

HERITAGE AT THE CROSSROADS

INTEGRATING BUILT HERITAGE WITHIN THE MORPHOLOGY AND SOCIAL LIFE OF THE CITY

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ABSTRACT

Built between 1807 and 1811 under the leadership of Peshwa Bajirao II's rule, Vishrambaug Wada is one of Pune's most significant Maratha-era heritage buildings. It symbolizes the city's ancestral cultural identity and serves as a crucial urban gateway at the intersection of Bajirao Road and Laxmi Road. Within the late Maratha capital, the wada—whose name means "place of rest"—was envisioned as a large residential, administrative, and ceremonial complex. Historically, it served as an administrative centre for public interaction, governance, and the projection of social hierarchy and political authority. This study explores Vishrambaug Wada's position within Pune's urban historic environment through a qualitative heritage management strategy and the conceptual triad of nodes, networks, and negotiation. To address persistent problems like funding shortages, structural repairs, public accessibility, and the delicate boundary between adaptive reuse and authentic cultural preservation, it investigates complex spatial and interpersonal interactions between local communities, government agencies, conservation professionals, and civil society stakeholders. The analysis emphasizes the discrepancy of streets transformed into lively, informal public spaces while formal squares do not exist, revealing conflicts between contemporary urban life and built history. In order to encourage inclusive governance, community-driven projects such as history walks and interactive programs become crucial negotiating tools. The research study also highlights community's activities and public involvement programs like heritage walks as crucial negotiating tools that promote inclusive heritage protection. It suggests that integrated development that upholds Vishrambaug Wada's historic identity while improving its role as a live public space is necessary to revitalize it as a dynamic cultural hub. This study advances our knowledge of heritage sites as dynamic nodes in urban networks where public engagement and negotiation are essential to long-term preservation and urban vitality.

KEYWORDS: Transit-Oriented Development; 9D principles, Governance; Regulatory framework; Pedestrianization, Parking Policy; Mumbai. Transit-Oriented Development; 9D principles, Governance; Regulatory framework; Pedestrianization, Parking Policy; Mumbai.

INTRODUCTION

Pune's oldest Maratha-era historic structures, Vishrambaug Wada is an important emblem of the city's both past and present. This spectacular residential and administrative complex, called as the "place of rest", was built between 1807 and 1811 during the reign of Peshwa Bajirao II. It served as a ceremonial retreat that projected social hierarchy and political authority. With its inward-oriented planning, three main courtyards, timber-rich features like finely carved columns, brackets, and balconies, as well as locally sourced, climate-responsive materials, it is an architectural exemplar of the traditional Wada typology. It served as an essential centre for interaction between the public and government in addition to being utilized for private purposes.

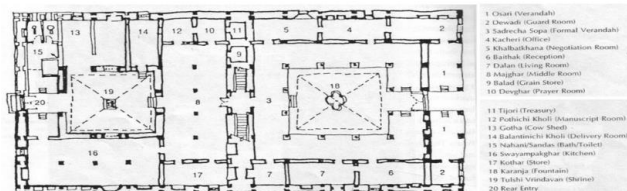


Fig: 1 Shows typical layout of wada

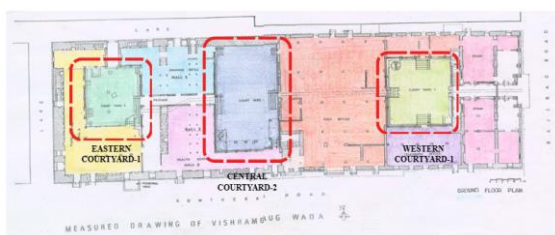


Fig: 2 Shows Planning of Vishrambaug wada with central courtyards

Perfectly situated at the busy intersection of Bajirao Road and Laxmi Road, two of Pune's main commercial and cultural thoroughfares, the wada has long connected marketplaces, trade routes, temples, and administrative centres, making it a vibrant hub in the socioeconomic network of the city. While there are no formal squares, the neighbourhood's dense commercial surroundings convert nearby streets into informal public areas in the face of growing urbanization. [1] To be able to achieve a balance between preservation and urban vitality, this protected site—which houses cultural and municipal functions—must negotiate issues of conservation, accessibility, and adaptive reuse with inclusive stakeholders.



