

The **Qutb complex** is a collection of monuments and buildings from the Delhi Sultanate at Mehrauli in Delhi in India, which were built on the ruins of Al Kot, which consisted of 27 Hindu and Jain temples and Qila-Rai-Pithora (Prithviraj Chauhan's city, whom Muhammad Ghori's Afghan armies had earlier defeated and killed in the Second Battle of Tarain).^[1] The Qutub Minar in the complex, named after Qutbuddin Bakhtiar Kaki, was built by Qutb-ud-din Aibak, who later became the first Sultan of Delhi of the Mamluk dynasty. The Minar was added upon by his successor Iltutmish (a.k.a. Altamash), and much later by Firoz Shah Tughlaq, a Sultan of Delhi from the Tughlaq dynasty in 1368 AD. The Qubbat-ul-Islam Mosque (Dome of Islam), later corrupted into Quwwat-ul Islam,^[2] stands next to the Qutb Minar.^{[3][4][5][6]}

Today, the adjoining area spread over with a host of old monuments, including Balban's tomb, has been developed by the Archaeological Survey of India (ASI) as the Mehrauli Archaeological Park, and INTACH has restored some 40 monuments in the Park.^[8] It is also the venue of the annual 'Qutub Festival', held in November–December where artists, musicians and dancers perform over three days. The Qutb Minar complex, which drew 3.9 million visitors in 2006, was India's most visited monument that year, ahead of the Taj Mahal (with 2.5 million visitors).^[9]

Alai Darwaza

Qutub Minar

Quwwat-ul-Islam Mosque

Iron pillar

Tombs

 Tomb of Iltutmish

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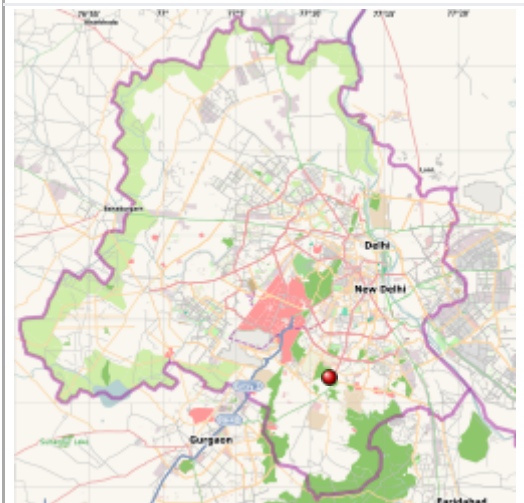
 Footnotes

 Sources

A photograph of the Qutub Minar in Delhi, India. The image shows the tall, tapering tower in the background, surrounded by the ruins of the Qutub complex. The foreground features a large, weathered stone wall on the left and a smaller, partially ruined structure on the right. The ground is paved with stone tiles, and there are some scattered stones and debris. The sky is clear and blue.

Qutub Minar and surrounding ruins

Location	Mehrauli, India
Criteria	Cultural: iv
Reference	233
Inscription	1993 (17th Session)
Coordinates	28°31'28"N 77°11'08"E



Location of Outb complex in Delhi.

Alai Darwaza



Close up of the inscriptions on entrance arch, Alai Darwaza built by Alauddin Khalji

The Alai Darwaza is the main gateway from southern side of the Quwwat-ul-Islam Mosque.^[10] It was built by the second Khalji Sultan of Delhi, Alauddin Khalji in 1311 AD, who also added a court to the pillared to the eastern side. The domed gateway is decorated with red sandstone and inlaid white marble decorations, inscriptions in Naskh script, latticed stone screens and showcases the remarkable

craftsmanship of the Turkish artisans who worked on it. This is the first building in India to employ Islamic architecture principles in its construction and ornamentation.^[4]

The Slave dynasty did not employ true Islamic architecture styles and used false domes and false arches. This makes the Alai Darwaza, the earliest example of first true arches and true domes in India.^[11] It is considered to be one of the most important buildings built in the Delhi sultanate period. With its pointed arches and spearhead of fringes, identified as lotus buds, it adds grace to the Quwwat-ul-Islam mosque to which it served as an entrance.

