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**INDIA'S COMMITMENT TO SUSTAINABLE CITIES-BALANCING
MODERNITY AND HERITAGE**- Suraksha Rai¹**Abstract**

The article discusses the progress of India in the pursuit of achieving Goal 11 on sustainable cities and communities. This is done through an assessment of challenges and opportunities raised by tension between modernization and the preservation of India's rich heritage. Further assesses the consequences that the movement toward modernization has brought to the cultural landscape of India and its environmental consequences and sustainable urban development potential. Thereafter, recommendations are given for a balanced approach that will enable both aspects of heritage conservation and sustainable city-building.

Keywords: Sustainable Development, Communities, Environment, Heritage, Modernization.

Introduction

The vast and diverse urban terrain of India does pose a serious challenge in reaching the goal of sustainable development, especially in connection with SDG 11. This goal refers to creating an inclusive, safe, resilient, and sustainable city and community.² India's rapid urbanization is projected to see over 600 million people living in cities by 2031, thus making it critical to address all the multifaceted issues created by this growth.³ Urbanization in India

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² Sustainable Development Goal 11 (SDG 11) focuses on making cities and human settlements inclusive, safe, resilient, and sustainable. This goal is part of the United Nations' 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, which aims to address the challenges posed by rapid urbanization and environmental degradation.

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is not just a shift in population demographics; it is a very complex change in infrastructure, socio-economic dynamics, and environmental conditions. The modern and heritage play in Indian cities is particularly marked because the forces that push towards modernization clash with the imperative of preserving rich cultural legacies.⁴

This article considers this crucial interaction, examining the potential to align the pursuit of modernization goals with India's cultural heritage. It submits that the attainment of SDG 11 for India requires an integrationist approach which brings contemporary urban planning in sync with tradition and culture. Existing policies and initiatives towards sustainable urban development are thus assessed within this study to reflect the success as well as shortcomings of their implementation. Understanding the challenges brought about by the lack of proper infrastructure, environmental degradation, and social inequalities will help foster resilient urban environments. Ultimately, this study seeks to provide insights into effective strategies for promoting sustainable urbanization in India while honoring its historical context, thereby contributing to a more holistic understanding of urban development in the country.

SDG 11 and It's Importance

SDG 11, "Sustainable Cities and Communities," aspires to make cities and human settlements inclusive, safe, resilient, and sustainable.⁵ Sustainable development means a whole process that looks forward to satisfying the needs of the present without jeopardizing the ability of future generations to meet their own needs. Sustainable development covers the economic, social, and environmental dimensions. It is through these communities that sustainability can be carried out in units and then observed. The environment is a critical component, providing natural resources and ecosystem services necessary for human survival and well-being. Heritage means the cultural, historical, and natural assets that define communities' identities and help them to be resilient. Modernization refers to the adoption of new technologies and practices that improve living standards and economic productivity. Modernization, however, should not compromise heritage or environmental integrity. Therefore, sustainable development requires a harmonious balance between these factors to ensure that the

⁴ Kanchana, R.A.C, Challenges of Urbanization towards Sustainable Development,2022/10/27.

⁵ David Drakakis-Smith, *Third World Cities: Sustainable Urban Development*, Urban Studies, May 1995, Vol. 32, No. 4/5, REVIEW DOUBLE ISSUE (May 1995),pp. 659-677

communities flourish but their heritage and environment are also protected during continued modernization. This goal has a really wide scope and involves reaching targets such as:

1. *Inclusive cities*: ensuring access for all to adequate, safe, and affordable housing and basic services, improving road safety.
2. *Safe cities*: It reduces crime, violence, and disasters.
3. *Resilient cities*: It develops cities that have resilience to climate change and other shocks.
4. *Sustainable cities*: The aim is to contribute to sustainable urban development and minimize the environmental impact of cities. SDG 11 is crucial to safeguarding the well-being of billions of individuals inhabiting such cities. It also pertains to the curbing of very significant global challenges like climate change, poverty, and inequality.

