URBAN REGENERATION AND PRESERVATION OF BUILT HERITAGE:
A CASE OF HAUZ KHAS ENCLAVE PRECINCT, NEW DELHI

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Abstract

The case of Hauz Khas Enclave precinct in New Delhi, that includes Siri fort and Kalu Sarai area, provides a perfect context for a discussion on co-existence and integration of urban built heritage and modern urbanisation. The study focuses on the urban development around these frozen-in-time monuments that are isolated from the city and also around the living urban villages that are equally a part of this built heritage.

This paper will put forward the various layers of history in the precinct and the chronological growth around them. The gradual transformation that can take place if and when diverse communities get involved in the integration process is also analysed in detail. Hence, association of people with the urban heritage is an important aspect of this research paper and it will discuss clues to the level of integration possible between heritage and urbanisation.

Lastly, the paper will focus on finding ways to create such associations by developing around and with these historical places than isolating these in cordoned-off green spaces in the name of preservation which only leads to further degradation of the built heritage than its preservation.

The paper is hence a case in exploring a model for sustainable urban development that is firstly, in complete response to the context and secondly, aims in preserving the collective memory of heritage precincts as well as creating new values by integrating them in newer developments. The model can lead to making these precincts a part of daily life of the communities rather than being a point of ignorance.

Key words: Development, Community, Association, Transformation

Introduction

New Delhi today is an amalgamation of a historic and a modern city. Historically, it has been the seat of power for various dynasties, most developing their own city, mainly consisting the Seven Cities of Delhi (Hearn, 2009). It is a city of unique character because of the various historical monuments spread all over the city. Siri, the city of Sultan Alauddin Khalji is one of these seven cities that is a part of the Hauz Khas Enclave precinct. The extent of the area of study is restricted to Siri fort on the east, Hauz Khas Village on the west, Kalu Sarai on the south and modern neighbourhoods such as Green Park, Hauz Khas and Asiad Games Village. The study area also includes built heritage in the precinct mainly covering remains of fort wall & bastions, historic villages, tanks, tombs and mosques. This provides a perfect context for a discussion on co-existence and integration of urban built heritage and modern urbanisation.

Fig.1 – Green Park (New Delhi, India). Chhoti Gumti monument amidst modern urbanisation

Interestingly, the national development guidelines and policies for built heritage have cordoned off these historic structures, situated in modern urbanised areas of our cities, into isolated pockets surrounded by green cover. These development guidelines have been governed by blanket preservation policies that has concern only for the monumental buildings and not the urbanisation around them.

Growth of the Precinct

The earliest settlement in the area was the city of Siri built in the early 14th Cen. during the Khalji dynasty as a military camp. Hauz-i-Khas, a water reservoir was also built to supply water to the newly founded city. <<Today, there are a very few remains of any major buildings from this period around the fortifications except perhaps, Tuhfewala Gumbad, a ruined mosque and Chor Minar>>[1]. The subsequent major developments in the vicinity happened 50 years later during the Tughlaq dynasty when the silted-up reservoir was restored, and a madrasa, a mosque and a tomb was built, now known as the Hauz Khas Complex. <<Various monuments like the Nili Masjid and Bijai Mandal, built in the later years, all located around Siri, testify to the fact that this area remained an important location for the next few centuries to come>>[2].

However since the Mughal era, the thrust of development moved away from Siri towards the north. Till the burst of urbanization in Delhi post-independence, the landscape around here remained predominantly rural and pastoral. Along these centuries, few village settlements grew next to these monuments such as Shahpur Jat around the remains of Siri, Hauz Khas next to Hauz-i-Khas water reservoir and Kalu Sarai close to Bijai Mandal. After independence, New Delhi began growing rapidly without any immaculate planning to accommodate refugee population and the government started acquiring farmlands. By the 1950s, AIIMS was one of the first institutions that was established here on Aurobindo Marg which connected Lutyens Delhi and Mehrauli.

While the city was growing, ASI formulated strict norms in the form of AMASR Act, 1958 in order to protect the various monuments of national importance. Simultaneously, in the early 1960s, Delhi Land Finance (DLF), a private company, developed Hauz Khas Enclave and Green Park (Guerrieri, 2017). Because of lack of any association with the monuments, structures like Nili Masjid, Chhoti Gumti and many more were not integrated with new developments. While the villages were earmarked as Lal Dora areas in the MPD and hence, were completely ignored by new developments, the green areas around Hauz-i-Khas and Siri Fort were identified as city greens and hence were

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[1] INTACH, 2012

[2] Ibid.

preserved. DDA continued to acquire land in the 1970s, more so after Delhi was declared as the host for Asian Games 1982. Following this, most farmland around Shahpur Jat was acquired in exchange for heavy compensation. Gradually, rentals became the source of income and the low-rise settlement converted into a vertical real estate, making the built fabric denser, more so due to the absence of building bye-laws for Lal Dora areas.

