
The Aga Khan IV is one of the richest men in the world. Born Prince Karīm al-Hussainī, he became the Aga Khan IV at the age of 20 in 1957. Aga Khan is now both his name and his hereditary title as the Imam or leader of the Nizārī Muslims, the largest branch of the Ismaili branch of the Shī'a faith. He is the 49th Ismaili Imam, who trace their lineage back to Fatima, the prophet Muhammed's daughter.

Khan's father was a leader in the Pakistani independence movement, but Khan spent his childhood in Kenya before attending school in Switzerland and graduating from Harvard University in 1959. He skied for Turkey and then for Iran in the 1960 and 1964 Olympic games. His personal wealth has been estimated at more than \$1 billion, with business interests in hotels, airlines, and a tourist complex in Sardinia. Living in Paris, he also operates the largest horse racing and breeding operation in France.²

But, here I am most interested in his work as founder and chairman of the Aga Khan Development Network, which participates in projects promoting culture, economic development, education, interracial harmony and faith in religion – often in fragile economic or post-conflict societies. For example, the Network has mobilized more than \$700 million in development projects in Afghanistan, and Khan himself has personally pledged more than \$75 million for rebuilding. The Network has multiple arms:

The Aga Khan Foundation, which focuses on rural development, health, education, the environment, and civil society in the poorest parts of South and Central Asia, Africa, and the Middle East;

The Aga Khan Agency for Microfinance, which supports projects ranging from village lending cooperatives to self-standing microfinance banks;

Aga Khan Education Services, which operates more than 300 schools in Bangladesh, India, Kenya, the Kyrgyz Republic, Pakistan, Tajikistan, Tanzania, and Uganda;

The Aga Khan University, Pakistan's first private international university, and the University of Central Asia, which has campuses in Tajikistan, Kazakhstan, and the Kyrgyz Republic;

Aga Khan Health Services, which provides health care in more than 200 health centers, dispensaries, hospitals, and diagnostic and community health centers;

The Aga Khan Fund for Economic Development, the only for-profit agency in the Network, which mobilizes investments in infrastructure, financial institutions, and employment opportunities;

Focus Humanitarian Assistance, which provides emergency relief supplies and services to victims of conflict and natural disasters; and

The Aga Khan Trust for Culture, which includes the Aga Khan Award for Architecture (the largest architectural award in the world, given every three years), the Historic Cities Program, a Music Initiative to preserve the traditional music of Central Asia, and a Program for Islamic Architecture.

Like the Soros network, the Aga Khan Foundation consciously seeks to build civil society and nonprofit sectors. The Foundation has especially “made targeted efforts to build the civil society sector” since 2002. The Foundation says it “strongly believes that CSOs [civil society organizations] can achieve what neither government nor business can achieve by themselves... In recent years, this need has given rise to a separate and specific civil society programme that cuts across activities of the entire Network.” The Foundation says this civil society sector work “is especially critical where governments are weak or non-performing, as in situations of failed democracies or post-conflict reconciliation and reconstruction... Where civil society organizations function well, development indicators improve... Their common factor is that a group of citizens believe in something strongly enough to put their energies and resources to work to achieve their objectives.”

The Foundation is not a naïve, distant rich uncle, however. It candidly describes the challenges that the civil society sector has in the countries where it works:

“Competence: CSOs may be long on enthusiasm, but less consistent on competence...

Trust: Governments tend to be mistrustful of civil society actors – they consider them as organisations which may show up government faults, compete for the people’s loyalty and attract funds which might otherwise go to government...

Awareness: Citizens are often unclear, particularly in countries that are emerging from a legacy of single-party rule, about their rights and responsibilities...

Good governance and integrity: Citizens are faced with many examples of those who hold power over them, abusing that power and diverting resources meant for the public good.

Rapport with the private sector: Businesses...are suspicious of a sector that is new to them, and often face disincentives in giving funds to such bodies.”³

With all this in mind, I went to see one of the projects being undertaken by the Aga Khan Trust for Culture in Delhi, India, the Nizamuddin Conservation Project, headed by Ratish Nanda. Ratish and I had become acquainted through the Eisenhower Fellows Program, an international leadership development program with more than 1,500 Fellows in 107 countries. When I travel, I always contact the Eisenhower Fellows there because they’re doing such interesting things.