The Importance of Heritage Preservation to Sustainable Cities

Heritage preservation is key to the aspect of sustainable cities. In most cases, heritage sites and buildings reflect sustainable design principles that have been passed down through generations. Those are useful in giving suggestions for constructing a sustainable urban environment. These historic sites and buildings may also be important cultural and economic assets.⁶ They may generate tourism dollars and foster a sense of place and identity. In addition, it may even contribute to the building of social cohesion and community.⁷ Urbanization pressure rapid urbanization in India presents significant challenges, such as infrastructure shortages, housing crises, and environmental degradation. Cultural loss, the push for modernization has led to the erosion of the historical sites, traditional neighborhoods and unique cultural identities. Environmental impact modern construction practices often deplete natural resources and increase carbon emissions, further threatening ecological balance.

The Impact of Modernisation on Indian Heritage

⁶ Baltà Portolés, J. (2018), "Cultural Heritage and Sustainable Cities. Key Themes and Examples in European Cities", UCLG Committee on Culture Reports, n°7.

⁷ M. Shamsul Haque, *Environmental Discourse and Sustainable Development: Linkages and Limitations*, Ethics and the Environment, 2000, Vol. 5, No. 1 (2000), pp. 3-21.

The thrust for modernity has drastically changed the urban panorama in India. The country is bridged with modern highways, rail and road bridges, and buildings. While these changes have come with economic growth and superior standards of living, they are inadvertent in their own right. It has wiped out much of the rich cultural heritage that India had, the historical buildings, monuments, and traditional neighborhoods have gone down in favor of new building developments. Further, such erosion does not drain just the cultural identity but depletes the cities of their distinctive character and historic essence. Moreover, various materials and the construction practices used in modern development have contributed to negative environmental effects. For instance, the use of concrete and steel depletes natural resources and contributes to carbon emissions. Destruction of green space and traditional land-use patterns can lead to negative ecological effects.

India's Strategy towards Sustainable Cities - Approach to Sustainable Cities in the United States

The rapid pace of urbanization in India, combined with its rich cultural diversity, offers a set of unparalleled challenges and opportunities to achieve SDG 11. The government has thus adopted a multi-dimensional approach balancing economic development with environmental sustainability and social inclusion. While the United States of America differs from India on many counts. For one, urban city developments there date back a long way. Its record in attaining SDG 11 likewise has been no less stormy, with suburban sprawl, pollution, and inequality being among its many challenges.⁸

SDG 11: A Pillar for Conservation of Indian Heritage

This goal, in the context of India—a country with an enormous number of cultural heritages—assumes all-new importance. Conserving this heritage is not only a matter of preserving the past but also an important milestone toward building sustainable communities for the future. Cultural Identity: Indian heritage is the tangible form of the cultural identity of this nation. It roots people to their origins, helps them identify themselves with a certain group, and enables a shared narrative regarding nationality. By conserving heritage sites, we save the essence of India's cultural heritage, allowing future generations to reach out to and

⁸ Dr. Dominic Dixon, India's stance on SDG 11: Sustainable cities and communities, UNADAP International Diplomatic Alliance, Sep 27, 2018.

appreciate the rich tapestry of their ancestors. **Economic Benefits:** In many Indian towns and cities, heritage tourism is an excellent way of earning large sums of money. Preserving the site of heritage and promoting heritage tourism will develop job opportunities that will improve the local economy and India's image in the world as a cultural tourist destination. **Educational Value:** Heritage sites are like living laboratories for education and learning. They afford the students an opportunity to reach history, architecture, and other cultural traditions firsthand. Once conserved, heritage sites become valuable educational assets with the potential to inspire and educate future generations. **Sense of Place:** The Indian heritage sites give character and distinctive identities to cities and towns. They give a sense of place, connect people to the immediate locals, and create pride and a feeling of belonging. Preservation of heritage sites thus aids in developing vibrant and sustainable cities conscious of their cultural heritage⁹.

How Indian Heritage Serves and Protects the Environment?

