



Built Heritage of Delhi A Technical Report by the Main Bhi Dilli Campaign



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Main Bhi Dilli is a people's campaign aiming to envision and enable a more inclusive city. It is a collective of civil society organisations, activists, researchers and others who work on diverse issues of housing, livelihood, gender and other rights. Visit www.mainbhidilli.com for more information on the campaign.

INTRODUCTION

Essentially a riverine valley amidst low-lying hills, Delhi has a rich history going back many thousands of years. Unlike most such cities though, Delhi has not had a historic core from which the city had grown into the surrounding countryside. For many political and cultural reasons, there have been multiple iterations of urbanisation in the region today identified as the National Capital Territory of Delhi. As a consequence, a rich array of heritage sites and archaeological remains may be found in the city. Much of this was identified and granted protected status by the Archaeological Survey of India in the first few decades of the twentieth century. However, due to the pressures of urbanisation this historical legacy often suffers from neglect and is, at times, under active threat of erasure. Therefore, there is an urgent need to mandate resident engagement with heritage sites and provide adequate civic services for their integration into citizens' lived experience of Delhi.

EXISTING SCENERIO

MPD 2021 notes the existence of 1208 historical monuments and sites in Delhi¹. Amongst these, 174 centrally protected. Out of these, 3 are World Heritage Sites and 10 are ticketed as structures of national importance. Most centrally protected monuments are under government ownership, and the Archaeological Survey of India (ASI) exercises exclusive jurisdiction over them. As per the *MPD 2021*, six heritage zones have also been identified in Delhi:

1. Walled City of Delhi, Shahjahanabad
2. Lutyen's Bungalow Zone (LBZ)
3. Nizamuddin and Humayun's Tomb Complex
4. Mehrauli Area
5. Vijay Mandal–Begampuri–Sarai Shahji–Lal Gumbad Complex
6. Chirag Delhi

Additionally, *MPD 2021* identifies the following three archaeological parks in Delhi:

1. Mehrauli Archaeological Park
2. Tughlaqabad Archaeological Park
3. Sultan Garhi Archaeological Park

The definition of heritage sites and structures is also ambiguous in the current legal regime: they have to be deemed of 'historical, archaeological, or artistic interest', but how these are to be defined have been left wide open to interpretation. Moreover, there are no provisions for listing contemporary buildings less than a hundred years old as heritage sites of importance. Consequently, Delhi's built heritage has been under severe risk of:

1. Land-grab
2. Aesthetically insensitive construction
3. Communalisation

Out of the centrally protected monuments, 15 have been identified by the National Monuments Authority (NMA) as under “severe pressure of urbanization”, 11 have been listed as “missing”, and 1 has been de-notified as no longer a monument of national importanceⁱⁱ.

Many other hundreds of structures not protected by the ASI have been notified by the Department of Archaeology, Government of NCT of Delhi (GNCTD) under its jurisdiction and also by the Delhi Building Bye-Laws under its heritage clause, e.g. the Rashtrapati Bhavan and the Central Vista. Along with ASI and Dept. of Archaeology, GNCTD, *MPD 2021* identifies NDMC, MCD, Cantonment Board, and DDA as the other government stakeholders in the protection of listed monuments. Significantly, only ASI and the Dept. of Archaeology, GNCTD can own heritage sites and structures: the remaining bodies can only act as caretakers as per provisions of central and state law. The municipalities control ‘heritage buildings’, but there are no clear bye-laws to comprehensively specify whether this control extends to just façade or to the structures in their entirety.

HOW DID WE GET HERE?

A series of acts over the past hundred years have defined the powers of the ASI. Those presently in operation are the Ancient Monuments and Archaeological Sites and Remains Act, 1958 and the Ancient Monuments and Archaeological Sites and Remains (Amendment and Validation) Act, 2010. Additionally, the Delhi Ancient and Historical Monuments and Archaeological Sites and Remains Act, 2004 grants powers to the Dept. of Archaeology, GNCTD. Considered in toto, these acts grant the central and state governments powers to:

1. notify structures and sites as protected monuments
2. take such monuments under public ownership
3. acquire and fence land in their vicinity
4. restrict public access and rights in monuments

The ASI, particularly, has a massive mandate, maintaining over three thousand protected monuments all over India, carrying out excavations in numerous dig sites, and operating over 46 museums. Its work, of late, has been complemented by establishment of the National Monuments Authority and the National Mission on Monuments and Antiquities, but its jurisdiction is still spread unevenly over urban, semi- and peri-urban, and rural areas and through planned and unauthorised settlements. Its budgetary allocations have not been wholly in sync with its expenses, and it has consistently faced capacity issues in carrying out its mandateⁱⁱⁱ. *MPD 2021* suggests that each local body/land owning agency “should formulate Special Development Plans for the conservation and improvement of listed heritage complexes and their appurtenant areas”, but it does not lay down any clear guidelines on how these plans are to be made and implemented^{iv}.

