



Aga Khan IV
Photo credit: AKDN.org




PROACTIVE ISMAILI IMAM:

HIS HIGHNESS THE AGA KHAN

PART - 3 (SEGMENT 2)

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*“There is but One God, He Who gives
All blessings to man and other creatures.
His greatest gift is that He reveals
Himself. But in many tangible ways
He cares for man and provides for his growth
And sustenance. In rain, in milk,
In fruits and honey, and in Nature and the life
Of man, with his opportunities
Of social, moral, and spiritual growth,
Are Signs for those who understand ...”*

The Holy Quran
C. 125.
(16:51-83.)

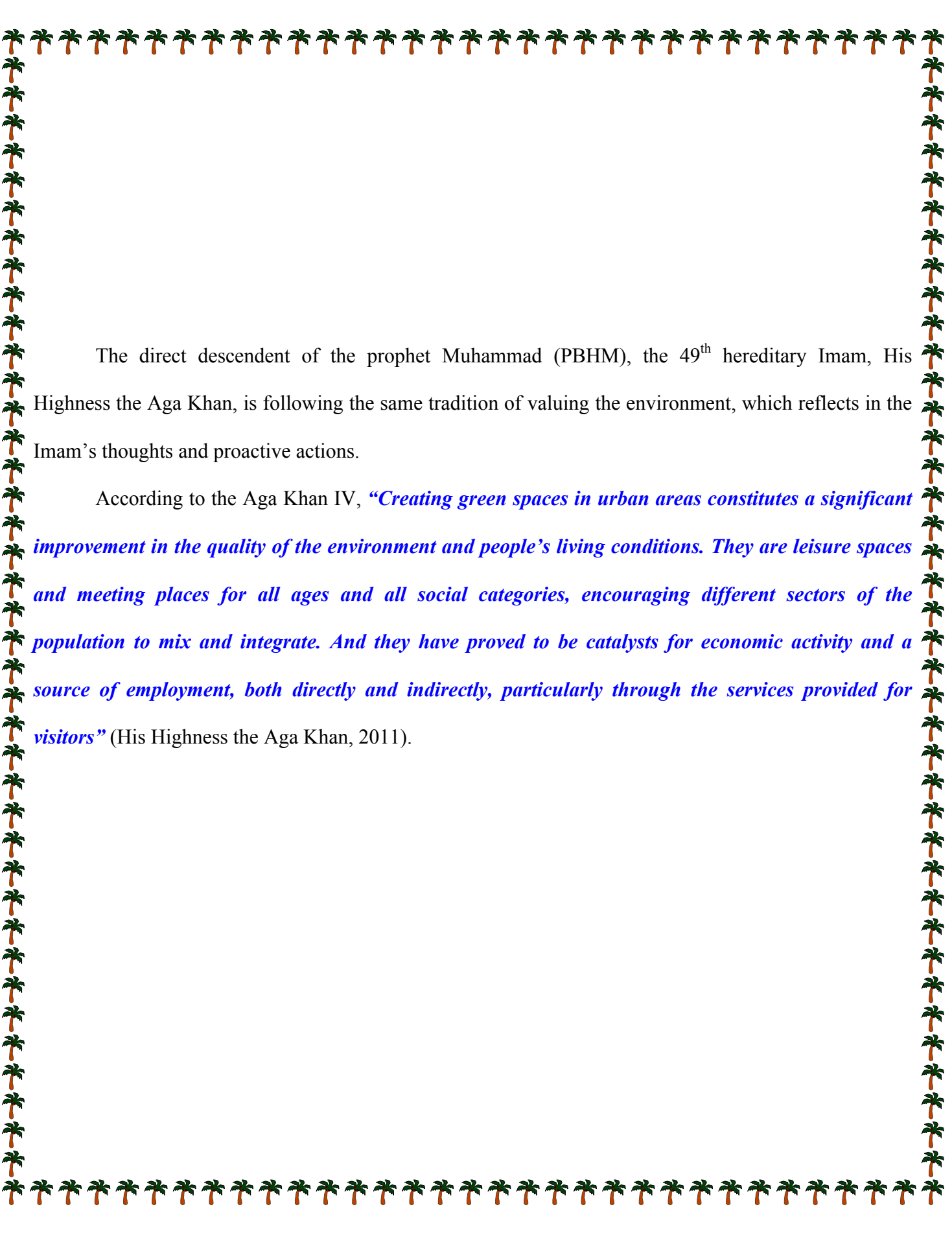
Prophet Muhammad (Peace be upon him) advised his followers to take care of the environment.

