

Impact of Urban Transformation on Heritage Conservation: Case Study of Matharpacady in Mazgaon, Mumbai

Tapas Mondal

Ph.D Senior Research Scholar / Fellow, University of Mumbai

Abstract

Urban transformation has emerged as a significant process shaping the spatial, social, and economic fabric of rapidly growing cities, often posing serious challenges to heritage conservation. This study examines the impact of urban transformation on heritage conservation through a case study of Matharpacady, a historic precinct located in Mazgaon, Mumbai. Known for its distinctive East Indian architecture, narrow streets, and cohesive cultural identity, Matharpacady represents a unique urban heritage landscape under increasing development pressure.

The research investigates how processes such as redevelopment, infrastructure expansion, and changing land-use patterns influence the preservation of built heritage and local cultural practices. It also explores the role of planning policies, governance frameworks, and community participation in mediating these transformations. Through qualitative and spatial analysis, including field observations, stakeholder interactions, and policy review, the study identifies key conflicts between modernisation and conservation. Findings reveal that while urban transformation brings opportunities for economic growth and improved living standards, it often leads to the erosion of architectural integrity and the displacement of traditional communities when not carefully managed. The study highlights the need for context-sensitive planning approaches, stronger regulatory mechanisms, and inclusive strategies that integrate heritage conservation into urban development processes.

This research contributes to the broader discourse on sustainable urban development by emphasising the importance of balancing growth with cultural preservation, particularly in historic neighbourhoods of rapidly urbanising cities.

Keywords: Urban Transformation, Heritage, Community, Architect, Historic.

I. Introduction

Urban transformations and concomitant spatial changes have been the core elements of metropolitan regional development. There have been various forces and agents shaping urban areas differently in different historical epochs and phases of socio-economic development. Right from the historical background of colonisation to the era of nationalisation and globalisation, a complicated mix of local, regional and global factors has shaped the urban spaces in India. Indian cities have responded to all the agents and processes uniquely shaping them based on their geographies, local terms and conditions and socio-political structures. The complexities in the space-economy of Indian metropolitan regions, thus,

have been the result of a long struggle between various agents of change claiming and implementing their perceptions of what the urban space would be.

Indian cities have experienced the transformation under the influence of various forces and have made attempts to accommodate newer forms of economic activities and built environments. The major wave of urban transformation has been in the post-globalisation period, where cities continuously experience changes, but the urban change processes in the contemporary scenario are unparalleled (Haase et al. 2018; UN-Habitat 2016 b). It would be interesting to note that many planning efforts in recent decades have driven the urban transformation processes much more speedily than the conventional industrial urbanisation. The main drivers of urban and economic development are transforming the structure of the cities, which provides the way to new forms reflecting dynamic, economic, social and political conditions. The land-use patterns and dynamics, circulation and building infrastructure and processes of planning, urban renewal and privatisation of the real estate market economy.

At this juncture, it would be necessary to interrogate how far the process of urban transformation is sustainable and offers better standards of living to the citizens. It was in the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) of 2030 of the United Nations that urban transformation was primarily connected to sustainability and resilience. (SDGs) (United Nations, 2016) and the New Urban Agenda (UN-Habitat 2016a). How far the present urban areas in India have addressed the questions of urban liveability and sustainability is a crucial question. The inquiry needs to be made deeper as there are multiple agents involved in urban transformation, and also to further the analysis in terms of liveability and sustainability. Mumbai, being the economic capital of India, has experienced major transformations since the last century. Colonial powers made the Bombay presidency their centre of rule during the 19th century. Thereafter, it has seen exponential migration from various parts of India. Migration of labour, skilled workers and experts from small villages to second-tier cities could be seen at large. Beyond these migratory crowds, it has its own language of architecture and settlement pattern which is still in existence at various corners of it.

