



INTACH

DELHI CHAPTER

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Editor's Note

Tomb built 500 years ago lies in a shambles

Missing monuments!

Colonial heritage comes under wheels of progress

Buy Rs 10 ticket, visit 14 heritage sites

Common entry ticket for heritage monuments

Untouched heritage

Heritage houses in CP offer bed, breakfast and slice of the past

TOMB BUILT 500 YEARS AGO LIES IN A SHAMBLES

The capital has “lost” the highest number of monuments, and the list only seems to be growing. While the ministry of culture has narrowed down on 12 historically significant monuments that have virtually been wiped out, experts say that with rapid urbanization and encroachment at heritage sites, many more structures are slowly fading away. In yet another instance of encroachments swallowing up a piece of history, a 16th century gumbad in Nizamuddin basti — Do Siriya Gumbad — is barely visible today. Multi-storey buildings have come up around the tomb, making it difficult for anyone to see the structure. At best, one can spot the dome’s head peeking over a three-storey building. Located just a few feet from the ASI-protected Subz Burj monument, which gets visitors on a regular basis, this Lodi-period tomb continues to bear the brunt of unconcerned authorities. The only access to the tomb — a narrow, dingy lane — has been taken over by scrap-dealers, motor repair shops and a makeshift cowshed. Small jhuggi clusters have mushroomed over the tiny space on which the monument stands. Locals watch television and go about their daily chores even as electrical wires dangle close to the tomb. “This is our land and we don’t allow visitors in here,” said a hostile scrapdealer when Times City tried to see the monument up close. Next to the monument is a hotel, the additional floors of which have completely overshadowed the tomb. With no authority willing to take responsibility for the upkeep of the structure, basti residents have had a free run of the monument. The tomb is neither under central protection by the ASI nor included in the list of 92 monuments identified by Delhi government’s department of archaeology for notification and conservation. Meanwhile, MCD — which is responsible for removing encroachments — said it would look into the vandalism caused on the site. “MCD will take appropriate action to protect the sanctity of this historical monument as per the law,” said Deep Mathur, director (press and information), MCD. According to conservationists, the 500-year-old tomb has been encroached on by the locals for decades. As the structure, which has typical Lodi architecture, is located on Lodhi Road, they say it can become a popular tourist destination. “Humayun’s Tomb, a world heritage site, is walking distance from Do Siriya Tomb... In fact the entire Nizamuddin area is a heritage zone. It thus becomes all the more important to acquire and conserve the structure,” said an expert. The tomb is listed as an important heritage structure both by MCD and Intach, which has also given it a ‘B’ rating in terms of archaeological value.

SOURCE

1st December 2009, Times of India

MISSING MONUMENTS!

It is an intriguing coincidence that the parliamentary standing committee's critique of the National Commission for Heritage Sites Bill, 2009, has been advanced in parallel with a startling disclosure by the Archaeological Survey of India. No fewer than 36 structures or heritage sites are missing across the country. To blame it on poor protection would amount to laboring the obvious. And the ASI merely hedges its primary responsibility as it gropes for other possible factors- the demolition of monuments and tombs to facilitate real estate operations, in the main shopping malls and high-rise apartments. With an air of almost injured innocence, the ASI now speculates that the heritage sites may have been razed as they came in the way of perceived development. To promote the development of underdevelopment would be nearer the truth. As the entity entrusted with safeguarding historical sites, it has palpably failed in its surveillance if it pleads ignorance of such calculated desecration over time. The lapse is still more serious as the ASI functions under the ministry of culture, one that is directly under the Prime Minister the admission that as many as 200 monuments are "unattended" confirms the callous negligence. And if the ASI requires the PM's authorization before security guards can immediately be appointed, it only reinforces the inherent shortcomings of the chain of command. Small wonder why 12 monuments are "untraceable" in the national Capital alone.

