



INTACH

DELHI CHAPTER

Weekly News Clippings – 119

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ARE MOSQUES LIVING SPACES

Mosque is like an island of peace amidst the cacophony of buses and heavy vehicles plying on the Ring Road. The 18th century mosque is surrounded by a garden, called Qudsia Garden, and is located opposite Inter-State Bus Terminal at Kashmere Gate. A heritage monument protected by the Archeological Survey, the mosque is one of the 12 monuments that have repeatedly featured in the ASI's list of encroached upon monuments. Here's why. The monument has been used for prayers for many years now, but of late, the encroachment has increased manifold. When HT visited the place, there were many signs showing people lived there. On the western side of mosque, a family had stored many things of personal use. On the eastern side, a clothesline was in place with washed clothes drying on them. Inside, there were many things like mats used for prayers. A car was parked a few feet away from the monument. Sanjay Bhargava, member of Society for Culture and Heritage, said: "The reason for encroachment at heritage monuments is simple. They come up in connivance of ASI officials, police and politicians." Nili Masjid in Hauz Khas in has a similar story to tell. The 16th century structure has been encroached upon for several years now. There were water tanks, fans (and even coolers), clothes drying in the courtyard and mats on the floor. Inside the mosque were racks to keep stuff apart from lights and other electrical equipment. The structure is intact but the blue tiles -- which gave it the name of Nili (blue) Masjid -- have come off at most places. Plaster is peeling at places and the façade has been painted with white and green lime plaster. Sohail Hashmi of Sahmat (the Safdar Hashmi Memorial Trust) said: "Once a mosque or a temple is declared a protected site under the ASI Act, it ceases to be a place of worship. It should be treated as a heritage monument."

SOURCE

22nd September 2009, Hindustan Times

DIG THIS WORK?

In his student days, says KK Muhammed, superintending archaeologist (Delhi circle), ASI, he read Nehru's Glimpses of World History and Balakrishna Pillai's Through the Heart, both in Malayalam. That, he says, led to his fascination for temples. Coincidentally for Muhammed, Pillai's book was about Buddhism and Bihar, and the Bihar Circle was where he found himself later as an archaeologist, working amongst all those monuments he had read about and been inspired by. Dr Alok Tripathi, superintending archaeologist, Underwater Archaeology Wing, Archaeological Survey of India (ASI), describes this profession as a multidisciplinary activity that includes search, study and preservation of human history. "Archaeologists", adds Dr Tripathi, "irrespective of their specialization or branch, are expected to conduct explorations of archaeological sites and remains."

For the study of buried remains, these sites are excavated by field archaeologists. "Experts from various branches collect and study remains pertaining to their specialized areas. For example, archaeo-zoologists study unearthed bones to understand fauna (animals) domestication, hunting practices, food, etc. in different periods; archaeo-botanists study the remains of flora (plants) to find out about agriculture, food habits, environment, etc; geo-archaeologists study rock and soil samples to study environment conditions and geological changes; physical anthropologists study human remains (skeletons); archaeologists would study different material assemblages to understand contemporary society, technological development, their contacts with other contemporary cultures, etc." To become an archaeologist, you have to spend years in training, writing exams, term papers and theses. Visits to excavation sites are mandatory for study of monuments and relics. Qualified archaeologists can find work with ASI-run museums, cultural centres and the historical division of the ministry of external affairs. The option of research and/or teaching is open to students who have got a doctoral degree or have cleared SLET (State Level Eligibility Test) or NET (National Eligibility Test). There is room for the government to do more, feels Muhammed. Apart from making today's youth aware of India's heritage, trained archaeologists need to be paid better, he says. Things are improving, though. As science advances rapidly, archaeology has also benefited enormously. Newage technology -- from satellite remote sensing to genetic studies -- has been utilized in studying and understanding the past better. With the development of underwater engineering, archaeologists are now engaged in retrieval of historical remains from ocean floors. Marine archaeologists can now study shipwrecks, graves, buildings, tools and pottery from past cultures engulfed by the sea, using the knowledge of archaeology and anthropology.

