Fading Urban Memories: Status of Conservation of Historic Samasthan/Zamindari Palaces in Small & Medium Town Master Plans in Telangana, India

Vasanta Sobha TURAGA, Vasaamaha Consultants, India

Abstract

'Public memories' are an important aspect in preserving a place's culture and heritage. Actions of the government and society many times define/redefine identities of places, impacting collective memory of people in perceiving places. Conscious efforts are required to make and keep public memories alive. Insensitive and uninformed Urban Planning can lead to erasing history and heritage not just physically but from public memories as well. This Paper discusses the issues of Fading Urban Memories by taking case studies of two historic towns in the South Indian State of Telangana.

Most of the Small & Medium Towns in Telangana, India, developed over the last two centuries from their historic core areas of the Capitals of erstwhile Samsthans/Zamindaris, land revenue administration units/sub-regional authorities under the British and the Princely States' Rules in India till Independence in 1947. These Samsthans/Zamindars/ Jagirdars were 'Chieftains' of their own territories and ruled from 'Palaces' located in their Capital city/town. The palaces and historic areas of old Samasthan/Zamindari settlements represent local histories whose significance, memory, heritage needs to be preserved for posterity.

Gadwa and Wanaparthi were two such towns, which developed mid-17 Century onwards becoming present day Municipalities of different Grades. The Department of Town and Country Planning, Govt. Of Telangana, prepares Master Plans for development of Municipalities. The surviving Fort/Palaces is marked by their present land use in the development plans, unrecognized for their heritage status, thus posing threat to heritage being erased from collective Urban memory.

The case studies presented in this paper are from the ongoing doctoral research work being done by the author at School of Planning and Architecture, Jawaharlal Nehru Architecture and Fine Arts University, Hyderabad, on the topic of 'Planning for Conservation of Samasthan/Zamindari Palaces of Telangana and Andhra Pradesh'.

Keywords

Historic Cities Conservation, Heritage Planning, Inner Cities, Public Memories, Telangana, Samsthans & Zamindaris.

1. Introduction :

'Public memory refers to the ongoing choices made when a group of people (typically, a nation) remembers a particular part of its history, highlights that part of history within a container available for everyone to experience, and locates that container within a social, cultural, and political context' - The SAGE Encyclopedia of Communication Research Methods, 2017, Online.

'Public memories' are an important aspect in preserving a place's culture and heritage. Actions of the government and society many times define/redefine identities of places impacting collective memory of people in perceiving places. Conscious efforts are required to make and keep public memories alive.

India has witnessed such definitive actions by Government and Society in the last few decades in redefining Identities, especially those which were altered under the Colonial rule. The names of three of the major metropolitan cities are reverted to their pre-colonial names viz, Calcutta, Bombay and Madras are now called Kolkata, Mumbai and Chennai once again. And smaller cities followed as Allahabad is now called Prayagraj, Pondicherry as Puducherry, Gurgaon as Gurugram etc.

Discussions and debates keep happening across India and the world, when place histories, cultures, identities are desired to be changed. Places and areas within the cities, whether Connaught place in the Capital of New Delhi should be called Rajiv Chowk; if or not statues, memories of a particular historical controversial person should be retained or removed, similar to the protests that occurred recently in England.

While these situations are attempts to change course of history and redefine identity through conscious decisions, uninformed urban planning can cause long-term harm of erasing local histories and heritage of significance from memories of people, and can disconnect future generations from their own roots in the long-term.

This Paper discusses the issues of Fading Urban Memories by taking case studies of two historic towns of Gadwal and Wanaparthy in the South Indian State of Telangana. The Department of Town and Country Planning, Govt. Of Telangana, prepares Master Plans for development of these towns which developed mid-17 Century onwards becoming present day Municipalities of different Grades. The surviving Fort/Palaces is marked by their present land use in the development plans, unrecognized for their heritage status, thus posing threat to heritage being erased from collective Urban memory.

This Paper is presented in the following structure:

The Historical and Planning Context is given in Section 2 of this Paper

In Section 3, a brief on the Methodology adopted for conducting the on-going Doctoral research work, from which the case studies are taken to discuss issues relevant to the Present Paper

Selected two Case Studies are presented in Section 4

Research Results, Discussions and Conclusions are provided in Sections 5 to 7 followed by References.

2. Background:

2.1 Overview of Heritage Conservation and Urban Planning in India

India adopts a three-tier legal system for preserving monuments and heritage at National, State and Local levels. Comprehensive legislations exist along with well-made institutions of the Archaeological Survey of India and State Level Archaeology Departments with staff and budgets exist for conservation and maintenance of National and State level Monuments.