SOURCE

1st December 2009, Statesman

HERITAGE HOPPING EASIER AS SINGLE-TICKET WINDOW OPENS

VERY shortly, visits to all World Heritage sites and Centrally-protected monuments will become a lot more convenient. The government is finally launching the common ticketing system that will give visitors access to a large number of tourist places with a single ticket. The common ticket will be launched tomorrow by Prime Minister Manmohan Singh, who also has charge of the Culture Ministry. The idea of a common ticket, as first reported by The Indian Express, was mooted by the Archaeological Survey of India (ASI) to do away with long queues for tickets at monuments. With a single ticket, a visitor in Delhi can now take a pick of 10 World Heritage sites across the country. Tourists who buy a single ticket for five monuments and are not able to visit all five in the Capital can use the same ticket to enter another monument in any other city. These tickets will have barcodes and every time a visitor swipes the ticket, money will be deducted. The tickets will be valid for a year. The ASI has planned three categories of tickets -- one exclusively for World Heritage sites, another for all other Centrally-protected monuments and the third for Taj Mahal. Foreign and domestic tourists will, however, have different common tickets as the two pay different rates for entry. Initially, these tickets might be available only at the ASI headquarters on Janpath in New Delhi and another counter in Agra, but gradually these can be obtained from tour operators, hotelier associations and accredited travel agents.

SOURCE

2nd December 2009, Indian Express

COLONIAL HERITAGE COMES UNDER WHEELS OF PROGRESS

At a time when various other government authorities are trying to showcase Delhi's rich heritage ahead of the Commonwealth Games, the Municipal Corporation of Delhi (MCD) is going to demolish a colonial-era bungalow for an upcoming flyover project near Tis Hazari. The civic body has already started land acquisition for the 1.61-km flyover from Filmistan on Rani Jhansi Road to St Stephen's Hospital near Tis Hazari. Of the several heritage structures that would be affected due to the flyover, Bishop House, situated inside the Methodist Church complex -built in the 1930s -- would be razed completely. The church authorities have been issued eviction notices and they have been asked to vacate the bungalow premises by December 7. **OLD PROPOSAL** This project was originally sanctioned in the early 1990s. MCD took all this while to shift the tyre market and other shops in the area. The Unified Traffic and Transport (Infrastructure and Engineering) Centre (UTTIPPEC) recently cleared the revived

proposal and Delhi Urban Arts Commission (DUAC) chairman Prof KT Ravindran said, "The proposal has not come to us during the last one and a half years. It was cleared long back -- October 21, 1995." However, it was only after 2000 that INTACH came up with a heritage listing for the city and MCD's list of heritage properties is based on INTACH's list. As per the procedure, when the proposal was revived, the civic body should have taken into consideration the fact that the flyover project would mean demolition/alteration in heritage buildings. Traffic conditions have changed drastically since the 1990s. Two metro stations have come up in the vicinity. Sources in the civic body said, the flyover project would also partly affect facades of several other listed heritage buildings like Queen Mary's school and St Stephen's Hospital Chapel. MCD director (Press and Information) Deep Mathur argued, "These are not yet heritage buildings because these are not notified." Bishop SS Singh of the Methodist Church in India said, "We had taken up the issue with authorities a number of times, but to no avail. Instead, we were told this is necessary in the interest of larger public good." The church authorities have finally accepted monetary compensation. Residents of bungalows number 12, 14, 16 (including the Bishop's House) and 12 quarters in the Methodist mission compound are packing up.

