HERITAGE – A CASE STUDY OF SURAT

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Abstract: Country is losing its real identity because of new development in the urban area. It is important to preserve the original identity of the country. Heritage is the historical identity of any city. So conservation and preservation of it is very necessary. Any heritage has historical, social, cultural, scientific or aesthetic significance. Identification if any heritage building is based on type of building, history, material used in construction, plan, age etc. Many agencies are working in India for the conservation of the heritage like Archaeological Survey of India (ASI), Heritage Conservation Committee (HCC) under Ministry of Urban Development, INTACH etc. Surat Municipal Corporation has started work for the conservation of heritage in Surat. For that the heritage policy was drafted in 2008. SMC is developing the Chowk area as Heritage zone of the Surat. Surat needs proper places for the tourism. In this paper, the heritage of Surat is discussed. Need of conservation of heritage, categories of heritage, recent efforts for conservation of Surat heritage, Salient features of heritage buildings and precincts of Surat, Instruments of heritage conservation and some important heritage places are included.

Keywords: Conservation, Heritage, Intangible Heritage, Surat heritage, Tangible Heritage

INTRODUCTION

Heritage is the historical identity of any city. It reflects the history and life style of the people who lived in the city. As per handbook of Conservation of Heritage Buildings, Central Public Works Department, Heritage is deemed to mean those buildings, artefacts, structures, areas and precincts that are of historic, aesthetic, architectural or cultural significance and should include natural features within such areas or precincts of environmental significance or scenic beauty such as sacred groves, hills, hillocks, water bodies, open areas, wooded areas, etc. It must be recognized that the 'cultural landscape' around a heritage site is critical for the interpretation of the site and its built heritage and thus is very much its integral part. The conservation of built heritage is generally perceived to be in the long term interest of society. The three key concepts need to be understood to determine whether a property is worthy of listing as a Heritage are namely according to Historic significance, Historic integrity, Historic context. Mere listing is of limited use unless it serves the cause of preservation and conservation of the heritage of the area. Publication of the Listing of the area does help in raising the level of awareness and public consciousness about what constitutes their heritage. However, the cause of preservation and conservation of heritage can be served...
only by providing statutory backing to the listing. Only the statutory backing makes it an effective tool for conservation.

**SOME IMPORTANT DEFINITIONS RELATED TO HERITAGE**

In the Handbook of Conservation of Heritage Buildings published by Central Public Works Department, New Delhi, following important terms related to heritage, is given.

- **“Heritage building”** means and includes any building of one or more premises or any part thereof and/or structure and/or artefact which requires conservation and/or preservation for historical and/or architectural and/or artisanary and/or aesthetic and/or cultural and/or environmental and/or ecological purpose and includes such portion of land adjoining such building or part thereof as may be required for fencing or covering or in any manner preserving the historical and/or architectural and/or aesthetic and/or cultural value of such building.

- **“Conservation”** means all the processes of looking after a place so as to retain its historical and/or architectural and/or aesthetic and/or cultural significance and includes maintenance, preservation, restoration, reconstruction and adoption or a combination of more than one of these.

- **“Preservation”** means and includes maintaining the fabric of a place in its existing state and retarding deterioration.

- **“Restoration”** means and includes returning the existing fabric of a place to a known earlier state by removing accretions or by reassembling existing components without introducing new materials.

- **“Reconstruction”** means and includes returning a place as nearly as possible to a known earlier state and distinguished by the introduction of materials (new or old) into the fabric. This shall not include either recreation or conjectural reconstruction.

**CASE STUDY OF SURAT**

Surat is one the most dynamic and fastest growing cities of India in terms of its economy and culture. The city also has a magnificent heritage value as the one of the oldest port and with a history of having business linkages with more than 84 countries. Surat’s heritage policy, “Policy Formulation for Conservation and Development of Heritage /Historic Places of Surat” is prepared by Urban Space Consultant, New Delhi in July, 2008.

[Map of Surat City]

1 Surat city (Source: SmartSurat.com)
Need for Conservation and Development

- A city without heritage is a city whose history will remain only in textbooks and this should be unthinkable for a city like Surat, which traces its antecedents back to 300 B.C. and which has played such a significant role in the formation of modern India. Surat’s heritage is integral to its identity.
- Surat is one of the most rapidly growing cities in India. A large number of heritage structures, especially of residential type are overcrowded and in poor structural condition, a result of overcrowding and neglect from property owners, who are unable to extent higher rents from old buildings and thus unable to invest in maintenance and retrofitting.
- Surat has a long and rich history of development from 3rd century BC onwards and is even today a melting pot of cultures and societies.
- The absence of a lively tourism industry is another factor that contributes to the neglect of heritage.

