

BAGH-e-BAHAAR

Tracing a sense of place for the last surviving Tughlaq Garden in an urban context.

District Park, Delhi, India

Public Landscape | Urban | Built | 18ha. | 2017-2019

Firoz Shah & His Gardens:

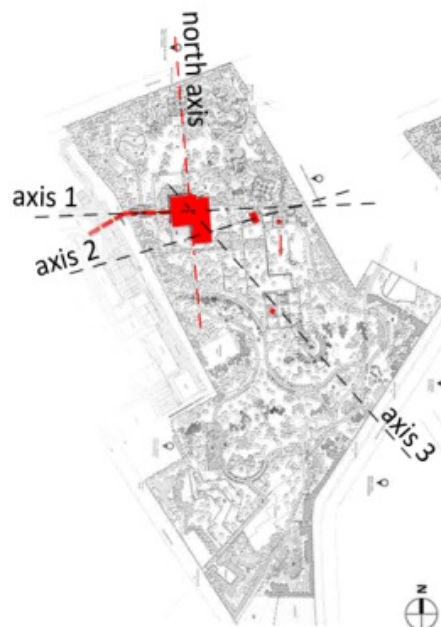
Firuz Shah Tughlaq had laid-out 1500 gardens in greater Delhi during his reign. How exactly would those gardens look and what were their salient features, there are not many ways left to know it. This garden is one of those ways. Ever since the later years of 14th century, and in bits and pieces, this garden has survived till date and remains the last living memorial of Tughlaq era gardens. Firoz Shah was very fond of fruit gardens or orchards, and his gardens would also cultivate grapes among other fruits. Zia ul Barani has given a detail of Tughlaq Gardens in his book 'Tarikh-i-Firuz Shahi', where he remarks- "...Now in those gardens would grow flowers such as the red rose, the hundred petals rose, the flower of the red gooseberry and sewanti etc. Moreover, there will be cultivated in these gardens fruits like pomegranate, grapes, apples, melons, orange, jhaneri, fig, lemon, red gooseberry, jhawang, mango, beans and poppy besides black sugar cane and paranda. They also planted there trees of Khirni, Jamun, Tamarind, Badhal, Clinth, Peepal and flowering plants."

Our sites, as a piece of earth, are often layered with diversely distinct identities adsorbed one after the other over a period of time. Sometimes they sustain the travel of time, sometimes lost completely and occasionally these layers manage to retain their identities holistically evolving into another heterogeneous system. Our site, a district park in Vasant Vihar, was found to be one such system. The last surviving of the 1500 approx. gardens that were once planted, with deposited layers of historical context and presently serving the local population as an urban park.

It is located in Vasant Vihar and is spread over an area of 18 Ha in a dense urban fabric of the city of Delhi. It was largely used by the surrounding neighborhood as a routine everyday park. The same park and surrounding area, however, during the reign of Firuz Shah Tughlaq (1309-1388), was a garden laid out by him. In 12 Ha. area of this present-day park were spread the remains of the layout that originally existed. As per his biographer Afif, in 'Tarikh-i-Firuzshahi', Sultan had laid out some 1500 gardens in Delhi and its close vicinity. This is the last surviving garden of those baghs. The project 'Bagh-e-Bahaar' (literally the garden of spring) as we call it now, traces a sense of place for this garden by laying a narration around the existing monuments and building a socially cohesive urban green that side by side acts as an ecological repository.

The core idea for Bagh-e-Bahaar is based on tracing a journey of reading the site through the overlaps of various identities at urban, historical, and community level where it was a part of larger open space structure. Instead of looking at the site in isolation it was first intensively studied in different layers of historical context (monuments and layout) and geological timescale (natural components like topography, hydrology) to congruously suggest the genius loci of the place. This arrangement was then harmoniously linked with the present-day context of a District Park.

The four-terrace layout of the garden makes the historians speculate about its multipurpose nature. It was a garden complex with a mosque, with an area big enough for large gatherings, was a camping ground for troops and was also an irrigated stepped enclosure for cultivation of cash crops and expensive fruits for dignitaries. According to the noted historian W.H. Siddiqi, the garden comprised a rectangular enclosure of 12 hectares, divided into four stepped terraces. The highest level had a Baradari with a domed pavilion build by Firuz Shah Tughlaq. About hundred years later a tomb (Bada Lao ka Gumbad) was added to its North side by Lodis. On next terrace stood a mosque. On third level, there used to be a raised stone watercourse with wells and cisterns. The ruins of these structures can still be seen on site with Gumbad dominating the skyline of a large part of this open space. accommodated in proposal.



