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## Paradox of Preservations: Navigating the Dichotomy between Protected and Unprotected Heritage Sites in India and Bangladesh

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### ABSTRACT

India and Bangladesh, South Asian neighbors, boast a combined total of 45 UNESCO World Heritage Sites (42 in India; 3 in Bangladesh). The abundance of heritage sites in both the countries raises a significant issue between demarcation of protected and unprotected sites, resulting in numerous unprotected sites and contrasting character of these two types of heritage sites. The paper addresses this challenge, analyzing one protected and one unprotected heritage site in the respective national capitals of India and Bangladesh, Delhi (and Delhi NCR- National Capital Region) and Dhaka. The focus is on understanding the character and performance of a heritage site managed under a formal system versus an unprotected site. The comparative study unveils key aspects such as narratives, interpretations and understanding among the stakeholders, encompassing source communities, users, heritage or non- profit organisations/experts, communities living in the vicinity of the site, etc., behavioral patterns of the users and the management and conservation status of the site. The research study approach is explorative and qualitative. This research will perform case analyses on a protected and an unprotected heritage site in both Delhi and Dhaka, sharing similar typology and located within the same geographic region. The comprehensive examination will involve observations, site investigations, and the use of semi-structured questionnaires for thorough analysis. With the objective to safeguard, conserve, and manage the rich heritage of both countries sustainably, regardless of its formal status, the authors further delve into the importance of engaging the stakeholders in this process, need of popularising the heritage sites and fostering awareness about the importance of the heritage site among them.

#### **Keywords:**

Protected and Unprotected Heritage; Heritage Interpretation; Character; Engaging Stakeholders; Sustainable Heritage Management.

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## 1. Introduction

South Asia, a region rich in cultural heritage, houses an extensive array of sites that are repositories of centuries of human history, architecture, and art. These sites present a study in contrasts: while protected sites benefit from structured conservation efforts and robust support systems, unprotected sites often grapple with neglect and the imminent threats of urban development and environmental degradation. The disparity in the management and conservation of these sites is profoundly influenced by their protection status and the extent of community involvement. This interaction plays a crucial role in determining the effectiveness and sustainability of conservation efforts. Protected sites receive systematic support, including legal recognition, funding, and technical assistance, ensuring their preservation for future generations. Conversely, unprotected sites often lack such support, leaving them vulnerable to threats such as development pressures, tourism practices, neglect, natural disasters, looting and disrepair.

To navigate these complexities, understanding the nuanced dynamics between protection status and community involvement is essential. This paper explores how these factors affect conservation outcomes in Delhi (and Delhi NCR) and Dhaka. By examining both protected and unprotected sites in these cities, the study aims to uncover differences in management approaches, stakeholder perceptions, and community engagement practices.

This approach seeks to forge pathways for tailored conservation strategies that honor the physical and cultural contexts of heritage sites. Such strategies are vital for the sustainable preservation of South Asia's rich cultural heritage, ensuring its endurance amidst modernization and globalization.

### *1.1 Methodology*

This study employs a comparative analytical framework to examine the management and conservation outcomes of protected and unprotected heritage sites in Delhi and Delhi NCR, India, and Dhaka, Bangladesh. By focusing on one protected and one unprotected site in each city—Sunderwala Burj and Eidgah wali Masjid in Delhi and Delhi NCR respectively, and Lalbagh Fort Mosque and Kosaituli Mosque in Dhaka - this research aims to uncover how protection status influence heritage conservation, community engagement, and stakeholder perceptions.

As in Figure 1, the methodology integrates a qualitative approach, combining site observations, semi-structured interviews with key stakeholders, and document analysis to provide a comprehensive understanding of each site's management practices and community interactions. This approach allows for an in-depth examination of the socio-cultural and management dynamics at each site, assessing their impact on the preservation and utilization of heritage spaces.

Analytical efforts focus on thematic analysis to identify patterns and themes across sites, exploring the interplay between conservation practices, community involvement, and urban development pressures.

Ethical considerations are central to the research, ensuring respect for the cultural significance of each site and the communities involved. The study aims to contribute to the broader discourse on heritage conservation, providing recommendations for sustainable and inclusive heritage management.

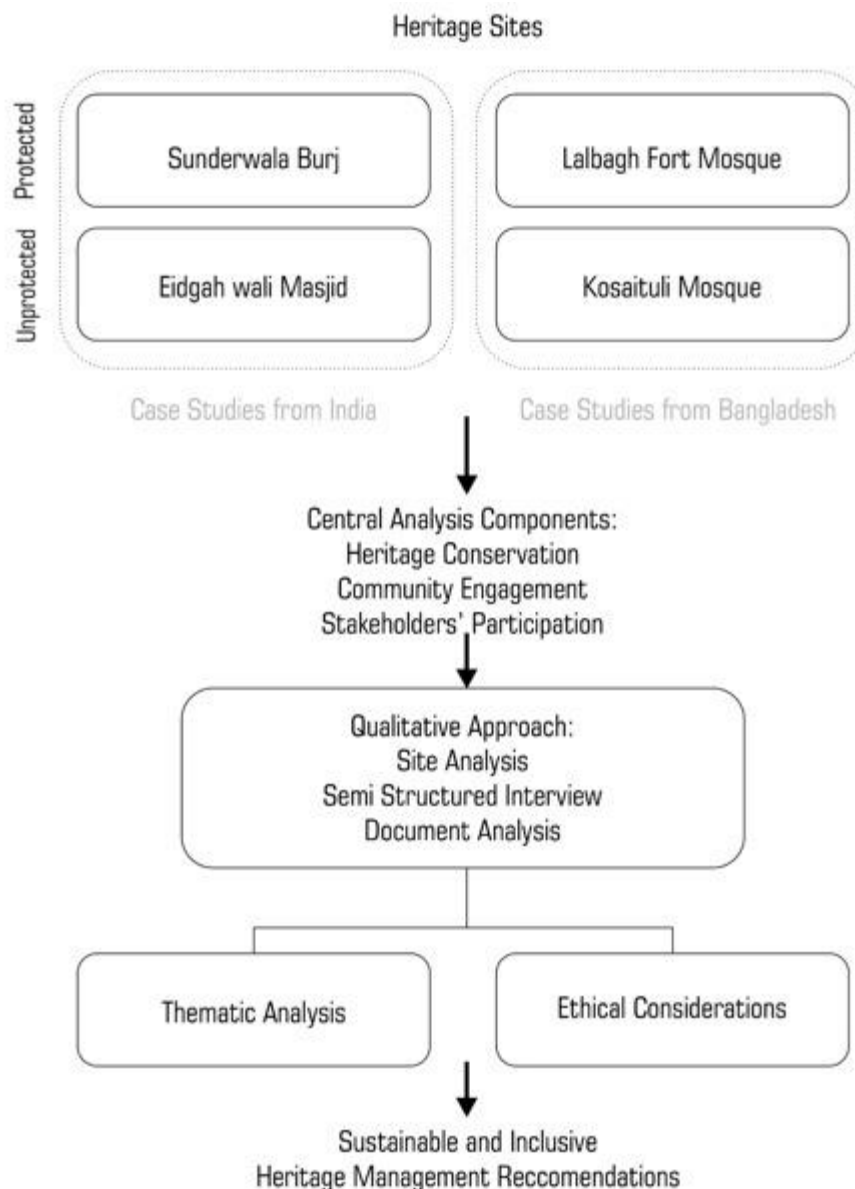


Fig. 1. Diagram illustrating the methodology (Source: Authors)

## 2. Literature Review

### 2.1 Protection Status of Heritage Sites

Protected cultural heritage sites refer to buildings/monuments or areas that are legally recognized and designated for their cultural, historical, or natural importance. These sites are typically managed and conserved by government bodies or other authorized entities to ensure their preservation for future generations (Merryman, 1990, Blake, 2000). For example, in India, sites under the Archaeological Survey of India (ASI) receive considerable attention, including regular maintenance and restoration work (Sanyal, 2020). Similarly, in Bangladesh, the Sixty Dome Mosque and Paharpur, both UNESCO World Heritage Sites, demonstrate how legal protection can lead to better resource allocation and management practices.

However, the protective status can also introduce challenges and sometimes lead to exclusionary practices where local communities are marginalized from participating in the conservation processes. As Lowenthal (1998) argues, the rigid frameworks employed can sometimes alienate local

communities, whose living culture may offer the most sustainable means of heritage conservation. Moreover, Tunbridge and Ashworth (1996) note that the designation of heritage sites can lead to an overemphasis on monumentality over intangible cultural values, which are often crucial to the local cultural identity. This can result in a disconnect between the site and the cultural practices it was meant to embody, occasionally leading to conflicts over access and use (Smith, 2006).

On the other hand, unprotected cultural heritage sites are areas that lack legal recognition or designation for their cultural, historical, or natural significance. These unprotected sites may not receive the necessary resources or attention for their preservation and can be at risk of irreversible damage or loss (King, 2016).

## *2.2 Community Involvement: Challenges and Advantages*

Community-managed heritage sites highlight the importance of local involvement in sustainable management and preservation. This model leverages community engagement to align conservation efforts with local values and enhance visitor experience, as demonstrated by Grimwade and Carter (2000) in their study on interpretative planning at smaller heritage sites.

