

LEARNING FROM THE VANISHING BUILT HERITAGE
(A Case of Colonial Buildings in Abbottabad City-Pakistan)

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ABSTRACT

Built Heritage is irreplaceable when it is at high risk. Rapid urbanization is threatening the historic urban landscape and is making it increasingly vulnerable to natural hazards i.e. earthquake and man-induced interventions. These threats have endangered the built heritage of colonial buildings in Abbottabad. To preserve these valuable assets from vanishing which is the reflection of our past inherited from the British era in indo-Pakistan and then Pakistan. This could be only possible through practical approaches for sustainable development. These approaches ranging from mass awareness campaigns regarding the protection of built heritage to National legislation for its protection & well-equipped and trained people acquired for the preservation. Architecturally and historically significant built heritage is now at high stake and needs proper consideration of heritage experts, Architects and structure Engineers to make sure of keeping its true identity by maintaining its glorious history of the British Empire, its antiquity and for the blooming of cultural tourism industry in Pakistan. This paper is focused on the documentation of the colonial buildings in Abbottabad city and the preservation of Frontier House & DCO office Abbottabad.

KEYWORDS: Built Heritage, Colonial Architecture, Documentation, Preservation, Tourism

INTRODUCTION

Buildings are the true manifestation of the culture and lifestyle of their users. Buildings are more vulnerable to both natural and man-made disasters than any other thing. Whenever disasters struck the community it results in the destruction or partial damage of the buildings especially the older and neglected buildings. The great earthquake of 2005 not only vanished a lot of built heritage but also damaged the significant urban landscapes and historical buildings generally in a different part of AJK, Hazara division, and northern regions of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, Pakistan, was a huge disaster that ever occurred in the history of Pakistan.

ABBOTTABAD CITY

Abbottabad is lying between 34°09'N latitude and 73°13'E longitude at an altitude of 4,120 feet. To the north is the picturesque Kaghan Valley. The town of Abbottabad, under the British Raj, was the headquarters of the Hazara District during the British rule of India. It was named after Major James Abbott who founded the town and district in January 1853 after the annexation of Punjab. The city is at a distance of, 110 kilometers north of the capital, Islamabad & 190 km from Peshawar. Abbottabad is one of the colonies of the British era since 1857. Most of the buildings were built by the British during their governance in Indo-Pak. After the earthquake in 2005, most of the built heritage was either damaged or destroyed due to earthquakes or due to calamities like fire and climate effect.

Earthquake Reconstruction and Rehabilitation Authority (ERRA) had taken the initiative of re-constructing the public buildings like Frontier house, Commissioners House, and other public buildings partially destroyed during the earthquake. Now the need was that how to protect these historical buildings of the colonial era on war footing bases. Heritage Foundation Pakistan, under the chair of Architect Yasmeen Lari, has taken the initiative to rehabilitate the colonial-era buildings of Abbottabad in their true identity. "A building is considered to be historically based on its aesthetic, historical, scientific or social value as a basis of cultural identity for past, present, and future generation. For Pakistan, most structures built before 1947 are considered historic. In this connection, the first step was taken from prominent public buildings of colonial architecture i.e. Frontier House and Commissioner House Abbottabad.

METHODOLOGY ADOPTED FOR PROTECTION OF VANISHING BUILT HERITAGE**FRONTIER HOUSE
AND COMMISSIONER HOUSE
ABBOTTABAD****1.1. INTRODUCTION**

Frontier House and commissioner House was among top priority in the list of built heritage to be conserved after the great earthquake 2005. Both houses are unique examples of British Era Architecture (Figure. 1 & 2). After the preliminary visual survey, a lot of cracks and material decay were identified.



Fig. 1: Frontier House Abbottabad
Source: Author

1.2. RESEARCH

It is important to trace back the history of these two prominent buildings and it could be only possible by producing historical documents and maps. Then it would be convenient for the expertise like Architects, Conservationists, and Archeologists to carry out the initial survey to assess the damage and then to sort out the practical approach for the conservation of buildings.



Fig. 2: Commissioner House Abbottabad
Source: Author

The true identity of the buildings is based on their materials, construction techniques, form, and spaces. The historical research enables us how to bring back the earthquake-affected heritage into its original form. For this, we studied the old documents and historical background of buildings to reach possible solutions.



Fig. 3: Commissioner House Roof Inside
Source: Author

1.3. CONDITION SURVEY

To know exactly about the existing condition of the affected buildings before undergoing the process of conservation. During this exercise of conservation, we use three types of condition survey i.e. good, worse, and completely damaged.

The visual survey of these two buildings is all done through the help of Heritage Architects (Student Volunteers). Every technical aspect of the buildings was checked during the condition survey to ensure the safety and authenticity of built heritage. The buildings were examined in detail. The Architectural and Archeological features were identified by Architects & Volunteers during the condition survey. Plans and sectional details, elevation, and roof details were documented during the survey as well as primary and secondary elements and technical aspects were studied to sort out treatment. (Figure. 3)

1.4. MONITORING

It is worthy to monitor the overall exercise from conception to completion so that no misshape would happen before undertaking the conservation work.

1.5. NON-DESTRUCTIVE TECHNIQUES

To make sure that none of the destructive techniques incorporated in this exercise to avoid any harm to the built heritage that later became a cause of vanishing. In this connection, Different methodology and conservation techniques were utilized based on our previous experiences while handling any conservation work.

