

# Understanding Heritage potential of Saswad, “A HISTORIC Medieval Town of Deccan”

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**Abstract :** *Further discourse attempts to identify heritage potential of town, along with that it investigates how this character could be protected in the context of changing time. First part of the research paper will cover the origin and development of a historic town of Saswad. In second part methodology developed to rediscover the Cultural Significance of Saswad in terms of its built heritage. Further discourse, unfolds various historical factors involved in the development processes and understand the town as a cultural resource. Concluding part will examine issues concerning heritage at risk in Town and brief guidelines to formulate a comprehensive Conservation Policy for Saswad. Study is carried out with observation and visual analysis methods instantaneously mapping, drawings, and inventories supported the arguments developed in the process of analysis. Interview of historians, architects and local people helped in understanding the forms and meanings of various historic elements and a town as a whole.*

Keywords :

**Medieval town, Historic Town, Heritage, Cultural heritage, Conservation policy, Historic settlement, Cultural significance**

## I. Introduction

Historic town of Saswad well known medieval town in Deccan<sup>1</sup> flourished in later Maratha period under local philanthropist Sardar<sup>2</sup> Purandare marks its presence in various ways. Numerous tangible and intangible historic elements define distinctive character of Saswad. Its unique character in terms of its setting in the landscape, the shape of the settlement and the nature of its edifices emerged over the period of time, are the assets and qualities that are most valued by its inhabitants and visitors. Its scenic location at the confluence of two rivers Chambali and Karha relates association of settlement, with the important natural element “water” manifested in the built form of Sangameshwar Temple located right at the convergence. Apart from this, Saswad is important base town to Purandar fort

geographically important in the historic events. Saswad is located north side of river Karha and 40 KM away from Pune

<sup>1</sup> Deccan plateau is the largest region located in southern part of India situated between western and Eastern Ghats or mountains

<sup>2</sup> Word *Sardar* denotes nobleman or commander from Maratha army

city on its southeast side. The Sangameshwar temple is adorned with exclusive Yadav era sculptures depicting various stories related to *Purankatha*<sup>3</sup>. Other important nearby places, such as Jejuri, Pandeshwar, Morgaon, Bhuleshwar, and the forts of Vajragad, Rajgad and Torana establishes the socio-historic and cultural context of Saswad.

Historic town of Saswad is well known for its special architectural character. Various architectural typologies such as Residential, Religious, commercial, and mixed use are still unharmed to a larger extent which needs extra protection from conservation point of view.

Meandering road pattern segregating several communities such as *Shimpi Ali*, *Borate Ali*, *Jagtap Ali*, *Brahmin Ali* and so on according to their professions and years they established developed in town. Alignment and locations of these houses their character tells the story of town and fits eudal setup of characteristically developed in medieval period. Main axis of town connects both the important parts of town those are open market space at one end whereas riverside on the other. Royal mansion of town Purandare Wada Grade II structure in the context located on this axis articulates story of the period and its importance in Deccan region. This mansion was the model used to build Shaniwar Wada in Pune under Bajirao Peshwa.<sup>4</sup> Maratha town planning system emerged was outcome of political will of various Maratha Ministers till early nineteenth century. They followed pattern of Organic planning and probably similar architectural character followed in various typologies such as evolution of Wada Architecture with cortile planning.

The Shaniwar Wada was the most magnificent and stately mansion that was ever built in Poona by the Peshwas in the 18th

<sup>3</sup> *Purankatha* are glorifying stories from ancient scriptures related to various deities

<sup>4</sup> Sowani Avinash, Maratha Town and City planning with reference to the systems of Village development during 17th and 18th centuries, (Unpublished thesis work submitted to Tilak Maharashtra Vidyapeeth, Poona 2011), 48. Original contribution in the Maratha town planning systems in Deccan region explained with several examples of administrative and economic systems developed over the period of time. This includes sketch maps of Towns such as Baramati, Kolhapur, Poona and other small towns around Poona.

century. Bajirao I (1720-1740) laid the foundation stone of the building on Saturday, the 10th of January 1730, being an auspicious day. Palace was completed in 1732. Purandare family supported Bajirao I in the establishment of his rule in Pune.

Several traces of history are evident in lanes of Saswad. Various layers of those are left in built form such as courtyard mansions, temples with intricate carvings and specific locations spread out in whole town.

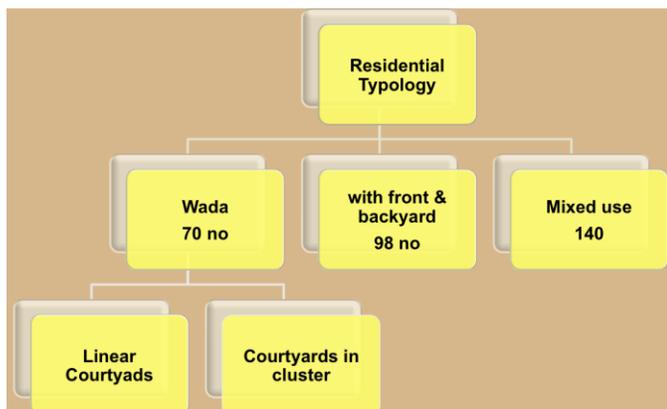
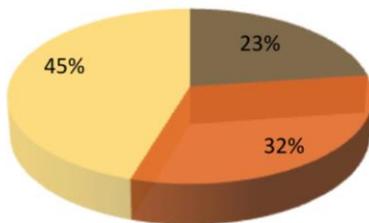
## II. Heritage potential of Saswad as a important Medieval town in Deccan

### Residential typology

Various typology structures such as residential, religious, mixed use along with important community spaces such as market spaces, Par areas, and open spaces along with the temples are distributed in the old core of town. This establishes importance of Saswad town as an important historic town located on Warri route as well its existence as a strategic base village of Purandar fort.

