



Strategies and Options for Promoting Conservation of Built Heritage in the Indian Urban Context

Jit Kumar Gupta^a, IP Singh^b

^aFounder Director, College of Architecture IET Bhaddal, jit.kumar1944@gmail.com

^bHead of Department - Architecture, NIT Hamirpur, ipsingh@nith.ac.in

Abstract

The built environment has been an integral part of human living and definers of growth and development since the inception of mankind. For the needs of human survival, different typologies of buildings have been created catering to their physical, social and economic needs besides improving their quality of life. These heritage needs to be critically studied and analyzed for understanding the traditional wisdom. In this paper, a number of critical measures and steps are discussed for preserving the heritage, which includes putting in place an innovative, people-oriented and heritage-focused policy. The paper discusses, the current issues related to heritage conservation, emphasizes the need for redefining the concept of heritage in architecture and planning. Introduction of new policies, development regulations and community-driven heritage conservation are described.

Keywords: Heritage, built-environment, conservation, policy, community development

1. INTRODUCTION

Buildings have been an integral part of human living and definers of growth and development of mankind right from inception. Human beings have been actively involved in creating different typologies of building for catering to their physical, social and economic needs besides improving their quality of life. Growth and development of communities and nations have been largely showcased by the quality of buildings created by them. Buildings have also been acknowledged as the definers of urban fabric and structure because they constitute the large mass of the city. Accordingly, numerous iconic and theme based buildings have been planned, designed and constructed, locally and globally, in urban areas which are known for their state of art quality, structure, ambience, spaces and technology. These iconic buildings, created over a period of time, have now been recognized as the heritage of a place.

As reservoirs of skill and manpower, cities have been reckoned as drivers of growth and development besides generators of wealth. Cities are also major contributors to the economic health, social well-being and quality of life prevailing in any area. Housing large iconic buildings, cities are also known to be repositories of cultural heritage, reflecting the personality of a community. Heritage provides a vital link between past and present and has also an important role in defining and shaping the destiny of the community. These footprints of past,

provide us vital knowledge about the culture, way of life, social fabric, level of development, building technologies, use of materials, art and architecture besides physical, social and economic edges of a society of a particular period. Accordingly, its careful and thoughtful conservation, preservation and management, assumes importance so that these repositories of knowledge, forming irreversible links between past and present, are not lost to the posterity in the dynamics of urban development.

Known globally, for having the longest history of human habitation and civilization spanning over more than 5000 years, India as a nation, has been fortunate to inherit the enormous wealth of built heritage. However, in the face of ever-increasing urbanization coupled with the enormous growth of population and physical expansion, built heritage located within the urban area has come under enormous pressure and threat. This threat is assuming alarming proportion due to lack of awareness about the role and importance of heritage besides constant neglect and misuse perpetuated over the built heritage, both by state, parastatal agencies, communities and people at large. This has led to posing a serious threat to the very existence of the valuable heritage and accordingly calls for evolving appropriate strategies and framework for action for its conservation and preservation.

2. ISSUES AND STRATEGIES

Heritage is known to have an enormous capacity to build a strong urban identity and to create pride in our cities and towns. However, looking at the entire context of growth and development, it can be seen that value of heritage is not being understood and appreciated in the right earnest. Cities and built heritage are under a state of great stress due to the existing pattern of haphazard, unplanned growth and development. Majority of vital heritage is being lost in the haze of uncontrolled development and growing greed of speculation and unauthorized construction. Considering the role and importance of built heritage, it becomes important that these valuable assets should be rationally preserved and conserved. Target 11.4 under Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) 11, defined by United Nations (UN) has called upon all stakeholders to strengthen efforts to protect and safeguard the world's cultural and natural heritage. Accordingly, it becomes important to have a well-defined, rational and objective policy framework for preserving the heritage is defined and made operational on priority. Any good heritage preservation policy has enormous potential and capacity to create large employment, leverage economy and alleviate poverty for any city and nation besides promoting, preserving tangible & intangible cultures and achieving sustainability goals. Any effective policy framework for heritage conservation should invariably revolve around, defining and identifying heritage, looking at the local context where the heritage is located, legal framework defining the built heritage, bye-laws regulating the built form, master plan showcasing the growth and development of the city and heritage area, generating resources, involving communities and identifying nodal agencies for managing the heritage, etc.

