

# INDIA

## Case Study 1: Victorian Gothic and Art Deco Ensembles of Mumbai and its Esplanade Mansion

### About the site

In the second half of the 19th century, the city of Mumbai became a global trading centre. This led to the implementation of an ambitious urban planning project that resulted in the construction of ensembles of public buildings around the open space, Oval Maidan. The buildings on the eastern side of the Oval Maidan were constructed in the Victorian Gothic style and, then, in the early 20th century, the land on its western periphery was filled up with Art Deco buildings. These two ensembles bear testimony to the phases of modernisation that Mumbai underwent in the course of the 19th and 20th centuries. In 2018, the entire group of buildings on both sides of the Oval Maidan was inscribed on the UNESCO World Heritage List as “Victorian Gothic and Art Deco Ensembles of Mumbai” (Figs. 1 and 2).

This case concerns the grave threats faced by one of the component buildings of the World Heritage property, namely the Esplanade Mansion, originally called Watson’s Hotel. At the time of inscription in 2018, this building, though occupied by multiple tenants, was in a fairly dilapidated condition. Hence, one of the recommendations in the Advisory Body’s evaluation was to “undertake urgent conservation of the grade IIA building, the former Watson’s Hotel (known at present as Esplanade Mansions” (Fig. 3).

### The Esplanade Mansion

The Esplanade Mansion is a Grade IIA landmark historic building (as per DCR 67), with an undisputed local, national and global significance. The building is a work of brilliant engineering and architecture of the Victorian era in Mumbai and is the only Victorian Industrial component in “The Victorian Gothic & Art Deco Ensembles of Mumbai” (Fig. 1). Built in 1867–70 by John Hudson Watson as Watson’s Hotel, it is significant as Mumbai’s first “well-equipped, European type” hotel, and is an important testimony to the emergence of the city as a global commercial centre. The Esplanade Mansion is a prefabricated structure, using a combination of cast and wrought iron. It was designed by Rowland Mason Ordish, who had worked as an assistant draughtsman with Charles Fox and Henderson for the design of the Crystal Palace. Esplanade Mansion was fabricated and assembled by the Phoenix Foundry Company, Derby, England.

Today, it survives as “the only multi-storey, fully framed building, arguably the most ambitious and technically accomplished of all the exported buildings of the 19th century”, also housing India’s first power-operated elevator. It is recorded as the first

residential building in the world, using the said structure system construction technology.<sup>1</sup> As a unique example of ‘Shared Built Heritage’, it represents the adaptation of a Western idiom to the local climatic conditions. The openness in plan with central courtyard, break in the rear elevation and balconies allowed free circulation of air through the building. The building also interprets Mumbai’s domestic vernacular architecture in a modern, industrial material. The building is also significant in the history of Indian cinema as the location of the very first screening of motion pictures in India.

With this cultural significance, the Esplanade Mansion contributes to the Outstanding Universal Value (OUV) of the Victorian Gothic and Art Deco Ensembles of Mumbai and to the criteria (ii and iv) under which this World Heritage site is inscribed. The Esplanade Mansion is also one of the 40 CESSSED buildings in the inscribed WH property (Fig. 2). CESSSED buildings are governed by the CESS Act,<sup>2</sup> under which the Maharashtra Housing & Area Development Authority (MHADA) is responsible for the repair and restoration of such buildings (Figs. 4 and 5).

### Threats to the site

In May 2019, MHADA issued notices to all occupants to vacate the building for repairs. The Indian Institute of Technology Bombay (IIT-Bombay) in Mumbai was also approached to undertake its structural audit. On 23rd May 2019, the ‘Mumbai Mirror’ reported that the IIT-Bombay had recommended demolition of the historic structure, also reproducing the following excerpts from the IIT-Bombay structural audit report: “The rigidity of the structure is lost. Several alterations have been made in the form of rooms and mezzanine floors, which have increased load on structure. In our view, any kind of structural repairs are neither logical nor economically viable. The repair of the building will be a dangerous job as many structural elements are not rigidly connected to each other. The repairs also cannot make the structure habitable under seismic conditions. Considering the above, it is of the opinion that it will be prudent to demolish the building.” MHADA, in turn, submitted the report to the Bombay High Court for seeking permission for the building’s demolition.<sup>3</sup> On 4th June 2019, ‘The Times of India’ reported that the Bombay High Court had asked MHADA to list precautions for demolition (Figs. 6–9).<sup>4</sup>

### Action by ICOMOS India

On 10th June 2019, ICOMOS India wrote letters to all stakeholders, i.e. to MHADA, the Office of the Chief Minister of the Government of Maharashtra, the Archaeological Survey of India, the Municipal Corporation of Greater Mumbai (BMC), the Mumbai Heritage Conservation Committee (MHCC, an advisory body to Municipal Corporation of Greater Mumbai), pointing out the potential loss of the integrity and authenticity of the entire World Heritage site that the intended demolition would cause,

