

AHMEDABAD: INDIA'S FIRST WORLD HERITAGE CITY

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ABSTRACT

Heritage is an asset to our cultural identity and Conservation is an activity to give real identity to the heritage of city. Various cities in the country like Jaipur, Agra, Indore, Allahabad, Raipur, etc. have approached the case Ahmedabad to gain the International recognition for their heritage. For this purpose, a deep study of the process of Ahmedabad becoming a Heritage city would be very effective. The process involves all the measures taken to retain the original character of the city which reflect their culture and history.

KEYWORDS: Conservation, Heritage

The city of Ahmedabad was declared as a World Heritage City at the 41st session of UNESCO's world heritage committee which was held at Krakow, Poland in 2017. Heritage Cell of Ahmedabad Municipal Corporation initiated the revitalization of the six-century-old walled city of Ahmedabad through several innovative mechanisms under an effective and successful model of the institutional framework. The architecture of the city exhibited an important interchange of human values over its span of time, which truly reflected the culture of the communities that were the important inhabitants of the city. Also, the city has put up for its "peace" and "unity", and is one of the "finest examples of Indo-Islamic architecture and Hindu-Muslim art". The local residents of any city, in its everyday routine, don't give much thought to our cultural assets. It is important that other potential cities get such a recognition like Ahmedabad city so that those cities assets will also get more visibility. Being India's first World heritage city, Ahmedabad has a great significance, due to which many other potential cities are taking reference from this city for becoming a heritage city.

AIM

To understand how the City of Ahmedabad became the India's first World heritage city and evaluating how these certain efforts can also be done for other potential cities.

OBJECTIVE

- To study the importance of the heritage of the city.
- To study how the heritage of the city is conserved.
- The tangible and the intangible aspects of the City.
- Understanding what makes it a WHC.
- The approach of becoming a world heritage City.

- Government and non-government authorities which had significance in making it a heritage city.

SCOPE

The area of study will give a brief description of the conservation of the heritage of city of Ahmedabad and a broad list criterion for becoming a World Heritage City. Various cities in the country like Jaipur, Agra, Indore, Allahabad, Raipur, etc. have approached the case Ahmedabad to gain the International recognition for their heritage. For this purpose, a deep study of the process of Ahmedabad becoming a Heritage city would be very effective. The study will not cover features of other potential cities.

HISTORY OF THE CITY

Ahmedabad is unique from the other cities because no matter which regime took over the city in the last six centuries be it the Solanki's or the Gujarat Sultanate, the Mughals or the British an unbroken chain of information was passed down with every succession. This is something that stays till today. In fact, this was one of the key factors behind UNESCO's decision to list Ahmedabad as a WHC. Ahmedabad was built at an open and spacious plane to the east of River Sabarmati. The city consists of a small fort known as Bhadra citadel. The citadel was enclosed by the fortified wall with 12 gates. History of Ahmedabad mentions that the city kept on growing in every direction with the addition of new areas on both sides of the river Sabarmati. Well brought out beautiful buildings, mosques, and lakes adding to the cities scenic beauty. The city has seen the rule of different dynasties, right from Sultanate and Mughal rule to Maratha and British rule. Thus, the history

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of Ahmedabad is very rich. During the freedom struggle of India, it helped as the home for many prominent nationalist leaders like Mahatma Gandhi and Sardar Patel. The urban fabric is made up of densely-packed traditional houses called pols in gated traditional streets called puras with characteristic features such as bird feeders, public wells and religious institutions. The city continued to flourish as the capital of the State of Gujarat for six centuries.

Sultanate Rule

Towards the end of the 13th century, Gujarat was under the rule Sultanate of Delhi. Under the rule Ahmed Shah, the city got its name Ahmedabad. In the year 1487, Mahmud Begada (grandson of Ahmed Shah) established the outer city wall, so as to protect Ahmedabad from outside attack. Muzaffar II was the last Sultan of Ahmedabad. Gujarat Sultanate Architecture from the 15th century has enjoyed a distinct place in the history of Sultanate Architecture of India and left a distinct mark with its fusion of local indigenous Jain and Hindu traditions to the imposed Islamic idioms imported by the Sultan rulers which are shown in the Bhadra Fort, the fortified walls and gates, the mausoleums of the royal family, the Jama Masjid, and other mosques and minarets.



