

Revitalizing Architectural Heritage: A Study of Rajwada Palace and its Context

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Abstract

Taking into consideration history, deterioration, urban interventions, preservation, and potential future strategies, the research paper examines Rajwada Palace in Indore within the broader framework of architectural heritage conservation. It draws parallels with globally successful practices in heritage revival, offering insights that can be adapted to the Indian context. The study ultimately offers actionable recommendations that can be adapted for similar historic precincts across India, bridging the gap between conservation and urban development.

Keywords: Architectural Conservation, Rajwada palace, Urban Development, Cultural Heritage, Preservation, Architectural Originality

1. Introduction

Preserving architectural heritage is essential to maintaining cultural identity, fostering tourism, and promoting sustainable urban development. Across the globe, historical monuments and precincts stand as testimonies to their times, offering glimpses into the lives and aspirations of past generations. Architectural heritage preservation, hence, is a cornerstone of cultural continuity, enabling societies to maintain a tangible connection with their past while navigating the challenges of modernisation. Heritage sites such as Rajwada Palace in Indore are not merely static monuments but living entities that embody the socio-cultural and architectural evolution of a region. Rajwada Palace is a quintessential example of architectural splendour that embodies the cultural and historical evolution of central India. Built in the 18th century by the Holkar dynasty, the palace served as a political and cultural hub, and its seven-story structure reflects a confluence of Indo-Saracenic architectural styles. However, like many heritage structures, Rajwada Palace faces threats from urbanisation, environmental factors, and inadequate conservation practices.

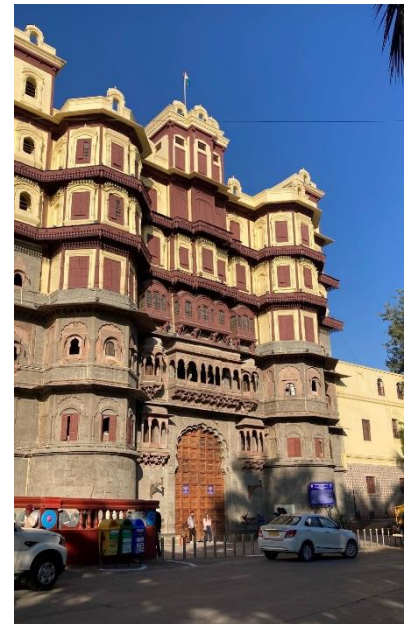


Figure 1: Rajwada Palace

The preservation of such sites demands a nuanced approach that respects historical authenticity while accommodating contemporary needs. By emphasising traditional aesthetics, fostering community engagement, and integrating sustainable practices, heritage conservation can serve as a catalyst for urban revitalisation and cultural tourism. Deciphering global practices in heritage revival offers new avenues and opportunities that can be implemented to the Indian context—fueling a larger conversation around architectural heritage for policymakers, conservationists and local stakeholders.

2. History of Rajwada Palace: Origins

The Rajwada Palace, constructed in 1747 by Malhar Rao Holkar, the founder of the Holkar dynasty, symbolizes the grandeur and political dominance of the Maratha Empire in central India. Strategically located in the heart of Indore, the palace served as the administrative headquarters of the Holkar rulers. Its towering structure, spanning seven stories, was designed to reflect the might and vision of the dynasty. The palace's unique architectural style combines Mughal and Maratha influences, evident in its ornate wooden jharokhas, grand arches, and intricate carvings.

- **Architectural Features**

The palace comprises two distinct sections: the northern structure, which is predominantly made of wood, and the southern stone façade. The central courtyard is surrounded by galleries and rooms, which once hosted political meetings and cultural events. The wooden upper stories, though visually striking, are also vulnerable to weathering and fire damage—a fact underscored by the devastating fire in 1984 that destroyed parts of the palace.

- **Role of Surrounding Structures**

Rajwada's precinct includes several historically significant elements, such as Chhatris (cenotaphs), the Krishnapura Market, and adjacent havelis. These structures together formed the core of Indore's socio-economic and cultural activities. The markets and havelis reflect the bustling trade networks and the opulent lifestyle of the era. Today, however, these structures face encroachments and neglect, diminishing their historical value and visual coherence.

- **Transformation Through the Years**

During British rule, Rajwada's significance shifted as modern administrative and residential areas emerged in Indore. Post-independence urbanisation further marginalized the palace, turning it into a relic amidst a rapidly modernizing city. Despite its diminished administrative role, Rajwada remains a cultural icon, attracting tourists and serving as a focal point for festivals like Ahilya Utsav.