When I meet Ratish, he wears a classic Nehru vest and has a poncho-like cape to ward off the cold fog of Delhi. With a hairline that’s receding over his temples, he peers through large-framed glasses with eyes that convey seriousness of purpose. In his late 30s, he is an architect working to restore a Muslim monument but not Muslim himself.

He had been working in Kabul for 5 years, also for the Aga Khan Trust for Culture when he moved back to set up the Delhi office of the Aga Khan Trust and to undertake a project that integrates conservation and restoration of a Muslim architectural treasure, urban renewal in a nearby slum, and creation of green space with a new city park. In Ratish’s words, “It was a

chance to show how conservation of architecture is not just for the elite but for the people.” With the scale of work required at Nizamuddin, he expected the Trust’s response to be “Get real!” but when the call came, the voice on the end of the line said, “This is exactly what we’re looking for.” The project with a staff of four. They now employ over 100 people full-time, several consultants, and over 500 craftsmen, with 60 percent staff working in the socio-economic part of the project. Then Aga Khan himself came to talk to Ratish and sat with him, saying at the end, “What needs to be done has to be done, don’t hesitate.”

Humayun’s Tomb was built in Delhi in the middle of the 16th century. Humayun was the son of Babar, the founder of the Moghul empire in India. Equally as well educated as his father but not as militarily astute, Humayun was ousted by an Afghan chief and exiled to Persia. He recaptured his throne and Delhi in 1556 but died a month later when he accidentally fell down the stairs of his library. His widow constructed his tomb and camped on site during its construction.

The tomb launched a new architectural era in India that culminated in masterpieces like the Taj Mahal in Agra. The Moghuls brought to India their skill in the art of painting miniatures and their love of gardens and fountains and architecture that fuses symmetry of lines and angles with decorative splendor. Built of red sandstone and white marble, Humayun’s Tomb sits on a raised platform with a blue dome and gardens divided into quarters and crisscrossed by water channels. At the intersections of the waterways are octagonal or rectangular pools. It was India’s first tomb-in-a-garden complex. The gardens had been restored by the Aga Khan Trust for Culture as a gift of His Highness the Aga Khan to honor the 50th anniversary of India’s independence.

Between Humayun’s Tomb and a railway station is Nizamuddin, a neighborhood named after Hazrat Nizamuddin Auliya, Delhi’s most famous Sufi saint. In the western section of the neighborhood, there is a lively market while the eastern section contains the residential area. It is

an historic district with five important monuments, including the saint's mausoleum, and walking the twisting narrow lanes, you can hear devout Sufis singing ecstatic religious songs called qawwalis. About 15,000 people live in this neighborhood, most of them poor and many homeless near the railway station.

The neighborhood is not only a religious site, however. Ratish says it's also the drug capital of Delhi – where everything from paint thinner to cocaine to heroin is for sale. It is home base for a famous druglord, Sharafat Sheikh, who built a mansion called “Bihar Bhawan” in Nizamuddin. He had come to Delhi from Bihar, the poorest state in India, and washed utensils at a guesthouse and delivered newspapers to earn a living. He became a scrap dealer and bought stolen goods and then started selling drugs. From his profits in the drug trade, Sheikh owns a fleet of cars and properties, a restaurant and bar in Mumbai, and showrooms in Delhi and Mumbai.

Sheikh had been jailed in 2005, and police had attached his properties and tried to break up his network, but Sheikh stayed in business from jail through trusted lieutenants. Just days before my visit to the area in 2009, members of Sheikh's gang had been in a shootout with police nearby.

This is what Ratish and his team face – aging monuments, a drug-ridden slum, and poverty, all in a tightly packed urban area in India's national capital. It has taken a year to convince the residents that the goal of the project is not to move them all out. Also, the druglord had not been happy with this incursion on his turf. “Our people have been beaten up and threatened,” says Ratish. And, there were lots of government agencies which had to approve the project – the Ministry of Law, Urban Development, Public Works, Tourism, the Home Ministry, the slum department of the Municipal Corporation of Delhi. Finally, on July 11, 2007 after 18 months of negotiations, the Trust signed a five-year memorandum of understanding with three different government agencies. At \$20-30 million, this will be the biggest non-government

project in India; it would cost the government an estimated \$300-400 million if the government did the project itself, says Ratish.