Significantly, the centralised nature of preservation and maintenance of built heritage in India has largely alienated local communities from the historical structures and sites in their vicinities^v. Heritage management has been conceived primarily as an exercise managed best by technocratic and bureaucratic experts, and community partnership is hardly ever imagined as integral to this process. This system is rooted in the colonial rhetoric of protection, which saw Indians as incapable of appreciating their own heritage and sought to aestheticize these sites and structures by keeping

local residents at manageable distances from their own built heritage. Premised on the disciplinary logic of zoning and a rigid segregation of work from home, planning for Delhi has also not been inclusive in its vision for the city and its heritage. In Delhi's case, these legal and operational protocols seem to have deepened an enduring indifference to the city's past given the cultural rupture of Partition, the 1984 pogrom, and the successive influx of migrants post-Partition. Rapid, aspirational urbanisation has put not only the monumental heritage but also more recent structures at active risk of obsolescence and demolition. When hardly anyone claims to belong to Delhi, the fate of its heritage is more or less constantly at risk of encroachment, spoliation, and erasure.

WHERE SHOULD WE GO?

A planning vision for Delhi's future should give adequate attention to its past, not just in terms of its monumental past classified and protected by law but also its more recent built heritage from the late nineteenth, twentieth, and even twenty-first century. Citizens cannot be made to care about a heritage which they largely do not perceive as theirs, so attempts must be made to reorient this heritage as a more relevant part of their lived experiences. The common perception that heritage sites occupy premium space which may be put to better use for housing and infrastructure provisioning is another symptom of the failure of planning to innovatively ease the boundaries between Delhi's past and present. Unlike most other major historical cities in the world, Delhi is more or less blind to its past even though many of its historical sites and structures are of considerable civilizational value integral to South Asia's cultural and architectural history.

It is necessary, therefore, to insert Delhi's built heritage—from archaeological mounds under extreme stress of urbanisation to neglected medieval monuments being littered and vandalised to modern structures being simply demolished for 'world-class' replacements—into the affective makeup of its citizens. It is important to recognise that urban built heritage is not separate from urban economies and ecologies: a sustainable and inclusive planning vision for Delhi should view the city's built heritage as vital to its future. The legal and governance apparatus protecting Delhi's heritage needs to be overhauled to answer the city's specific needs for land in a manner which adaptively integrates historical sites and structures with the needs and aspirations of the city in its entirety. Hence, the new Master Plan for Delhi should seriously rethink the existing strategy of segregating the city into various zones, heritage and otherwise: continuation of this paradigm is bound to lead to similar kinds of apathy and neglect seen till now. Rather, the new Master Plan for Delhi should creatively facilitate public interaction and access to Delhi's built heritage, incentivising citizens to recognise these sites and structures as vital urban commons and open cultural spaces of social and historical importance. It should embed heritage management within urban communities at local, ward levels through active engagement of all residents, whether house owners or tenants, in the form of community museums of tangible and intangible heritage. For example, many archaeological parks have listed and unlisted monuments in their surrounding areas: these can be sites of community partnerships with nodal heritage centres in the localities themselves. Such initiatives will reconnect local populations with local histories, and generate a greater sense of ownership. The new Master Plan should identify optimal sizes of localities and facilitate how people of those localities envision their areas to function and appear with regard to their entire living environment, including not simply heritage management but heritage management as linked to water, sewage, education, healthcare, livelihood, and transportation.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Actionable points for repositioning heritage management in Delhi with reference to the new Master Plan for Delhi are:

1. Make Local Area Plans (LAP) integral to the preparation of the Master Plan, and treat all listed—and not just protected—sites and structures as integral to the social life of all citizens—house owners and tenants; small businesses and educational institutions—at ward level. Doing so will facilitate decentralisation from the existing conservation apparatus of monuments of national, regional, and local importance. It will allow state and municipal authorities and residents' associations to address local civic services holistically, tackling which will create greater incentive and energy for citizens to develop associations with their built heritage and enable them, at ward level, to adopt monuments in their neighbourhoods as community assets.
2. Streamline work of institutions involved in maintenance and care of heritage sites and structures, including not just those belonging to the state but also those under private ownership. The owner/caretaker of each site/structure should be publicly identified and listed, and area-specific rules made emphasising façade control but allowing modification of interior spaces. This will allow, for instance, havelis in Shahjahanabad to re-acquire a semblance of cultural value without compromising on their functionality as residential and commercial spaces.
3. Allow educational and research institutions to adopt monuments in their neighbourhood, set up at least one Community Heritage Museum, and look after their day-to-day maintenance through Heritage Societies constituted specifically for this purpose. For instance, Flagstaff Tower can be taken up by the University of Delhi and the Mutiny Telegraph Memorial can be taken up by Ambedkar University. This will allow students to appreciate continuities between lived experience and cultural histories, understand local linkages to Delhi's past, and develop attachment to the city's built heritage.
4. Evaluate tourism potential of heritage sites and structures in light of existing physical and social infrastructure of surrounding neighbourhoods as part of LAPs. Introduce phased improvement of this infrastructure so as to generate revenue not through monetization of access but local livelihood opportunities in hospitality and artisanship. Heritage walks and tours should be designed so as to strengthen the connection of homes to heritage through skilling, knowledge co-creation, and training.
5. Institute differential ticketing for monuments currently closed to public, such as Qutub Minar, the tomb in Jamali–Kamali Mosque, the maze in Adham Khan's Tomb, amongst others. These should be opened, albeit at prices higher than the standard ticket price as per ASI guidelines. This will boost revenue generation and allow staff and tour guides to be regularly trained for site-specific maintenance.
6. Assess ecological significance of baolis and tanks—such as Rajaon ki Baoli, Hindu Rao ki Baoli, Shamshi Talab, amongst others—and incorporate them as part of Delhi's water provisioning infrastructure. Recharging these structures with community participation will encourage neighbouring residents to treat them as community assets to be preserved and protected.
7. Recognize the value of trees and urban greens in not just tackling pollution but also bolstering senses of belonging and ownership with heritage in particular and the city at large. Heritage management in zones such as the LBZ and archaeological parks such as the Mehrauli

Archaeological Park is essentially tied to the maintenance and strengthening of the trees and water bodies in and around them. Inculcating deeper appreciation for these through LAPs and community museums will contribute towards lowering Delhi's environmental footprint and enrichen its intangible heritage.

8. Adopt and extend NMA's category of 'living monuments' to not just places of institutionalised religious worship but all other sites which are found to be embedded in their neighbourhood's sociality—such as Satpula, Pipal Thala, Ferozshah Kotla, amongst others. This will further strengthen local affective claims over built heritage.
9. Allow adaptive social reuse for structures completely divorced from their surrounding contexts, such as Chauburji Masjid, Qila Rai Pithora walls, Salimgarh, amongst others. Visions for such reuse to be generated at ward level in community museums to be set up as part of LAPs, and processed in consultation with state custodians.
10. Mandate generation of heritage bye-laws specific to Delhi's particularities at zonal level. Different bye-laws for different heritage zones, such as Shahjahanabad, LBZ, Mehrauli, amongst others. Bye-laws should be generated in keeping with needs and aspirations of local communities at ward level and should reflect key concerns and visions identified in LAPs.
11. Heritage zones should also include markets with historical significance, such as Meena Bazaar and Dariba, and markets with relevance to the city's intangible heritage, such as ceramic market at Hauz Rani. Bye-laws may be generated in keeping with needs of each such zone.
12. Generate public interest in modern built heritage of contemporary Delhi—such as Central Vista, Mandi House area, Indraprastha and Lodhi Institutional Areas, amongst others— notified under the Delhi Building Bye-Laws and make city-wide public consultation mandatory for redevelopment of these sites and structures.

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ⁱ Delhi Development Authority. “Conversation of Built Heritage.” *Master Plan of Delhi 2021*. Delhi: Delhi Development Authority, 2010. 101–103.

ⁱⁱ National Monuments Authority. *Categorisation of Centrally Protected Monuments of Delhi Circle, ASI*. New Delhi: National Monuments Authority, 2019.

ⁱⁱⁱ Comptroller and Auditor General of India. *Performance Audit of Preservation and Conservation of Monuments and Antiquities*. Delhi: Comptroller and Auditor General of India, 2013.

^{iv} Delhi Development Authority. “Conversation of Built Heritage.” *Master Plan of Delhi 2021*. Delhi: Delhi Development Authority, 2010. 101–103.

^v Lahiri, Nayanjot. “Monumental Follies.” *India International Centre Quarterly* 33 (3/4): 2007. 128–139.