

# History and Conservation, As if people Matter

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A Summary of Papers and Sessions by Shweta Wagh

## Discussion Summary for the Symposium: An Introductory Note

Following is a summary of key arguments and discussions in the papers and sessions at the Symposium titled 'History and Conservation, As if People Matter' organized by The National Scientific Committee for Historic Towns and Villages, ICOMOS India, in collaboration with the CEPT University and the Sushant School of Architecture. The symposium was envisaged as a platform for reflections and discussions on architectural historiography and processes of architectural conservation in the Indian sub-continent with the intention of generating new ideas for architectural history and conservation. The theme note for the symposium contended that “discourses have become 'expert oriented' and have “invariably subordinated the complex experiences of ordinary people.” There would be an attempt “to address this dislocation by focusing attention on people-centric approaches.”

The symposium consisted of six sessions, each of which addressed different themes such as Recording Documentation and Ways of Seeing, Conservation on the Ground, Communities and Conservation, Plural Histories, Difficult Questions and the Afterlife of Conservation.

What follows is a brief note on the objective / theme of every session, followed by a note on the key arguments / ideas of each paper presented in the session. The session summary then presents the various issues raised and discussion points of every session.

## Session 1: Recording/Documentation/ Ways of Seeing

Moderator for the session: Dr Gauri Bharat

Papers in this session reflected upon conventional ways of documenting and recording historic sites that tend to be centred around monuments and built heritage, while highlighting unconventional methods or approaches that explore other ways of seeing.

### Paper summaries: Highlighting the key arguments

**-Mellissa Smith, Nikita Shah and Mansi Shah** in their paper titled, *Mapping Common Voids, Ahmedabads Chowk Networks*, argued for the need to acknowledge and represent the 'social' alongside the built, in the mapping of urban space. They focussed on approaches to map and represent types of information that are not so easily recorded, and yet play a primary role in the formation, continuation and reproduction of spaces and networks in the city. To achieve this, they argue, the city or urban landscape must be viewed as a 'field,' rather than as a collection of buildings. They demonstrated how a combination of systematic and observational drawing methods could be used to study the social aspect of shared spaces using the case of chowks in the old city of Ahmedabad. Their mapping methods attempted to marry the 'physical' morphological aspects of the shared chowk spaces, with their uses, traces of inhabitation and occupation by communities.

**-Kaushik Kumar** in his paper *Defamiliarisation as a Tool for Preservation*, referred to Victor Shklovskys concept of 'defamiliarisation'- a technique of presenting familiar or habituated aspects of things, cultures or landscapes to the audience in an unfamiliar way, in order to change their perception and bring in fresh perspectives. He introduced the concept of 'vuja de' as an inversion of the notion of 'deja vu' which involves the sense of being in a place for the first time, although one has already been there before. It refers to the ability to 'see with new eyes' and observe things which may previously have gone un-noticed. He showed with the help of case studies how defamiliarisation could be used as a tool to establish a sense of 'vuja de' for the local inhabitants thus enhancing and heightening their sense of awareness. This in turn could renew their interest in both tangible as well as intangible aspects of heritage and become a motivation for conservation.

**-Vidhi Jobanputra** in her paper *Value assessments of Historic Fort Precincts of Mumbai* presented a

framework for assessing values of archaeological sites through a mapping and documentation of peoples perceptions and existing use of space. She described how historic forts in Mumbai are caught between functional redundancy and contemporary urban pressures of development. Over the years with the growth of the city around them, informal activities and habitation have slowly infiltrated into these areas, designated as restricted archaeological sites. According to her the new land usage and activities which are now a part of these fort precincts have given birth to new values and associations between communities in relation to these historic monuments. The framework she proposes involves a mapping of ground realities and a nuanced understanding of the spatial configuration and built form in relation to activities and perceptions of space.