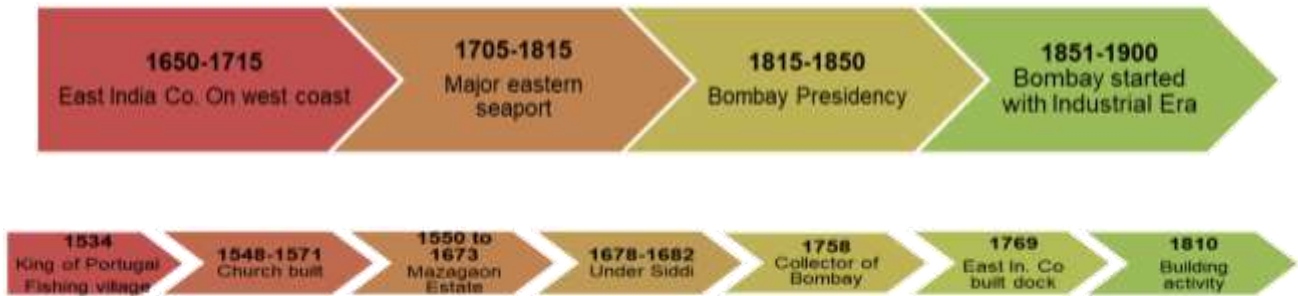
One of the prominent examples of this settlement is Mazgaon. Matharpacady is a part of this heritage settlement where the majority of the Christian community has resided for over a century. Many of the residents during their childhood have experienced open doors, windows, a view of the sea and space to breathe as a response to the settlement pattern and architectural character it has. This heritage precinct is currently undergoing serious threats in terms of exponential urban development and increasing land costs in the southern part of Mumbai, which is considered the most precious. Matharpacady is seen by various researchers, such as Ar. Pankaj Joshi.

Heritage sites are an amalgamation of social-cultural as well as architectural and historical heritage values. In order to satisfy the needs of the stakeholders, streetscapes, urban structure and buildings are evolving, but the importance of urbanisation in preserving the heritage character is often neglected. Though heritage is now being encouraged as a subject for achieving a stronger economy, it is constantly challenged worldwide due to several pressures, including increased urbanisation, increasing demand for housing, deteriorating infrastructure and socio-cultural transformations. Thus, the present study aims to understand the pressure of newer infrastructural developments on the existing heritage at the Matharpacady by identifying the issues and challenges that have been faced by this heritage precinct.

II. Historical Background

Portuguese came to Mumbai in 1535 and in next centuries they established their dominion to the islands

of Mumbai such as Uttan, Malad, Malwan, Marve, Versova, Sashti Island, Elephanta Island, Trombay, Vasai, Worli, Mahim, Parel, Old Woman’s Island, Bombay, Mazgaon, and Colaba, Old Woman’s Island. These places were later mixed up into one single island of Mumbai, which was greatly disciplined and urbanised under the British Empire. In modern times, we can find scattered ruined churches and traces of Portugal all over Mumbai city. One of the villages, Matharpacady, located in the heart of Mazgaon, is an outstanding existing example of the typical Portuguese-British architecture that speaks about the history of the village to date.



Sketch drawn from Mazgaon hill: from the Collection of Daiana G. & Hansel B.

