

## THE LEANING WALLS OF SON BURJ



It was another hot, dusty day in Mehrauli when Ajaz and I wandered down Market Street toward Andheria More and into the framed entrance of the Son Burj Masjid. With the mosque being deserted we respectfully admired its bright blue doors and aged stone walls. Eventually we were joined by locals who told us the mosque was built in 1492 AD. Reflecting later, I pondered the history of Columbus' bold crossing of the Atlantic, which seems ancient by American history standards. In comparison it is dwarfed by India's incredible, extensive history.

Imam Hassan Mohammad, the current leader of the mosque, soon emerged and took his seat respectfully amongst three local community members sitting in the open courtyard. We inquired about the history of Son Burj, the basti (a low-income settlement built on government land) that flows up to the steps on the eastern side, and the potential of bringing our guests to visit. After extending a warm welcome and speaking of the untapped potential of tourism in Mehrauli, they turned the conversation to the tilting walls.

Two walls of the historic mosque are leaning. An outdoor, south-facing wall, decorated with faded yellow, green, and white paint, appears to be well on its journey to toppling over. While exploring the inside of the mosque, we already taken note of the west-facing wall's precarious lean towards the busy Market Street. With the problem getting worse and worse, Imam Hassan has appealed to government bodies for help, but none has come.

"If 50 of us appeal for help, they won't listen, but if one of you goes, they might listen," stated Imam Hassan in local Hindustani dialect.

This request, among others, confirms to us of the potential for Project Mehrauli to preserve and restore the historic sites of Mehrauli, as well as restore honor to forgotten people and broken-down places.

