



Preservation Of Colonial Urban Heritage In Guwahati Through Cultural Resource Management

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Abstract: -

The paper presents an overview of the application of Cultural Resource Management in the management of heritage resources in the urban context. Taking the example of Guwahati, a city located in the North Eastern state of Assam in India and which is a growing metropolis, the paper attempts to apply Cultural Resource Management (CRM) as a means of preservation for protecting the heritage resources which have already faced the axe of the developers within the urban scenario. Taking note of the kinds of threat to the archaeological sites the policy of CRM follows the features of Historical Urban Landscape (HUL) adopted by UNESCO in 2011 and has applied it for the preservation of a colonial monument in Guwahati. The monument in question is the Nursing College and Hostel of the Satribari Christian Hospital which was established in 1926. CRM is widely practised in the USA and this can become a movement in Assam too for preservation of cultural resources. The methodology applied to study the process of management of heritage resources in Guwahati and which can also be applied in the case of the Nursing College are to build a (1) Case study (2) establish credibility of the monument (3) Record the inventory of the monument (4) Drawing the Ground Plan to scale (5) Description of the building (6) Making Free hand drawing of the immovable monuments (7) Taking photographs of the movable and immovable properties (8) Recording the History (9) Describing the architectural features of the monuments (10) Applying the legislative policies of the country and the state (11) Using a financial tool, for the management of a building.

To conclude, the CRM policy enables the age old buildings a breathing environment within the urban space and aims at educating the community and passing the monuments and sites to the next generation.

Keywords: - Built Environment; Urbanisation; Preservation; Cultural Resource Management; Legislation.

Introduction

..Our heritage-our historic buildings, landscape, archaeology and gardens, and the art, books and machines that they contain- is a set of essential landmarks to guide our journey from the past to the future... (History Matters: Pass it On, 2006)

Preservation of cultural heritage should be an integral part of the development of a city. Cultural landscape is a palimpsest (Bridgwood and Lennie, 2009) and a city as a cultural

landscape and like a palimpsest too, has history written on it, over which built environment intervenes with every passing generation. This built environment contributes to the concept of visual aesthetics. Built environment is essentially linked with identity, shared experience, evoking joy, and is associated with creation of memory and myriads of moments of sadness. As the cultural landscape shapes itself into a city it gives way to growth or loss of or change in the character of the built environment. With the progress of urbanization which gradually leads to the vertical and horizontal growth of the cities, what previously existed might be gone resulting in the change of identity, partly of an individual and completely of a place. The 21st century has seen the destruction of the archaeological resources exponentially. Economic development, population growth, elite acquisitiveness, increasing wealth, extension and intensification of agriculture, the mining of materials and minerals, the growth of cities and suburbs, development of reservoirs, transportation systems and other public work poses threats to the in-situ archaeological resources. The loss of sites due to economic development is increasing at an alarming rate worldwide. Looting of archaeological sites particularly in the Third World Countries is becoming common to feed the antiquities markets. As the root cause of development is urbanization, hence at every turn of a city there are roads which are newly constructed, flyovers, footbridges, multi storeyed shopping complexes, growth of industries which poses the threat of sudden destruction of archaeological sites and heritage resources. The urban sprawl destroys the beauty of a site. Cities in the 21st century are facing high urban density, traffic congestion, poor natural hazards management in overpopulated areas, crime, and pollution of water, soil and air leading to environmental degradation, climate change and poor governance arrangement. Urban cultural heritage lies within the urban sprawl thus creating less visibility as shops and business organizations overcrowd the sites, besides the sites live in constant jeopardy owing to the growth of the urban sprawl which continue to jostle for space thus affecting the visual aesthetics associated with the urban cultural heritage. These features of an urbanizing city enable less breathing space for the heritage monuments or other heritage sites within a city.