Qutub Minar

The Qutb Minar is the tallest brick minaret in the world, inspired by the Minaret of Jam in Afghanistan, it is an important example of early Afghan architecture, which later evolved into Indo-Islamic Architecture. The Qutb Minar is 72.5 metres (239 ft) high, has five distinct storeys, each marked by a projecting balcony carried on muqarnas corbel and tapers from a diameter 14.3 metres at the base to 2.7 metres at the top, which is 379 steps away. It is listed as a UNESCO World Heritage Site along with surrounding buildings and monuments.^[12]

Built as a Victory Tower, to celebrate the victory of Mohammed Ghori over the Rajput king, Prithviraj Chauhan, in 1192 AD, by his then viceroy, Qutbuddin Aibak, later the first Sultan of Mamluk dynasty. Its construction also marked the beginning of Muslim rule in India. Even today the Qutb remains one of the most important "Towers of Victory" in the Islamic world. Aibak however, could only build the first storey, for this reason the lower storey is replete with eulogies to Mohammed Ghori.^[13] The next three floors were added by his son-in-law and successor, Iltutmish. The minar was first struck by lightning in 1368 AD, which knocked off its top storey, after that it was replaced by the existing two floors by Firoz Shah Tughlaq, a later Sultan of Delhi 1351 to 1388, and faced with white marble and sandstone enhancing the distinctive variegated look of the minar, as seen in lower three storeys. Thus the structure displays a marked variation in architectural styles from Aibak to that of Tughlaq dynasty.^[14] The inside has intricate carvings of the verses from the Quran.



Excavations of pre-Islamic ruins near Anang Tal.



Qutb Minar and Alai Darwaza (Alai Gate), the entrance to the Quwwat-ul-Islam Mosque

The minar made with numerous superimposed flanged and cylindrical shafts in the interior, and fluted columns on the exterior, which have a 40 cm thick veneer of red and buff coloured sandstone; all surrounded by bands of intricate carving in Kufic style of Islamic calligraphy, giving the minar the appearance of bundled reeds.^[15] It stands just outside the Quwwatul mosque, and an Arabic inscription suggests that it might have been built to serve as a place for the muezzin, to call the faithfuls for namaz.^{[16][17]} Also marking a progression in era, is the appearance of inscriptions in a bold and cursive Thuluth script of calligraphy on the Qutb Minar, distinguished by strokes that thicken on the top, as compared to Kufic in earlier part of the construction.^[18]

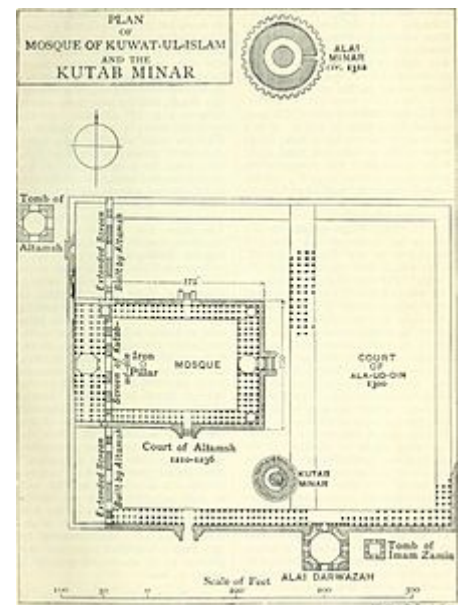


Inscriptions also indicate further repairs by Sultan Sikander Lodi in 1503, when it was struck by lightning once again. In 1802, the cupola on the top was thrown down and the whole pillar was damaged by an earthquake. It was repaired by Major R. Smith of the Royal Engineers who restored the Qutub Minar in 1823 replacing the cupola with a Bengali-style chhatra which was later removed by Governor General, Lord Hardinge in 1848, as it looked out of place, and now stands in the outer lawns of the complex, popularly known as Smith's Folly.^{[3][16][19][20]}

After an accident involving school children, entry to the Qutub Minar is closed to public since 1981, while Qutub archaeological area remains open for public.^[21] In 2004, Seismic monitors were installed on the minar, which revealed in 2005 Delhi earthquake, no damage or substantial record of shakes. The reason for this has been cited as the use of lime mortar and rubble masonry which absorbs the tremors; it is also built on rocky soil, which further protects it during earthquakes.^[19]

