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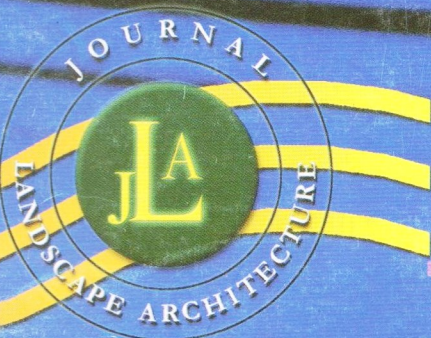


INTERVIEW

**Michael van
Valkenburgh**

**Cultural
landscapes**

**Rainwater
Harvesting**



INTERVIEW • LANDSCAPE DESIGN • HORTICULTURE • TECHNOLOGY • WEB SITES

PHOTOS: GRAFINITI



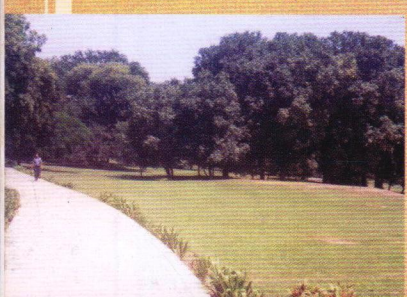
POLYALTHIA LONGIFOLIA FRAME THE VIEW TOWARDS BARA GUMBAD AT THE ENTRANCE



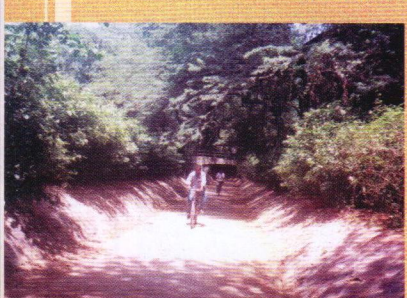
BARA GUMBAD



TREE FOLIAGE OFFERS FILTERED VIEW TO THE MONUMENTS



ROLLING LAWN INTERSPERSED WITH TREE GROVES



THE CURVILINEAR CYCLE TRACK



If there is an open space in Delhi that depicts layers of history coexisting to produce a unique landscape, it is the 'Bagh - I - Jud', the Lodi gardens. Once referred to as Lady Willingdon Park (after the wife of the then British Viceroy), it provides glimpses of the architectural styles in a sensitively planned landscape setting. This space was designed around the time when Lutyen's New Delhi was being completed. Envisaged as an appropriate context for a complex of five hundred-year-old buildings, considered worthy of preservation, the garden was planned with native and exotic vegetation around the monuments in 1936. Redesigned in 1968, it was renamed as the Lodi Gardens.

Architecturally as well as stylistically, the period between the renowned and powerful Tughlak and Mughal dynasties, consisting of the Sayyid and the Lodi periods, has been clubbed together. While the more powerful reigns flanking this period were responsible for building larger capital cities of Tughlakabad and Jahanpanah, there was little building activity during the Sayyid-Lodi period. Few mosques were designed along with the tombs but there were no large public mosques that were present in the Tughlak period or in the periods later.

The Sayyids and Lodis built square or octagonal buildings for their tombs that were precursors to the spectacular Mughal buildings of Humayun's Tomb at Delhi and the Taj Mahal at Agra. The area between Safdarjung Tomb and upto the Race Course was probably a necropolis, a burial ground, which is attested by the presence of a large number of known and unknown graves. The siting of the Tombs was often based on their proximity to the burial place of a renowned person- a holy man or a king. The site was often selected for its natural scenic value. Though the real reason behind the location of these tombs in this area may be difficult to ascertain, these buildings are known to have been located near a tributary of the River Yamuna that formed an integral part of the royal tomb landscape during the Lodi era. The *Athpula* bridge was probably a contribution of Emperor Akbar's reign.

The garden layout, with the pathways and planting schemes, were envisaged so as to focus entirely on the monuments. A combination of native and exotic trees and plants were laid out around the monuments. Everything conspired so that all the views could be di-

Lodi G

A WALK THRO

rected to the ruins. This garden was laid out on the principles of the contemporary English Landscape style whereby historic monuments were used as eye catchers and where none existed mock ruins or 'folies' were constructed. Until now it retains the scenic value of the rolling lawns and provides glimpses of the monuments through canopies of carefully located trees. A *folly*, in English landscape, is usually a tower or a Gothico classical ruin or structure in a landscaped park intended to enhance the view or picturesque effect.

Entering the Garden through one of the sides, one comes across the *Bara Gumbad* and *Sheesh Gumbad*. The view is spectacular with the monuments standing on a gently sloping mound. The grand large trees forming a background are a mix of the local and indigenous. *Ficus infectoria* (Pilkhan), *Mangifera indica* (Mango), *Erythrina variegata* (Indian Coral Tree) - producing dense clusters of bright scarlet flowers in spring, *Sygium cumini* (Jamun), *Dalbergia sissoo* (Shisham), *Delonix regia* (Gulmohar) - a large ornamental tree with feathery foliage and showy orange flowers; and *Alstonia scholaris* (Devil's Tree) are some that contribute to the scene.

The *Bara Gumbad* (1494), literally meaning a building with a big dome, is conjectured to have been a gateway as there is no evident sign of a grave. The largest structure in the garden, it appears to have two stories and is characteristic of the square type tombs of the Sayyid-Lodi period. Adjoining this building on the west side is a mosque with five arched openings. A pavilion located opposite the mosque lends a sense of visual balance to the complex while also framing the view towards *Bara Gumbad*.