III. Problem Statement

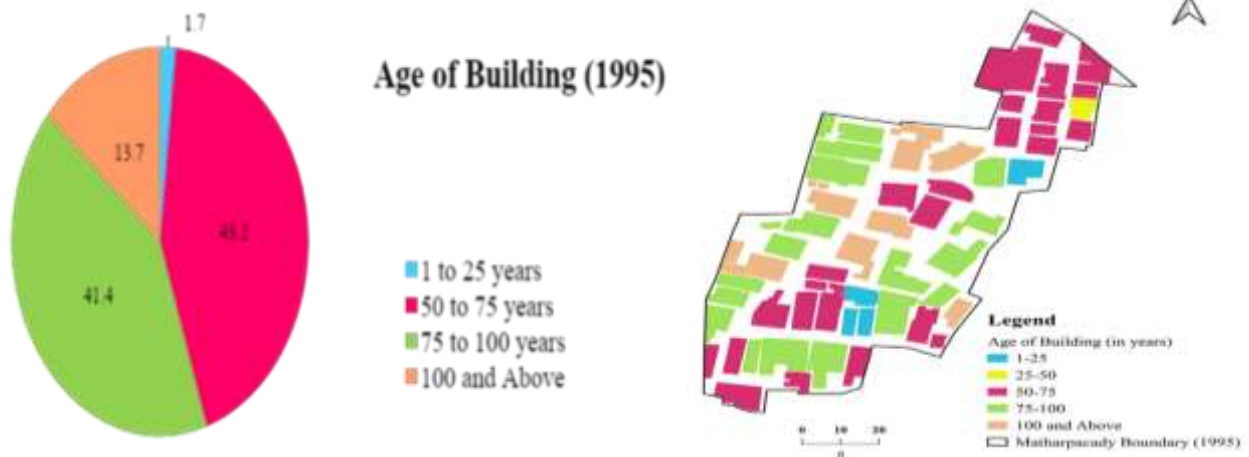
Matharpacady village covers an approximate area of 1.53 hectares, has been declared by the Government as a ‘Heritage Precinct’ as Grade III in 1999 and upgraded as Grade II-B in 2012, respectively, which is

now mentioned as Matharpacady club.

Matharpacady village in Mazgaon is undergoing many urban pressures and changing its form. Residents at Matharpacady have been dealing with several issues, such as migration, increasing land cost, the Tenant Act, no incentives from the government to restore heritage structures and insecurity of losing the fabric and essence of the place. Residents who have been residing here for many decades still call this village. They have seen the changing scale, spaces, warmth and essence of the neighbourhood. Significant questions, such as the right to live in their native places and conserve their homes, are becoming more severe day by day.

Due to the encroachment, changing patterns of settlements around the village have put stress on the resources of basic amenities (limited water supply, power cuts, plying of vehicles, safety concerns in terms of robbery and eve-teasing). Real estate agents' interests in land have left the locals in danger of losing the charm of infected Portuguese fashioned residential landscape.

Residents have tried to approach the local Govt, that is, BMC authorities, but the issues are delayed, misguided or no further action was taken up thereafter. This attitude indirectly states that the village might be under a redevelopment plan without any concern for the people residing here for decades.



- Sloping Roof on wooden trusses and use of Mangalore tiles prominently seen.
- Fascia Board/ Eve board at the edge of roof
- Arched window with four shutters
- Wrought iron railing
- Pilasters and cornice detail
- Porch