Built Heritage –The Tangible Resource

Aldo Rossi quotes "Historic artefacts are primary elements in the city that are persistent and related to the growth and evolution of the city" (Rossi, 1982) and that clearly reiterates the value of built heritage. The list of built heritage identified in the study precinct, as per INTACH listing includes all the historic monuments, a total of 56 listed heritage buildings. 35 of these are protected by ASI and the remaining are maintained by MCD.

Fig.2 – Hauz Khas Enclave Precinct (New Delhi, India). Major listed monuments.

As Tweed points out, such identification of built heritage is narrow and relies on conventional conceptions of architectural and historical value and the protection of these listed individual buildings and monuments is rarely a problem, as these are addressed directly by existing legislation (Tweed, Sutherland, 2007). Sadly, MPD 2021 briefly identifies urban villages as heritage, but till date has not developed any bye-laws that can protect these zones and control the urbanisation. <<These 'urban fragments' often epitomise a unique population density, historic nature, street pattern or other urban morphological or cultural feature. They provide the context in which the more obvious heritage assets are located, but should not be treated as mere context, because it is often the ensemble of objects and their context that create value>>[3]. The book, The Image of the City establishes why a community's perception of its urban surroundings are important: 'Every citizen has had long associations with some part of his city, and his image is soaked in memories and meanings' (Lynch, 1960).

Community & Association –The Intangible Resource

Community in Webster's dictionary is defined as "people with common interests living in a particular area" or "a body of persons having a common history or common social, economic, and political interests". Public participation is a collaborative process in which people are involved in the decision-making and association to a place, a communal living, both bring a sense of identity which is a very crucial aspect for this process. According to Keyes' analysis, a person's sense of belonging is one of the components attributed to the creation of "social integration" (Keyes, 1998).

Fig.3 –Green Park (New Delhi, India). Chhoti Gumti & Dadi ka Gumbad, Places for the Community (INTACH)

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[3] Tweed, Sutherland, 2007

<<As there is a growing recognition of the link between cultural heritage and social well-being, the call for more public participation in preservation practice is gaining momentum>>[4]. The MPD too clearly recognises that built heritage of Delhi needs to be protected and nourished by all citizens and passed onto future generations, for which involvement of community is very essential, but currently, there are hardly any mechanisms that can effectively engage people.

Stakeholders & Public Participation

The first step for participatory program is to identify, prioritize and map local stakeholders (individuals or groups). In our area, these are the elected village heads, RWAs of neighbourhoods, institutions and corporates, markets associations and other social groups, who then engage with government experts to voice their opinions and be a part in the overall decision-making. The other tools for community engagement are area mapping & documentation, planning city development strategies along with SWOT (Bandarin, Oers, 2012), making local area plans, all to be prepared as part of the heritage outreach programme, both for development of the area and preservation of the heritage.

The paper is hence a case in exploring models for sustainable urban development that is in complete response to the context and aims in preserving the collective memory of heritage precincts as well as creating new values.

Case Study: Community-driven Heritage Engagement Model

St+Art India is a non-profit organisation which works with a community of artists who engage with the public realm through street art that helps reclaim public spaces. The main objective of the foundation is to make public spaces more vibrant and interactive for people which is primarily achieved by engaging the immediate community. Formed in 2014, the site of their first art project happened to be Shahpur Jat.

Fig.4 –Shahpur Jat (New Delhi, India). Impact of St+Art India's work (St+Art India)

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[4] Chan, 2016.

Today while most peripheral plots and some along the main streets are occupied by high-end fashion boutiques and cafes, on the inside, the village is still primarily residential with few small enterprises. As per Akshat Nauriyal, these aspects provided St+Art India with a very interesting space for an art intervention in a high-density area which is also easily navigable by foot, has a sense of community and is also a crucial part of our built heritage.

Permissions were sought both from the government and the building owners by going around the village and showing mock-ups of how the walls would look with the proposed artworks. The impact of the experiment has been multi-faceted and has happened at various levels. At the local level, it has led to an increased sense of community pride and ownership of their surroundings. The first artwork was a mural of a cat by Indian artist Anpu and as per the residents, it quickly became a recognized landmark, fulfilling the lack of signage within the community. At the city level, the idea to get people to explore Shahpur Jat and experience the real essence of the neighbourhood has been achieved to quite an extent. Overall, the project has helped the city create newer associations with this urban village.

Design Proposal: Heritage Integration Model

The site is a perfect case for demonstrating ways how to achieve urban regeneration of the built heritage and to give future proposal, for an area that is under gradual transformation, more so, due to the introduction of metro along Aurobindo Marg, the focus of our design intervention.