3. REDEFINING HERITAGE

Identifying right kind of heritage, understanding the value and need of preserving and conserving heritage assets, remains the most critical element of any effective heritage management policy. In order to ensure effective preservation and conservation, it is important

that first of all efforts should be made to clearly identify and define what comprises the built heritage. At present entire process of identifying the heritage is done under the ambit of national and state laws enacted to protect it. The legal framework in the state of Punjab defines built heritage in terms of:

Any structure, erection or monuments or any tremulous or place of internment or monolith which is of historical, archaeological or artistic interest which has been in existence for not less than one hundred years.

Looking at the above definition, heritage in the context of law must not only be of historical, archaeological or artistic value but should also have a lifespan of more than 100 years before it could qualify for protection and preservation as heritage. This excludes enormous wealth of built heritage created which has a lifespan of fewer than 100 years out of the purview of these Acts. Heritage includes objects, spaces, buildings which are of exceptional quality and merit which qualify to be preserved and conserved. Thus, in the generic sense heritage cannot be solely linked to the time because time may be one of the elements but cannot be made the critical criteria to determine the value of any object. Accordingly, it calls for amending the definition so as to include the built heritage having less than 100 years of existence within the ambit of existing laws in order to ensure its preservation and conservation. In addition to the relooking at the definition of heritage, there is an urgent need of putting in place a set of detailed guidelines, norms, standards and criteria for evaluating buildings as heritage buildings, in order to bring objectivity in evaluation, which would go a long way in facilitating the process of identifying the built heritage and its proper preservation and conservation.

Manmade heritage in the Indian context has narrow connotations, as it is only buildings specific. City spaces have been, by and large, marginalized in the legal framework. Thus in the majority of cases, individual buildings have been taken care of but the city or urban spaces have been ignored. In order to preserve the sanctity of the historical buildings and to maintain the basic character of the area, it would be desirable to enlarge the scope and ambit of the legal framework by extending their operational areas to include urban spaces in additions to buildings. Incorporating the concept of heritage cities or zones would go a long way in not only ensuring orderly growth and development of the area and buildings through conservation but also minimizing misuse and distortions which have been perpetrated on these areas by excluding them from the scope of the law. Accordingly, walled cities, existing in a large number of cities in India and forming their heart and soul, need to be declared as the Heritage Zone in order to preserve not only its valuable heritage but also ensure its comprehensive development.

3. REDEFINING URBAN PLANNING

Built heritage forms an integral and vital part of the urban fabric, and its growth and development. Globally, a large number of cities have reinvented themselves by building and emphasizing their historical roots and cultural assets. Accordingly, for rationalizing urban growth, heritage conservation and preservation of built heritage should be made an integral part of city planning and development process. But in the majority of cases, heritage

conservation remains a subject of marginal importance in city planning and development process and legal framework governing its planning, development and management. In order to preserve urban heritage, it will be essential that town planning laws of the state are redefined to include urban heritage as a major component of city growth and development. Punjab government amended in the year 2003, the Punjab Regional and Town Planning and Development Act, 1995, which provides for preparing Master plans for cities, Regional plans for the regions and Development schemes for parts of the city, to include heritage as an integral part of the development process. However, other major urban development laws like Punjab Municipal Corporation Act, Municipal Act, and Improvement Trust Act etc. are yet to be amended to include heritage as an essential ingredient of local development. Unless and until all urban related laws are amended to include heritage conservation and preservation as an integral part of planning, development and management process, it would be rather difficult to save our precious heritage.

