

Echoes of History: Conservation Endeavours for India's Varied Architectural Styles

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Abstract

India has a rich historical, architectural, and cultural past that spans millennia, as evidenced by its numerous monuments. These landmarks, which range from the iconic towering medieval structures and colonial-era buildings, provide priceless insights into India's storied past. However, the demands of contemporary growth and environmental dangers are making the preservation of these assets more and more difficult. Tracing the historical development of Indian heritage monuments from antiquity to the present, this study offers a thorough examination of their growth. It looks at these monuments' current condition and highlights the problems they have, such as pollution, encroachment, urbanization, and neglect. It also explores the several conservation initiatives that have been made, with an emphasis on sustainable approaches. It talks about modern ways of preserving cultural heritage, like using eco-friendly materials, energy-saving devices, and community outreach programs. The article concludes by suggesting a grading system to order conservation efforts according to many criteria, including historical relevance, architectural worth, state, and potential for tourism. The objective of this grading system is to direct the distribution of resources and strategic planning in order to guarantee the fair conservation of India's rich cultural legacy for upcoming generations. India has the potential to improve the efficacy and inclusivity of its conservation projects by cultivating a sense of ownership and responsibility among local populations. India can protect its rich legacy for the benefit of future generations by adopting a comprehensive strategy that incorporates community involvement, sustainability, and historical preservation.

Keywords: Indian heritage monuments, conservation, sustainability, grading, preservation, history, architecture.

INTRODUCTION

India's rich historical and cultural legacy are attested to by its heritage monuments. These buildings, which date back several millennia, provide windows into the magnificent past of the nation by exhibiting social development, religious zeal, and architectural genius. The built environment of India has been influenced by various historical periods, including the Indus Valley Civilizations, the Mughal kingdoms in the Middle Ages, and the British colonial era.

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All in all, this demonstrates the variety and depth of Indian architectural forms, each of which adds to the nation's architectural and cultural heritage [1].

THE EVOLUTION OF INDIAN HERITAGE MONUMENTS

The heritage monuments of India can be roughly divided into different eras, each distinguished by unique architectural influences and styles. (Table 1) The earliest instances can be seen in the Harappan culture, where highly developed urban

planning and craftsmanship can be found at places like Mohenjo-Daro and Harappa. The building of temples and stupas, which stand for creative expression and religious passion, occurred throughout the Vedic period that followed [2].

Later eras saw the creation of numerous temples, stupas, and rock-cut caves that exemplified the fusion of spirituality and creative expression. These empires included the Mauryan, Gupta, and Chola ones. Dravidian temple architecture is distinguished by tall gopurams (portal towers), elaborate carvings, and substantial stone buildings. It is elaborate and has a shikhara (tower) style [3]. It was common to witness Hindu temples with their very elaborate and detailed architecture, star-shaped floor plans, finely carved ceilings and pillars, and sculpture reliefs illustrating historical and mythical subjects. The intricate workmanship of these rock sculptures is quite remarkable [4].

The Mughal and Sultanate regimes, which typified an era of architectural magnificence, brought in the medieval period. Famous sites like the Taj Mahal, Qutub Minar, and Humayun's Tomb serve as prime examples of how Islamic, Indian, and Persian architectural features may be combined.

European influences were brought about by colonial control, and as a result, buildings like Rashtrapati Bhavan and Victoria Memorial combined Indo-Saracenic and Neo-classical architectural styles.

Table 1. Overview of the evolution of Indian heritage for Monuments (Source: Author).

Period	Architectural Style	Location	Materials	Typologies
Indus Valley Civilization	Harappan	Northwest India (modern-day Pakistan and northwest India)	Fired brick, mud brick, stone, Lime mortar	Planned cities, granaries, public baths, monumental structures
Mauryan Period	Mauryan	Northern and central India	Stone, particularly polished sandstone	Ashoka's pillars, monolithic rock-cut caves, monumental architecture
Gupta Period	Gupta Nagara	Northern India	Stone, Brick	Temple architecture with shikhara style, rock-cut cave temples
Chola Period	Dravidian, Hoysala, etc.	Southern India	Granite, sandstone	Temple architecture with towering gopurams, intricate carvings
Mughal Period	Mughal	Northern India	Red sandstone, marble	Forts, palaces, mosques, and tombs
Rajput Period	Rajput	North western and Central India	Sandstone, Marble, Granite	Forts, palaces, temples with intricate carvings, ornate domes, defensive architecture
Maratha Period	Maratha	Western India	Stone, Wood	Forts, Temples, Palaces with robust architecture, bastions, Grand gateways
Colonial Period	Indo-Saracenic, Neo-Gothic, Neo-Classical	Across India	Stone, Brick, Lime mortar	Government buildings, churches, administrative structures

CURRENT SITUATION OF INDIAN HERITAGE MONUMENTS

Many of India's heritage monuments are threatened by urbanization, pollution, encroachment, and neglect, despite their cultural significance.