Hodges and Watson (2000) emphasize protecting intangible cultural heritage through inclusive practices that sustain heritage and foster community pride. Millar (1989) discusses conservation and tourism intersection, advocating strategies that support local economies without undermining heritage values. Han et al. (2016) refine community participation with a co-management framework involving locals in decision-making, ensuring equitable tourism benefits and effective site management. However, challenges like ongoing dialogue, balancing perspectives, and aligning customs with international standards arise.

Community involvement fosters better conservation outcomes and brings social and economic benefits, including empowerment and social cohesion (Pace, 2019). Stovel (2005) provides examples of community-led initiatives employing local knowledge for adaptive management. However, inadequate resources or expertise can lead to heritage deterioration.

Unprotected sites face magnified challenges due to the lack of formal recognition and educational outreach, resulting in undervaluation of intangible aspects significant to local communities.

In defining heritage, Harrison and Sterling (2020) posits that it is not a static resource but is continually shaped by social, political, and environmental contexts. This dynamic understanding calls for adaptive management strategies that recognize the value of both protected and unprotected heritage in fostering community identity and resilience in the face of change. Participatory governance models involving local communities at all conservation stages are increasingly seen as solutions, as suggested by Silverman (2010) and Bandarin & van Oers (2012). Successes like the model at Galle Fort in Sri Lanka show how integrating formal protection with community involvement leads to sustainable site management. Community engagement is essential for balancing traditions and socio-economic development, ensuring the sustainability and global relevance of heritage sites.

## *2.3 Urban vs. Regional Heritage Sites: Protection Status and Community Affiliation*

Urban and regional heritage sites in India and Bangladesh show stark contrasts in protection status and community engagement, reflecting broader societal inequalities. Prominent urban sites like Humayun's Tomb in Delhi and Lalbagh Fort in Dhaka benefit from significant visibility and resources from both government and non-governmental organizations, enabling much effective conservation. In contrast, regional sites like Eidgah wali Masjid in Nuh district, Delhi NCR, and the ruins of Panam Nagar near Dhaka face challenges due to remoteness and lack of recognition, resulting in inadequate protection.

The relationship between heritage sites and their local communities varies considerably, as highlighted by Smith (2006) and Graham et al. (2000). Urban sites, under commercial, touristic, and

administrative pressures, often become isolated from local communities, leading to a reduced sense of local ownership. In contrast, regional heritage sites are frequently more deeply woven into the local social fabric, fostering a robust communal identity, as emphasized by Harvey (2001) and Lowenthal (1998). This contrast underscores the varying degrees of community engagement and the potential for heritage to serve as a focal point for local identity, as explored in comparative studies by Logan and Craith (2016).

The dichotomy between urban and regional sites highlights resource allocation disparities and underscores social inequalities, as discussed by Pendlebury et al. (2009) and Ashworth and Tunbridge (1990). High-profile urban sites receive significant attention and resources due to their strategic importance in tourism, ensuring better protection and visibility. In contrast, regional sites are often overlooked, reflecting the marginalized status of their communities, as Harrison (2013) and Smith (2006) have emphasized. This situation underscores the need to re-evaluate protection criteria in heritage conservation, which often mirrors and reinforces existing power structures, as argued by Graham, Ashworth, and Tunbridge (2000) and Byrne (2008). These criteria determine which histories are preserved and whose voices dominate or are marginalized, perpetuating social inequalities within heritage practices.

There is a pressing need for inclusive approaches that encompass not just the physical conservation of sites but also their social and cultural dimensions. Such approaches challenge conventional frameworks underpinning heritage policies, advocating for recognizing heritage as a complex interplay of histories and meanings that transcend mere physical preservation. By acknowledging and integrating the diverse narratives and significances attributed to these sites by their communities, heritage conservation can move towards a more equitable and holistic practice that respects both tangible and intangible aspects of heritage.

### 3. Case Studies

#### *3.1 Sunderwala Burj, New Delhi, India*

##### *3.1.1 Documentation and Inventory*

Sunderwala Burj, a 16th-century mausoleum in Sunder Nursery, is among the three heritage structures integrated into UNESCO World Heritage Site of Humayun's Tomb in 2016. Designated as a protected monument, it is meticulously documented and conserved by Aga Khan Trust for Culture in collaboration with the Archaeological Survey of India, supported by the US Ambassador's Fund for Cultural Preservation. Its restoration is an integral part of the broader Nizamuddin Urban Renewal Initiative spearheaded by the Aga Khan Trust for Culture (Nizamuddin Urban Renewal Initiative, n.d.).

Period: 16th Century, Early Mughal

Area: Approximately 70 sqm

Management and Protection Status: As part of Sunder Nursery, it is managed by a trust including Ministry of Urban Development, Central Public Works Department, South Delhi Municipal Corporation, Archaeological Survey of India, Aga Khan Trust for Culture and Aga Khan Foundation (Aga Khan Trust for Culture, 2019). Listed as a protected monument by the Archaeological Survey of India in 1927.

Sunderwala Burj, within the Sunder Nursery complex and integral to the broader Nizamuddin Urban Renewal Initiative, stands as an exemplary case of community involvement in conservation. With a core vision centered around the active participation of Nizamuddin Basti's local community, this initiative seamlessly combines preservation efforts with community and environment development (Nizamuddin Urban Renewal Initiative, n.d.). Besides its historical and architectural significance,

Sunderwala Burj symbolizes an innovative model for culturally driven development in India's historic city centers as part of the Urban Renewal initiative.

Located prominently in alignment with the main entrance of Sunder Nursery, this tomb, though non-living, is one of the earliest architectural marvels from the Mughal era. One of its most notable features is the intricately adorned star-shaped ceiling inside, complemented by Quranic inscriptions at the lintel level (Nizamuddin Urban Renewal Initiative, n.d.).

### *3.1.2 Nuanced Understanding of the site* *Socio-Economic impact*

Sunder Nursery, alongside the Basti and Humayun's Tomb, embodies profound cultural importance, serving as a nexus where the area's rich built and natural heritage intertwine with the community's culture and diverse traditions like cuisine, music, and handicrafts. This non-profit People Public-Private Partnership approach demonstrates 'culture as a tool for urban development' (Nizamuddin Urban Renewal Initiative, n.d.).

The Sair-e-Nizamuddin initiative organizes heritage and nature walks at Sunder Nursery, led by trained Basti community members. Insha-e-Noor hosts embroidery workshops and operates a stall in the park, showcasing handicrafts made by women from the Basti. These endeavors, along with various other initiatives under this project, contribute significantly to both the social and economic well-being of the community.

### *Community Engagement*

Since its restoration and revitalization in 2018, Sunderwala Burj has transcended its local significance, attracting a diverse audience from across the nation and around the globe. Previously, despite its exceptional historical, cultural, and architectural significance, the area, along with Nizamuddin Basti, was associated with perceptions of being unsafe and chaotic, deterring visitors, especially in the evenings (Singh, 2022). However, today, the bustling environment sees people enjoying the area well into the night, engaging with it in various ways, fostering diverse interpretations and connections among visitors, making it safer, more inclusive, and accessible.



(a)



(b)

**Fig. 2.** (a) Nizamuddin resident seeking shelter in Sunder Burj as it rains during his evening stroll (b) Various ways visitors engage around the water feature adjacent to Sunder Burj (Source: Nitya Bali)



Sunder Nursery, cherished by the local community in Nizamuddin, has become a favorite destination for daily walks and connecting with nature. The tomb, particularly, serves as a resting spot for senior citizens, who leisurely stroll through the park, engage in conversations with staff, and delight in nature's beauty amidst the lively atmosphere. Popular among other visitors for photography, picnics, and various activities, security personnel note that only a fraction, especially foreigners, explore its historical significance.



**Fig. 3.** Visitors seen enjoying and picnicking in the lawns of the tomb (b) People seen sitting on the plinth of the tomb, clicking photographs and passing by (Source: Nitya Bali)

Another fascinating connection it establishes with the community is through the benches scattered throughout Sunder Nursery and around Sunderwala Burj. These benches serve as public memorials for the loved ones of people who have donated them under the 'Dedicate a Bench program' (The Delhi Walla, 2022). Each bench features interesting inscriptions that, when read by visitors, create a sense of connection to a larger community.

The community engagement at Sunder Nursery is hence multifaceted, highlighting its role as both a space for community gatherings and social cohesion, as well as a historically and culturally rich environment.

### *Cultural Context*

The profound intertwining of the ecological landscape and historical surroundings of Sunder Nursery with the cultural activities and community engagements enrich the holistic significance of the tomb.

The Urban Renewal initiative, encompassing both living and non-living monuments, places the community, cultural practices, and religious beliefs at the center of its decision-making process. It not only conserves and develops these areas but also offers opportunities for Basti residents to showcase their cultural, historical, and ecologically rich context. This initiative aims to raise awareness about the tangible and intangible heritage of the Nizamuddin area while empowering the local community.

### *Conservation Challenges*

Sunder Burj suffered decay due to water seepage and past improper repairs with modern materials, harming its architectural integrity. In 2012, the Aga Khan Trust for Culture effectively conserved the tomb, restoring its integrity, historical ornamentation, and garden setting using craft-based approach that reinforced age-old building skills (Nizamuddin Urban Renewal Initiative, n.d.).

