CONTESTED HERITAGE AND THE ROLE OF PRINT MEDIA: A CASE STUDY OF AN UNKNOWN TOMB, HUMAYUNPUR VILLAGE, NEW DELHI

[1]Dr. Sunjay Jain, [2]Sailendra Kumar Swain

[1] Professor, Dept. of Museology, M. S. University, Baroda

[2] Research Scholar, Dept. of Museology, M. S. University, Baroda

ABSTRACT

Heritage is cherished and nourished due to its social, economic, political, cultural and identity values. Due to these value additions, often heritage is contested. Many times that contestation leads to social unrest, violence, death and destruction and even legal hassles also. A sustainable cultural resource management could act as a deterrent to such problems. Therefore, one of the major objectives of cultural resource management is the public awareness about heritage. Media could achieve that objective in its various forms. However, that is not the only objective of the media. Media can influence and sway public opinion, pressurize public authorities to speak and act responsibly and also sensitize people for activism on myriads of public interest issues including heritage. Heritage and media are comprehensive disciplines. Although a lot of research works have been done in both the disciplines, i.e. heritage and media independently, academic works on their inter-relationships are very few. The present study makes a humble effort to explore that inter-relationship in the context of one of the contested built heritages of Delhi. The research will be mostly based on the primary sources, i.e. content analysis of the reviewed built heritage stories in the print media of Delhi.

Keywords: Contested Heritage, Content Analysis, Cultural Resource Management, Print Media, Public Awareness

INTRODUCTION

Heritage is a broad concept. Inheritances in various forms bequeathed by past generations are our heritage. From local to national and international level, from antiquity to recent past, from antiquarian objects to palatial buildings, from tangible to intangible and from cultural to natural, all are our heritage. Heritage is cherished and nourished due to its social, economic, political, cultural and identity values. Due to these value additions, often heritage is contested. Many times

that contestation leads to social unrest, violence, death and destruction and legal hassles. A sustainable cultural resource management could act as a deterrent to such problems. Therefore, one of the major objectives of cultural resource management is the public awareness about heritage. Media could achieve that objective in its various forms. However, that is not the only objective of the media. Media can influence and sway public opinion, pressurize public authorities to speak and act responsibly and also sensitize people for activism on myriads of public interest issues including heritage. Although a lot of research works have been done independently in both the disciplines, i.e. heritage and media along with their popular co-relate disciplines as inter-disciplinary studies, academic works on their inter-relationships are very few. Due to the growing fascinations with heritage by the modern generation and the resultant increasing concern of media for that public fascination, an inter-disciplinary study of heritage and media became imperative. The present research aims at focusing that inter-relationship in the context of a contested built heritage in Delhi.

CONTESTED HERITAGE: AN OVERVIEW:

From time immemorial, heritage—both tangible and intangible—have been cherished, nourished and nurtured around the world. This is precisely because heritage gives people their roots, identity, pride, belief or faith and many times economy as well. Depending on the

level of affiliation and acceptance of patrimony; an individual or a group, a locality, a region or a nation long for that heritage. During the course of history, in the dictatorial regimes, both

the tangible and intangible heritage have been created, intruded, added, altered and destroyed for hegemony, wealth, vengeance and whims. Ravages of time have their fair contribution in the form of impact of nature and natural calamities and war that took tolls on heritage also. This could be traced in the narratives of the then literatures and existing material culture as cultural heritage around us—in ruins, unexcavated mounds and other dilapidated heritage structural remains.

In 21st century also, "we live in an increasingly fraught world where religious, ethnic, national, political, and other groups manipulate (appropriate, use, misuse, exclude, erase) markers and manifestations of their own and others' cultural heritage as a means for asserting, defending, or denying critical claims to power, land, legitimacy, and so forth" (Silverman, 2011, p.1). Depending on the nature of heritage, contestation could be between two or multiple claimants. It has also been observed that contestations are made on the basis of religion, ethnicity, patriotism, jingoism etc. But, in most of the cases, contestations are religious. This contestation could be traced in the heritage sites of Middle East, Europe, North America, Asia and some other parts of the world also. The most contested built heritage sites of the world are—the temple mount in

Jerusalem; Preah Vihear in Thailand-Cambodia border; Potala Palace at Lahsa, Tibet; Bamiyan Buddha near Afghanistan capital, Kabul and Babri Masjid at Ayodhy, Uttar Pradesh, India.

In India, there are a whole host of monuments which are contested. These contestations are embedded in the millennium years of its history which has witnessed successive phases of migrations and invasions resulting in destruction and conversion of cult centres of the vanquished by the victors and appropriators into the centres of their own faiths. The high profile contested built heritage of India includes the demolished Babri Masjid at Ayodhya in Uttar Pradesh; Bhojsala Temple in the Dhar district of Madhya Pradesh; Krishna Janmabhumi temple at Mathura, Uttar Pradesh and other disputed structures include Quwwat-ul-Islam mosque at Qutb Complex, New Delhi; Dhai din ka Jhonpra at Ajmer, Rajasthan; mount Girnar in Gujarat; Jami Masjid at Malan in Banaskantha district of Gujarat etc. Many times, the origin and perpetuation of these contestations are ascribed to the colonial regime due to their differential approaches and partisan attitude towards the monuments and shrines (Mishra, 2015, pp. 239-277) and the same approach is being followed by the present dispensations also. The impacts of these contestations are mostly fraught with danger as it often leads to border skirmishes (in case the built heritage is located in a contested international border between two countries), riots (in case of contested religious heritage), violent protests and legal battles also.