In addition to amending the urban laws, effective and efficient heritage conservation would also require that the approach and intent of urban planning process should be redefined to include heritage as an integral part of city planning and development process. Master Plans, which have been used by urban planners, as the panacea to overcome all urban ills and rationalize the growth and development of cities, in the majority of cases accord low priority to heritage while defining strategies and agenda for growth and development of cities. At present, heritage conservations in urban areas, despite the existence of master plans are being carried out by proxy and in a piecemeal manner. Accordingly, intent, content and approach to preparing master plans need a critical review and redefinition for not only rationalizing urban development but also preserving and conserving its valuable heritage. In order to make these plans as instruments for heritage conservation, it would be important that Master Plans, Development Plans, Regional Plans, District Plans or Metropolitan Area Plans evolved at the local, district or regional level must identify the areas of art, architecture, cultural and historical importance and also suggest appropriate strategies for preserving them. These plans must have an exclusive and dedicated agenda allocated to the heritage of the city so as to clearly identify the objects, areas to be preserved, problems faced in preserving the same and strategies suggested ensuring their proper preservation. Such an approach would go a long way not only in achieving the objective of effectively managing the built heritage but also restoring pride in the city and leveraging urban economy by generating employment and alleviating poverty.

In addition, if preparing the city development plans is supplemented with preparing a comprehensive and detailed plan of the core areas including the walled city (where existing), it will help in not only restructuring the historic core and make it more vibrant but also overcome the majority of urban problems. It will also restore and enhance the visibility of key heritage to bring about a holistic tourist experience and to promote tourism as an engine to bring resurgence and rejuvenation of the local economy. Heritage areas, if digitally mapped, using IT and IT-enabled services, will help in not only creating an accurate database but also help in evolving realistic strategies for their rational development and provision of appropriate services and infrastructures.

4. DESIGNATING A NODAL AGENCY

Conserving culture and securing heritage in cities have suffered largely due to a multiplicity of planning and development agencies operating in the urban areas. These agencies including development authorities, improvement trusts, industrial corporations, housing development agencies etc., have been found to be operating without any coordination and without any operational framework regarding preserving and promoting the urban heritage. All these agencies have misused and abused the city and its resources including heritage, as a mechanism for generating money with little or no value addition made towards its planned development and heritage. In fact, most of these agencies have operated in a manner which has largely harmed valuable heritage of the city. In the given circumstances, for promoting orderly growth and to preserve heritage, it is essential that a nodal agency must be given the exclusive right, role and responsibility of managing cities and its heritage. It is impossible for a state level authority to take care of the city development and its heritage. Accordingly, for conserving the footprints of past, a multiplicity of the agencies operating at the city level would require elimination and removal to be replaced by a local agency to look after the entire gamut and issue related to the rational planning and quality development of the city in a comprehensive manner.

In this context, urban local bodies, operating at the local level, for a large number of years, offers the best option to fill the existing institutional gap. Local bodies, operating at local level having locally elected representatives as city fathers, can render an excellent service in the area of urban heritage conservation. This will also be in consonance of the letter and spirit of the 74th Constitutional Amendment Act, 1992, which mandates, urban local bodies to be made government at the local in their own right to manage the urban areas. Twelfth schedule, defining the functions to be given to urban local bodies also include conservation of heritage as one of the 18 functions included in the schedule. However, looking at the present context, urban local bodies don't have requisite capacity, capability, authority, resources and manpower to take up the onus and deal with the nitty-gritty of the conservation of heritage. Urban local bodies would require strengthening in terms of trained manpower particularly in the area of built heritage and fiscal resources to take care of the needs of the heritage conservation. Creation of a special and dedicated committee /cell for heritage conservation would go a long way in identifying and managing the city heritage. The heritage cell/committee must include eminent citizens having knowledge and expertise in heritage conservation. The inclusion of the academic institutions, industrial associations, and professional institutes will improve the effectiveness of the committee in managing the city heritage. In order to promote efficacy and efficiency, urban local bodies should be vested with the role, responsibility, authority and power to regulate all issues related to orderly planning and development and heritage management with no exception permitted including state/ central agencies.