Fig: 3 Shows strategic location of Vishrambaug wada



Fig: 4 shows Meghdambari, an ornately carved balcony

This paper reframes Vishrambaug Wada not as an isolated monument but as an active urban node embedded in spatial, social, and governance networks. India's traditional monument-centric conservation—prioritizing architectural integrity, legal protections, and material stabilization—often detaches heritage from surrounding dynamics like traffic, vending, and public life, leading to

underuse and neglect. In contrast, a networked approach views heritage as a process interfacing with streets, thresholds (courtyards, plinths), and pedestrian flows, enhancing civic relevance.[2] Heritage management in Indian cities involves fragmented governance among local bodies, state agencies, custodians, residents, vendors, and tourists. Expert-driven formal systems clash with informal adaptations—temporary occupations and everyday uses—that reveal public agency in reinterpreting heritage. By embracing these negotiations, conservation can evolve from static preservation to adaptive urban integration, sustaining sites like Vishrambaug Wada as living mediators of past and present. Local governments, state agencies, custodians, citizens, vendors, and visitors all participate in the divided, multi-stakeholder governance of heritage in Indian towns. Informal modifications, such as temporary occupations and ordinary utilization, that illustrate public reinterpretation of heritage intersect with expert-led formal structures. By accepting these agreements, conservation becomes adaptive integration rather than static preservation, maintaining places like Vishrambaug Wada as dynamic links between the past and present.[3]

THE SHIFT FROM MONUMENT TO PROCESS

For several decades, conventional preservation initiatives in India have been influenced by the monument-focused perspective, that treats heritage as an independent entity capable of just material preservation and architectural integrity conservation. Large-scale demolition is prevented by these methods, yet they often separate buildings from the urban activities that make them relevant, leaving them as fenced-off or neglected relics. Vishrambaug Wada, located in the heart of Pune's historic period, represents the meeting point of powerful public action and administrative background. Because of its proximity to significant metropolitan corridors, it is positioned as a potential mediator between historic and contemporary urban activities.[1] This study makes the instance that heritage structures need to be seen as dynamic urban nodes that are integrated into networks of governance, society, and space in order to solve their problems.

URBAN MORPHOLOGY AND SPATIAL NETWORKS

The strategic location of Vishrambaug Wada in the centre of Pune's "Old City," surrounded by an explosion of economic, cultural, and administrative activity, characterizes its urban context. The Wada is part of a busy urban network that is marked by a high volume of pedestrian traffic and social interactions. It is directly connected to major arterial streets such as Bajirao Road and Laxmi Road. The narrow streets, street boundaries, and transitional spaces surrounding the Wada serve as informal public spaces in the absence of formally designed civic squares, according to an analysis of the actual street network. In a predominantly intricately built environment, figure-ground plans draw emphasis to the Wada as one of the few enormous and significant built forms, which both increases its appearance and puts a lot of strain on its outer limits. The structure serves as a social foundation and a noticeable visual landmark within this

shape, impacting spatial orientation and collective memory. It is an essential part of the city's social, cultural, and spatial network rather than a standalone monument.

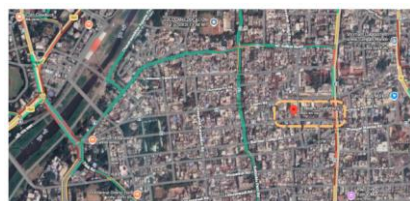


Fig: 5 shows location of wada amongst the busiest streets of the city



Fig: 6 shows graphical representation of the strategic location of wada

PUBLIC PARTICIPATION AND "EVERYDAY URBANISM"

