

CONSERVATION OF HERITAGE BUILDINGS IN  
DELHI

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## INTRODUCTION

Delhi has a very rare endowment of a rich cultural heritage. This is because of the fact that over the centuries, many dynasties have settled in Delhi. The only real connection one can have with the history is through some structures that were built in the past, and are known as ‘Heritage Buildings ’today. It is very important to identify a ‘heritage building’ for the rich history which is associated with it, and not just consider it as an old building that is a liability for the government. On the contrary, monuments have enormous potential to attract visitors and they are an asset to a nation in every sense of the term.

Unfortunately, despite having over 1300 such heritage buildings in Delhi, we are not even aware about 100 such structures. Only a few buildings that were identified to be of national importance by the government were taken up for protection by the Archaeological Survey of India, and the others are still ‘unprotected.’ It is arguable that it is not possible to protect each and every structure that was built in the past, but the argument in this paper is that the heritage buildings have enormous potential to generate revenue, and it makes economic sense to conserve, protect, and most importantly, promote these important sites.

## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Out of around 1300 monuments in Delhi, only 174 are centrally protected and the State Department of Archaeology plans to undertake around 200 monuments. For the protected monuments, the popular ones are in a good condition but unfortunately, some of these monuments of national importance are not in a decent shape. The ASI has been making some efforts in the recent past to improve the condition of these monuments, and as a part of this initiative some of the work has been outsourced to private players.

The important thing is that ASI can outsource the work of only those monuments that are centrally protected and are under the legal ownership of ASI. But there are several other important heritage buildings that are not of national importance, but are important for the historical value associated with the place, or because of its architectural merit. If these places are promoted intelligently and people are made aware of the existence of such places, it would not take much time for these places to emerge as tourist attractions.

## RESEARCH OBJECTIVE

The objective of this research is to figure out a way to improve the condition of monuments in Delhi. In order to do this, it is very important to identify the problems that the monuments in Delhi face. With around 1300 monuments spread throughout the city, the problems for conservation are varied and very region specific, ranging from socio-economic in case of illegal encroachment to legal ownership issues in case of unprotected monuments. The solution to these exclusive problems can't be generalised, and therefore the objective is to identify problems with "conservation" at a macro level, and also consider some specific monuments for case study.

The following questions will be considered during the research:

- What are the legal problems with the monuments in Delhi that involve policy issues?
- Can the conservation work of monuments be outsourced to private parties?
- What does a visitor look in a monument when he says that the condition of the monument is bad?
- How can we possibly promote the monuments to attract tourists and also generate revenue?
- Is there a model that is followed in some other country/state that we can incorporate in Delhi to improve the present scenario?

## RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

The research can be divided into two broad components.

The first part involves identifying the general problems with conservation of monuments in Delhi. The methodology adopted for this purpose was to talk to the people directly involved with conservation of monuments in Delhi. This includes:

- Archaeologists at Archaeological Survey of India (ASI)
- Archaeologist at the Delhi Circle, ASI
- Engineer at the Delhi Circle, ASI
- Person responsible for National Culture Fund (NCF) at ASI
- INTACH Delhi Chapter
- Conservation Architects

To compare the situation of conservation in Delhi with the experience in other countries, some case studies were referred.

The second part of the research was to identify some specific monuments and then identify the problems at these sites. The monuments were selected from the listing of Delhi monuments by the INTACH Delhi Chapter. The monuments in a neglected condition but with some historical or architectural importance were selected, as they had some scope for promotion. Field visits were made at these sites to find out the actual scenario and the region specific problems. The following were taken into account during the field visits:

- Connectivity of the monument by roads
- Awareness of the local people about the location / existence of the monument
- Awareness of the visitors and the local people about the historical importance of the monument
- Condition of the monument
- Frequency of visitors at the monument
- Attitude towards the monument

From the findings of the field trips at the selected monuments, some suggestions were made to promote the monument.

## BRIEF HISTORY OF CONSERVATION IN DELHI

In India, the first instance of conservation was when Emperor Ashoka ordered to conserve wildlife in the 3<sup>rd</sup> century BC. Then in the 14<sup>th</sup> century AD, Firuz Shah Tughlaq ordered to protect ancient buildings. Later, during the British Rule, the “Bengal Regulation (XIX)” was passed in 1810, and the “Madras Regulation (VII)” was passed in 1817. These regulations vested the government with the power to intervene whenever the public buildings were under threat of misuse.

