

Preserving Architectural Originality: A Case Study of Rajwada Palace and Its Surroundings in Indore City

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Abstract: Through a comprehensive analysis of various factors, including urban development, neglect, commercialisation, and changing cultural values, this study examines the challenges faced in maintaining the authenticity and historical significance of the Rajwada Palace in Indore. The findings underscore the importance of robust conservation policies, community involvement, and sustainable development practices in safeguarding historical landmarks against urbanisation and cultural transformation.

Keywords: Originality, Architectural originality, originality in architecture, Architectural Conservation, Rajwada Palace, Urban Development, Cultural heritage, Preservation

1. Introduction

For any geographical region in the world, its architectural characteristics constitute a significant fragment of its identity, its originality. The distinctive language that manifests in built forms differentiates one region from another. This architectural originality encompasses historical landmarks, cultural heritage and even vernacular components interspersed throughout the city's fabric. With the rapidly developing urban environments, rampant commercialisation and urbanisation, cities experience the gradual loss of architectural identity; the new buildings abide to 'global' semantics while many historical gems deteriorate.

A similar plight struck the Rajwada Palace and its surroundings in Indore City, India. Urban development, neglect, commercialisation, and changing cultural values led to the palace being subjected to erosion and decay. Furthermore, the commercialisation of surrounding areas, tourism impact, and inadequate conservation policies exacerbate the loss of architectural originality over time. Reestablishing and maintaining the authenticity and historical significance of the palace posed its own set of challenges. If carefully examined and supported with conservation policies, community assistance and enhanced preservation efforts, the landmark contributing to the identity of Indore City can be reintegrated into the urban fabric despite the contemporary cultural transformation. A broader discourse on safeguarding heritage and urban planning must come into play, offering valuable insights for policymakers, conservationists, and local stakeholders striving to protect and promote architectural heritage in rapidly evolving urban landscapes.

2. Location

Indore traces its roots to its 16th-century founding as a trading hub between the Deccan and Delhi. The city and its surroundings came under the Hindu Maratha Empire on 18 May 1724 after Maratha Peshwa Baji Rao I assumed full control of Malwa. During the days of the British Raj, Indore State was a 19 Gun Salute (21 locally) princely state (a

rare high rank) ruled by the Maratha Holkar dynasty, until they acceded to the Union of India. Indore served as the capital of the Madhya Bharat from 1950 until 1956. Indore is a district and commercial centre of the Indian state of Madhya Pradesh. It is situated on the banks of the River Kahn and Sarawati. Indore is known for its architectural splendour. The tales of the glorious past are narrated by these splendid historical monuments and cast a magical spell on the visitors. Rajwada is one such kind of structure.



3. History and architecture of Rajwada Palace

Rajwada is a historical palace in Indore city. It was built by the Holkars of the Maratha Empire about two centuries ago. This seven-storied structure is located near the Chhatris and is a fine example of royal grandeur and architectural skills today. It served as the residence of the Holkar rulers and witnessed significant events that included royal ceremonies and the hosting of various cultural programs.

Fig. 1. Front Façade of Rajwada Palace

The Rajwada Palace's imposing architecture is an ode to the grandeur of the royal dynasty. Also known as the Holkar Palace, it features intricate carvings, arches, and pillars that showcase the artisans' skill. The palace's entrance is a grand archway and central hall with a facade that has ornate balconies and jharokhas, facing a lush garden with fountains and an artificial waterfall. The palace was his residence and remained so till the year 1880 A.D.

This remarkable structure is placed in Khajuri Bazaar, right in the centre of the city. The new palace is on the northern side, while the old palace stands in the old part of the town. The old palace is a multi-storied building that also serves as a gateway to the Rajwada. It stands amongst the crowded streets of the Khajuri Bazar and faces the main square of the city. The palace was once the centre of all the trading activities in the city. It is a blend of Maratha, Mughal, and French styles of architecture. The entrance of the palace has a lofty archway with a giant wooden door which is covered with iron studs. The Gopura-like monument is made up of wood and stone. It has several balconies, windows, and corridors. The entrance leads to a huge courtyard, which is surrounded by galleried rooms, and the arcaded Ganesha hall, which was once the venue of all state and religious functions. This hall is now used for art exhibitions and classical music concerts. Rajwada has been burnt three times in history. The last fire broke out in 1984 and caused the maximum destruction. The lower three floors are made up of stone, while the top floors are made of wood. This made it very vulnerable to destruction by fire. Now, only the front part of the original structure remains. The palace has recently been renovated, which has managed to bring back the old glory to some extent. In the rear part of the palace, a beautiful garden has been created. It contains fountains, an artificial waterfall, and some magnificent pieces of 11th-century sculpture.

