

The Dargah of Hazrat Inayat Khan, Nizamuddin, New Delhi

Remembering Architect Mau Khan

by David Murray

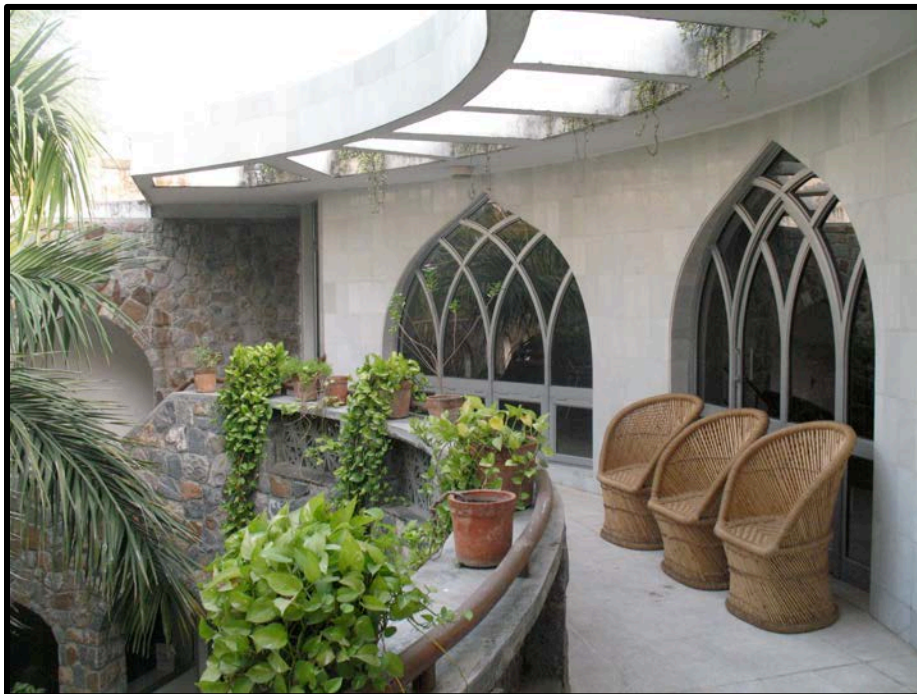


Photos by David Murray

My first visit to India and the Dargah was in November 2004. That year I arrived in the middle of the night and stayed in a nearby guesthouse. It wasn't until morning that I could see and experience the Dargah. As much as the public face of the complex offers compatibility and continuity with the historic streetscape, it also stands out for its dignified and serene presence in the midst of what appears to a westerner, at first, as chaos. The beautifully-rendered cut stone front wall acts as a fortress, offering a sense of security and mystery for the interior. At the same time, the layout of the entrance is inviting and deliberately so. The long low wall, ramp and raised platform under a large tree near the arched entrance offer an attraction that invites a great deal of street interaction among children, street vendors, animated locals and roaming goats. This is an admirable feature for an important quasi-public building in the historic neighbourhood of Nizamuddin and is part of the genius of Architect Mau Khan.

Architect Mau Khan

I briefly met Mr. Kahn in November 2004 and had a longer meeting and conversation with him when I returned in November 2007. He took the trouble to drop by one afternoon and we talked about the architecture of the Dargah and some of his inspirations. He was of a generation that studied and admired the work of Frank Lloyd Wright, who achieved the pinnacle of his success with the Guggenheim Museum in New York just before his death in 1959 . Wright's influence can be seen in the curved plan and walls that overlook the central garden.



Instead of the late-career round arches that Wright incorporated into some of his buildings such as the 1957 Marin County Civic Centre, Mr. Khan adapted the pointed Islamic arch as a reoccurring theme. In particular, we see Wright's influence in the overhanging trellis above the second floor walkway that faces the inner garden, with its exposed beams and large openings that offer some shade on a sunny afternoon. This feature was often seen in Wright's later work and when I mentioned the possible influence, Mr. Khan seemed delighted that I had noticed. The full appreciation of this device can be seen when the sun casts long shadows between the beams onto wall of the music room increasing the perception of wall depth and the drama of this important visual feature. Overall, the design of the Dargah displays good planning and insight into hot climate design and a sense of harmony and beauty, in the midst of apparent precinct chaos, that befits the legacy of Hazrat Inayat Khan. For

the westerner, the liberal use of marble cladding and the delicate marble screens seem exotic. For an Indian, they are tasteful and practical, while the play with light is always inspirational.



