

Rethinking Conservation

Nandini Bhandari

Student, Sushant School of Art and Architecture, Gurugram, Haryana, India

ABSTRACT

The study primarily focuses on the importance of heritage conservation as a process parallel with the overall development of a region and the formation of identity of the host community, who otherwise remain indifferent to it. It accounts for the role of general public along with various organizations as a key stakeholder in the heritage conservation projects. Light has been thrown on how public awareness programmes and incentives for persuasion of local public participation in conservation contribute in enhancing the knowledge base of the people regarding their traditions along with forming a sense of identity and responsibility among them. The research includes case studies along with student level surveys and analyses based on which conclusions have been drawn on the perception and awareness levels of different categories of people to architectural heritage conservation.

Keywords: Analyses, Conservation, Heritage, Landscape, Survey

***Corresponding Author**

E-mail: nandinibhandari8@gmail.com

INTRODUCTION

The heritage of a place is a reflection of its past, for the future inhabitants to embrace and respect as it showcases the age old cultural characteristics and traditions.

Thus, it is clear that heritage primarily belongs to the people and it is their plant to nurture and pass on to the future generations, through restoration or conservation practices, by vernacular methods.

Now a days the process of conservation is not only restricted to monuments and built forms but also spans to the other aspects of heritage like historic settlements and the natural environment .

However, with the current global scenario, the indifferent attitude of people has

resulted in de-valuing their cultural heritage.

Reforms have been brought about by agencies like ICOMOS, which look into worldwide heritage conservation thus devising ways for international networking for these issues.

In a multi-cultured country like India, the possibility of practicing heritage conservation along with overall development is often doubted, specially by the central authorities.

The Government and Non-Government agencies are the main decision and policy makers on issues of architecture conservation in the country, while the general public is forced to take a back seat.

However, the question is- who is being represented and in whose interests are these decisions being made- whether it's the general public or locals residing in the areas of heritage sites.

Or the bureaucrats and other authorities.

Thus, it becomes essential to find answers to these questions and understand the importance of incorporating traditional conservation techniques through public engagement at different levels of conservation.

In today's time the real question is not to define heritage but to give the existing definition, a new meaning.

Why can't we then fuse today's need with yesterday's glory and craftsmanship to create a meaningful heritage for the future?

Change is the only constant and viewing conservation in a holistic way, the only approach to define our identity.

METHODOLOGY

1. Understanding the concept of heritage in terms of the following-

The meaning, significance and categories of heritage.

How are people connected with heritage?

What relevance does it hold in the current world scenario.

2. Studying the history of India's heritage and how important it is to shape the identity of the country.

3. Drawing conclusions based on the literature review, research, case studies and surveys carried out.

HERITAGE AND PEOPLE

Introduction

Architecture forms an eminent dialogue between the past and the future of our built environment, interweaving mankind with their value systems under the banner called heritage.

It is through the traditional path of construction technology and materials that we can contribute to a sustainable future and garner responsibility towards our age old legacy [1].

Abiding by the climate sensitive techniques and following the instinct based building designs to build in today's time, we are not only encapsulating the essence of the bygone era, but also evolving into an improved need based society with due respect to the historic context.

Heritage

Heritage is a French term which means 'legacy'- something that is passed on from generation to generation and is based on the concepts of inheritance and ownership.

It may be classified into TANGIBLE and INTANGIBLE, where tangible heritage is everything that has a physical dimension to it like the monuments, artefacts, sculptures and so on, while intangible heritage is the cultural systems, based on values and notions [2].

It may be segregated on various levels broadly- national, personal (familial), international as well as regional and local, based on the historic relevance attributed to it.

The whole idea of heritage is primarily based on the concept of identification and is solely driven by human values, it is a catalyst in the establishment and search of identity of certain people, in the constantly changing global scenario.

However, heritage might seem the only stable element over the years, yet in reality it is the worst deteriorating with these tides of change [3].

Heritage not only has values but also has functions attached with it, which maintain the original character and authenticity.