Conservation of heritage of 'Local' Level importance is a relatively recent phenomenon in India, is made a subject of the urban/rural local governing bodies ie., Urban Development Authorities, Municipal Corporations and Municipalities are expected to take up Listing and Conservation of Urban Heritage in their respective jurisdictions, incorporating Conservation policies, programmes and guidelines in statutory Master/Development Plans.

Urban Heritage listing is mostly taken up by bigger metropolitan cities in India. Hyderabad, the capital of Telangana, one of the five States in southern India, was one of the first cities to have taken up heritage listing as early as 1981 and notification issued in 1995/1998. But beyond Hyderabad heritage conservation is almost a non-starter in other smaller and medium cities and towns which have had rich historical past and surviving heritage. The two towns of Gadwal and Wanaparthy in the State of Telangana are taken as Case Studies to demonstrate the historical background, their status in Master Plans and the harm of losing heritage physically and from memory.

2.2 Case Studies- Historical Background

Prior to Independence in 1947, two-thirds of Indian territory was under British Rule and the remaining one-third under the rule of 'Princely States'. The present State of Telangana was a part of one such Princely State 'Hyderabad' under the Nizam of Hyderabad. Across India and in Nizam's Hyderabad State too, during the colonial period, land revenue administration systems were adopted, wherein sub-regional authorities called 'Zamindars', 'Samsthans', 'Rajas', 'Jagirdars' or any other such title, ruled/administered demarcated jurisdictions under the overall rule of the British or Nizam.

The Case Study towns of Gadwal and Wanaparthi represent such Capital Towns of the Samsthans/Zamindaris, which developed from mid-17th Century to become Small and Medium Towns and Municipalities of different Grades, whose Master Plans are prepared by the Department of Town and Country Planning, Government of Telangana.

2.3 Literature and Applied Research relevant for the subject of the Paper- Overview

As the topic of Doctoral research work is related to heritage, the literature review covered study of historical, archival material available in English and native language of Telugu. Old records of the British and Nizam government were referred to. Extensive field work was conducted for study of architecture and assessment of present condition. Existing Master Plans, Development Plans have been studied sourced from different Urban Development Authorities, Municipal Corporations and Municipalities applicable to Telangana and Andhra Pradesh, the geographical region of the Doctoral work. The study and Research work taken up by the author pertaining to Planning for Conservation of Palaces of Samsthans/Zamindaries and

particularly of the states of Telangana and Andhra Pradesh, is in a way a first of its kind and so, literature review is taken up by multi-disciplinary approach, borrowing findings and knowledge from fields of history, architecture, conservation and urban planning

3. Methodology- Doctoral Work and Present Paper-

The case studies presented in this paper are from the ongoing doctoral research work being done by the author at School of Planning and Architecture, Jawaharlal Nehru Architecture and Fine Arts University, Hyderabad, on the topic of 'Planning for Conservation of Samasthan/Zamindari Palaces of Telangana and Andhra Pradesh'.

The aim of this Doctoral work is to survey the Heritage Status and State of Preservation of historically important Samasthan and Zamindari Palaces in Telangana and Andhra Pradesh, study the influencing factors and dimensions of ownership and management, and propose dovetailing strategies for conservation of 'unprotected' heritage in the existing planning and development contexts.

As Samsthans/Zamindaris were land revenue administration units covering towns and villages across two State of Telangana and Andhra Pradesh, the initial part of study focused on listing of historic villages and towns and later identifying the palaces in the capital towns of the erstwhile Zamindaries/ Samsthans. The assessment of present condition of the historic palaces in existing planning and development contexts, Master Plans of select Case Studies are studied and analyzed, including the two historic towns of Gadwal, and Wanaparthy being presented here.

Among many aspects of study such as history, architecture and present condition of historic palace buildings, one of the main criteria is study of Master Plan context and development policies that apply to the sites of palaces, their present land uses etc. Whether or not 'heritage' status is recognized and marked on the Master Plan land uses was considered a key factor in the state of preservation of the selected historic palaces. This particular part of research is presented here to demonstrate 'uninformed' urban planning that is insensitive to 'heritage' recognition and preservation.

Figure 1: Broad Research Methodology of Doctoral Research Work- Parts Relevant to this Paper covering towns and villages are highlighted in the box

4. Case Studies:

The two Case Studies selected are Gadwal and Wanaparthy, located south of Capital City of Hyderabad in the State of Telangana.

4.1 Gadwal

Gadwal Samsthan was one of the important sub-ordinate kingdoms and vassal of the Nizam of Hyderabad. Palaces and buildings were built within ancient fort walls with moats and gates in the 17th century by Peda Soma Bhupala. The fort complex, partly in ruinous condition, at present consists of three temples and an educational institution. Despite its poor condition, the fort still has glimpses of its former grandeur and architectural beauty with gates and bastions.