By constantly engaging with public life, Vishrambaug Wada maintains its vitality and presents itself as a "living heritage space" compared to a static monument. Heritage walks, museum initiatives, and the presence of handicraft and souvenir stores that raise awareness of the site's cultural significance all contribute to increase the community's current engagement. Also, "everyday urbanism" is crucial for bringing the site into harmony with the city's pace. Pedestrians make use of the Wada's edges, thresholds, and areas with shade as makeshift places to sit, gather, and sell goods. These unofficial activities, which are frequently accepted rather than criticized, show how historic settings may be modified to accommodate societal demands. The site's usefulness and visibility are further enhanced by community-led alterations that don't interfere with the monument, such as planning activities and negotiating access during festivals.



Fig: 7 shows the vending and makeshift areas in and around wada

STAKEHOLDER NEGOTIATION AND GOVERNANCE CHALLENGES

Heritage management in Indian cities is a complex situation defined by a "fragmented governance" environment with overlapping authorities and shared powers. At Vishrambaug Wada, municipal agencies focus on traffic management and infrastructure, while custodial institutions exercise roles in security and preservation.[1] Due to the complex negotiation climate produced by these conflicting interests, restoration delays are frequently caused by financial concerns, dependence on government grants, and administrative clearances. The existence of operational municipal departments within the Wada presents a special challenge at this location, necessitating the coordination of conservation efforts around routine administrative tasks.

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STAKEHOLDER GROUP	PRIMARY INTERESTS AND ROLES
PMC Heritage Cell	• Primary responsibility for ownership, regulation, and implementation of conservation.
Heritage Professionals	• Advocacy for material authenticity and historically sensitive restoration methods.
Local Community/Businesses	• Seek increased public access, cultural programming, and economic opportunities.
Civil Society	• Mediation between authorities and experts; facilitation of public programs.

Fig: 8 shows Roles and interest of the stakeholders of wada

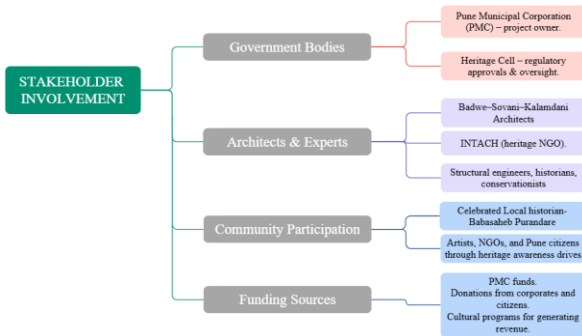


Fig: 9 shows Stakeholder Involvement for wada

- **Inclusive Management:** Recognizing "informal edges" and surrounding streets as part of the heritage experience to encourage inclusive use.

By treating heritage as "lived" urban infrastructure, cities can transform contested spaces into resilient cultural hubs that support both preservation and urban vitality.

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- *NTACH charter*

ADAPTIVE REUSE AND INCLUSIVE INFRASTRUCTURE

Adaptive reuse strategies have become efficient methods of preserving heritage significance while addressing administrative and financial constraints. The Government Post Office's ongoing operation within the Wada precinct serves as a remarkable example. By integrating an everyday public service into a historic building, the structure's heritage value is honoured and regular public participation and occupancy are assured.[1] The Wada's function is similar to that of major urban structures such flyovers or hubs for transportation, where multiple users must constantly negotiate access, transportation, and space. The Wada is not an exclusive enclave but rather an inclusive metropolitan centre thanks to a constant process of spatial negotiation that is reflected in its marketplaces and neighbouring streets, which support multiple functions.

CONCLUSION AND STRATEGIC RECOMMENDATIONS

Vishrambaug Wada serves as a dynamic node that mediates between historic identity and contemporary urban life. Its long-term sustainability depends on shifting from fabric-centered conservation to integrated urban public space planning.

Recommendations for the future include:

- **Participatory Conservation:** Actively involving local communities, businesses, and cultural groups in decision-making processes.
- **Spatial Activation:** Implementing low-impact interventions such as improved pedestrian connectivity, shaded gathering areas, and interpretive elements.