Quwwat-ul-Islam Mosque

Quwwat-ul-Islam mosque (Arabic: قوة الإسلام) (Might of Islam) (also known as the *Qutub Mosque* or the *Great Mosque of Delhi*) was built by Qutb-ud-din Aibak, founder of the Mamluk or Slave dynasty.^[22] It was the first mosque built in Delhi after the Islamic conquest of India and the oldest surviving example of Ghurids architecture in Indian subcontinent.^[23] The construction of this Jami Masjid (Friday Mosque), started in the year 1193 AD, when Aibak was the commander of Muhammad Ghori's garrison that occupied Delhi. The Qutub Minar was built simultaneously with the mosque but appears to be a stand-alone structure, built as the 'Minar of Jami Masjid', for the muezzin to perform adhan, call for prayer, and also as a *qutub*, an Axis or Pole of Islam.^[24] It is reminiscent in style and design of the *Adhai-din-ka Jhonpra* or Ajmer mosque at Ajmer, Rajasthan, also built by Aibak during the same time, also constructed by demolishing earlier temples and a Sanskrit school, at the site.^[25]



According to a Persian inscription still on the inner eastern gateway, the mosque was built by the parts taken by destruction of twenty-seven Hindu and Jain temples^{[4][5][6]} built previously during the reigns of the Tomaras and Prithviraj Chauhan, and leaving certain parts of the temple outside the mosque proper.^[26] Historical records compiled by Muslim historian Maulana Hakim Saiyid Abdul Hai attest to the iconoclasm of Qutb-ud-din Aibak. This pattern of iconoclasm was common during his reign, although an argument goes that such iconoclasm was motivated more by politics than by religion.^[27]

However, some medieval Muslim historians and travellers often ascribed the construction of the complex to Mamluk Sultan Iltutmish, rather than to Qutb ud-Din Aibak as is commonly accepted.^[28]

The mosque is one of the earliest extant mosques in India. The original dimensions of the mosque had a courtyard measuring 43 m (141 ft) by 33 m (108 ft). The prayer hall, located on the west measures 45 m (148 ft) by 12 m (39 ft). The mosque has grey colonnades made of greystone with three bays in east and two bays deep on the north and the south. Extensions were made to the



Intricate stone carvings on the cloister columns at Quwwat ul-Islam Mosque, Qutb complex, Delhi – Resembles Hindu Temple Pillars – Pillars taken from Hindu temples.

mosque during 1296 when its dimensions in north and south were extended by 35 m (115 ft). The famous iron pillar is located on the stone pavement in front of it, while Qutub Minar is located west of the main entrance. The central arch of the mosque is ogee in shape and is 6.5 m (21 ft) wide and 16 m (52 ft) tall. The side arches are smaller in size. The screen is sculpted with religious texts and floral patterns. Desai believes that the mosque was not constructed in scientific style but in Corbel style as indicated by the variations in the pattern of the arches.^[29]



Quwwat-ul-Islam (or Might of Islam) mosque started in 1193 CE by Qutb-ud-din-Aibak to mark his victory over Rajputs

The mosque is built on a raised and paved courtyard, measuring 141 ft (43 m). X 105 ft (32 m), surrounded by pillared cloisters added by Iltutmish between 1210 and 1220 AD. The stone screen between prayer hall and the courtyard, stood 16 m at its highest was added in 1196 AD, the corbelled arches had Arabic inscriptions and motifs.^[3] Entrances to the courtyard, also uses ornate mandap dome from temples,

whose pillars are used extensively throughout the edifice, and in the sanctuary beyond the tall arched screens. What survives today of the sanctuary on the western side are the arched screens in between, which once led to a series of aisles with low-domed ceilings for worshippers.^[23] Expansion of the mosque continued after the death of Qutb. Qutbuddin's successor Iltutmish, extended the original prayer hall screen by three more arches. By the time of Iltutmish, the Mamluk empire had stabilised enough that the Sultan could replace most of his conscripted Hindu masons with Muslims. This explains why the arches added under Iltutmish are stylistically more Islamic than the ones erected under Qutb's rule, also because the material used wasn't from demolished temples. Some additions to the mosque were also done by Alauddin Khalji, including the Alai Darwaza, the formal entrance to the mosque in red sandstone and white marble, and a court to the east of the mosque in 1300 AD.

