

**COMMUNITY EMBEDDED APPROACH
FOR CONSERVATION OF
MEHRAULI HERITAGE AREA**



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I. Summary

Mehrauli is an ancient settlement which came into prominence in late 12th century AD when the Qutab Minar was built here by Qutub-ud-din Aibak, founder of the slave dynasty which conquered and ruled over parts of Northern India. Today Mehrauli is a bustling urban village of South Delhi and it is spread over an area of about 400 hectares, which includes an Archeological Park of nearly 100 hectares. Mehrauli settlement as well as the surrounding area is rich with historic monuments and archeological remains.

It is proposed to initiate a heritage conservation project in Mehrauli with the focus on community involvement such that the heritage assets become the joint responsibility of the local community and the State. To achieve this it will be necessary to repair the urban habitat simultaneously with the repair of historic buildings.

The urban heritage of Mehrauli is perhaps best expressed in the annual community celebration called the *Phool Walon ki Sair*. This festival is still celebrated every year in Mehrauli although its importance in community life has diminished in recent years due to changing demographics. Urban infrastructure upgradation has to be an essential part of the conservation strategy so that the community benefits overall.

The Municipal Corporation of Delhi is undertaking the preparation of Local Area Plans (LAP) which will focus urban development at the scale of the electoral ward and the neighbourhood. A Local Area Plan for Mehrauli, devised in close consultation with citizens, to be implemented by the local authorities/government agencies, is required to be formulated such that it originates from a heritage perspective.

Two sites for demonstration projects of architectural conservation tied with urban environmental upgradation are proposed to be taken up for execution. These projects are located at the two ends of the *Phool Walon ki Sair* route, thus metaphorically binding the community with its urban heritage.

The program of work is divided into three phases, the first of one year is the preparatory and planning phase, the second of implementation of the demonstration projects and start of the execution of the Local Area Plan formulated, is of two years and includes training of the local community in the tasks of management and maintenance of the urban assets being created. The third phase of another two years is of monitoring the local community in the management and maintenance of the urban assets.

The budgetary estimate for the first phase has been worked out. The estimates for the other phases will be worked out in the first phase of work.

A project team which includes several disciplines from architecture, urban planning, architectural conservation, community work, and social sciences has been identified and is in place.

II. Introduction

“Architecture is an ancient discipline, and the results of its thinking and endeavor provide us with some of the most lasting examples of our culture.”¹

Architecture has flowered not only as individual monuments but also as building clusters that form living neighborhoods in cities. Historical evidence reveals that urban life is rich with cultural meaning.

“The city in history has had not only a spatial existence but an ideational one – an existence in the realm of ideas. It has elicited and gathered around itself notions, images, and associations. Those ideas of the city are as material a part of the story of urban space as the tangible structures and systems that inhabit or delimit it on the ground.”²

Delhi is a city that has a rich cultural legacy and a history of habitation that spans over at least two millennia. Over the last few decades, Delhi has witnessed a dramatic growth and with it a conflict between spontaneous developments set within rich historic centers; and a resultant cultural complexity that is difficult to decipher.

The transition can be witnessed as an ongoing process in Mehrauli. The settlement of Mehrauli “came into prominence at the end of the 12th century with the defeat of Prithviraj Chauhan at the hands of the invading Turko-Afghans. It was here, on the site of an earlier Rajput fort that Qutub-ud-din Aibak, founder of the slave dynasty, built the Qutab Minar or Victory Tower. Other rulers of the same period, Altamash, Razia Sultan and Alauddin Khilji, also built monuments in this area. With the establishment of the *Dargah* of *Qutubuddin Bakhtiar Kaki* in 1541 A.D. Mehrauli became a place of religious pilgrimage too. Later rulers, Akbar and Bahadur Shah Zafar, built palaces and mosques in the area. Around these historic buildings there arose a bustling urban culture, offering employment opportunities and resulting in the flourishing of arts and crafts.”³

“Mehrauli, today, has not yet lost all traces of those times; spectacular ruins and remnants still lie enclosed in the dense concrete of a fast growing ‘urban village’ of South Delhi.”⁴

¹Ganju, M.N. Ashish&Dengle, Narendra, August 2013, *The Discovery of Architecture: A contemporary treatise on ancient values and indigenous reality*, GREHA Publications, New Delhi.

