

# Challenges of Heritage Precincts: A Case Study of Ambavilas Palace, Mysore

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**Abstract:** - *The heritage monuments and precincts provide tangible links with the past and they demonstrate various important phases in the development in a city. Heritage precincts are valuable and irreplaceable elements, which contribute to the creation of a sense of place and connectivity to the past for the local community and it has cultural significance. In the rapidly modernizing built environment, the heritage area/precincts namely monuments, natural areas viz. lakes and gardens, public squares, water fountains, gateways, avenue trees and traditional residential buildings along with their associated elements (precincts) are losing their identity. Therefore, there is need for identifying and preserving these cultural and architectural heritage buildings including its associated areas with appropriate planning conservation measures for harmonious development. The paper presents the case study of Ambavilas Precinct, Mysore.*

**Key Words:** Precinct, Heritage Areas, Monuments, Cultural Significance.

## I. INTRODUCTION

In India, the approach towards conservation of built heritage is monument centric or building centric. It is required to change the approach and adopt heritage area or heritage precinct approach. A heritage area/ precinct is an aggregate of buildings, streets, and open spaces that, as a whole, is a collective asset to a community. It has a special character that distinguishes it from its surroundings. In order to preserve aesthetic environs around the heritage buildings, it is necessary to identify the heritage area/ precinct in the cities so that the character of the area can be protected through the course of change. "Heritage precinct" means an area comprising heritage building or buildings and precincts thereof or related places that share wholly or partly certain common physical, social, cultural significance worth preservation and conservation.

## II. BACKGROUND OF MYSORE

Mysore is the second largest city in the state of Karnataka, India. It is the headquarters of the Mysore district and it lies about 146 km (91 miles) southwest of Bangalore, the capital of Karnataka. The name *Mysore* is an anglicized version of *Mahishūru*, which means the abode of *Mahisha*. *Mahisha* stands for Mahishasura, a demon from Hindu mythology. According to the census of 2001, Mysore city had a total population of 799,228. Kannada is the most widely spoken language in the city. The city is spread across an area of 128.42 Sq.kms and it is situated at the base of the Chamundi Hills. It is located at

12.30°N 76.65°E and has an average altitude of 770 metres. The city is situated between the rivers Kaveri and Kabini, which are main sources of drinking water to the city. Mysore has several lakes, prominent among are the Kukkarahalli, Karanji and Lingambudhi lakes.

## III. HERITAGE OF MYSORE

Mysore city has both natural and built heritage components. The city has retained its studiously built character of a native princely city. The most imposing and majestic building in Mysore is the Ambavilas Palace, which is the focal point of the city. It was built in an Indo-Sarcenic style. The city is characterized by buildings, gardens, boulevards, and planned markets and all these were the contributions of Maharajas, Dewans, and their talented workmanship. Their architectural and urban design elements like vistas, focal points, landmarks, avenues, plazas etc., make it undoubtedly the most important tradition city in India. Albert-Victor road is beautifully laid down street, has a pathway beautifully laid within the Curzon park which and hugging the palace gate and fort with a moat on northern side of the palace as a landmark, represents the vista with edges. The townscape of the city viewed from Chamundi hills present a skyline of clock tower, statues, palaces, mansions depicts the beauty of the city.

## IV. HERITAGE BUILDINGS IN MYSORE

The heritage buildings have four distinct architectural styles viz. Indo-Saracenic, Traditional Hindu Style, Greco-Roman and Gothic (Pearl)[1].

TANGIBLE ELEMENTS – A. Architectural Monuments



Fig.1 Tangible Heritage Resources

The city exhibits both tangible and non tangible elements of heritage character, and it has been recognised as 'Heritage City' by both State and Central Governments. The INTACH has identified 139 heritage buildings and

Mysore Heritage Agenda Task Force has identified 201 heritage buildings.

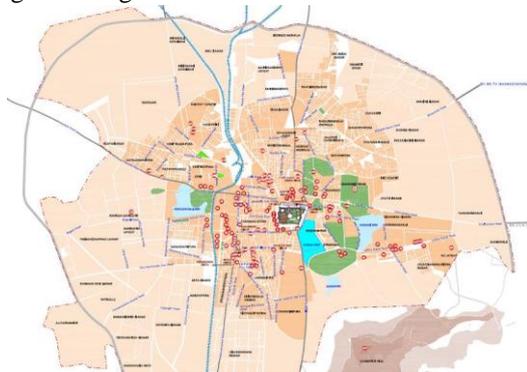


Fig 2 Locations of Heritage buildings in Mysore  
Source: Office of the Heritage Commissioner, Mysore

### V. HERITAGE PRECINCTS IN CORE AREA

There are number heritage precincts in the core area viz. the Ambavilas Palace and its group of building viz. temples, landscape and public space within fort forms another relevant example of a precinct due to its distinct style of architecture within the premises. The other precincts are Devaraja Market Precinct along with the ‘Small Clock Tower’ (Chikka Ghadiyara), Town Hall Precinct, Gandhi Square Precinct, Old and Present Procession Street-Precincts and many more. The predominant heritage precincts in the core area are three categories.