**-Khushi Shah** in her paper *Standardisation of Heritage Documentation in India- Potential of the National Mission of Monuments and Antiques* reviewed the efforts of the National Mission of Monuments and Antiques (NMMA) at creating a database on heritage and antiques. She argued that information management was a critical step in the process to ensure that heritage records and documentation were securely stored in accessible formats for long term use sharing and dissemination as well as to support knowledge based decision-making for conservation interventions. She contended that although the efforts of the NMMA and the idea behind undertaking such an exercise were laudable, the mission had suffered due to lack of proper evaluation of the task at hand, a lack of clear policies for recording documentation and information management, a lack of data standards/standard terminologies and the lack or sustained/consistent efforts.

**-Rupali Yadav** in her paper *Visual Documentation of the Palace in the Eighteenth Century Murals of Kota*, spoke about the role of art and paintings as an important source of information and successful mode of documentation of historic events. She described how the murals that adorned the walls of the various chambers of Kota palace were not just decorative features, but were preconceived to be communication tools that recorded and disseminated key messages to varied audiences. According to her this method of documentation and dissemination proved to be particularly effective as it withstood the test of time, proving to be an unusual but extremely useful tool for historians in understanding the role of the palace as a centre of ceremony, decoding the beliefs of the Kota royals as well as understanding the complex relationship they shared with their subjects.

**-Priya Joseph** in her paper titled *Heritage of Building Material and Processes: Case of Mangalore Tiles and Fired Clay Elements by the Basel Mission*, argued that heritage conservation had only addressed buildings as a whole, while building components such as materials, techniques and processes of making them were seldom deemed important in heritage studies. By documenting the history of production of fired clay components, especially Mangalore tiles made by the Basel mission in 1865, she demonstrated how technologies and production processes did not develop in isolation but were an outcome of a complex set of influences. She argued that use, adaptation and processes of making building components could reveal just as much about a culture as tangible aspects such as the buildings themselves, and were integral to the understanding of the evolution of architecture of a region.

### **Session Summary: Issues raised and Discussion Points**

The following key concerns / questions regarding discourses, approaches and processes were raised during this session:

- 1) There is a need to adopt new ways of seeing, and new approaches to documentation to acknowledge and represent the social apart from the built. A focus on mapping intangible aspects requires understanding the built environment as a field or a set of as dynamic relationships, rather than as a collection of objects.
- 2) A few authors argued for the need to develop new tools and frameworks for mapping and understanding values and perceptions of communities towards heritage. This process is essential to conservation as it is these values that determine if a cultural asset is worthy of conservation or not. Any changes or shifts in values could either facilitate or hinder conservation efforts.
- 3) It is also essential to document intangible aspects such as a history of components, processes, and cultures of building apart from the buildings themselves. These play an important role in creating an understanding of the evolution of the architecture and history of a region, through an interchange with, or the influence of other cultures.
- 4) Apart from this there should be efforts to recognise unconventional sources of information such as historic art as a useful mode of documentation, or as a tool for understanding socio-political and cultural aspects of buildings, which could help in piecing together a larger historical narrative.

5) Finally there is also a need to standardise basic documentation procedures and formulate clear policies towards information management. This is critical step in order to ensure accessibility, long term use, sharing and dissemination as well as to support knowledge based decision-making in conservation processes.

## **Session 2: Conservation and Communities**

Moderator for the Session: Ms Suruchi Shah

Papers in this session challenged mainstream or 'expert oriented' approaches and processes which often neglect socio-cultural aspects such as associations of communities with historic places, as also the role they play in the safeguarding of heritage.

### **Paper Summaries: Highlighting the Key Arguments**

**Katheeja Talha** in her paper titled, *On the life of a neighbourhood*, described how Triplicane's many histories so intricately tied to the formation of the secular Tamil identity are often ignored. Its proximity to the amenities of the city have made Triplicane a home to a range of communities who have immigrated here from across the former Madras presidency. Contained in this dense neighbourhood are many histories ranging from the deeply personal and spiritual to the political. However, its relative anonymity in English speaking academic circles, heritage and mainstream media have resulted in its erasure from the collective imagination of the city. The paper moves away from these popular narratives about Triplicane from both the heritage professional and mainstream media to try and understand the neighbourhood and its public life through local narratives and oral accounts of a diverse set of residents.