SOURCE

23rd September 2009, Hindustan Times

NEW HOMES DWARF OLD DOMES

Seventeen years ago, the government banned all construction and mining within 100 metres of centrally protected monuments. But the law was not enforced strictly in Delhi. Result: monuments in urban villages are now lost to sight. The Tughlaq-era (14th century) archaeological marvels, Khirki Masjid and Hauz Khas, are two glaring examples. **KHIRKI** Regardless of the government's order in 1992, Khirki Village in Malviya Nagar has grown tremendously. Pointing to several buildings around the protected mosque, Parkash Sana, who claims to have lived in the village for more than 35 years, said, "I have seen these buildings change from small ones to big, posh ones." A few years ago, Archaeological Survey of India (ASI) had removed most of the encroachments from inside the mosque. However, some issues are yet to be addressed, especially those outside the mosque building but inside its walled compound. "We are in the process of removing the encroachment within the premises," said KK Muhammed, ASI's Delhi circle chief. **HAUZ KHAS** In Hauz Khas village, several residents open their windows on to the tomb of Firoz Shah Tughlaq and the beautiful yet decaying lake beside it. Some locals said not all the buildings around the site had existed before 1992. On its part, ASI issues notices to encroachers and then gets into never-ending legal tussles. "Is it that ASI sleeps when the construction is taking place near or at the monument? Why does it send notices after the buildings are completed?" said Rikhaj Kalita (67), a regular visitor to the monuments that are surrounded by posh buildings in Hauz Khas Village.

SOURCE

23rd September 2009, Hindustan Times

GARBAGE KNOCKING ON HERITAGE'S DOOR

Fourth of 5-part series : Nestled between the plush south Delhi neighbourhood of Sarvapriya Vihar and the urban village of Begumpur, Begumpur Mosque is an example of how the present usurps the past. A walk through the sunlit compound, with broken domes topping the elegant, square gallery is something of a transporting experience...till you run

iron gate to a verandah. Heaped on the other side is a pile of stinking garbage. Residents of the area treat the large verandah of the mosque as their personalized recreation spot, or worse, dumping ground. Locals laze around on a sunny winter morning, fly kites and calmly upend their garbage bins in the courtyard of this 14th century heritage monument.

BELEAGUERED FORT Not far from the Begumpur Mosque is one of Delhi's most picturesque citadels: the qila of Tughlaq, better known as the Tughlaqabad fort. Like the Begumpur mosque, the wall of the fort--that runs along the Mehrauli-Badarpur road in south Delhi--possesses an evocative beauty. But a different story unfolds inside. This early 14th century citadel, built by Tughlaq dynasty founder Ghias Ud Din Tughlaq is one of the worst encroached monuments in the Capital. Three roads hack the compound into separate portions. A mini-settlement has mushroomed in each area. The extent of the encroachment can be imagined by the fact that inside one portion, more than 100 bighas are categorized as lal dora land, on which construction is not allowed. "Another 2,500 plus bighas of land is crowded by unauthorized houses," say sources. Although, a city existed inside its premises when the fort was built, the present encroachment is a gift of the late 20th century. "When Jagmohan was the Minister (of Culture), he ensured much of the encroachment was removed in 2001-02. However, nothing has been done after that," ASI sources said. When questioned about the encroachment, ASI chief K.K. Mohammad said: "Yes, we are aware of the problem and are coordinating with agencies for removal of encroachment." In April 2005, the Delhi High Court asked the state to appoint a committee to look into encroachment at heritage monsites. "Many committees have been formed over the years. But to no avail," rued A G K Menon, Delhi Chapter convenor of INTACH, a non-profit body.

SOURCE

24th September 2009, Hindustan Times

JAMA MASJID'S MAKEOVER GETS FINAL NOD

The last hurdle in the redevelopment of the historic Jama Masjid was cleared on Wednesday. The Municipal Corporation of Delhi's (MCD) standing committee cleared the facelift plan for the 17th century-mosque. The highlight of the plan which adopts the 'minimum intervention' idea - is that, once completed, there would be a clear, barrier-free visual field between the Jama Masjid precinct and the Red Fort, a World Heritage Site, across the road. Architect Pradeep Sachdeva made a presentation during the meeting of the standing committee. As per the plan, all shops in the Meena Bazar in Red Fort would be re-located to the north, i.e., at the Parade ground side and would be single-level, retaining the same cover area. On the same lines, shops in front of the Dargah--which actually block the visual field between Red Fort and the Jama Masjid, would be remodeled at the same place to single groundlevel shops as against the present two or three storeys. There would be bus alighting bay for tourists on the Subhash Marg at the southeastern side of the whole complex. The ASI conditions included that the overall re-development should be in sync with the Comprehensive Conservation and Management Plan (CCMP) for the Red Fort. Deputy Commissioner City Zone Vijay Singh said, "The most important is the clearance of visual field between the Jama Masjid and the Red Fort." The civic body had earlier faced lot of flak for its original plan, which mentioned of underground parking and heritage malls. All this has now been done away with, only after which the MCD was given a go ahead by the Delhi Urban Arts Commission. Two weeks ago, the plan was submitted the Delhi High Court, which too cleared it. The only thing that the MCD is not very sure about is parking for the busloads of tourists. Sources said, the civic body will possibly go ahead with an underground multi-level parking for 1,500 vehicles at the Parade Ground.