²Kaul, Shonaleeka, 2010, *Imagining the Urban: Sanskrit and the City in Early India*, Permanent Black, Delhi, pp

³Alkazi, Feisal , Jain, Priti, Oza&Ramdas, Kaushalaya, 2001, *Exploring an Environment: Discovering the urban reality*, Orient Longman Limited, Chennai.

⁴Arif, Yasmeen, Unpublished Paper Draft 2011, *Mughals, Mystics and Mandirs: A Legacy of Communal Harmony in Delhi*.

III. Approach

There has been for some time a requirement for situating heritage conservation work, especially that relating to monuments in urban areas, effectively within the community where such monuments are sited and enveloped by the growing urban fabric. Such work ideally is to be so directed that the local community is the primary driver of the efforts on the ground, thus becoming in due course the prime mover for maintenance and conservation of the assets so created.

Such an approach has been discussed in conservation circles for long, but we have hardly any examples in execution. The purpose of the present proposal is to go beyond the rhetoric and demonstrate how such an approach can be translated into ground reality such that others can learn from this demonstration. This will necessitate research into first principles across a number of disciplines from architecture to social sciences.

Mehrauli settlement as well as the surrounding area is rich with historic monuments and archeological remains. The Qutab Minar, located adjacent to the settlement is a UNESCO World Heritage site and attracts visitors from all over the world. Yet Mehrauli is also a growing and a dense urban precinct located within electoral ward number 169 of the Municipal Corporation of Delhi. The dynamics of urban growth conflict with the imperatives of preserving our historic legacy, and the contradictions created by the seemingly opposing tendencies give rise to physical dysfunction and erosion of heritage values.

If the urban fabric within which the historic monuments are located is in a state of blight and disrepair, we cannot expect the inhabitants to appreciate the heritage value of the monuments and care for them. It therefore becomes necessary to repair the urban fabric simultaneously with the repair of historic buildings.

IV. Culture and Community

The expression of urban life is a representation of the culture of a community. Before we restore monuments, we need to focus on the culture that produced them.

The significance of monuments lies in the collective memory of people and it is often “the internalized cognitive map of the surrounding urban reality. It is only a universalized picture of the urban phenomenon.”⁵

The urban reality of Mehrauli is perhaps best expressed in the annual community celebration called the *Phool Walon Ki Sair*.

“Perhaps no other festival in the city, or in the country even, portrays a public and symbolic celebration of history, the present and an aspired future, particularly in the fraught terrain of Hindu-Muslim co-existence in the nation. Traced back to the later years of the Mughal Empire, it is an occasion that has continued over time to its current form, tracing in this wake of nearly two centuries the changing times of the city, its peoples and its politics and most of all, a seeming legacy of communal harmony.”

It is remarkable that this festival is still celebrated every year in Mehrauli, even though its importance in community life has diminished in recent years. A contributing factor may well be the change in the urban character of Mehrauli because of the influx of new settlers and consequent increase of property speculation and physical congestion. Infrastructure provisions have not kept pace with demographic reality, and this causes urban blight. Urban renewal therefore becomes an essential part of the conservation strategy.

V. Guiding Principles

Greha has been working in the field of urban renewal for three decades. This has led us to an understanding that urban renewal is best managed by citizens. Working on these principles the renewal activities can be divided into four interdependent aspects, as follows:

- Community Action
- Habitat Design
- Recording for Learning
- Raising of Resources, both human and financial

These aspects can be expressed graphically as four quadrants of a symbolic ‘world’ in dynamic equilibrium.

⁵Kaul, Shonaleeka, 2010, *Imagining the Urban: Sanskrit and the City in Early India*, Permanent Black, Delhi, pp Pg51



Ideally citizen action needs to be integrated with the activities of the government agencies legally responsible for the provision and maintenance of urban infrastructure. In Delhi there has been a policy initiative recently taken by the Municipal Corporation to initiate the preparation of Local Area Plans which will focus urban development at the scale of the electoral ward and the neighbourhood. This will also make it possible to integrate citizen action with planned development. Public participation in urban planning has been part of the theory for many years now, but in practice we do not find effective models which demonstrate the principles being enunciated. A Local Area Plan for Mehrauli, devised in close consultation with citizens, can result in a development model which is sustainable and implementable by the local authorities. Such a Local Area Plan for Mehrauli will necessarily originate from a heritage perspective.