**Sharmishta Agarwal** in her paper *Local Communities and Built Heritage* argued for the need to imbibe a people centred, planet sensitive urban agenda. Using case studies such as Pondicherry, Muziris and Nizamuddin Basti as illustrations, she proposed an integrated approach to conservation with the adoption of culture sensitive urban strategies as a means to re-humanise the city. She argued that by moving beyond preservation and protection, heritage could play a more assertive role in proposing visions and strategies for a sustainable future of cities. For this, conservation would need to move beyond a narrow agenda of promoting preservation and tourism by integrating a component of community development. This would entail improving sanitation, services, social infrastructure and providing livelihood opportunities. She also advocated reinforcing the role of the community as a key participant/stakeholder in shaping the future.

**Niyati Jigyasu** in her paper *Whose Heritage is it?* argued that although conservation from the people's perspective has been part of theoretical discourses both nationally and internationally it is difficult to implement in actual sites. Since tourism is generally a key driver for heritage management and regeneration processes, lesser known community based heritage assets as well as intangible social and economic dimensions of heritage precincts that are not directly connected with tourism are often sidelined. Interventions to facilitate tourism sometimes also adversely affect or transform the original functioning of precincts and their socio-economic character. The living heritage approach is based on the notion of continuity. To make conservation more people centric, one would need to empower the communities to set the agenda and be directly involved in decisions related to conservation processes.

**Tejashree Lakras** in her paper *Community-The Real Heritage Custodian- The Case of the Pokhran Talao Area of Kalyan City* argued for a place specific documentation process which entails a detailed understanding of intangible aspects, local histories, peoples perceptions, the community's historic and contemporary activities makes a difference not only to the delineation of boundaries but is critical when it comes to drawing out guidelines for conservation. She observed that in case of the Pokhran talao area, a significant pilgrim site, boundaries between the tangible and the intangible, the open and the built, the private and public realm seemed to merge as the physical or built infrastructure of the precinct which included the temples, talaos, trees, paars, kunds, courtyards and chowks enabled and supported pilgrim related activity by providing temporary spaces for religious festivities, congregation, rest and stay.

### **Session Summary: Issues raised and Discussion Points**

The following key concerns / questions regarding discourses, approaches and processes were raised during this session:

- 1) Overall the papers in this session highlighted the need to address intangible dimensions which encompassed the use and local or place based associations of communities with tangible and physical aspects of built heritage.
- 2) A few papers highlighted the need to go beyond the aestheticisation and sanitisation of urban neighbourhoods, that ignore the needs of communities and often sideline or displace socio-cultural and economic dimensions of heritage places.
- 3) It was also suggested that the narrow agenda of preservation and tourism development needs to be accompanied with the recognition and enhancement of existing uses, facilitation of community development and improvement of the social infrastructure of heritage sites and precincts.
- 4) Reiterating the question 'Conservation for Whom?' some of the presenters advocated an emphasis on and foregrounding of local and community based values and the adoption of people-centric approaches entailing local stewardship and participation, thus reinforcing the role of the community as a key stakeholder in the conservation process.
- 5) It was implied that a move towards community based and people-centric approaches would also involve a methodological shift towards alternative place based approaches, to the understanding and interpretation of history. This would require a shift from mainstream narratives to local narratives based on oral history accounts which could shed light on the public and social life in neighbourhoods of the city.

### **Paper Session 3: Conservation on Ground**

Moderator for the session: Ms Parul Munjal

Papers under this theme highlighted the ground realities of conservation, by attempting to understand and evaluate the translation of existing theoretical discourses into practice thus shaping directions for further action and research.