Heritage precincts are being encroached upon by rapid urban expansion, which is changing the surrounding area and removing historical context [5]. Air and waterborne pollution deteriorates stone surfaces and finely carved details more quickly, endangering the structural integrity of the building. Furthermore, conservation efforts are hampered by a lack of finance and resources, which exposes

numerous monuments to deterioration and neglect. These problems are made worse by encroachment and unauthorized building, which destroys the authenticity and historical setting of the past.

CONSERVATION OF HERITAGE MONUMENTS WITH RESPECT TO SUSTAINABILITY

To secure the long-term survival of Indian heritage monuments, conservation efforts must place a high priority on sustainability. This entails incorporating cultural preservation into sustainable development projects, encouraging community involvement, and implementing eco-friendly conservation techniques. Green landscaping, energy-efficient lighting, and adaptive reuse are a few examples of projects that might lessen their negative effects on the environment while protecting cultural heritage [6].

For India's historical monuments to remain viable over the long term, sustainable conservation techniques are essential. This entails using all-encompassing strategies that strike a balance between community involvement, environmental management, and preservation. To reduce their negative effects on the environment, conservation initiatives should give priority to eco-friendly products, methods, and technologies. Cultural heritage can be protected while promoting socioeconomic benefits through integration with sustainable development initiatives. Programs that promote awareness, education, and community involvement are crucial for encouraging a sense of accountability and ownership for cultural preservation [7].

The Archaeological Survey of India defines "conservation" as the procedures used to preserve a monument's material, architectural worth, and integrity while also acknowledging its historical relevance in relation to cultural connotations.

Any building that is to be preserved must have value in order to receive professional advice from the relevant authority or governing body and be protected by legislation for the benefit of future generations. There are main 6 reasons for listing any building for conserving it, they are:

1. Historical
2. Architectural
3. Archaeological
4. Traditional
5. Scientific
6. Artistic significance

The building should be listed once it has been determined, with the assistance of the relevant governing agencies, what makes it what it is. Listings are records of the location that contain all the information about that specific region that needs to be preserved [8].

GRADING SYSTEM FOR HERITAGE MONUMENTS

Grading is a crucial step in the preservation of cultural heritage, (Table 2) as is the designation of a specific historic site as a provincial or national historic site. Grading separates precincts based on categories and makes buildings easier to distinguish from one another.

Majorly grading are categorised under 3 categories:

- a. Grade-1
- b. Grade-2
- c. Grade-3

Grade 1

These are buildings which has an area of national & historic importance which are under the protection of ASI or the State Department of Archaeology.

Grade 2

In this category the buildings has a regional or local importance with architectural & historical values. These are landmarks which create an identity of the particular city. In this grade we have 2 divisions:

- a. *Grade 2a:* Here we can do modifications in the interior aspect without changing its natural surrounding & without affecting the structure.
- b. *Grade 2b:* In this we can add an addition building beside the monument under the same boundary provided it maintains all the regulations & consistency of the existing building [9].

Grade 3

These are important for townscape which showcase the architectural, aesthetics & sociological interest in the building. These include art works like pottery, handicrafts, etc. which are native to only that particular place which has to be preserved. These interests can be created as additional buildings in the same compound to promote the style & culture within the existing building.

Table 2. Evaluation-grading of listed heritage (Source: CPWD-JULY 2013).

	GRADE				TYPOLOGIES					
	State and Central Protected	Wadas	Religious	Maths Dharma-shalas Lodges	Public Buildings	Water Bodies, Natural Features	Bridges/Chowkes/Lanes	Memorial	Neighbourhood	Total
Grade - I	2	1	19	Nil	3	4	Nil	2	Nil	31
Grade - II A	Nil	36	19	8	11	4	5	1	1	85
Grade - II B	Nil	29	12	6	4	1	4	Nil	1	57
Grade - III	Nil	6	15	1	4	1	7	Nil	Nil	34
Total	2	72	65	15	22	10	16	3	2	207

Individual governing bodies formulate their own standards based on the primary listings provided by the head of the organizations, as per the evaluation for grading listed buildings. In the Indian setting, (Figure 1) Goa is one instance where grades are assigned based on color and importance. This demonstrates how grading with all of the current markers can be done at the regional level.