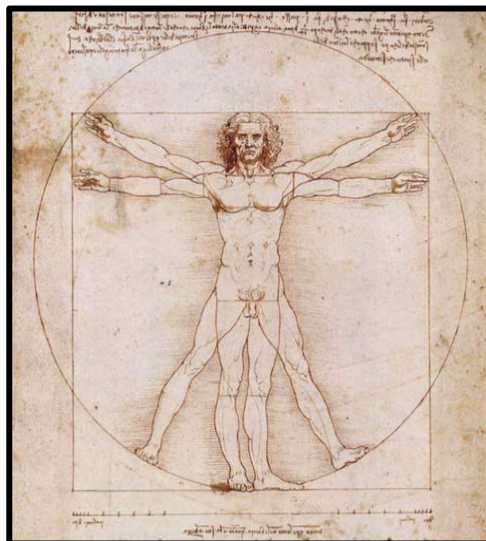
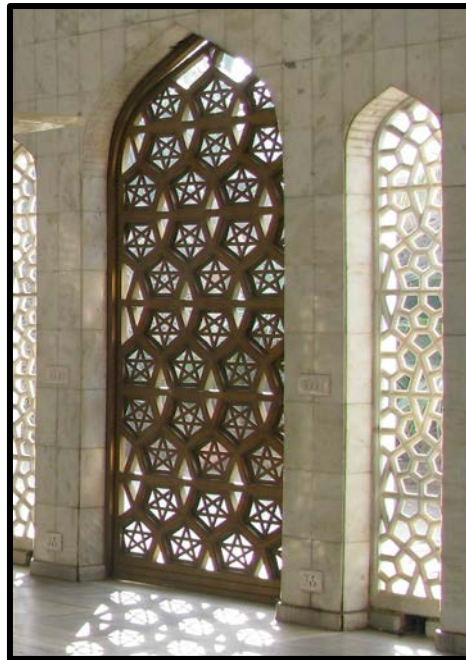
Mr. Khan incorporated a strong sense of history and connection with Indian culture while creating a modern facility of significance to the Nizamuddin community. He spoke to me of his interest to bring his design for the Dargah of Hazrat Inayat Khan to the attention of the Aga Khan Foundation in their biennial Aga Khan Awards for Architecture, the most prestigious award program in the non-western world. He didn't get to do this in his lifetime and perhaps he was waiting until the vision was complete. As it is, this architectural complex stands out as a remarkable and inspired oasis in the middle of the intensity of historic Nizamuddin. It is a wonderful architectural accomplishment.



Hazrat Inayat Khan was very interested in geometrical symbolism, as was told to me by his son Murshid Hidayat over our years at the Lake O'Hara retreats, especially the 5-sided pentagram. This is a universal symbol of the human form – a symbol of Divine form manifested, a symbol of balance and harmony. Mau Khan has incorporated the pentagon into all the metal and marble screens in the Dargah as a tribute to Inayat Khan's vision and to this universal geometrical symbol.

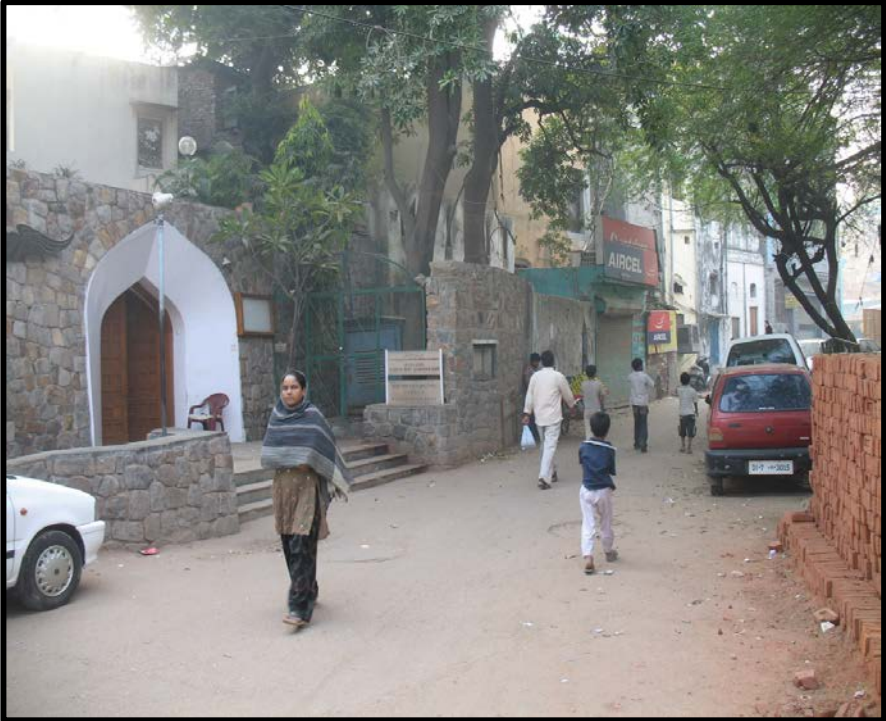
“The 5-pointed star suggests perfectly kindled divine light.”

Page 242, Complete Works of Pir-O-Murshid Hazrat Inayat Khan 1925 II



Leonardo da Vinci's Vitruvian Man

My 2007 visit with Mr. Khan ended with a walk through the neighbourhood to his son's place of business on the opposite side of this historic neighbourhood. Along the way he enlightened me about some aspects of the history of the neighbourhood – the layers and layers of lives and buildings that form the foundation of the present-day community.



I had hoped to speak with Mr. Khan more about Nizamuddin and the Dargah as well as his career and accomplishments, but unfortunately that was not to be. His legacy will remain and his work will carry on over the coming years as the Dargah is enhanced and renovated to accommodate the changing times. It will remain a wonderful symbol of beauty and harmony in a chaotic world.

The Legacy of Architect Mau Khan

from an email May 30, 2023

Dear Mr. Murray,

Greetings from Premchand Archives, Jamia Millia Islamia!!!

I am directed by Prof. Shohini Ghosh, Hony. Director, Jamia's Premchand Archives and Literary Centre, Jamia Millia Islamia to write to you regarding your query about the architect of the Dargah Compound of Sufi Inayat Khan in the Nizamuddin. I would like to inform you that the name of the architect was Mau Khan. He was also the architect of various buildings of Jamia Hamdard University including Majeedia College and the new auditorium.

However, he did not design any building for Jamia Millia Islamia University, therefore, no material on him is available with Premchand Archives.

Sir, it will be a pleasure to host you at our archive whenever you are visiting Delhi. We look forward to a visit from you soon. Please feel free to contact us for any further queries.

Warm regards,

Snigdha Roy
Archivist,
**Jamia's Premchand Archives
& Literary Centre (JPALC),
Jamia Millia Islamia**