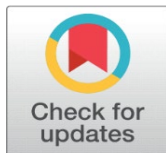
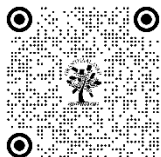


EXISTING TRENDS OF HERITAGE CONSERVATION IN SHIMLA: A HILL TOWN IN INDIA

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ABSTRACT

India is bestowed with rich cultural diversity manifested by a wide range of tangible heritage resources. The formal inception of the Archaeological Survey of India (ASI) during colonial rule paved way for heritage conservation protecting the National Monuments pan India that are less than 0.01% of the total existing heritage resources. Though the State Archaeology Department and the National Monuments Authority have taken various initiatives at the state levels, the adopted conservation process lacks an integrated approach due to the involvement of a wide array of stakeholders ranging from the Central Government to the local authorities to the various conservation groups. Each of these agencies employs vivid funding sources and mechanisms and variable sets of guidelines and norms with diversity in delivery models for various heritage conservation projects limiting the conservation process to piecemeals. Shimla, a colonial hill town in the north of India, and the state capital of Himachal Pradesh is home to vast stock of tangible and intangible heritage resources. Amidst rapid growth and urbanization, over the past two decades, several initiatives have been taken by the state government of Himachal Pradesh (GoHP) in resonance with the urban local bodies of Shimla but only a few of the conservation projects have seen success. However, the findings of the research bring out that though the GoHP has been proactive in protecting its heritage resources, however, a large part of the heritage resources in Shimla remain in a state of neglect and lack maintenance and management. This is because of the complexity involved in the conception and implementation of heritage conservation because of the vastness of heritage resources and the involvement of diverse groups of stakeholders in the process, as the role of urban local bodies directly impacts the efficiency of the conservation program. The study brings out the heritage conservation process adopted in Shimla by various government agencies.

Keywords: Heritage Conservation, Stakeholders, Colonial Heritage, Shimla, Urban Local Bodies



1. INTRODUCTION

Colonial hill towns in India are landscapes created by the British, to bring home-like lifestyles to a foreign country, as they felt that it was crucial to return to colder climates from the enervating low altitudes [Aiken \(1994\)](#). The paradox of imperialism and its implication for growth and development outline the trajectory of colonial development and give these hill towns their significance [Dasgupta and Garg \(2020\)](#). Most of the colonial buildings that exist in these hill towns are manifestations of the social and cultural legacy associated with these towns. They

came under Indian governance after India's independence in 1947 and subsequently paced development when they gained socio-economic significance and became important tourist destinations throughout India [Baker \(2010\)](#). From administrative headquarters, they have gradually transformed into primary activity and economic centers attracting a large number of national and international tourists [Bansal and Chhabra \(2019\)](#). Due to this, in the present day, the colonial hill towns are experiencing immense urban transformation & diversity and complexity of issues of urban planning and development due to explosive population growth and increased tourism activities ultimately impacting their built heritage [Krishan \(2020\)](#).

Within this context, Shimla, a colonial hill town and the state-capital of Himachal Pradesh as well as the summer capital of the erstwhile British, is experiencing constant risk of degradation and loss of its rich stock of built heritage because of inflated urbanization and development pressures [Bansal and Chhabra \(b\) \(2022\)](#). One of the main reasons for the current situation is the lack of sensitive comprehension and the due importance of cultural heritage values by the responsible stakeholders and custodians of heritage. Furthermore, a general deficit in integrating urban development policies and frameworks with heritage conservation management and implementation policies, an absence of expertise, traditional skills and training, and resources among decision-makers has been an ever-emerging and pressing concern in heritage management [Garg and Kaur \(2020\)](#). Furthermore, persistent competition and conflict between the developers' interests and conservation needs add to the woes of the situation [Ghosh \(2015\)](#).