#### **Paper Summaries: Highlighting the Key Arguments**

**-Pratyusha Ravi Nilkanthan** in her paper titled *The Political Narrative of Puducherry Heritage, Why the French heritage emerges stronger than Tamil Heritage* highlighted the distinction and continuing segregation between the colonial and native parts of the port town of Puducherry both in terms of the physical characteristic of its built fabric as well as contrasting approaches towards conservation and development in these two distinct areas of the town. She observed that while the French Heritage which forms a popular tourist attraction is frozen in time, often by replication though the creation of imitations, the Tamil part of the town is conspicuous by its seeming lack of any development control regulations. The paper refers to attempts at image-making towards tourist promotion based on a biased view of what constitutes heritage. It also brings up the issue of authenticity through a discussion on heritage buildings and their replicas or fakes.

**Swapna Kothari** in her paper titled, *Revisiting Basic Challenges* undertook a critical reflection on the existing parochial nature of the heritage profession which according to her is in a dire need of attitudinal change. Using case studies she commented on the present rigid approach to the conservation of sites, which were based on an idealisation of the past rather than understanding of these as living systems. According to her, inherent ethical and disciplinary restrictions need to be re-evaluated to develop more specific contextual approaches. Due to top down processes and a lack of community engagement, knowledge does not trickle down to where it really matters. She advocates a systematic breakdown of boundaries between disciplines accompanied by a dialogue between officials, conservators and communities. This needs to be accompanied by a breakdown of status hierarchies with a more discursive nature of practice that is receptive of new ideas.

**Ms Monica Esteves Reis** in her paper titled *Application of Hio An Protocols to the PRAHA Project* (*paper missing from the folder*)

#### **Session Summary: Issues raised and Discussion Points**

The following key concerns / questions regarding discourses, approaches and processes were raised during this session:

- 1) Papers in this session addressed the disciplinary challenge concerning the tendency to idealise the past and disconnect it from contemporary realities. This often results in tendencies such as imitation, replication or the creation of fakes, bringing forth the question of authenticity with regards to conservation initiatives.

2) The presenters also argued that this kind of idealisation often results in a failure to recognise and understand conservation areas or sites as living systems, thus limiting the practice of conservation to superficial efforts at image making and beautification, often exacerbating conflicts at heritage sites.

3) Concerns were also raised with respect to the rigid hierarchical and bureaucratic systems that continue to plague the practice of conservation as well as traditional discourses on ethics and disciplinary restrictions which need to be re-evaluated to develop more specific contextual as well as multidisciplinary approaches.

## **Session 4: Plural Histories:**

Moderator for the session: Dr Gauri Bharat

Drawing largely from post colonial theory, papers under this theme examined the historiography of the heritage discourse, challenging the singularity of dominant narratives and imaginations of history and heritage, while exploring alternative processes which foregrounded other architectural/urban histories,

### **Paper Summaries: Highlighting the Key Arguments**

-**Ginella George** in her paper titled *Other Histories, Local narratives and the Meaning of Heritage* argued that there is a need to rethink ways in which history can be employed in order to understand heritage. Citing the examples of Jewish and Chinese communities in Mumbai, she attempted to draw a distinction between academic historical narratives and more personal memories of space as they exist in local histories which includes lives lived out in particular localities, people and their relations with one another. She contended that individuals do not know the past singly but with other individuals through the knowledge that predecessors and contemporaries transmit to them which manifests in the form of collective memory. According to her Conservation needs to go beyond being a narrative of loss by drawing upon collective memory as a tool for conservation. This would allow a city to reinvent itself by finding new meanings in the present.