CASE STUDY: THE ISSUE

The contested heritage under review is an unknown tomb ((it is not known whose tomb, also locally called *gumti*) at Humayunpur village in Safdarjung Enclave, South Delhi. In May 4, 2018, the tomb came to the limelight through media because of the changing of its colour to white and saffron and some idols were placed inside it (Times of India, May 5, 2018, p.7). Most of the newspapers, other print media and some electronic media in Delhi reported this issue immediately. As a result, the Deputy Chief Minister of Delhi, Manish Sisodia ordered an inquiry on the alleged conversion of the monument into a temple.

The Domed Monument before (left) and now (right)   Photo: Dainik Bhaskar

A statement from Manish Sisodia said, 'Causing damage and harm to a heritage property is against the law and a serious offence. It is the duty of the state archaeology department to ensure the protection of heritage monuments listed under it and take strict actions in case of a lapse. The reported incident should be handled with zero tolerance by the department as it not only violates heritage related laws but is also an attempt to disturb peace and harmony in the area' (Times of India, 05/05/2018, p.7).

Historical Background

This tomb was enlisted as a monument by the then official of Archaeological Survey of India, Maulvi Zafar Hasan in his four volumes book 'Hindu and Muhammadan Monuments of Delhi' published in 1916, 1918, 1920, 1922 (Reprinted in 1997 as 'Monuments of Delhi: Lasting Splendours of the Great Mughals and Others'). From the characteristics of the architecture, it seems that the tomb belongs to 14th-15th century and most probably of Tughlaq period. Regarding this tomb, Zafar Hasan says, the 'domed building, 21' EM constructed of rubble masonry plastered and has an arched doorway on each of its four sides. The corners of the roof

which is battlemented are marked by small minarets. The building is used as a fodder store by villagers and its doorways are filled in with earth and rubble' (Hasan, Vol.III, p. 190). Most probably, in the course of time after the documentation by Zafar Hasan, the tomb was converted into a shrine by the villagers.

Monument vs Shrine

After the issue came to the limelight due to the change of its colour and installation of idols, the Delhi government has ordered an inquiry. A preliminary report of the Delhi government revealed that the tomb is a medieval era monument and notification was issued in 2009 for its protection (Times of India, 06/05/2018, p.2). As per the Citizen Charter of the Department of Archaeology, one 'cannot paint, draw or whitewash any wall in and around the monument, cannot hamper or spoil the originality of the monument and help in maintaining the sanctity of the monument' (http://www.delhi.gov.in). However, a plaque fixed at the top of the arched entrance of the tomb, dated 15 June, 1971, claims it as Bhola Shiv temple. The plaque also says about 'Bhola Dharmartha Trust' i.e. a religious trust in the

name of the temple which has been registered by that date. Since the monument was converted into a shrine, now, the built heritage is contested between the state and the local community. While the state claims it as a monument and wants to take it over, the local community asserts it as a shrine and resists its takeover.

The Plaque mentions it as Bhola Shiv Mandir (Photo: TOI)

Role of Print Media

The basic role of media is objective presentation of facts taking into consideration all the stakeholders and all aspects. Objective presentation means to portray any issue or event in an

unbiased manner. The print media also gives value judgements or try to find out solutions through their features, columns or editorials on those issues. In the present case study, from 4th to 7th May 2018, most of the English and Hindi print media of Delhi reported about the Humayunpur tomb which was converted into a Hindu temple. Let's discuss the nature of reporting of these media so that we could ascertain their role on this issue.

The Headlines

The headline of the story is one of the strong indicators of the role of media on a particular issue. While breaking the news, The Indian Express wrote, 'Tomb to temple in two months: In South Delhi a monument changes colours' (4th May, 2018, p.3). 'Tomb transforms into temple in Delhi; here is how', is the headline given by The Financial Express (FE Online, May 4, 2018). The Hindustan Times headlines run 'A Tughlaq era tomb converted to a temple? Delhi govt orders probe' (5th May, 2018). 'From tomb to temple: Tale of monumental neglect' is the headline of The Times of India with the strapline 'Probe Ordered, FIR Soon To Take Back Tughlaq-Era Building'(5th May, 2018, p.7). The DNA headlines said, 'Row erupts over tomb in Delhi: Have always known it as a temple, say Humayunpur residents' (5th May, 2018). While The Hindu reported with the headlines 'Heritage structure painted: used as temple' (5th May, 2018), The Pioneer gave it the headlines 'Structure turned into temple in Safdarjung Enclave a medieval-era monument: Delhi govt. report' (6th May, 2018).