2. HERITAGE CONSERVATION IN INDIA

India is bestowed with a uniquely diverse, vast, and vibrant cultural heritage including a colossal corpus of built heritage and a noteworthy genre of living monuments [Krishan \(2020\)](#). To protect and conserve the stock of India's built heritage, it needs to be recognized at multiple levels ranging from the international to national to the local level. The establishment of the Archaeological Survey of India (ASI) by the British Raj in India laid the foundation for the formal development of the heritage conservation profession in India. The handbook produced by the ASI in 1923 gave technical guidelines to maintain uniformity in conservation practice and continued its spree post-independence.

A report by [Aayog \(2020\)](#), indicates that India is a land of more than 500,000 heritage sites and monuments that are either centrally or state-protected monuments or fall under different trusts for protection and conservation [Aayog \(2020\)](#). As many as only 40 heritage properties have been listed on the UNESCO World Heritage List against a count of 3,691 heritage under the custodianship of the Archaeological Survey of India (ASI) [Archaeological Survey of India. \(2022\)](#). An additional 4122 monuments of regional significance are protected by the State Departments of Archaeology by governments of different states accounting for a total of 7813 protected monuments across the country [Gupta et al. \(2021\)](#). Fatefully, it accounts for even less than 1% of the nationally protected heritage buildings in India as the complexity involved in the vastness of the heritage in India makes it unviable for ASI and State Departments to protect a major portion of the built heritage and therefore many lies unidentified and unprotected to further degrade and diminish with time and change [Shah \(2016\)](#). The huge potential in this heritage needs to be thereby unlocked considering the vast amount of heritage that stands unidentified and unprotected. It thus becomes imperative to empower the local

bodies and authorities along with the involvement of local communities to take charge and monitor the unprotected built heritage.

Figure 1 shows the structural organization of the various agencies and institutions that have gradually undertaken the task of heritage conservation along with ASI. However, in the present affairs, amidst the protected and unprotected, the Indian-built heritage of India is still facing grave concerns related to preservation, conservation, and management of built heritage Bansal and Chhabra (2022).

Figure 1

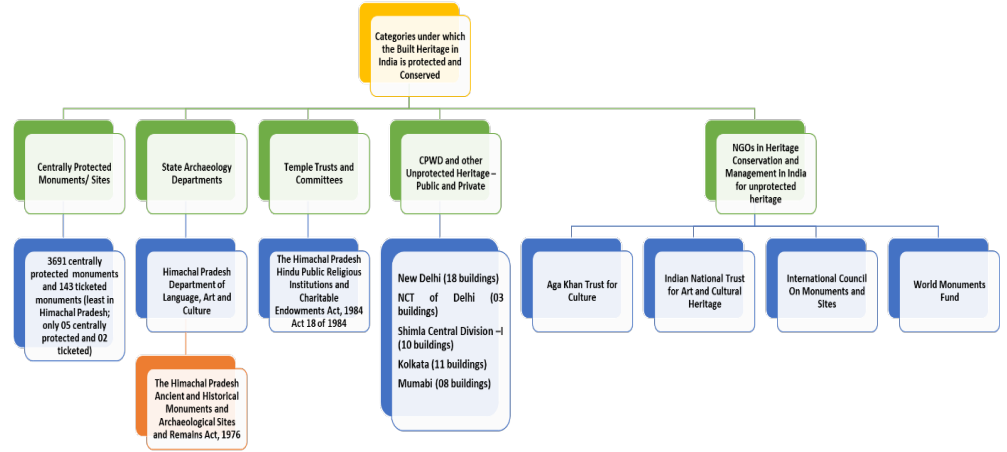


Figure 1 Heritage Conservation in India- Structural Organization

Source Aayog (2020), adapted by the Author

3. THE STATE OF BUILT HERITAGE IN SHIMLA

Existing research by INTACH indicates that at a national average 22% of built heritage structures show signs of deterioration with the highest in Kerala and Himachal Pradesh comprising 40% of the total national average, though West Bengal and Madhya Pradesh have the highest number of listed buildings in danger of disappearance (Figure 2) Gupta et al. (2021). Besides 5% of the built heritage is in imminent danger.