In the words of Ratish Nanda, “We wanted to make the locals own the project and participate wholeheartedly. So instead of waiting for them to come to us, we went to their homes. It took us years of convincing before they joined.....” (Singh, 2022). Considering the Urban Renewal initiative as a whole, it's essential to acknowledge the years of collaborative effort. This involves building trust, integrating the community effectively, and fostering continued sense of ownership and belonging. This approach not only serves as a model for conserving heritage but also sets a commendable standard for community-driven initiatives.

### *3.2 Eidgah wali Masjid, Akera village, Nuh District, Haryana, India*

Like numerous other heritage sites of regional or local importance, the mosque lacks mention in historical records or sources. It is listed in the unpublished 2003 INTACH listing but has not been documented to date. To bridge this gap, the first author undertakes a comprehensive exploration of the unprotected mosque, conducting preliminary documentation and research to unravel its multiple layers and gain a nuanced understanding of the site.

#### *3.2.1 Documentation and Inventory*

Locally known as the Eidgah wali Masjid among the villagers, the mosque is situated in the Akera (Akhera) village in the Nuh District of Haryana.

Latitude and Longitude- 28° 1'18.20"N

Longitude- 76°59'41.24"E

Area- Approximately 4,000 sqm (current complex) and 500 sqm (original complex)

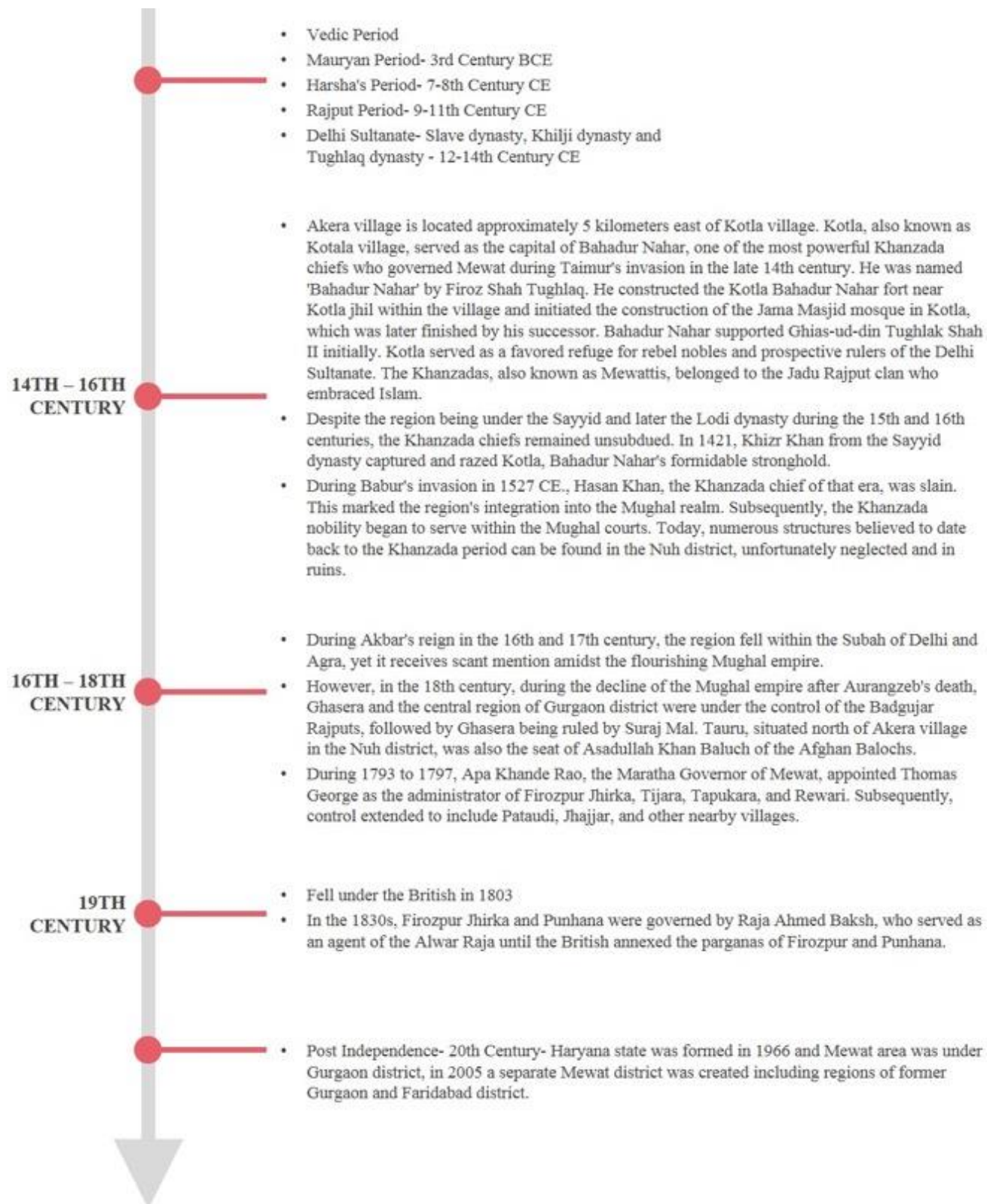
Usage- Living monument, used as a mosque by the Akera village community

Property type- Building and site, Religious

#### *3.2.2 Historical Significance*

The Nuh district, formerly known as Mewat district, was established in 2005 following its separation from the Gurgaon district. Situated within the Mewat region, often referred to as the 'land of the Meos,' the area holds a rich historical significance. In Figure 4 a summary of the region's historical timeline, particularly focusing on the key references pertinent to the areas surrounding Akera village has been given.

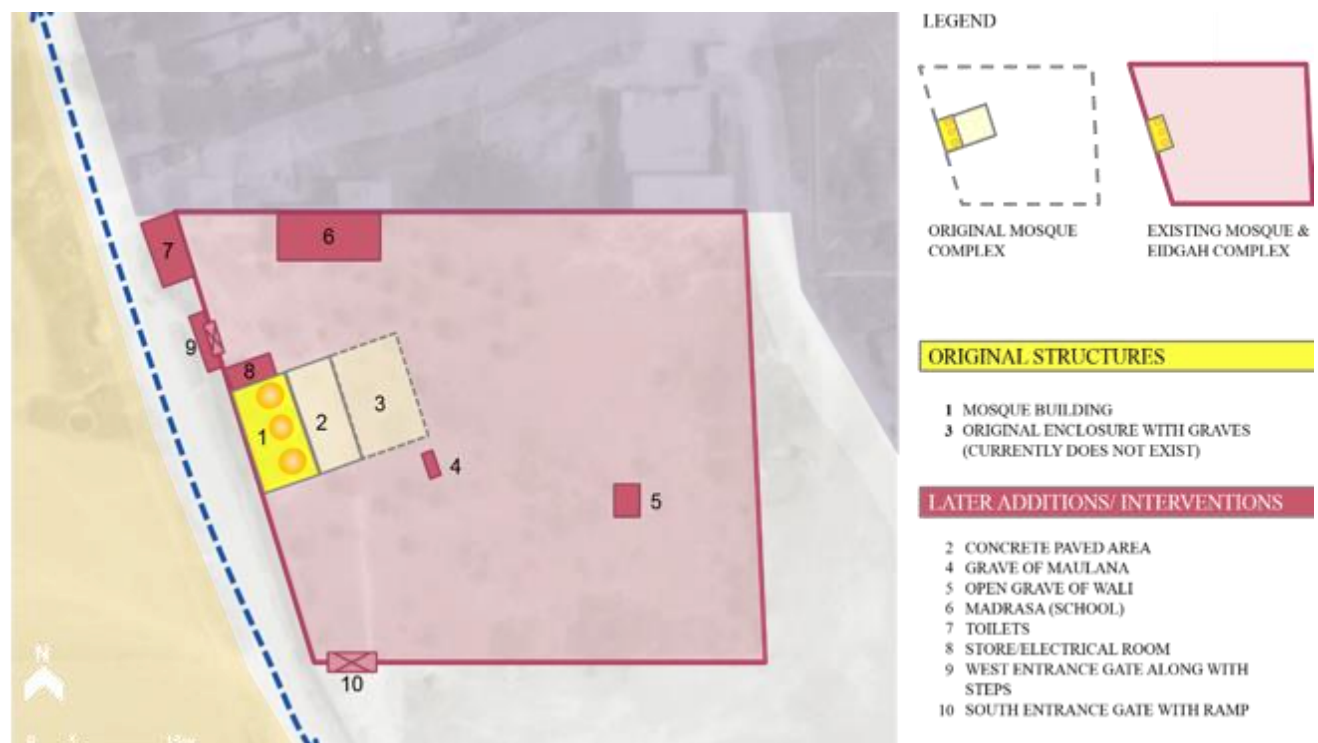




**Fig. 4.** Historical timeline of the region (Source: (K.S.Bhoria & Bajaj, 1983), (INTACH Haryana Chapter, 2011))

Akera village, situated in a region of historical significance, reached its pinnacle during the 14th-18th century encompassing the Khanzada and the Mughal period.