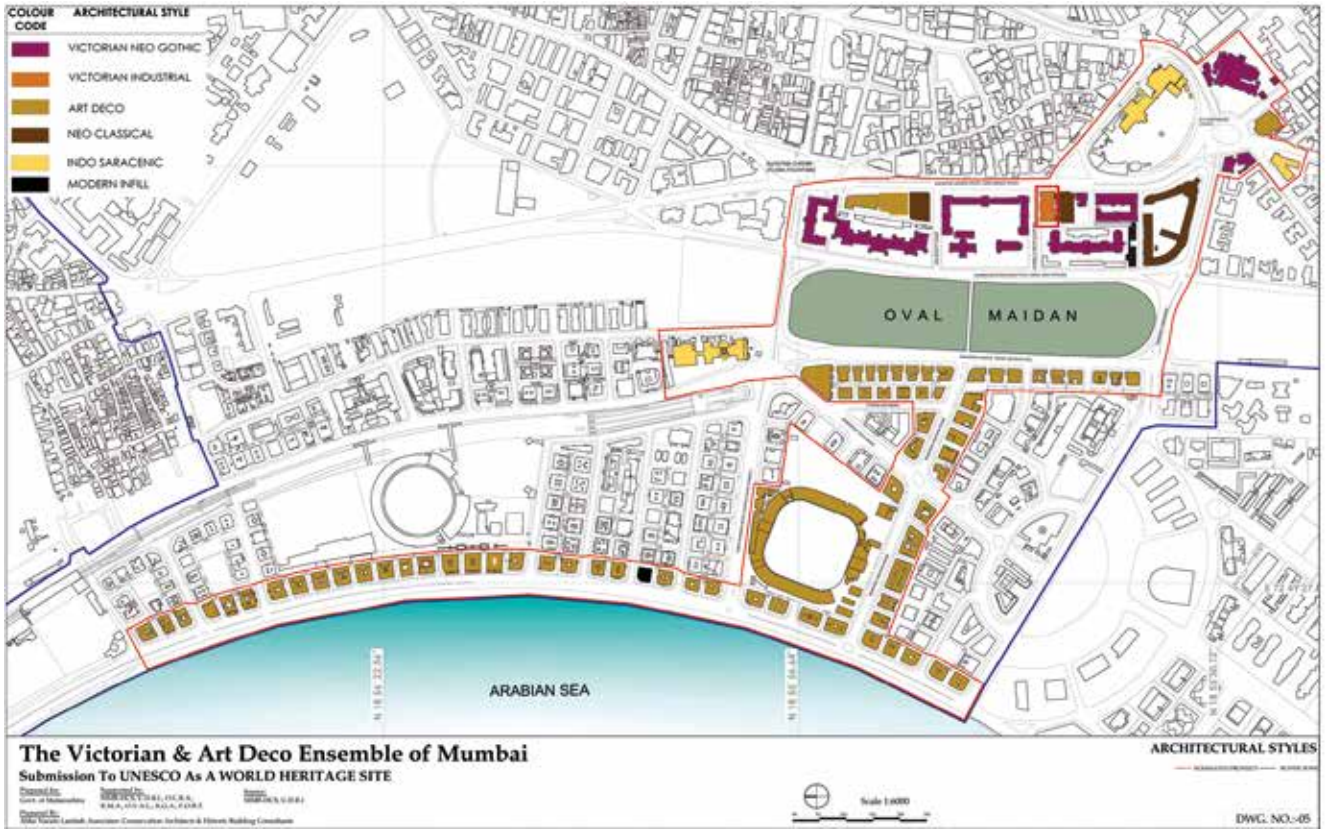


Fig. 1: Map showing various architectural styles of the World Heritage property where the Esplanade Mansion is highlighted under Victorian Industrial style (Source: Maps, Victorian Gothic and Art Deco Ensembles, UNESCO World Heritage Centre website <https://whc.unesco.org/en/list/1480/documents/>)

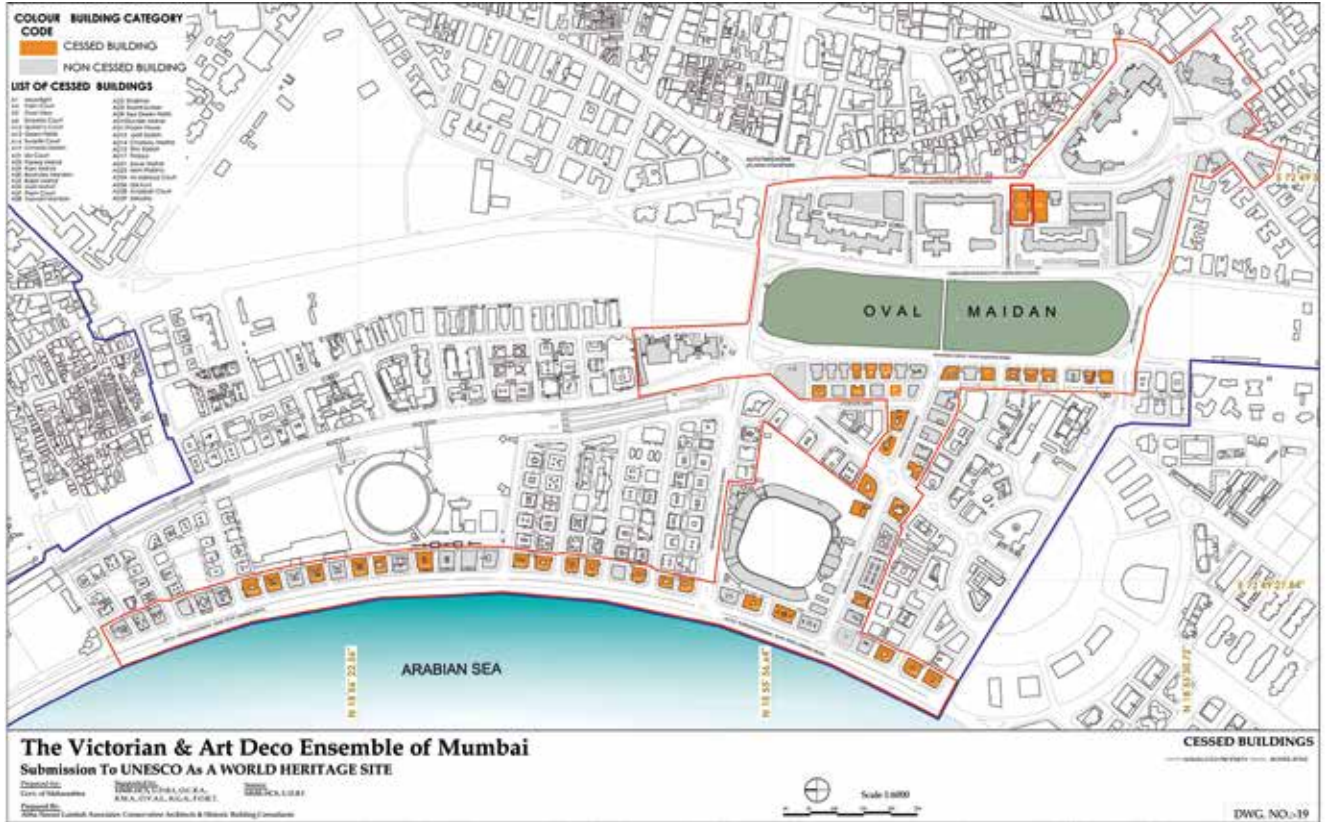


Fig. 2: Map showing CEsSED buildings in the World Heritage property where the Esplanade Mansion is highlighted (Source: Management Plan, Victorian Gothic and Art Deco Ensembles, UNESCO World Heritage Centre website <https://whc.unesco.org/en/list/1480/documents/>)