VI. Design of Intervention

Having identified *Phool Walon Ki Sair* as an anchor of community expression and a representation of the settlement's mythology; we based our intervention idea on the route of the festival procession. This route ties together the most important monuments of Mehrauli.

Initial Survey



Monuments on *PhoolWalon Ki Sair* Route



Old Mosque



Jharna



Shamsi Talab



Jahaz Mahal



Near the entrance of Dargah



Entrance of Zafar Mahal



Entrance of St. John's Church



Aadam Khan's Tomb



Entrance of Yogmaya Temple

It is noteworthy that the festival of *Phool Walon Ki Sair* is still celebrated every year in Mehrauli. As described by an anthropologist who has been living in Mehrauli for the last nine years, "*Phool Walon Ki Sair* is a festival unique to the extent that practices and agents, which often remain separate, are combined. For instance, Sufi shrines or other religious places in India are often places that bring people from all faiths together – these are local traditions or customs and spontaneous individual acts that do not necessarily enter the arena of the state. Similarly, the alleged secular credentials of the Indian state are displayed, critiqued, contested in various institutional settings, ostensible practices of governance or even in state sponsored spectacular performative displays. *Phool Walon Ki Sair* is an event that combines both – it is a civil society effort (the Anjuman and its organizational contribution) that invites the participation of the state and addresses and involves others from a wider public. In a sense then, this appears to be a practical realization of a democratic process that creates a set of participatory publics – each involved in the individual expression, reception and representation of a significant message – communal harmony."⁶

VII. Sites for demonstration

The principle of urban renewal by citizens assigns value to the demonstration project that becomes the meeting ground for the various publics to work together. The two ends of *Phool Walon Ki Sair* route can be the sites of two such demonstration projects.

The festival procession starts from the *Shamsi Talab*, which is next to the *Jharna*. Symbolically a water source is the starting point of an urban settlement. The *Jharna* is an enclosed public garden that is in dire need of physical restoration, and this can become the site of the first demonstration project. This neighborhood of Mehrauli is home to the most economically disadvantaged people of the settlement, and their habitat can also benefit from the restoration activities.

⁶Arif, Yasmeen, Unpublished Paper Draft 2011, *Mughals, Mystics and Mandirs: A Legacy of Communal Harmony in Delhi*.