-**Seemantini Chaphalkar** in her paper titled *How to make Conservation Popular?* discussed how academic and scholarly histories tend to have a limited audience as they involve a selective interpretation of the past and foreground certain histories over others. As they focus on the elite, histories of common people are rarely acknowledged. History is thus confined to museums disconnected from contemporary lives of communities. She instead advocated alternative methods of documenting histories, based on popular and inclusive narratives which deviate from mainstream narratives. According to her an emphasis on local specificity, living traditions, popular personalities and sensationalised events would recreate a sense of local identity and reconnect people with their past. Through a discussion around experiences of heritage conservation in Solapur she demonstrated how stories could be employed as an effective tool to popularise conservation and inculcate a sense of belonging and a sustained interest of communities towards conservation efforts.

-**Arunima Shankar** in her paper titled *Demolition Drive 2017, Case of the Markets in Hyderabad*, argued how political and economic interests in the city play a role in the creation of 'heritage'. Referring to the case of markets in Hyderabad, she describes how certain localities or histories of the city are singled out and valued over others. Markets constitute intangible dimensions of the city's history, which vary according to location typology and function. Social and livelihood values are often undermined as aesthetic or visual attributes are prioritized while assessing their heritage significance. There is a conscious differentiation between markets that contribute to the tourism economy and others that don't. While the prior are commodified and also included in local heritage registers, the remaining are neglected, marginalised, classified as derelict properties and subsequently faced with demolition drives. In response to this vendors often allude to the 'heritage' value of buildings in an effort to resist demolitions and safeguard their livelihoods.

-**Sonali Dhanpal** in her paper titled, *Changing Perceptions of the Bungalow in the Trans-Local Context of Bangalore* argued the singular narrative of the bungalow as a global phenomenon, excluded many alternative or plural histories that co-produced the bungalow. Drawing from post-colonial critical theory, the paper laid an emphasis on local or indigenous agency and the need to acknowledge the role played by local populations as active agents in social and economic change. She argued for the contextualisation of the evolution of the bungalow as a building type in Bangalore. Historians have attributed the appropriation of the building type by the Indian elite to their desire to emulate the colonial lifestyle symbolised by the bungalow.

Contrary to this general view, the author argued that in the specific context of Bangalore the reasons for the appropriation of the bungalow varied and ranged from it being perceived as an anti-plague measure, a harbinger of health and sanitation, a capitalist investment or simply being a pragmatic choice.

**-Jasmine Saluja, Oormi Kapadia and Tapan Mittal** in their paper titled *McCluskiegunj: Imaginations of Urban histories and Collective Heritage* describe the cultural landscape of McCluskiegunj located in the pastoral landscape of the Chota Nagpur plateau. In the 1930's Anglo-Indians of British, Scottish, Irish and Portuguese descent from all over India gathered here to build their home, protect their identity, heritage and social status. The place symbolises a syncretic culture with the intertwining of the elite lifestyle of the Anglo-Indian community with the simple and arduous existence of the local tribal community. Outmigration of the anglo-Indian community in the aftermath of violence that took hold in the region led to its abandonment and impending ruin. Reviving this landscape would entail re-establishing associations with the past through the acknowledgement of multiple histories and imaginations, and involving changing relationships between the colonial elite and their subjects as also the relationships between people and the landscape.

### **Session Summary: Issues raised and Discussion Points**

The following key concerns / questions regarding discourses, approaches and processes were raised during this session:

- 1) Overall the papers under this theme argued for the recognition of the diversity of groups of people and stakeholders and a varying set of values and associations with historic environments. Each paper took on and addressed this theme using overlapping but slightly different positions or perspectives. The main strands of argument have been enumerated below.
- 2) One stand emphasised the importance of acknowledging multiple histories as opposed to singular narratives contended that much of the conservation discourse has been historically premised upon or underpinned by singular, often built form oriented narratives and needed instead to acknowledge the multiplicity of meanings and values associated with them.
- 3) Another strand which posited marginalised histories as against dominant narratives with the concern that as a result of processes based on conventional approaches to history writing and identification of heritage, (which predominantly laid an emphasis on historic and aesthetic considerations); certain histories of the city were singled out and valued over others.
- 4) Yet another strand of inquiry argued for an area specific contextual historical narrative in contrast to generalised universal narratives. It countered simplistic categorisations based on universal paradigms by drawing attention to the role played by local factors and indigenous agency which actively contributed to social and economic change.
- 5) While some papers were predominantly exploratory or analytical, a few others were also propositional, and by contrasting popular histories based on collective memories with scientific/academic approaches to history writing, managed to shift the focus from the past to the present and to the contemporary meaning or relevance of heritage.
- 6) Points raised during the discussion asked the question, "which or whose version of history should be deemed as relevant or legitimate in the absence of a scientific approach based on verified facts?" Concerns were raised regarding conflicts that were likely to emerge due to differences in perspectives in the understanding, of history.
- 7) Another point that emerged during the discussion was that identities are often connected to aspects such as power, the politics of space, and struggles over material resources in the city. There is also a need to exercise caution as concept such as 'collective memory' if appropriated for political ends could potentially lead to collectivist or majoritarian narratives that sometimes suppress marginal voices.
- 8) It was also pointed out that there was a prevailing tendency to essentialise cultures by objectifying or fossilising a certain way of life, thus disconnecting it from contemporary reality or a socio-political and historical understanding of change.

### **Session 5: Difficult questions**

Moderator for the session: Dr Jigna Desai

Papers under this theme focussed on the politics of history and heritage. While some involved an analysis of historiography in relation to institutions and power systems, others looked at heritage as a site of economic and political conflict, highlighting multiple claims and attempts towards the appropriation of both history and

heritage.

### **Paper Presentations: A Summary of Key Arguments**

**-Vishvesh Kandolkar and Pithamber Polsani** in their paper titled *Monumental Ruins of Post Colonial Goa*, draws on Stoler's conception of 'ruination' as a political project or process; to describe the contemporary nationalist post-colonial project and its ongoing undermining of Goan Catholic identity. The minority community has been targeted for its association with an imagined Portuguese imperial past. Just as historic ruins are rendered monumental and fossilized in time, Goa was projected as a pleasure periphery for India. Goan Catholic culture and architecture have become objectified in a way that people from the rest of India look upon churches and congregations through a tourist gaze. Countering the large numbers of tourists who visit monuments, the gathering of large crowds of locals during festivities is one of the many performances that serves to reclaim and reinforce Goan identity.

**-Rajat Ray's** paper *On Conservation and History, State of the Mind* involved a critical and discursive commentary on Indian historiography. His elaborate treatise delved into the various 'Histories of Indian Architecture' ranging from the 'canonical', the 'stylistic', 'the archaeological' 'the departmental' to the 'modern'. Through this investigation he highlighted how the colonial antiquarian construct of the history of Indian architecture and the practice of conservation had shaped the destiny of historic buildings and architectural traditions in India. The Conservation movement was itself a modern phenomenon based on Western influence, born out of a sense of nostalgia, and a selective valuation of fragments or residues of the past, thus reinforcing the dichotomy of the ancient and the modern. Today the opposition between conservation and development seems to have vanished as it has been usurped by both economic and political interests and is aligning with global trends.

**-Mahdieh Khajeh Piri** in her paper titled *Reconstruction of a Contested Historical Site through reconstruction of the past and memory the case of the Babri Masjid* drew attention to heritage in divided communities. According to her, buildings are canvasses on which social discourses are inscribed but conflicts arise due to different interpretations of the past. Aggressive forms of nationalism suppress the culture of minorities and monuments that symbolise these cultures, often become targets of acts of violence. Reconstruction in the aftermath of destruction is seen to play a key role in the process of reconciliation, but the fact that physical reconstruction must be accompanied by social transformation is often ignored. She posits "Forensic architecture" as an approach and research methodology to be used to analyse violations of human rights as they bear upon the built environment which includes buildings, cities or territories.

