

# **Status of Sanjay Van**

**A Preliminary Report**  
(November 2010 – May 2011)



**Srishti**

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issues of Delhi's greens and biodiversity.**

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## Summary Points

1. Boundary of Sanjay Van not defined on the ground, especially in its South, hence adjoining areas/ villages have free access.
2. Where there is a boundary wall, this has been breached in many places
3. A number of gates are open allowing access to cars and vehicles from the Gorakhnath Mandir side
4. The religious structures in the park are building new rooms even now beyond their fences.
5. New religious structures are coming up.
6. There is garbage all around the religious structures, which offer meals as well.
7. There is a large sewage stream in the forest from Vasant Kunj
8. There is a DDA structure in the forest, which has no evident use.
9. There are hundreds of pits made for planting trees but these have only plastic bags and garbage in them.
10. The institutions and dhabas around the northern boundary of the park throw garbage into the forest regularly
11. There is no DDA caretaker to be seen and no one seems to be guarding the forest.
12. There are dogs without leash, which come in regularly with morning walkers into the park. They destroy birds nests on the ground.
13. There are 2 LPG Godowns
14. There are 2 cricket pitches in the park.

## **Contents**

**Summary Points- pg 3**

**Survey Report - pg 4**

**Some Recommendations – pg 13**

**Google Map pg -14**

**List of encroachments/ structures/ activities- pg 15**

**Photographs- pg 17**

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**South Central Ridge as notified:**

Sanjay van is notified as a Reserve Forest, in the South Central Ridge (as per the 1994 notification under Section 4 of the Indian Forest Act (1927)). It extends from behind Qutab Institutional Area to the Qutab Minar. It has laldora areas like Kishenganj around it as well as the Qutab Institutional Area, and the Qutab Colonnade in its south.

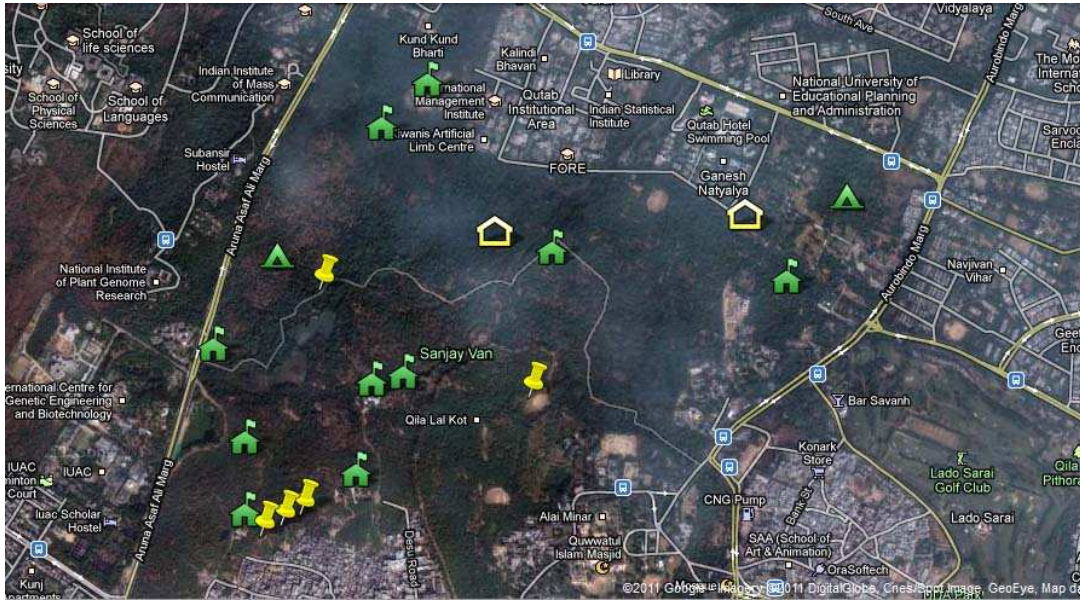
The forest within this areas is amongst the most dense and beautiful greens in the city, however it is under grave threat as the following report shows. The area is under the charge of the DDA, who are supposed to maintain it like a forest, but there is evidence of horticulture all around.

The following ongoing survey is being conducted, to obtain a ground level view of the situation.

**Survey**

With the idea of understanding the Sanjay Van better we began regular walks and mapping of the forest in November 2010, using transects and GPS. We spent the initial few weeks familiarizing ourselves with the exits and entries to the forest and getting a basic sense of the scale of this stunning south central ridge. This was followed by documenting the various encroachments in forest, complete with GPS maps and photographs. The GPS locations of the encroachments are available on Google maps and the photographs and other details are available on a facebook page titles "what's happening in Sanjay Van?" We also observed the community/ ies that access the forest for a number of reasons, ranging from morning walks to gathering firewood for the evening meals. We have also approached a number of institutions in the Qutab institutional area with an offer to begin conversations about community conservation of the Sanjay Van and hope to take this forward in the near future.

Within the bustling metropolis of Delhi this 1,582 acre expanse of green is fighting a tough battle with land encroachments and acute deforestation. Scattered within the folds of this forest are a number of religious establishments, some that claim to be *paracheen* (ancient) others that we have observed over the months expand from a small clearing into a thriving sacred site complete with devotees and priest.



## Details of some of the encroachments in the Sanjay Van: -

### Religious structures

#### Guru Gorakhnath Mandir, Katwaria Sarai

The oldest and largest of the three Gorakhnath temples in this forest, this temple is built around a lake that is said to be sacred. In the past few months we have not seen a drop of water in this so-called lake, although that does not deter the devotees that frequent the temple. Biannual fairs (mela) attract large crowds to this temple.