It is important to understand the term heritage as an amalgamation of age old traditions and the relics available now, where neither of them can be put over the other.

Heritage can be categorized in terms of their nature and image in the society, as discussed by Peter Howard in his publication *Heritage- Management, Interpretation, Identity*.

Heritage for People

Heritage has a personalized character linked with it, where people base their notions to it as per their ancestral norms and philosophies.

Thus, it becomes crucial to understand these perceptions framed by the people, who are the true legatee of this heritage overtime [4].

Heritage in any form belongs to people only, of a different era, and is handed down over time also to people of another era.

It is a reflection of the stories, dreams, memories and entire lives of a set of people, which can only be interpreted to draw conclusions about the past by the others.

Hence, it is all a play of the lives and value systems of people over generations and their outlook towards the past and the future of the past.

People may also be categorized- those who are closely attached to their legacy and believe in conserving most part of it, and prioritise the past as a catalyst for future enhancements in society, while the others who consider the traditions as backward which may hamper the development of the area.

However, the variation in the socio-economic strata of the society, resulting in a top down approach in the decision

making, where the ideas being propagated in the society are in the interest of the dominant group [5].

This might result in conflicts among people, where one group might seem patronizing and insensitive to the other groups cultural needs and values.

Thus, the issue of heritage(mainly built) which has been close to the hearts of people, even though their outlook towards the same has changed with time and experiences has also been subjected to unjust decisions and conflicts.

Categories of Heritage

Natural Heritage

Natural heritage as opposed to built heritage constitutes of the flora and fauna of an area.

In today's times it considered as a completely different discipline of study, which has a more scientific quotient to it, whose decisions have delved on scientific reasoning based on facts, even though they are also driven by human values as well as the needs of the society.

It is perceived that saving birds and animals is more like preserving clean air and water, and thus cannot be categorized under heritage conservation.

The plant species of a historic site are equally important to study and interpret, hence should be conserved parallel with other features of a heritage site [6].

Cultural Landscapes

Cultural landscapes form part of the built heritage in terms of their utility or function like a recreational space and aesthetic value.

Landscapes primarily include gardens and large sprawling lawns, directly associated with historic structures, which are given immense importance at times for the sake of the maintenance of the entire historic site.

At times landscaping tends to overshadow the structure, for instance the Persian landscaping style- Char Bagh concept, is used to identify with the Islamic architecture till date, while most of the tombs and palaces have been lost in the dark [7].

Monuments and Small Historic Structures

The historic built environment encompassing the archeological remains of built forms, glorified monuments, small historic structure and other buildings, has been the prime contender of the term heritage, as far as the history of conservation goes among people.

Built forms establish a sense of identity due to the physicality in nature, which is somewhat absent in the other categories and hence they are attributed as the sole heritage.

Certain small structures, however might not be very important to conserve, and draw value from the architecture or art works they house or the role in history they were meant to play.

Historic Sites

Historic sites are a prime consequence of certain events that took place over them, from battlefields to sites important to certain people and are bereft of any monuments or structures of historic importance.

At times there is a sacred character to the site, which makes them important, in the eyes of the people, it may turn out to be an open ground as well [8].

Artefacts

Artefacts include objects created or collected by people and groups, specially those who have archeological and history based interests.

These are mostly on display in museums and galleries, ranging from ordinary items of historic importance to the more grand and renowned ones.

It is very rare that the objects are put to their original use once their era of existence has passed and are thus seen mostly on display or put to adaptive reuse in contrast to the original utility.

However, the only drawback of the much glorified museums is that the articles displayed are bound by the rules of the museum.

The scale of the object at times becomes the subject of question, as to whether it should be categorized under architectural built heritage, if it is big in size or an artefact to be displayed in a museum.

Museums may further be international or region based introducing the people to the local heritage and culture, depending on the location [9].

Culture Based Activities

Activities form the intangible component of heritage which can't be identified in physical terms but are a way of life, passed on from generation to generation.

