

Architectural Conservation

Urban Conservation

Lecture 8

Historic Cities

If you actually look into India's historic cities like Shah-Jahanabad, Nizamuddin, Mehrauli, they all are considered unsuitable, unsafe and inappropriate alterations have been made on them. And the focus of conservation actually needs to shift from being monument centric to people centric. When we think of conservation, we need not just think of Qutub minar, Taj Mahal all these massive buildings that we speak of our heritage. There are lots of these small buildings and entire towns or urban courts that are reminiscent very rich historic past and heritage of our country and which affects culture as well as the life of the people. So we have to bring this scale down from monuments to people. We need to forget what our cities want worth. We should stop being repetitive oh the good old days, such things that are happening. We need to see where the city, town today is and where it can be tomorrow. It should be in a better place and definitely not in a place delousing not only our heritage, even for the current quality of life for the people who are living. So we have to focus on restoring Chandhni Chowk not to the Mughal era that is there, but focus on what is going to become of it now. This not only is required to be done by the government, but lot of civil society involvement is required in the decision making process. It has to be sensitive, multi-disciplinary effort rather than just basic engineering approach to develop our historic cities. The word develop is misconstrued. Does development mean there is internet, television in all the houses? Or the development means sustained living where the people do have creature comforts but not in the cost of living in bad sanitized area or areas that are not being looked after well. Survey analysis and compilation of inventory are the foundations as only on the basis of an understanding of the area morphology can appropriate improvements be planned. The ASI that is the Archaeological Survey of India has the national mission on monuments and antiquities. This was meant to carry out the primary survey across the country which will actually help identify the significant clusters of historic buildings. And for this to be effective, any conservation effort has to be co-ordinated with

comprehensive planning policy the urban design programmes which is aimed at improving living standards in historic settlement. So it has to be multi-disciplinary effort and it has to be multi-faceted approach as well. Just not to think of conservation but also to improve the quality of life as well. the development of our historic cities needs a conservation-led approach and as a first step our municipalities need to follow the lead of the Ahmedabad municipality. They have conservation departments manned by multiple disciplinary teams. So conservation doesn't mean having a sole conservation architect. We need to have planners, architects, urban designers, transport planners who are sensitive not only to the needs of historic cities but will also help restrain the engineers in making wrong decision regarding the historic fabric of the city. Just to provide a flyover they might breakdown a monument or a landmark, so to avoid such disasters it is very important that, everything is discussed in transparent mechanism such that the community is involved as well as different expertise from different branches and walks of life are excepted. political will always remain a key. However people want to be involved, final political will that is legislation policies are crucial. But if greater awareness is on the part of the architects, planners as well as general public, then we will realize that there is more than 1 way to preserve or conserve a particular area or building. We can learn from other examples across the country or the world that there is better way of doing things and what we are doing till now, does not necessarily make it right. For instance the Vienna memorandum that proposes an integrated approach to the contemporary development of existing cities in a way that does not compromise their heritage significance. We have to learn to create a balance and to create a great balance it is very important that we do not push away our history, we learn from it adapt it, and make sure that the future takes a great chunk of the history to future generation and we learnt from it as well.

SriRangam – Case Study

And to put all these principles in action, we will see the case study of Srirangam, a very famous temple in the Tiruchirapalli district in Tamil Nadu. Srirangam is a historic sacred town in central Tamil Nadu. It is actually bounded by the Cauvery river on 1 side and its tributary on the other. The most important temple here is the sri Ranganadha swamy temple which forms the focal point of the vaishnavait settlements. It pretty much covers around 630,000 square meters. So it is a very

