

Community Engagement and Heritage Management: A Case Study of the Hazrat Nizamuddin Basti

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Abstract

India, boasting millennia of history, showcases a diverse and culturally rich architectural legacy. Its extensive landmass and large population contribute to a wealth of cultural and natural heritage. Surprisingly, only around 15,000 heritage structures and landmarks enjoy legal protection. Even those of national, state, and local significance that are safeguarded face threats from urbanization, neglect, vandalism, and potential demolition. This prevailing state of heritage preservation for a substantial portion of India's national legacy arises from our failure to demonstrate that conservation endeavours can lead to more sustainable development outcomes. These heritage sites are intertwined with the lives of the surrounding communities. It is imperative to incorporate heritage management into the broader, community-defined development objectives. The current planning process in India is heavily centralized, resulting in limited community engagement in the heritage sector. This has created a divide among the people, obstructing the conservation efforts. This article aims to shed light on the factors contributing to the lack of community involvement and propose potential solutions, drawing insights from a case study of the Hazrat Nizamuddin Basti Urban Renewal Project.

Keywords: Integrated Heritage Management, Community participation, conservation of Cultural heritage, Public-Private partnership in Heritage

Introduction

India, with its extensive history spanning thousands of years, showcases a varied and culturally rich architectural legacy. Its vast expanse and large population embody a wealth of cultural and natural heritage. Virtually every urban area in the country is marked by both tangible and intangible heritage. The nation as a whole is experiencing rapid urbanization and substantial population growth, posing a threat to heritage sites and their significance (K. Kiruthiga, K. Thirumaran; 2018). Despite the government's numerous initiatives aimed at safeguarding heritage, only a small number of structures and monuments are shielded from the pressures of urban development, neglect, vandalism, and demolition. This subpar state of preservation for a significant portion of India's national heritage is the result of those tasked with their care and management falling short. They have failed to demonstrate that conservation endeavors can contribute to achieving development goals in a more sustainable manner. In addition to the managing authorities, the population residing near heritage sites also plays a crucial role in either preserving or contributing to the deterioration of these sites. Their recognition of the value of heritage

determines the success or failure of endeavors to conserve cultural assets (UN India, 2019). In India, the prevailing belief is that the imperative of providing the population with essential infrastructure, employment, healthcare, education, etc. should not be impeded by expenditures on heritage preservation (Jyoti Hosagrahar; 2015). A similar perspective is evident in other developing nations as well. Therefore, it is crucial to explore the reasons behind the divide between heritage preservation and society's requirements. It's worth investigating whether meeting the fundamental needs of the local population through heritage management projects can elicit a more positive response and greater participation from society in preserving heritage. Furthermore, understanding the diverse needs of the population may enable policymakers to better coordinate with local communities for the more effective implementation of people-centric heritage management in urban areas of India.

Heritage and Conservation: Some Perspectives

The term 'heritage' holds various meanings, influenced by the backgrounds and interests of those involved. It refers to something of historical, scientific, political, religious, or cultural significance that is important to individuals, communities, countries, institutions, organizations, or communities (Sreedevi, Indu. Panda, Jeebananda. Omayio, Enock; 2021). Heritage management involves the identification, protection, and responsible care of heritage in the public interest. It encompasses the conservation and restoration of both historical and architectural elements through identification, interpretation, and maintenance, while also striking a balance between modern urban development and preserving the character of these heritage sites to maintain the city's value (Senthil, Ramya; 2016).

The concept of heritage is evolving due to changing attitudes, needs, and demands of society. It now encompasses broader phenomena, contributing to political ideals, economic prosperity, social cohesion, and cultural diversity (Clark, 2000). In today's world, heritage management serves as a tool for socio-economic, cultural, and environmental development. As Brian Graham puts it, "heritage is recognized as both an engine and catalyst of socio-economic development."