With the growth of urbanization, Guwahati city is also facing these common global problems as the city is in the cusp of urban transformation. Guwahati is an old city dating back to remote antiquity, to the times of the legendary Narakasura and Bhagadutta after which various dynasties followed. However the city is young in terms of the 200 years old rule by the English East India Company from 1826 onwards. The change in the political scenario had direct repercussions in terms of its built environment (Dodson, 2012). Guwahati is the major city in the North Eastern Region of India. It is called the Gateway to the North East. Today Guwahati is a fully urbanized city with a population of 2.381056 million in 2020 (estimated) (<https://indiapopulation2020.in>). Under the given situation, the possible threat to the cultural heritage resources looms large. Already few heritage buildings had faced the threat of demolition within the city to accommodate more urban city traffic and also while planning for construction of new buildings by replacing the old ones.

Types of Threats to Archaeological Sites

The UNESCO has recognized several types of risks as threats to archaeological sites which are non-renewable in nature. They are-

- Effects due to globalization which have brought about massive change to rural economies; besides imposed modernization is another kind of threat, so also forced migration
- Vandalism, looting, armed conflict, war, and poaching,
- Uncontrolled urbanization and unchecked tourist development, lack of visitor management, social and cultural changes in and around the heritage properties. Threats could be also from weakness of the socio economic situation and governance in the country, lack of training of personnel, failure to apply legal measures for protecting the heritage properties.

Threats to Heritage Structures in Guwahati

In Guwahati, the specific area of study, the global threats are visible but some of them are more dominant and visible while others are less operational or visible at present. The most dominant threat is the growth of the city which is listed and recognized by UNESCO as a global threat or risk. Guwahati is a city undergoing rapid urbanization and in the process majority of its heritage structures are under threat. The heritage structures in India face threats which are similar to the threats listed by UNESCO. But there are certain threats which are unique to India. Most prominent among this is population pressure. Taking into consideration the kind of threats prominent in India the paper makes an attempt to study the issue of preservation of urban cultural heritage through Cultural Resource Management (CRM) in a monument in Guwahati city. It is necessary to understand how CRM works in managing the change in the urban heritage context.

Cultural Resource Management (CRM)

The archaeologists of the United States of America for the first time in the world used the term Cultural Resource Management (CRM) in the early 1970s. CRM actually helps to identify sites that may be eligible for the National Register of Historic Places, testing them for evaluation and sometimes excavating those before they are destroyed. When heritage is considered as a resource it has to be managed. In USA, CEQ i.e. Council on Environmental Quality, helps in resolving cases with national policy implications and develops government wide policy on environmental matters. Besides Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) Land Management Agencies, Forest Service, Department of Housing and Urban Development, Engineering Department etc come under the field of CRM. (King, 2002, pp 34). The federal agencies developed Environmental Impact Assessment (EIA) to ensure that its actions were viewed through environmentally sensitive eyes. In the history of the development of CRM as an essential practice in the discipline of Archaeology, America and Australia connected it with the development of nationwide assertive indigenous political movements. The second development was the increasing concern throughout 1960's and 1970's about the need to conserve and preserve the past. American and Australian legislation regarding heritage conservation

and other associated policies was the basis of the development of CRM as a formal management process. Based on the loss of archaeological sites in the United States due to vandalism, professional excavations, development etc, CRM programmes of all kinds have assumed importance in federal and state land management agencies and in general historic preservation movement as a whole.

The National Register of Historic Places in the USA is a Register, a Schedule, and a List, of all those places deemed to be historically important. Few countries in the world have the comprehensive US style legal provision that compels the government to consider environmental and cultural factors. In Britain the official agency “English Heritage” advises the relevant government department on sites worthy of protection. If they are regarded as of national importance they are placed on a Schedule of Ancient Monuments (Renfrew & Bahn, 2008).

Other countries also have national policies where cultural resource management has been placed within the framework of site management; collections management; national/local legislations; education; networking; research; public involvement; heritage tourism, etc.