### 3.2.3 Architectural Characteristics and Site Findings



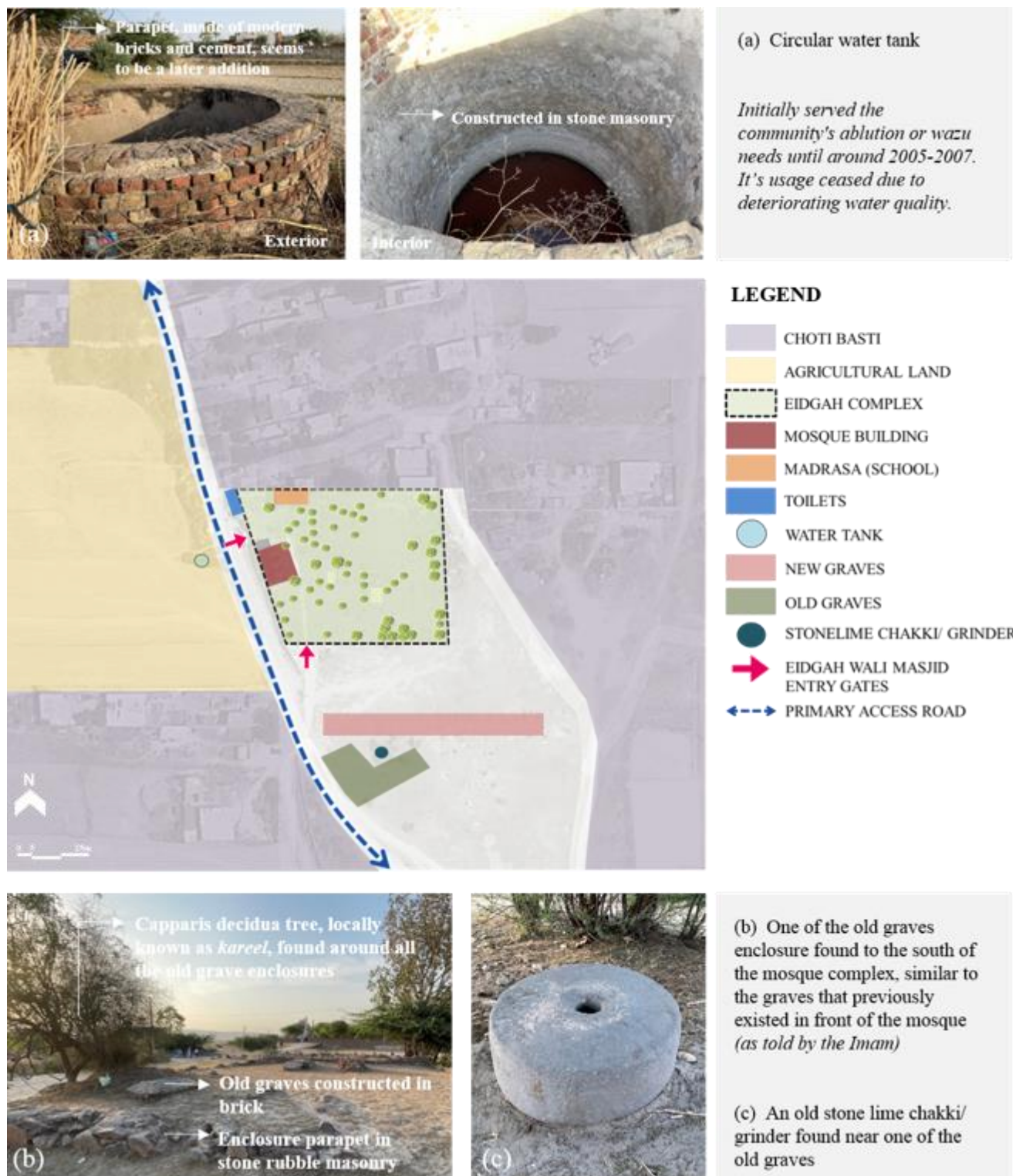
**Fig. 5.** Schematic plan of Eidgah wali Masjid, Akera indicating the original fabric and the later additions to the complex (Source: Nitya Bali)

*Site Findings*

Presently, the site consists of a mosque building along with an Eidgah situated on elevated terrain. According to information provided by the Imam and the village community, there used to be an enclosure approximately 15'X15' in front of the mosque to the east containing 4-5 graves. In 2005, these graves were covered and filled in to create a leveled area, which was further extended on three sides. Subsequently, a boundary wall and two gates were erected enclosing this expanded space that is being used as Eidgah by the villagers.

Originally, only the mosque and the graves enclosure occupied the raised land, with the approximate boundary marked in Figure 5 based on community-provided information. Further additions include steps constructed with brick and cement mortar for accessing the elevated complex, along with a small store/electrical room built along the north wall of the mosque using modern materials. On the extended land in front of the mosque, there is an open grave dedicated to a Wali (a saint considered a friend of God) and a covered grave dedicated to a Maulana from the village. Recently, in 2022, additional facilities have been added north of the mosque on the extended land, including a madrasa (school), toilets, and water taps for ablution.

Since 2004, many villagers have relocated from the main Akera village area to settle around the mosque, adjacent to their agricultural farmlands. Among them, this area is commonly referred to as Choti Basti.



**Fig. 6.** Schematic site plan marking the findings at the site (Source: Nitya Bali)

### Architectural characteristics of the Mosque

The mosque, together with the covered graves, formed the original fabric of the site. Currently, no inscriptions or written records are present on the site, nor were they found around the original graves, as reported by the villagers. Therefore, this research endeavors to document the architectural characteristics and style of the mosque (refer Figure 7), as well as establish its approximate date.



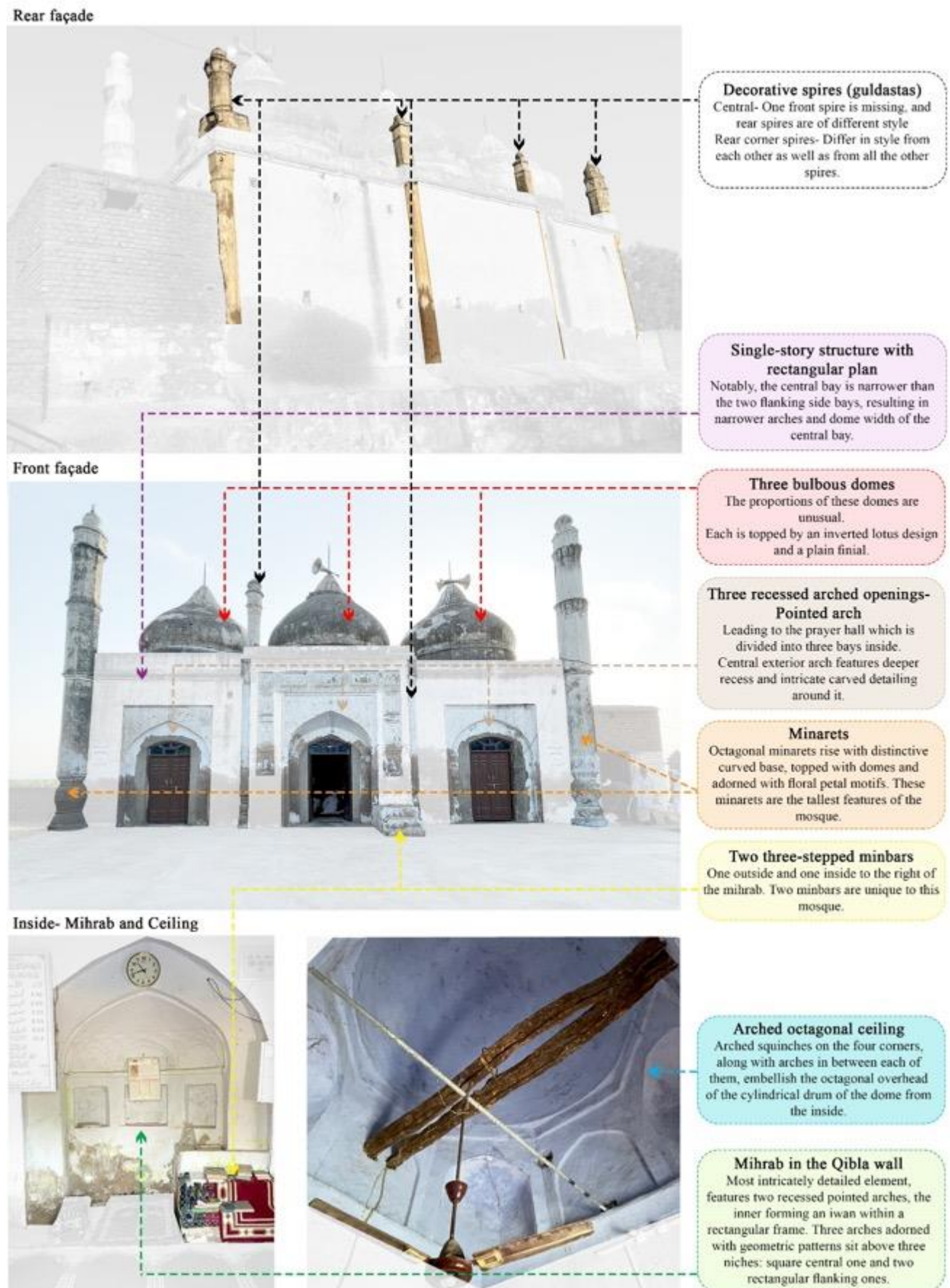


Fig. 7. Architectural features of the mosque (Source: Nitya Bali)






**Fig. 8.** Different building materials of the mosque: Lakhori bricks, stone rubble masonry, and lime mortar (Source: Nitya Bali)







The mosque's architecture eloquently reflect the Indo-Islamic style, typical of the Mewat region, showcasing a harmonious blend of Rajput, Khanzada (Delhi Sultanate influence), and Mughal influences. Additionally, it boasts unique architectural nuances that are exclusive to this revered mosque.