Under residential typology typical Wada houses with cortile planning, small houses with front and backyard and mixed use with shop on ground and residence on top are observed.

■ Wada Typology ■ small scale houses ■ Mixed use



Total 70 numbers of cortyard mansions in Brahmin ali are identified as per 2009 survey for M.Arch. Studio work. Purandare family being the main philanthropist of Saswad appointed by Peshwe Balaji Vishwanath developed the town to its peak. Large wadas of ministers like Bokil, Gokhale, Mehendale, Haladkar, Damle and so on were built around Purandare Wada near the confluence of rivers Karha and Chambali/Bhogavati and the part was known as Brahmin ali. Particular character of cortile mansions observed such as

staggered accesses for each court. Primary court adjacent to entry was called as Phadacha Chowk used to be public area where offices were located and that was accessible to public. Inner courtyard was called as Khajgicha Chowk<sup>5</sup> that was mainly used by women in house. This Khajgicha Chowk mainly surrounded by Women's Rooms and Pooja<sup>6</sup> Room. Service area mainly consists detached toilets and servants Rooms usually located on left side of Wada towards south. Out of these very few have survived at the moment.

In Jagtap ali 98 small houses with front and backyard are observed with same characteristic. Jagtaps<sup>7</sup> were farmers in occupation. Instantaneously architectural vocabulary evolved has its own flare such as Hierarchy of spaces developed considering its utilitarian circumstances.

Compound wall is observed for the protection of the house. *Padvi* is the important Semi open Seating area used as welcoming public space in house allowed for all guests.

*Sopa* is the closed living area as seating. Outsiders are generally not allowed to cross this space.

*Majghar* is storage area quite dark used by ladies in the house. *Swaympak Ghar* or kitchen located at the back, used for cooking by ladies. Water tank, toilet, bath are detached from main house. Parasbag Backyard open space at back utilized as drying area and so on.

Mainly locally available Materials are used for construction. Ground floor is constructed with thick stonewalls whereas first floor mainly constructed in flat brick walls. Composite structure using load bearing stonewalls and timber framed structure. Introvert planning is observed in mansions.

In Shimpi ali and other commercial alis 140 numbers Mixed use houses are seen with shops with display platforms on ground and residential areas on first floor. Arrangement of spaces is like first you arrive at *Padvi* area adjacent to road. This interface used for commercial purpose earlier still serves the purpose to some extent. *Osari* is the Seating area for visitors. Similar hierarchy such as *Majgharas* storage area, Kitchen mainly located at the back, separate services area and backyard is seen in all houses. Similar construction techniques and materials applied for these houses. But the scale is smaller with an extrovert planning. Segregation/ planning of Saswad clearly indicates hierarchy of casts and class.

### Religious Typology

Religious architecture is concerned with design and construction of places of worship & sacred or intentional space, such as churches, mosques, stupas, temples, etc.

Intention of group worshipping of natural elements like sun, moon, rain, trees and so on, were origin of human worshipping sources which later get converted into idols this led to space

<sup>5</sup> *Khajagicha Chowk* is Private courtyard with surrounded rooms usually used by women in the house.

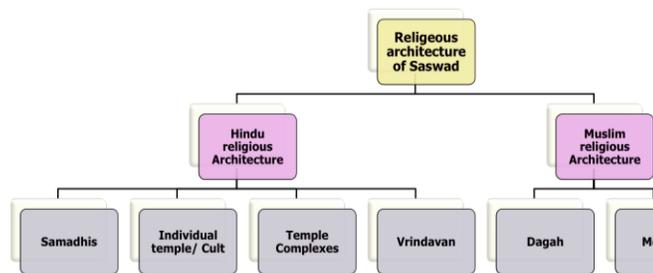
<sup>6</sup> *Pooja* room is a worship room where deities are placed according to Hindu religion

<sup>7</sup> *Jagtap* is a surname from Hindu Maratha community. In the context of Saswad they are settled since shivaji period

for idols which could be identified according to type of idol, myths related to that. Evolution of small menhir to large temple complex tells stories related to origin of temples & eras & layers of history ruled in region.