4. Restoration and redevelopment of Rajwada

Rajwada, a grand residential palace complex built in the mid-eighteenth century, inevitably suffered from structural decay, water infiltration, lack of maintenance, and development pressures—the primary challenges to the site. After its collapse, on May 29, 2017, a tender was floated by Indore Smart City Development to expedite the process of its revival. Presently Rajwada is occupied by the Department of Archaeology, Archives and Museums, (DoAAM) Government of Madhya Pradesh, Madhya Pradesh wherein apart from a temple, and office of DoAAM it also houses a museum on the first floor at its Northern wing. Rajwada fulfilled the criteria of being a heritage site deserving of conservation efforts due to:

- Its historical significance
- Architectural and aesthetic importance (traditional building materials and architecture supporting the heritage site)
- Integrity and authenticity (original facade intact and less alteration and additions)
- Social significance
- Diversified experience (Heritage, religion, local culture, and more)

4.1 Restoration goals

The vision for the area focuses on enhancing the area as a Retail and Cultural precinct while preserving and building on the built form and character of the cultural heritage of the area including:

- *Retaining the existing mix of uses and businesses* - To ensure the area retains its character, it's important to retain tangible and intangible heritage. Old Businesses and shops which have been in the precinct define the character of the area, such businesses need to be retained. Such shops such as Joshi's Dahi Wada / other such old shops define the retail character of the area.
- *Connectivity* - To extend the street network through a series of improved streets, sidewalks, walkways and driveways to service and address new development, and provide safe, comfortable connections between uses, minimising the traffic impacts on surrounding residential areas.
- *Pedestrian realm* - To develop a common language for streetscaping, enhance connections to the open space network and generally provide safe, comfortable connections.
- *Attractive and vibrant streetscape* - To create a safe quality public realm, utilising facades that enliven the street, thus making walking more interesting. Sensitive design of the building forms and scale is important to complement and reinforce the greenery, civic and heritage characters of the area. Barrier-free and visually appealing streetscape should be provided in the core of ABD.
- *A pedestrian-friendly district* - Core City Area will be a pedestrian-friendly district with connectivity between major nodes within the development and the public transport hubs via a comprehensive network of vehicle-free streets and designated pedestrian links free of encumbrance, ensuring a walkable district. Planned larger-scale developments/redevelopment, will have to ensure permeability at the ground level to allow pedestrians to walk through the buildings / connecting streets. Connectivity of pedestrian walkways should be ensured along with their linkage to the public open spaces.
- *Unique features* - To take advantage of the opportunities created by the area's diversity and cultural heritage.
- *Distinct district* - To create a branded image for the area using easily recognizable and unique elements to the district, such as wayfinding signage, advertising and corporate signage. Gateway entrances / Precinct markers would be located at Primary Entrance Points to ABD Areas near Krishna Pura Chhatri, Gopal Mandir, etc. Gateway entrances / Markers represent significant opportunities to mark entry into the Core Area of ABD. A gateway may be implemented through a streetscape element, such as a sign, or reinforced by an appropriate architectural expression; and Potential open/green spaces, views and special places.
- *Environmentally sustainable development* - To develop a strong, sustainable district that encourages new development while minimising resources and respecting the natural environment.
- *Economically viable development* - To balance the cost of area improvements, such as streetscaping, with improved Market Rent in the area and increased collection of Property Tax. Simultaneously, redevelopment parcels will help increase overall revenue collection

4.2 Zoning

The historic Rajwada building will be divided into six zones to carry out renovation work in impeccable detail keeping in mind the original structure and heritage value. For restoration work, the Rajwada building was divided