**-Sonal Mithal** in her paper titled *Looking the Other Way... According Agency to Heritage and People during Conflict* presents a case of the abandoned textile mills in Ahmedabad as heritage that has endured conflict due to economic vulnerability. A narrative that evokes sentiments of nostalgia and hope, attempts to obscure dispossession and exploitation in an urgency to assign the abandoned buildings with a function based value through revitalisation. In search of alternative narratives she employs techniques of bricolage- a piece by piece building of the micro-narratives of contemporary voices in order to rewrite the spatiality and materiality of the ruin. These stories reveal a new resurgence of life in the urban ruins which have been appropriated by informal practices such as networks of waste recycling, and a host of other ambiguous 'hostile' and 'anti-social' activities that have kept other urban dwellers as well as land-sharks at bay.

**-Mr Juzer Shabbir** in his paper titled *A Flight from Dante's Purgatory* describes how in the present day neoliberal context with exchange value prioritised over use value, urban historical landscapes are often reduced to the status of a commodity for tourist consumption. Contrary to monuments where history is alienated from life and lived experiences, living urban heritage which includes public streets, squares and markets, cannot be alienated from people and everyday life. He referred to the case of the Bhadra square in Ahmedabad. which local communities had claimed and used for their livelihood activities thus making it a part of their own histories. The tourism driven project to revitalise the square however reduced it to an idealised image, emptied of everyday life. He raised pertinent questions about historically marginalised communities in the city and their claims to its history and heritage.

### **Session Summary: Issues raised and Discussion Points**

The following key concerns / questions regarding discourses, approaches and processes were raised during this session:

- 1) In different ways each of the speakers asked the critical question “Which version of history and whose right to heritage should be acknowledged or considered?”
- 2) Through a critical reflection on the Historiography of Indian architecture and the ideologies and institutions that shaped processes of knowledge production as well as conservation, it was argued that according 'Heritage Status' to certain buildings based in a selective interpretation of the past, disconnected them from their own historical trajectories as well as ignored other micro-histories.
- 3) It was argued that although the conservation movement in India earlier assumed a combative posture of resistance to insensitive development and an erasure of history, over the years through the heritage narrative has often been employed as either a populist or political tool and is often aligned with development interests and global trends.
- 4) Some of the papers brought up the issue of how heritage, which is significant for a local community is often conceived of as a 'product' and objectified for the tourist gaze. They highlighted how this kind of appropriation of heritage for national or global consumption often undermined its local value.
- 5) A few papers suggested that conflicts often arise due to divergent interpretations of the past. Cultural hegemony operates through the creation of a dominant narrative and the appropriation of heritage through a suppression of minorities or marginalised voices. In reaction to this communities often make efforts to reassert their identities and attempt to reclaim their lost heritage.
- 6) There was a discussion on the role of practitioners while engaging with heritage faced with destruction due to political/economic conflict. It was argued that a sensitive evaluation of the situation with an understanding of the conflict and human rights violations should precede any kind of reconstruction or peacekeeping efforts.
- 7) In cases where the nature of conflict is economic and the exclusion of the community a probable consequence of heritage production, alternative approaches were proposed which accorded agency to heritage and the users or current occupants of such sites. Conservation was thus proposed as a tool of empowerment in the hands of people marginalised or oppressed by history, as an antithesis to political and economic appropriation.
- 8) While the discussions in the previous session on plural histories highlighted the importance of acknowledging multiplicities in the conceptualisation of history, this session raised some difficult questions and challenges, urging the academic or practitioner towards adopting a definitive stand or position.

## **Session 6: The AfterLife of History and Conservation**

Moderator for the session: Dr Parul Munjal

The papers under this session discussed the afterlife of conserved projects by examining how conservation projects shape, transform or in many cases end up erasing a community's relationship with their historic environment.