The mosque is in ruins today but indigenous corbelled arches, floral motifs, and geometric patterns can be seen among the Islamic architectural structures.^[30] To the west of the Quwwat ul-Islam mosque is the tomb of Iltutmish which was built by the monarch in 1235.

Iron pillar

The iron pillar is one of the world's foremost metallurgical curiosities. The pillar 7.21-metre high and weighing more than six tonnes, was originally erected by Chandragupta II Vikramaditya (375–414 AD) in front of a Vishnu Temple complex at Udayagiri around 402 AD, and later shifted by Anangpal in 10th century CE from Udaygiri to its present location. Anangpal built a Vishnu Temple here and wanted this pillar to be a part of that temple.

The estimated weight of the decorative bell of the pillar is 646 kg while the main body weighs 5,865 kg, thus making the entire pillar weigh 6,511 kg.^[31] The pillar bears an inscription in Sanskrit in Brahmi script dating 4th century AD, which indicates that the pillar was set up as a Vishnudhvaja, standard of god, on the hill known as Vishnupada in memory of a mighty king named Chandra, believed to be Chandragupta II. A deep socket on the top of this ornate capital suggests that probably an image of Garuda was fixed into it, as common in such flagpoles.^[32]

Tombs

Tomb of Iltutmish

The tomb of the Delhi Sultanate ruler, Iltutmish, a second Sultan of Delhi (r. 1211–1236 AD), built 1235 CE, is also part of the Qutb Minar Complex in Mehrauli, New Delhi. The central chamber is a 9 mt. sq. and has squinches, suggesting the existence of a dome, which has since collapsed. The main cenotaph, in white marble, is placed on a raised platform in the centre of the chamber. The facade is known for its ornate carving, both at the entrance and the interior walls. The interior west wall has a prayer niche (*mihrab*) decorated with marble, and a rich amalgamation of Hindu motives into Islamic architecture, such as bell-and-chain, tassel, lotus, diamond emblems.^[3]

In 1914, during excavations by Archaeological Survey of India's (ASI) Gordon Sanderson, the grave chamber was discovered. From the north of the tomb 20 steps lead down to the actual burial vault.



The Iron pillar in the Qutb Complex

Ala-ud-din Khalji's tomb and madrasa



Alauddin Khalji's *Madrasa*, which also has his tomb to the south, ca 1316 AD

At the back of the complex, southwest of the mosque, stands an L-shaped construction, consisting of Alauddin Khalji's tomb dating ca 1316 AD, and a *madrasa*, an Islamic seminary built by him. Khalji was the second Sultan of Delhi from Khalji dynasty, who ruled from 1296 to 1316 AD.^[33]



Tomb of Iltutmish

The central room of the building, which has his tomb, has now lost its dome, though many rooms of the seminary or college are intact, and since been restored. There were two small chambers connected to the tomb by passages on either side. Fergusson in his book suggested

the existence, to the west of the tomb, of seven rooms, two of which had domes and windows. The remains of the tomb building suggest that there was an open courtyard on the south and west sides of the tomb building, and that one room in the north served as an entrance.^[34]

It was the first example in India, of a tomb standing alongside a *madrasa*.^[3] Nearby stands the Alai Minar, an ambitious tower, he started constructing to rival the Qutb Minar, though he died when only its first storey was built and its construction abandoned thereafter. It now stands, north of the mosque.

The tomb is in a very dilapidated condition. It is believed that Ala-ud-din's body was brought to the complex from Siri and buried in front of the mosque, which formed part of the madrasa adjoining the tomb. Firoz Shah Tughluq, who undertook repairs of the tomb complex, mentioned a mosque within the madrasa.^[35]

Alai Minar

Alauddin Khalji started building the Alai Minar, after he had doubled the size of Quwwat ul-Islam mosque. He conceived this tower to be two times higher than Qutb Minar in proportion with the enlarged mosque.^[36] The construction was however abandoned, just after the completion of the 24.5-metre-high (80 ft) first-story core; soon after death of Alauddin in 1316, and never taken up by his successors of Khalji dynasty. The first storey of the Alai Minar, a giant ruddle masonry core, still stands today, which was evidently intended to be covered with dressed stone later on. Noted Sufi poet and saint of his times, Amir Khusro in his work, *Tarikh-i-Alai*, mentions Ala-ud-din's intentions to extend the mosque and also constructing another minar.^[37]