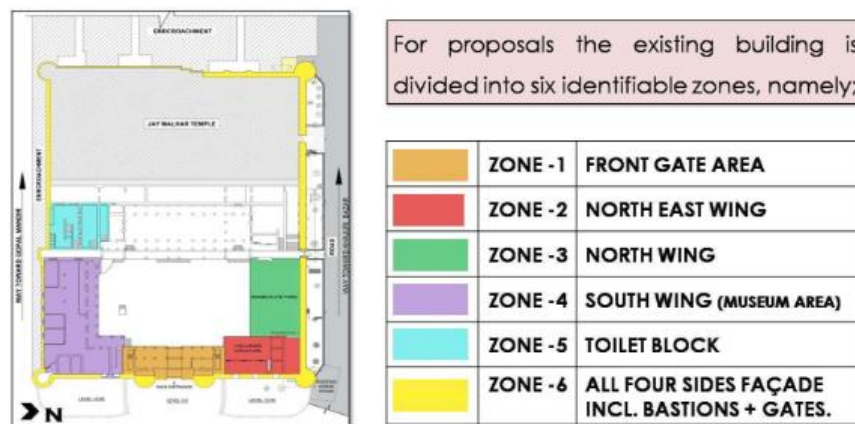


Fig. 2. Site Plan of Rajwada Palace

into six identifiable zones for the proposed makeover plan which included chemical cleaning, work on doors and windows, finishing work, restoration and stabilising of the existing structure and protecting the plinths.

5. Interventions

5.1 Restoration of the structure

The time taken in carving wood, replacing it with rotten pillars, and distributing the burden of roofs on it while considering other technicalities of the project as per the original design as the reasons behind proved both effort and time-intensive. The restoration project was meant to give the required strength to the seven-storied historical building to withstand for nearly the next 100 years. The following activities that took place in preserving and restoring the Rajwada Palace's structure and facade:

- **Cleaning and De-Vegetation** - Clearing grass including uprooting of vegetation, grass, bush wood, trees and saplings of all girth and any height above/below ground level. De-vegetation from the monuments by chemical injection of Round-Up (arsenic base) compound.
- **Removal and Dismantling** - Careful dismantling of old lime plaster/cement plaster from walls of the heritage structure without damaging the stonework/brickwork/historic fabric of the building.
- **Earthwork** - Excavation/removal of debris (malba) by mechanical means.
- **Roof Dismantling** - Careful removal of the woodwork in frames, trusses, purlins (Karis), and rafters.
- **Masonry work** - Traditional brick masonry with special brick size in lime mortar in a proportion similar to the existing traditional lime mortar after removing the damaged and out-of-plumb masonry from the historic structure.
- **Consolidation Work** - Stitching of cracks in stone masonry using stone and lime mortar matching /toothing with the traditional lime mortar and stone as existing size and type joinery courses in the historic structure.

- **Roofing** - Repair and retrofitting of the reusable existing wooden members including column beam purlin etc by replacing deteriorated members with new first-class well-seasoned chemically treated teak wood.
- **Repairing wooden items such as doors, windows & ventilators** - Repairing of frames and re-fixing the frames of doors, windows, clerestory windows, and ventilators.
- **New door, window & ventilators** - Providing and fixing new 1st class well-seasoned and chemically treated Teak woodwork in frames of doors, windows, clerestory windows, and ventilators.
- **Flooring** - Restoration/repairing of basalt stone flooring of existing floors including replacement/patchwork of damaged stone by using original size stone.
- **Finishing** - Making Mehrab, Arches, pillars, highly decorative creepers, flowers of small sizes, etc. in lime surkhi plaster as per old traditional practices.
- **Artwork** - Conservation of ornamental work /paintings/decorative artwork in the Darbar hall by cleaning painted surfaces of dust, dirt, deposits, oil accretions, etc. with suitable solvents, gels & dry cleaning methods.

5.2 Making the Rajwada area a vehicle-free zone

The authorities at the Urban Administration are looking to make the entire Rajwada area a vehicle-free zone. This is going to bring about a change in tourist activities as it will make way for people to move freely. In turn, this will bring about a huge tourism boost to the city, and not Rajwada alone. Apart from that, visitors will also be able to indulge in a better and more wholesome experience, owing to the lack of motor vehicles and noise.

As of now, Rajwada has become a vehicle-free zone during the festivals and the goal is to implement the same throughout the year. Since Rajwada is a heritage building, pollutants from motor vehicles prove detrimental to the architecture and the stones used.