**Table 1**

Table showing comparative study of the mosque's architectural features with similar features found in other heritage building with its period of construction to infer the approximate date of the Eidgah wali Masjid

SNo.	Architectural Feature of the Eidgah wali Masjid, Akera	Similar Architectural Feature found in other heritage buildings/structures with their period of construction and location
1.	Arch – Pointed with decorative patterns carved on exterior façade	<div>  </div> <div>  <p>Mosque of Mughal Sarai, Nakodar, Jalandhar, Punjab 1690-91 CE (Photo Source: American Institute of Indian Studies); (Virtual Museum of Images &amp; Sounds)</p> </div> <div>  <p>Open mosque, Group of Tombs, Tauru, Haryana 1456-1526 CE (Photo Source: American Institute of Indian Studies); (Virtual Museum of Images &amp; Sounds)</p> </div>



2.	Dome – Bulbous with inverted lotus and plain finial		
		 <p>Tomb of Shah Roshan Chirag, Palwal, Haryana 1662 CE (Photo Source: American Institute of Indian Studies); (Virtual Museum of Images &amp; Sounds)</p>	 <p>Shahi Masjid, Malab, Nuh, Haryana 17th-18th Century CE (Photo Source: Author); (National Mission on Monuments and Antiquities)</p>
3.	Ceiling - Arched squinches and arches embellish the octagonal overhead		
		 <p>Tomb, Allahabad Village, Punhana tehsil, Nuh, Haryana Attributed to Khanzada period (Photo Source: Vinit Bhanwala); (Heritage Haryana, 2023)</p>	 <p>Mosque of Mughal Sarai, Nakodar, Jalandhar, Punjab 1690-91 CE (Photo Source: American Institute of Indian Studies); (Virtual Museum of Images &amp; Sounds)</p>

4.	<p>Minarets – Octagonal with curved base and floral carvings</p> <div data-bbox="260 237 632 896">  </div> <div data-bbox="689 237 1027 869">  </div> <div data-bbox="1070 237 1414 840">  </div> <div data-bbox="689 840 1027 992"> <p>Palace of Maharaja Sher Singh Batala, Punjab 1780-1839 CE (Photo Source: Ravi Sandhu); (Baring School, Batala)</p> </div> <div data-bbox="1070 840 1414 1025"> <p>Shahi Masjid, Malab, Nuh, Haryana 17th-18th Century CE (Photo Source: Author); (National Mission on Monuments and Antiquities)</p> </div>
5.	<p>Mihrab- Recessed pointed arches, iwan with decorative pattern</p> <div data-bbox="252 1151 632 1601">  </div> <div data-bbox="689 1151 1114 1601">  </div> <div data-bbox="1118 1151 1414 1601">  </div> <div data-bbox="689 1601 1414 1727"> <p>Mosque and Mughal Sarai, Fatehabad, Punjab 1606-1650 CE (Photo Source: American Institute of Indian Studies); (Virtual Museum of Images &amp; Sounds)</p> </div>

Source: Nitya Bali

Approximate date- 16th-17th Century

This dating is based on a comparative analysis of its architectural characteristics with other buildings in Haryana and neighboring states of Rajasthan and Punjab (refer Tab. 1). Additionally,



folklore and statements from both current and former imams suggest the mosque is approximately 500 years old, aligning with the estimated date.

### 3.2.4 Nuanced Understanding of the Site

Given the intricate heritage of this mosque building, a nuanced understanding of the cultural, social, and environmental context is imperative. The mosque serves as a focal point, used, managed and protected by the Muslim community of Akera village. As recounted by the Imam, before 2004, villagers gathered at the sacred site for Eid prayers, using the surrounding grounds due to limited space within the mosque enclosure. In 2005, as residents resettled closer to the mosque, they began the tradition of daily Namaz in the mosque, continuing the legacy of community prayer on Eid. Around 100 villagers visit the mosque daily for Namaz, increasing to about 4000 during Eid. Additionally, approximately 150 children from Akera village, mainly from Choti Basti, attend the newly established madrasa.

According to villagers, funds for any mosque-related work are collected among them, and they actively participate in decision-making. The entire village manages and maintains the mosque, which is the only old mosque left in Akera village. In contrast, other mosques in the main village area, like Noorani Masjid and Jama Masjid, have been renovated using modern materials and styles. These mosques are managed by *mohallas* (neighborhoods), and funds for their renovation are collected from their respective neighborhoods. In contrast, this mosque is considered the responsibility of the entire village community, and funds for its upkeep are collected from entire village. There is also a customary practice where the groom's family makes a donation to the mosque whenever a girl from the village gets married. The villagers appoint the mosque's imam from within their community, believing only a community-appointed imam can lead prayers for them. Any outsider appointed by religious trusts are not allowed to lead prayers for the villagers. The mosque holds significant social importance for the villagers.

The community is rich with myths and stories about the mosque. One tale tells of a Jinn who lived there and was heard by villagers, but vanished once regular prayers began. Another story involves the Wali, to whom the open grave is dedicated. Villagers claim to have seen him in multiple places simultaneously until 2001 and 2002. The amalgamation of such beliefs, cultural practices, traditions, and the deep-rooted association of villagers with the mosque enhances the profound significance of the mosque within the community. It intricately weaves into the fabric of their existence, embodying not just a place of worship, but also a symbol of social cohesion, identity, and cherished heritage for the village populace.

Akera Village in Nuh district, among Haryana's most backward regions, relies primarily on agriculture, notably wheat farming. Some villagers also supply fish, poultry products, and sheep to Delhi. Local crafts include pottery, knife production, metalwork, and carpentry.

### Conservation Challenges

Akera village residents manage the mosque site, deeply valuing its historical significance and committed to its preservation, unlike other mosques in the main village area that have been completely refurbished. They have conducted various repair works within the mosque, including patch filling with modern materials like bricks and cement, repainting multiple times, and redoing the flooring in concrete. Additionally, they have added doors for security and built a small storeroom next to the north wall of the mosque to house electrical equipment. While the repair works may not strictly adhere to conventional monument preservation ethics, the community's commendable intentions to safeguard the mosque cannot be ignored. These actions primarily result from a lack of awareness and knowledge about conservation or restoration techniques.

The new additions or interventions, such as the madrasa, toilets, and water taps, have been constructed at a distance from the mosque building on the expanded land, ensuring the integrity of the old mosque building remains intact. However, a major intervention was made to the old graves enclosure, which previously existed alongside the mosque. These graves have now been filled and covered, a decision reflecting the social beliefs and cultural values of the community. Villagers explain that to accommodate more people for Namaz in the mosque, additional space was necessary. Because the old graves were over 100 years old, according to their religious beliefs, if necessary due to circumstances, the graves could be covered and Namaz could be performed there. They emphasize that no damage was done to these graves; they were simply covered. For the community, the continuity of the space and its use, along with their associated values, is central to their decision-making. However, this approach conflicts with the established conservation ethics, as it affects its character, authenticity, and integrity.

Given the significance of this mosque as a religious heritage site deeply intertwined with community values and beliefs, it requires to be conserved with a sensitive approach that acknowledges and respects diverse cultural perspectives. This involves navigating the diverse cultural values through respectful negotiations and fostering collaboration with the community for its management and effective conservation. To achieve this, a shift from the traditional material-based approach, which has historically dominated heritage conservation in India, to a value-based approach is necessary (Sharma, 2019). For sites of similar nature, it is imperative that all stakeholders, including the community, heritage professionals, and bureaucratic experts, embrace a shared vision for the effective management of these heritage sites.

### *3.3 Lalbagh Fort Mosque, Dhaka, Bangladesh*

#### *3.3.1 Documentation and Inventory*

Lalbagh Mosque, within the monumental Mughal fort complex, is an emblematic site of religious heritage. It represents grand and nationalistic narratives, often seen more as a symbol of power than religiosity. This emphasis on historical significance can overshadow its religious function, creating tensions between preserving historical values and the community's attachment to the site. Scholars recognize it as a unique example of the Bengali expression of the Mughal archetype.