Categorization of Surat’s heritage

- Surat has a rich heritage, not only in terms of buildings, but also in terms of cultures, arts, historical associations, trades and associations with significant personalities and events.
- Surat’s heritage can be divided into two categories.
  - Tangible heritage
  - Intangible heritage

1) Tangible heritage
- Heritage buildings: Four categories of heritage buildings have been identified in Surat:
  - Religious (Temples, Mosques, Churches like Chintamani Temple, Parsi Fire Temple, Rander and Jama Masjid etc)
  - Institutional (Colleges, Schools, Officers like Sir J.J. School, I.P. Mission school)
  - Historic (Fort, Dutch post office)
  - Building with Associative significance like Narmad House
- Group of heritage buildings: This category includes areas/precincts which are of heritage significance due to a continuous heritage character. This category can further be subdivided into:
  - Heritage Wards: Municipal wards with high heritage content. Eg Ward 11 and 12 (Chowk area and its precincts)
  - Heritage Streetscapes: Streets which have heritage significance due to cluster of heritage buildings (Eg: Nagar Seth ni Pol)
  - Riverine Heritage: This includes areas and structure associated with the River and its immediate surrounding including the banks.

2) Intangible heritage
- Arts and Crafts: This category includes all traditional arts, crafts, plays, dances, music, literature, poetry, events and activities which are of any heritage significance. Eg Navsari weaving
Cultures and traditions: This category includes significant and symbolic cultures and traditions of the communities of Surat, which are of heritage significance.
  - Kite flying
  - Navratri celebrations

Traditional Trade and commerce: this category includes all traditional trades/commerce of Surat and the places, events, activities, traditional markets, associated with these traditional trades and commerce like:
  - Zari Trade
  - Power Looms
  - Diamond Industry

Music, plays, poetry and literature like
  - Kavi Narmad’s Granrthavali
  - Parsi Natak

Traditional communities like
  - Bohras
  - Jains
  - Parsis

History of Surat like
  - History related to associations with events/persons like arrival of British
  - Trade and Commerce related history
  - Folklore, literature, documents related to the Evolution of the city

Recent efforts for heritage conservation
  - The SMC has been proactive in its efforts to promote the heritage of Surat. It has published a number of important texts, such as Ishwarlal Desai’s book “Surat sonani moorat”, and regularly publishes pamphlets and maps to inform the general public and tourists about the significance of the city and its heritage.
  - The City Development Plan, 2006 and Surat Inner City Revitalization Plan contain extensive suggestions for heritage conservation.
  - The school of Architecture run by the Sarvajanik Trust has also been regularly involving its students in undertaking heritage studies and has also dedicated one member of the faculty to this disciplinary area.
  - The Surat Inner City Revitalization Plan of 1998 was an initial effort to address the problems of the former walled city. The report recommends some of the basic needs of heritage conservation – the incorporation of heritage regulations into the GDCR, establishment of a loan fund for repair and restoration of heritage properties and creation of public awareness programs – and also identifies a number of projects for heritage precincts, such as the Chowk area, the Gopi Talav area, the Old Civil Hospital and the development of various Ovaras as part a more comprehensive riverfront development.
  - The recommendation for the use of heritage-based TDR (Transfer of Development rights) as an incentive for maintenance and upkeep of heritage properties follows on the successful Mumbai model.
Salient features of heritage buildings and precincts of Surat

- Ownership is often disputed, and survey for property tax assessment recently conducted by revenue department would provide useful pointers for the listing of properties and their management.
- Encroachments and crowded surroundings are common and must be dealt with, as the effectiveness of conserving a heritage structure is largely determined by the visual impact and functional efficiency that can be maintained in and around the building.
- While the owners/occupiers of heritage buildings seem willing to preserve their buildings, they do not have the financial wherewithal for the actual conservation effort. Thus, financial incentives and encouraging schemes for bringing the private investment must be one of the significant focuses of policy formulation.
- Heritage structures are located in a variety of physical conditions, such as the river-banks, the vicinity of the lake, on the side of a busy thoroughfare, and in congested inner city areas. The policy and regulations must respond to and account for this physical contextualization.
- While the heritage buildings and precincts are in themselves extremely attractive as places, their access is limited and providing easy access would have to be a priority for their development. It is very important that a pragmatic approach is taken to the pedestrianization and traffic management.
- Many structures are endangered not only by inherent problem of lack of maintenance, but by their location on streets that would require widening for providing the public easy access and thoroughfare on the main a street. The policy and guidelines will deal with this problem, through the creation of incentives for remodelling, in-situ well-planned pedestrian precincts supported by transportation planning i.e. the planning for right of way and parking.
- There is a vast range of aesthetic styles represented in the buildings, and this reflects the cultural legacy of Surat’s growth. Age of the building is also important criteria in heritage listing.
- The Surat castle area is the heart of historic Surat and should indeed become a central destination for tourists and local citizens alike.
- Citizens of Surat have inclusive and participatory approach to heritage revitalization. Citizens, civil society, private investment and administration and public funding can combine to create a real global city.

