south wall contains a narrow staircase that leads up to the terrace level. The front of the mosque is decorated with medallions on the spandrels of each of the arches. There is an overhanging chhajja running throughout the length of the mosque supported by carved brackets.





## DEFENCE COLONY

Although it's known mostly for its market crowded with restaurants and smaller eateries, Defence Colony is also home to two tombs: the Gumti of Sheikh Ali and the Tomb of Khwajasara Basti Khan. Both are easy to find and though not open to the general public, can be seen from the outside.

### 17. GUMTI OF SHEIKH ALI

The Gumti (small-domed building) of Sheikh Ali dates back to the Lodi period and stands in a prominent location – at the centre of the large circle next to Defence Colony market. The road forms a loop around the garden of the Gumti. Itself a small octagonal tomb, the Gumti originally must have been open on all eight sides, each of them pierced by an arched doorway. Although you can still see the lines of the arches on the outside, the doorways have been bricked up. The base of the dome has two rows, one above the other, of ornamental *kangura* battlements. It would originally have also had a *chhajja* below the dome all around the building—all you can see now are the stone brackets that would have supported the *chhajja*.

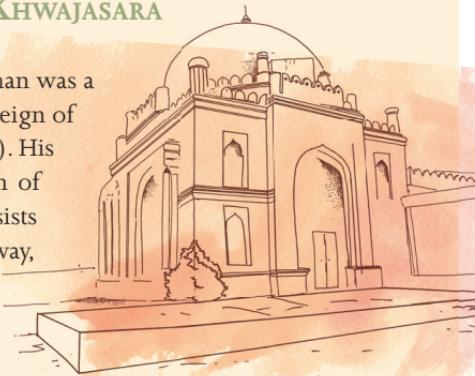
The Gumti, now liberally whitewashed and embellished with air-conditioners, serves as the office of the Defence Colony Residents' Welfare Association (RWA). It isn't, therefore, a thoroughfare, but you may take photographs of the building from outside.





## 18. TOMB COMPLEX OF KHWAJASARA BASTI KHAN

The eunuch Khwajasara Basti Khan was a prominent courtier during the reign of Sikandar Lodi (r. AD 1489–1517). His tomb complex lies to the north of the Gumbti of Sheikh Ali and consists of three main structures: a gateway, a mosque, and the tomb itself.



**The gateway:** Although the tomb complex is now entered through a modern gate that looks out onto Garuda Marg, the original gateway leading to the tomb is the large, square, domed structure that stands ahead of, and a little to the left of, the new gate. The gateway dates back to AD 1488. While that puts it firmly in the Lodi period, the gateway also shows signs—especially in its thick, faintly sloping walls—of the architectural style typical of the preceding Tughlaq era. The central section of each of the four walls projects outward slightly and the exterior of the tomb is decorated with minarets, arched niches, kangan battlements, and two attractive projecting balconies that face eastward, on either side of the main arch facing east.

**The mosque:** Like the gateway, the mosque too was built in AD 1488. Situated on a high platform, the mosque is divided into three bays: the central one is topped by a flattened dome, while the bays on either side have vaulted roofs. The ceiling is beautifully worked in a decorative geometric pattern of plaster, with floral designs around the point at which the dome springs from its base.

**The tomb:** Khwajasara Basti Khan's Tomb was built in AD 1494, six years after the construction of the mosque and the gateway. The tomb stands on a terrace which is approached through a sandstone gateway. It was originally marked by four domed chhatris, of which only one now remains—a pretty structure with carved capitals on its four pillars and a deep chhajja projecting in the shape of a square below the dome of the chhatri. The drum of the chhatri is decorated with kanguras and medallions bearing calligraphy.

The tomb complex now serves as a madrasa. You can enter the complex and have a look at the buildings from the outside.

Photography is forbidden.



## ZAMRUDPUR AND THE VICINITY

In 1986, the Lotus Temple, the primary centre of Baha'i worship in the Indian subcontinent, was unveiled here in East of Kailash, New Delhi, making it, almost immediately, the symbol of modern, yet beautiful, Delhi. It is today one of the world's most visited monuments.

Just across the road from the Lotus Temple is the Kalkaji Temple, dedicated to the Hindu goddess Kalka, or Kali. Though at first glance very modern, the temple was probably a part of ancient Delhi's landscape originally.