Period: 1678-1679 (Mughal Era) by Mughal Prince Muhammad Azam

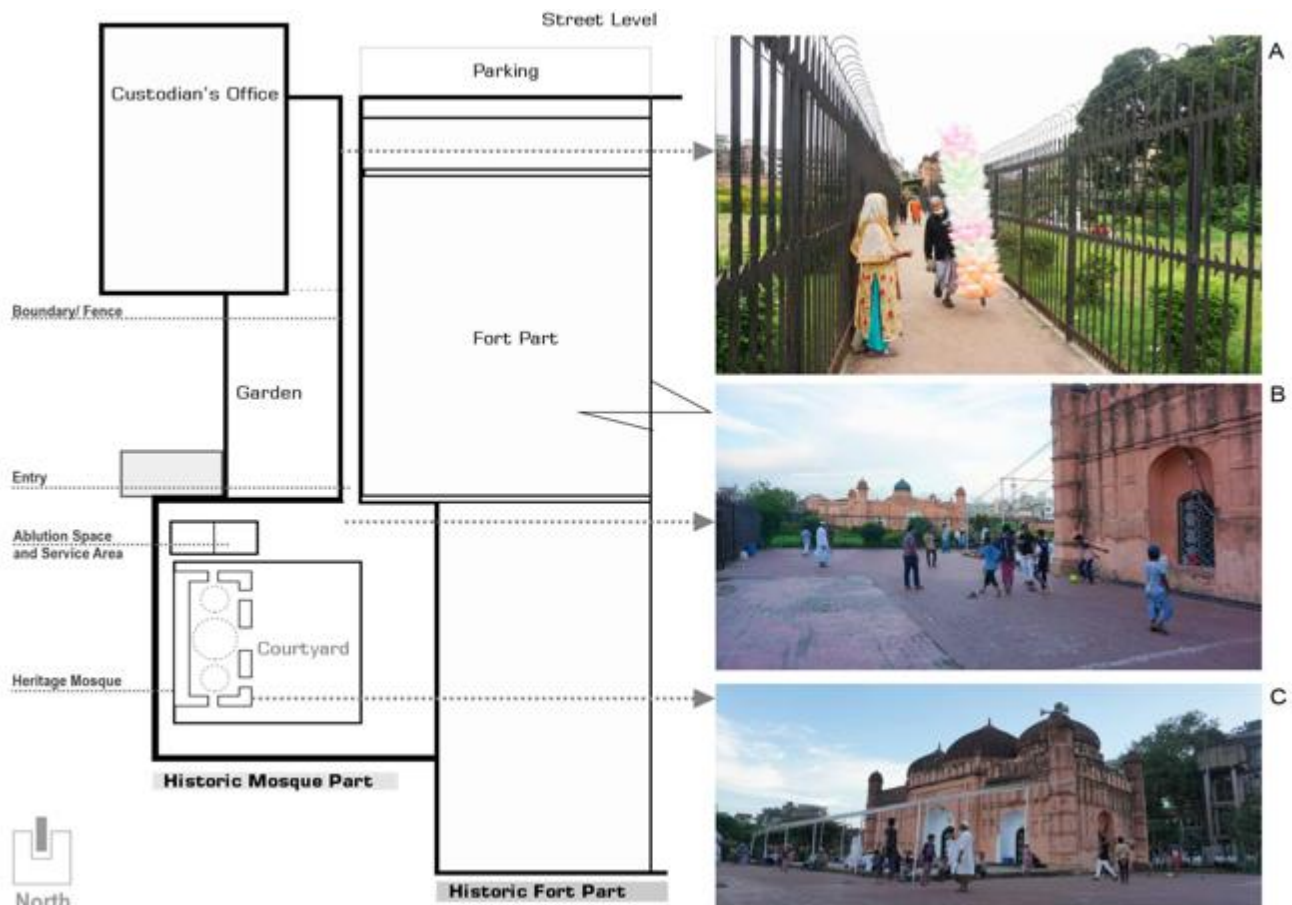
Area: 66'9" x 33'6"

Management and Protection Status: Managed and Protected by State. Listed as a protected site by the Department of Archaeology in 1984.

Located within Lalbagh Killa, the mosque exemplifies Mughal architectural splendor. Constructed at the height of Mughal prowess, it showcases imperial influence in Bengal and acts as a repository of cultural heritage. Measuring 66'9" x 33'6", the mosque's construction materials have been carefully preserved, reflecting a commitment to maintaining its authentic essence. This highlights the community's dedication to preserving its historical legacy.

Beyond its role as a place of worship, the mosque is a vital center for community traditions and spiritual practices. Ongoing religious services reinforce the spiritual connections of the current community to their ancestral heritage, underlining the mosque's continuous relevance.

The management of Lalbagh Killa Mosque, led by the curator and the Khadem cum Muazzin, exemplifies dedication to preserving the site's historical integrity. The curator balances the preservation of historical authenticity with contemporary needs, maintaining "age-old purity while preserving the authentic historical outlook." This philosophy sometimes leads to strict conservation measures, provoking controversy among a community deeply connected to the site.



**Fig. 9.** (A): A narrow 400 feet long pathway with fences leading towards the mosque (B): The open courtyard (C): The Mosque. (Image and CAD drawings source: Imamur Hossain)

In contrast, the Khadem cum Muazzin emphasizes the mosque's dual role as a sanctuary for worship and a space that connects the community to their shared historical narrative. He highlights the mosque's aesthetic and communal value, blending historical monument and community space. This integration of heritage preservation with community involvement resonates with both visitors and locals.

Lalbagh Mosque is crucial for both the local community, who visit primarily for prayer, and tourists, drawn by its historical and architectural significance. The mosque's gates are operational during prayer times, aligning with tourist entry periods, and marrying religious observance with cultural tourism. Regular attendees, predominantly locals, perceive the mosque not just as a heritage site but also as a living continuation of spiritual and community traditions. These interactions underscore the mosque's role in maintaining historical continuity and social cohesion.

### 3.3.2 Nuanced Understanding of Sites *Socio-economic Impact*

The mosque is pivotal for community cohesion, extending beyond its role as a place of worship. It serves as a focal point for affirming identities and strengthening social bonds, evident in the congregation's preference for this heritage mosque over modern alternatives. This choice highlights a deep cultural connection. Economically, the mosque significantly impacts local commerce, especially during religious festivals and gatherings, showing a symbiotic relationship between site preservation and community economic well-being.

The custodian skillfully manages the complex socio-economic dynamics, balancing the site's roles as a spiritual haven and historical monument. The local community, reflecting a deep sense of

ownership, supports the mosque through donations and volunteer efforts, emphasizing its vital socio-economic role.

### *Community Engagement*

Community engagement at Lalbagh Killa Mosque extends beyond worship activities to include decision-making, conservation, and cultural practices. The community's involvement in the mosque's upkeep and preservation efforts demonstrates their vested interest and robust commitment to heritage. This includes active participation in discussions with authorities about physical modifications, like fencing, which some feel restrict access and inclusivity, reflecting a dynamic interaction between historical preservation and contemporary needs.

The curator manages a delicate balance between respectful custodianship and perceptions of overreach, evident in debates about the Imam's residential expansion. The mosque's role in religious education and social welfare, such as teaching Arabic and Quran, underscores its contributions to community life.

### *Cultural Context*

The Lalbagh Killa Mosque's cultural significance is linked to its historical and ecological surroundings, harmonizing with the landscape and environmental ethos of the region. Cultural practices, historical commemorations, and religious observances enrich the site's heritage. Interviews with the curator and community members reveal that the mosque's significance is dynamically shaped by ongoing interactions with the surrounding community, illustrating the evolving nature of cultural heritage preservation.

The mosque's historical ambiance enhances the spiritual experience, serving as a repository of tangible and intangible heritage. The use of open spaces within the mosque complex fosters social interactions and community gatherings. Preservation efforts aim to maintain the mosque's material and historical integrity with minimal intervention, sometimes suppressing community-centric processes and collective memories, transforming it into a semi-public space with restricted access.

Management practices often promote a unified historical narrative, marginalizing local historical accounts and social memories. This can limit the community's engagement with their religious interpretations and practices, presenting the mosque more as a historical display than a living religious site.

### *Conservation Challenges*

The mosque faces ongoing threats from environmental factors, urban development, and differing conservation interpretations. Tensions arise between preserving material authenticity and accommodating community use, exemplified by disagreements over fences and access restrictions. The challenge is to promote preservation awareness while respecting the community's lived experiences and memories.