Indian heritage has often enshrined sustainable practices and architectural innovations standing the test of time. This perhaps is very instructive for modern urban planning and conservation of the environment. A balanced approach to urban development is essential because preserving cultural heritage not only fosters community identity and pride but also offers sustainable design principles and practices that can enhance urban resilience and environmental sustainability.¹⁰

Traditional Building Techniques: Most traditional Indian building techniques, like mudbrick construction, included very few materials other than the locally sourced ones; besides, they incorporated passive cooling and ventilation. Such techniques need to be revived to reduce the ecological footprint of modern construction and contribute toward sustainable living.

Conservation of Water: Most traditional Indian architecture incorporates a system of water harvesting through step wells and rainwater harvesting tanks to conserve water resources. These could be replicated in today's urban scenario to meet the challenges arising due to lack of adequate water resources.

⁹ Usha Tandon, *POPULATION GROWTH AND SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT*, Journal of the Indian Law Institute, APRIL-JUNE 2008, Vol. 50, No. 2 (APRIL-JUNE 2008), pp. 209.

¹⁰ Urban Heritage in Indian Cities, Compendium of Good Practice, 2015.

Ecological Wisdom: Great respect for nature, as well as a sense of interconnectedness underlying the Indian heritage. Ecological wisdom should provide guiding principles that could guide modern-day efforts at biodiversity protection and sustainable development.

Climate Resilience: Most of the traditional Indian villages and settlements are based in areas that are more concerned with natural calamities. People residing in these areas have come up with adaptive strategies for dealing with natural calamities—from building on platforms to using flood-resistant materials—both of which serve to provide crucial resilience in the age of climate change.

Economic benefits heritage tourism can generate significant revenue and create jobs, supporting local economies.¹¹ Educational value heritage sites serve as educational resources, allowing future generations to connect with their cultural history. Ecological wisdom, traditional building techniques and water conservation methods demonstrate sustainable practices that can inform modern urban planning.

Challenges in the Achievement of SDG 11 in India

Fast urbanization is one of the major challenges being faced in India. It creates a lot of problems regarding the development of infrastructure, shortage of housing, and degradation of the environment.¹² While modernization is necessary for economic growth, it should not come at the expense of cultural heritage; thus, a nuanced approach is vital for sustainable urban development.

Resource constraints: This can occur when there is an inability for the proper implementation of sustainable development initiatives due to resource unavailability.

Lack of Awareness: There is a need to create awareness about the issue of sustainable cities and communities among all the stakeholders.

Some Institutional Challenges: The divided responsibility among various governmental agencies may obstruct the smooth functioning of achieving SDG 11.

Balancing Modernisation and Heritage Conservation

¹¹ UNESCO, World Heritage Convention.

¹² Justin Lowe and David R. Brower, *Is Sustainable Development Sustainable?*, Earth Island Journal, Summer 1992, Vol. 7, No. 3.

SDG 11 demands a balancing between modernisation and heritage conservation. Challenges such as resource constraints, lack of awareness, and institutional fragmentation can hinder the implementation of heritage conservation policies, but proactive measures, including public engagement and financial incentives, can mitigate these obstacles.¹³ While modernisation is essentially needed for economic growth and better living standards, it should not be at the expense of cultural heritage. Here are some of the ways to balance the books:

Conservation of Heritage: Frame all-inclusive heritage conservation policies and rules. Take preservation measures for historical buildings and sites, and end.

Sustainable Urban Development: Promote sustainable urban development methods integrated with heritage conservation in the face of modern development.

Public Awareness: It will contribute to public awareness of the importance of heritage preservation and its contribution to sustainable cities.

Community Engagement: The process of engaging with local communities on decision-making in developing the urban area and preserving its heritage.

Financial Incentives: Provide financial incentives toward projects for heritage conservation and sustainable development.