#### Gorakhnath Mandir

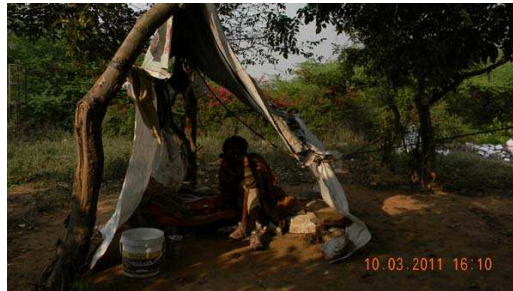
This is the second largest Gorakhnath temple in the forest. Sri. Yogi Radhenath Jee is the head priest here. [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Gorakhnath\\_Math](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Gorakhnath_Math)

Radhenath moved to the forest in 1981 after the demise of this predecessor. Since then he has gradually encroached on land and cut trees on all sides of the temple, there is currently a hall under construction. *"It will be used for holding meeting (mahashabha) of senior priests."*.. says Radhenath



### Gorakhnath Mandir

The priest protecting the property claims this temple was built in 1981. This is the smallest of the three Gorakhnath temples in the forest. A whitewashed brick wall surrounds a few statues of Hindu gods, and the priest shacks up in a makeshift tent right outside the temple premise.



### Thekey-wala Mandir, Lado Sarai

Popularly called the Thekey-wala mandir, this temple is apparently supported by the liquor shop in Lado Sarai just outside the forest. The caretaker/ priest was unavailable to corroborate the stories as we mostly found him in an intoxicated condition and unable to communicate. Not to mention the 40 dogs, 30 ducks and a monkey that this temple houses, the dogs guard the temple premises and we were chased away a number of times before we had the opportunity to photograph the temple and record its GPS coordinates. There is also a volleyball court on campus. We have encountered many young boys washing their motorbikes with water from a boring dug into the forest and generally hanging around here in the evenings.



Dargah Ashiq Allah, Mehrauli

<http://ashiqallah.hpage.com/>

Since 1317 this Dargah has hosted *Langars* at this very site. However there is no system for garbage collection here, leading to massive plastic/waste mismanagement and water clogging. Akbar baba, the spiritual head of the Dargah has refused the use of LPG for cooking food for the *langar*, as a result the fuel for the kitchen is collected from the surrounding forest. There are a number of Mazar/graves sites around this Dargah that are also sites of worship and are gradually increasing in number and size.



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### Eidgah

Usually situated on the outskirts of the city an eidgah is an open-air mosque, this particular eidgah is well within the city limits and within the forest, walking distance from the Dargah Ashiq Allah.



Many other smaller sites of worship including several *makbaras* (graves), improvised temples under trees and clearings in the forest, dot the expanse of the forest. These religious institutions have absolutely no regard for the sanctity of the forest, while they burn plastic and litter the forest with garbage they are also gradually expanding in dimension.



There are other spaces like abandoned rooms and walled enclosures, cricket stadiums, Hindu crematoriums, what they call the *Mahan atma sthal*. Even government allotted LPG godowns and DDA plant nursery near the Qutab Institutional area, the DDA Park and offices within the forest premises.

Condition of the **natural lakes/ drains and garbage** in the forest.

The natural drains of the landscape are choking with plastic and garbage almost everywhere, the border between Kishangarh and Mehrauli is particularly disturbing in this aspect. The locals to tie cattle and dry cow dung cakes in small clearings created within the forest are also using this area. The boundary wall is missing in many places and it is often hard to

distinguish if you are in someone's backyard or the backyard is in the forest.

Garbage is an issue along the Qutab Institutional area wall as well, where the local food stalls use the forest for organic, inorganic waste dumping. To make matters worse there are no dustbins anywhere in or around the forest.



The few lakes and natural depressions that had water were full of murky sewage water. In the winter some migratory birds still seek shelter in the forest and the unsuspecting guests are welcomed with cesspools of human waste.



We were heartened to find many small pits dug and ready for **planting trees** in early November, when we began mapping the forest. However when we last checked the pits were collecting plastic bags and still waiting for the sapling.



A range of **community/ies access the forest** for morning walks, midday strolls after lunch, walking their pets in the evenings, collecting firewood, motorists and pedestrians use it to take shortcuts to avoid traffic on the main roads, devotees visiting temples and graves, children come here to pick berries and play cricket, bird watchers and cycling enthusiast, the forest provides for those seeking purpose as well as those seeking pleasure. Yet another community to engage are the students, office and hospital staff in the Qutab Institutional area. We believe conversation about conserving the Sanjay Van with these stakeholders will yield positive results.



Please find further details @  
[Google Maps](#)  
[Facebook](#)

**Researcher**  
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**Some Recommendations:**

1. Immediate overview of DDA staff and improvement of oversight responsibility of the forest
2. Immediate marking of boundary and bounding fences to be made.
3. Demarcation of existing structures and their boundaries
4. Marking and removal of structures/ uses which have come up after notification, such as cricket ground.
5. Immediate stoppage of new construction activity in the forest.
6. Stoppage of sewage flow in the forest.
7. Immediate survey of status of forest greenery and stoppage of horticultural activities with the involvement of the Forest Department.
8. Closure of gates to any vehicular entry
9. Stopping of dogs without leash within the forest.
10. Notice to institutions around the forest to stop throwing garbage in the forest.

**Education and Awareness**

11. Education and awareness to begin of morning walkers and institutions about the heritage of the forest.
12. Development of nature trails and student activities in the forest for education and awareness in association with school and NGO networks.