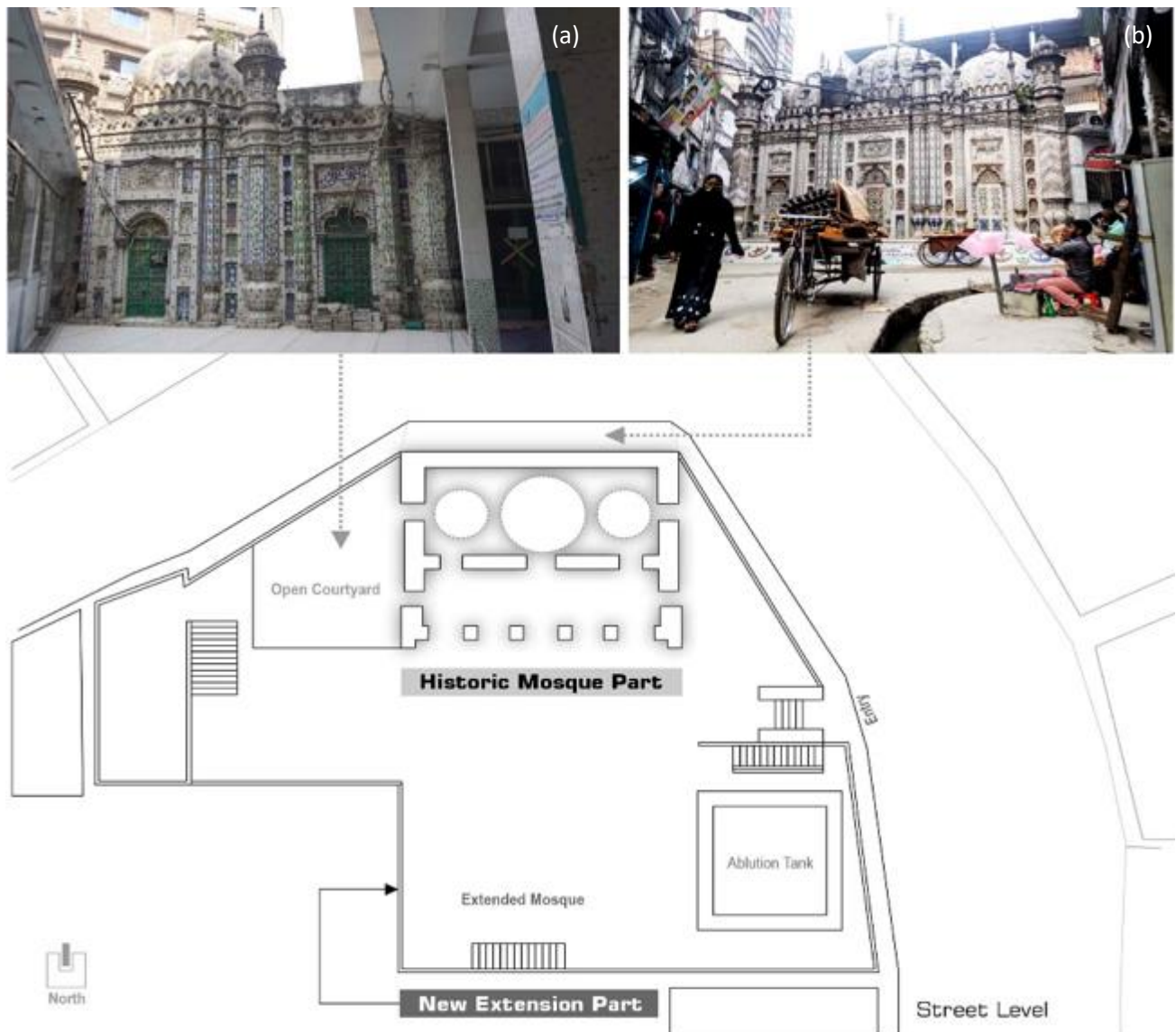
Both the curator and the Khadem cum Muazzin navigate these challenges, balancing the mosque's cultural identity with contemporary demands. The curator's access restrictions to protect the heritage ambiance elicit mixed community reactions, reflecting the complexities of managing a historic site still used for worship. The Khadem cum Muazzin emphasizes balancing openness with control to preserve the mosque's sacredness.

Conservation efforts go beyond physical preservation to managing relationships, expectations, and community aspirations. These efforts represent a dialogue on heritage preservation, shaped by community sentiments, managerial decisions, and the passage of time. The intricate interplay of preserving a living heritage impacts communal bonds and collective memory.

Interventions to protect the mosque's material integrity and promote national historical narratives can overshadow local values, creating a sense of disconnection and inaccessibility. The focus on material preservation often conflicts with community-centric values, leading to disputes. Therefore, conserving Lalbagh Killa Mosque requires balancing historical fidelity with its role as a living heritage site. The mosque's management and community must navigate a path that honors its past while fostering an environment where traditional practices thrive alongside modern interventions, shaping the preservation of the mosque as a vibrant, integral part of the community's cultural fabric.

### 3.4 Kosaituli Mosque, Dhaka

#### 3.4.1 Documentation and Inventory



**Fig. 10.** Historic Mosque and the new extension (a) The newly built structure is visible from the courtyard (b) The western façade of the historical part is discernable from the street (Source: Imamur Hossain)

Kosaituli Mosque exemplifies community-led heritage management, with significant insights provided by the Imam cum Khadeem during an interview. With eight years of involvement, the Imam highlighted the community's deep engagement in maintaining the mosque, reflecting its intrinsic values and generational legacy. Unlike institutional settings, Kosaituli Mosque offers a unique communal space maintained for centuries, enhancing its heritage significance.

Constructed in 1919, the mosque is distinguished by its interior and exterior adorned with porcelain fragments. The local community body, the 'Panchayat,' has historically overseen it. A notable extension was added in 2004 to accommodate more worshippers. While the original structure has been preserved, the integrity of the extension remains debated, resulting in the mosque being unlisted by government authorities.

Period: 1919 (British Colonial Era) by Abdul Bari (Merchant and philanthropist)

Area: 35'7" x 28'4"

Management and Protection Status: Managed by local traditional 'Panchayat' committee. Not listed yet.

### 3.4.2 Nuanced Understanding of the Site

#### *Community Engagement and Cultural Context*

Kosaituli Mosque consistently attracts heritage visitors and local residents, drawn by the continuation of traditions, ancient atmosphere, memories, and social interactions post-prayer. These factors highlight the mosque's dual significance as a religious and socially pivotal space.

Survey participants discussed their dynamic experiences, emphasizing the enriching encounters with the mosque's historicity and aesthetic materiality. They also commented on current interpretations and interventions, providing insights into how their attachments, memories, and experiences were shaped. The management of Kosaituli Mosque received positive feedback for its community-oriented approach to preserving neighborhood heritage.

#### *Conservation Challenges*

Visitors described their feelings towards the mosque with terms such as safe, comfortable, nostalgic, peaceful, and secure. These sentiments reflect a well-preserved heritage site that facilitates both religious and non-religious activities, enhancing social interactions and community identity.

The mosque's heritage image was seen as a reflection of authentic local culture, with interactions with authorities primarily focused on donation-facilitated restoration efforts using authentic artisans. The Imam expressed strong resistance to external, government-led conservation proposals, emphasizing the importance of local artisans and community funding to preserve the mosque's cultural and spiritual values. This approach preserves the mosque's architectural and historical integrity and reinforces its role as a central element of community life.

The mosque's distinctive floral decorations and motifs are unique to Old Dhaka's religious and cultural identity, enhancing the community's connection to the mosque. The absence of graffiti and posters on the mosque walls further reflects the community's respect and pride for their heritage.

Community engagement extends beyond financial contributions to active participation in religious and cultural discussions, particularly after prayer sessions. This relationship is crucial for maintaining the mosque's historical authenticity and religious sanctity. The community's efforts ensure that the mosque continues to serve as a vibrant center for social and religious activities.

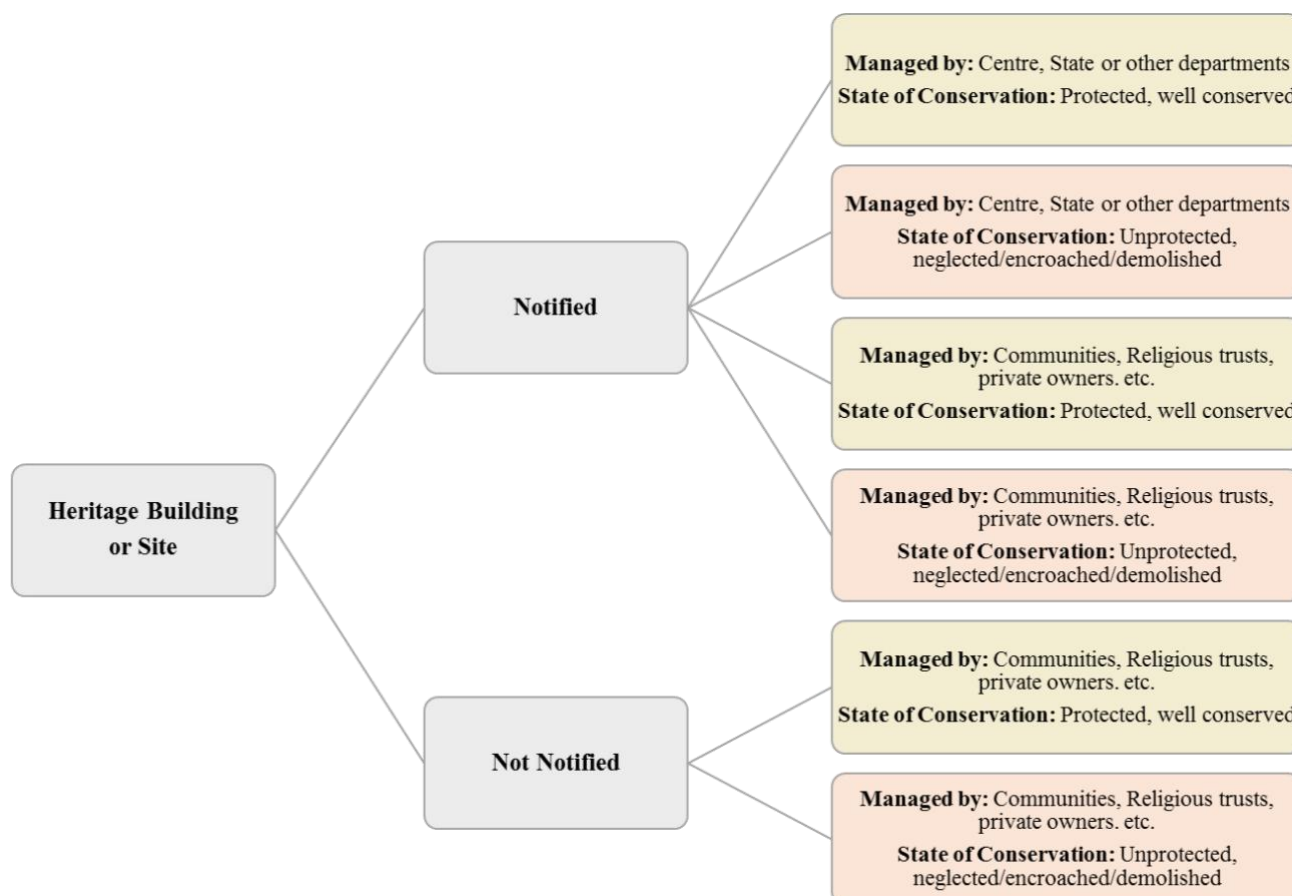
The Imam noted challenges such as fluctuating funding and the community's desire to retain control over management decisions, highlighting the complex dynamics of heritage management at Kosaituli Mosque. The community's involvement plays a pivotal role in defining and sustaining its heritage significance.