Figures 2-4: Gadwal Fort Architecture – Temples and Historic Structures – Images (Author)

Heritage Status: Gadwal Fort is a State Protected Monument under the Telangana State Heritage Authority

Present Use: Temples and a functioning Government school.

Present Condition: A few of the historical buildings have been demolished.

Gadwal Town, located at about 200km south of the State Capital, Hyderabad is at present

- District Headquarters of Jogulamba Gadwal District
- Grade 3 Municipality
- Population of about 60 thousand persons. (Estimated, 2020)

Figures 5-7: Gadwal Fort, Gadwal Town, Telangana- Location on Google Earth Image, History, Photographs and Details of Municipality – Plates prepared with material from different sources (mentioned), Internet and field work - from Author's Doctoral research work.

4.2 Wanaparthy

The Wanaparthy Palace, one of the triumvirate of important Samsthanams in the region, is a regal structure in the heart of Wanaparthy, a bustling town in Telangana State. Wanaparthy Samsthanam traces its history back to 14th century after the Kakatiya kingdom declined.

The present double storied building was built in the 18th-19th Centuries in the Colonial Style. The campus with the main palace building, historic gate, an old well and other structures- was donated to the Government after Indian Independence in 1947.

Figures 8-10: Wanaparthy Palace Architecture – Palace, Old well and Historic Structures
- Images (Internet and Author)

Heritage Status: Wanaparthi Palace has no statutory heritage status

Present Use: Polytechnic College

Present Condition: Fairly in good condition.

Wanaparthi Town, located at about 150km south of the State Capital, Hyderabad is at present

- District Headquarters of Wanaparthi District
- Grade 3 Municipality
- Population of about 100 thousand persons. (Estimated, 2020)

Figures 11-13: Wanaparthi, Telangana- Location on Google Earth image, History, Photographs and Details of Municipality – Plates prepared with material from different sources (mentioned), Internet and field work - from Author's Doctoral research work

5. Research Results

5.1 Master Plans for Cities and Towns in India – Heritage Sector

In India, 'Master Plans' are prepared for Cities and Towns, which are '*statutory instruments for controlling, directing and promoting sound and rational development and redevelopment of an urban area with a view to achieving maximum economic, social and aesthetic benefits. The Master plans are vision documents giving perspective of 20 to 25 years keeping in view the future growth of population, economic development potential and ecological improvements likely to come up during the plan period*'

In Telangana and most of the other States of India, the Master Plans for Small and Medium Towns are prepared by the Department of the Director of Town and Country Planning. Urban and Regional Development Plans Formulation and Implementation (URDPFI) and other Guidelines issued by the Offices and Ministry of Urban Development, Government of India specify in detail the objectives, priorities that need to be included in Master Plans and Development Plans prepared for different sizes of towns in areas, population and as per geographical, topographical locations. Heritage and Environment sectors are listed to be included in surveys and proposals of Master Plans.

5.2 Master Plan of Case Study Towns of Gadwal and Wanaparthy

Details of towns and palaces of two historic towns of **Gadwal and Wanaparthy**, their Location, History, Photographs and Details of Municipalities are given in the plates

The Master Plans prepared by the Director of Town and Country Planning, Government of Telangana are studied and shown here with existing/proposed land-use colour coding

Figures 14-15 show Master Plans of entire towns and Figure 16-17 show the sites of the historic palaces of Gadwal and Wanaparthy. It can be seen that the two palaces, in spite of their historical significance and architectural heritage are marked by their present land use in the Master Plan as Public/Semi Public sites (as Institutions) and not as Heritage Sites.

Figures 14-15: Master Plans of Gadwal and Wanaparthy Towns – with Land use colour coding – Source- DTCP, Govt of Telangana

Figures 16-17: Sites of Historic Palaces highlighted in the Master Plans of Gadwal and Wanaparthi Towns – showing Land use colour indication of Public/Semi-Public – Source- DTCP, Govt of Telangana

6. Discussion on Research Outcomes

Heritage conservation policies and institutions in India are made parallel to mainstream development laws and agencies. Conservation and development organisations and departments work on separate and sometimes mutually contradictory goals, which act in a detrimental way for protection of heritage conservation. There is a need to integrate and dovetail heritage conservation exercises into mainstream development policies and works, for effective, sustainable, long-term protection & upkeep of heritage sites.