The contribution of the UNESCO so far as conservation of the cultural resources is concerned is immense, and it has played an active role in focussing international attention on the stewardship and preservation of monuments and cultural property.

Guwahati is a growing metropolis and for the continued existence of the urban cultural heritage it is essential to realise about the alarming damage that may arise to historic neighbourhoods, buildings, structures, and archaeological sites carried out by construction of inter state highway system, four lane roads, etc. Taking the example of Cultural Resource Management an attempt is being made to study about its application in the building of the Nursing College, of Satribari Christian Hospital (1926) Guwahati, in the Indian state of Assam.

Nursing College, Satribari Christian Hospital, 1926

Case Study

The Nursing College of Satribari Christian Hospital started functioning at the same time when the foundation of the Satribari Christian Hospital was laid down in the year 1926. It is located in the same campus along with other colonial buildings consisting of the Doctor’s quarters, Student’s Hostel and other Staff quarters. In the year 2012, the management of the hospital went over to the 4B Health Care Pvt Ltd, after which plans were implemented for the overall restructuring of the hospital building along with the Nursing College, Church etc. Massive renovation work was taken over by the 4B Health Care Unit for improving its facilities. This would mean a change in the look of the colonial buildings which have existed for the last 95 years. Though the old buildings still exist today large scale developmental works were introduced within. This would need urgent management plans for maintaining the old colonial world buildings. At present, the administration of the Satribari Christian Hospital and the Nursing College are under the Council of Baptist Churches North East India (CBCNEI).

An analytical framework tool developed by UNESCO for the historical urban landscape approach was adopted.

Methodology

The methods adopted to frame this paper are non-invasive and non-destructive methods and techniques that were used for recording and surveying the heritage monument under study. It suggests a landscape approach under the Cultural Resource Management plan related to identifying, conserving, and managing historic areas within the urban area, involving a variety of stakeholders, including local, national, regional, international, public and private actors in the urban development process. (<http://whc.unesco.org/en/cities>). Certain tools for urban heritage management were used. They are (a) Civic engagement tools (b) Knowledge and planning tools (c) Regulatory systems (d) Financial tools.

Civic engagement tools involve a diverse cross-section of stakeholders, and empower them to identify key values in their urban areas.

Knowledge and planning tools help in protecting the integrity and authenticity of the attributes of urban heritage. These tools include documentation and mapping of cultural and natural characteristics.

Credibility

The framework of credibility advocated by the Historic Urban Landscape in 2011 adopted the tools of civic engagement and knowledge and planning tools and which has been used in the case of the Nursing College. It comprised of the questionnaire to assess the credibility of the structure.

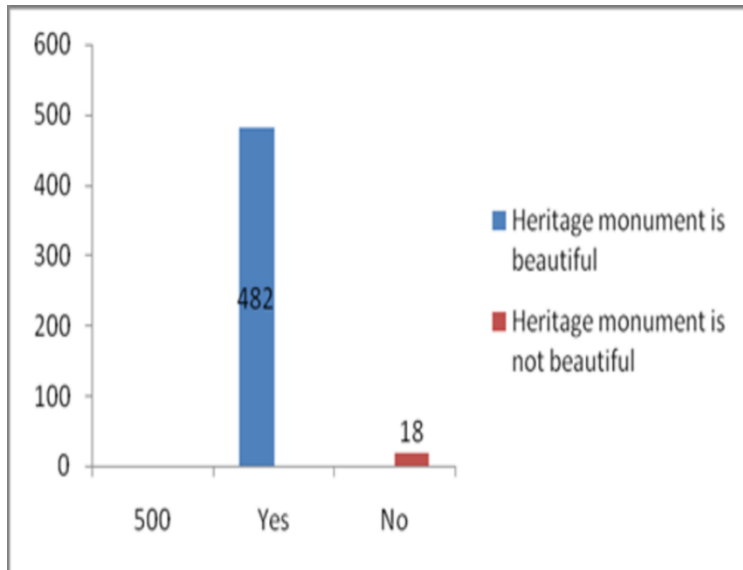
Knowledge and planning

So far as the knowledge and planning tool used in the Nursing College is concerned the favourable methods adopted are laying out an inventory of the cultural heritage objects, defining the significance of the structure through a valid description of the present structure, pencil drawing, photography, interviewing a cross section of the population, and examining the case study of the said structure.