SOURCE

3rd December 2009, Hindustan Times

BUY RS 10 TICKET, VISIT 14 HERITAGE SITES

Rs 10 will buy Indians a ticket to visit 14 national heritage monuments. The same price applies to visitors from Saarc and Bimstec countries (Bangladesh, Bhutan, Myanmar, Nepal, Sri Lanka, Thailand, Maldives, Pakistan and Afghanistan). For tourists from other nations, the common entry ticket, launched by Prime Minister Manmohan Singh on Wednesday, will cost Rs 250. The 14 monuments are Fatehpur Sikri, Humayun's Tomb, Agra Fort, Red Fort, Qutub Minar, the Buddhist monuments at Sanchi, the western group of temples at Khajuraho, the Sun Temple at Konarak, the Ajanta Caves, the Ellora Caves, the Elephanta Caves, the group of temples -Pattadakal, the group of monuments -- Hampi, and the group of monuments -Mamallapuram. The common entry tickets to these heritage sites and a separate set for the Archaeological Survey of India's ticketed monuments will be available at the ASI headquarters, all ASI offices and outlets of the India Tourism Development Corporation. The government will also permit hotels, travel agents and tour operators to buy the tickets in bulk. A second common entry ticket will be sold at Rs 5 for all ticketed monuments in India. For Indians and Saarc and Bimstec nationals, the price of the ticket is Rs 5, and for other foreign tourists it is Rs 100. To visit the Taj Mahal, the ticket price for Indians is Rs 20, including the Agra Development Authority's toll tax of Rs 10. For Saarc/Bimstec nationals the price is Rs 510 including Rs 500 tax. For other foreign nationals, the tickets will be Rs 750 (including Rs 500 toll).

SOURCE

3rd December 2009, Hindustan Times

COMMON ENTRY TICKET FOR HERITAGE MONUMENTS

Tourists will no longer be required to queue up for buying tickets at each of the world heritage and protected monuments in the country. From now on tourists can buy a common entry ticket to visit all 10 world heritage sites in India and another one for its other ticketed monuments. These tickets, to be available at 250 outlets across the country, were launched by the PM today. The world heritage sites include the Red Fort in Agra in Uttar Pradesh, Humayun's Tomb and Red Fort in Delhi. There are over 3,600 protected monuments in the country. While foreigners will be charged Rs 250 to visit all World Heritage Sites, domestic tourists will have to shell out Rs.10. a visit to national monuments will now cost foreigners Rs 100. Indians will have to pay just Rs 5. But the government has kept the Taj Mahal, one of the most popular monuments in the world, out of the world heritage sites list. Foreigners will be now charged Rs 750 to visit the Taj, while the tickets for domestic tourists will be just Rs.20.

SOURCE

3rd December 2009, Statesman

UNTOUCHED HERITAGE

The heart of India's countryside conceals much by way of heritage. I speak with specific reference to a quiet dusty little town north of Alwar in Rajasthan. Tijara, as the town is called, has come a long way from being the capital of the kingdom of Mewat, which straddled both the present day states of Rajasthan and Haryana. Mewat wasn't a regular medieval era kingdom. It was different and what made it so were its people — the Meos, who were originally Rajputs. During the Tughlaqs reign at Delhi, a number of Sufi saints began to move into the area and it was under their influence that the Meos gradually converted to Islam. The result of this mix of cultures has been strange and delightful at the same time. While the people may be Muslims in practice, they have retained many links to their roots and many Hindu customs still find prevalence here. **FORT-UITOUS FINDS** The single most important monument in Tijara is the fort located on the outskirts of the town. Built high at the top of an isolated hill from which it commands a sweeping view of the area around, the fort is devoid of any battlements or even a protective wall, thus making the word 'fort' a working title only. The only element that offers a shade of protection to the fort is an old irrigation dam and a stream at the foot of the hill. The fort would have been very vulnerable in its heyday and only the most optimistic of rulers would have stayed here in the turbulent middle ages. Today, the fort makes for a very pleasant outing. A road takes you to about a half kilometer from the base of the hill. From that point, a walk along the narrow pathway created by a gap between the vegetation and the irrigation dam brings you to the hill itself which is not too much of a climb for an active person. At the top of the hill are three palaces, two set at the edge to the front of the hill and a third one towards the back. Interestingly, none of the palaces have the stamp of Sultanate period architecture, indicating that while the kingdom of Mewat may have been ruled from here, the original buildings have vanished with time and the current structures put in place later. The palaces have been abandoned for long, occupied by only birds that flying in and out of the windows all day. **THE TOMB TALES** On the drive back from the fort to the town there's another interesting structure — the Lal Masjid. Unlike its more notorious namesake in Islamabad, this mosque is peaceful. Having once served as the congregational mosque for the city, this is the only structure in the place which bears the mark of Tughlaq architecture. It has three massive bays each of which were originally topped by a huge dome, of which two survive. Across the town from this mosque is an octagonal tomb, which the locals incorrectly call the 'Bhartari ka gumbad'. It is actually the tomb of a cousin of the Lodi rulers. Apart from these monuments, Tijara is littered with many more heritage buildings of varying charm and significance. The first steps in putting a stop to the decay of Tijara's heritage buildings seem to be taking place — that is only if the rumours of the Tijara fort being taken over by a hotel chain with plans to convert it into a heritage hotel hold true. Tomorrow, tourists might gaze out of the windows through which birds fly in and out, but today Tijara remains the kind of place that should be explored before it is 'discovered'.