According to one of the Prophet's sayings (ahadith) -

*"If a Muslim plants a tree or sows seeds,
and then a bird, or a person or an animal eats from it,
it is regarded as a charitable gift (sadaqah) for him."*


Another hadith quote –

*"If the Hour (the day of Resurrection) is about to be established and one of you was holding a
palm shoot,
let him take advantage of even one second before the Hour is established to plant it."*



The direct descendent of the prophet Muhammad (PBHM), the 49th hereditary Imam, His Highness the Aga Khan, is following the same tradition of valuing the environment, which reflects in the Imam's thoughts and proactive actions.

According to the Aga Khan IV, *“Creating green spaces in urban areas constitutes a significant improvement in the quality of the environment and people's living conditions. They are leisure spaces and meeting places for all ages and all social categories, encouraging different sectors of the population to mix and integrate. And they have proved to be catalysts for economic activity and a source of employment, both directly and indirectly, particularly through the services provided for visitors”* (His Highness the Aga Khan, 2011).

A decorative border consisting of a repeating pattern of palm trees, with a denser row of palm trees along the top and bottom edges, framing the text.

In Islam, spiritual and material lives are harnessed together and considered inseparable. Allah is the creator of the earth and the heavens. The holy Quran has many verses that talk about taking care of the environment and appreciating the physical world as God's gift. Therefore, valuing the aesthetics of physical environment is considered a prime responsibility of every Muslim. According to the Aga Khan, *"[a]s trustees of God's creation, we are instructed to seek to leave the world a better place than it was when we came into it"* (Aga Khan; MHI, 2011, May). Therefore, the projects of His Highness the Aga Khan are dedicated to making the world a better place by merging the history, culture, and values of pluralism. His Highness' mission is to help people become aware of God's creation and its expression by improving their quality of life.

The Sunder Nursery project is one of the magnificent projects that reflect the Aga Khan's appreciation for God's creation. The AKTC, along with supportive consortiums, actively collaborated to turn overlooked land filled with rubble into a lively atmosphere. The rays of improvement and appreciation for the physical environment can be felt through the sweet aroma of the colorful flowers, the chirps of the birds, the eye captivating landscaping, and through the laughs and lively conversations of the families and young children who are learning about bio-diversity, history, and culture in the serene historic site of the Nizamuddin Basti.

What we know about the Sunder Nursery Project

Significance of the Sunder Nursery – “There are over 13,000 parks in New Delhi, but not a single arboretum showcases the diverse flora available in Delhi. The Garden house aims to supplement the diversity of Sunder Nursery by introducing plants that would ordinarily not survive in the harsh climate of Delhi” (Annual Progress Report, 2011, p. 179).

Location – On the north side of Humayun’s Tomb.

Earlier known name - Azim Bagh.

Area covered - 70 acres (Sunder Nursery introduction, 2009).

History - “[Sunder Nursery] was set up by the British to grow select trees for the new capital that was coming in the early 20th century” (Batra, 2012).