5. PREPARING DEVELOPMENT CONTROLS

The role of development controls, zoning regulations, building bye-laws is crucial in preservation and conservation of the character and footprints of built heritage. Areas identified as built heritage would require innovative and state of art provisions for their development

because of their specialized character. It may revolve round specifying provisions relating to eliminating misuse and specifying uses, use of materials, carrying out repairs, making additions and alterations which would not damage the basic character of the heritage buildings. Development Controls etc. should be evolved with sensitivity, after careful and detailed study. It must be commensurate with the special character of the area. However, in case of hardships to the owners/occupant of the buildings, appropriate incentives must be made available to ensure the conservation of buildings. A concept like Transfer of Development Rights (TDR) and exemption from property tax/ income tax etc can be made available in case of such buildings which require preservation etc. A large number of states in the country have already prepared heritage regulations, which specifically deal with the planning, development and management of heritage areas. These regulations have added a new dimension to the development of such areas without compromising with the quality of buildings & spaces. Accordingly framing of Heritage Regulations, distinct from prevailing building by-laws, on the pattern of Hyderabad and Mumbai for the heritage buildings, areas and precincts would be critical in order to ensure that the basic fabric of these buildings and areas is not changed and essential architectural elements are not tampered with. Existing by-laws and urban laws applicable in the majority of cities are not capable to respond to the challenges of heritage-related issues and have caused more damage than good. They need to be amended on priority.

6. CONSTITUTING HERITAGE COMMISSION

The root cause of major maladies in preservation and conservation of man-made heritage in India has been the absence of proper system and rational approach to identify and manage the heritage. In the absence of proper machinery and mechanism to undertake the task, the entire approach to the subject matter is both ad-hoc and subjective. It would be desirable to constitute “Heritage Commissions” at the centre, state and regional levels. However, as already said, setting up of a heritage conservation committee/cell at the local level, comprising of experts in the area of heritage conservation, engineering, architecture, urban design ,planning, environment, history, sociology ,law, NGOs, INTACH etc. would be critical to identify the valuable heritage of the city, and for aiding, assisting, advising the local authority on issues related to development, construction, conservation and preservation, framing of special development regulation for heritage areas etc. Heritage Committee should prepare Heritage Atlas containing heritage maps of the city and other details of such buildings and spaces, on the pattern followed in Hyderabad city in order to create awareness among the institutions, tourists and the public at large. The task needs to be completed on a time-bound basis in a phased manner. Heritage Committee must be provided with necessary technical, fiscal and trained manpower duly supported by the State Commission for scientifically completing the job. Creation of such Commissions/ Committees would be a vital step in the direction of not only identifying but also effectively preserving and conserving the built heritage. Appropriate amendments need to be made in the National and State Laws for the creation of such Commission/ Committees and by defining their powers, role and functions in accomplishing the task. Appropriate supportive machinery at the regional and local level needs to be created to facilitate their task. In fact, Heritage Commissions/ Committees should work as the fulcrum around which entire mechanism of conservation and preservation should gravitate. In addition, it is proposed that Heritage Cells must also be set up within the state departments of Town and

Country Planning and Development Authorities in order to ensure that all development schemes/ master plans do take cognizance of the heritage related issues as an integral part of the planning and development process.

7. USING LISTED BUILDINGS

In order to ensure the preservation and conservation of valuable manmade heritage, it would be desirable to look at the concept of listed buildings followed in United Kingdom (UK). Under this concept, buildings of architectural and historical value, which require conservation and preservation, are identified at the city level. The onus of preservation and conservation of these buildings lies on the owners of such buildings. No structural or other changes, which impinge on the character of the building, are permitted unless prior permission of local bodies or competent authorities is sought and obtained. For making any change, the owner has to apply to the concerned authority, which may be granted or refused after considering the individual merits of each case. The concept of public hearing followed in UK has played a crucial role in promoting the cause of preservation and conservation of built heritage in the country. The concept of the public hearing is based on the premise that heritage belongs to the community at large and not to the individual and accordingly its conservation and preservation should be community-based. The concept of listed buildings has revolutionized the total concept of preservation and conservation of built heritage in UK. Annually large numbers of buildings are being added to the list. Thus the concept of listed buildings needs to be adopted in India also with appropriate modifications.

8. INVOLVING COMMUNITIES

Effective heritage conservation strategy must revolve around and involve the active participation of local communities on all issues related to planning, development, implementation and management of heritage. The absence of an effective mechanism of involving communities/ public participation in the process has been the root-cause of damage and destruction of the majority of valuable built heritage in India. Creation of heritage has its genesis in the efforts made by communities/ society and accordingly onus of its preservation and conservation must also be shared by it. It is said, the honest inclusion of a community's representatives as "partners" in decision-making, ensures active citizen's participation and non-involvement of communities causes enormous loss/damage to heritage.