Fig. 3: Aerial view showing Esplanade Mansion on extreme right (photo: Jehangir Sorabjee, Abha Narain Lambah Associates, 2010; Source: Victorian Gothic & Art Deco Ensembles of Mumbai, WHC)



Fig. 4: Esplanade Mansion (photo: Nichalp, 2005; Source: Wikimedia Commons)



Fig. 5: Esplanade Mansion in the 19th century (photo: public domain, Source: Wikimedia Commons)



Fig. 6: Esplanade Mansion, main (north) facade, June 3, 2019

and the need for the conservation of the Esplanade Mansion, while also offering technical guidance for the same. The letter was also copied to the Director of ICOMOS.

The specific recommendations given by ICOMOS India included a conservation-led methodology for scientific conservation and retrofit of the Esplanade Mansion by experts in cast-iron restoration, ensuring protection of the authenticity and integrity of the said building, and consultations with all stakeholders for sustainable management of the World Heritage site. ICOMOS India also offered technical guidance through the experts in its National Scientific Committee of Analysis and Restoration of Structures of Architectural Heritage (NSC-ARSAH). It was stressed that conserving the Esplanade Mansion would not only serve as an example for the conservation required of other buildings of the “Victorian Gothic and Art Deco Ensembles of

Mumbai”, but would also serve as a catalyst for other similar examples of Shared Built Heritage, Industrial Heritage and Modern Heritage in India.

### Impact of ICOMOS India letter to stakeholders

On 13th June 2019, ‘The Times of India’ reported that the members of the Mumbai Heritage Conservation Committee had unanimously suggested that the restoration of the Esplanade Mansion should be considered.<sup>5</sup> On 22nd June 2019, the same paper reported on the Bombay High Court’s direction to MHADA and BMC to introduce safety measures, including creation of a pedestrian walkway outside the Esplanade Mansion to avert accidents (Fig. 5).<sup>6</sup> On 6th July 2019, ToI reported that the Bombay High Court had directed MHADA to take additional safety pre-





Fig. 7: Esplanade Mansion, internal courtyard, June 3, 2019



Fig. 8: Main staircase, wrought and cast-iron details, June 3, 2019



Fig. 9: Esplanade Mansion, internal façade details, June 3, 2019



Fig. 10: Esplanade Mansion, barricading and provision for pedestrian pathway by MHADA after Court Orders, July 5, 2019

cautions by covering the Esplanade Mansion with a net to avoid any possibilities of collapse of parts of the building (Figs. 10 and 11).<sup>7</sup> On 8th August 2019, ‘The Times of India’ reported that the Bombay High Court had directed all the stakeholders, including the Government of Maharashtra, BMC, MHCC, MHADA, landlord, and the Indian National Trust for Art & Cultural Heritage (INTACH), which had filed a Public Interest Litigation (PIL) in the Bombay High Court for preventing the demolition of the Esplanade Mansion, to state the possibility and the cost of structural restoration.<sup>8</sup>

### INTACH seeks advice from ICOMOS India

On 12th September 2019, INTACH Mumbai approached ICOMOS India to advise on the consequences of the demolition or its loss due to inaction and/or neglect, also asking details of

the provisions under which UNESCO could take any action(s) to prevent this.

In response, ICOMOS India highlighted commitments made in the Site Management Plan<sup>9</sup> by the State Party as well as by other stakeholders such as MCGM and MHADA, who are responsible for the protection and the management of the CESSÉD buildings such as the Esplanade Mansion.<sup>10</sup> It was made clear that the demolition, or any irreversible alteration/damage to Watson’s Hotel/Esplanade Mansion, or the failure to control deterioration processes or, implement measures for conservation of the historic building would adversely impact the “Integrity” of the physical fabric of Watson’s Hotel/Esplanade Mansion as well as the visual & physical relationships between various components of the Ensemble. The “Conditions of Authenticity” and the “Statement of Outstanding Universal Value” adopted during inscription of the property on the World Heritage List would also be compro-





Fig. 11: Esplanade Mansion, protection and netting done by MHADA after Court Orders, July 23, 2019

mised. The loss of Esplanade Mansion could also be construed as the State Party's failure to stand by its commitment to protect and conserve the World Heritage property, as well as, amount to ignoring the ICOMOS recommendation to undertake its urgent conservation.

It was also mentioned that any action leading to the demolition or a lack of urgent and appropriate conservation action with regard to the Esplanade Mansion would increase the possibility of the site being categorised as 'under threat', and setting up of 'reactive monitoring.' Mention was also made of the possibility of inscribing the site on the "List of World Heritage in Danger", an action taken when a property faces actual or potential threats, including serious deterioration of materials, structure and/or ornamental features; significant loss of historical authenticity; important loss of cultural significance; lack of conservation policy.

To conclude the letter, ICOMOS India reiterated the importance of undertaking a conservation-led methodology for sustaining the authenticity, integrity and cultural significance of the World Heritage site.

### Current status

On 14th August 2019, the 'Mumbai Mirror' reported that the Government of Maharashtra wanted MHADA to get a fresh structural audit of the Esplanade Mansion through a structural engineer experienced in restoring heritage structures. A MHADA official, at the same time, also spelt out their need for funding the high cost of restoration. 'Mumbai Mirror' quoted MHADA officials: "(...) If this building was a public-owned building like the Gateway of India, then it would have been wise to spend public money to restore it. It won't be advisable for us to use public funds and hand over the building to a private landlord. If MHADA spends so much money on repairing one building, it won't be left with any funds for other CESSSED building."<sup>11</sup> Subsequently, following the directions of the Bombay High Court, two conservation architects and a structural engineer were appointed to

estimate the cost of conservation. The Court has also directed the owner of Esplanade Mansion to deposit the estimated amount as a bona fide based on his willingness to pay for the restoration of the building.