Figure 1: Bhadra Fort.

Source: (Bhadra Fort Ahmedabad (Entry Fee, Mughal Rule

In the year 1573, the city was taken over by the Mughal emperor Akbar. Under the rule of Mughals, Ahmedabad became the leading center of textiles in Gujarat. The son of Akbar named Jahangir visited Ahmedabad in 1617 but found the city to be nothing more than a garbage ground and so, he called it Gardabad, the city of dust. However, Shahjahan spent a major part of his life in Ahmedabad. In fact, he also constructed the Moti Shahi Mahal in Shahibaugh. The contribution of the

building and gardens during his residence in Ahmedabad were the early prototypes for his constructions in Agra when he became emperor.



Figure 2: Moti Shahi Mahal.

Source: (Sardar Patel Museum, 2018)

Maratha Rule

In 1753, the Mughals ruling came to an end when the combined forces of Raghunath Rao and Damaji Gaekwad attacked the fort and captured it. The power struggle between them in due course led to the destruction of the city.

British rule

In 1818 the city was taken over by the British East India Company. The year 1824 led to the setting up of a military cantonment. A major development took place in 1864 when the railway line was laid, that connected Ahmedabad with Bombay. These developments brought Ahmedabad in the map of leading centres of trade and manufacturing. In 1915, people of Ahmedabad raised their voice for the independence of India.

Post-Independence

This period saw the declaration of Ahmedabad as a provincial town of Bombay. In 1915, Mahatma Gandhi returned from South Africa and established an ashram on the banks of the Sabarmati River. On the 1st May 1960, Ahmedabad became the capital city of Gujarat.

Present Time

It is now the largest city of the Indian state Gujarat and due to its location in the cotton growing belt, this city has been a centre for manufacturing cotton textiles. It became a major industrial city and also popularly known as 'Manchester of the East'. Muslim, Jain and Hindu residents of Ahmedabad coexist and share common traditions of

commercial enterprise and humanity, regardless of their different religious beliefs. The nominated property consists of the remains of the city walls and gates, 28 historic buildings of a national significance and the footprint of the traditional urban fabric of gated residential streets called puras, and traditional houses (pols).



Ahmedabad plan (old)

Significance of the Ahmadabad World Heritage Site

The Historic City of Ahmadabad consists of six municipal wards, divided into 13 sub-wards and includes 28 historic buildings protected by the ASI, one historic building protected by the SDA, and 2,696 important buildings protected by the AMC.

Architectural Expression

The historic city still retains wholeness and intactness of its extremely rich wooden architecture with its exquisite character of form, its intricate carving and decorative quality, which signifies its streets – the pol domain. The Bird feeders, the gates, the temples and mosques built over several phases during the city's history still retained and the urban environment still reflect the characteristic features of a historically evolving town. The historic fort wall enclosure is existing only partially in the north-west side of the city, however all the gates constructed during several phases are intact and are preserved many of them under ASI protection and some under the protection of State Department of Archaeology. These are representative of the Sultanate and later period architecture and still provide a fair idea of the building practices for military and security provisions in that period. Gujarat Sultanate Architecture has enjoyed a distinct place in the history of Sultanate Architecture of India and left a distinct mark with its blend of local indigenous and the imposed Islamic idioms imported by the Sultan rulers. This

was due to the absorption of the practices in both the diverse culture and the city's progressive communities adapted themselves to these approaches with sincerity and acceptance for the progressive trends. It is this culture of the people which evolved further and at every important stage in history adapted to the breakthroughs which came about due to changing leadership. This was also the factor in recent history of the 20th century that the city became one of the most important progressive cities in India by inviting masters of modern architecture to build important institutions here which has placed the city in forefront of architectural development in India.