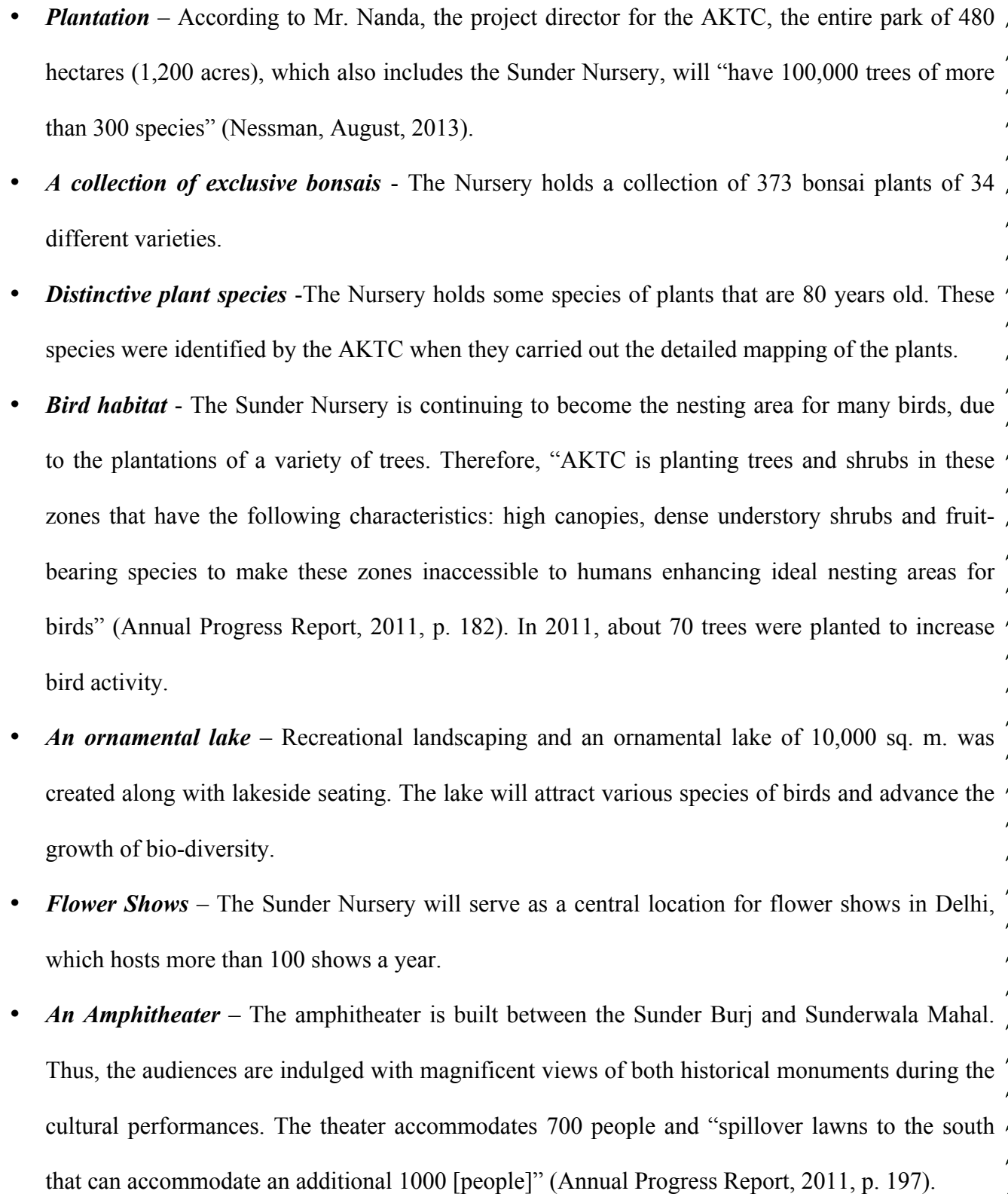
Establishment - In the year 1913.

Who laid the Nursery - Mr. Sydney Percy Lancaster laid out the Sunder Nursery. Mr. Lancaster was born in Meerut, India in 1886. He was a banker, had a keen interest in gardening, and became the Secretary of the Agri-Horticultural Society of India. Over a period of time, Mr. Lancaster “planted 1500 trees and laid 150 miles of hedges all over Delhi” (Batra, 2012).