Then in 1863, Act XX was passed which authorised the government to “prevent injury to and preserve buildings remarkable for their antiquity or for their historical or architectural value”. However, many historic structures were destroyed by the government itself in Shahjahanabad. The Archaeological Survey of India (ASI) was established in 1861 to initiate legal provision to protect the historical structures all over India. The “Ancient Monuments Preservation Act (VII)” was passed in 1904 which provided effective preservation and authority over the monuments, and in 1905 for the first time, 20 historic structures in Delhi were ordered to be protected.

At the time of independence, 151 buildings and complexes in Delhi were protected by the central ASI. The State Department of Archaeology was set up in 1978 in Delhi, but it lacks the power to acquire or protect buildings, and merely looks after some monuments de-notified by ASI. In 1984, Indian National Trust for Art and Cultural Heritage (INTACH) was founded to stimulate awareness for conservation of cultural heritage among the people.

## POLICY CONCERNS

The Constitution of India provides conservation of monuments at two levels. The central government takes care of the monuments that are identified to be of national importance, and ‘other monuments’ are taken care of by the respective state governments. But as

there is no compulsion to include conservation as a part of city planning, the various city planning agencies have shown little concern for heritage buildings.

Before considering policy problems, it was important to scan through the list of monuments in Delhi and the details of their ownership. The concern for listing the monuments was realized by ASI in the British period itself, and Maulvi Zafar Hasan prepared a list of 1317 buildings in Delhi, and published the listing as “Hindu and Mohammeden buildings of Delhi” in four volumes between 1916 and 1922. The ASI still uses the Zafar Hasan list, though many of the structures have crumbled, have been demolished, or have been encroached upon.

The INTACH Delhi Chapter has published a list of 1200 buildings in Delhi called “Delhi -The Built Heritage: A Listing”. The list has every detail of the structure, which includes the ownership details, significance of the building, condition of the structure etc. Out of all the monuments in Delhi, the Delhi Circle of ASI lists 174 monuments, and a recent article in delhiscoop.com says that a list of 250 unprotected monuments<sup>1</sup> has been prepared which would be taken up by the State Department of Archaeology. All the monuments owned by ASI are protected from destruction or illegal construction by the “Ancient Monuments and Sites and Remains Act” of 1958.

In short, there are many historically and architecturally important monuments in Delhi that are unprotected and there is no policy for the safeguard of these heritage buildings from destruction, illegal construction or encroachment. With an over burdened ASI, and shortage of government resources to fund the ‘less important’ heritage buildings, it might seem illogical to restore such monuments. But it is important to note that many unprotected as well as protected monuments have the enormous potential to attract tourists and can generate huge revenues if adequate awareness is created in public.

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<sup>1</sup> Unprotected Monument: Any listed building not in ownership of ASI or State Department of Archaeology is not legally protected and is an unprotected monument



## ROLE OF PRIVATE SECTOR

### PROTECTED MONUMENTS

ASI is responsible only for the centrally protected monuments and is undertaking constant efforts for the past few years to improve their condition, and sharing the work with private sector is also a part of this initiative. At present, the major problem is with the unprotected monuments and many structures are under the threat of depletion. ASI can outsource the work at only the centrally protected monuments and this initiative would help only a very small number of monuments. But even if the initiative helps to improve the condition of 174 monuments out of over 1200, it should be considered.

#### *Private outsourcing of conservation*

One reason that the ASI officials had to give for the poor condition of monuments in Delhi was the lack of ‘skilled manpower’ at ASI and the government policies that restrict its expansion. This is the main reason that ASI is outsourcing the conservation work at some of the monuments. There is also some pressure on ASI because of the upcoming Commonwealth Games in Delhi, for which 62 monuments in Delhi have been identified and due to shortage of time and lack of ‘supervisory conservation staff’, work at most of the monuments would be outsourced to private parties.

According to ASI, conservation of monuments is a highly skilled work and it requires a certain amount of expertise which the private construction companies lack because of no hands-on experience for conservation of monuments. One of the major problems with conservation of monuments is the fact that mistakes are not permissible as the structures being dealt with are very old and represent the cultural wealth of a nation. For this reason, ASI has to be very careful while assigning conservation work to private companies and also has to closely supervise the work done by these companies.

Since these monuments are under the protection of ASI, it is reluctant to give responsibility to a private company because at the end of the day, ASI is answerable to the people and it can not afford any sort of mishap at the monuments from any private

company. But according to a private conservation architect, it is high time for the ASI to realize that architects and not archaeologists are the people who should be responsible to take care of the conservation of monuments.