Fig. 3. Rajwada Palace



Fig. 4. Sarafa Bazaar

5.3 Digitisation of books and documents

As per the instructions from the Commissioner's office, the documents and books from the Holkar dynasty are to be digitised. These documents are currently preserved in the Rajwada's Darbar hall. The initiative has been taken to further preserve the records in digital format. It has been reported that the discovered documents date from 1854 to 1948. The documents primarily written in the Modi script of the Marathi language are stored in about 2400 bundles. The digitisation of historical documents is likely to take place in the archives office of the Archaeological Survey of India in Rajwada. The rich history of the Holkars will be available for generations to come.

6. Present and future challenges: what needs attention

6.1 Maintaining the historical character

The area has a mix of strong historical characters along with buildings with random characters. New development and any redevelopment should complement and enhance the historical character. The use of simple materials, detailing and historical character is encouraged. A clear architectural expression of building facades is essential for all redevelopment in the precinct. This can be achieved through the careful design of the relationship between the ground floor, its uses and the building design.



Fig. 5. Mix of Historical Character in the area

The use of high-quality and durable materials that reflect existing aged buildings in the district should be used for new developments. Wherever appropriate, new buildings should reflect the building materials and/or the existing/old style. Use of materials like Aluminum Composite Panel / High-Pressure Laminate (ACP/HPL) with Buildings with Contrasting Colors / Materials like ACP/HPL etc. to avoid a Mix of Historical Characters in the area contrasting colour/texture to surrounding buildings should be avoided. Materials should respond to the Cultural Heritage of the Precinct.



Fig. 6. Buildings with Contrasting Colors / Materials like ACP/HPL etc. to be avoided



Fig. 7. New Buildings with Classical Style and integrated Signage should be promoted

6.2 Preservation of identity and urban fabric

Interventions by the Indore Smart City initiative ruined the identity of Khajuri Bazar which is adjacent to the Rajwada Palace. It fulfils the expanding need for traffic management but demolishing the buildings for expansion and not taking care of them afterward killed the urban fabric of the place.



6.3 Signages

The design, materials, scale, style, and technology of signage should reflect the historical look and feel of both wayfinding signage and business advertising signage. Encourage signage to be integrated with building design rather than as a secondary structure or covering the complete facade. Building identification signs should be compatible with the building design in scale, material, and colour. Design signage should be complementary, not the dominant feature of buildings or development. Closely relate signage to building entrances and generally place signage in a low wall element or on the building itself. Commercial signage should add diversity and interest to retail streets, and be compatible with the building design in scale, material, colour, and respond to detailed signage. The distinct character of buildings should not have extraneous or oversized signage. The area, particularly the historical feel, in corporate/retail identities utilised in building signage.



Fig. 8. Buildings should not oversized Signage. It should be proportionate to building

6.4 Negligence from authorities and local community



Fig. 9. Damaged parts of Rajwada palace

Following the Rang panchmi procession (2023), marks of damage on one of two towers situated on the 7th floor of the structure were observed along with around 100 nails hammered at the top of Rajwada Palace to hang tarpaulin. Moreover, lack of cleanliness, dust in the entire premises along with bamboo, ropes, and other construction materials continue to tarnish the image of the historical building. There are some common complaints regarding damaging drainage pipelines to install wiring for light & sound shows and installing speakers and lights by hammering nails on the walls. The inside campus is sometimes also used inappropriately for parking of

vehicles. Despite the structure being restored, continued diligence is required from both authorities and local communities to ensure the heritage site retains its grandeur.

7. Conclusion

The Rajwada Palace is one of the most prominent tourist spots of Indore and the absolute pinnacle of the Holkar era architecture erected almost two centuries ago in around 1766. Since then, the structure has witnessed major changes, and now, while its restoration and renovation were completed just recently to re-display its authentic charm. Architectural strategies played a critical role in preserving the historical heritage, safeguarding physical integrity, establishing a harmonious relationship between the past and present, educating the public, and promoting sustainable development. Beyond what is already achieved, we need to recognise and implement more strategies to ensure the longevity of our historical heritage—enriching our cultural legacy, reviving the region's architectural originality and fostering a collective appreciation for the importance of our built environment. Preserving historical heritage through

architectural strategies requires a forward-thinking approach that considers the evolving needs of society while safeguarding the authenticity and significance of cultural assets.

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