*The matter is pending at the Bombay High Court due to the lockdown imposed due to the COVID-19 pandemic.*

Several commitments were made through the Management Plan submitted at the time of the property's inscription. Despite this, as of today, the restoration and funding of the restoration work of the Esplanade Mansion is still in question.

Ritika Jharia and Kiran Joshi  
Members of ICOMOS India

## Case Study 2: The Risk of 'Contemporising' Historic Urban Landscapes – The Case of the Sacred Town of Varanasi

### Description of the town

Varanasi, also known as Benaras or Kashi, is situated on the banks of India's holiest river Ganga in Uttar Pradesh. It is said to be the oldest living city in the world and is heterogeneous with multiple layers of culture, religiosity and art forms. The urban form of Varanasi is informed by the sacred geographies of various religions and has a multitude of meanings underpinning its sense of place.

The city is a famous centre for music and arts and is identified as part of the UNESCO Creative Cities Network due to its vision of a creativity-led development as a bridge to sustain and revitalise its rich cultural heritage. Cultural knowledge embedded in the tangible and intangible heritage of Varanasi continues to be transferred through rituals, festivals, fairs, processions, formal schools and informal interactions. The dense labyrinthine historic core remains the epicentre of significant activities of Varanasi.

### Vishwanath Dham Corridor Project

The Vishwanath Dham Corridor Project was introduced in mid-2018 with the intention to create an open vista in front of the most visited and worshiped Vishwanath Temple. The Corridor Project is spread over about 11.6 acres (47,000 square metres) extending from the Temple to the three famous Ghats on the Ganga – Mahakarnika, Jalasen and Lalita (Fig. 1). The design envisages a large Mandir Chowk (square), an open space fronting the Vishwanath Temple, and a smaller open space that provides the foreground for the Gyan Vapi Mosque adjacent to the temple (Fig. 2).

About 250 individual or family properties have been acquired and cleared for redevelopment. There are 51 temples within this area, most of which have come into public view during the site clearance as several had been covered by the extensions to buildings (Figs. 3 and 4).

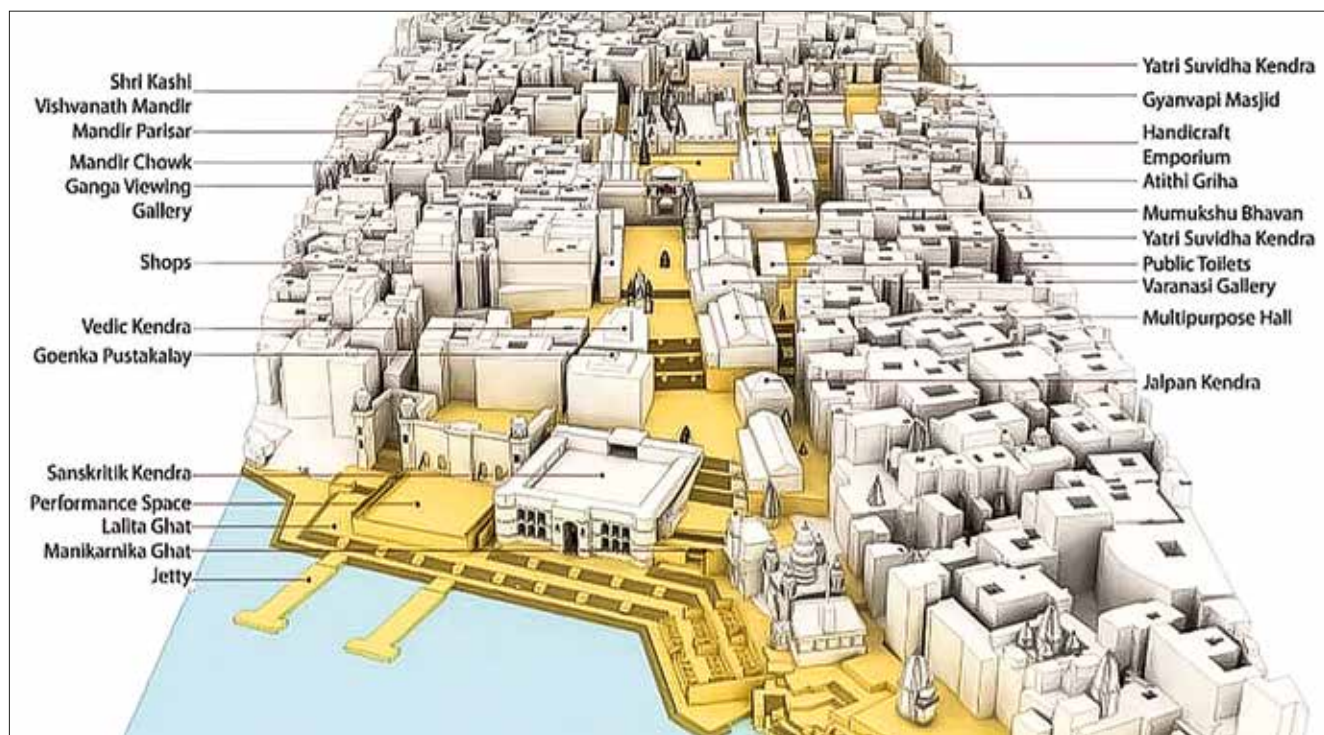


Fig. 1: A view of the proposed "redevelopment", the Vishwanath Dham Corridor Project (Source: "Varanasi, by design: Vishwanath Dham and the politics of change", <https://www.thehindu.com/society/varanasi-by-design-vishwanath-dham-and-the-politics-of-change/article26607193.ece>)



Fig. 2: An artist's rendition of the project (© HCP Design, Planning and Management Pvt. Ltd. Source: "Varanasi, by design: Vishwanath Dham and the politics of change", <https://www.thehindu.com/society/varanasi-by-design-vishwanath-dham-and-the-politics-of-change/article26607193.ece>)

### Action by ICOMOS India

The ICOMOS India Annual General Meeting was held in Varanasi in June 2019, along with the scientific symposium *Interfacing Sacred Heritage, Cultural Landscapes and Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs): Exploring Reciprocity among Tangible and Intangible Heritages in the Context of*