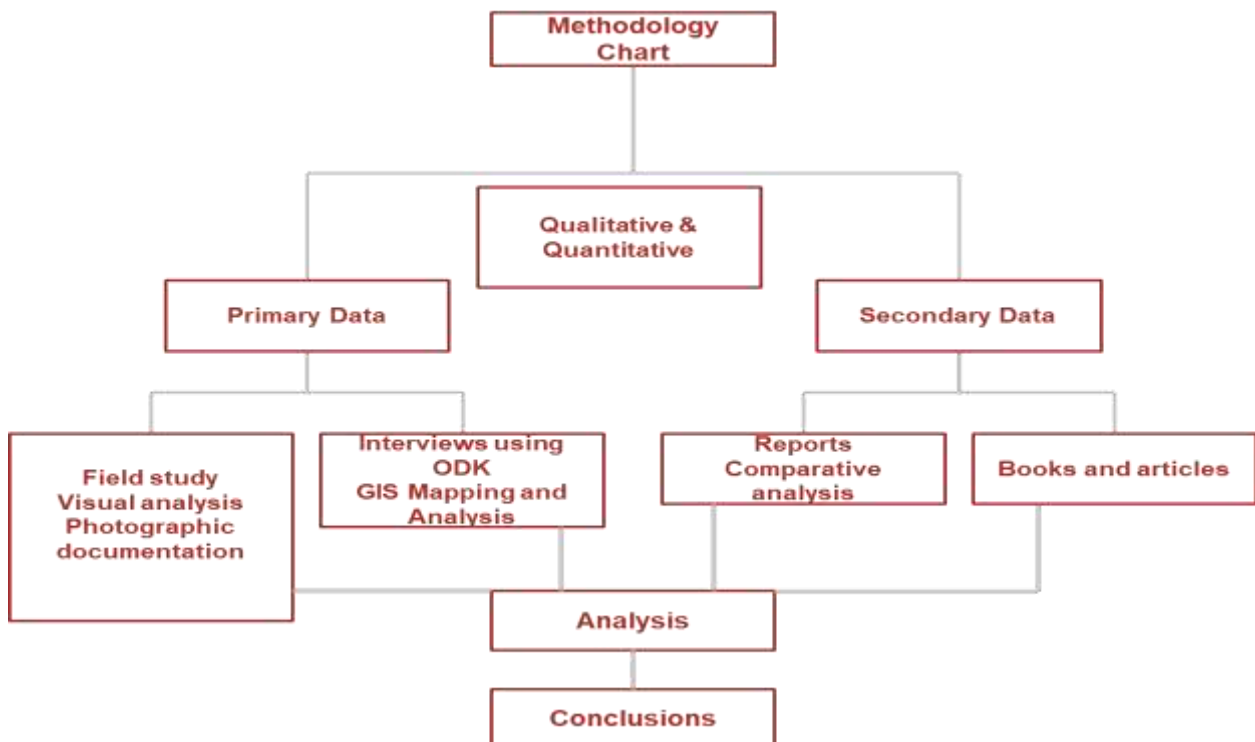
Baptista house
Indo- Portuguese Introvert house
Image by Author

IV. Objectives

1. Briefly understanding the Historic evolution of the village and tracing historic timelines.
2. To understand the Architectural language and features
3. Awareness of conservation norms among residents
4. Protection measures and concerns from the residents' point of view
5. To sustain the planned water supply line, power line and drainage line



V. Methodology



VI. Data Sets

Data Sets include previous reports published by

1. Report of MMR-Heritage conservation society prepared by Ar. Pankaj Joshi (2001),

- Heritage list notified by MUNICIPAL CORPORATION OF GREATER MUMBAI (No. CHE / 1271 / DP / Gen Date: 31/07/2012)
- Model Heritage Regulations by Town and Country Planning organisation, Ministry of Urban Development, Govt of India, 2011.
- Google Earth