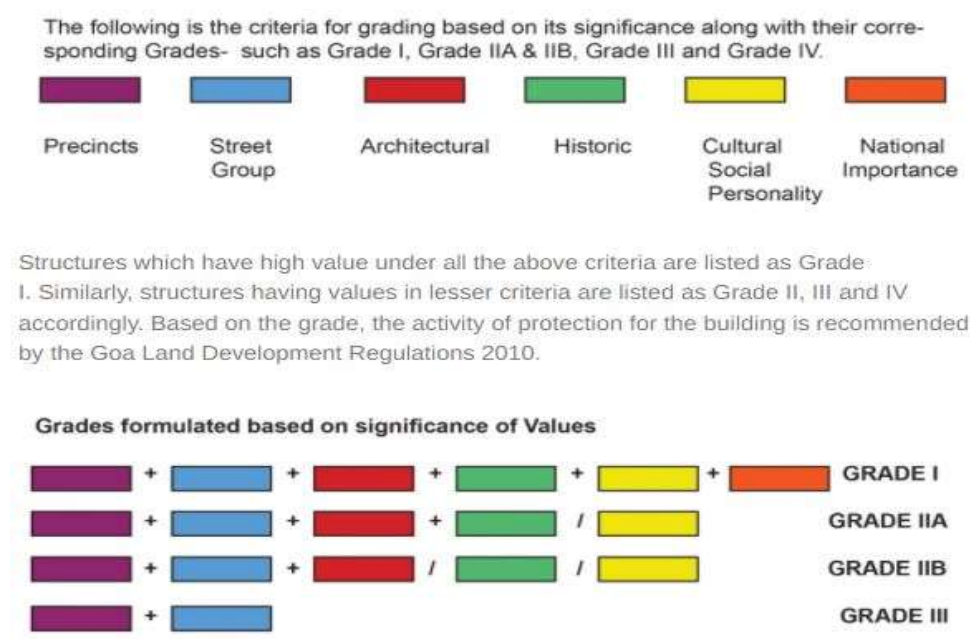


Figure 1. Grading Buildings in Goa by Govt. (Source: Foundation, 2019).

BENEFITS OF HAVING AN INDIVIDUAL CONSERVATION GRADING SYSTEM

The individual grading system gives a better analysis in a regional & local level. This also helps in the overall development of the area and also creates a governing body other than ASI, HCC, CPWD and INTACT. Even after listing if the regional & local governing body shows a good amount of assessment with proper care actions for conservation the main governing bodies can allow the local bodies to take care of the structure [10].

Because they have a closer personal connection due to their shared historical and cultural characteristics, the local governing authorities are better equipped to manage the structure. This aids in keeping the major regulatory organizations informed about all maintenance activities, as most reports and inspections are conducted on a regular basis. A few building precincts can be managed by the local governing bodies, but organizations like ASI and Intact are unable to manage all of them. Tourism is also boosted by this. When a heritage property possesses extraordinary traits, it can be awarded grade I status, the greatest level of significance, providing a clear image to the authorities about what needs additional protection and conservation [11].

CONCLUSION

The development authority must assign regular maintenance as the membership of local governing bodies is subject to change, much like in municipal authorities. If this isn't done, it may differ throughout bodies and lead to conflicts. A structure may also lose its worth and significance if appropriate maintenance isn't provided in accordance with social and ecological considerations. It is necessary to create a dedicated team to uphold the building requirements. There are 24 circles that make up the entire nation. Due to the organization's extensive staff of skilled archaeologists, conservators, architects, scientists, and others, it is able to carry out archaeological projects involving excavation, history, building surveys, and other related activities. So in every region this type of team has to be setup to check the building factors.

If an architectural building or heritage site is graded, some of the sites that receive lower marks may become less significant or receive fewer visitors than the ones that receive better grades. Because social and cultural aspects are crucial to the history of a building, it is imperative that authorities ensure that the value of social and cultural heritage is preserved in relation to the type of building.

India's architectural legacy, cultural variety, and rich history are all palpably connected through its heritage monuments. These monuments continue to awe and inspire adoration despite a number of obstacles, such as urbanization, pollution, and neglect. To protect these riches for future generations, community involvement, creative thinking, and sustainable conservation activities are crucial. India can ensure the conservation of its priceless legacy and foster cultural stewardship for future generations by putting in place a strong grading system and giving conservation efforts top priority.

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