Jharna: An Enclosed Public Garden next to Shamsi Talab



Shamsi Talab

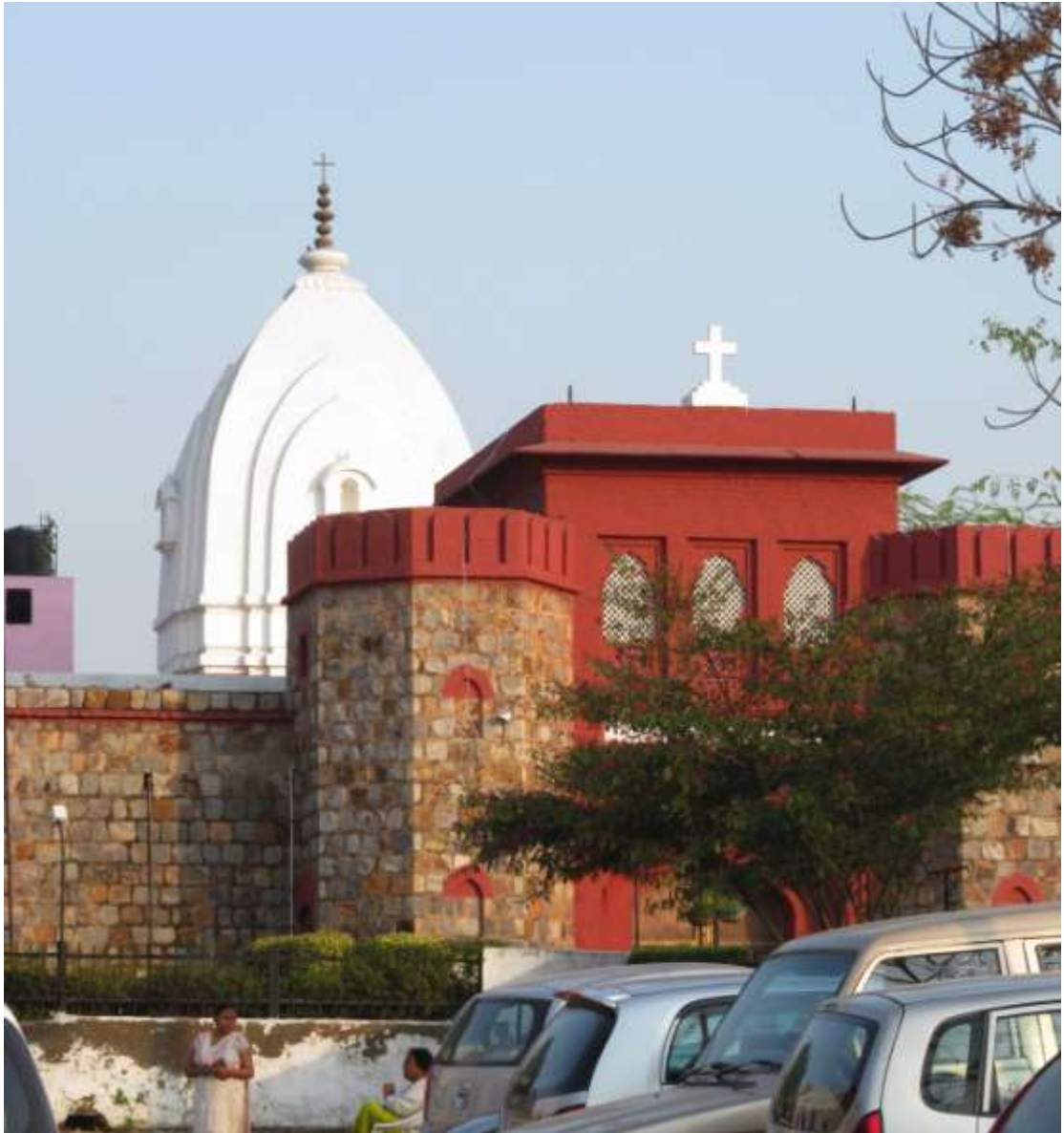
The second demonstration project site is proposed at the other end of the festival route. This end is marked by important heritage structures, like the *Yogmaya Mandir*, the wall of *Qila Lal Kot*, the wall of Qutab Complex, St. John's Church, Adam Khan's Tomb; as well as important civic institutions such as the Bus Terminal and the *Tehsil* headquarters. This is a most lively public space and for most newcomers/visitors, the first introduction to the urban realm of Mehrauli.



Qila Lal Kot and Adam Khan's Tomb



Approach and Entrance to Yogmaya Mandir



St. Johns Church

VIII. Scope of Work

Phase I

(1 year)

The first phase is the preparatory phase before work on the ground is taken up. The twin objectives of community awareness/mobilisation and upgradation of the built environment are to be addressed simultaneously.

Community mobilisation is to be facilitated by establishing an INTACH - Greha site office in Mehrauli village. Awareness raising programs, community meetings, and events will be organized through the site office. Community interaction will continue as the basis of the entire project and lead to initiating work on the sites for demonstration of a community embedded conservation approach in the second phase.

Community interaction will also enable the project team to initiate the environmental upgradation exercise by the preparation of a Local Area Plan. The implementation of the Local Area Plan can be taken up by the Municipal Corporation of Delhi (MCD) starting with the second phase. Other government agencies will need to be engaged with in order to address the specifics of the heritage area. To meet the twin objectives of heritage conservation and urban renewal, a special Heritage Cell is proposed to be established within the MCD South zone office.

Specific items of work will include:

- Research and documentation
- Harmonizing institutions
- Raising awareness and highlighting values
- Reimagining *Phool Walon Ki Sair* to become relevant again; a new meaning that appeals to the younger generation as well
- Conceptual Scheme for the two demonstration sites to be integrated with the Local Area Plan
- Preparation of Local Area Plan for Mehrauli Heritage Area to be implemented by MCD and other concerned government agencies
- Raising resources for implementation activities proposed in the second phase

Phase II

(2 years)

- Documentation of the process and training members of the community for management and tasks of implementation and maintenance

- Implementation of the two demonstration proposals integrated with the urban renewal activities proposed in the Local Area Plan
- Details for these will follow from Phase I report

Phase III

(2 years)

- This is the period for monitoring the maintenance work by the community and the Urban Local Body /identified agencies.