Issues regarding Tangible heritage

- Road widening in walled city areas not only changes the character of individual buildings but also changes the entire street character.
- Dilapidated condition of heritage structures.
- The property owner’s fear of reduction of value of the building after it has been listed, rather than an enhancement of value as intended by the listing.
- There is a back of clear definition of zones and areas for conservation, which further creates a lack of a coherent heritage management strategy.
- Willingness of owners of heritage structures to sell their buildings.
- Need for community representation in the heritage conservation committee.
- Adaptive reuse should not deter the original character of the building.
Owners of heritage buildings should be given more autonomy to deal with their structures and the entire process of listing should be transparent and interactive.

Scope for PPP and government buy out of heritage structures should be considered.

Government should provide funding or cost of building at market rates.

Need to protect riverfront and activities associated with it from pressures of development

Need for chapter on heritage conservation in GDCR and development plan.

*Issues regarding Intangible heritage*

- Surat has a rich history associated with its trade and commerce which needs to properly documented.

- Need to promote and finance training institutes related to traditional trades of Surat.

- Need for better transportation facilities like shipping and international airport facilities to reduce dependence on Mumbai as a hub to deal with international clients.

- Need to introduce tax rebate on machinery import.

- Technological and skill up gradation required for trades to compete in the international market.

- Need to provide financial incentives to students to take up courses related to intangible heritage.

- Need to introduce courses on intangible heritage to safeguard the future of such arts and cultures.

*Instruments of heritage conservation*

The competent authority shall institute the following key instruments of heritage conservation:

a) A heritage list
   
   This is containing all tangible and intangible heritages that have been identified through a rigorous process involving the participation of relevant stakeholders. List shall also include grading of listed heritage buildings.

b) A heritage conservation committee (HCC)

   HCC, duty constituted and empowered, with a mandate to deal with all matters concerning heritage conservation in the city of Surat, especially advising the Competent Authority in disposing of its functions related to Heritage Conservation and Management.

c) A heritage cell

   Heritage cell headed by a heritage coordinator and updates the heritage manual and coordination the activities of the HCC.

d) Heritage guidelines

   It is stating all allowances, restrictions and incentives for heritage conservation, which may partly or wholly be enacted as regulations that supplement and, in some cases, substitute, and relevant clauses of the General Development Control Regulations (GDCR) of the city of Surat.
c) A heritage plan

It constitutes a time-bound roadmap for heritage conservation activities, graphically represented on an integrated map of significant existing and planned developments, especially of public infrastructure and consisting of a list of projects that will be developed during the next five and ten year period, supported by a financial and management plan for the funding and execution of the plan and its projects.

Chowk Bazar: new heritage zone of Surat

The city’s first heritage zone’s project under the heritage policy of the Surat Municipal Corporation (SMC) and Chowk Bazar blueprint is now ready for the development. Under this project, 11.5 hectares of land around the fort will be redeveloped at the cost of more than 17 crore. The areas covered include Ghanta Ovara, Kasturba Garden, Raja Ovara, Andrews Library, Fort, forecourt of fort, Gandhi Baug and the area beyond the baug towards the river.

2 Heritage places in Surat

I. HERITAGE PLACES IN SURAT

Andrews Library
www.andrewzlibrary.com

Mugal Sarai
www.suratmunicipal.gov.in

Clock Tower
www.veethi.com
CONCLUDING REMARKS

- Heritage conservation is very important for the identity of the city. There should be conservation of both tangible and intangible heritage. The proper steps should be taken to overcome the problems regarding conservation of tangible and intangible heritage.
- SMC has already started their efforts regarding conservation of heritage places in Surat with starting of chowk square. Like chowk square all other building should be conserved with proper planning. This will promote the tourism industry in Surat.
- Different planning strategies are needed in CBD area to conserved heritage. Public awareness is also required for the conservation of heritage.

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