Some of the Main Features in the City

The Walled City

The grandson of the city's founder, Mahmud Begada built a 10 km walled fortification with 12 gates. Portions of the imposing wall, particularly along the river Sabarmati and several of the gates such as Delhi Gate, Khanpur Darwaza, Teen Darwaza, Dariapur, Sarangpur etc are still to be seen.

The Mosques and the Temples

There are many prehistoric mosques, dargah, and temples where worship has continued for centuries. Even more remarkable is the coexistence and amalgamation of diverse faiths, particularly in the old city. It is a unique spirit of the ideal Amdavadi that still coexists here.

The Stunning Architecture

Ahmedabad has been known as the birthplace of the Indo-Saracenic style of architecture. The incredibly intricate work of the Sidi Saiyyed Jali (originally a mosque) is a piece of history surrounded by the modern chaos of Ahmedabad roads. At present, it is the symbol of the city

The Pols

A 'pol' is the name given to narrow streets with closely packed houses in the old parts of town. Many pols still have some stunning surviving havelis and homes, and it is these pols that helped Ahmedabad gain a place in UNESCO's tentative lists.

Unique Landmarks

The Jhulta Minara or the Shaking Minarets are a unique example of architecture. When one minaret is

shaken, the other shakes as well. These Minarets date back to the mid-15th century.

City almost bypassed by colonial rule Most of the big cities in India bear the stamp of colonial occupation. However, barring a few landmarks such as Ellis bridge, some educational institutions and so on, Ahmedabad shows far fewer signs of colonial occupation

It is the City of the Mahatma

Though Gandhiji was born in Porbandar and over the years had stayed in many different places, he chose to settle in Ahmedabad and set up his Ashrams there: the Kochrab Ashram (1915) and the Satyagraha or Sabarmati Ashram in 1917.

Dutch Cemetery

Dutch traders from Holland traded in cotton cloth, yarn and indigo in the city of Ahmedabad and they made this city their home for life. Thus, they never returned, and that's why they were set to rest here itself. The cemetery built during the 17th and 18th century, situated at the One Tree Hill Garden by the side of Kankaria Lake and has 49 Dutch and Armenian graves with cenotaphs in Indian and Western styles. There are on some tombs with Dutch and Latin inscriptions on them. The tombs there are of four types: domed tombs, pyramids, walled tombs and plain gravestones.

Framework of Conservation in Ahmedabad City

Authorities Involved in the Conservation

Concerned with the rapid decline of its heritage resources, AMC with the help of Ford Foundation, New Delhi first undertook a study in 1984 to initiate policies for the conservation and preservation efforts in the walled city. Ahmedabad was one among three cities (Jaipur and Hyderabad are other two cities) in the country at that time to be chosen for such an exclusive study and grant from the Ford Foundation. By 1995-96 there were campaigns in the walled city by some residents to stop reckless destruction of the traditional havelis. In 1996, AMC invited the Conservation and Research of Urban Traditional Architecture (CRUTA) Foundation, Calcutta for helping it to take measures to arrest decay and preserve the city's heritage. AMC with the expert assistance from CRUTA set up a Heritage Cell within the Municipal Corporation in 1996. With this the AMC became the first local government

body in India to devise the Heritage Programme and prepare a comprehensive plan for the conservation and revitalization of the walled city. A separate budget of Rs 50 lakhs was allocated as a start-up fund for the cell. (Indian National Trust for Art & Cultural Heritage, 2015) In 1997, AMC drafted the Walled City Revitalization Plan in consultation with a local NGO called Environmental Planning Collaborative, which highlighted the need to modify the old heritage regulations, to reduce the density allowed for new constructions in old areas, and to make larger areas available for pedestrians. The Heritage Cell advocated extensively for the restoration of the Pol houses, chabutaras and the city walls and gates.