The Constitution of India prescribes protection of heritage as one of the important duty of each citizen but no effort has been made to make people aware of this duty. Efforts need to be made, to make preservation and conservation of heritage people-centric by involving each and every citizen in conserving heritage. Heritage conservation must be made an integral part of study curriculum of school/ higher studies, so as to imbibe the habit of conservation at the student stage. Architects have an important role cast for them in the area of heritage conservation. Accordingly, heritage conservation and preservation should be included as a compulsory subject of study in all architecture and planning institutions. This would sensitize all architects and planners during their process of education. Academic institutions involved with imparting education in architecture, planning and construction must also start courses leading to specialization in heritage conservation in order to create of pool of skilled manpower to deal

with the issue. Valuable contributions can also be made by the Indian Institute of Architects, Institute of Town Planners, institutions imparting education in art, architecture and planning, in the area of heritage, which should become role model for other institutions to emulate. Voluntary agencies, NGOs and pressure groups have important role cast for them in safeguarding and promoting the cause of built heritage. City authorities must bring out pamphlets, maps and brochures, highlighting the heritage of their cities so as to make people proud of it. This would help in creating competition among different settlements in the context of preserving its heritage and would help in achieving the end result. INTACH has creating awareness among masses and involving communities in the process. In Ahmadabad awareness has been created among the community through the mechanism of organizing Heritage Marches and Heritage Exhibitions at the city level.

Effective and comprehensive participation of the local community in heritage planning and implementation will help in maintaining continuous dialogue between the government and community so that a coordinated/integrated approach can be affected, and conflicts get resolved. It also helps in utilizing local resources to the best possible extent and establishing a network where training and awareness building can take place. Community participation can be used to deal with micro issues, which usually suffer due to lack of focus and location-specific solutions. The mass media - print, electronic and online - play an important role in raising awareness, educating and involving the local communities on heritage issues and the value they represent for them. Seeking their active involvement in the heritage conservation action right from the beginning will ensure that the local community is informed and involved in the activities (Srinivas, 2015).

9. GENERATING RESOURCES

Major hiccups and roadblocks in conserving heritage in the urban context have been lack of availability of dedicated fiscal resources. In order to ensure that heritage remains for posterity, it will be desirable that heritage fund at the national/state/local levels is created on priority, so as to generate enough resources for the conservation and preservation of built heritage. Exempting donations to the fund from taxation; levying cess on tourists visiting India, dedicating part of fee collected from visitors at historical sites; raising funds by organizing charity shows; earmarking part of the budget of local bodies/development authorities; making heritage conservation a part of Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR); starting a heritage lottery etc., can help in raising resources for the heritage conservation. Proceeds of the heritage fund should be used exclusively for promoting research and development in the area of conservation and preservation besides providing financial support for maintenance and upkeep of buildings listed as built heritage.

10. CONCLUSION

Built heritage is known be the definer of art and architecture of a city showcasing its glorious past. Conserving built heritage helps in retaining the distinct identity of a community and preserving its old culture and accordingly calls for its careful and thoughtful, preservation for posterity. For preserving the built heritage, it will be critical to put in place an innovative, people-oriented and heritage-focused policy. A good heritage conservation strategy should

essentially revolve around having an urban/ regional context; promoting settlement sustainability; involving historical, natural and cultural heritage; involving local community; making heritage conservation people centric; creating large pool of skilled heritage professionals; making heritage conservation integral part of urban development process; promoting employment, prosperity and alleviating poverty; generating resources for research, maintenance, repair and adaptation of heritage buildings and making heritage conservation integral part of education system, so as to ensure that substantial benefits of our built and cultural heritage can continue to be realized by present and future communities. The strategy should also identify the risks, challenges, or barriers facing heritage conservation and create appropriate opportunities to remove these roadblocks in order to put heritage conservation on the fast track for making city growth rational, productive and sustainable.

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