Photo plate.1- Structure of the house
Source: Primary Survey



Matharpacady village In 2009



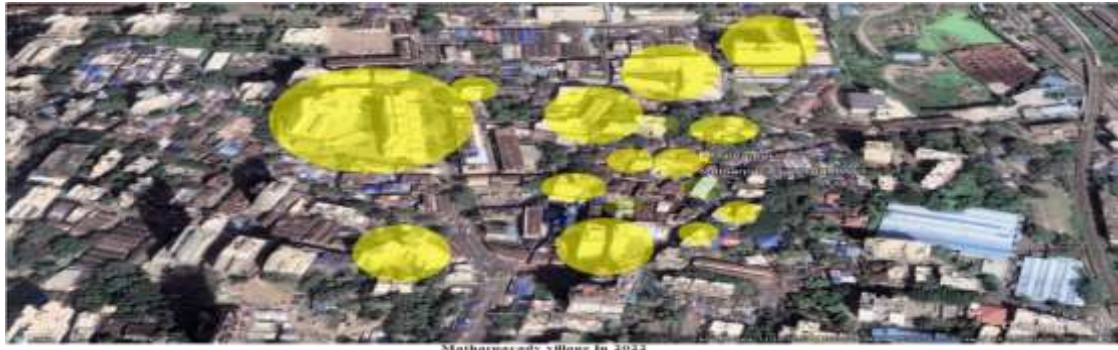
Matharpacady village In 2000



Matharpacady village In 2014



Matharpacady village In 2011



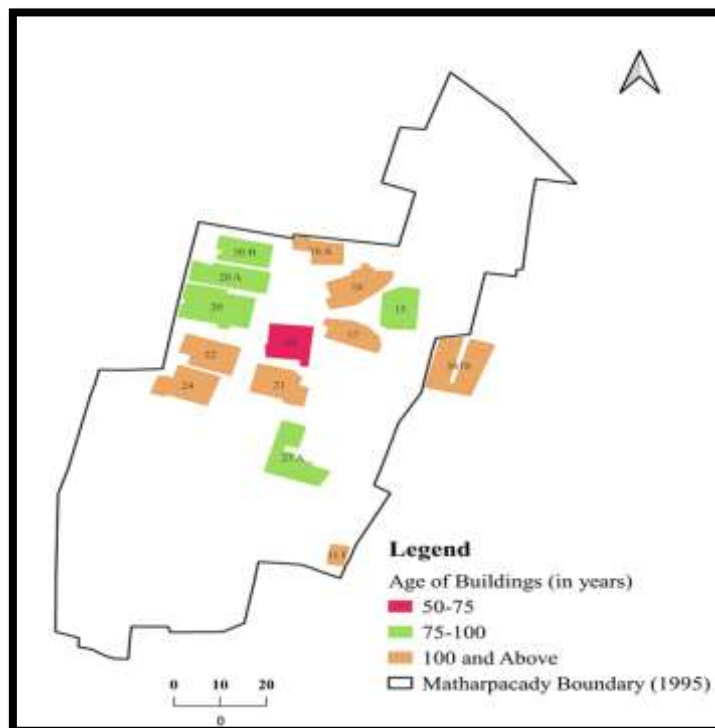
Source: Google Earth images tracing the evolution of the village and the addition of new urban fabric.