Hindi newspapers of Delhi also reported the story. While Jansatta reported with the headlines, 'Tughlaq period tomb converted to temple: painted saffron and idols installed' (4th May, 2018, headlines translated by the author), Dainik Bhaskar reported 'This is tomb or a temple: tomb in Humayunpur converted into temple due to lack of maintenance' (6th May, 2018, headlines translated by the author). Another popular Hindi daily, Navbharat Times reported, '650 years historic tomb converted into temple, idols installed and painted with white and saffron' (5th May, 2018, headlines translated by the author). Amar Ujala also reported the story with the headlines 'Big twist in the tomb turn temple issue: proof of temple since 1971' (7th May, 2018, headlines translated by the author).

From the headlines of the print media as cited above, in most of the cases, it is clearly seen that the focus is on the conversion of the tomb into a temple or heritage structure turned into a temple with the exception of the DNA and Amar Ujala which also highlighted the views of the local communities. However, the headlines of Dainik Bhaskar is a balanced one which put the blame on the public authorities for their non-maintenance (including sign board, security and conservation maintenance) of the tomb that led to its conversion into a temple. Almost all the headlines are heritage-centric airing the concern of the heritage lover professionals and officials and only a couple of print media gave community specific headlines as an adjunct.

The Sources

The second important aspect of the print media's role on heritage issues is their sources. In this case, they have consulted multiple sources, many of which have been named and some were not revealed. The sources consulted by the media includes—survey of literature to know the background (most of them have cited the listing of monuments of Delhi by Maulvi Zafar Hasan in 1920s), officials of Delhi state department of archaeology, officials of Indian National Trust for Art and Cultural Heritage (INTACH), local politicians and the local community. While dealing with the sources, some of the print media have given priority to government sources while others gave primacy to the local community and still a couple of them tried to give equal footage to both the sides.

The Local Community

The local communities are the real custodians of their heritage. All the leading dailies of Delhi reported the matter from the field. They have interviewed many local people there. All of the villagers including octogenarians have said that from the very childhood they know this tomb as a temple in which there was always a Shiv Lingam. They have admitted that only in March 2018, i.e. two months back the Radha-Krishna idols were installed and the structure painted white and saffron. Even the author personally inquired from one of the senior villagers, Dalip Singh about the status of the tomb and he said that the structure is a temple and under active worship since 1971.

Follow Ups

Another important role of the media is the follow up of the story. If the story is not followed up, everybody associated with the issue will be complacent and no solution will be reached for the problem. In the present context, most of the print media followed up the story for the next day with the report of the government probe establishing that the tomb is a medieval-era monument. However, only one newspaper i.e. The Indian Express followed up the story for three consecutive days with headlines 'Tomb to temple: Govt. starts probe, says zero tolerance' (5th May, 2018), 'South Delhi structure, a medieval-era monument: Report' (6th May, 2018) and 'Tomb turn into temple: Govt. panel may take over case' (7th May, 2018). But after that nothing is heard about the case.

Photographs

The role of print media is incomplete without photos and other associated illustrations to support and authenticate their stories. In this case, most of the print media have presented the story accompanied by colour photographs of the tomb before and after the painting along with

interiors and exteriors. One photo of the plaque describing the date of the temple is also taken by the Times of India.

The Interior of the Structure   Photo: Hindustan Times

CONCLUSION

Media has played a critical role on the issue by making it public. It has also alerted the government to take cognizance of the matter and act upon it. Due to the media impact, govt. ordered a probe and promised action. From overall content analysis of the stories, it is found that no print media analysed the story critically so as to establish who is at fault for this mess and how it is to be addressed. This could have beeen done through the writings of the editorials or features on this issue but unfortunately, with so much hue and cry with almost four days of consecutive reporting, not a single feature or editorial have been written on the issue. No newspaper did ever try to trace from which date the tomb has been used as temple. Most of the media are confused about this and vaguely tried to establish that the tomb was converted to a temple just before two months when it was painted white and saffron and idols installed. Some of the broadsheets tried to establish, on the basis of the plaque in the structure that it has been used as a temple since 1971, but fixing of plaque does not necessarily imply that the structure has been used as a temple from that particular date and it also certainly establishes the fact that its use as a temple predates the fixing of the plaque.

Further, no comparative analyses have been made either by the reporters or by the editors taking into account some similar events or issues of the past. For example, during the tenure of V.P. Singh government (1989-90), all heritage non-living mosques in India, where *namaaz* were not allowed since long time, were made living and opened it up for the community to offer *namaaz* at those mosques and it continues even today. Even the Jami mosque in Firoz Shah Kotla, which is a centrally protected site (by Archaeological Survey of India) and converted into a living mosque during that period, is being frequently painted and no media takes note of this. Finally, due to no further follow up by the media, the matter is still in limbo awaiting a permanent solution of the problem.

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