3. Surrounding Markets and Heritage Sites

Apart from being a historical core, the Rajwada precinct can also be understood through its vibrant markets, each with a unique identity and function. These markets not only cater to commercial needs but also create a social and cultural bond between shopkeepers and buyers. Below are key markets around Rajwada and their characteristics:

- **Maharaja Tukoji Rao Cloth Market (Kapda Bazaar)**

Located close to Rajwada Palace, this market, established in 1918, specialises in wholesale and retail cloth trading. Over time, its activities have expanded, encroaching upon nearby residential areas, highlighting the pressing need for regulated urban planning.

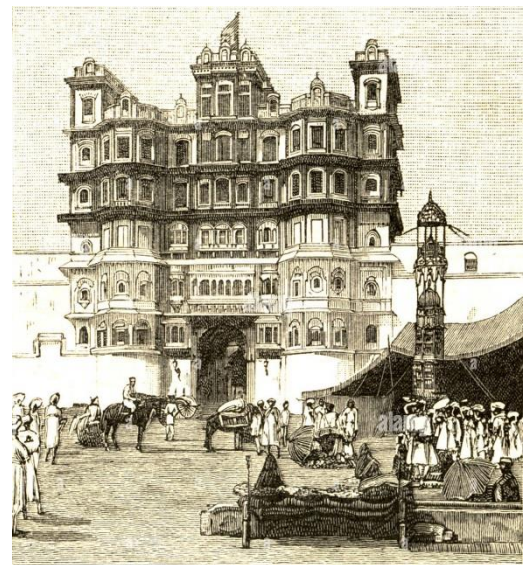


Figure 2: Old picture of Rajwada Palace and its surroundings

- **Vegetable Market**

Situated near Veer Savarkar Market and the Krishnapura Chhatris, the wholesale and retail fruit and vegetable market occupy road edges, creating congestion and conflicts between pedestrians and vehicles.

- **Hardware Market (Bohra Bazaar)**

Positioned behind the cloth market and extending to Jawahar Marg, Bohra Bazaar is a regional hub for hardware and tools. This market is predominantly owned by members of the Bohra community, fostering a strong communal identity.

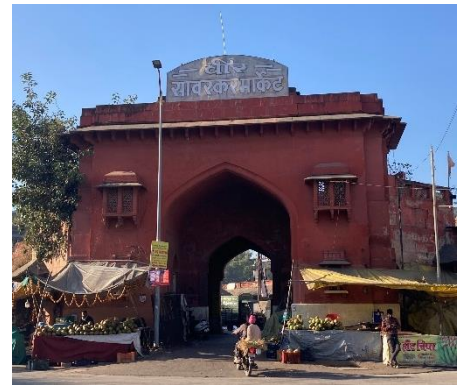


Figure 3: Veer Savarkar Market Entrance

- **Gold & Silver Market (Sarafa Bazaar)**

Strategically located near Rajwada for added security during the Holkar reign, Sarafa Bazaar operates as a bustling jewelry market by day and transforms into a vibrant food street (Khau Gali) at night. This dual purpose adds a dynamic character to the area.

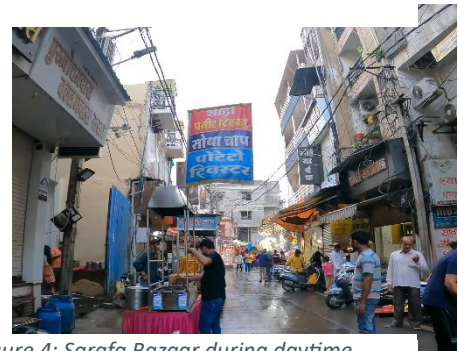


Figure 4: Sarafa Bazaar during daytime

- **Decoration Items Market**

This market, situated in the forecourt of Rajwada, offers seasonal decorative items, with products tailored to big festivals. Its year-round activity enhances the festive spirit of the precinct.

- **Khajuri Bazaar**

Located along Mahatma Gandhi Road, Khajuri Bazaar is renowned for its books, stationery, and wedding cards. As the only market of its kind in Indore, it caters to both retail and wholesale demands.

- **Marothiya Bazaar**

This market specializes in spices and grocery items, operating through both wholesale and retail units, thus playing a vital role in the city's culinary culture.