From 11th century onwards Deccan region was suffering from unstable political conditions due to invasions from north parts of India as well from southern region. One concrete reference what we have is ‘Sopandev’s samadhi’, brother of saint Dnyaneshwar near river side of Saswad of 11th century. Then Samadhi of Baji Pasalkar one of the ministers during Shivaji period in 15th century is located right in the core city of historic city of Saswad. Near by temples like Shiva temple at ‘Hiware’ and Shiva temple on Narayanpur road known as ‘Vateshwar’ are the good examples of ‘Vesara style’ indicating vocabulary emerged from both Nagar and Dravidian style. Diverse empires have always besieged religion and religious places for destruction as well as construction as political strategy.

As per types of temples two basic types could be categorized as,  
1 Individual Temples  
2 Temple complexes  
In individual temples could be categorized as private, public.  
Other religious elements observed are Samadhis, Individual Cults and so on. Examples from Muslim and Christian could be located very rarely.



As per survey of Saswad the region is dominant Hindu community so more number of Hindu religious structures are found are as follow

#### List of temples

- 1 Sangameshwar
- 2 Ganpati
- 3 Nagareshwar
- 4 shani
- 5 Kalabhairav
- 6 Karabai
- 7 Munjaba temple
- 8 Murlidhar temple
- 9 Vateshwar
- 10 Maruti
- 11 Durga

#### List of Samadhis

- 1 Sopandev
- 2 Baji Pasalkar

3 Godaji Jagtap

### III. Grading of Heritage structures in town

After understanding criteria for grading as per UNESCO world heritage sites and locally formed guidelines by INTACH existing heritage sites could be categorized in specific way after filling the relevant inventories.

Heritage Grade-II (A&B) comprises of buildings and precincts of regional or local importance possessing special architectural or aesthetic merit, or cultural or historical significance though of a lower scale than Heritage Grade-I. They are local landmarks, which contribute to the image and identity of the region. They may be the work of master craftsmen or may be models of proportion and ornamentation or designed to suit a particular climate.

1. Purandare Wada
2. Sangameshwar Temple
3. Vateshwar Temple
4. Tahsildar Kacheri
5. Kalbhairav temple
6. New shimpi ali
7. Brahmin Ali comprising big scale courtyard wadas
8. Wari in town – Cultural landscape
9. Karha river side – Natural Heritage

Heritage Grade-III comprises building and precincts of importance for townscape; that evoke architectural, aesthetic, or sociological interest through not as much as in Heritage Grade-II. These contribute to determine the character of the locality and can be representative of lifestyle of a particular community or region and may also be distinguished by setting, or special character of the façade and uniformity of height, width and scale.

1. Sopandev temple
2. Godhaji jagtap samadhi
3. Baji Pasalkar samadhi
4. Pars in historic town
5. Samjai Temple in Brahmin ali
6. Gansh temple near Purandare wada

### IV. Brief Policies and guidelines

The main objectives of the policy are to,

- Maintain and enhance the unique heritage character of Saswad
- Preserve significant buildings and building features, and ensure new designs contribute to the Saswad heritage character
- Ensure that changes to Contributing Buildings enhance the Saswad Heritage Character
- Maintain identity of Saswad
- Support pedestrian amenities by maintaining human-scaled development, connections to adjacent neighborhoods, and a welcoming, interesting sidewalk environment
- Encourage the redevelopment and revitalization of underutilized sites to enhance Saswad heritage Character
- Involve area residents, property and business owners, and interested individuals in the process of evolution of the Saswad

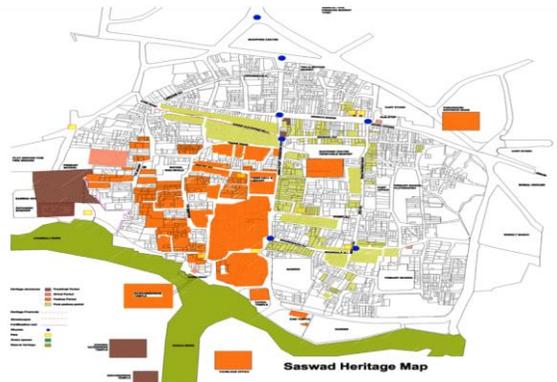
#### Changes in legislations

- FSI should be restricted to 1.5 or less in old historic core

- Change in bye laws according to scale & proportions of existing heritage buildings should be made
- Heritage committee – If opinion of the Heritage Conservation Committee, such demolition / reconstruction /alteration is undesirable then it is mandatory for owner of heritage structure to stop reconstruction/ demolition. The Heritage Conservation Committee shall have the power to direct, especially in areas designated by them, that the exterior design and height of buildings should have their approval to preserve the beauty of the area .
- Widths of buildings
- Road widening
- Pedestrianization
- Preparation of list of heritage sites including heritage buildings, Heritage precincts and listed natural features areas. A concentration of heritage buildings, which contribute to the overall heritage character of the street. These are identified individually in the Inventory sheets
- Alteration / Modification/ Relaxation in development norms
- Road widening - Widening of the existing roads under the Master Plan of the City or Town / Zonal Development Plan or in the Layout Plan shall be carried out considering the existing heritage buildings

#### IV. Conclusions

Though historic core of Saswad is full of built heritage sites its suffering through urban pressures such as population growth, modernization and so on. From the conservation point of view its very much issential to implement policies to enhance local character and use it in today's context with the understanding of new generations.



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