Table: 1: Heritage Precincts in City Core

Category/Type	Precincts
I-Palace/ Mansions Precinct	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Ambavilas Palace Precinct</li> <li>Jaganmohana palace precinct</li> </ul>
II- Public Buildings Precinct	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Townhall Precinct</li> <li>Krishna-Rajendra Hospital Precinct</li> <li>Church Precinct</li> </ul>
III - Street Precincts	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Sayyaji Rao Road Precinct</li> <li>Ashoka Road Precinct</li> </ul>

### VI. AMBAVILAS PALACE PRECINCT

Ambavilas Palace is known as Mysore Palace and it is located in the heart of Mysore. The Palace that stands on the site of the former Fort represents the physical hearth of the city of Mysore. This site has been there for many centuries and it was a center of the political and military power of the Kingdom of Mysore. The palace construction was commissioned in 1897, and it was completed in 1912 and expanded later around 1940. It was designed by a British architect, Henry Irwin.

### VII. ARCHITECTURE

The architectural style of the palace is commonly described as Indo-Saracenic, and blends together Hindu, Muslim, Rajput, and Gothic styles. It is a three-storied stone structure, with marble domes and a 145 ft five-storied tower. The palace is surrounded by a large garden. The three storied stone building of fine gray granite with

deep pink marble domes. The facade has seven expansive arches and two smaller ones flanking the central arch, which is supported by tall pillars. Above the central arch is an impressive sculpture of *Gajalakshmi*, the goddess of wealth, prosperity, good luck, and abundance with her elephants.



Fig.3 Ambavilas Palace

### VII. LAND USES OF PALACE PRECINCT

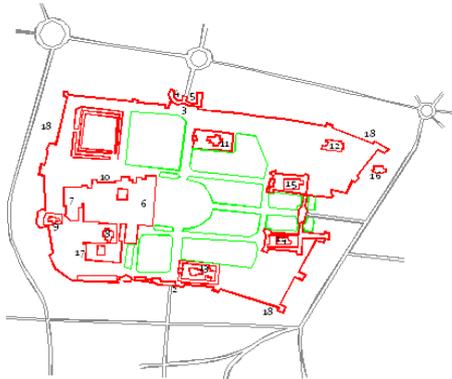
The land use in the precinct is mainly public buildings leading from Ambavilas palace which is converted into museum, government offices like MCC, Public offices, Central telegraph office and Banumiah's school. All these public buildings are located within substantial open spaces and parks. The next category is the commercial use of buildings namely Janatha bazaar, Lansdowne bazaar and commercial spaces around the K.R circle

#### 1) Built Form Characteristics

The buildings within the precinct are two-storied buildings that is ground plus first floor structures, which is monumental in scale. A very wide setback between buildings gives prominence to architecture. The precinct is dominated with the civic buildings and a few commercial buildings. From architectural point of view, all the buildings in the precinct are traditional in character. All buildings in the precinct are state government properties. Un-built space is prevailing over built space. Two types of voids, the wide boulevards and large patches of open pockets like parks, the solids represent footprints of many civic buildings and few commercial buildings. The four types of streetscape characteristics are found in the precinct; a wide boulevard with double tree lining and substantial building setbacks; enclosed road with double tree lining and clear building alignment on both sides; open representative areas with major isolated buildings set against the backdrop of the existing transforming city; and enclosed green road with double mature trees lining in an unenclosed green-spaces.



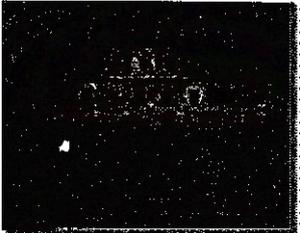
**Fig.4 Amba Vilas Palace Precinct;**  
**Source: Google Image, 2010**  
**VIII. PALACE COMPLEX**