As the study revealed, the face of Green Park along the main north-south artery is gradually changing functionally from residential to commercial built-use further catalysed by the metro corridor and the TOD guidelines. So the design proposed to give this transformation a planned direction, while constantly keeping in mind the potential of the artery as well as sanctity of the neighbourhood behind, hence trying to maintain a balance between the city and the neighbourhood. This was achieved through firstly, providing transition zones of mixed use between city level commercial along Aurobindo Marg and the purely residential nature of Green Park. The second important strategy to achieve the balance was unlocking spaces in between to provide the public realm and this is where the existing built heritage played an important part since the monuments were used to create an integrated public space network.
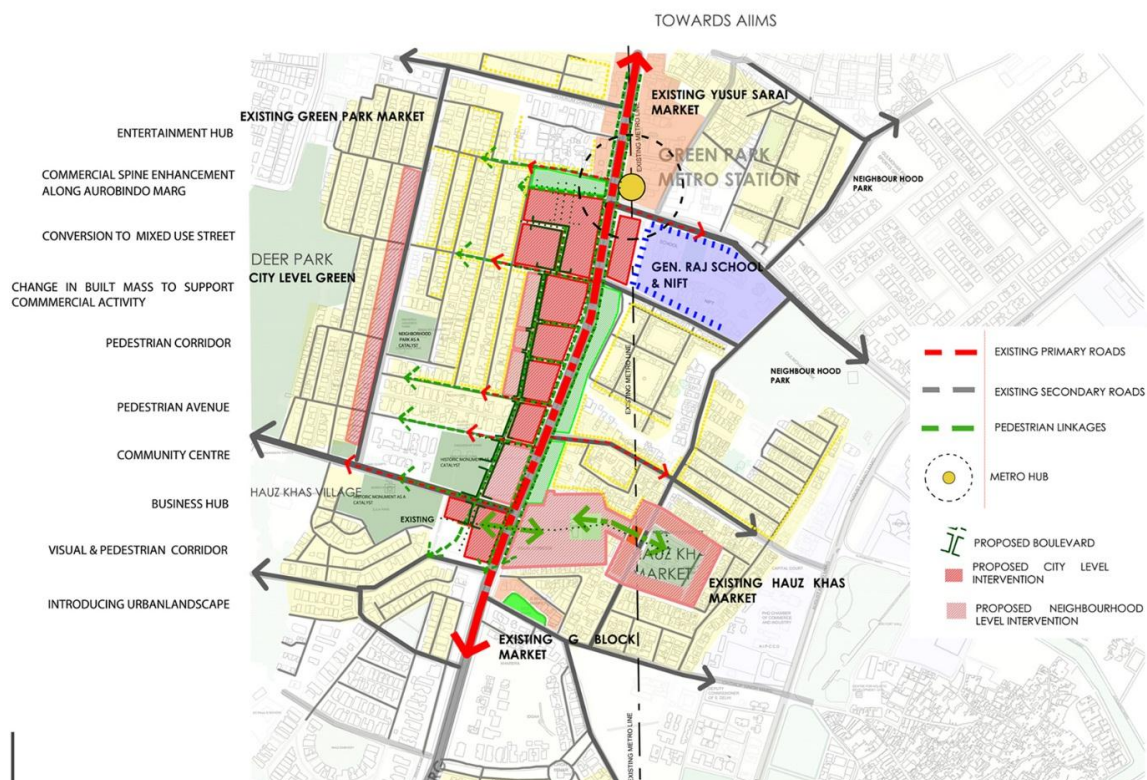

Fig.5 –Structure Plan, Heritage Integration Model

Conclusion

As Dr. A.G.K. Menon quoted "Conservation in India is at a cross roads. It can provide the impetus and ideology for a conservation-oriented development policy">>[5]. A planning strategy needs to be developed that looks at monuments in the contemporary part of the city. Coordination among various authorities and organisations is required for integration of heritage planning and conservation, so that heritage becomes a resource of development than becoming a constraint. Bottom-up approach is needed to prepare both, local area/ zonal development plans as well as toolkits and guidelines that control and guide growth. The common perception is that conservation is deterrent to development and we need to change this attitude so that the community begins to take ownership of built heritage rather than feeling alienated towards it.

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Biography

Nidhi Dandona is an architect, urban designer, Associate Professor with M.Arch from SPA (Urban Design). She is one of the director's at RDA, supervising design and urban conservation projects and has gained her work experience with Prof. Ram Sharma and Dr. Priyaleen Singh. Nidhi is currently the program head of M.Arch Urban Design at Sushant School, Gurgaon with keen interest in conservation of lost spaces and urban development around monuments.

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[5] Menon, 1989

Manisha Balani is the Founder and Principal Architect of USDP Architects, Urban +Space Design Partnership, based in Gurgaon and is a visiting faculty in the Department of Urban Design at SSAA, Ansal University. She has previously worked with DADA Partners in Gurgaon and has seven years of work experience. Having an M.Arch. in Urban Design, Manisha has deep interests in urban issues and the future of urbanisation in our cities.