Collaboration between AMC and French Government

In the same year 1997, Indo-French cooperation in the field of heritage was initiated on the occasion of the 15th anniversary of India's independence. A MoU was signed between AMC and the French Government for rehabilitation of the Historic Centre of Ahmedabad. AMC heritage cell and the French Experts jointly initiated actions for documentation and creation of a database. About 12,502 heritage properties were listed by 2001. A Heritage Cell was planned for providing technical assistance and guidance to heritage property owners. Later AMC and the French Government collaborated with HUDCO to initiate a project called "Enabling Communities to Invest in Heritage" which is one of the India's first models for public private partnership to enable historic city center preservation. HUDCO along with support from the French Government provided loans to heritage house owners at subsidized rate of interest, who otherwise were not able to take housing loans as per the RBI guidelines, that does not recommend repair loan for houses more than 15-year-old. The project was managed on the ground by the Heritage Cell in terms of approaching the owners and facilitating the loan procedure.

Tie up between ASI and AMC

A memorandum of understanding has been signed in the year 2011 between the AMC and the ASI for cooperation to preserve ancient monuments and sites, and to revitalise heritage precincts in Ahmedabad. The MoU was signed by ASI Director General Gautam Sengupta and Ahmedabad Municipal Commissioner I. P. Gautam. AMC and ASI agreed to cooperate for preservation and revitalisation of heritage monuments and their precincts in

Ahmedabad, particularly Bhadra Fort and its precincts. For the purposes of this MoU, a “precinct” refers to the space beyond the area declared as a Centrally-protected monument and/or site as defined in the Ancient Monuments and Archaeological Sites and Remains Act, 1958, amended as the Ancient Monuments and Archaeological Sites and Remains (Amendment and Validation) Act, 2010.

The city has more than 50 national monuments under ASI, and the MoU is part of the 600 years’ celebration of its foundation. Mr. Gautam said that the memorandum would help enhance the beauty of monuments in Ahmedabad, making it a key destination for tourists. The origin of most of the city's monuments can be traced back to the 15th Century.

CHANGES IN THE ECONOMY

Closure of Textile Mills

A large part of the residential population in the Walled City consisted tenants working in textile mills. With the mills closing down, they were rendered jobless and stopped maintaining the old buildings that they occupied. This led to a variety of heritage properties getting ruined.

Growth of Gold and Silver Units

The gold and silver industry in the Walled City grew and attracted many skilled persons into the fabric. This influx of people from outside has disturbed the homogeneity of the social fabric in pols. This is also suspected to have increased the crime rate in the Walled City. Commercial ingress in the old fabric, especially after the addition of Relief Road, created a lot of undesirable changes in the land use. Warehouses coming up inside the pols greatly disturbed the residential character.

Social Problems Leading to Migration

Successive riots and communal problems have forced people to migrate thus weakening the upkeep of the urban fabric of the city.

PROJECT IMPLEMENTATION

The Heritage Cell has been actively involved in various aspects of urban conservation in the old city of Ahmedabad and effectively implementing the same.

The Following Initiatives are Some Examples

Heritage Walk: A key tool for urban revival

The heritage walk was introduced in year the 1997. It begins at the Swami Narayan temple with the projection of slides portraying the treasures of the city and ends at the Jumma Masjid the route goes through a number of pols. The temple has since reserved a room on the first floor for presenting the slide show and ticket collection. The walk not only targets tourists but also the citizens, targeting to build a sense of urban identity and belonging.



As the name suggests, heritage walk behaves as an effective tool whereby the inner areas of the city shall be explored in terms of the architectural heritage, cultural heritage and the craft heritage. The walk in its due course take the people through specific routes penetrating through the inner areas and habitats of the people, exploring the beautiful temples, heritage buildings, haveils, pols, shops and a lot more. The exploring and exposing of the inner areas of the Walled City requires an initiative from the AMC, which needs to provide some basic infrastructure, in terms of proper paving, cleaning up of the streets, provision of street lights, signage, public amenities. The walk carries with it another kind of advantage - the changes it can bring about in the land use pattern of the area, by conversion of a part of the heritage building into a cafeteria or into a paying guest accommodation, where the tourists can get the actual feel of the cultural heritage by staying within the precincts of it. This can allow a total change in the economy of the area wherein the tourists can stay in and spend at these inner areas.