From ancient to modern and everything in between: that is the story of this part of south Delhi. The colonies of Greater Kailash, East of Kailash, and Defence Colony are immediately identifiable as 'modern' neighbourhoods that have mushroomed here after Independence. Hidden away in the depths of these neighbourhoods, however, are much older structures: the Tughlaq-period tomb, now Mahavir Library, or the Lodi-era tombs of Zamrudpur village, or the tomb complex of Khwajasara Basti Khan in Defence Colony.





## 19. LALIT KALA AKADEMI ARTISTS' STUDIOS

India's main government-run fine arts foundation, the Lalit Kala Akademi, took a decision in the early 1970s to create a space where artists could live and work in Delhi. The space chosen was a plot of land, once an eighteenth-century Mughal garden, in the area known as Garhi in East of Kailash. The Delhi Development Authority (DDA) built residential blocks as well as community workshops here in 1976 and subsequently handed them over to the Lalit Kala Akademi.

Today, you can wander into the Artists' Studios and watch artists at work or see the exhibitions that are hosted at the studios. The studios' main attraction are two relics of the days when Garhi was home to a Mughal garden. One is the main gateway (not the modern gate of the Studio Complex), the other is a garden pavilion around which the residential block curves. Of the two, the gateway, with its upper balcony, its arched niches and oriel windows, and the main cusped-arch doorway, is the better-preserved. The garden pavilion, also with cusped arches, is unfortunately falling apart.

Timings: 11.00 am–5.00 pm, Sunday closed.

Entry: Free





## 20. THE TOMBS OF ZAMRUDPUR

Though universally called Zamrudpur, the proper historical name of this village is Zamarrudpur, zamarrud meaning emerald.

It is like many of Delhi's other urban villages: crowded with double-and triple-storeyed buildings, a maze of narrow lanes that conceal older structures.

Although there are five medieval tombs in this area, only two, one large and prominent, the other small and obscure but a beautiful and intricate structure, are worth looking for.

Timings: Sunrise–Sunset

Entry: Free

**Tomb 1:** The largest and most prominent of Zamrudpur's tombs is the one behind Blue Bells School, on Lala Lajpat Rai Marg. The tomb has been taken over and converted into a residence, so you can't go in, or even take photographs, but this is an interesting example of a Lodi tomb, made of dressed stone instead of the usual rubble masonry. This is Delhi quartzite, in shades of grey and pale brown, which gives the tomb a pleasing patchwork effect. Since quartzite is hard and notoriously difficult to carve, it's not surprising that the decoration here is very sparse—it's mainly in the form of arched recesses and niches on the outside of the tomb. The tomb is topped by a high dome that rises from an octagonal drum or base.

**Tomb 2:** From the first tomb, a short walk to the right will bring you to the centre of the village, the chowk. From here, if you take the lane to the right, you'll reach a side lane that branches off towards Zamrudpur's most exquisite tomb. Although it's now used by the neighbourhood as a rubbish dump and to hang clotheslines, this twelve-pillared Lodi tomb is a small and beautiful structure. The square-sided grey quartzite pillars have





ornately carved capitals, some of them still showing remains of the red sandstone chhajja that once ran across the top of the pillars.

Though the interior of the tomb is smelly and dirty, it's worth venturing into. The inside of the domed ceiling is decorated with beautiful teardrop-shaped medallions of calligraphy worked in incised plaster, connected to a circular central pattern by bands of incised plaster.

## 21. MAHAVIR LIBRARY

At about five minutes' walk to the south of Zamrudpur village is the Central Park that abuts the neighbourhood of N-Block, Greater Kailash-I. Within the Central Park, on a mound, is what is known as Mahavir Library. Though it is now no longer even used as a library, this was once a Tughlaq tomb. It's a square



building topped with a squat dome that rises from an octagonal drum. The entire building is made of rubble masonry, though recent 'renovations' have given it an ugly pinkish coating of plaster (besides adding a square structure—possibly supposed to function as a water tank—on one side). You can still see some of the original decoration outside, such as the arches on either side of the main arched doorways; the pretty niches decorated with incised plaster; and the carved grey stone brackets above the doorways.

Timings: Sunrise–Sunset

Entry: Free, no access to interior.





## 22. KALKAJI TEMPLE

One of Delhi's best-known and most popular Hindu temples, the Kalkaji Temple is a shrine to the goddess Kalka (Kalika or Kali). The temple has been around almost certainly since a long time, but has undergone so many changes that almost nothing remains of its original character. Perhaps the most obvious pre-Independence part of the temple is the gateway, a late Mughal structure with a large cusped-arch leading into the temple precincts. The passage formed by the arch is flanked by small arched *dalans* (colonnaded verandahs) which can be entered through three small cusped arches.