Estimated Cost – USD 1.35 million, “the bioclimatic architecture of the Garden House will use natural light and trend-setting earth-tunnel ventilation systems for climate control reducing its reliance on conventional electricity” (Annual Progress Report, 2011, p. 179).

Distinguishing features –

- “The development of Sunder Nursery into a sustainable park is part of a larger socio-economic development programme that includes the urban regeneration of Nizamuddin Basti and restoration of Humayun's Tomb complex ...” (Sunder Nursery rehabilitation, n.d).

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- **Plantation** – According to Mr. Nanda, the project director for the AKTC, the entire park of 480 hectares (1,200 acres), which also includes the Sunder Nursery, will “have 100,000 trees of more than 300 species” (Nessman, August, 2013).
 - **A collection of exclusive bonsais** - The Nursery holds a collection of 373 bonsai plants of 34 different varieties.
 - **Distinctive plant species** -The Nursery holds some species of plants that are 80 years old. These species were identified by the AKTC when they carried out the detailed mapping of the plants.
 - **Bird habitat** - The Sunder Nursery is continuing to become the nesting area for many birds, due to the plantations of a variety of trees. Therefore, “AKTC is planting trees and shrubs in these zones that have the following characteristics: high canopies, dense understory shrubs and fruit-bearing species to make these zones inaccessible to humans enhancing ideal nesting areas for birds” (Annual Progress Report, 2011, p. 182). In 2011, about 70 trees were planted to increase bird activity.
 - **An ornamental lake** – Recreational landscaping and an ornamental lake of 10,000 sq. m. was created along with lakeside seating. The lake will attract various species of birds and advance the growth of bio-diversity.
 - **Flower Shows** – The Sunder Nursery will serve as a central location for flower shows in Delhi, which hosts more than 100 shows a year.
 - **An Amphitheater** – The amphitheater is built between the Sunder Burj and Sunderwala Mahal. Thus, the audiences are indulged with magnificent views of both historical monuments during the cultural performances. The theater accommodates 700 people and “spillover lawns to the south that can accommodate an additional 1000 [people]” (Annual Progress Report, 2011, p. 197).


Post – benefits:

According to the Aga Khan – *“Endeavours such as this are vital for countries like India, well-endowed with historical and cultural treasures, but also burdened by the responsibility of preserving them for future generations. It is my hope that this project will serve as a model for more collaborative ventures among the private and public sector, national and international entities and civil society”*

(Press center speech by His Highness the Aga Khan, April, 2003).

The Sunder Nursery will provide:

1. A wonderful experience for families and young children, and the opportunity to learn about Delhi’s ecology.
2. A major attraction for students during their visit to Humayun’s Tomb.
3. According to Mr. Khurana, the former head of CPWD, “a tourist magnet with 20,000 to 30,000 visitors a day” (Nessman, August, 2013).
4. An Amphitheater to provide a center for cultural events. The income produced from the Amphitheater will be utilized in the maintenance of the Nursery. [Please check the Nizamuddin Annual Calendar for the various cultural events, especially from the Quwwali tradition. The Quwwali tradition was created 700 years ago at the Nizamuddin Basti by Hazart Nizamuddin’s famous disciple, Hazart Amir Khusrau.]
5. A management trust with the government to utilize the additional income generated from the Nursery to improve the living conditions of the neighboring Nizamuddin Basti by supporting MCD health, sanitation, education, and other socio-economic development initiatives.



One may seldom see His Highness talking about his work or giving an interview because “... *one who knows that his speech is part of his action will speak little except of that which concerns him*” (Counsels of Hadrat Ali). Hence, the work of the proactive Ismaili leader, His Highness the Aga Khan, needs no words of introduction. Its beauty and actions speak for the ethics of Islam, works for the quality of life, and cares for uplifting the living conditions of diverse populations.

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