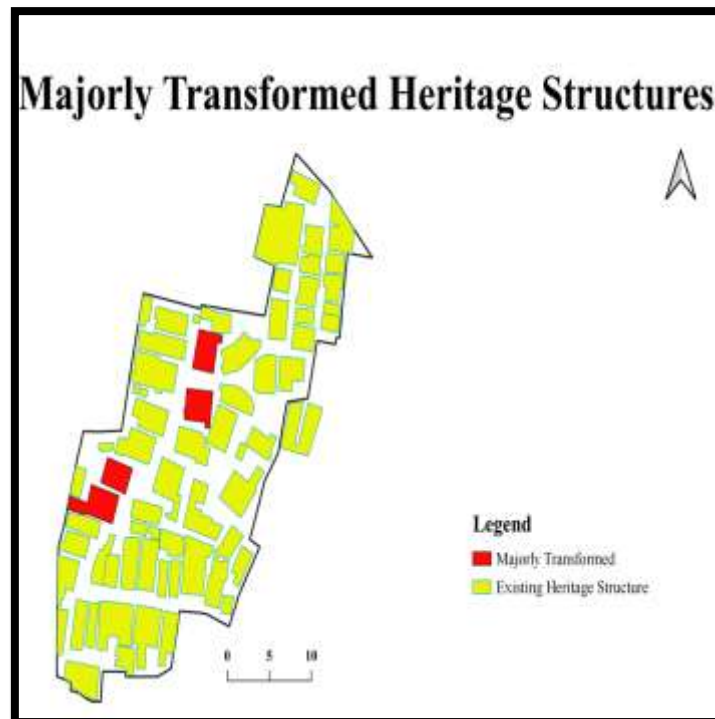
VII. Results



Legend
 • Surveyed locations
 □ Matharpacady boundary

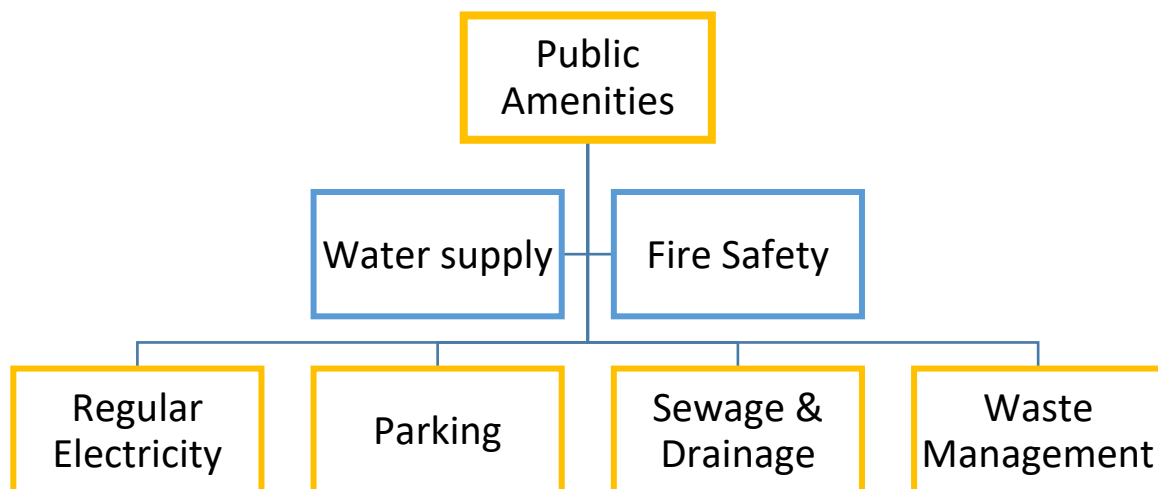
ODK collect and conducts field interviews to understand current issues and challenges
 Map Showing houses from the village Matharpacady, from where data was collected using ODK Collect





VIII. Discussion

Observations and issues pointed out by residents during field visits:



In recent times, there have been issues related to overflow of drainage, frequent power cuts and water supply, as well as drainage water mixed with the locals. These problems never occurred till the new structures that are illegal and enjoy all the facilities. The lanes have become narrow due to the extension of structures and the space occupied for parking vehicles. A very important note, the ambulance cannot enter the village and cause a lot of harm to persons' lives.

Water System:

The well in this village also marks an important landmark. The well is not maintained, breeds mosquitoes, and for 15 years, some residents have connected drain lines to the well. It is sad to know

that the drain connected to the well is unhygienic to the people living around, as it leads to foul smell and mosquito breeding. The upcoming high-rise structures are a great threat to the existing village, affecting its heritage site. Memories shared by a local of his childhood days, where he mentions the view of the sea from his terrace, which is now blocked due to the high-rise structures. It gives a clear picture of ignorance from government officials in terms of granting permission without any proper study of the area.

Macro-level issues, such as a change in land use:

As illegal multi-storey buildings are being permitted, there is no check on the extension of buildings, thus narrowing the lanes and causing inconvenience to the original locals. As the number of migrants increases, the stress on the land area is affected. The plying and parking of vehicles have become a major issue for the original residents.

Migration, no young generation residing in the village:

1. Constant migration pattern observed.
2. Better job opportunities and various other issues have forced the young generation to move overseas. Constant fear of instability and losing ownership has caused insecurity among the residents.

Change in community:

1. New arrivals are occupied by specific communities, thus compressing the Catholic and Hindu communities, as other communities are trying to take charge of the village.
2. Matharpacady at the micro level, the dilapidated condition of houses

Other:

1. Fire safety is required in the precinct as major heritage structures are made of wood.
2. Poor management of heritage values is marked by maintenance issues such as cleanliness, waste management, etc.
3. Tenant issue - Less rent and no government incentives to repair houses, though it is in the Grade II-B list.
4. Open spaces, such as parking, are not sighted because of haphazard growth in the area.

New Highlight:

While the authors interviewed the residents of Matharpacady came across an interesting historical background of our great heroes, who we call freedom fighters, who resided in this area. A resident in Ganganath chawl mentions that this chawl was Bal Gangadhar Tilak's office. To add more, advocate Joseph Baptista worked along with Tilak, who also resided in this village.