Figure 2

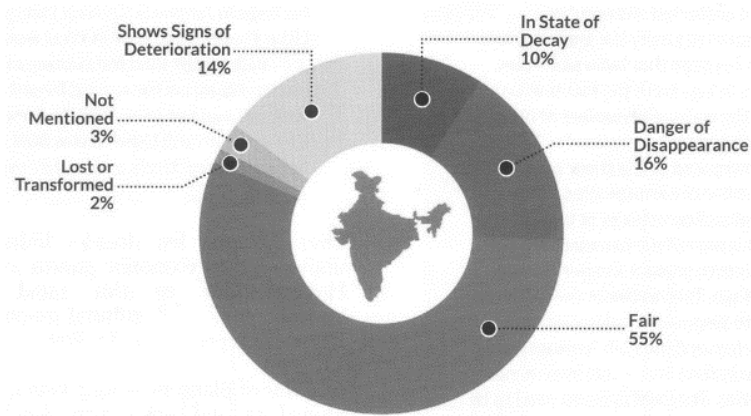


Figure 2 National Average of the State of Built Heritage Conservation in India

Source Gupta et al. (2021)

Within the state of Himachal Pradesh, there are 40 ASI-protected monuments, 5 State Archaeology-protected monuments, and the Kalka-Shimla Railway Line is a World Heritage Site by UNESCO [Aayog \(2020\)](#). Furthermore, a total of 862 properties have been listed by INTACH in 4 districts and 05 towns and cities of the state. The physical state of built heritage in Himachal Pradesh is degrading at an alarming rate of 40% of built heritage stock at the stage of disappearance in Himachal Pradesh [Gupta et al. \(2021\)](#). Amongst these, some of the nationally significant built heritage falls in Shimla, the present state capital, and the Imperial capital of the erstwhile British in India pre-independence [Kumar and Pushplata \(2012\)](#).

Figure 3



Figure 3 The Bantony Castle (Before Restoration) & Cecil Hotel in Shimla

Rapid in-migration and increasing floating population owing to the high tourist influx have been one of the major concerns in the state of Himachal Pradesh with the problem accelerating in Shimla ([Jutla \(2016\)](#), [TCPO \(2016\)](#)). Though several measures have been adopted by the State Archaeology Departments through the Himachal Pradesh Department of Language, Art, and Culture and urban local bodies, [Figure 3](#) shows that built cultural heritage is facing neglect and is being replaced by concrete buildings at an alarming rate [Sharma et al. \(2022\)](#). Within Shimla, as many as 300 colonial heritage buildings built between the early 19th century to mid-20th century till India attained independence exist, though many have been lost in the wraths of time. The state of built heritage as it exists today in Shimla is given in [Figure 4](#). The analysis indicates that only 36% of the built heritage rests in good condition, while the remaining 64% is fast depleting. Though the present situation calls for immediate action for the 3% of buildings that are at the brim of getting extinct. Further, active attention is needed for the 18% and 25% of buildings that have symptoms of fast decay and deterioration, whilst due consideration must be given to the remaining 18% of buildings that have started showing signs of deterioration before they deteriorate beyond repair and are feared to get lost.

Figure 4

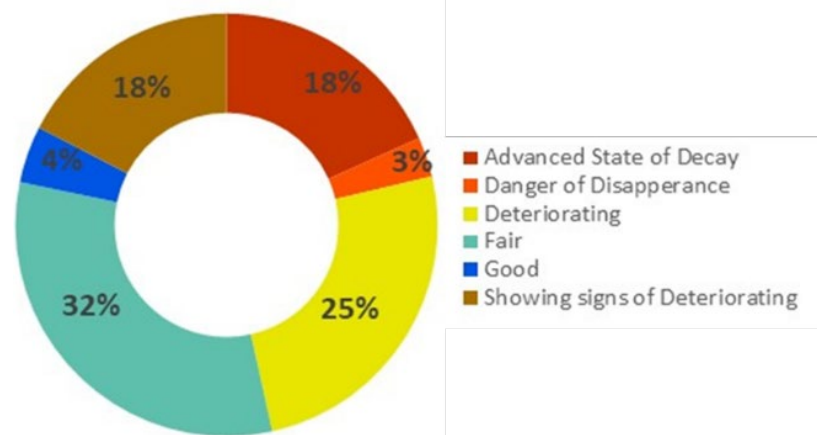


Figure 4 The State of Colonial-Built Heritage in Shimla

Source Author

In light of the above, the present research brings out the initiatives taken by the GoHP to conserve the built heritage in Shimla, the state capital of Himachal Pradesh in India. It addresses the gap that exists between heritage conservation and management policies as well as the local urban development frameworks for an integrated and sustained development process.

4. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

A qualitative research methodology has been adopted in the context of Shimla for this study. Focus group discussions and interviews based on a structured questionnaire were primarily adopted as survey tools. For the primary studies, a format was developed to study the various aspects of the built heritage to document the following for each building – the building typology, past and present use, ownership status, cultural significance, period of construction, present condition, and the threats and risks that the heritage properties are exposed to. For further analysis, the buildings selected represented a fair sample of the government-owned public buildings built between 1850-1900 by the British in Shimla that have been considered for heritage conservation. The intention of the discussion and the interview was to comprehend the initiatives taken by the GoHP to identify, prioritize and conserve the built heritage conservation in Shimla. Data were collected and compiled from different secondary sources as well as primary surveys. The secondary sources include historical documents, survey reports, publications, and plan documents. The selection of the stakeholders was based on a pilot survey and consisted of a total of 46 stakeholders. The sample consisted of 20 public stakeholders who had been a part of the process of heritage conservation including 04 members of the Heritage Advisory Committee, 05 from the Shimla Municipal Corporation, 06 members from the Town & Country Planning Department, and 05 members from the Himachal Pradesh Tourism department. They were instrumental in giving an insight into the processes and challenges of heritage conservation faced by them in Shimla. Apart from this, 20 private stakeholders who owned heritage buildings in Shimla and 06 residents were interviewed. Primary data were collected (Oct-Nov 2022) by the methods of reconnaissance, in-depth interviews with the identified sample, focus group discussion, photographic documentation, and

researcher observation to evaluate the present state of built heritage as well as the stakeholders take on the present state of affairs for conserving the built heritage.

5. HIMACHAL PRADESH STATE GOVT'S INITIATIVES TO CONSERVE THE BUILT HERITAGE

The state government has deputed the department of Town and Country Planning Organization to control and regulate all construction actions in the defined zones in an organized and planned manner. Within the premise of the Himachal Pradesh TCP Act 1977, 34 Special Area Development Authorities (SADA) are constituted consisting of a chairman and other officials appointed by the State Government who meet once every quarter. These are the areas with the potential for growth concerning urbanization but lack an agency for undertaking their development. Further, a Heritage Conservation Advisory Committee constituting heritage experts, historians, engineers, and architects led by the Secretary (TCP) was formulated by the Govt. as an advisory committee to advise on matters concerning Shimla's historical features. The committee has notified heritage zones in Shimla with the Municipal Commissioner, State Town Planner, Director of HP Art, Language & Culture Department, and Senior Architects from the HPPWD as its officiating members. Additionally, a Restricted Area Committee was formed to monitor and control the construction and development activities in the demarcated restricted zones notified within the SPA (Shimla Planning Area) by the state government. This Committee is headed by the Director (TCP), a representative of the Urban Design Department deputed by the Director (UD), the Municipal Commissioner, the Member Secretary of SADA as well as the State Town Planner as its members.