Considerable research has been conducted in areas related to heritage conservation, the impact of urbanization on heritage, sustainability of heritage tourism, and related topics. For instance, K. Kiruthiga, K. Thirumaran (2018) observe in their study on the effects of urbanization on historical heritage buildings in Kumbakonam, Tamilnadu, India, that excessive population growth, economic development, and lack of institutional or legal frameworks have led to the destruction of the historic urban fabric. This leads to a migration towards urban areas due to fewer employment opportunities, resulting in many monuments becoming slums or shelters.

In developing countries like India, urbanization is occurring at an unprecedented pace, posing a threat to heritage towns with unique aesthetic, cultural, architectural, and historical significance. UNESCO emphasizes the importance of including the recognition, conservation, and management of historic regions in a comprehensive approach to urban planning, considering both physical characteristics and socio-cultural and economic values (UNESCO, 2011). Rapid urbanization in developing countries often leads to the decline of the historic environment and built heritage.

The influx of modernism and large-scale reconstruction during the 20th century has prompted many cities to reject traditional architecture, building techniques, and materials in favor of more modern methods, as noted by M. Susan (2011) in "Contemporary architecture in the historic urban environment." Commercial interests often push for new architectural interventions, expecting old

historical buildings to sacrifice their heritage value. This can extinguish the social and cultural essence of the city, eroding people's sense of place and identity.

Each region in India has its own distinct characteristics and changes in land use. Increasing populations with different needs and aspirations are significantly altering the character of historic areas due to uncontrolled development. While some Indian cities have implemented conservation strategies in their development plans, efforts to protect built heritage and its characteristics are often insufficient.

Neel Kamal Chapagain calls for a contextual rethinking of the heritage concept and conservation strategies in South Asian countries. He emphasizes that heritage in these countries should be understood in its diversity, and conservation approaches should be flexible to accommodate the evolution of multiple engagements with heritage.

People living in close proximity to built heritage in urban areas understandably desire an improvement in their standard of living. This should be a top priority in policymaking and budget allocation (Logan, William: *Managing cultural heritage in Asian cities*). Florian Steinberg, in his article on the conservation and rehabilitation of urban heritage in developing countries, points out that urban settlements with built heritage often house lower-income families, and their socioeconomic, physical, and cultural values differ from the perspectives of bureaucrats or planners.

Heritage and Conservation: Some Gaps

As noted earlier, numerous researchers have explored the impact of factors like population growth, urbanization, and contemporary commercial development on built heritage within urban environments. Many studies have delved into the significance of integrating heritage into urban planning and how heritage tourism can contribute to sustainable development. However, there is a notable scarcity of research addressing the obstacles encountered in planning and executing heritage management initiatives, particularly in South Asia, and specifically in India. Similarities in the approach towards heritage management in urban settings can be observed between India and other developing nations. A key concern lies in the perception of heritage and culture, often viewed as burdensome by government bodies and private proprietors. Conversely, for nearby residents, especially those in lower-income brackets, these structures are seen as old buildings that can be utilized based on their needs and circumstances.

Another gap in the existing body of literature pertains to the current usage of unprotected built heritage in urban areas, which can be categorized into two segments. Firstly, there are unprotected heritage structures in densely populated urban settlements, which frequently face acts of vandalism and demolition due to encroachment. Secondly, there are privately-owned heritage structures, many of which are rented out as residential apartments or shops. In such cases, owners often make alterations to the structure to fit their requirements, thereby compromising the originality and aesthetic appeal of the building. In a country like India, where the government imposes restrictions on making structural changes to historic private properties, these buildings are sometimes demolished overnight to make way for new constructions or left to deteriorate, as seen in Mandawa (Rajasthan) and Old Delhi, respectively. Hence, it is crucial to grasp the present usage and potential repurposing of such heritage edifices, all while taking into account the viewpoints, aspirations, and challenges of all stakeholders involved.