Gardens

UGH HISTORY

NUPUR PROTHI KHANNA

Entering the garden through the other side, a row of mature, closely planted *Polyalthia longifolia* (Ashoka) trees frames the view towards the *Bara Gumbad*. The access to the garden setting of this tomb and the path network around it seem to have been designed keeping in mind optimal visibility towards the monument. This intention of the English garden designers is evident at other such nodes in the gardens. The octagonal tomb of the Sayyid ruler-Muhammad Shah (1434-1444), the next point of interest on the walk, provides a befitting example. Built probably by his son, Allaudin Alam Shah, in the year 1450, this monument is the oldest in the garden. Resting on a raised plinth with a verandah running around it, the tomb of Muhammad Shah, along with others in its series is a precursor to the tombs of Isa Khan at Nizammuddin, that of Adam Khan at Mehrauli and that of Sher Shah at Sahasram at Bihar. A cluster of small domed *chhatris* surround the gracefully proportioned main dome. Seemingly depicting the sun with its orbits of planets, this arrangement of the *chhatris* can also be seen at the Humayun's Tomb and the Taj Mahal. The setting for the monument is so designed that it is framed on all sides by a row of *Roystonea regia* (Bottle Palm trees) planted around 1940. The trees have been so arranged as to direct the view towards the monument all along the pathway leading up to it. The species appropriate for their tall trunks and light foliage provide a rhythmic appearance and filtered view from the Lodi Road as well as from other parts of the garden.

The long path, leading from Muhammad Shah's tomb to the tomb of Sikander Lodi, provides interesting views of the rolling lawn interspersed with groves as well as some noteworthy individual specimens of some

indigenous as well as exotic trees. One passes a series of *Prosopis juliflora* or Mesquite (*Vilayati Keekar*)-a drought resistant tree. Further along the way we come across a spectacular specimen of *Bombax ceiba* or Silk cotton tree with fleshy orange / red flowers that attract birds. Next in the series is a *Schleichera oleosa* tree (*Kusum*)-spectacular new leaves emerge bright red in March- April.

Moving along the path, one reaches the tomb of the second ruler of the Lodi dynasty, Sikander Lodi (1489-1517). With a fort like appearance, it is the third and last of the octagonal tombs of the Lodi period. This tomb (built 1518) was the first double domed structure which, from the exterior gives a monumental effect whereas, is of an appropriate scale from within. Set in a square garden, with the surrounding walls having battlements and sentry positions, this building seems part of a larger complex.

Moving away from the complex, one arrives at the *Athpula*, a bridge with eight arches, as its name literally implies. The once eight pierced bridge is believed to have served as a passage over a tributary of the Yamuna's - a part of the river system that drained the South Delhi area.

On the journey back from where the walk is commenced, one comes upon the *Sheesh Gumbad* or glass dome-a square tomb, deriving its name from the glazed tiles that would have adorned its facade. Remnants of its former elegance and glory in the form of turquoise and cobalt blue tile work are still visible.

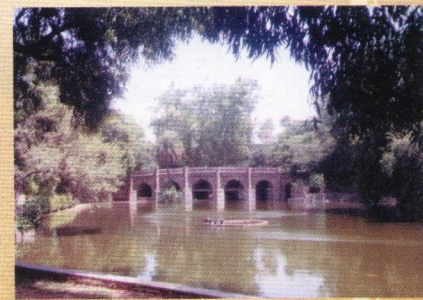
Covering a vast area and surrounded by posh residential localities and institutional areas, Lodi garden, due to its location, setting and ambiance, has become a hub of various kinds of activities. In early mornings, people come here for morning walks, during daytime groups of school children can be seen celebrating their picnics and day outs, while in the evenings, families visit the garden for its cool and quiet evenings. It is often visited by keen photographers for grand views of sweeping lawns, natural settings, nature lovers, horticulturists, botanists etc for a variety of plant species. Other interesting features of the garden include a curvilinear cycle track connecting one side of the garden with the other and a rose garden.

With some other remains, including a tower / turret to be found here, this garden is a treasure trove of history-a unique experience for natural and cultural heritage enthusiasts.

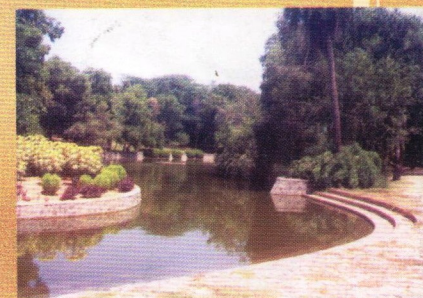
For more details regarding the monuments and trees located in the Lodi Gardens, a set of two heritage maps published by INTACH, can be referred. These are available at INTACH and better bookstores in Delhi.

Information compiled from:
Lodi Gardens - Buildings, Trees, set of two heritage maps, INTACH Delhi Chapter and Heritage & Communication Service publication, New Delhi

Ranjit Sinha, *Lal Kot to Lodi Gardens*, Published by Rupa & Co., 1996



ATHPULA BRIDGE...



... AND THE WATER BODY



VEGETATION AS SETTING TO THE MONUMENT

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TOMB OF MUHAMMAD SHAH SAYYID RESTS ON A GENTLE MOUND

