

From ruin to glory: Journey of a haveli

REVIVAL PLAN Despite several challenges, a late 19th century mansion in the narrow lanes of Shahjahanabad is slowly coming to life due to the untiring efforts of Rajya Sabha MP Vijay Goel

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NEW DELHI: Till six years ago, this Haveli in Dharampura was just another dilapidated structure situated in the narrow lanes of Shahjahanabad. It had all the features distinctive to this part of the town - a good mix of medieval and contemporary architecture, decorative patterns on arches, exquisite floral carving on walls, circular pillars and elaborate wooden doors.

But this architectural marvel in purani dilli was in ruins. Built around the central courtyard plan, this grand mansion constructed in the late 19th century would have collapsed under its own weight and disappeared from the landscape of the Walled city. But it survived after Rajya Sabha MP Vijay Goel took up the restoration challenge. It took six long years to achieve the goal. Now, the restored structure is popularly known as "Goel Saheb Ki Haveli".

Goel purchased the property from a Jain family around 10 years ago. Initially it had 60 rooms but the previous owner had been using just two. Goel did not touch the haveli for four years but decided to restore to its former glory in 2008 after his son Siddhant Goel encouraged him. "It was a crumbling structure. Rains were approaching, I was worried. My only concern was if it collapsed, its original artwork and designs would be lost forever. Then Siddhant persuaded me to restore it. I took up the challenge and pledged to redevelop it. I called several architects but no one was interested after seeing the condition of the building. Later, I engaged my architect friend based out of South Extension, Kapil Aggarwal. He helped me a lot. I would say that without his support it wouldn't have been possible," said Goel, who is also two-time former Lok Sabha MP from Chandni Chowk.

But the restoration faced several challenges. A significant portion of the haveli had already collapsed. A huge amount of debris lying on the terrace was weighing down the decaying structure. Removal of tonnes of malba was a Herculean task. Goel claimed there was 1,000-truckloads of wreckage.

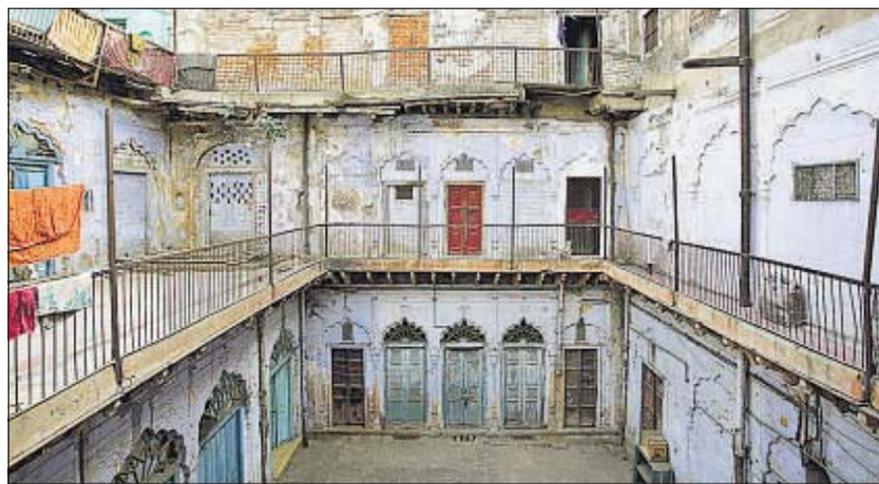
The next hurdle was to find appropriate techniques, materials and people to carry out reconstruction. Funds were limited and the work required expertise to preserve the unique character of the structure. As Goel puts it, "Intriguing motifs and stone work can be redone but the challenge was to retain the original form of the structure. We worked hard on minute details. We used a few conservation techniques like stitching to fix cracks in walls. Another challenging task was to hold decaying eaves" (Chajjas). I roped in one local mason Suresh for the job." He said nearly ₹30 lakh were spent on conservation of the property measuring 600 square yards.

The haveli's exterior had a coating of lime plaster - which consists of lime, lentils, jaggery, jute fibre and wood-apple. It required fresh coating. Goel approached various agencies involved in conservation to arrange skilled labourers. But it turned out to be a disappointing experience. Then he came to know about the ongoing conservation work in the Red Fort. He convinced trained labourers working there and brought them to get lime plaster work done in his haveli.



NOW

Stitching was done to fix cracks in walls, special artists were roped in for lime plaster on the exteriors and material was sourced from various cities of Rajasthan and Uttar Pradesh.



THEN

Built around the central courtyard plan, the grand mansion constructed in the late 19th century. A large portion of the haveli had collapsed and debris lying on the terrace was weighing down the decaying structure.

To source conventional raw materials, Goel visited various cities of Uttar Pradesh and Rajasthan known for their indigenous products. Once he sent a giant wooden door to Shekhawati (Rajasthan) for its repair. "After I failed to get assistance from the government and private agencies, I did extensive research myself and personally visited various cities to fetch different materials. I came to know that stone carving is done in Sikandra. I found Belgian glass replacement in Firozabad and brass fitting and fixtures were brought from Aligarh. For decorative lamps and marble fountain, I went to Moradabad and Jaipur respectively.

Jharokhas are from Jaisalmer," he said. Different ornamental articles and artefacts were arranged from Delhi. "Wood carving work is done in trans-Yamuna area from where I got carved lattoos (top) which are attached to wooden beams on the ceiling. Various other things were collected from different farmhouses in Delhi," he said.