Heritage and Conservation: Present Context

At present, roughly 35% of India's population resides in urban areas. According to a United Nations report from 2017, it is projected that by 2050, 69% of the global population will be concentrated in urban centers. India is expected to undergo a similar shift. Growth, progress, and urbanization are necessary to cater to the needs of a growing population. In light of this transformation, the United Nations is emphasizing the achievement of sustainable development goals by 2030, aiming to address challenges such as climate change, biodiversity loss, socio-economic disparities, and health crises through collaborative efforts involving all nations and stakeholders. A well-preserved heritage, serving as a repository of knowledge and offering various goods and services, can directly contribute to fulfilling these sustainable development goals. It promotes social unity, encourages socio-economic revitalization and poverty alleviation, bolsters social well-being, enhances the allure and innovation of regions, and brings about long-lasting benefits for tourism.

Nonetheless, India encounters difficulties in bridging the divide between heritage management and urban area development. The substantial tourism potential of heritage sites has yet to be fully harnessed. The public's awareness and the emphasis placed on safeguarding and conserving heritage monuments in the country fall short when compared to more developed nations worldwide. This similar situation is also evident in other developing nations.

Community Engagement and Heritage Management: Issues and Insights

A significant challenge in heritage management in India arises from the local population's approach and understanding, as well as the stance of local administration towards heritage. Regardless of the strength of national or international heritage management policies, without ample support from local authorities and the community, it cannot yield the desired positive impact. Especially in urban areas, the residents surrounding a heritage site come from diverse backgrounds, influencing their stance on heritage. It is essential to grasp their viewpoint, current needs, and future requirements before initiating any heritage conservation or management endeavor. Their approach to conserving and managing heritage in India's urban settlements plays a pivotal role. Their comprehension of heritage and aspiration for improved living standards become a significant barrier to the successful execution of heritage management initiatives. The current use of unprotected built heritage in urban areas also impacts heritage conservation and management in India.

Another crucial aspect, apart from the local population, is the attitude of local administrative and political authorities towards heritage. Their perspective on heritage preservation can determine the success or failure of an integrated heritage management initiative in the area. The involvement of the local community in the decision-making process, alongside local administrative and political authorities, in formulating a policy or project for heritage management is another pivotal factor. Their participation in heritage decision-making is a substantial gap in the existing planning process in India. Due to the present governance structure of heritage planning, local residents have limited opportunities to interact with government officials and voice their concerns. This lack of communication leads to a mistrust of administrative bodies, discouraging participation in projects. In a developing nation like India, limited financial resources and expertise within the administration pose a significant challenge. Governing bodies are hesitant to allocate their limited funds for community engagement initiatives with outcomes that may seem distant. This acts as a substantial barrier to fostering community involvement in decision-making. The complete community engagement process, from identifying stakeholders to incorporating

their suggestions into policies, can require extensive administrative efforts and financial resources. This further deters decision-makers from initiating such endeavors.

During field visits to Chandni Chowk, Chirag Delhi, Shahpur Jat, and Khirki Village, interactions with the local community underscored their desire to be part of decision-making and address their concerns, but they lack awareness of how to do so. Their limited understanding of heritage and its socio-economic benefits hinders their eagerness to participate in the planning process. There is also a prevailing belief that authorities are best equipped to make decisions, and ordinary people should not interfere with their work. Socioeconomic disparities in the community present another significant obstacle. Economically disadvantaged individuals, religious minorities, women, and other marginalized groups rarely have the opportunity to voice their opinions. Individuals from these categories also fear upsetting administrative bodies by interrupting their work.

These existing barriers to community participation compound the challenges for integrated heritage management and related conservation efforts. There is a need for increased social awareness and the fostering of social cohesion to integrate heritage conservation into mainstream development projects. This will assist developing countries like India in utilizing integrated heritage management as a tool to achieve sustainable development goals.

One noteworthy example of a heritage conservation project that exemplifies integrated heritage management in India is the Hazrat Nizamuddin Basti Urban Renewal Project. Using this project as a case study, this article will shed light on the various facets of the initiative and its outcomes.