### ***Private outsourcing of maintenance***

The Humayun's Tomb was outsourced for 'Environment Development' under the National Culture Fund (NCF) trust in 2003. The condition of the monument and its surroundings **was** very good and according to an unofficial source, there has been an increase in the number of visitors to the monument after the completion of the work. Still, some of the visitors think that the condition of the monuments is not very good. After talking to the local guard, some visitors and also by primary observation, it was concluded that for a layman, a monument is in a bad condition if it is not properly 'maintained', in the most basic definition of the term. People generally do not complain about the bad condition of the structure, but would just like to see the area 'clean'.

To make it clearer, by 'maintenance' the observers mean the primary removal of dust and litter from the place, proper installation of information sign boards and provision of basic facilities like toilets.. Work of this nature does not require high level of skills, and can be easily outsourced to private companies, given the manpower shortage ASI is facing. To this, the ASI officials responded by saying that such an initiative is being considered but ASI has to be very careful before assigning any work to a private company.

Even if the ASI decides to outsource conservation or maintenance or both, it would still require funds from the government and this can not be a long term solution. Private organisations are taking up the work at certain monuments through the NCF basically for two reasons: for the advertisement of their company, or out of charity. The work done by some charity organisations is appreciable, but sadly some of the work taken up by companies for their own promotion has not shown expected results. Again, getting work done by charity is not a long term solution and there has to be some incentive for the private parties to take interest in conserving the important heritage buildings.

### ***Private outsourcing of promotion***

The Old fort or the *Purana Qila* is an important landmark in Delhi and many people frequent the place. At a random field trip to the place on a boiling afternoon on a weekday, it was surprising to find people walking inside the premises. But sadly, people there were engaged in two major activities: boating at the lake, and having lunch / afternoon nap in the beautiful gardens there. All the people inside the premises had bought the entry ticket to the place, which costs Rs5.

It is very important to have beautiful surroundings at a place like this, and it is perfectly fine if people choose to sit in the garden rather than checking out the magnificent monument, which has housed several emperors and dynasties over the centuries including the last Hindu emperor Prithviraj Chauhan. In fact, visitors can not be expected to look at an empty building usually with a closed door in the front and appreciate its beauty, most of which has been lost or evidently re-constructed. People would be interested in a monument only if it has a story behind it, which would also give them an idea about the historical significance of the building.

Although there are information sign boards in front of each and every structure inside the premises of a monument, it is important to ‘promote’ the building for its historical significance. For people to be interested in visiting a monument, it is of prime importance that people are aware about the existence of such an important place with an interesting story behind it or with a marvellous architecture, and this is the best way to increase tourism at places that have been neglected for years now. Promotion of these buildings would also create public awareness about the importance of the building and attitude of people towards the monument could change.

Visitors are equally to be blamed for the poor condition of the monuments. Monuments are not well maintained partly because of the fact that people engage themselves in littering around and defacing the monuments. Ample amount of awareness about the importance of the building could sensitise general public towards the monuments. Promotion of the monument can play vital role in increasing the number of tourists and in

educating the people about the importance of the building. Private sector can take care of promotion as it would require fair amount of research to find the historical significance behind the monument and most importantly, to promote the story in an effective way.

## UNPROTECTED MONUMENTS

Delhi has a very rich cultural past with several dynasties settling here in the last millennium, and it should be rare to find a heritage building with absolutely no historical or architectural merit. The approach at every unprotected heritage building has to be unique, depending on the surroundings. The private sector can not solve the problems like road connectivity on its own, but some initial work has to be undertaken so that the importance of better roads is felt and the problem is taken care of by the responsible authority.

As discussed above, the main problem with the unprotected monuments is the lack of a policy to protect them from destruction, illegal construction or encroachment. Many heritage buildings in Delhi are unprotected, some under the ownership of a public agency and some under private ownership. These heritage buildings were identified as ‘less important’ buildings and were not centrally protected. But these buildings have the enormous potential to attract tourism and they deserve their due share of respect for standing erect for centuries now.

A random walk through the narrow streets of Shahjahanabad gave a glimpse of the numerous magnificent buildings, mostly of the late Mughal period. There was a blue sign board in front of these buildings saying ‘Heritage Building’, followed by some information about the significance of the place. But unfortunately, most of these buildings were either used as commercial shops, or were converted into store houses. It was observed that most of the local people were not even aware about the existence of a heritage building at the place, leave aside its importance.

Taking the case of Shahjahanabad, the protection of these heritage buildings becomes even more difficult because people still live there and the shops there have existed for generations now. People can not sacrifice their livelihood just for the sake of protecting a heritage building. But the point is that the present use of these buildings is not their best utilization. These heritage buildings have a great story behind them, or a marvellous architecture, which does not exist today. These are hubs with enormous potential to be developed as great tourist destinations.