Although most of Kalkaji Temple has been whitewashed, painted, tiled, and modernized to the point where it is nearly unrecognizable as a historical building, the oldest extant part



of it dates back to about AD 1764. The dharamshala abutting the temple was built in AD 1845.

**Timings:** Sunrise–9.30 pm, Monday closed.

Prayer sessions 10.00 am–10.15 am,  
12.00–12.15 pm, 3.00 pm–3.15 pm,  
5.00 pm–5.15 pm.

**Entry:** Free



## Another place of interest

### BAHA'I HOUSE OF WORSHIP (LOTUS TEMPLE)

The Baha'i House of Worship, informally known as the 'Lotus Temple', is one of the most visited buildings in the world; approximately 13,000 people come to the temple every day. The construction of the Lotus Temple was completed in AD 1986.

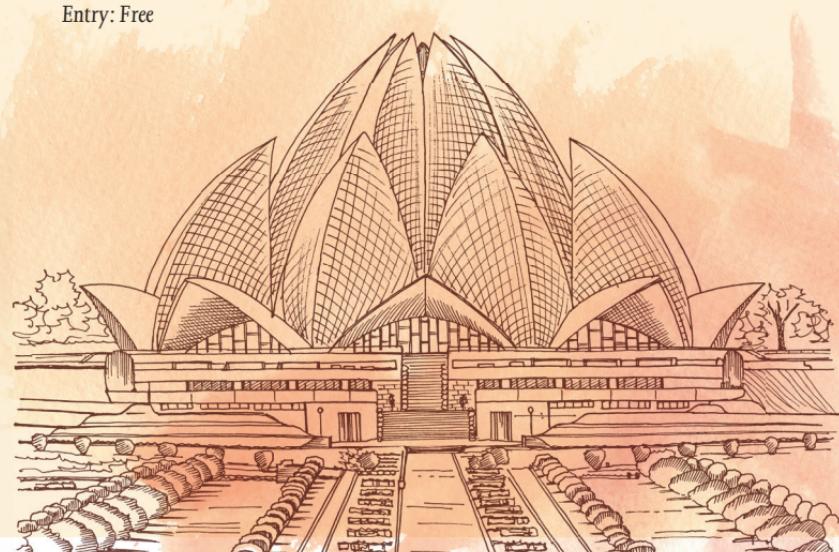
Designed by the Iranian-born architect Fariborz Sahba, the building is aptly named, its shape being inspired by a blossoming lotus. Twenty-seven 'petals', clad in pristine white marble and arranged in three concentric rows form the circular building, which sits amidst vast gardens. Nine pools of clear blue-green water surround the structure, representing the leaves of the lotus. The central hall of the Lotus Temple rises to a height of 40 m and can accommodate 2,500 people at a time. The Baha'i faith believes in the essential unity and equality of all religions, so all visitors, irrespective of religious beliefs, are welcome here. Regular prayer services, though, are held four times during the course of each day.

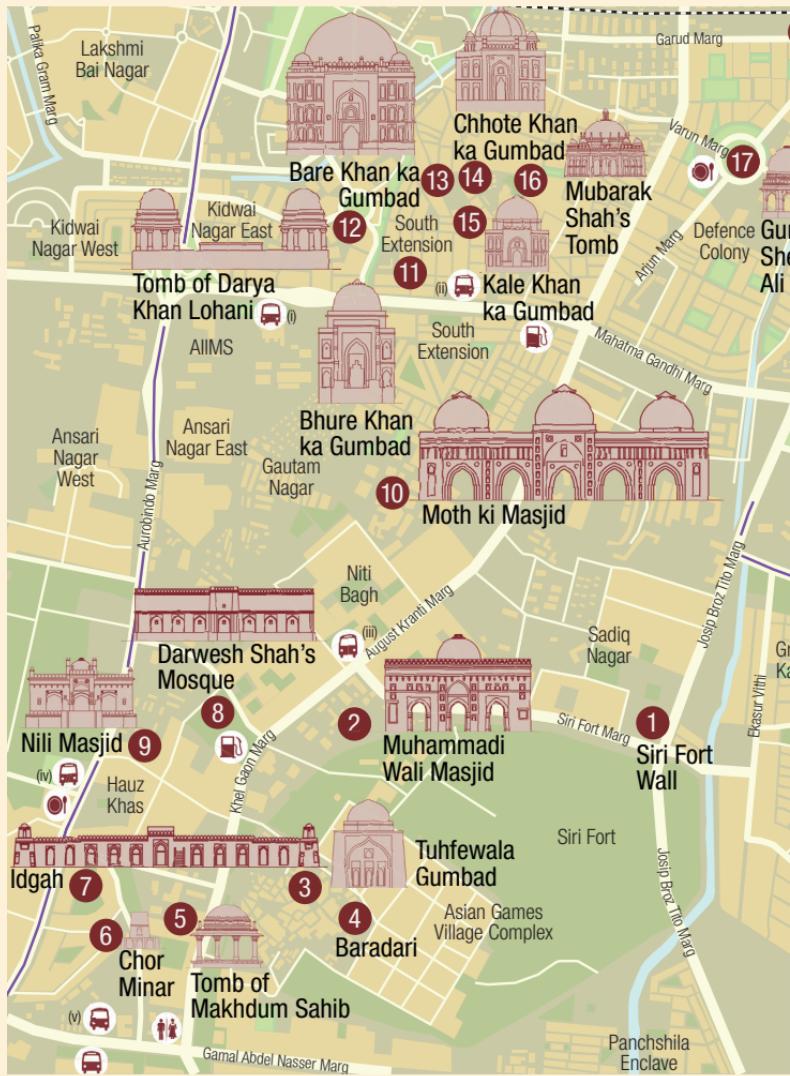
**Timings:** 9.00 am–7.00 pm (summer), 9.30 am–5.30 pm (winter),