huge temple complex and temple town. And the temple of Sri Rangam is the only one in the country with 7 concentric rectangular enclosures around the sanctuary. The enclosing walls are breached by monumental gates or otherwise called as gopurams and these are placed in the centre in the axis of the sanctuary and facing the cardinal points. So this is the distant view of rajagopuram, the main entrance of the ranganaatha swamy temple. You can see the intricate details over here of the rajagopuram. This is considered a splendid example of temple architecture. Here you have sri rangam designed according to religious beliefs and the entire town has grown around the temple. We have the rajagopuram at the very entrance over here, then you have 7 enclosures and finally the holy enclosure, which is the shrine over here. The main entrance to the temple complex is the southernmost gateway the rajagopuram, which is actually considered the tallest in asia which is about 71 meters high and has 13 storey in it. And this marvelous rajagopuram is the key landmark for the local pilgrims as well as the people in and around sri rangam. This gopuram is visible in many distance in and around 20 km radius. On studying the views of rajagopuram, it is evident from the immediate views that it not only marks the entry to the historic city but also has to create a lasting impression on the viewer. One might actually think what is the importance of gopuram, why it is actually made so tall? And it is only for this reason that lot of planners today have to keep in mind that the gopuram needs to be visible from a greater distance. It's not just something that you come close to a temple then you see the gopuram. The planning and the buildings around the temple has to be constructed in such a way that they do not become over power or taller than this structure. Here you can actually see the map, you have the final gopuram over here and these are the different viewing corridors, we have 9 different views that are finally there and this is the main rajagopuram-the culmination point. Now we will discuss why we should have so many views , why is it necessary, because in terms of religion, people would actually like to get the view of the gopuram from different parts of the temple town. Its not something that they would approach the temple and get the glance of that particular temple, so the 1st view point, 2nd, 3rd and all these you will see from different corridors. And when we think of historic temple town we even think of tourism. So we have to make sure that these views are maintained and well developed so that we actually economies on it as well as trade on this factor, make money of it as well. Now we have view point 1, this is the immediate view of the rajagopuram from the ammamandapam road. As you approach the temple. Then

you have the 2nd view point, it's actually blocked by the hotel over here. You can't actually view the gopuram to the best extent possible. Trees are natural phenomena, that need not worry us. That all adds to the order of the place, it's only these concrete structures, vehicles, that actually distract from the view. This is viepoint 3. This is the immediate view of the rajagopuram from the northern side. So your pretty much inside the temple complex, when you are seeing this and you can see the encroachments on either side. The gopuram doesn't get completely hidden, but it is definitely unsavory way to view the gopuram. And here you can see tall regulations, g+1 structure has come. It is only supposed to have ground structures on this level. This is view point 4, the intermediate view of the rajagopuram from ammamandapam road, but from the other side. And again here you can see only the top most portion of the gopuram. The trees are not providing the correct kind of vistha but crowding vehicular action is what blocking all of the view. These are the huge boards that you end up seeing. This is fortunately for us being told now. This is the huge advertising boards and temporary structures for political rallys. All of these block the view of the gopuram from different places. You can see the haphazard parking lot which has been structured, the advertising boards that have been placed without permission or any such details. If you see the rajagopuram it is surrounded by haphazard development. you have lot of encroachments that block the view, sinages, hoardings, power lines, roof projection, all of these detracts from the overall visual quality. this is mainly due to the heavy volume of pedestrian, 2 wheeler traffic, which passes through the gopuram to access the historic city. The presence of obstructive elements which blocks this view, has been partially observed, we have seen them. Some of them are temporary, where some of them are permanent. Today there is actually a threat to this viewscape . The urban development which is happening in the immediate setting is obscuring the visual dominance, the importance of the temple is getting lowered, the aesthetic contribution is also getting lowered. He setting around a protected heritage resource or monument is often an unprotected urban, suburban or cultural landscape. For world heritage site, it is something, very important to have something called a buffer zone, where we have the main heritage site, the buffer zone and then the area for development. So that way we actually have an area that protects the heritage core from encroachments or any such unwanted elements. If you look at the current Indian spatial planning policy and legislation, it does not actually provide good infrastructure to save such buildings. What

actually is the current prohibition is construction activity within 200 meter radius and the protected property. But there is no restriction on the vertical height. So if the building is outside the limit, just outside 205 or 210 meters or it could be a 3 storeyed hotel or restaurant, there is nothing that can actually prevent this from happening. There is no law or legislation, to help us out there, what are the steps we need to take

1. To identify the significant view in the townscape historic environment that needs to be protected or enhanced
2. To conserve these views and different relationships to the monuments
3. To enhance the heritage value of the city by promoting tourism. Yes we have to promote tourism but not in the cost of tourism distracting or spoiling the temple town.
4. To rank the significant public views and classification of visual resources. So value based perception is very important. To identify significant values people relate to the historic monuments, to identify the dimension of setting from monuments and sites
5. To formulate development and guidelines in the historic core to preserve the views and visual relationships

Finally to conclude the case study – the view of the sacred monument brings people closer to religious ideals, spiritually, community and place. By enhancing and preserving the views of the sacred monuments, we are strengthening the connection between people, religion and the place that they want to be in. So it's not only the temple that needs to be protected, it's the emotion and the culture behind it. We need to make sure that as well is protected.