5.1. HERITAGE CONSERVATION IN SHIMLA

The heritage in Shimla comprises various types of built heritage along with its urban character and natural heritage. The majority of heritage buildings fall in the historic core which is experiencing tremendous development pressure and has become overcrowded and congested with time [Kumar and Garg \(2018\)](#). The complexity involved in the vastness of the heritage in India makes it unviable for ASI and State Departments to protect a major portion of the built heritage [Sharma et al. \(2022\)](#). It was thus imperative to empower the local bodies and authorities along with the involvement of local communities to take charge and monitor the unprotected built heritage. In this context, the breakthrough in heritage conservation was the delineation of the zones under the Interim Development Plan (IDP), introduced in 1979 defining developmental regulations of Shimla Planning Area (SPA) and has been amended several times along the way [Kumar and Garg \(2015\)](#). To preserve the historical significance of Shimla, the Himachal Pradesh state government set up a heritage advisory panel in December 2000 to prepare an all-inclusive set of heritage policies and regulations to prevent the haphazard growth of the town [TCPO \(2016\)](#). The Town & Country Planning Department constituted a Heritage Advisory Committee (HAC) consisting of heritage professionals and experts, architects, historians, and Engineers with the Secretary (TCP) as the Chairman as an advisor on all the matters relative to Shimla's heritage resources [Sharma \(2018\)](#). In 2002, the IDP was amended to divide SPA into Core Area & Restricted Area, Heritage Zone & Heritage Buildings, and other buildings as per the IDP (2002), put forth by TCPO, chapter 10, General Regulations governing development. As per the HAC "heritage buildings, heritage areas and Cemeteries of historical importance that possess distinct architectural designs, façade, elevations and religious as well as tourism importance have been identified and notified as

Heritage Zones". Specific regulations about the heritage zones have been laid down by the TCPO and all heritage-related decisions are taken under the HAC [Weebers and Idris \(2016\)](#).

5.2. THE INITIATIVES TAKEN

Furthermore, appreciating the heritage significance of Shimla's built heritage the GoHP has taken the following measures- a) Heritage conservation as a domain falls under the responsibility of the department of TCPO along with the Shimla Municipal Corporation; b) a 50m area around the Mall Road notified as Heritage Zone under the Town and Country Planning Act 1977; c) An inventory of Shimla's colonial built heritage within as well as outside the heritage zone was prepared, listing as many as 97 buildings and cemeteries [TCPO. \(2016\)](#). Presently, nearly 250 heritage buildings are listed by INTACH, 10 Heritage Buildings fall under the jurisdiction/maintenance of CPWD in Shimla Central Division Namely The Bernloe Cottage, Eddleston, Earneston, Grand Hotel, Vice Regal lodge, The Cedar, Railway Board Building, Kennedy Cottage Building, Clairiount Building, and Gorton Castle [Bansal and Chhabra \(2022\)](#). Zoning regulations for the heritage zone and buildings that fall within it have been prepared by the TCPO. Under the chairmanship of the Director TCPO, a Heritage Conservation Advisory Sub-Committee is formulated to regulate the laws for any alteration/addition in the existing heritage buildings.

6. ISSUES IN HERITAGE CONSERVATION

Findings of the survey reveal that presently, the built heritage conservation in Shimla has concurred through a piece-meal approach and there are no defined regulations and guidelines for undertaking conservation work. One of the primary issues that arise while conserving the built heritage in Shimla is that most buildings are functioning as government offices in the present day. There are additions/replacements/alterations and demolitions within these buildings which are insensitive to the heritage character and impact the heritage value of the building. [Figure 5](#) shows an example of the State Library at the Ridge in Shimla where insensitive interventions have impacted the heritage value of this building. The elements, styles, and materials of the new developments are in absolute contrast to the existing heritage building. The modifications to fulfil the contemporary needs within these office spaces do not account for the unique character because of the paucity of funds and expertise. This is also because of the absence of a stringent regulatory mechanism to control the interventions and construction activities carried out in heritage buildings.

Figure 5



Figure 5 Façade of the State Library, Shimla with the Front Flight of Wooden Dog Leg Stairs Removed and Treated with the White Plastered Band at the Base on all Sides to Cover the Damp Surface.

Source Himachal State Archives and Author

Figure 6 indicates the densely packed buildings in the historic core of Shimla posing a threat to the existing cultural heritage. Lately, a lot of incongruous intrusions and moderations impacting the architectural values have been carried out in a lot of buildings like the Gorton Castle. All this has resulted in the loss of the unique architectural character and distinctiveness for which Shimla is famous. The need, therefore, arises to adopt a more carefully thought repair and restoration process to be adopted in the safeguarding process of heritage buildings. Furthermore, the shortage of heritage experts and professionals along with skilled artisans and craftsmen is another area of concern that leads to unsuitable alterations in the heritage buildings. Additionally, the lack of an appropriate framework and defined set of guidelines paves way for deprioritizing fund allocation for restoration and conservation works further adding to the woes of the situation.