*Sacredsapes* with the intention to deliberate upon issues of urban development in historic cities of religious significance. There was consensus among members that a memorandum must be submitted to the concerned authority to bring to their notice the lacunas in the processes of designing such projects and the subsequent methodologies for their implementation. At present, these processes do not require the presence of conservation pro-



professionals; thus, the loss of significance comes to light only when it is too late. Outlined briefly below is the content of the memorandum:

*It was felt by the General Body of ICOMOS India that, since Varanasi is a globally significant, sacred historic centre of knowledge and culture, the current proposal for the 'Vishvanatha Dham Corridor Project' also needs to address the multiple cultural, historic and social sensitivities that are intrinsic to the city of Varanasi, the significance of which is cherished by its residents and visitors alike. It was felt that various scientific methods and processes necessary to retain the integrity and heritage character of this very significant area of Varanasi need to be adopted as part of the said Project.*

*The General Body of ICOMOS India, therefore, proposes that the following steps be taken up on an urgent basis by all concerned:*

1. Establish a dialogue with citizens and local experts who have done extensive studies to address multiple sensitivities of the tangible and intangible heritage of this sacred city;
2. Make efforts to integrate the project area's embedded knowledge systems of science and culture in the development plan as well as the associated conservation works;
3. All intervention planned on the site should aim at conserving and valorising the heritage artefacts found on site. Careful



Fig. 3: The streets of Varanasi at the time of the demolition of residential fabric (© Gurmeet Rai)

- planning and monitoring of the execution process, through involvement of conservation professionals, is required;*
4. Varanasi is one of the cities in the Creative Cities Network of UNESCO. ICOMOS, as an advisor on World Heritage matters to UNESCO, recommends that a Heritage Impact Assessment of the 'Vishvanatha Dham Corridor Project' be undertaken



Fig. 4: Temple foreground area after removal of residential fabric (© Gurmeet Rai)

*and, mitigation measures be carried out wherever possible; ICOMOS India, as an association of heritage professionals working towards conservation and safeguarding of tangible and intangible heritage, extends its support and assistance, in an advisory capacity, to the organisation executing the project towards achieving the above.*

### Current status

*At present the demolition of the private properties has been completed and the project is to be awarded to a contractor. ICOMOS India has been informed through informal sources that conservation architects have now been included in the project team of the consultant for preparing the conservation plans for the temples and other features of historic and cultural significance. The project team has also introduced stakeholder workshops and interactions with local expert as a part of their process.*

Dr. Jigna Desai  
Scientific Counsellor, ICOMOS India

## Case Study 3: Saving Chandni Chowk, the Mughal Ceremonial Avenue of Shahjahanabad

Shahjahanabad, founded by the Mughal emperor Shah Jahan, was one of the three most important capitals in the world of the 17th century. The city was planned on two rocky eminences situated on the western bank of river Yamuna. The palace citadel called the Lal Qila, or Red Fort, was built on the hillock northeast of the city walls and the Jama Masjid on a higher hillock within the city walls. Shah Jahan had a highly cultivated aesthetic sense and the city was planned on a noble scale. At the time it was planned, it displayed an urban morphology that was unprecedented. It is an exemplar of the sovereign city model of pre-modern cities, conceived as axis mundi. The design of Shahjahanabad itself was inspired by Isfahan. To quote Muhammad Salih, “neither Constantinople nor Baghdad could compare with Shahjahanabad’s splendour”.

Shahjahanabad moved beyond precedents set by the earlier Sultanate capitals to introduce grand vistas and dramatic planning. The walled settlement constituted a splendid ceremonial avenue, a principal physical and visual east-west axis. “The main artery of the city was 40 yards in width, 1520 yards in length. Along this radial road lay Kotwali Chabutra, Urdu Bazar, Chawk of Saadullah Khan and Chandni Chawk, latter measuring 100 by 100 yards”.<sup>12</sup> “This grand street was laid out by Jahanara Begam, daughter of Shah Jahan in 1600 AD. Through the centre of the street ran the canal of Ali Mardan shaded on both sides by trees.”<sup>13</sup> This ceremonial way of the historic settlement was flanked by bazaars and gardens with a channel of water running on the central median. In the centre of the square fronting the *sarai* sat an exquisite octagonal pool reflecting moonlight (*chandni*) which gave this square the name “Chandni Chowk”. The name later extended to the whole avenue. The principle of *Qarina*, an organisational axis which ensures balance and bilateral symme-

try without uniformity, i. e. *Sawal-Jawab* [Question-Answer], was utilised consciously as a guiding principle for the layout of Chandni Chowk. The axis was planned with trees and waterbodies, modulating the microclimate and providing an outdoor living space for the inhabitants. Standing atop the gate of Red Fort, one got an uninterrupted view of the promenade that culminated at Fatehpuri Masjid. Chandni Chowk, which was an integral component of Shahjahanabad, the Mughal capital, was an important bazaar street during Mughal times and remains so even today.

This famous ceremonial promenade, one of the most formally complex and vital public spaces of Shahjahanabad, was used later as a model and emulated while designing many other historic promenades and boulevards. The visual effect is extraordinary and unique. Moving on foot along the centre from the vantage point of Red Fort to the Fatehpuri Mosque at the other end creates an experience of varied architectural enclosures through a constant dimensional variation in plan and section.

Today the avenue is flanked by shops on either side, punctuated by iconic structures, mostly religious and institutional buildings, built from the mid-17th to the early 20th century. The very inclusive nature of the city is reflected in the fact that shrines of different religions coexist on the same street, imparting a strong cultural harmony. The street and its squares are also the setting for religious and secular celebrations and processions, some going back to the days when the city was founded. Gradually the settlement began to evolve as a wholesale market. The shopping experience retains its original charm of close interaction with the shop owner and a sense of getting a great bargain. The footfall has increased because of the connectivity by the Metro rail. Therefore, there is an urgent need to make this vast market street safe and to provide public amenities while retaining its historicity.

The Shahjahanabad Redevelopment Corporation, (SRDC), a Special Purpose Vehicle, was set up in May 2008 specifically to promote conservation.<sup>14</sup> Its vision for the redevelopment of Chandni Chowk, as stated on its website, is as follows:<sup>15</sup>

- The proposed project should be a catalyst for the future conservation and revitalisation of Shahjahanabad.
- It should generate a physical and visual continuity in the streetscape, which will augment the imageability of the streets.
- The main intention is to reinforce safe and free pedestrian movement, by giving significance to pedestrians over vehicles.
- The multifunction of Chandni Chowk as a market street, a gathering place for the public and a ceremonial axis for festive processions will be considered and retained.
- To bring landscape back, trees will be planted along the two sides of the road.