Historic Precincts

Historic districts or historic precincts: What is historic precincts? It's actually an area comprising either a single heritage building, number of buildings or precincts, districts thereof related that share similar style or kind of architecture, or they share certain physical, social or cultural significance that is worth preservation and conservation because of its relevance to today's society as well as there is something for us to learn from them. What are the common issues faced in a heritage precincts

1. There is no comprehensive approach followed in identifying heritage buildings in the precinct area
2. New and tall buildings that were permitted by the local authority do not have the harmony with existing architecture and the area losing its significance
3. The heritage structure of high significant value are dilapidated in condition due to non-provision of financial assistance from the government or local authority in conserving and maintaining them.
4. Original owners are disposing off their properties due to increase in land value and maintenance cost of these heritage structures.
5. The number of vehicles plying in this precinct has increased over the years.
6. Poor quality of roads and gutters although the area is unique in its character
7. Street parking of vehicles is allowed, thereby reducing the carriage width of road by the outsiders who visit the area, let it be local or even tourists.
8. There is no proper signage in the area to control the hoardings
9. There is no management action plan to improve the precinct with the support from the government for improvement and restoration of houses in the area

Planning strategies for conserving a heritage precinct: The strategy or policy shall ensure that the alterations of existing buildings or any new house are sensitive and enhance the existing visual qualities of the streetscape in the precinct. So it is very important that we don't detract from the heritage of the area or the heritage elements from the area, but at the same time it is important that the people do not sacrifice or go back on the kind of life they wanted to lead. Because then what happens is the standard of living is reduced in such heritage areas, people will tend to move out from such heritage areas and gentrification would take place and people will abandon these historical areas and these places will get dilapidated and unattended. So you want people to live there, for which it means it has to have all the facilities and amenities there in the rest of the urban city as well as it does not affect the historic fabric of that particular area. And it is very important that all heritage precincts have heritage conservation management plan, So what the management plan does is, it identifies, lists and then it develops and maintains the heritage building of that particular area. It will actually list out based on that particular gradation. How important is this building? If it is very important no alterations will be permitted and if it is not that architecturally important, internally changes may be made, but externally it should still match the hazards of

the building. The character has to be preserved in all the identified and listed heritage buildings in the precinct. So in the conservation management plan, initially the 1st step is to survey the area entirely, so what happens sometimes is, over the week end, a demolition may happen. So it is very important that if any person or owner doesn't follow these string rules, strict action has to be taken against them, either in terms of fine or minor imprisonment is required. Because without any control, it is very important to make sure that these areas are preserved the way they are. If there is no hammer standing above, then no one is going to follow these rules and regulations. Steps to be taken for maintaining the listed heritage buildings and encouraging the restoration of street frontages. Literally heritage precinct, the street hazards are like made up to seem from this particular area. It is from this particular period and this particular style of architecture. So any alterations or additions are happening, it has to maintain the architectural integrity of that particular listed building but also it should enhance the appearance of the general streetscape. So when we think of heritage precinct or distinct, it is no more 1 building in question, but an entire area comes into preview, the surrounding infrastructure comes into the preview that is attached roads, streets, lanes, bi-lanes everything. Another important thing that comes into importance over here is the people, the quality of life of such people. Parking is always a very important issue. do you give parking to the tourists or the locals who visit the place or you need to provide parking for the people who live in that area. And if parking happens in the street what happens to the rest of the road. It becomes very haphazard, there is no particular way is done. Restrictions are to be imposed in precinct. A part of it could be made friendly all the vehicular action and motor action should be kept in the periphery of the core. Abandoned or dilapidated structures shall be restored by providing financial assistance and incentives to the owners in form of tax, rebate, concessions etc. It is very important that people actually learn that okay this can be done to their house or building. But they will not do it if there is no incentive for them. What will they gain out of it, keeping a very good historic building in good condition may be they could get a cut in their electricity bill, utility bill which will give them a carrot or dangling that you have in front of a rabbit. It's exactly the same situation, you need to give them something, if you want something from them as well. So those kind of incentives can be given by local authorities. Any modern or non-harmonious buildings in these areas have to be discouraged by proper development control in the area. Any new construction that should

happens, actually the plans, elevations, everything should be submitted to this conservation management authority. They should go through the plans, elevations, is it going to detract, is it going to affect the streetscape all of them have to be studied before permission is given for construction of new buildings. special grants may be obtained from the state and central governments for getting finance for up keeping of these buildings but also new constructions with respect to these buildings are required or severe repair is required to these buildings or you have to retro fit such buildings to suit today's needs.