Kosaituli Mosque exemplifies successful community-led heritage management. This localized approach fosters stronger social cohesion and cultural continuity, supporting theories that emphasize the importance of social recognition and religious engagement in heritage conservation. This dual focus on material and spiritual aspects suggests a holistic understanding of heritage that incorporates intangible elements like community identity and religious practices.



## 4. Findings

As the research unfolded, delving into the categorization of heritage buildings and sites into 'protected' and 'unprotected' revealed nuanced layers that added depth to these terms. Further exploration yielded distinct types within both categories, enriching the understanding of the complexities inherent in these sites. As illustrated in Figure 11, a total of six different types emerged, comprising three each of 'protected' and 'unprotected' heritage buildings or sites.



**Fig. 11.** Types of Protected and Unprotected Heritage buildings or sites (Source: Authors)

This observation emphasizes that legal protection status of heritage buildings or sites doesn't guarantee effective conservation and management. Even notified sites remain vulnerable to threats like neglect, encroachment, or demolition. For instance as evidenced in the Delhi: The Built Heritage publication, five Lodi era tombs in Zamrudpur, Delhi, India, notified by the South Delhi Municipal Corporation in 2010, continue to deteriorate and face encroachment. Additionally as per Abhishek De's article in India Today, protected monuments like Bara Khamba Cemetery and Inchla Wali Gumti in Delhi are now 'untraceable' or 'missing', listed among the 18 monuments that the Archaeological Survey of India plans to delist, stating they are no longer of national importance. Similarly in Bangladesh, sites like 'Baro Katra' exist in a contested context, while its adjacent 'Choto Katra' has gradually assimilated into the surrounding neighborhood, with no visible physical evidence of its original structure remaining.

Conversely, some sites lacking legal protection are well managed and conserved by their respective communities, religious trusts, NGOs, or private owners. For example, the Indian National Trust for Art and Cultural Heritage (INTACH) Gurgaon chapter, an NGO, conserved a 19th Century tomb erected in memory of Major Jean Etienne in Gurugram, India in 2022. Similarly, the Kosaituli Mosque



in Old Dhaka, Bangladesh, exemplifies successful community-led conservation efforts. Managing heritage in India, Bangladesh, and other South Asian countries presents numerous challenges requiring innovative approaches. Collaboration among stakeholders, including communities, is crucial for preserving our cultural legacy for future generations.

Further, intriguing comparisons emerged during the analysis of the four selected case studies, shedding light on various gaps in heritage management. Comparing the Lalbagh Fort Mosque with Sunderwala Burj in Sunder Nursery revealed contrasting cases of protected monuments with community association.

In the case of Lalbagh Fort Mosque, a living monument, the community, despite its association with the mosque, is not involved in its management. The mosque's protected status has sparked access issues, triggering community resistance and feelings of neglect and disconnection. This highlights the need to involve community voices in managing living heritage sites, enhancing their relevance and accessibility. In contrast, Sunderwala Burj in Sunder Nursery is part of the Nizamuddin Urban Renewal Initiative, where the local community is integral to the process, and community development is prioritized alongside conservation efforts. Despite being a non-living monument with a ticketed entry, Sunderwala Burj, nestled within Sunder Nursery's landscape, enjoys a multifaceted community association. Moreover, Dargah Nizamuddin Aulia, a living protected monument in Nizamuddin Basti, provides a contrasting view. Open to devotees and visitors without access restrictions, it reflects its religious significance. This inclusive approach has empowered the community, enabling active participation and fostering a sense of ownership and belonging among them.

Both cases exemplify similar protected heritage sites and highlight how the former's lack of community involvement could be addressed with a community-centric approach, as seen in the second case. Additionally, the public-private partnership in the Nizamuddin Urban Renewal Initiative, a first in India, tackled challenges like resource scarcity and funding shortages, leading to effective conservation and holistic development.

Comparing the two community-managed case studies reveals disparities in managing heritage sites between urban and rural contexts. Kosaituli Mosque in Old Dhaka represents an urban setting, while Eidgah wali Masjid is in the rural context of Akera village, Nuh District. Varying levels of conservation awareness and knowledge lead to differences in effectiveness. The community's awareness at Kosaituli Mosque facilitates appropriate conservation, preserving its integrity. Conversely, at Eidgah wali Masjid, despite intentions, lack of conservation skills results in repairs with modern materials, compromising integrity. This highlights the need for targeted training in rural areas to equip communities for effective conservation. It further raises concerns about conflicts between community beliefs and conservation ethics, as seen in the latter case. Collaborating with communities and adopting a sensitive approach are crucial for conserving unprotected living monuments, respecting their cultural values and beliefs.

Another gap that persists in urban and regional or rural heritage sites is the lack of documentation and inventory. This disparity is apparent when comparing both case studies: Kosaituli is well documented, while Eidgah wali Masjid remains undocumented. This research aims to bridge this gap by preliminarily documenting Eidgah wali Masjid.

In both cases, the community's resistance to government interference stems from a fear of losing ownership and connection to the mosque, which is deeply ingrained in their identity. Their commitment to managing and protecting these sites themselves underscores the potential for community participation in heritage management.

## **5. Conclusion**

India, Bangladesh, and other South Asian countries are rich in heritage sites, necessitating a deeper understanding and addressing of various gaps that exist in heritage management. The research is based on four case studies—two from each country—where one protected and one unprotected site were

selected and analyzed using a similar framework. Given the vast number and typologies of heritage sites in both countries, the study focuses on sites from the capital cities, reflecting the globally recognized categories of 'protected' and 'unprotected.' The number of cases discussed in the paper is limited to one per category, given the timeframe and feasibility. Further, since Delhi lacks heritage sites, which are legally unprotected, the author extended the research area to Delhi NCR, choosing Eidgah wali Masjid in Nuh for its community involvement. Additionally, while Sunder Nursery is part of the broader Nizamuddin initiative, only relevant aspects have been referenced, with other areas not discussed in detail as they fall outside the research focus.

This research paper offers valuable insights into categorizing heritage buildings and sites as 'protected' and 'unprotected,' uncovering nuanced layers that enhance comprehension of these terms. Within both categories, six distinct types enrich understanding of inherent complexities. This also revealed that legal protection does not guarantee effective management and conservation of a heritage site, highlighting the need for increased attention by the concerned authorities/departments in this area.

The analysis of the case studies, based on data collected using a qualitative approach, reveals several gaps, including differing community behaviors and interpretations of protected heritage sites depending on community involvement. Disparities between urban and rural contexts, particularly in conservation awareness and knowledge, as well as the lack of documentation in rural areas, have been identified. To address this, documentation for unprotected heritage sites in rural contexts has been established. The research also highlights conflicts between community cultural values and conservation ethics, emphasizing the need for a value-based approach when collaborating with communities, especially for religious and living heritage sites. Maintaining the enduring bond between communities and heritage sites is crucial in conservation planning, as these intangible elements form the social fabric of heritage and are indispensable to its cultural significance.

By adopting collaborative and community-centric approaches and sustaining people-place bonds in conservation planning as suggested by Chen and Wang, we can ensure the preservation and celebration of our cultural legacy for generations to come. Collaborating with communities should be considered, especially for religious heritage sites, as it can address resource shortages in government authorities and contribute to effective documentation, relevance, management, and conservation of built heritage. This inclusive approach would also further lead to community empowerment and participation. Additionally, public-private partnerships, as demonstrated by the Nizamuddin Urban Renewal Initiative, serve as models for protecting other heritage sites in the country, highlighting the importance of stakeholder collaboration for sustainable heritage conservation and development.

Heritage sites in rural or local settings, especially unprotected ones, require urgent attention as they face constant threats of loss. Documentation and training programs about protecting the heritage sites along with its intangible aspect at the regional level should be promoted to enhance their conservation and management. Local communities should be made aware of available collaboration opportunities with the government agencies, NGOs, universities, and heritage organizations to help protect these sites.

A pressing requirement exists for the creation of new paradigms in heritage conservation across South Asian nations. In light of these findings, initiatives aimed at educating stakeholders, capacity-building programs for communities, fostering collaborations, and formulating policies and guidelines for the conservation and management of heritage sites are imperative.

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