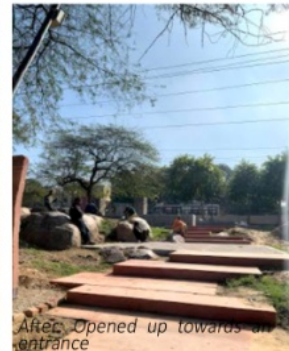
Binding the historical context together



Relaying pedestrian circuit and strategic placement of entrance plazas



Integration of proposed public domain along the circulation.



Monument: Bara Lao ka Gumbad



Mosque

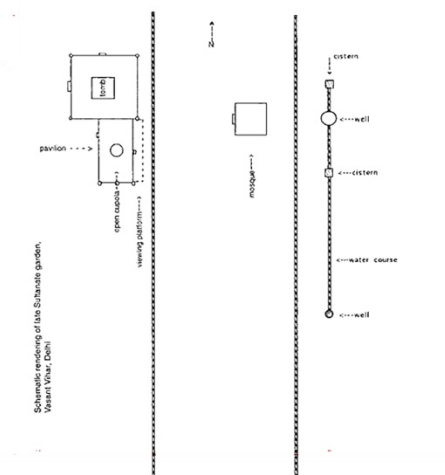
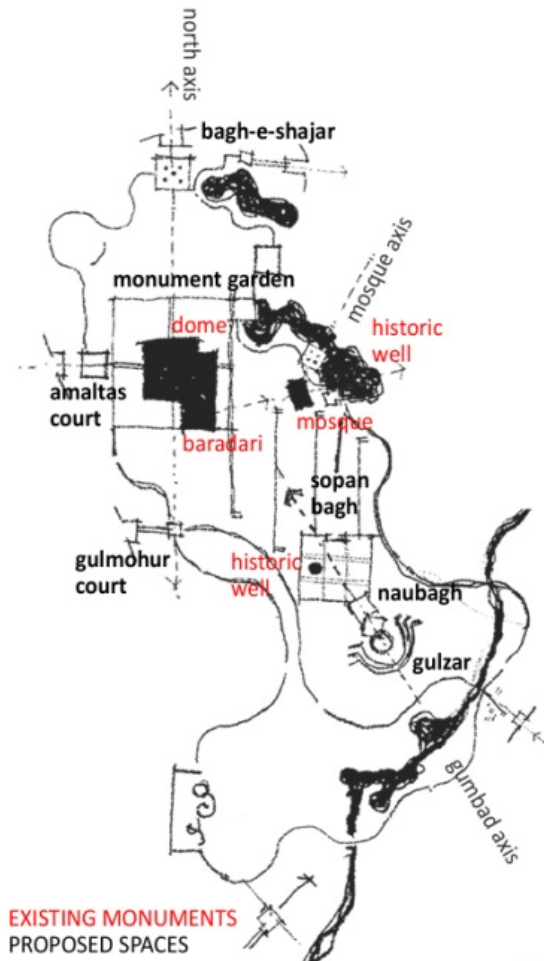


Diagram of the Four Terraces of Tughlaq Garden, W.H. Siddiqi, "The Discovery of Architectural Remains of a Pre Mughal Garden at new Delhi"



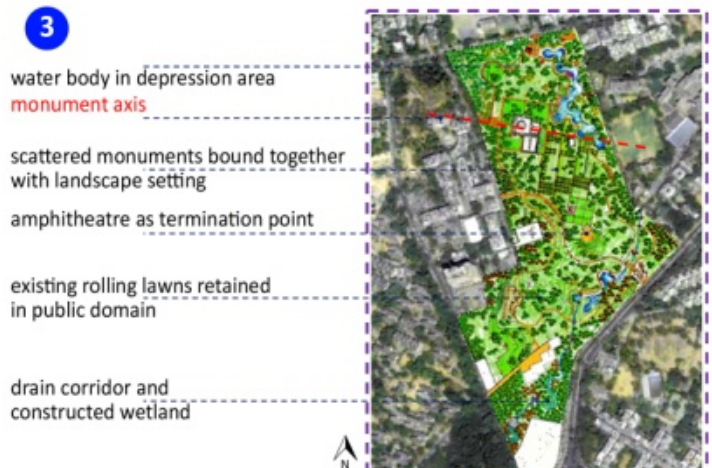
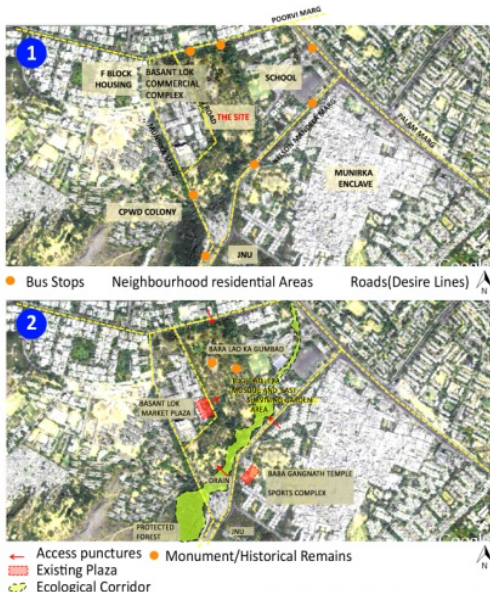
The design scheme for the monument garden 'Bagh-e-Bahisht' creates a square setting for the Tomb and the Baradari, as derived from the footprint and access point of the monument. The axes of the Charbagh culminates onto entrance courts. Towards the Northern end at Poorvi Marg, 'Bagh-e-Shajar' (Trees' Court), and towards the Eastern side connecting to Basant Lok Complex 'Amaltas Court' is placed. The western axis connects to a structure said to be used as a mosque originally. A square courtyard, 'Poetry Garden/ Bagh-e-Sukhan' is placed at a diagonal axis to this structure complementing the geometry of the entire layout. The Southern side expands onto stepped orchard terraces created as per the available historic reference.

