



Digital Delhi

HUSSEIN KESHANI, ASSISTANT PROFESSOR, ART HISTORY

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"As historians we always work at building bridges between the past and the present. I also try to build bridges of understanding between historic Muslim cultural practices and contemporary societies," says Hussein Keshani, Assistant Professor of Art History.

Through his research, Keshani hopes to advance understanding of the architectural and urban history of Delhi—a region that, despite its significance in world history, Keshani believes is relatively understudied and whose cultural heritage is perpetually at risk.

Keshani is the leader of a collaborative international team of scholars from Japan, India, and Canada who pool their humanities and technology expertise to discover innovative ways to apply computer technologies to the study of Delhi's architectural history during the 12th and 16th centuries.

"We're interested in advancing the field of 'medieval' Indian history, in part by posing new questions to the field of informatics technology, such as: what is the interplay between religious mentalities and Delhi's urban environment? Or, what are the cultural politics of conserving Islamic monuments in contemporary

secular India with its Hindu majorities?" says Keshani. "It's a blend between humanities and technology; we're trying to see how these two areas can intersect, and specifically in ways that are not driven solely by technology, but by humanities-oriented research agendas."

The milestone of the collaborative project will be the development of a prototype of a "digital lab," with a knowledge-base that can be shared globally. More importantly, unique analytical tools will be conceptualized that illuminate linkages between visual, spatial and textual information across space and time.

"There's an abundance of ways of using computing technologies to gather information, now we need new tools to reconcile the data, including how, why and when it was generated," he says.

Ultimately, the development of a digital lab for Delhi's architectural and urban history will enable more researchers to participate in the field in collaborative ways, achieve new insights and spur the development of new kinds of informatics technologies.