The restoration of the haveli nears completion and Goel soon plans to open a heritage hotel and a cultural-cum-heritage centre in its premises. He believes his achievement may inspire several others who intend to carry forward their forefathers' legacy. "I was passionate; I did

it despite several hurdles without any help from government. I will not stop here. I will keep working on restoration of heritage in the Walled city area. I am planning to set up a heritage centre under Heritage India Foundation (HIF) there. It will help those who want to restore their havelis. I want to facilitate others with my knowledge which I acquired during the process," Goel said.

The MP wants the government to come up with an economically-viable plan for heritage property owners in Shahjahanabad. He said strict norms and red tape are the biggest challenges in the way of conservation of the historical Shahjahanabad.

OF AN ERA GONE BY

Havelis are an integral part of the life and architecture of the historic city of Shahjahanabad. While many of them are lying in ruins, some of them have been restored by their owners.

FEATURES OF A HAVELI

- Stone-carvings on the façade
- Chhajja, overhanging deck, supported by carved brackets
- Use of lakhori bricks that are small enough for masons to create fine details on walls
- Passage between the main door and the courtyard
- Long courtyard with corridors on three sides
- Fountain in the courtyard and arches
- Baithak, kitchen and other rooms located by the corridors
- Outer area near the entrance kept for men for their routine work
- Minimal furniture in baithak, arrangement for sitting on floor
- Sandstone pillars
- Toilet located on one side with its door opening into the lane



USE OF LIME PLASTER

Traditionally, masons in north India used lime and several indigenous ingredients to plaster walls. Lime mortar is known to have lasted for centuries though it takes much longer to make as compared to cement mortar.

Lime is soaked in water for up to a fortnight for maximum binding strength. It is then mixed with jaggery and gum from acacia tree for binding, powdered and soaked urad dal (for waterproofing), wood apple pulp and jute fibre (for shrinkage).

HOW CONSERVATION CHALLENGES CAN BE MET



FINANCE: Government may give aid/easy-interest free loan

EXPERTISE: Government run centres for training /free consultation centre/economic sustainability plan for revitalization of heritage

STRICT LAWS: Single Window system clearance for restoration and legal assistance

NON-AVAILABILITY: of raw material Development of commercial supply for conventional or cost-effective alternative material for renovation

MAINTENANCE: Allow tourism-driven businesses—Home stay, café, spa, eateries, boutiques, etc

OWNERSHIP DISPUTE: Legal assistance/mediation

Conservation an expensive, tedious job

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NEW DELHI: There are at least 554 havelis in Old Delhi which, if restored, can revive the charm and glory Shahjahanabad was once known for. Most of them are privately owned. A scheme proposed by the Shahjahanabad Redevelopment Corporation, which is likely to roll out in December, will give owners the opportunity and funds to conserve their havelis much like the one at Dharampura.

With no government help in the offing till now, conservation has been an expensive and tedious process for owners of these palatial houses. Many of them instead found it easier to move out than pay lakhs and run around seeking permission for restoration. Ownership disputes, unauthorised construction and land sharks, meanwhile, caused destruction of many of these heritage structures that showcase the imperial architecture of the Mughal and British era.

"As these buildings are protected by MCD or ASI, it's difficult to carry out even minor repairs as several permissions are required. Carrying out complete conservation will be full of complications. Also, it takes expenditure of lakhs of rupees, which I can instead earn by renting out my portion of the haveli to a trader," said Dhiraj Sharma, a resident of Kucha Pati Ram. He said



The haveli at Dharampura, restored by Rajya Sabha MP Vijay Goel (left) and his son Siddhant, sets an example for Old Delhi's haveli owners. RAVI CHOUDHARY/HT PHOTO

he was still staying in the narrow lanes of Old Delhi only because it was convenient and cheap. "These structures have become old and it's a risk to stay here. The government should seriously decide if they want to save Shahjahanabad or not," he said.

The haveli at Dharampura that was restored by Rajya Sabha MP Vijay Goel will be used as a heritage hotel and a cultural centre now. It's an example of what SRDC aims to achieve through its new scheme that will grant funds up to

₹5 crore to an owner willing to conserve a haveli and reuse it as a hotel, art and culture centre, museum or tourism centre. The owners will also be offered tax holidays.

"The scheme is likely to be rolled out within a month. It is to inspire owners to preserve their heritage and utilize it in the right way," said an officer.

Though multi-storey flats dominate the landscape of Old Delhi now, some beautiful mansions with original installations and design still stand in

the dingy lanes there. In Dharampura, there are several old havelis with intricate carvings on their facades and giant ornamental wooden doors. Commercial units, however, dot the area too. There are several havelis at Chawri Bazar, Chandni Chowk and Kucha Pati Ram also, however, most of them have been split and turned into shops, garages and godowns where mechanics and labourers now work next to the fountain in the greying courtyards.

Some of the havelis that have been devastated and only their ruins remain, include the 1846 mansion of Zeenat Mahal, Bahadurshah Zafar's third wife, at Lal Kuan which now has a tattered facade and a primary school, some shops and private offices running on its premises. The haveli of Ghalib's in-laws, where he is known to have performed, lies neglected and encroached in Ballimaran. Haksar ki Haveli at Kucha Pati Ram, where Jawaharlal Nehru's baraat stayed for three days, is hard to locate. Its ruins lay covered in filth even as flats are coming up all around it.

According to OP Jain, heritage conservationist and former convener of INTACH Delhi, people of Old Delhi will show interest in preserving their heritage only when it becomes profitable for them. SRDC's scheme can make that possible if owners and private investors collaborate to turn the place around with financial and technical support from the government.