6.1 Heritage Conservation and Development Planning

Heritage Conservation Perspective: Heritage conservation focuses by theory and definition on the 'values' that the heritage signifies, assessed in terms of architectural, historical, archaeological, associative, social etc, (Mason and Avrami, 2000) which are usually in non-economic, non-fiscal terms. Heritage that has one or more of these values is then 'listed' and designated with a 'protection' status. Regulations are framed, guiding preservation, regulating development and promoting conservation to preserve antiquity and to restore historic building fabric in all authenticity in form, use and material. There are trends viewing the heritage properties as 'assets' and 'resources' for development, especially for adaptive reuse and tourism development. (*Global Report on Culture for Sustainable Urban Development*, 2016)

Development Perspective: Heritage sites, located mostly in the inner core of cities – as originating and growing spatially from their historic centres – occupy prime city centre lands and are seen as a hindrance for speedier development of cities. Redevelopment, optimal utilisation of land, redensification, upgrade of infrastructure and services etc and other development options used for betterment of cities are considered threats against heritage conservation. (PEARL Compendium, 2015)

Conflict on Ground: It is to say here that Heritage conservation policies and institutions are focused on value-based heritage preservation, in spirit and sentiment, form and material. Heritage conservation and development priorities often collide on ground, at the site and city levels. From either side of the board, conservation and development specialists see threat & constraints from the other (Palumbo, Gaetano, 2000)

Most of the times, it could just be a point of view as to how much value one gives to heritage conservation versus development. But often, the position of heritage when reviewed in the existing land market situation could make conservation a non-viable option too, which should not be undermined.

Heritage sites and structures, when positioned in the present planning and development planning scenario in cities and villages and assessed for within the existing legal, physical, spatial, environmental, infrastructure, social and economic systems, are likely to provide different conservation and development options for the government and the owners.

6.2 Role of Government and Local Bodies:

As of date, the role of the government at the Central and State Levels is limited to protection, conservation and upkeep of a few thousands of Protected Monuments across States. These Protected Monuments in almost all the cases are owned by the government and have establishments of various levels of archaeology departments taking care of them.

For the sites 'Listed' by different ULBs across the country, consisting of sites of both public and private ownership, the government has been, in most places, categorically distancing itself in either financing or taking up the repairs and restoration of the Listed sites, making it the responsibility of owners. Because of the government's stand, conservation action in India is incidental and sporadic.

In the scenario of government's stance towards supporting and taking responsibility of repairs and maintenance of Listed heritage properties and no role at all in the case of unprotected, unlisted historical sites, the fate and future of heritage sites is left to the mercy of the property owners.

6.3 Constitutional Rights of Property and Ownership:

When a heritage property is not 'Protected' or 'Listed' by any Statutory 'Heritage' Status and brought under conservation policy and regulations, the owners of historic sites are entitled by the Constitutional Rights of Property and Ownership.

All citizens of India by Article 19 (1) of Constitution of India have the right (f) to acquire, hold and dispose of property (Constitution of India, 1949). It means that land and building owners are entitled by the Constitution the right to own, use and build which also, in a way includes rights to modify, demolish and rebuild on the site, leading to damage to or loss of heritage. By ownership laws, there is no rule binding on owners to preserve and conserve heritage properties, unless notified by heritage regulations.

Article 19 (5) also states that 'Nothing in the above clauses shall prevent the state from making any laws in the interest of the general public', giving authority to state to make laws, policies which may include for heritage protection and development regulations.

6.4 Absence of Heritage Recognition in Master Plans – Risk to Heritage

In the absence of a compelling law and heritage regulations, personal sentiment or an inclination for preservation of antiquity, owners look forward to recycling of their historic properties, by redevelopment options which would increase the FSI, usable area and financial flow and start a new lifecycle of the building with longer lifespan. Inadequate conservation laws will prove detrimental to heritage conservation, unless streamlined with development options.

The implications of non-recognition in Master Plan is for Heritage has the risk of demolition, mis-use and non-compliance to heritage conservation methods of repair and maintenance

6.4 Absence of Heritage Recognition in Master Plans – Identity and Public Memories

Besides the direct implications on physical future of heritage properties, the non-recognition of Heritage and non-acknowledgements of history and culture of region in the Master Plans or Government Policies, will erase from the memories of public, especially the younger and next generations to come.

7. Concluding remarks

History, Culture and Heritage need to be preserved and promoted as integral part of development processes and plans. Master Plans are legal documents dictating development for cities and towns. Unless heritage is recognized in the Master/Development Plans, the conflicts on ground continue giving scope for damage and demolition of heritage.

The erstwhile Samasthan/Zamindari Towns of Telangana represent local histories and architecture, which needs to be told, studied and remembered by local communities of present and future generations. Not identifying heritage by its name and historical significance by government policies and development laws of land ie., Master Plans will allow heritage to be destroyed not only physically but will get erased in the memories of people and urban communities. The change in development planning has to come now and urgently, before heritage is lost forever.

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