### **Paper presentations: A summary of key arguments**

**-Sylvie Dominique and Aishwarya Tipnis** in their paper titled *Empowering the common man for heritage conservation in Shahjahanabad, Case Study: Seth Ram Lal Khemka Haveli, Kashmere Gate* attempted to demonstrate an alternative process that reiterated that conservation was not just about buildings but about people and their stories related to these places. This particular case concerning an ancestral haveli in old Delhi was based on a thorough understanding of its historical and contemporary urban context as well as its social significance. The process entailed a collaborative dialogue between the owner, craftsmen and the designers highlighting the relevance of heritage to its residents as well as others. The haveli soon became an object of public interest, as every step of the documentation and conservation process was made available in the public domain, demystifying the process of conservation for practitioners and non practitioners.

**-Ravi Inderjit Singh and Mona Iyer** in their paper titled *Mainstreaming Conservation of Heritage Water Structures A Case Study of Batala*, highlights how the conservation interventions by the ASI for the restoration of Anarkali water tank ended up disconnecting it from an integrated system of channels and inlet points and also undermining its socio-ecological significance as a traditional water system. These water systems have multiple values associated with them which range from them being a source of water, recharge



aquifers, flood control devices, habitats for biodiversity, scenic places as well as being ecological commons which support a range of cultural and livelihood activities. Despite this there is a tendency to perceive them solely as monuments by conserving only their architectural and archaeological attributes. This calls for alternative approaches and governance systems integrated within the larger domain of urban planning.

**-Sankha Subhra Nath** in his paper, *Temporal way of Preserving Built Environment: A Case of two Temples in West Bengal* draws a comparison between processes of conservation in two temples in Bishnupur. One is a 'dead' monument subjected to institutionalised conservation efforts by the ASI, the second is an example of living heritage, kept alive through daily acts of worshipping and belief systems and associations of devotees. According to him the specialised, expert oriented process of architectural conservation conserves the shell of the building, but ignores its 'spirit' often transforming its original purpose and intention. This could manifest in the commoditisation of heritage converting it into either a product for the consumption of tourists or an object of academic research. He instead proposes a temporal approach to conservation as an alternative that attempts to reconnect the monuments to ordinary people.

**-Ms Manalee Nanavati** in her paper *Interpreting Conservation as a Method for Community Development based on the Works of Heritage Foundation of Pakistan* argues that conservation often produces museumised pieces of built objects that lie redundant in their surroundings having no relation to inhabitant communities. Referring to the case of post-disaster rehabilitation work in Pakistan she proposes a shift in the conception of conservation from being a one-time, act of heritage preservation, to a multidimensional approach, which can potentially facilitate the holistic development of a region and its inhabitant community. She advocates an approach to conservation as a participatory, people-centric process which could accommodate and guide temporal changes in vernacular settlements while developing the economy, technical ability and collective strength of the community.

### **Session Summary: Issues Raised and Discussion Points**

- 1) Overall the papers in this session argued that the perception of heritage assets as objects or monuments disconnected them from their larger socio-ecological contexts or institutional systems, undermine significant values and relationships. They proposed alternatives to ensure that these relationships were maintained during the afterlife of conservation projects.
- 2) Some of the papers pointed out how the lack of integrated approaches to the conservation often severed the connection of heritage assets with their environmental or urban setting as well as their larger socio-spatial landscape. They called for alternative approaches and governance systems that were holistic and integrated within the larger domain of urban planning and governance.
- 3) Other papers in this session also reflected on museumification efforts, which transformed heritage assets either into products for aesthetic consumption, or into objects of academic research frozen in time, devoid of their original use or purpose. They argued for the need to acknowledge the temporality of heritage assets, and their significance as living entities, which gradually transformed over time while retaining a continuity with the past.
- 4) A few papers also suggested that rather than conceiving of conservation as a one time act, it might be more relevant to conceive of it as a process of inhabiting, which could accommodate and guide temporal changes. They proposed a demystification and a democratisation of the conservation process making it more people centric, participatory, collaborative, and transparent.