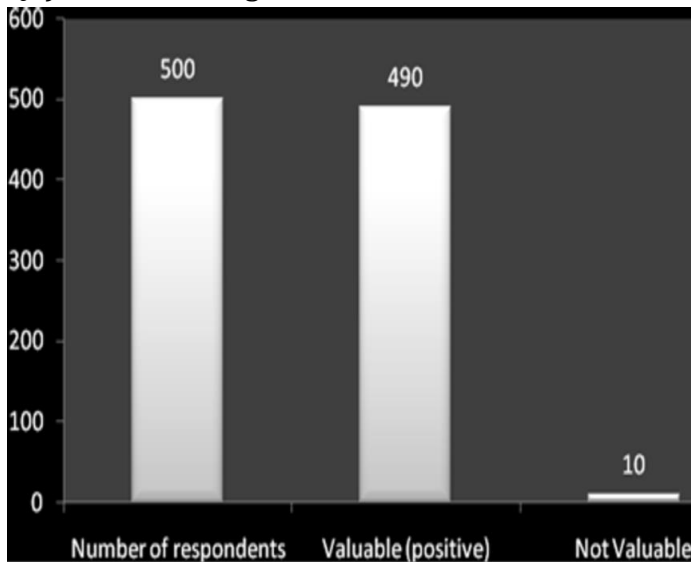
In the present study, architectural documentation, photographic documentation, mapping, pencil drawing of the immovable antiquities, drawing to scale by means of the software AutoCAD of the buildings that is subject matter of this study, preparing an inventory of the cultural objects present inside and outside the buildings, comparing the architectural features of the building, description of the history behind the establishment of the buildings and defining their architectural features, besides taking interview of the stakeholders are part of the methodology.

Questionnaire

Q1 Is the Nursing College building as a heritage monument beautiful?

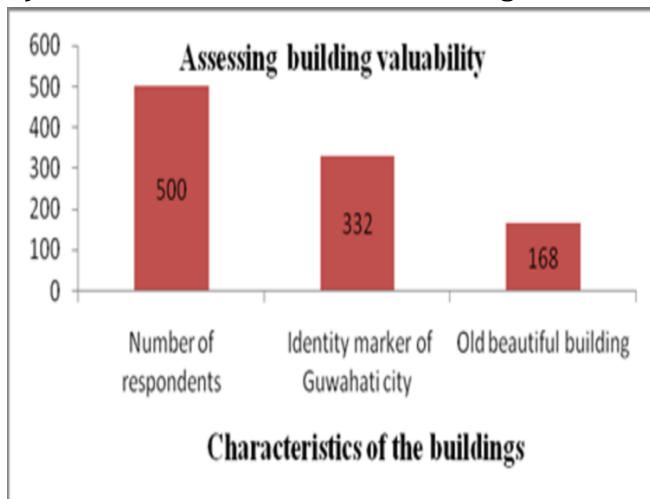


Q2) Is the building valuable?