Hazrat Nizamuddin Basti Urban Renewal Project

In 1997, in commemoration of India's 50th independence anniversary, the Aga Khan Trust for Culture (AKTC) undertook the preservation of Humayun's Tomb in Delhi, India. Following its successful completion, the organization offered to extend its services and collaborated with the Archaeological Survey of India (ASI), along with the Central Public Works Department and South Delhi Municipal Corporation, to revitalize the urban settlement of Hazrat Nizamuddin Basti. The funding for this project was sourced through Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) initiatives from major corporate entities such as the Sir Dorabji Tata Trust, Sir Ratan Tata Trust, Ford Foundation, World Monument Fund, the United States Ambassador's Fund for Cultural Preservation, The Embassy of the Federal Republic of Germany, the Delhi Urban Heritage Foundation, and contributions from the Municipal Corporation of Delhi, among others. Over a span of 10 years, restoration work was conducted on over 40 structures in the vicinity of Humayun's Tomb and the Nizamuddin area. The Aga Khan Trust aided ASI in acquiring an additional 35 acres of land, reclaiming it from encroachment, and implementing landscape restoration around the monuments. As part of this initiative, over 10,000 trees were planted. Employment opportunities for local communities were provided through the National Rural Employment Guarantee Act fund, addressing the need for labour and skilled craftsmen.

Tangible Heritage

Nizamuddin Basti, named after the prominent 14th-century Sufi saint Shaikh Hazrat Nizamuddin Auliya, houses his tomb, drawing around 4 million visitors annually. It is a well-known cultural and tourist destination in Delhi. The densely populated urban settlement near this monument spans approximately 0.17 square kilometers, with a population of around 25,000. In this area and the nearby locality, there are over 40 built heritage structures. The AKTC spearheaded the conservation of these

structures under the Hazrat Nizamuddin Basti Urban Renewal Project. Notable structures preserved under this project include Humayun's Tomb complex, Nila Gumbad, Isa Khan's Garden Tomb, Batashewala Complex, Sundarwal Burj, Lakkarwal Burj, Mughal Garden Pavilion, Hazrat Nizamuddin Baoli, Chausath Khamba, and others. The conservation process aimed to restore their historical character while maintaining authenticity. Initial steps included rectifying improper repair work carried out in the 20th century. Experienced conservation architects and conservators oversaw the replacement of cement and modern building materials with traditional materials like surkhi, mortar, and lime plaster, employing traditional craft techniques and masonry work. Alongside architects and engineers, stonemasons, plasterers, tile makers, bricklayers, art conservators, and carpenters were engaged. Craftsmen were encouraged to emulate the work of their predecessors using age-old techniques, tools, materials, and building practices.

Intangible Heritage

The poetry and music associated with the renowned poet-composer Hazrat Amir Khusrau Dehlavi, who lived in the 13th century, are integral to the rich Sufi traditions of Nizamuddin. His writings, music, and philosophies have had a profound influence on contemporary Hindustani music and culture. An initiative has been launched to document, interpret, and share the heritage of this cultural icon. This program encompasses research, archiving, documentation, audio-visual exhibitions, fellowship programs, and performances, all aimed at commemorating and celebrating diversity.

Community: Engagement and Impact

Upgrading of open spaces and street development: Prior to the project's initiation, only 2% of the population could access open spaces, largely due to encroachments by rag pickers and other elements engaging in negative activities. After assessing the urban setting, streets were improved, and open parks were established. Responding to the local Muslim community's request, a park exclusively for women and children was created. Community groups are responsible for maintaining these parks. Additionally, with collaboration from the Municipal Corporation, the streets in the Basti were improved.

Sanitation

By 2008, over 25% of households lacked toilets. AKTC constructed two community toilets, a bathing area, and a washing area, repaired sewage systems, covered open drains, and established a filtration plant to treat bathing water for use in toilets. These facilities are managed by a community group called Rehmat Nigrani Samooh.

