



Safdarjung's Tomb

## SAFDARJUNG'S TOMB

Located at the head of Lodi Road, at its intersection with Aurobindo Marg See Map p. 139, is the last of the grand pre-British monuments, Safdarjung's Tomb. Safdarjung was the Governor of Awadh (modern day Lucknow). Powerful in his own right, he came to the defence of the capital and thus rose to the post of Wazir during Mohammad Shah Rangila's reign. However he was subsequently sacked on account of being a Shia and his tomb was constructed by his son in 1753 after his death. Such was the state of the empire at this stage that it was necessary to strip the great Khan-i-Khanan's Tomb of its exterior stone dressing to decorate this one. The structure is not one of my favourites as it appears rather inelegant to my eye. However the red

and buff stone exterior has extensive ornamentation and the floor of the grave chamber is embellished with some fine stone inlay work. Its onion shaped dome is in complete contrast to other tombs and this monument does enjoy an aura of serenity as it is much less frequented than the nearby Lodi tombs. Surrounded by well-maintained and manicured lawns and some gracious trees, this enclosure is surprisingly tranquil given that it is hemmed in by busy roads and thundering traffic. If you drive past it, coming from Racecourse Road, just outside its walls is a beautifully laid out rose garden.

Visiting nearby Aliganj is a journey for serious history buffs, or those interested in delving a bit into the Shia faith. From the reign of the sultanate right through to the Mughals the rulers of Delhi were followers of the Sunni faith. However

### SNEAK PEEKS!!!

You are close to **Dilli Haat** with its variety of food stalls from different states of the country. It also has some great ethnic handicrafts, carpets, shawls and sarees.

### TRAVEL TIPS

#### Time Line:

Safdarjung's Tomb:  
30–45 minutes

#### Entrance Charge:

₹10 for Indians  
₹100 for foreigners

#### Public Conveniences:

Available

during the reign of Mohammed Shah Rangila (1719–48) Quidsia Begum, a Shia, became his favourite wife and their son Ahmed Shah succeeded as the next emperor. Safdarjung, as you may remember, was a Shia and in fact was discriminated against for it. His heirs had a large estate in Delhi called Aliganj (modern day Jorbagh and Lodi Colony). This became a centre for the capital's Shia population. Although much encroached upon, with many sections in a state of dilapidated ruin and with some buildings so greatly altered that they no longer truly represent their period, Aliganj retains its historic significance as a Shia stronghold.

You enter through the northern gate known as Naqqar Khana (drum house) and to the right is a white triple-domed mosque. The main central courtyard holds two shrines, the Qadam Sharif and Bibi ka Rauza. Quidsia Begum was presented a holy relic, the footprint of Prophet Mohammed's son-in-law Hazrat Ali who was revered as Shah-i-Mardan (king among men), and this complex is named after this relic. The holy relic was placed at the bottom of a dry tank and a finely carved marble enclosure built over it. Women were not allowed into the Qadam Sharif while men were barred from entering the adjoining Bibi ka



Onion domes in Safdarjung's Tomb

Rauza, the shrine of Ali's wife and the Prophet's daughter Fatima Bibi. In the next courtyard is the Imambara (Majlis Khana) that is thronged by devotees during the month of Muharram and on Ali's birthday. Opposite this is a small tomb where the child saint Arif Ali Shah is buried – he died when he was only twelve. Just outside

the compound, to the north, is the cute Lal Masjid with its small bulbous red domes. The nearby Rajdhani Nursery which has seemingly encroached into the original Aliganj territory contains a tomb which predates the Shah-i-Mardan and it is here that the Muharram tazia procession (which mourns the death of the

Prophet's grandson in the battle of Karbala) concludes. The walled enclosure here is also referred to as Karbala.

Set in a large garden nearby is the somewhat plain square tomb of a later day powerful minister called Najaf Khan but it is not really worth a dekho.