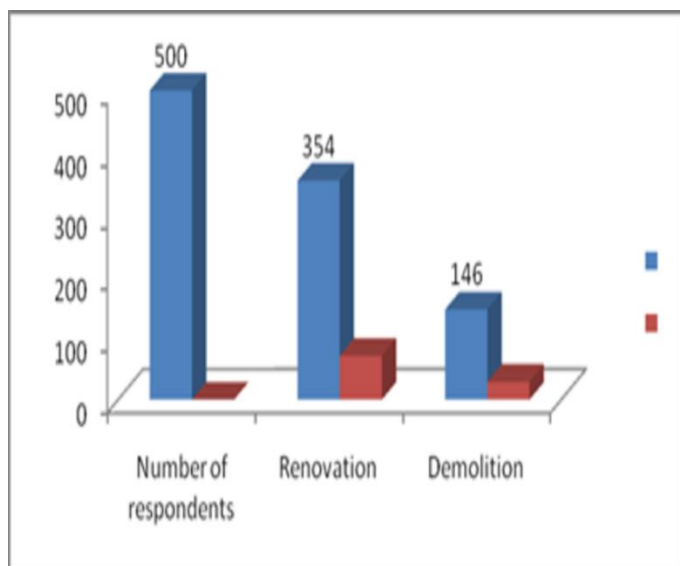


Q 3) Why is the building valuable?

- a) The building is an identity marker of Guwahati city
- b) It is an old beautiful building



Q 4) Would you agree if the buildings are demolished/renovated?



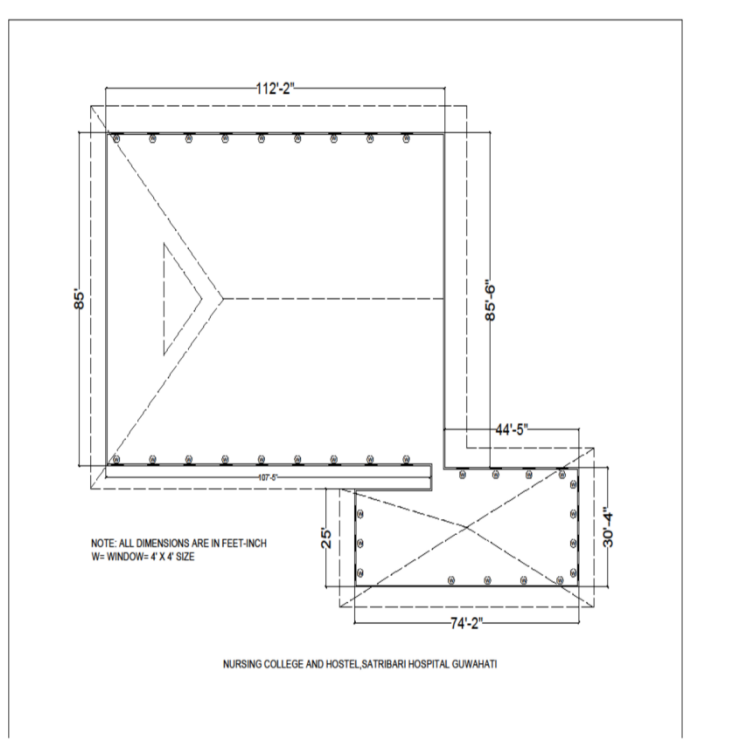
Inventory- (Nursing College, Satribari Christian Hospital (NCSCH)-estd 1926

Serial No	Items	Description	Length (meters)	Breadth (meters)	Height	Remarks	Information
NCSCH1	Truss and tins	Corrugated galvanised iron	2,4384	0.7366	-	Tins are in good condition	Truss- for structural stability
NCSCH 2	Old fan in the classroom of the Nurses	Attached to the ceiling in a short rod	0.508	-	-	Fan is in working condition	These fans have not been replaced till now
NCSCH 3	Door leading to the Nurses' Hostel	Teak Wood	-	0.9144	2.0066	Painted in black colour	Wooden door with net on the upper half
NCSCH 4	Marble table in the classroom	Polished	2.1336	0.3048	0.9144	Water Tap is attached in the end of the table with two stands supportin	Light brown colour marble