Freedom March

A freedom walk is held linking together eight houses which have association with eminent leaders of Indian independence including Mahatma Gandhi.

Auto rickshaw guides

The auto-rickshaw drivers were trained and supported with maps and photographs.

Celebration of Pol- Day

The Pol signage was one of the successful initiatives that were posted at every Pol gates. Traditional street theatre (Bhavai) performed in the Pols were great attractions and effective in awareness generations.

World Heritage Week Celebration at Desai-ni-Pol

The first public programme entitled 'Preservation of the Past and Glimpses of History' was launched at Desai-ni-Pol in Khadia area on 19th November 1996 on the occasion of World Heritage Week celebration. This was a unique programme where "Heritage" was the main issue and organized jointly by citizens' groups and municipal authorities. **Desai-ni-Pol** has a place in history because of its rebellious past during the British rule. The residents of the pol released a booklet to mark the Heritage Day, listing the historical houses, personalities who lived there, and a chronicle of important events.

A meeting at Khadia

A meeting was held in the Old City 'Khadia' area to discuss the possibilities and strategies of conservation and development of Walled City of Ahmadabad. This was organized by AMC and attended by many citizen groups, renowned personalities and AMC officials.

Conservation and Restoration Projects

AMC as part of its conservation programme regularly undertakes conservation and restoration of heritage buildings and important structures under its ownership, based on state of conservation. Following conservation, restoration projects are either ongoing have been carried out during the financial year 2015-2016.

Restoration of Dwarkadheesh Temple

Grants from the World Monuments Funds were received to restore the Dwarkadheesh temple situated within a haveli and damaged in the 2001 earthquake. The

temple's delicately carved wooden facade has since been restored in partnership with the local temple trust who also mobilized funds from pilgrims, and from the Gujarat State government.

Restoration of Chabutaras

The Chabutaras (bird feeders), which are part of the identity of the Pols were documented and restoration was initiated for some damaged Chabutaras such as the 200-year-old Chabutara at Karanj and Khadia.

Restoration of Panchkuan Gate and the adjacent Baori

The Panchkuan Gate, which was in dilapidated state, was restored along with the restoration of the adjacent baori (stepped well). An old building next the gate was restored and reused to house the Municipal Ward office.

Restoration of Kankariya lake, Ahmedabad

This historic lake built by Karnadeva Solanki and later renovated by Sultan Qutbuddin in 15th century is also known as "Hauz-e-kutub". This place of historic and tourist interest is visited by about 5.5 million people annually. The restoration project covers restoration of steps, embankments and retaining walls lying between gates No.2 & 3 of this huge tank. The project is funded by the GoG, under the Chief Minister's Golden Jubilee Urban Development Programme.

Restoration of Fort wall, Ahmedabad

The city walls, built during the 15th century was about 10 km long in circuit with 12 original gates and two more gates added during the British Period. Most sections of the historic fortification have long been lost to the urban expansion and renewal projects of 20th C, except the segments facing the river Sabarmati. As an important step towards conserving this very important historic heritage of the city, AMC has undertaken major repairs and restoration works on the fortifications since last 5 years. This is a long term project and shall be continued to cover all historic fragments of the wall which have now been listed as Grade I structures. The following segments of the Fort wall were taken up for restoration during 2015-16:

- a) Fort wall near Gurjari Bazar, facing river front under the chief minister's "Golden jubilee Urban Development Project"
- b) Fort wall opp. Shankar Bhavan, Shahpur

Restoration of Calico Dome, Ahmedabad

This Geodesic dome designed by Mr. Gautam Sarabhai using the principles developed by the 20th century legendary Engineer Buckminster Fuller is an exceptional structure of architectural heritage of 20th C. in the city. Having been abandoned since the mid-90s, it was damaged in the 2001 earthquake and suffered further collapse in the heavy rains of the year 2003. AMC purchased it from the Calico Mills during the liquidation proceedings and has protected it as listed heritage structure for which conservation work is ongoing. A Significant part of the project for restoring it to its original glory has already been completed.