The promotion of these buildings in the right direction would create an excitement about these heritage buildings and the attitude of people towards these structures would change. The private sector can do this job efficiently as it would undertake fair amount of research regarding the history of the place and advertising it in order to sell its 'product'. This would ultimately bring competition in the industry, and the market forces will make sure that all heritage buildings are taken up and are well preserved. But the purpose of this initiative will be lost if the private sector is given grants from the government (in case of publicly owned buildings), and in its place the private company can be given a share in the revenues coming from the visitors to the monument. This would serve as a good incentive for the private company to maintain the place.

## LEARNINGS FROM ABROAD

### HAMPTON COURT PALACE<sup>2</sup>

It takes a very specific trip from central London to reach the Hampton Court. The superb parkland setting with free access to the magnificent view of the Palace also acts as a deterrent for people to pay and go inside. In 1988, Hampton Court Palace decided to undertake a promotion strategy to improve its visitor ship. The first step was to study the pattern of visitors with the total number of visitors and the variation in their number, in

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<sup>2</sup> Robinson, Kenneth. Selling the heritage product

order to get a view of who visited the Palace, who did not and, most importantly, why not.

After evaluating the above study, a creative concept was developed which would present the Palace effectively. A logo was designed and the concept proposition 'Royal History by the Thames' was selected and fine tuned by research against target market groups ranging from overseas and once-only visitors to upper-middle educated families who lived within day trip distance of the Palace and would take a specific interest in visiting such properties. For advertising to both the target groups cost-effectively, leaflets distributed either through press insertion or by door-to-door delivery became the main media.

By careful management and distribution during winter 1989, the programme was successful in significantly increasing the number of visitors to the palace during that winter season. The most striking part of the campaign was the tag line used in their leaflets, which read 'Discover the True Stories of a Royal Home'. Such an effective line would entice any person to visit the Palace.

### WARWICK CASTLE<sup>3</sup>

The management believes that a visitor in return for his admission fee seeks an experience which can be greatly enhanced by receiving information in a form which heightens his appreciation and pleasure. In the main show areas of Warwick Castle, the communication of information to visitors is by the guides and the room stewards, as it is believed to be the most satisfactory way of interpreting the rich contents and history of the building. The curator's policy is to provide new insights and information about various aspects of the Castle on a regular basis so that the guides do not develop a stereotype.

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<sup>3</sup> Case study by Martin Westwood

The Castle is always promoted as an establishment which is vibrant, alive, and a place where something is always happening and there is something new to discover. In order to get this image across, they market editorials continuously and this has been a major contributor to its success in recent years. The unique selling proposition of the Castle is their powerful tagline 'Warwick Castle – the finest medieval castle in England'. Other description that helps in promoting the property is the quote where Sir Walter Scott describes it as 'the most noble sight in England' and 'that fairest monument of ancient and chivalrous splendour'. Such phrases are capable of instantly conveying the prestige of the site and its 'must see' quality.

## CASE STUDIES

Some protected as well as unprotected monuments in Delhi that lie in a bad condition, but have enormous potential to increase their visitor ship were selected to study the specific problems.

### TOMB OF RAZIA SULTAN

This 13<sup>th</sup> Century structure in Bulbuli Khana near Turkman Gate, Shahjahanabad is the tomb of Razia Sultan, daughter of Iltutmish. The place is not very important from architectural point of view, but has a very unique history attached to it. Razia Sultan was the first and the only woman Sultan of Delhi, and it is sad that her grave lies in a corner of Delhi with no visitors despite having so many feminist leaders and activists talking of equality of women. And surprisingly, it is a centrally protected monument.



The tomb was neglected for a long time and according to a local resident, the place was converted into a mosque to keep it clean. The picture on the right shows the Mihrab on the Western wall of the tomb. The construction of a mosque at the tomb has certainly helped in improving the condition of the historically important place, but it has caused certain amount of defacement to the place. We can see the water tanks in front of unidentified grave of a child near the entrance to the place. The walls also had cement paint and it is not the way to treat a monument of mid 13<sup>th</sup> century.



The local people were aware about the existence of the tomb of Sultan Razia, and according to one of them, the tomb was restored by the people living in the neighbourhood and it was converted into a mosque by their own efforts. Connectivity to the place is a little problem as is the case in whole of Shahjahanabad, but since people know about the place, reaching there by getting directions from local people is not very difficult.

The tomb of Sultan Razia, who died on 14<sup>th</sup> October 1240 AD fighting against the rebellion caused by those who opposed her, certainly deserves some more respect. More importantly, this place has the enormous potential to be developed and promoted for its historical importance.