The scheme to prioritise the pedestrian, retrofit services and public amenities in Chandni Chowk was first formulated by SRDC in 2012. It was based on an understanding of the way the ceremonial public space functioned in historic times and of the contemporary needs. This scheme went through statutory approvals. However, work on the scheme did not begin for multiple reasons related to availability of funds, the technology to put in a service tunnel and political will. The scheme was drastically altered at a meeting of the Unified Traffic & Transportation Infrastructure (Planning & Engineering) Centre, which was set up by the Delhi Development Authority (UTTIPEC)<sup>16</sup> in August 2018.

The current redevelopment scheme proposed by SRDC misunderstands the central axis, creates a physical divide with structures such as public amenities and transformers on this sacrosanct





Fig. 1: Map of Shahjahanabad dated c. 1850, redrawn by E. Ehlers, T. Krafft, J. Malik (Source: from an original manuscript in the Map Section of the Oriental and India Office Records)

axis.<sup>17</sup> It places 23 transformers (3.5 x 4.5 metres each) along with six toilets (3.5 x 11.2 metres each), three urinal blocks (3.5 x 4.8 metres each), three police booths (3.5 x 2.4 metres each), two police posts (3.5 x 9.2 metres each) and two traffic police booths (3.5 x 2.4 metres each) on the central verge of Chandni Chowk. This intervention, under the guise of urban renewal, will destroy the character of the central section of the axis mundi in the ceremonial wide historic public space. Incorporating such large intrusive service blocks on the central verge will compromise the significance of this street along with destroying the uninterrupted views along and across the central vista. This construction will amount to making a high 3.5-metre-wide wall along the most significant part of the most important processional avenue of the historic city of Shahjahanabad. This scheme will cut the avenue into half, disrupting the integrity of the whole settlement.

However, the SRDC architect and proponents of this scheme argue that historically, an asymmetrical road is not accept-

able; therefore, a symmetrical road having two carriageways with central verge has been proposed, which will facilitate the smooth movement of emergency vehicles, fire tenders, etc. This argument is arbitrary and without any understanding of the complexities or the attributes of authenticity embodied in the settlement.

The redevelopment scheme could have been the best opportunity to reinforce the historic concept of this highly significant Mughal ceremonial avenue through a conceptually balanced virtual symphony of diverging dimensions, an ode to asymmetry and irregularity. The sidewalks could have been varied, with the utilities placed in the sections that widen out. Unfortunately, the historic hydro-engineering innovations have not been understood or respected in the proposed redevelopment scheme. The river Yamuna (along which Shahjahanabad is sited) was tapped up north and water was brought in to the centre of this spine. To quote Ebba Koch on one of the main water-works in the reign



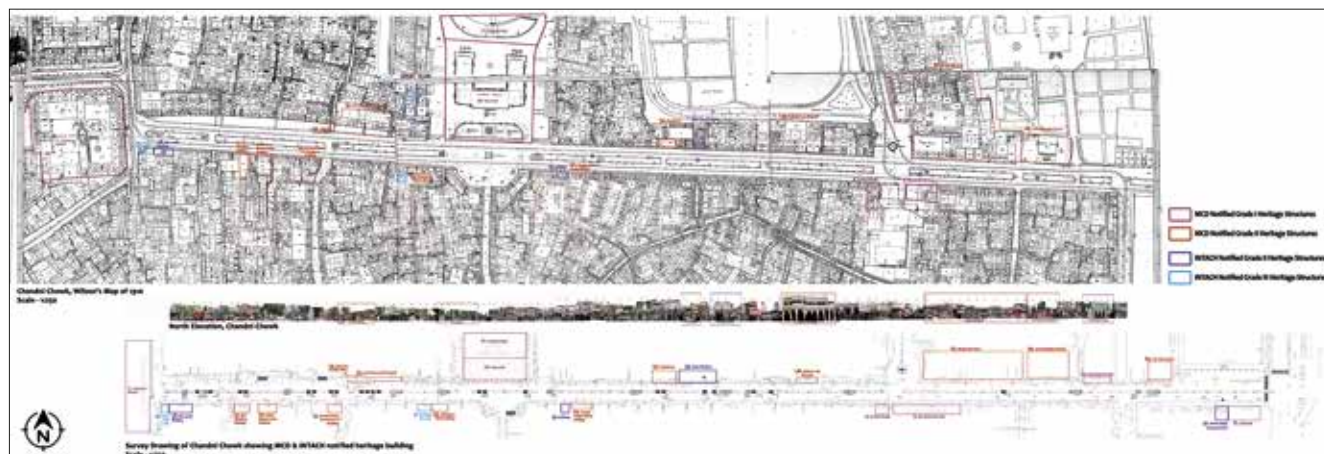


Fig. 2: Map of listed buildings on Chandni Chowk overlaid on Wilson's Survey Map of c. 1910 (Source: Shinhini Bhattacharya and Pratyush Prateik, Design Innovation Centre, SPA, Delhi)



Fig. 3: Historic illustration of Chandni Chowk showing the Canal on the central median seen from the Red Fort, 1857 (Source: 1857 – A Pictorial Presentation (15 August 1957), published by The Publication Division, Ministry of Information and Broadcasting, Government of India, Delhi. p. 13)



Fig. 4: Historic illustration of Shahjahanabad showing the east-west axis Chandni Chowk in 1857 (Source: 1857 – A Pictorial Presentation [15 August 1957], published by The Publication Division, Ministry of Information and Broadcasting, Government of India, Delhi. p. 8)

of Shahjahan: a “reactivation of the old canal of Firuz Shah Tughluq, which ran from Khizrabad to Safidun was undertaken. It was repaired and extended to Shahjahanabad to serve as the main water supply for his new palace and capital.”<sup>18</sup>

The memories embodied in the original design of the central canal will be completely violated by giving it a highway treatment and placing public utilities of such a massive scale. The Octagon where the reflective pool once stood cannot be used just as a crossing. There should be an attempt to interpret the octagonal *hauz* in the current scheme as a prominent public space. Any intervention to retrofit utilities of this historic component of the city must respect the above-stated significance and keep the central section free of any obstructions. Our concern is that now, in an effort for urban renewal, the very character that made Chandni Chowk so unique will be completely lost by locating numerous utilities on the central section.