Cultural activities as they may be termed primarily include folk dances, music as well as traditional crafts which are losing their importance over time.

People associate heritage with certain rites and rituals all across the world based on their religious beliefs and value systems.

HERITAGE OF INDIA

With the ages of industrialization and the resultant globalization, the world saw its moments of unison, blurring the boundaries leading to an exchange of ideas and

formulation of philosophies at religious and cultural levels.

People became enlightened about existence of multiple customs-based societies across the globe, displaying a plethora of folk styles through dances, music.

Western culture being in lead has had the maximum influence over the minds of people superficially, yet they tend to be well connected with their traditional roots owing to their unique heritage.

So is the case of India, located towards the eastern end of the globe, which is multi-faceted through the interplay of the diversity in its traditional features reflected through the ancient scriptures, festivals and religious beliefs at an intangible level to the built monuments, sacred structures as well as cultural landscapes.

India displays an inter-laced constitution in the name of built heritage from the Hindu temples to the Islamic architecture, as well as the colonial Victorian architecture, each comprising of a variety of palaces, civic buildings, fully functional cities and sprawling green spaces [10].

Taj Mahal, one of the seven wonders of the world is part of the Mughal contributions to India, while the Rashtrapati Bhawan earlier known as the Viceroy's House has been constructed during the country's colonial rule, each telling a different story in the shaping of India's identity.

The old-new, monumental and ordinary are all well knit into the same fabric, this leaving bare minimum scope for differentiation between the settlements and the heritage sites, especially in the rural areas.

As it has already been mentioned that the lives of people are interconnected with remnants of their heritage, which they come across daily, and are dependent on to a certain extent, at the socio-economic level.

Thus it is once again the people of the country or place which define heritage for the current and future generations, as a blend of what was and what should remain at display for the benefit of visitors as well as the host communities.

CURRENT STATE OF INDIA'S HERITAGE

One can site many views pertaining to the Indian Heritage Conservation Issue, from considering the country backward due to these traditions to basking in the glory of this world renowned cultural diversity.

There is a chaos of different policies and techniques, based mainly on the opinions of politicians, activists and authorities, with marginalization of the general public.

Western notions on the conservation practices have greatly influenced the Indian formal sector of governance, which believes in the continuation of colonial routines, even after so many years of freedom, and changes in the structure of the society.

The constant neglect of heritage areas has caused formation of slums, which are a socio-economical setback in the society, specially in areas like Shahjahanabad, the initial lifeline of Mughal empire in Delhi.

The main approaches in conservation in India are-Government based systems, established by organizations like A.S.I., S.R.D.C.1 and so on, which are actually compromising the future of our past to a certain extent using English sensibility.

Centuries old traditional methods, based on vernacular techniques, by indigenous societies, based on immediate needs of people.

The number of unprotected buildings outnumbers the protected one as stated by

Ar. A.G.K. Menon², and thus an amalgamation of both the approaches can together not only improve the quantity of workforce, by increased participation of traditionally skilled- craftsmen but also reduce the time taken in the process.

With the passage of time there has been a change in the perception of some people, whose concerns are not only historic in nature but are also environmentally inclined, that the vernacular and traditional conservation are most suitable ecologically.

Hence, the awakened public somehow feels, they do have a role in determining the fate of historic structures and preserving the broken fragments of the Indian tradition.

HERITAGE CONSERVATION AND PUBLIC AWARENESS

Importance of Heritage Conservation and the Role of Public

Heritage conservation is important to safeguard the identity of a place and the culture of the people, which is incomplete without the involvement of the public itself. The communities residing in a particular place, are most aware of its historic essence.

The idea of heritage conservation as a sub division of other architectural practices is important for building within the context of the site, and thus blending the latest technology with the existing historic fabric. Conservation includes restoration, preservation and so on depending on the site and its condition., with the use of traditional skills and expertise [11].

Public Awareness in India

It is a known fact that there is inequality in terms of conservation of built heritage in India, where only a few selective built forms are given due respect and importance and thus subjected to conservation and maintenance.