SOURCE

24th September 2009, Hindustan Times

FINALLY, JAMA MASJID REDEVELOPMENT PLAN CLEARED

ON THE drawing board for long, the Jama Masjid redevelopment plan is set to see light of the day soon. The proposal was cleared at the MCD Standing Committee meeting on Wednesday. The Rs 1,200-crore plan has been waiting for approval from various civic and heritage bodies for several years. It is aimed at redeveloping and beautifying the area around the historic mosque. Among other things, MCD had initially proposed to build a 60-foot-deep "four-storey basement world heritage centre" with shops, an auditorium, art galleries and studios, a library and a three-tier parking space for at least 4,500 cars, 4,000 two-wheelers, and 60 buses. An MCD official said the meeting passed the proposal today but the date on which work will begin is yet to be decided. The plan was recently passed by the Delhi Urban Art Commission (DUAC) and with changes in the original plan. The civic body will have to do away with the controversial 'heritage mall' and another 'dome-like structure' that it had proposed to construct at Meena Bazar. The proposed multi-storey shopping complex along Dargah Sheikh Kallimullah will also be changed to a single storey structure.

SOURCE

24th September 2009, Indian Express

WE CAN SAVE MONUMENTS

What can the Archaeological Survey of India (ASI) do to protect the country's splendid architectural heritage from rapid urbanisation? The answer is quite simple -- it has to make full use of all its powers. The problem is, most of the time it does not. The ASI generally issues notices to encroachers under Ancient Monuments and Archaeological Sites and Remains Act, 1958 and Rules 1959. It is followed by an order from the ASI director general to the district collector or magistrate under Section 19(2) of the Act and Section 38(2) of the Rules. But nothing really helps. "This is easier said than done," an ASI official said as he blamed "inaction" on part of the civic agencies and the police and also "the lack of political will". But what he did not speak about was the extra power senior ASI officials enjoyed. An ASI state chief is vested with the powers of estate officer. Which means he/she can issue eviction notices to encroachers under the Public Premises (Eviction of Unauthorised Occupants) Act, 1971. Agreed ASI Director General K.N. Shrivastava, "It is indeed a powerful act. We can certainly take action under this Act without waiting for the civic agency's help." What else can be done to protect our heritage? Make students feel proud of their past. Nayanjot Lahiri, Professor of History at Delhi University, said: "The education system should be such that it has involvement of local monuments." "In European countries, school students are taught about local archaeological structures." What Lahiri meant was quite clear: if students know about their local monuments, they will take pride in their heritage and have a sense of belonging. Another hope for the beleaguered monuments is the proposed National Commission for Heritage Bill 2009 -- introduced in the Rajya Sabha. "This has a provision for maintenance of a Heritage Site Roster. This will ensure monitoring of all protected heritage sites," the official said. Last of 5-part series

SOURCE

25th September 2009, Hindustan Times

MCD APPROVES JAMA MASJID RE-DEVELOPMENT PLAN

After having been in the pipeline for over four years, the last hurdle in redevelopment of the historic Jama Masjid here was cleared on Wednesday with the MCD standing Committee approving the project. The MCD had earlier faced criticism for its original plan which mentioned an underground parking and heritage malls. But all this has now been done away with and the DUAC has given the go-ahead to the MCD. The plan was submitted to the Delhi High Court which too cleared it about two weeks ago. Architect Pradeep Sachdeva made a presentation during the meeting of the MCD Standing Committee. MCD officials said the work would start by this year-end as a detailed project report is yet to be prepared.