The risk to the heritage is first and foremost caused by the arbitrary way a proposal which was approved by all statutory bodies is discarded in favour of another which treats Chandni Chowk like a highway and insensitively places all utilities on the central

verge. This will set a bad precedent for other heritage renewal projects in the country. Secondly, the stakeholders who support the proposal are some shop-owners with political goals that benefit a select few.

Concerned citizens and heritage professionals, including ICOMOS India, sent statements to the Delhi Government, and held meetings with all the executing agencies, but without receiving any response from the authorities to modify the scheme. As a last resort, a public interest litigation was filed in the Delhi High Court to seek justice. The following points were the most relevant:

1. Failure of the government mechanism to adhere to its own objective was pointed out to SRDC. The scheme chosen for implementation defies SRDC's own vision, which is to “generate a physical and visual continuity in the streetscape, which will augment the imageability of the streets.”
2. A dossier has been prepared for placing the historic cities of Delhi, including Shahjahanabad, on India's Tentative List. This dossier clearly states the attributes of authenticity for the area.<sup>19</sup> This information was shared with the Delhi gov-





Fig. 5: Chandni Chowk, 1863–67 (Source: [upload.wikimedia.org/wikipedia/commons/ea/Chandni\\_Chowk%2C\\_Delhi%2C\\_1863-67.jpg](https://upload.wikimedia.org/wikipedia/commons/ea/Chandni_Chowk%2C_Delhi%2C_1863-67.jpg))

ernment, but since their team consisted of only implementing bodies and no heritage professionals, they could not understand the value of inheriting such an invaluable heritage resource.

3. The demographic profile of Shahjahanabad also had a role to play in this culturally inappropriate intervention. The clustering of the original inhabitants of the historic city was based on communities with artisanal skills, who lived and worked in different *mohallas*, such as the Dariba Kalan, the Kinari Bazaar and Balimaran. The Partition of India in 1947 resulted in a historic divide based on religion. Muslim artisans fled to Pakistan, thereby destroying the peaceful co-existence of communities which produced and sold items they created. The abandoned built fabric was then occupied by people who came to India from the Northwest Frontier in Pakistan. These historic properties were then termed as ‘evacuee properties’ in the land records, with undefined ownership, and issues resulting from disputed ownership have been left unresolved to date. Along with this an archaic Rent Control Act has led to neglect and thus deterioration of the physical fabric. The second exodus was of families becoming affluent and moving towards newer areas with better amenities and more space. Both these factors resulted in a lack of any attachment of local inhabitants to the heritage or understanding of local values.

Despite having SRDC in place, the tailor-made site selection process for each segment of the street to retrofit public amenities

is bypassed. The historic maps made by Thomas Kraft (based on a map of c. 1857) and Wilson’s detailed survey of c. 1910 are available to make sensitive decisions which prioritise the heritage components in the settlements. Modern technology can be used for accurate three-dimensional mapping of the area. The issues are deeper than just providing pedestrian zones, electricity and other public amenities. The historic structures in Shahjahanabad were listed more than two decades ago but framing of regulations for interventions are still pending. Hence the change that we see is disruptive, with the skyline marred with aluminium panel facades.



Fig. 6: Historic photograph showing the Procession of King Edward VII and Queen Alexandra as Emperor and Empress of India, 1903, Delhi Durbar (Source: [en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Chandni\\_Chowk#/media/File:Durbar\\_Procession\\_in\\_1903](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Chandni_Chowk#/media/File:Durbar_Procession_in_1903))





Fig. 7: Current view of transformers being installed on the central median where the historic canal flowed (photo Smita Datta Makhija, October 2019)

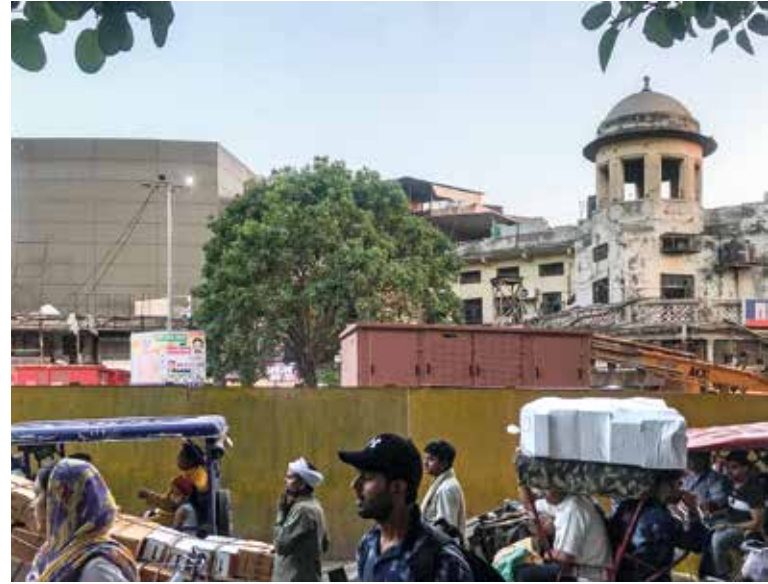


Fig. 8: Historic facades being concealed and replaced by aluminum-clad discordant materials and forms (photo Smita Datta Makhija, October 2019)



Fig. 9: The complexity of architecture on Chandni Chowk needing tailor-made solutions for facade restoration, upgrading and infill (photo Smita Datta Makhija, October 2019)



After pursuing the case in court and the involvement of the Lieutenant Governor of Delhi, a few issues have been resolved by placing police booths, urinals and toilets away from the central median to government-owned locations. However, the relocation of transformers is still to be addressed along with the appropriate technology selection for this densely populated heritage core.