						g the table	
NCSCH 5	Almirah	Reddish Mahogany wood	-	1.52400	1.7272	Old furniture	Perfectly polished product
NCSCH 6	Switch boards and regulators	6 switches ; 1 plug point	0.381	0.1778	1.7272	Very old	Varnished in light brown colour
NCSCH 7	Old chair	Finely polished	-	0.508	0.9779	Good condition	A heavy chair
NCSCH 8	Table and chairs in the Library of Nursing College	Table top is finely polished	3.6576	1.9685	0.8382	Reddish Brown Mahogany wood	Fine finishing
NCSCH 9	Nurses' Hostel	Walls, doors and windows are nicely painted to suit the hospital atmosphere	7.1628 (hall in the hostel)	4.7498	3.30200	Doors and windows are in good condition	There are 19 rooms in the Nursing College and hostel

"The Author"

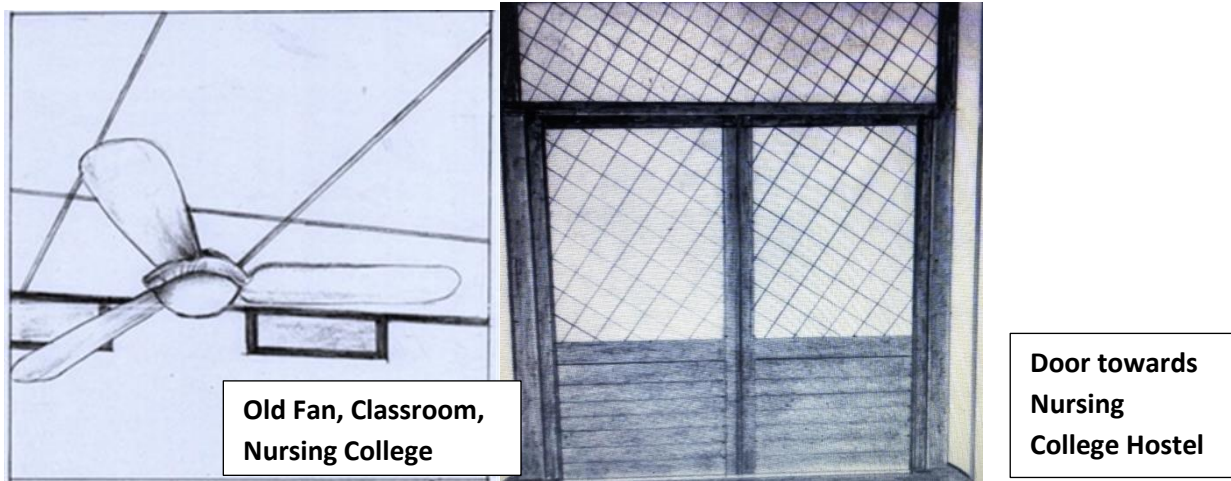
Ground plan and Description



Description

The structure of the Nursing College, Satribari Christian Hospital is an Assam Type structure. Assam Type houses are light in weight. They may be single or double storey houses. Timber is used and instead of brick reed locally known as icara is used in the walls over which mud layering and later on cement is used. These type of houses became more popular in the entire North Eastern region of India after the destructive Great Assam Earthquake of 1897 which razed to the ground the huge Gothic style structures in Assam. Hence the Satribari Nursing College building strictly adheres to the construction code of Assam. It has full concrete wall with gable roof. In some parts of the building reeds and cement layering still exist. Each window has rain guard on top of it. A corridor separates the interior of the building into two halves.

Free hand drawings of immovable properties of Nursing College, Satribari Christian Hospital



Mapping of Cultural Characteristics

History

The Nursing School of the Satribari Christian Hospital started functioning at the same time when the hospital was founded. In fact the hospital was started by a missionary nurse Miss Milli Marvin. She along with a handful of girls who joined as nurses started taking care of women and child patients in a small thatched house. Thus the beginning of the hospital was made by way of a nursing school on 26 October, 1926. From the very beginning, the hospital started nursing programme. From the first batch of graduating nurses in 1929, the nurses' training school gradually grew with more nurses, both staff and trainee nurses. The College of Nursing, Satribari Christian Hospital is under the ownership of the Council of Baptist Churches North East India.