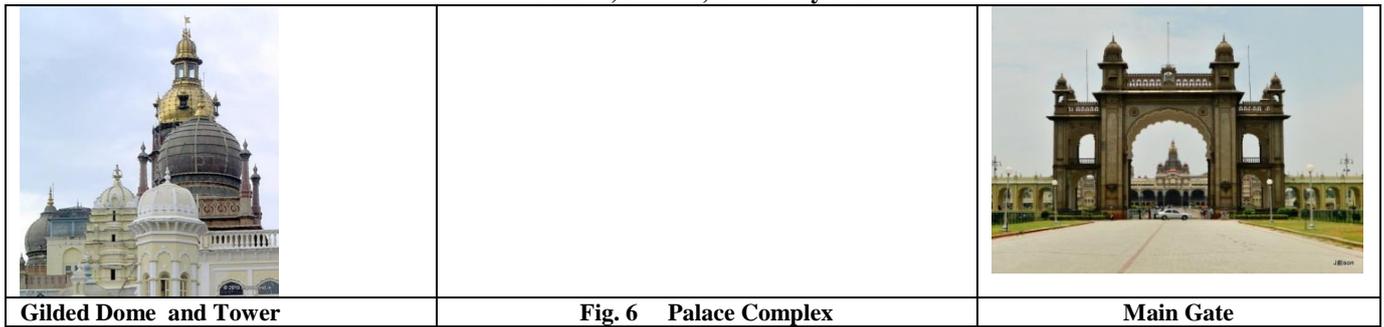


**Fig.5 Plan of Palace Complex**

- [2]. South Gate
- [3]. North Gate
- [4]. Ganapathi Shrine
- [5]. Hanuman Shrine
- [6]. Palace Museum (Ceremonial portion)
- [7]. Palace Museum (Residential portion)
- [8]. Sri Prasanna Krishnaswamy Temple
- [9]. Srilakshmi Ramana Swamy Temple
- [10]. Residential Area
- [11]. Sri Bhuvaneshwari Temple
- [12]. Kodi Someshwaraswamy Temple
- [13]. Shewtha Waraha Swamy Temple
- [14]. Sri Gayathri Temple
- [15]. Sri Trineshwara Temple
- [16]. Sri Kodi Bhairavaswamy Temple
- [17]. Killevenkataramana Swamy Temple
- [18]. Fort Wall and Trench

[1]. Jayamarthanda gate( main gate to palace)

		
<p><b>Colonnaded Pavilion</b></p>	<p><b>Gilded Dome and Tower</b></p>	<p><b>Old Palace</b></p>
		
		<p><b>Capital of a Column</b></p>



**IX. TEMPLES**

The palace complex includes twelve hindu temples. The oldest of these was built in the 14th century, while the most recent was built in 1953. Someshvara Temple is dedicated to God Lord Shiva; Lakshmiramana Temple is dedicated to God Lord Vishnu; Shwetha Varahaswamy Temple is dedicated to Lord Varahaswamy which is one of the 10 incarnations of Lord Vishnu.



**Fig.7 Temples within the Palace Fort**

**X. SIGNIFICANCE OF AMBAVILAS PRECINCT**

The significance of heritage precincts is based on a) *historical* b) *architectural* and c) *environmental* aspects. Ambavilas Palace Precinct has more than 85% of its heritage buildings are of very high significance. The precinct is associated with intangible heritage like Dasara and is being used as a Museum, which attracts millions of tourists. The significance of Ambavilas Palace Precinct is **“VERY HIGH”**.

**I. ISSUES OF AMBA VILAS PALACE PRECINCT**

- 1) Some parts of the palace and other buildings, there are cracks appearing in masonry structures which has not been properly addressed



- 2) Disharmonious development creating juxtaposition in front of the palace architecture.

**Disharmonious developments**



- 3) Lack maintenance and dumping of solid waste which has created ugly spots in the precincts.



- 4) There is congestion in the precinct as Mysore city bus stand is located just adjacent to the palace and also many public buildings are located surrounding the palace.
- 5) There is no separate designated Tanga path and Tangas are parked in front of the palace unorganizedly.
- 6) The railing design all around the palace are of varying designs and uniform design has not been maintained.
- 7) Lack of public amenities and poor infrastructure like public toilets, dustbins, creates unhygienic environment.

**XI. CONSERVATION MESURES**

- 1) The maintenance of buildings and areas within the Ambavilas Precinct need to be given priority.
- 2) Street beautification providing paved walkways, planting trees, street furniture, street lighting and proper maintenance around heritage building are to be taken up.
- 3) All the disharmonious development to be identified and micro-plan to be prepared for architectural harmony with incentives and concessions.

- 4) To promote heritage tourism, a separate Tanga transport with dedicated lanes to be developed around the Palace.
  - 5) By shifting existing city bus stand from the Palace Precinct, making one way traffic system and prohibiting movement of heavy vehicles and on street parking around Palace to solve the congestion and traffic problems.
  - 6) Basic amenities like drinking water, public toilets and waste disposal place etc, should be provided in large numbers at proper places.
  - 7) All buildings should conform to parking within their premises in the precinct. Wide pedestrian and tang/bicycle pathway all around the palace to be provided. The further growth of commercial activities should be contained in the precinct.
  - 8) Street hawkers and vendors have to be moved from the precinct Water fountains in combination with good
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landscaping around the palace in the moat area would revive back the glory.

- 9) Hoardings, posters etc, should be conformity with the heritage area. Only compatible & controlled signage can be allowed in a selected place without affecting the aesthetics heritage buildings/areas.
- 10) Cleanliness to be maintained in the precinct

## XII. CONCLUSIONS

The heritage precincts, which are associated buildings and areas have high cultural significance. Their problems need to be addressed by identifying precincts and assessing their significance. The appropriate proper conservation measures coupled with regulatory measures would promote harmonious development of precincts of Ambavilas Palace. Mysore Urban Authority has immense scope for formation of heritage precincts guidelines for identifying, assessing, conserving and managing the other precincts for harmonious development.

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