To conclude, both the integrity and the authenticity of Chandni Chowk's grand historic vista, as well as the relationship of its visual axis with the historic built mass is at high risk. There is the likelihood of unparalleled loss of both historic memory and glorious meanings embedded in each segment of Chandni Chowk due to the proposed interventions. The professional global communities comprising of conservation architects, historians, landscape architects, town planners and engineers must raise their voice re-

garding the significance of Chandni Chowk. A Heritage Impact Assessment must precede any implementation of ill-advised and detrimental proposals on this magnificent heritage that our generation has inherited and is the custodian of.

### Status of June 2020

*The litigation for keeping the central verge of the Chandni Chowk free of service infrastructure is ongoing in the Delhi High Court. The petitioners, along with DUAC, have suggested nine feasible locations for relocation of the electric transformers and also advised use of dry type pad mounted transformers instead of the hazardous oil type ones. While the government has agreed to consider two of the suggested nine locations to fit 14 transformers, the rest of the issues remain unresolved.*

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### Footnotes

- <sup>1</sup> Clarke, J. 'Like A Huge Birdcage Exhaled from the Earth: Watson's Esplanade Hotel, Mumbai (1867–71), and its Place in Structural History', *Construction History* 18 (2002), 37–77.
- <sup>2</sup> 131–134 the CESS Act, CESS buildings under the nominated property from *Annexure B Site Management Plan* of Victorian Gothic and Art Deco Ensembles of Mumbai, India, submitted by Government of Maharashtra.
- <sup>3</sup> Mumbai Mirror article, IIT-B audit report sounds death knell for 155-year-old Kala Ghodabuilding, says Esplanade Mansion is dilapidated beyond repair, [https://mumbaimirror.indiatimes.com/mumbai/cover-story/prudent-to-demolish-esplanade-mansion/articleshowprint/69449802.cms?prtpage=1\\_](https://mumbaimirror.indiatimes.com/mumbai/cover-story/prudent-to-demolish-esplanade-mansion/articleshowprint/69449802.cms?prtpage=1_)
- <sup>4</sup> TOI, Esplanade Mansion: Bombay HC asks Mhada to list precautions for demolition, <https://timesofindia.indiatimes.com/city/mumbai/esplanade-mansion-bombay-hc-asks-mhada-to-list-precautions-for-demolition/articleshowprint/69649525.cms>.
- <sup>5</sup> ToI, Esplanade Mansion can be restored: Heritage panel, <https://timesofindia.indiatimes.com/city/mumbai/esplanade-mansion-can-be-restored-heritage-panel/articleshowprint/69765458.cms>.
- <sup>6</sup> ToI, HC orders walkway outside Esplanade Mansion, <https://timesofindia.indiatimes.com/city/mumbai/hc-orders-walkway-outside-esplanade-mansion/articleshowprint/69901568.cms>.
- <sup>7</sup> TOI, MHADA gets seven days to draw up safety plan for Esplanade building, <https://timesofindia.indiatimes.com/city/mumbai/mhada-gets-seven-days-to-draw-up-safety-plan-for-esplanade-building/articleshowprint/70100368.cms>.
- <sup>8</sup> TOI, HC tells Maharashtra, INTACH to decide if Esplanade Mansion can be saved, <https://timesofindia.indiatimes.com/city/mumbai/hc-tells-maharashtra-intach-to-decide-if-esplanade-mansion-can-be-saved/articleshowprint/70598205.cms>.
- <sup>9</sup> *Annexure B Site Management Plan* of Victorian Gothic & Art Deco Ensembles of Mumbai, India submitted by Government of Maharashtra (a copy of the same is available on UNESCO World Heritage Centre website <https://whc.unesco.org/en/list/1480/documents/>).
- <sup>10</sup> Pages 112–121, Ownership and Stakeholders, from *Annexure B Site Management Plan* of Victorian Gothic & Art Deco Ensembles of Mumbai, India submitted by Government of Maharashtra.
- <sup>11</sup> Mumbai Mirror, A second chance for Esplanade Mansion: State government orders fresh audit of city's last surviving cast-iron buildings <https://mumbaimirror.indiatimes.com/mumbai/cover-story/a-second-chance-for-esplanade-mansion/articleshowprint/70667409.cms?prtpage=1>.
- <sup>12</sup> RE Frykenberg, *Delhi through the Ages*, p. 61, New Delhi 1993, p. 61.
- <sup>13</sup> Stephen Carr, *Archeology and Monumental Remains of Delhi*, New Delhi 1876, p. 247.
- <sup>14</sup> The Mission of SRDC, as stated on its website, is: The main objective of the Corporation is to promote conservation of built and natural heritage in the National Capital Territory of Delhi which needs to be protected, nourished and maintained by all citizens, conservation as an attitude in city's urban development process, conservation of the civic and urban heritage which would include architecturally significant and artisan works, historical landmarks and living monuments having socio-cultural value not with the motive of profit. <https://www.govserv.org/IN/New-Delhi/118442228224828/Shahjahanabad-Redevelopment-Corporation>
- <sup>15</sup> [http://srdc.delhigovt.nic.in/wps/wcm/connect/DoIT\\_Shahjahanabad/doi\\_shahjahanabad/home/ongoing-projects/redevelopment+of+chandni+chowk](http://srdc.delhigovt.nic.in/wps/wcm/connect/DoIT_Shahjahanabad/doi_shahjahanabad/home/ongoing-projects/redevelopment+of+chandni+chowk)
- <sup>16</sup> Notified under Gazette of India Extraordinary, see S. O. No. 1903(E), dated 31.07.08. All transportation projects/transport engineering solutions in Delhi by any agency having road engineering/infrastructure implication require clearance of the UTTIPEC. <https://www.govserv.org/IN/New-Delhi/180371992031994/UTTIPEC-Delhi-Development-Authority>
- <sup>17</sup> Drawings available at <http://srdc.delhigovt.nic.in/wps/wcm/connect/d9da3d8047f211bc914efbbbd1c31d3c/CC-Presentation-27-11-18.pdf?MOD=AJPERES&lmod=1939364257&-CACHEID=d9da3d8047f211bc914efbbbd1c31d3c>
- <sup>18</sup> Ebba Koch, *Mughal Architecture*, New Delhi 2002, p. 124.
- <sup>19</sup> See "Delhi – A Heritage City", Tentative List of India <http://whc.unesco.org/en/tentativelists/5743/>