1.6. ACCESS TO VOIDS AND STORMWATER DRAINAGE

The next crucial step in conservation was to open the roof to identify the voids which later on might be become a serious problem in stormwater management. In the frontier house, the access was difficult to roof due to very worse condition of the roof because of dampness in wooden materials as the structure is surrounded by heavy tall trees around the buildings. The roof was repaired in its original condition with the help of experts. (Figure. 4)



Fig. 4: Frontier House Back Side View
Source: Author

1.7. INVESTIGATION

Conservation is itself a helical process, the information which we collected during the research and condition survey was efficiently incorporated, but some information is still acquired which could be done through the investigation i.e. to visit archives and such other places where we can trace the footprints of colonial Architecture.

1.8. OPENING UP

While executing the opening up, it is precautionary that Extensive removal of materials needs to be avoided. The objective was only to investigate and determine the nature of the damage and to evaluate the percentage of risk, which might cause a threat to these historical buildings.

1.9. OPENING THE ROOF FROM ABOVE

The assessment for the roof of these buildings was being made to identify the nature of damaged occurred due to the earthquake and weather condition. It was considered to accessing the roof details of the historical building and to sort out the possible solution for retaining its originality without taking any risk. (Figure. 5 & 6)



Fig. 5: Commissioner House Roof Inside
Source: Author



Fig. 6: Commissioner House Roof Top
Source: Author

1.10. REMOVAL OF FINISHES

For proper investigation of built heritage which is at stake, we were supposed to remove the herbs on the walls and its roof very carefully according to the experts' opinions and advice. While removing the finishing from the walls, proper consideration needs to be taken. In given figure (7) the window shown was completely damaged and due to the vegetation on the



Fig. 7: Frontier House Window
Source: Author

wall surface, unnecessary plants were removed from the whole building to clean and secured from the further seepage and keep the originality of the buildings maintained. (Figure. 7)

1.11. RECODING INFORMATION

The recording is one of the important aspects of conservation, without proper documentation, this exercise seems to be incomplete. From our previous experiences in dealing with heritage sites and buildings, recording and documentation play a vital role in the transfer of a message from present to future generations. The detailed drawing of the built heritage regarding the conservation undertaken should be recorded. The extent of opening up should be recorded on the drawings along with photography of conditions before and after the intervention. Especially the materials that were taken out should be stacked and re-used whenever possible. All objects should be labeled and referenced according to drawings so that they can be accurately reproduced. (Figure. 8 & 9)

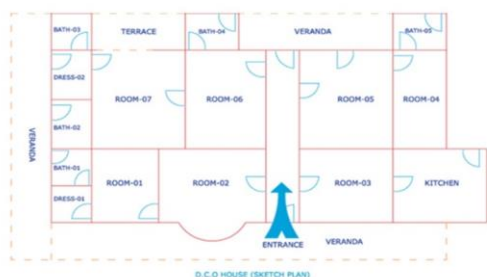


Fig. 8: Commissioner House Initial Plan Sketch
Source: Author

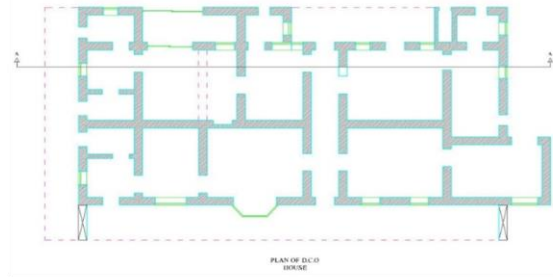


Fig. 9: Commissioner House AutoCAD Plan
Source: Author

1.12. PRECAUTION MEASURES

Precautionary measures in the conservation work are of prime importance and before undergone through the conservation of historic buildings that have been not in use for some time and are in a condition of a highly deteriorated state. It is important to use all safety tools, equipment's and methodology before enter into the building. (Figure. 10 & 11)



Fig. 10 & 11: Commissioner House Front and Back Entrance. Source: Author

1.13. SOME VIEWS DURING THE CONSERVATION WORK



Fig. 12, 13 & 14: Frontier House Inside and Outside View during and after work.

Source: Author



Fig. 15 & 16: Frontier House Back Side View and damaged wooden handrail

Source: Author

CONCLUSIONS

The focus of this paper is to highlight the importance of built heritage which is at high risk to all stakeholders. The aim is how to safeguard these vanishing built flourished in the British era now termed colonial Architecture. The conservation of frontier house and commissioner house at Abbottabad was not less than a challenge in that time of crises arose after the great earthquake 2005. Conservation expertise and awareness about the importance of heritage were lacking but with the passage of time all gone well, as authors initiate the project from these two prominent historically significant public buildings. At last but not least the conservation of the said built heritage started under the supervision of Architect Yasmeen Lari, Chairperson of Heritage Foundation Pakistan (HFP), in collaboration with Earthquake Reconstruction and Rehabilitation Authority (ERRA) &

DCO Abbottabad. After the successful completion of this project, we then accomplish the documentation of more than seventy built heritage buildings. The conservation & documentation of building was undertaken by using the guidelines manual of heritage with the consultation of expertise followed by Hague protocols and legislation. Disasters are the attached asserts with the human life but the precautionary measurements are important to be taken because of existing built heritage which is at high risk. It links the present with the past and then with future generations about their lifestyle and settlement. Heritage once vanished cannot be replaced as culture cannot wait!

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