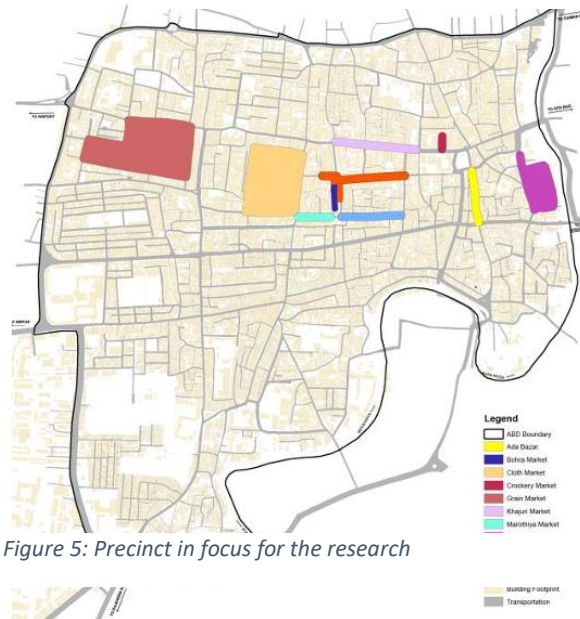


Figure 5: Precinct in focus for the research

- **Bartan Bazaar (Kasera Bazaar)**

Known for its diverse range of utensils and metalware, Bartan Bazaar's shopfront displays during Diwali often rise to four stories high, creating a unique visual identity for the area.

• Unorganised Markets

Informal markets operating along certain roads in the core city area predominantly sell fruits and vegetables. These unregulated markets contribute to congestion but also reflect the organic growth of trade in the precinct.

Other Heritage Sites in the Vicinity

The Rajwada precinct also hosts several heritage sites that add to its cultural value:

- **Bada Ganapati:** Famous for its large idol of Lord Ganesh.
- **Krishnapura Chhatris:** A set of cenotaphs commemorating Holkar rulers.
- **Gopal Mandir:** A temple dedicated to Lord Krishna, showcasing intricate marble work.
- **Hari Rao Holkar Chhatri:** A memorial for Hari Rao Holkar with a serene ambiance.
- **Kanch Mandir:** A Jain temple decorated with glass and mirrors.
- **Durga Mata Mandir:** A temple dedicated to Goddess Durga.
- **Malhar Rao Holkar Chhatri:** Another cenotaph honoring the Holkar legacy.



Figure 6: Krishnapura Chhatris view

4. Challenges and Threats

While these markets and heritage sites contribute to the cultural vibrancy of the precinct, they are losing their character due to:

- **Urbanisation:** Rapid and unplanned urban growth has led to encroachments and infrastructural strain in these areas.
- **Neglect:** Insufficient maintenance of heritage sites and lack of regulatory oversight over markets have caused deterioration.
- **Congestion:** Overcrowding and traffic conflicts diminish the accessibility and aesthetic appeal of the precinct.

Restoration efforts must address these issues to preserve the historical and cultural essence of the Rajwada precinct.



Figure 7: Overcrowding and traffic in Rajwada Precinct

4.1 Causes of Deterioration

• Environmental Factors

Weathering due to rain, humidity, and fluctuating temperatures has significantly impacted Rajwada's structural integrity. The wooden portions of the palace are especially susceptible to termite infestations and decay caused by moisture. Additionally, air pollution from vehicular emissions accelerates the deterioration of stone facades.

- **Human-Induced Factors**

Encroachments and unregulated urbanisation in the vicinity of Rajwada have compromised its aesthetic and structural integrity. Informal markets and illegal constructions obstruct access to the palace and contribute to its degradation. The lack of awareness among local stakeholders about heritage conservation further exacerbates the problem.

- **Management and Policy Gaps**

Although Rajwada is a protected monument under the Archaeological Survey of India (ASI), insufficient funding and a lack of comprehensive conservation policies hinder its preservation. Periodic maintenance is often neglected, and conservation efforts are reactive rather than proactive.

- **Past Incidents**

Historical events, such as the fire in 1984, caused irreversible damage to significant portions of the palace. Despite restoration attempts, the affected sections remain vulnerable due to the use of modern materials that do not align with the original construction techniques.

5. Indore Smart City Mission Interventions



Figure 8: Illustrations and renders proposed by Indore Smart city mission for Rajwada Precinct – Includes entrance of the precinct area and the passage from Veer Savarkar Market to Rajwada Palace

Under the Indore Smart City Mission, significant efforts have been made to rejuvenate Rajwada and its surrounding precincts. These interventions aim to integrate heritage conservation with modern urban planning:

1. **Heritage Walk and Façade Improvement:** The mission includes a heritage walk initiative that highlights key historical sites, including Rajwada. Façade treatments have been implemented to restore the visual integrity of the palace and nearby structures, focusing on maintaining their original architectural vocabulary.
2. **Pedestrian-Friendly Zones:** A no-vehicle zone has been created around Rajwada to reduce congestion and air pollution. Smart parking systems and battery-operated e-rickshaws provide alternative modes of transport for visitors.
3. **Utility Upgrades:** Underground utility ducts have been installed to declutter the area and improve infrastructure. This includes underground electrification, stormwater drainage systems, and sewage management.
4. **Digital Integration:** Smart city technologies, such as real-time air quality monitoring and Wi-Fi connectivity, have been introduced to enhance visitor experience and urban governance.