Architectural Features

Gable Roof

A gable is the triangular portion of a wall between the edges of a dual pitched roof. Gable depends upon the structural design and gives importance to aesthetic concerns too.

Features:-

- i) Gable roof look like triangle
- ii) The gable may be at the front or at the side
- iii) Gable roofs are generally made from metal sheeting or tiles
- iv) The traditional gable has a straight roofline. Another type of gable is crow step gable. Its roofline is constructed in the form of steps.

Gable roof is a unique style of roof design which is common across the colonial world of Europe, Africa, Australia, Asia, and the Americas. The front gable design depicted through Blenheim House, New Farm, Brisbane, 1887 is similar to the gable roof design of Guwahati Baptist Church, Christ Church, Nursing College, Satribari Christian Hospital, and the Conference Centre Complex. Gable roof looks like a triangle.

Conservation

For the purpose of conservation of the heritage monument under study the knowledge and planning tool has been used. The Nursing College is under the management of the Council of Baptist Churches North East India (CBCNEI). The Baptist Christian patients, the attendants, coming from all over the North East India and the staff of the hospital reflect the local condition. An interview of the Secretary of the (CBCNEI) was taken. The Chaplain of the hospital Church, The Principal of the Nursing College and the former Managing Director of the Satribari Christian Hospital were interviewed.

Interview - In a short discussion with the Chaplain of the Church inside the Satribari Christian Hospital premises regarding the existence of the old hospital building, he said that he supported the issue of preservation of the old colonial building as it has been a spectator of a growing urbanized city and where half of the population of Guwahati was born there. Therefore it should be maintained as a priced possession.

The Chaplain of the Satribari Christian Hospital Church was asked a few questions-

1) Do you feel that the Satribari Christian Hospital building is valuable from the structural point of view?

Yes, it is a valuable building. It was constructed at a time when the British Government was ruling over India. These types of buildings are few in number now a days across Assam. Today the hospital is more than 95 years old and therefore it needs to be preserved.

2) Is it meaningful to retain the old hospital/Nursing College building today?

Yes, it is necessary to have this old structure for those people who have always been involved in the hospital affairs, for example the retired staff and doctors. There was a time when the Satribari Christian Hospital along with a few other colonial buildings in Guwahati was amongst the few outstanding buildings of Guwahati. Apart from being a building it is an old hospital where senior citizens of Guwahati frequently visited for treatment. Even today the hospital caters to a large section of the population of Guwahati.

3) Don't you think it is necessary to cope with the neo urbanization trend so far as constructing new buildings are concerned?

A city adjusts according to the requirements of the businesses and the vision of the ruling Government. A new building constructed today may adhere to these motives of the Government and the developers. But an old building of the yesteryears with all their distinguished characteristics need not change dramatically. It is respected for what it is.

Q4) Would you prefer the demolition of the building of the Nursing College of Satribari Christian Hospital building?

Being a part of the Satribari Christian Hospital and the Nursing College for many years it would be disheartening to accept the demolition of the hospital building. Particularly when the design of the structure is but the few remaining colonial buildings within the developing city of Guwahati and the state of Assam. The Hospital staffs are of the opinion that the hospital building should exist in the form of a heritage structure.

Interview - When asked whether the Principal of the Nursing College supported the idea of having the original hospital building in the face of the changing landscape, she replied that she was open to the idea of accepting changes with a modern look. The Principal nevertheless is interested in the systematic preservation of all the old furniture, classroom tables where practical classes were held, electric goods, old classrooms, books etc, in the college. The old building of the Nursing College as well as the Nurses' Hostel located together however remains even today, though new buildings are being constructed inside the campus.