Socio-cultural: Despite the above-mentioned issues, the community of Matharpacady enjoys each social and cultural gathering all year round.

IX. Conclusion

The concept of heritage in Indian Cities is challenged because of several factors, such as rapid urbanisation, an increase in the demand for housing in the cities, cultural changes, climatic changes, and various other factors that emphasise pressure on the cities (Goswami and Kumar 2022). Matharpacady

village, till date, stands intact as a good example of a hamlet in the Metropolitan city of Mumbai. This hamlet highlights the population of Maharashtrians, East Indians, and Goans. Though according to the criteria and regulations of maintaining the heritage site, Matharpacady village fulfils the parameters drawn. The present scenario of new high-rise and unsuitable Development, encroachment, lack of planning, as well as lack of governance, is creating issues and threats to the residents. Therefore, a need for a broad vision or policy has to be drawn involving stakeholders to attain Sustainable Heritage in future without breaking its essence and legacy.

Reference

1. Joshi Pankaj (2001), "Mahatar Pakhadi" 3rd Stage Report, Conservation Guidelines For Mahatar Pakhadi
2. Precinct, A Study Conducted For Mmr-Heritage Conservation Society.
3. Heritage List Notified By Municipal Corporation Of Greater Mumbai (No. Che / 1271 / Dp / Gen Date :
4. 31/07/2012)
5. Model Heritage Regulations By Town And Country Planning Organisation, Ministry Of Urban
6. Development, Govt Of India, 2011.
7. Banerjee-Guha, S. (2010). Introduction: Transformative Cities In The Global Order. New Delhi: Sage
8. Publications India Pvt Ltd.
9. Bekdemir, A. L. E. V., & Kart Aktaş, N. I. L. Ü. F. E. R. (2011). Urban Transformation: Is It For
Everyone?
10. Dr. Atreya Paul, Debabrata Ghosh, Somasree Bardhan, Kumarjeet Chatterjee. (2021). Analysis Of
Urban
11. Green Space Using Geospatial Techniques: Case Study In Asansol Municipal Corporation Area. Ssrg
12. International Journal Of Humanities And Social Science
13. Un-Habitat (2016a) New Urban Agenda [Http://Habitat3.Org/Wp-Content/Uploads/Nua-English.Pdf](http://Habitat3.Org/Wp-Content/Uploads/Nua-English.Pdf)
14. Goswami, S., Kumar, A. (2022). Problems And Prospects Of Heritage-Based City Development In
India.
15. In: Ashish, D.K., De Brito, J. (Eds) Environmental Restoration. F-Eir 2021. Lecture Notes In Civil
16. Engineering, Vol 232. Springer, Cham. [Https://Doi.Org/10.1007/978-3-030-96202-9_9](https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-030-96202-9_9)
17. [Https://Mmrhcs.Org.In/Images/Documents/Regulation_Guidelines/Model_Heritage_Regulations.Pdf](https://Mmrhcs.Org.In/Images/Documents/Regulation_Guidelines/Model_Heritage_Regulations.Pdf)
18. [Https://Www.Mcgm.Gov.In/Irj/Go/Km/Docs/Documents/Eodb/Construction%20permit/Related%20circulars/Dcpr-%202034%20and%20notification.Pdf](https://Www.Mcgm.Gov.In/Irj/Go/Km/Docs/Documents/Eodb/Construction%20permit/Related%20circulars/Dcpr-%202034%20and%20notification.Pdf)
19. [Https://Lbb.In/Mumbai/Matharpacady-Mazgaon-Peaceful-Village-Hidden-Gem/](https://Lbb.In/Mumbai/Matharpacady-Mazgaon-Peaceful-Village-Hidden-Gem/)
20. [Http://Www.Matharpacadyvillage.Com/Home/](http://Www.Matharpacadyvillage.Com/Home/)