900 trees (45 Species, native and naturalized), including fruit bearing trees as per historical context, were planted in the park. This public space starts acting as a tree repository. Natural contours were followed to create recharge zones & waterbodies. All existing trees were accommodated in proposal.

On Urban Level, the site acts as a linkage between the surrounding neighborhood and commercial spaces due to which it is susceptible to ever evolving edge conditions. It is then assessed on the site features, topography, and existing monuments on the site. A landscape vocabulary was set up based on the

above factors and a holistic scheme was generated.

The site was analyzed and treated keeping in mind three major identities it carries- Urban level open space, Monument Garden, Ecological Repository. At urban level, the entire edge of the green area was studied to relocate the entrance points, universally accessible, strategically to give maximum reach to public. The circulation system was re-laid to generate short-cuts through the park to have maximum footfall. The boundary walls were lowered down to give natural surveillance and sense of safety to all genders and age-groups. Middle storey haphazard planting was removed to improve visual expanse and avoid shadow areas for anti-social elements.



LANDSCAPE DEVELOPMENT PLAN

LEGEND

1. Bagh-e-Shajar
2. Bagh-e-Sukhan
3. Old Baoli
4. Sopan Bagh/
Orchard Terraces
5. Naubagh
6. Old Well
7. Amphitheatre
8. Wetlands
9. Open Gym
10. Ramp Entry
11. Yoga Terraces
12. Sensory Garden
13. Mound
14. Amaltas Court
15. Children Play Area





Orcard Terraces- Before : Absense of sense of space



After: Terraces reminiscing the original layout of stepped terraces



Before: Inconspicuous entry.



After: Plaza with seat height walls for quick use by informal/hurried visitors.



Columns with selected poems on trees in Bilingual text and Braille.



Gulzar (The amphitheater) during Bahaar Utsav being celebrated on the inauguration ceremony of the park.

Overall, the attempt was to address, and bind each of these layers in a conducive manner, by intervening just enough, to trace a sense of place and generate a holistic system. Information boards with beeping devices, QR code text convertor, and Braille tablets are also designed and installed to provide information about historical background of the garden. To generate a sense of ownership a time-to-time interaction sessions are done with surrounding RWAs. An interpretation center is also being set up to provide more information about the park. To increase the reach of the park to maximum number of people, third party collaborations are signed to organize events and regular updates on the website.

The garden is also an attempt to give this resource back to the visitors coming from neighborhood to distant places. Sketchbooks, mugs, Postcards can be collected from the interpretation center being set up at the park. The seeds collected from the park are distributed in small sachets and fondly collected by the visitors for free every season. By doing so, this garden, that was once on the verge of being eroded with time, metaphorically grows itself back, giving it all back to earth.

Public Open Spaces like these are a good example of resonance in a linear system. The overlapped layers of time and culture bound together with one landscape vocabulary act holistically as singular and yet has possibilities to evolve into a system further. It is these well-designed green systems that amplify the social health of a neighborhood.



Information Boards for visitors.
With Braille strips.



Souvenirs from the park.



Amaltas Court



Monument lawns



Yoga Deck



Monument Entry



Entrance to the park



Looking towards amphitheatre



Pathways



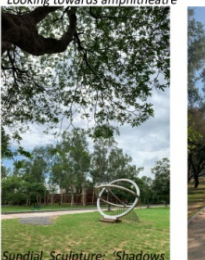
Pilkhan Court



Naubagh



Gulzar: Amphitheatre



Sundial: Sculpture- 'Shadows of Time'



Summer mounds



Toe Walls/Arrival Courts



Winter Mounds



A SCHEMATIC SECTION OF POETRY GARDEN ABUTTING THE WATERBODY