It is possible that the Phase II work generates a transformation in the community for undertaking further conservation tasks. In that case the more complex sites of Zafar Mahal, Gandhak ki Baoli and the Qutbuddin Bakhtiar Kaki ki Dargah Complex can be taken up for detailed study.

IX. Budgetary Estimate

Summary

Item	Greha	INTACH	Government Agency
1. Personnel	Rs. 64.00 lakhs		
2. Documentation and Dissemination of Information	Rs. 7.25 lakhs		
3. Community Meetings and Events	Rs. 2.50 lakhs		
4. Establishment Cost		Rs. 8.84 lakhs	
5. Consumables	Rs. 8.84 lakhs		
6. Conveyance and Transportation	Rs. 6.00 lakhs		
7. Topographical Map			Rs. 25.00 lakhs
8. Overheads @ 5%	Rs. 4.07 lakhs		
9. Service Tax	Rs. 10.57 lakhs		
TOTAL	Rs. 96.09 lakhs	Rs. 8.84 lakhs	Rs. 25.00 lakhs

Item	Fee	Unit	Qty.	Greha's Budget (INR)	INTACH's Budget (INR)	Govt. Agency Budget (INR)
1. Personnel				640000		
Regular						
1 Principal Investigator	110000	Man Month	12	1320000		
3 Co-Principal Investigators	75000	Man Month	36	2700000		
4 Research Assistants	35000	Man Month	48	1680000		
Part Time						
5 Advisors	35000	Advisor's Conference	20	700000		
2. Documentation and Dissemination of Information				725000		
Social Surveys		LS		55000		
Production Cost (Posters, Pamphlets, videos)		LS		550000		
Equipment Cost (Video Camera, Tripod, GPS)		LS		120000		
3. Community Meetings and Events				250000		
4. Establishment Cost					884000	
Rent for 400-500 sqft space	22000	Month	12		264000	
Furniture, projector, screen, computer machine		LS			260000	
Electricity, Water, Maintenance etc.	10000	Month	12		120000	
Staffing						
1 Desk Officer	15000	Man Month	12		180000	
1 Support Staff	5000	Man Month	12		60000	
5. Consumables		LS		170000		
6. Conveyance and Transportation				600000		
Local Transport	40000	Month	12	480000		
Domestic Travel (Airfare, Taxi)		LS		120000		
7. Topographical Survey						250000
SUBTOTAL				8145000		
			Overheads @ 5%	407250		
			Subtotal	8552250		
			Service Tax @12.36%	1057058.1		
TOTAL				9609308.1	884000	250000

X. Project Team

Greha is a not-for-profit organization that started in 1974 and is registered as a charitable society since 1986. Greha has been researching environmental development, habitat design and architecture. The thrust of Greha's efforts have been towards addressing issues of the majority of the population; the focus is the marginalized people in rural and urban settlements; the vehicle is developing knowledge and methodologies concerning settlement systems more suited to our history and cultural context.

For this project Greha has assembled the team of following persons:

Principal Investigator:

1. M.N. Ashish Ganju, Architect

President at Greha

M.N. Ashish Ganju is an architect in private practice since 1972. He has been teaching since 1968 in several colleges of architecture in India and Europe. The practice has taken him throughout the Indian sub-continent, including Afghanistan, and presently he builds with the Tibetan refugee community in Dharamsala to research the practice of a sustainable architecture in the Himalayas. He has won several prizes in national and international design competitions. Based in New Delhi, he lives and works on the urban fringe to demonstrate the principle of urban renewal by citizens.

Co-Principal Investigators:

1. Henri Fanthome, Architect

Founder at Henri Fanthome Office for Architecture (HFOA)

Henri Fanthome is the Principal architect at Henri Fanthome Office for Architecture (HFOA), a New Delhi based design consultancy. The firm engages in habitat and space design of varying scales with a clear agenda for responsible design and sustainable technologies. He teaches Architectural Design at the Department of Architecture, School of Planning and Architecture, New Delhi, where he is a visiting faculty. He is also teaches at the School of Design, Ambedkar University, New Delhi and the National Institute of Fashion Technology, New Delhi.