SOURCE

4th December 2009, Times of India

HERITAGE HOUSE IN CP OFFER BED, BREAKFAST AND SLICE OF THE PAST

HISTORY, architecture, myths and legends... the charms of a Heritage building are endless. And they come alive all the more when one has a chance to live there. About House no 7, Jain Mandir Marg, Connaught Place, myths tell of hidden treasures, secret vaults and escape routes. Also, legend has it that Sir Edward Lutyens, the architect of New Delhi, had lived there for a short time. Like all myths and legends, there is no way to confirm any of it. What is, however, possible today is to spend a few days in that building, with its wide lawns, huge windows and cool marble floors that give a feel of life before Independence. Even three years ago, this would have remained a dream. But now, the Bed & Breakfast Scheme of the Tourism Ministry have made it all too possible. The doors to this house, and a few others in Connaught Place have opened to anyone who can pay Rs 5,000 a night on an average. The House no 7, built in 1926, three years before the construction of CP began, is now called "Ram's Inn". It has five rooms where guests can live there with the family of Devisharan Vaish and his son Pavan. Registered under the scheme are two other properties of the neighbourhood --

"Atithi" at 1 Jain Mandir Marg and "Narula Inn" at 1/90, P Block, Connaught Place. As joint families broke up, the number of vacant bedrooms went on increasing in such houses. The scheme, launched in 2007, was a godsend to the owners. Today, the houses have been renovated and modern amenities put in place to make them more tourist friendly. But the charm of British architecture remains. At Narula Inn, built in 1939, the old windows and doors have been retained and the décor mirrors the old days. Black and white pictures dot the walls, lanterns hang from nails and heavy iron tables stand in corners. The rest of the furniture is dark oak. "Ever since the establishment was set up, there had been an inflow of guests," said Kamal Narula, brother of Sunil Narula who owns the place. "Our rooms remain booked through the year." While CP has many hotels or guesthouses, the Bed & Breakfast Scheme offers a homely place where guests can reside with families and get a taste of life here. The owners, however, say the Tourism Department has done little to advertise the scheme. "All our guests come through our own connections," said Pavan Vaish of Ram's Inn. "If the department placed proper ads at airports and railways stations, we could have had a steady supply of guests."

SOURCE

4th December 2009, Indian Express

NEARLY 300 SQ KM OF DELHI UNDER GREEN COVER: SURVEY

The forest and tree cover in the National Capital is on the rise with the total green cover in the city increasing upto nearly 300 square kilometers. The fact was revealed in the latest India State of Forest Report released by the Forest Survey of India. The report stated that the forest and tree cover in Delhi has increased up to 283 sq km from 283 sq km during the previous assessment. The report said that this constitute 20.20 percent of the geographical area of Delhi that is 1,483 sq km. the Delhi government, in its Endeavour to increase the forest and tree cover in Delhi, has undertaken plantation efforts and has been planting more than 1.5 million tree sapling every year with the cooperation of various agencies. During the past three years, twenty seven new city forests have been created, mainly in north-west and south-west districts, where more than three lakh saplings have been planted.

SOURCE

4th December 2009, Pioneer

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