#### MIRZA GHALIB'S HOUSE

The great 19<sup>th</sup> century poet had spent the later years of his life as a tenant in this haveli at Ballimaran, Chandni Chowk. Most part of the haveli was altered or destroyed and in 1999, the Government of Delhi acquired portions of haveli and renovated the premises. The haveli is now in a good condition and some information about the life of the poet and some of his work is also displayed.



According to the care taker of the haveli, the people sharing their boundary with the building are not very considerate for this important 19<sup>th</sup> century heritage building. The

picture on the right shows the residences sharing boundary with the haveli, and apparently they do not shy away from littering in the premises of the building, even though they are aware of the importance of the place.

Haveli of Mirza Ghalib is an important tourist destination and is frequented by many foreign and Indian visitors coming from different states. But still, the place has enormous potential to be developed as a major tourist attraction if it is promoted the right way. The 2007 Annual Report of the Trustees and Guardians of Shakespeare's Birthplace mentions that 688,000 visitors were welcomed on the property; 4,700 school pupils attended their education courses and 21 university groups from 8 countries extended their study of Shakespeare with them. The annual income of the trust was £5.769 million.

Haveli of Mirza Ghalib is a popular tourist attraction and local people are aware about its existence. The INTACH listing mentions a Haveli of the in-laws of Mirza Ghalib near Ghalib's haveli, where Mirza Ghalib used to recite his poems in the courtyard. But the local people were not at all aware about the existence of such a haveli, and it could not be located. This haveli also has enormous potential to be developed as a tourist attraction if it is promoted the right way.

#### SHER MANDAL

This structure is a part of the *Purana Qila* complex, and was built by Sher Shah Suri in 1541-42 AD. This building was later used by Humayun as a library, and he had fallen from the stairs of this building and had died. This important piece of information is mentioned on the information board in front of the structure, but it can be used to promote the place for its significance. This historical fact has enough potential to attract tourists for the building, apart from those who come to visit the *Purana Qila*.



The building seems to be in a good condition when seen from a distance and the surrounding area has beautiful gardens. As mentioned earlier, the main problem with this centrally protected monument was not of poor conservation, but lack of maintenance. The building has two doors and both of them are locked. A lot more people would be interested in the structure if they get to see the building from inside, even if they are not allowed to go in because of concerns for defacing of the monument. In fact, a higher fee can be charged for the visitors who wish to see the building from inside.

#### NAMAK HARAM KI HAVELI

This was a building constructed in the late Mughal period at Ballimaran, Chandni Chowk. The name of the building itself sounds very interesting, and many people would want to know the reason behind this peculiar name. The element of curiosity attached

with this heritage building can be easily exploited to attract tourists. Like most of the buildings in Shahjahanabad, the architecture is magnificent, but unfortunately, most part of the haveli has been converted into shops, and only the balcony at the first floor retains its original shape.



The picture clearly shows the view of the balcony on the first floor being obstructed by wires and advertisement banners. The other picture shows the ground floor of the haveli, which now consists of rented shops. There is a board in front of the structure which says 'Heritage Building' and has some information about the haveli and its peculiar name. Most of the people having shops in the same street were not aware about the existence of such a place, and this explains the reason for the neglect of this heritage building.

## CONCLUSION

Talking of the protected monuments, it is acceptable if the ASI keeps the conservation part under its supervision, with restricted involvement of the private sector. Though, it would be better to have a long term solution that increases the chances of involvement of private sector. This can be done by training more people for the same. But as far as maintenance and promotion go, there is enormous scope for private sector's involvement. The primary cleaning up of the place should help in building up the image of the monument, which would certainly increase tourism.

As mentioned earlier also, promotion is of vital importance for development of a monument as a tourist attraction, and private sector can do this efficiently if given proper incentives, like share in revenue from tickets. It is important to undertake extensive marketing and advertising campaigns (as mentioned in the 'Experience from Abroad' section) and interestingly, in case of monuments, the "consumers of the product have to be persuaded that the product is one that they are prepared to travel to any buy"<sup>4</sup>

For the unprotected monuments, it is of vital importance to frame a policy for these heritage buildings for their protection against destruction, illegal construction and encroachment. Because there is no central agency to take care of these structures, the private sector has to take the initiative to take up some heritage buildings having historical significance or architectural merit, and then promote these places for the same. Once a demand is developed for these places, the market will make sure that no such heritage building is left out.

In order to promote tourism, Delhi has the enormous potential to promote some 'dynasty specific' packaged tours, which would give the tourists the chance to visit all historically important places of that dynasty. Apart from this, there is an absence of a conservation lobby for heritage buildings which would ensure that such important structures are well preserved.

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<sup>4</sup> Robinson, Kenneth. Selling the heritage product