Figure 6



Figure 6 The Densely Developed Historic Core Exerting Pressure on the Heritage of Shimla

Moreover, the involvement of multiple agencies with diverse interests and roles in heritage conservation like the Shimla Municipal Corporation, TCPO, and Department of Arts and Culture leads to conflicts further delaying the process of conservation. The existing architectural and planning controls and regulations are not in coherence with heritage buildings leading to visual and physical conflict between the old and new. Insufficient / lack of funds leads to delays or dismissal of heritage conservation projects and is one of the biggest issues in Shimla, though ADB Bank funding was received for the restoration of the Town Hall, Shimla.

7. RECOMMENDATIONS

Formulation of a heritage conservation policy for Shimla that provides a comprehensive strategy for developmental and implementation framework for built heritage conservation is the immediate need. A detailed inventory of the identified heritage buildings is done to formulate a repository which shall require periodic updating. Digital tools and mechanisms may be employed for the same. Developing a Heritage Zone Master Plan that defines the development controls restricting the height of adjacent and new buildings, façade style and treatment, and defining the use and style of construction along with restricting the use of materials.

Defined guidelines for the preparation of heritage conservation, implementation, and management accompanied by details like project prioritization, cost estimation, economic potential assessment, the timeframe, budget calculation, and allocation along with the financing mechanism should be in place for effective conservation action. Adopting ways to decongest the historic core by shifting non-confirm activities outside the Heritage Zone Area. Integration of the heritage management plans with the smart city proposal will be step towards holistic and integrated development in Shimla as the present smart city proposal lacks any consideration to the cultural heritage of Shimla.

Self-sustainable solutions for heritage buildings by proposing an adaptive reuse plan of the built heritage and shifting of government office buildings outside the core heritage zone. Exploring the tourism potential of the heritage buildings by selective reuse and thus harnessing their commercial potential for a sustained future of heritage buildings. Creation of a separate heritage conservation cell under the CPWD for buildings owned by the central government and its agencies such as the Vice Regal Lodge. along with increased interaction with the heritage property owners shall be instrumental in conserving the heritage. The tourism potential of the heritage buildings should be harnessed by the HPTDB and the Shimla Tourism Department by proposing adaptive reuse and revamping heritage properties by promoting private sector investments.

Additionally, regular heritage management programme is the most effective way to prevent colonial built heritage from further degradation and deterioration. Public agencies like the HPPWD, CPWD etc. should be more proactive in conducting regular and frequent inspections to examine the structural and physical condition of all heritage buildings. In addition to the Heritage Advisory Committee for enforcing the zoning and development control plan, a Tourism and Heritage Development Cell consisting of heritage professionals, experts, and agencies for project management should be formulated. A special Heritage Fund should be dedicated in Shimla for the conservation and restoration of heritage buildings. Furthermore, active community participation is the key to success in heritage conservation projects and thus continuous efforts to spread heritage awareness

through frequent heritage walks that include the Kalka –Shimla railway line shall promote the cause of heritage conservation and preserving the past for future generations.

8. CONCLUSION

The conservation of heritage buildings while keeping pace with contemporary development holds paramount significance in places like Shimla which have a sense of place and identity attached to the existing heritage resources. The presence of heritage buildings adds to the historical as well as the cultural significance of a place and brings pride to the locals and visitors alike. In light of this, the urban local bodies must adopt a holistic approach and formulate appropriate guidelines and frameworks for heritage conservation that are integral to the planning and development plans. The proactive approach of the central government capped by active measures taken by the GoHP and the urban local bodies may streamline the process of heritage conservation which at the moment remains in piecemeals. The involvement of multiple stakeholders with their defined roles and powers shall smoothen the process of conservation. The central, state, and local governments of a historically significant place like Shimla should comprehend that heritage is a significant part of the built environment and must be used as a resource for a sustainable urban future and thus devise strategies for a heritage-integrated development approach.

CONFLICT OF INTERESTS

None.

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