Healthcare

A pathology lab was established at the Municipal Polyclinic, conducting over 55,000 free tests. Advanced equipment for Eye and ENT check-ups were provided at the polyclinic. As part of a community health program, 50 individuals from Nizamuddin Basti were trained as healthcare workers to identify vulnerable individuals within the community and ensure their access to healthcare facilities.

Maternal and Child Care

A maternal and child care center was set up, along with the appointment of a gynecologist and pediatrician to enhance maternal and child care services. Regular training programs for Aganwadi

workers are conducted at this center. It also provides holistic development for preschool children from the Basti. A community group of women, called Zaika Nizamuddin, was formed to address the issue of malnutrition in young children.

Education

Special guidance and monitoring are provided to ensure quality education for preschool, school-going, adolescent, and adult individuals in the Basti. The school was renovated, modern classroom equipment was installed, eligible community members were appointed as teachers, and school management was upgraded to meet modern-day requirements. Computer courses were introduced, and street computer kiosks were set up for accessibility. A community theatre group was established to conduct performances and offer regular music and visual art classes to interested students.

Vocational Training

A career development centre has been established to train young people for careers in retail and computer-related fields. Courses in building crafts, hospitality, and service industries are offered for individuals without prior schooling. Over 1,500 youth have received training, and 70% of them have secured job offers outside the Basti. Additionally, more than 1,000 women have received training in crafts such as Aari embroidery, crochet, tailoring, embroidery, and paper cutting. Many of them work collectively to create various products, generating significant income for their families. These products are sold under the "INSHA" brand at Humayun's Tomb complex. The popular chain store Fab India also sells their products in its stores. A resource center called "Rehnumai" has been established to facilitate connections between the community and government services, assisting people in obtaining official documents, information, and employment

Housing Improvement

Many residents were living in overcrowded spaces without proper lighting, ventilation, or sanitation in their homes. AKTC intervened in numerous homes to conduct structural and design repairs, as well as retrofitting, through a cost-sharing scheme with residents.

Waste Management

Due to high population density, commercial businesses, and a large number of pilgrims, a substantial amount of garbage was generated in the Hazrat Nizamuddin Basti. AKTC introduced door-to-door garbage collection and implemented other measures to improve solid waste management, contributing to the overall enhancement of the urban environment in the Basti.

Conclusion

This urban revitalization initiative encompasses both tangible and intangible cultural assets as well as natural heritage. It addresses the specific needs of the community, aiming to enhance their standard of living. The project focuses on capacity building and the development of infrastructure, all while respecting the beliefs and practices of the local population. To ensure self-sustainability, the project encourages community involvement by establishing local groups for each program. Collaborations with non-profit organizations, corporate entities, and government bodies at both central and state levels ensure the project's smooth operation and a steady flow of funding.

This endeavour has had a positive impact on the lives of over 20,000 residents in the Nizamuddin area, leading to an improvement in their overall quality of life. The project prioritizes the needs of the local community alongside heritage preservation. Notable aspects of the project include enhanced streets, the construction of community restroom facilities, the beautification of neighbourhood parks, upgraded healthcare facilities, and improved primary education. Additionally, the project successfully preserved and promoted the Sufi cultural heritage of the area through cultural events and exhibitions. The local population also received relevant vocational training. The project's successful completion resulted in an increase in tourist traffic, creating higher demand for souvenirs crafted by the women of Nizamuddin Basti.

Given the current state of heritage preservation in India, there is a pressing need for initiatives like this that focus on the betterment of local communities. It is imperative to grasp the comprehensive approach to heritage and development, which hinges on the sensitive integration of all stakeholders in India's urban areas. For the effective execution of an integrated heritage management plan for socioeconomic, cultural, and environmental development in an area, a thorough understanding of population composition, diversity, and the specific needs of the local community is crucial. The connection between heritage and development remains a largely unexplored concept, both in theoretical and practical terms. Despite this, it appears to offer a versatile, reliable, and robust framework for achieving both heritage conservation and development goals.

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