Restoration of Khanpur Gate, Ahmedabad

Khanpur gate was one of the most significant accesses to the river from the 15th century City walls. This Grade I listed structure suffered from issues of stone degradation and required structural consolidation. The documentation and conservation proposal for the structure was prepared by the Heritage Dept. in 2014 and the project is under execution.

Public place Urban Regeneration Plan for Manek Chowk, Ahmedabad

Manek Chowk (Square) is one of the liveliest market place located in the heart of the historic city of Ahmedabad. The presence of large number of ancient monuments, such as Jami mosque, Tomb of Sultan Ahmadabad - Muhurat Pol, remarkable stock exchange building from 19th C, traditional markets, including the famous night food market, make the place extremely rich in cultural heritage. Ahmedabad Municipal Corporation with a view of up gradation and effective management of Manek Chowk and its surrounding has conducted a detailed study of the existing situation in collaboration with EMBARQ India- World Resource Institute, under a bilateral MOU signed between the two. The final report of the study is expected by the end of Sept. 2015. After approval of the study report, Manek Chowk up gradation and revitalization programme will be taken up for execution. Ahmed Shah, Tomb of Sultan's Queens, Manek Baba's temple, the first residential settlement of Model street intervention - Sankdi Sheri, Ahmedabad.

This street passes through some of the finest traditional settlements of the historic city of Ahmedabad

and is dotted with a number of wood-carved Havelis (mansions), traditional pol houses and institutional buildings on its either side. AMC is in the process of preparing a detailed project proposal in collaboration with the INTACH, Ahmedabad Chapter with the intention of developing a pilot project for Model Street Intervention for Sankdi Sheri. The proposal will address the issues of traffic management, parking, and creation of public toilets, garbage disposal, street lights and street furniture, upgradation of infrastructure, signage and facade restorations.

Restoration and adaptive reuse of the Gordhandas Dalsukhram Choksi

Municipal School as Technical Cell & Building Centre in the Walled City

This former (now vacant) school building is a listed heritage property owned by the AMC and is being restored following accepted building conservation norms for adaptive reuse as the Technical Guidance Cell & Building Centre for restoration and conservation of the walled City. The necessary and permissible intervention for making it suitable for adaptive reuse has already been approved by the AMC. In this centre technical guidance through qualified and experienced Engineers and Architects will be extended to the building owners and other stakeholders. Craftsmen training for stone carvers, wood carvers and masons etc. in use of traditional building materials like lime and other traditional building crafts will also be provided at the centre. Advice and guidance on repair/restoration, plan submissions, including availing incentives of TDR etc. will also be provided at the Technical Cell. Preparation of a manual on heritage building repairs and restoration will also be undertaken by the Technical Cell.

Restoration and Reuse of Kavi Dalpatram House

The site of the house of Kavi Dalpatram, Gujarati poet and reformer, which was destroyed in 1885, is being reused as public space for meetings and recitals with the erection of facade at the backdrop and as a bronze statue of the poet on the Opla.

Revitalisation of Traditional Water Resources

As part of its sustainable development agenda, AMC has decided to restore and revive the traditional water

structures like tankas, community wells and vavs (stepwells) for rainwater harvesting, ground water recharge and supplementary water sources in case of emergencies. This project will serve the dual motives of Conservation of traditional architectural and urban elements and water conservation. A survey to study the feasibility for the project was initiated in June 2015. A pilot project for 5 such wells is currently under planning stage by the office of Asst. City Engineer, Heritage Dept., AMC and shall be implemented at the earliest possible. Further, AMC is also planning to undertake the Restoration of Amritvarshini Vav, a monument of regional importance located within the historic city and protected by the SDA.

Cleaning and Restoration of Tankas

In 2000, a survey was undertaken to identify and list the water tanks beneath the chowks inside the houses (locally called "Tankas"), which revealed that nearly 10,000 tankas still survived. In the first phase, about 25 tankas were cleaned and restored.

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