5. **Riverfront Development:** The rejuvenation of the nearby Kanh River involves green landscaping, pedestrian pathways, and the development of public open spaces to complement the heritage precinct.



Figure 9: Illustrations and renders proposed by Indore Smart city mission for Rajwada Precinct includes Rajwada Plaza Redevelopment renders

6. Potential strategies

1. **Culturally Aligned Urban Development:** focusing on designing building facades in the Rajwada precinct that reflect the architectural features, colours, and textures of local heritage structures. The use of arches, architraves, jharokhas, chattris and traditional materials can recreate the charm of the old city while incorporating modern utilities.

2. **Heritage-First Zoning:** Designate the entire Rajwada area as a heritage zone, where strict regulations ensure that all new constructions or renovations align with the traditional architectural style. Modern buildings should be located outside this area to maintain the precinct’s historic identity.



Figure 10: Reference of a temple behind Rajwada Palace

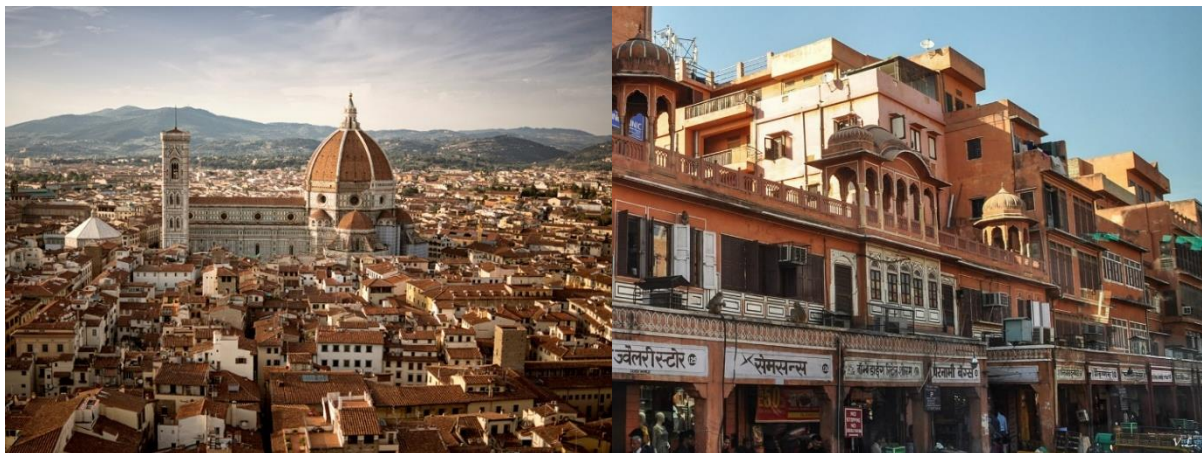


Figure 11: Florence city and Jaipur’s Bapu Bazaar area

3. **Enhanced Visitor Experience Develop:** cohesive entry points and urban design elements, such as thematic street furniture, traditional lamp posts, and signage that evoke the heritage character from the moment visitors enter the precinct.



Figure 12: Unified signages in Bapu Bazaar, Jaipur and designs of street lamps of Italy

4. **Sustainable Integration:** While respecting traditional aesthetics, integrate sustainable features like rainwater harvesting systems, solar panels discreetly designed within heritage-style rooftops, and energy-efficient lighting to balance functionality and cultural preservation.

5. **Urban Design Interventions**

- Create pedestrian-friendly streets paved with heritage-style tiles.
- Develop shaded walkways and seating inspired by historical designs.
- Implement landscape elements such as small courtyards and water features resembling those from the Holkar era.
- Restrict vehicular access and prioritize eco-friendly modes of transportation within the precinct.



Figure 13: Streets of Italy and Jaisalmer showing natural cohesive street pavements, materials and a unified visual character

6. **Community Engagement:** Conduct workshops and charrettes involving local artisans, architects, and residents to gather input on culturally appropriate designs and ensure a sense of ownership among stakeholders.

7. **Cultural Programmes:** Promote events such as heritage festivals, art exhibits, and cultural performances in the precinct to enhance its vibrancy and attract tourists while respecting its historical essence.

7. Conclusion

The interventions under the Indore Smart City Mission have improved access, visibility, and utility infrastructure around Rajwada Palace. However, challenges such as funding constraints and limited public engagement persist.

By implementing the potential strategies, Rajwada Palace can not only regain its former glory but also serve as a model for heritage conservation across India. Rajwada Palace is more than a historical monument; it is a symbol of Indore's cultural identity. While urbanisation poses challenges, it also offers opportunities to reimagine heritage preservation in the 21st century. This study underscores the need for holistic strategies that integrate conservation with urban development. By addressing these challenges, Rajwada can become a shining example of India's commitment to preserving its architectural heritage for future generations.

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