The current state of public awareness on heritage conservation in a country like India, where the literacy rates are already low is negligible, primarily due to-

The government policies, which hardly enlighten people about the dilapidating state of their legacy.

Lack of general awareness among the public, regarding their rich cultural heritage, due to the western influence, specially over the youth, where the mall culture is overpowering the monument culture.

Another cause is the hike in congestion in the Indian sub-continent in terms of transport and population along with non-uniform density and encroachment of historic sites.

The ideology that conservation of traditional heritage in a third world country like India is a setback to its development.

Public apathy due to other issues and concerns in the country which catch their attention.

The current land use zoning and allotment of functions to these zones, clash with the conservation policies as per the master plan.

Communal onslaughts and conflicts based on religious heritage conservation, has lead to a stagnation in the conservation processes all across the country.

Globalisation caused a sense of cultural loss among many people, who were attached to the roots of the Indian ethnicity.

This resulted in contrast in the minds of practitioners between global (mainly western) and local methods [12].

The colonial government proved to be partial in its selection of monuments to be

conserved, with hardly any consideration given to Indian and Islamic monuments, due to the lack of knowledge and respect.

The same ideology was followed by A.S.I. once it was set up in 1904, before and after independence.

However, there is this phase of realization among people at various levels.

The following are positive results of public awareness broadly-Awareness of indigenous techniques will ensure continuity of traditional building skills and knowledge leading to increased participation and employment, specially at grass root levels.

Development of the precinct of the historic site, will not only help in interweaving the traditional and contemporary, but also make the locals familiar with the heritage site.

Awareness through capacity building, will instill a sense of ownership and belonging among the people, and make them capable of maintaining the heritage site.

Apart from ownership, the sensitivity of public as the legatee of such a rich heritage will increase and persuade them to participate at different levels of decision making and discussions regarding their culture and thus protect it.

Effects of Public Awareness (In Conservation) On Host Communities

Awareness regarding heritage conservation not only enhances the knowledge base of the people on the issue, but also gives them a stake in decisions related with it, be it directly or in an indirect manner through a medium.

This kind of an arrangement is very crucial for protecting the identity if both the heritage as well as the people.

Following are a few ways in which public awareness is beneficial in safeguarding people's legacy-

Education

Conservation methods are incomplete if the techniques (specially the vernacular ones) are not propagated amongst the masses, as realization and the suitability of the techniques creates a better understanding of the site.

Capacity Building

Another important agenda under awareness is to make the people independent by supporting their livelihoods through training programmes and networking.

Vocational training if given to people will help them widen their sources of income and take pride in their ability to work, specially the economically backward people, this way they will also concentrate on career development [13].

Cultural Association

Enlightening people about their ancestral and community traditions is important to establish a connection with the heritage, which is diminishing over time due to the formation of global societies.

Thus, involvement of local communities in conservation activities, would give them a close look at the heritage and culture systems creating a sense of identity and thus sensitizing them to it in the whole process.

ICOMOS

ICOMOS is an international organisation called International Council on Monuments and Sites which has set a few guidelines for the protection and maintenance of monuments and other aspects of culture pertaining to sites all across the globe.

These guidelines are thoroughly followed and are mentioned under charters, two of which pertaining to conservation and public participation and awareness are mentioned.

MEANS OF SPREADING PUBLIC AWARENESS

Introduction

The 21st century, dwells primarily upon technology for its core functioning all across the globe as opposed to the earlier times.

This modern feature of today's time can be put to use in the field of public awareness even in case of the most traditional concerns such as heritage and its conservation.

Lack of awareness among the public is often seen as the reason behind their lack of participation in society based issues, specially those regarding their identity.

It thus becomes crucial for the authorities to use modes of awareness which the people can relate to and create an understanding among themselves on the issues concerned. These could be society based or based on individual perceptions [14].