prayer sessions everyday 10.00 am–10.15 am, 12.00–12.15 pm,

3.00 pm–3.15 pm, 5.00 pm–5.15 pm. Monday closed.

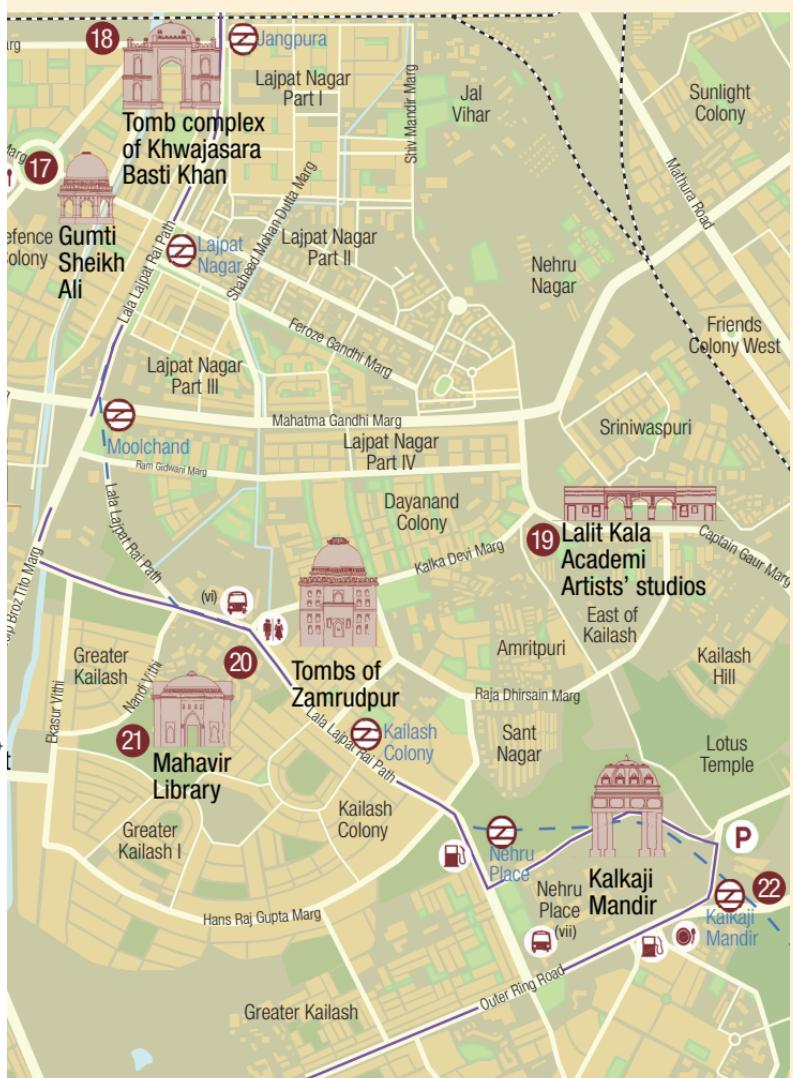
**Entry:** Free



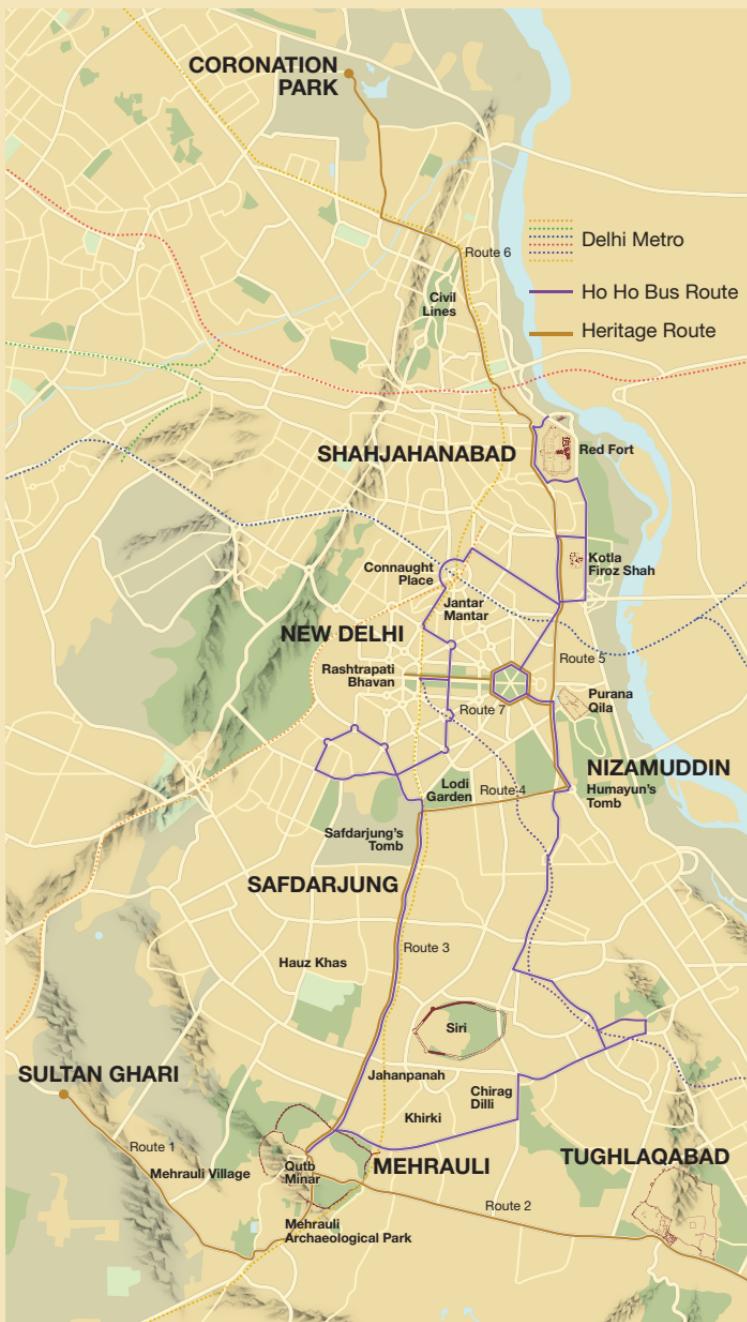


### Nearest Bus Stops

- (i) **AIIMS:** 400, 433, 437, 451, 460, 464, 470, 480, 483, 500, 524, 531, 532, 540, 543, 544, 606, 711, 724, 727, 864, 865, GL540
- (ii) **South Extension:** 303, 392 extra, 442, 479, 507, 518, 529, 544, 567, 611, 623, 724, 727, 769, 864, 865
- (iii) **Niti Bagh:** 413, 419 extra, 465 extra, 500, 522 A, 532, 540, 544, 580
- (iv) **Hauz Khas:** 043, 052, 335, 465, 501, 502, 503, 505, 506, 507, 508, 509, 512, 513, 514, 516, 517, 519, 520, 533, 536, 548, 558, 581, 590, 605, 618, 622, 725
- (v) **Sadhna Enclave:** 465, 467, 481, 511, 540, 541, 764
- (vi) **L.S.R. College:** 374, 375, 416, 425, 440, 442, 724, 774, 864, 865, 874
- (vii) **Nehru Place:** 414, 416, 425, 430, 435, 440, 445, 447, 449, 724, 864



- bus Bus Stand
- gas Petrol Pump
- car P Parking
- person Toilets
- plate Cafeteria
- z Metro Station
- purple HoHo Bus Route



This publication has been made possible by World Monuments Fund's Sustainable Tourism Initiative, sponsored by American Express.

SPONSOR



Created by



Delhi Chapter