His face lights up as he describes why it is worth trying to hurdle all these barriers. “This has never been done before,” he says, “It’s a chance to show how architectural conservation is not just for the elite. It’s also a chance to promote religious tolerance and empower the underprivileged.”

For the tomb complex, the project will offer additional attractions for tourists and local visitors, buffer zone protection, and enhanced greenery to lower the pollution that threatens many of India’s monuments. The park and nursery part of the project will offer green space in a city that badly needs refuges from development and densely populated areas. The slum rehabilitation in the Nizamuddin area will offer employment opportunities, appreciation of the historical significance of both the Sufi and Muslim sites, and showcase a spirit of pluralism and tolerance within a Hindi capital.

Part of the project involves replacing a rundown primary school which previously had plastic sheets for windows, toilets that didn’t work, and high dropout rates. Now refurbished and true to its architect’s goals, the school building itself is teaching. The steps are numbered to reinforce math lessons. There are maps of different sizes and fractions and geometry in the windows. The window grills illustrate shapes and figures. If you move the door, it shows you a new angle. There are messages in the toilets. There are writing surfaces for the children on the walls, on the doors, and in the hallways. The blades of the fans are in nine colors, but when it moves, it all turns white. Every room was designed by the teachers and the architects together with education in mind. “So even if the teacher is not teaching, the building is teaching,” says Meena Narula, a senior programme officer for the Aga Khan Foundation and Ratish’s colleague. “It will be the best school in Delhi,” she says.

A health initiative within the project will set up a pathology lab in a government health clinic. A gynecologist will also come once a week. The Trust provided equipment for eye, ear, nose, and throat treatment. The Trust staff have completed a profile of health problems in the community and first have chosen to address communicable diseases like tuberculosis, scabies, and the malaria that occurs during monsoon season. Later, they will deal with lifestyle diseases such as diabetes.

They also plan on community-based groups gradually taking over. For example, there already are volunteer awareness groups on education and health and social security groups with community representatives and district health officers. Self-help groups are forming in tailoring and embroidery to lead to employment and development of life skills. Others are learning how to manage the community services being created in sanitation units and the park and nursery.

Finally, there is a cultural component to the project which will document oral histories and stories of the people of the area. The Architectural Society of India will produce a history of the 70 monuments in the area, 40 of which are protected sites. There will be programs about Sufi music and maybe recordings. There will be workshops for the children using paper-cutting to teach them about the Islamic patterns in the monuments.

When the Aga Khan Award for Architecture was created in 1977, the Aga Khan said “The notion of culture as an asset rather than a drain on resources was still a new one in many parts of the world... Culture was still considered a luxury in an era of unmet social and economic needs.” Khan says the Trust for Culture, created in 1988, “demonstrates how conservation and revitalisation of the cultural heritage – in many cases the only asset at the disposal of the community – can provide a springboard for social development...[C]ulture remains a source of personal pride. It still has the power to inspire and unify an entire nation. And it can reveal that nation, at its best, to the outside world... For all these reasons, the Trust works to preserve the cultural heritage of the Muslim world – not as a bulwark against the contemporary world, but

rather to ensure that the rich heritage of these cultures endures. At the same time, the Trust's education programmes promote pluralism and tolerance as an antidote to what I call the 'clash of ignorance.' ... I know of no better road to lasting peace than tolerance for the differences of faith, culture and origin."⁴

This chapter has been about the difference that wealth and generosity can make in the size and shape of nonprofit sectors. Charitable giving can come from the wealthiest people in the world like The Aga Khan, George Soros, Vehbi Koç, and Sakip Sabancı, from corporations like the one formed by Ashok Agarwal's father, from fees such as sales of La Luciérnaga's magazine or charges at a health clinic, from Scandinavian lotteries, or from people like you and me or Osama and Marcela. But, the amount of that giving and what it is for can shape a nonprofit sector and reflect a nation's values.

² See http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Aga_Khan_IV

³ Aga Khan Foundation, 2008 report, Geneva, Switzerland, pp. 47-49.

⁴ Aga Khan, "On the Role of Culture in Development," Aga Khan Trust for Culture, 2007 report, pp. 4-5.