Regulatory Systems

The Ancient Monuments Preservation Act of 1904, passed by Lord Curzon, the Viceroy of India, was a landmark development in the conservation of cultural heritage in India. Since then the country saw several legislations which has been passed for the sake of conservation of monuments. Article 49 of the Directive Principles of State Policy as mentioned in the Constitution of India states about the Protection of Monuments and Places and objects of National importance.

The two most important legislations so far as conservation of heritage resources is concerned are the (i) Ancient Monuments and Archaeological Sites and Remains Act, 1958, and the The Antiquities and Art Treasures Act, 1972 for heritage conservation, (iii) Ancient Monuments and Archaeological Sites and Remains Act, Validation Act, 2010. In Assam too there are two important Acts for conservation of the heritage monuments which is used widely. These are THE ASSAM ANCIENT MONUMENTS AND RECORDS ACT, 1959 (Assam Act No. XXV of 1959)

In Assam The Assam Heritage (Tangible) Protection, Preservation, Conservation and Maintenance Act has come into existence in 2020. It will cover the entire heritage that has been in existence for at least 75 years (Times of India, September, 4, 2020). These Acts are meant for conservation of heritage monuments or sites in India. For management of the sites CRM can be practised in India

Financial Tool

The financial tool indicates the use of public private partnership for management of the old building.

Capacity Building, Communication and Communities

The knowledge and planning tool used in the case of the Nursing College, Satribari Christian Hospital are outlined in the credibility framework of the Nursing College. It can protect the integrity and authenticity of the features of urban heritage. Besides to serve the financial interests of the Nursing College, public private partnership is suggested. The tool of questionnaire has been used for civic engagement, communication and communities where a cross section of stakeholders including officials of the committees which maintain the building, trust and board members, besides the public of Guwahati, legal experts, heritage experts, and the Government officials concerned with heritage conservation participated.

Conclusion

To save the buildings of the past and to pass it for the community throughout generations, CRM can be practised and has to be a people's movement. The expanding city of Guwahati is an example of the transformed landscape where people, place and time have contributed towards the change. The archaeological landmarks of the city are considered to be an important part of a city's cultural landscape. The present study deals with the cultural landscape of Guwahati designed in between the middle of the 19th century till the midst of the 20th century when the British were ruling over India. In Assam the British started their administrative role from 1826 onwards after which they started designing the city of Guwahati and elsewhere in Assam according to their requirement. These buildings are important because of their original historic fabric, and the story each building has to say. With the onset of globalization and urbanization as more and more buildings are under the threat of demolition, governments of many countries are upright in preserving the cultural heritage for future generations. These have been possible through certain Acts enumerated in the constitution and the state heritage preservation rules. Hence to enable the age old structures a breathing space within an urbanized scenario certain measures have been adopted to allow the distinguished structures to manage a continued existence today. It is not possible to pass all the existing cultural heritage of yesteryears for the future generations without a changed landscape. As change of the landscape is now an expected feature therefore the aim is to manage the changing landscape by embracing the architectural components of yesteryears and shaping its future.

The conservation profession has fought its toughest battles with realtors, developers and critically with the contemporary aspirations of a modernizing city. The management of historic sites and evolution of its cultural significance are amongst the most complex aspects of conservation, since it demands balancing the multiple pressures of people, their aspirations, political ambitions and development priorities. This is true for sites like the splendid Taj Mahal, located in the city of Agra in Uttar Pradesh (India), where uncontrolled development and industrialization are causing high level pollution to the pristine marble. The Nara document focusses on renewal of the heritage as a cultural tradition. In New Zealand, the Treaty of Waitangi acknowledges the historical basis for indigenous guardianship. It is to be kept in mind that our historic cities are layers of civilizations which has a profound impact on the culture of the city and its citizens. Guwahati itself is a city of many civilizations where the cultural landscape is a living, ever growing entity. This cultural landscape and the urban heritage if managed by CRM can definitely survive and pass on the heritage to the community of the next generation.

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