Public Awareness and Communities

- Interactions between people govern the state of society they belong to, and thus contribute in forming relationships, beliefs and society based value systems.
- A relation can be drawn between the society and heritage in terms of the following factors- cultural, social and historic.
- The interplay of heritage, socio-economic condition of societies around it, identity and sense of belonging of the host communities, determine the future of the heritage sites as a result of the interest shown by the people.

The following are the prime stakeholders in initiating awareness programmes-

- Government Authorities

- Public Authorities
- Private Agencies
- Tourists
- Institutions
- Non-Government Organisations
- Service Providers

It is the policies of these authorities which together provide a platform to rediscover the longlost glory of an area be it tangible or intangible.

Public Awareness on Heritage Conservation is beneficial not only at individual levels but also at global platforms, in terms of recognising cultural diversity, such that due respect is given to every culture.

It has the following advantages-

- Establishment of personal relevance of heritage.
- Public interest and enjoyment in terms of physical experience and through theory based knowledge.
- Formation of sense of identity among individuals and societies so that they take pride in their traditions.
- Skilled and trained population generates economic benefits for the country aswell as their own households.
- Public awareness is also important to bridge the society gap between the various groups segregated on socio-economic aspects and develop a sense of companionship over large groups.
- Awareness acts as a catalyst for awareness itself, where people tend to spread the knowledge among others, creating a chain such that more and more people understand the importance of issues prevailing in the society.

The barriers to public participation in conservation projects are-

- Lack of knowledge or awareness,
- Lack of facilities or opportunities,
- Poor condition of facilities,
- Lack of companions,

- Lack of skills or abilities,
- Difficulties with transport and access.

As can be noted from the above enlisted reasons for poor public involvement, public awareness tops the list, which is also a contributor to lack of public opportunities.

The following is a case study of a successful public awareness programme in the culturally rich city of India- Jaipur, which can be used to understand the various elements and methods to enlighten the public.

CONCLUSION

Conservation has been practiced ever since the beginning of mankind in one way or another.

However, it can be perceived as fruitful only if it appears to be development oriented, as the nature of societies is meant to be dynamic to keep pace with the ever changing global scenario.

As has been discussed, people are the creators and also the destroyers of heritage, they are the sole decision makers in the long run, and the victims of the consequences of the same.

Equal platform for participation must be provided for the public apart from giving the supreme powers to the authorities only.

Indian conservation schemes should be based on the Indian value systems rather than applying the universal policies without required modifications.

It is crucial to interlace the conservation practices in such a way, that they help in the upliftment of the weaker section of the society.

As this tide of awareness is spreading across the country, more and more citizens, from different sects are becoming involved

in the conservation processes and thus benefitting from the fruits of the same.

This has not only been useful at individual or community level but has also contributed to protect the country's rich cultural identity.

It thus becomes important to attend to the following issues

- Giving due consideration to heritage of all kinds, rather than restricting to built forms and the famous monuments.
- Reducing the gap between the socio-economically diverse sections of the society through a fair share of involvement of all.
- Setting up optimum platforms to make people aware of the rich legacy they have been bestowed with and take pride in it.

The above mentioned points may be incorporated through a multi-disciplinary approach, where the concerned authorities work in collaboration with the host communities, resulting in a healthy exchange of ideas and knowledge.

Another important responsibility for the architect or planner is the blending of the latest technology with the existing historic physical realm.

This is possible only through the acknowledgement of the traditional skills of the locals and enlightening them about the treasure they behold among themselves.

A time will soon come when, today's technical and mechanized construction would be rendered as heritage as another layer over the previous ones, displaying its own story and myths.

However, even then the people will remain the sole inheritors as well as protectors of the same.

Hence, instead of segregating heritage and its conservation specially the built facets into a completely different tag under architecture, the concerned stakeholders (and not only the authorities) should work on merging the past with the present to create a colourful and culturally diverse future.

Professionals from other fields such as scientists, archaeologists, anthropologists and so on, should also spare thought for the sustainable future of these age old structures that have resisted the force of various natural and manmade threats.

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