Other monuments

A short distance west of the enclosure, in Mehrauli village, is the Tomb of Adham Khan who, according to legend drove the beautiful Hindu singer Roopmati to suicide following the capture of Mandu in Madhya Pradesh. When Akbar became displeased with him he ended up being heaved off a terrace in the Agra Fort. Several archaeological monuments dot the Mehrauli Archaeological Park, including the Balban's tomb, Jamali Kamali mosque and tomb.



Alai Minar

There are some summer palaces in the area: the Zafar Mahal, the Jahaz Mahal next to Hauz-i-Shamsi lake, and the tombs of the later Mughal kings of Delhi, inside a royal enclosure near the dargah shrine of Sufi saint, Qutbuddin Bakhtiar Kaki. Here an empty space between two of the tombs, *sargah*, was intended for the last king of Delhi who died in exile in Rangoon, Burma, in 1862, following his implication in the Indian Rebellion of 1857. Also standing nearby is the *Moti Masjid* mosque in white marble. The ruins of the Alai Minar are currently in the Qutb complex.

Gallery



A map of the Qutb complex (click to see large)



Tomb of Iltutmish



Tomb of Iltutmish



Interior of Tomb of Iltutmish



Statues from the destroyed Jain temples



Statues of Jain Tirthankaras embedded in a wall, which were part of the destroyed Jain temples



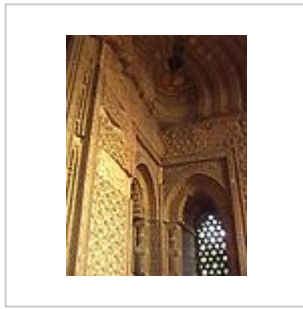
Tomb of Imam Zamin, Qutb Minar Complex



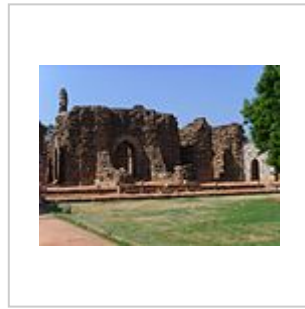
Another view of Qutb Minar, with a Jain temple reused pillar in view



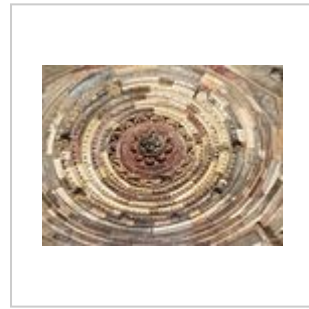
Upper storeys of Qutb Minar, in white marble and sandstone



Interior of Alai Darwaza, resembling timber ornamentation, Qutb complex



Tomb of Alauddin Khalji, Qutb Minar complex



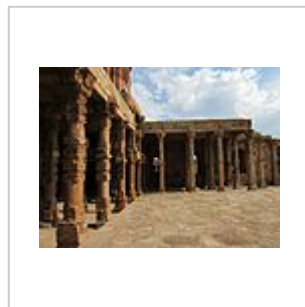
Dome interior



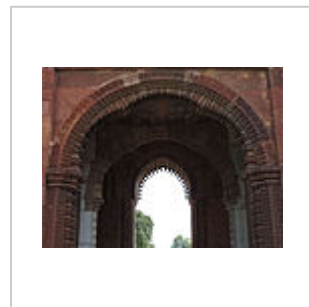
The Qutb Minar, looking up from its foot.



Calligraphy on the exterior of the Qutb Minar



Architectures of Qutb Complex



Alai Darwaza Arch Carvings

See also

- Indian architecture
- Islamic architecture
- Mehrauli Archaeological Park

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External links

- [Entry in the UNESCO World Heritage Site List](#)
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- [Nondestructive evaluation of the Delhi iron pillar](#)*Current Science*, Indian Academy of Sciences, Vol. 88, No. 12, 25 June 2005 (PDF)
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