SOURCE

THE LOST CITIES OF DELHI

STONE WALLS of a fort with inverted lotus corbels pop out of nowhere in the narrow bylanes of a very congested Mubarakpur village near South Extension. The place is dotted with tiny shops. Still, the walls stand out amid various signboards selling anything from dress material to cheap mobile phones. The residents, unfortunately, are oblivious of the presence of history amid them, rather its very existence. The fort that Mubarak Shah, a Sayyid sultan who reigned over Delhi between 1414 and 1421, built has long been levelled here to make way for living spaces for the city's growing population. Mubarak Shah's tomb in Kotla Mubarakpur is perhaps the only structure of that city to survive almost intact. Otherwise, what remains of that citadel is gradually being destroyed. In fact, portions of the fort's wall that one saw a few years ago are untraceable today. Still, what has miraculously survived is enough to provide a peek into a lost and forgotten city—perhaps a missing link between the fifth and the sixth cities of Delhi. Way back in 1865, while inspecting the walls of Lal Kot, the Rajput citadel that stretches from Mehrauli to Surajkund, Alexander Cunningham, the first chief of the Archaeological Survey of India, wrote: "I found the ramparts to be from 28 to 30 feet in thickness... they have a general height of 60 feet above the bottom of the ditch... at all the salient points there are large bastions from 60 to 100 feet in diameter." One hundred and fifty years since, that wall doesn't exist anymore. But Lal Kot and Mubarakabad are not the only lost cities. The Sayyids, who took over from the Tughlaqs and were replaced by the Lodis, built their own citadels. Khizr Khan, the first Sayyid ruler—who claimed to be a descendant of the Prophet—built Khizrabad near the Yamuna. Today, the place is an urban village near New Friends Colony and is at best known for some upmarket fashion accessory brands setting up their outlets there. The Yamuna has long changed its course and a ruined bridge over a dark drain in one corner of the village is what remains of the medieval city. The bridge was also perhaps a link between Khizrabad and the 13th-century citadel built at Kilokri, near Maharani Bagh. Kaykubad, in many ways the tenth sultan of the city, had inherited the Delhi Sultanate from Balban of the Slave dynasty in 1287. The new sultan built his capital away from the earlier one at Mehrauli. Since the site has been completely demolished, built and rebuilt over the centuries, nothing much is known about the fort at Kilokri except from whatever is mentioned by contemporary travellers and historians. That it was on the banks of the Yamuna is one of the most certain facts. Jalaluddin Khilji, who is said to have seized power from the Slave dynasty, too, had made Kilokri his citadel. The Khiljis later built their own city, Siri—one of the seven cities that's being excavated and conserved in view of the 2010 Commonwealth Games. Kilokri and Khizrabad are representatives of a heritage that the city has lost without even knowing that it once existed. No wonder in the hullabaloo of how best can Delhi's heritage, and particularly its seven cities, be showcased to attract tourists during the Commonwealth Games, there's no noise being made about what's gone missing.

SOURCE

27th September 2009, Indian Express

ROW OVER BUILDING NEAR NIZAMUDDIN SITES

Residents of Nizamuddin basti are up in arms against an unauthorized multi-storey building that is coming up near the dargah. Despite several complaints to Municipal Corporation of Delhi (MCD) and Archaeological Survey of India (ASI), residents claimed construction work was going on in fullswing at the building. They said recently work on the third storey was completed. The building falls within 100m of two centrally-protected monuments — Chausath Khamba and Atgah Khan's tomb — and thus, lies in a prohibited zone. Under the Ancient Monuments and Archaeological Sites and Remains Act, 1954, no construction work is allowed within 100m of a protected site. The construction work also does not have any sanction from the MCD, residents said. "Despite complaints to the concerned authorities and the police, no action has been taken so far and unauthorized work is still going on. They (the building occupants) have erected projections towards the graveyard and have opened a door illegally," said Syed Kamal Nizami, a resident who lives nearby. Residents said most of the work was undertaken in night and though, an emergency call was made to PCR at 2:45am on September 7, work was discontinued for merely 20 minutes and then re-started again. "We have seen the speed at which

the work is being completed in the building. Within a year, all three-storeys have come up and no authority has intervened,” said Nizami. The matter was also taken to a Patiala House court. Last month the trial court directed MCD to file a status report on the alleged construction. Next date of hearing in the case is October 10. Residents have also filed an RTI with MCD, inquiring into the nature of the unauthorized construction and the action, if any, that MCD has initiated against the people carrying out the construction. A reply to the RTI plea is expected within the next few weeks. ASI Delhi circle chief K K Mohammed said the construction was very much in a prohibited zone and in violation of their guidelines. “We have issued a notice to the persons concerned and also sent a copy of the complaint to the police and the MCD,” he said. ASI officials said action in this matter has to be taken by MCD and that they have already written to the civic agency regarding this. MCD deputy commissioner (city zone) Vijay Singh said: “We have issued a showcause notice to the occupants of the building. No further construction work will be permitted. The premises will also be sealed in the next few days after which we will book the building and give demolition orders for the illegal construction.” Locals in the area also said sub-standard material was being used in the construction and it could cause harm to those who live near the under-construction structure or to tourists visiting the shrine of Nizamuddin Aulia.

SOURCE

28th September 2009, Times of India

Should you have any comments or suggestions, you could reach us at

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