2. Priyanka Jain, Architect and Urban Planner

Co-founder at 3x3 Design

Priyanka Jain is the principal architect and cofounder at 3x3Design, a consultancy that combines urban planning, design, and technology to expand the livability of our cities. She is a part time Assistant Professor of Architecture and Urban

Planning at Ansal University's Sushant School of Art and Architecture(SSAA), Gurgaon, and Delhi Community Manager at URB.im. Priyanka has worked for the Zoning department at New York City Department of City Planning, and Technological Change Lab at Columbia University, New York. Her work at Abaxial Architects involved a range of projects, from the spatial planning of housing and commercial developments and the design development of bioclimatic buildings, workplaces and homes across India. She completed her professional architectural studies at SSAA, and holds a Masters of Science in Urban Planning from Columbia University.

3. Yasmeen Arif, Ph.D., Anthropologist with expertise in socio-cultural studies

Associate Professor of Sociology at the Delhi School of Economics

Dr. Yasmeen Arif is currently Fulbright – Nehru Senior Research Fellow affiliated with the Institute for Advanced Study and Interdisciplinary Center for the Study of Global Change, University of Minnesota (Twin Cities Campus), USA. She is Associate Professor of Sociology at the Delhi School of Economics, University of Delhi. Yasmeen has a PhD in Sociology/Socio-Cultural Anthropology from the University of Delhi. Her research and publications have a large focus on urban and city studies, which include work in both Lebanon and India on issues ranging from heritage conservation to critical socialities in contexts of urban violence. Her academic awards include a Sawyer Seminar post-doctoral Fellowship from the Mellon Foundation, a Quadrant Fellowship at the Institute for Advanced Study, University of Minnesota and a doctoral fellowship from the SEPHIS Foundation, Amsterdam.

Advisors:

1. Rabindra J. Vasavada

Head of Centre for Conservation Studies at CEPT

RJ Vasavada established the Master's Program in Conservation Studies at Faculty of Architecture in 2007 of which he is a Professor and Head. He also heads the Centre for Conservation Studies that he founded subsequently at CEPT University. He is an architect with post-graduation in architecture and planning from Royal Academy of Fine Arts in Copenhagen and has worked under Prof. Louis Kahn on his IIMA project and has been practicing since 1978. He has worked on several historic towns for Heritage Conservation and also worked on historic building restoration projects and has been a Project Consultant and Life Member of Indian National Trust for Art and Cultural Heritage, New Delhi. For the last three years Prof. Vasavada has been the Head of the Technical Committee established for preparation of the World Heritage Nomination Dossier for the historic city of Ahmedabad.

2. Feisal Alkazi, Community Work Specialist and Theater Expert

Feisal Alkazi is an educationist, trainer and theatre director. After a masters degree in social work, he headed Ankur, a society for alternatives in education for ten years, and taught at Jamia MCRC Centre for six years. He now heads Creative Learning for Change, a NGO that designs, carries out and documents innovative educational projects in gender, environmental and heritage education. He has co-authored twenty books along with CLC colleagues including exploring an environment, *The Riverfront of my Town*, *Discovering Jaipur* and *Discovering Kashmir*. He is also a well known theatre director, having directed over 300 plays for adults and for children.

3. Savyasaachi, Ph.D., Sociology and Cultural Anthropology Expert

Professor and Head of the Department of Sociology at Jamia Millia Islamia

Savyasaachi is Visiting Faculty at the Department of Conservation Architecture, School of Planning and Architecture, Delhi, and National Institute of Design, Ahmedabad. He was Country Faculty for Indigenous Perspectives and Global Ecology Courses organized by the International Honors Program, Boston, USA. He has worked in urban conservation projects and was consultant for the project Cultural Heritage and the Promotion of Understanding in Punjab as part of the Culture of Peace Program of the UN, for Cultural Resource Conservation Initiative(CRCI).

4. K.L. Nadir, Ph.D., Political Scientist

He has taught at Delhi University in the Department of Political Science and Indian Institute of Technology, Delhi in the Department of Humanities and Social Sciences, where he was also the Head of Department. He was also Dean of Administration at the TVB School of Habitat Studies, New Delhi. He has expertise in policy planning and management.

5. S.C. Gupta, Urban Development Consultant, Former Additional Commissioner Planning, Delhi Development Authority (DDA)

S.C. Gupta has over 36 years of experience in the field of urban development planning. As a consultant at the Asian Development Bank, he advised the government of Uttarakhand on projecting disaster management needs for urban development in the state. He is Professor of Planning at the School of Planning and Architecture, New Delhi, and Senior Advisor to the Association of Metropolitan Development Authorities and the Delhi Urban Arts Commission.