Contribution Made by Indian Judicial System

Landmark cases have played a very significant role in framing the legal environment for environmental and heritage protection in India. The cases mentioned below reflect some of the important milestones in the evolution of environmental jurisprudence and heritage protection:

Cases on Environmental Protection

*M.C. Mehta v. Union of India (1987)*¹⁴ Commonly known as the oleum gas leak case, this is a landmark case that established the concept of absolute liability for hazardous industries. The Supreme Court has held that an industry carrying on hazardous or inherently dangerous activity owes an absolute liability to a common victim for

¹³ Usha Tandon, *POPULATION GROWTH AND SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT*, Journal of the Indian Law Institute, APRIL-JUNE 2008, Vol. 50, No. 2 (APRIL-JUNE 2008), pp. 209.

¹⁴ *M.C. Mehta v. Union of India (1987)*

causing injury, and it is liable without any fault being attributed to it, and that such an industry must conduct its activity with the utmost care to avoid causing pollution.

*Vellore Citizens Welfare Forum v. Union of India (1996)*¹⁵ The precautionary principle and the principle of polluter pays were emphasized, and it was clarified that there should be no development that is not sustainable. Here, tanneries polluted groundwater, and stringent regulations were imposed regarding waste disposal by industries.

*Taj Trapezium Case (2003)*¹⁶: In this landmark judgment, the Taj Mahal was identified as a national heritage site that deserves protection from industrial pollution. The Supreme Court ordered the closure of polluting industries in the vicinity of Taj for saving it from destruction and preserving its beauty.

*Narmada Bachao Andolan v. Union of India (2000)*¹⁷: This case involved the environmental impact of the Sardar Sarovar Dam project. The Supreme Court weighed the developmental needs with ecological concern and integrated the precautionary principle in its judgment, laying down that any potential environmental damage must be taken into consideration before proceeding with development projects.

*Rural Litigation and Entitlement Kendra v. State of Uttar Pradesh (1985)*¹⁸: Commonly known as Dehradun Valley Litigation, the case brought a complete halt to the illicit quarrying of limestone in the Himalayas. The court held that degradation of the environment constitutes a deprivation of the right to life under Article 21 of the Constitution.

Cases Involving Heritage Protection

- *M.C. Mehta v. Union of India*¹⁹: The Taj Mahal Case was purely an environmental pollution case, but certain aspects brought out related to the preservation of cultural

¹⁵ *Vellore Citizens Welfare Forum v. Union of India (1996)*

¹⁶ *Taj Trapezium Case (2003)*

¹⁷ *Narmada Bachao Andolan v. Union of India (2000)*

¹⁸ *Rural Litigation and Entitlement Kendra v. State of Uttar Pradesh (1985)*

¹⁹ *M.C. Mehta v. Union of India*

heritage. The Supreme Court held that the Taj Mahal needs to be preserved for national pride and cultural identity.

- *Delhi Monuments Case (1996)*²⁰: The case was concerned with the protection of historical monuments from pollution and encroachment. SC ordered ASI to take all necessary steps to protect and preserve the sites and widened the liability of the government in heritage conservation.
- *Indian Council for Enviro-Legal Action v. Union of India*²¹ (1989) This case related to preventing water bodies from industrial pollution and, by implication, helped heritage sites that rely on clean water sources to maintain themselves.

These landmark cases demonstrate the proactive role of the Indian judiciary with regard to enforcement of environmental laws and protection of cultural heritage, perceiving development as balanced with ecological sustainability and cultural preservation.

Case Studies of Sustainable Urban Development in India²² Ahmedabad, Gujarat, smart city mission, the city of Ahmedabad has been in the frontline with regards to the Smart City Mission of India, with various works that are related to intelligent traffic management systems, solar power plants, and waste management solutions. Heritage conservation, the city has also undertaken efforts to preserve its historic heritage, including the UNESCO World Heritage Site of the Ahmedabad Fort²³ Kochi, Kerala, water metro Kochi has introduced a water metro project to enhance connectivity and decrease traffic congestion. Sustainable Urban Planning, a clear urban planning approach for the city was designed, considering the ideals of sustainable development.

- I. Puducherry: Pedestrian-Friendly Streets: The main emphasis of Puducherry has been to create pedestrian-friendly streets and public places to encourage active transportation by eliminating car addiction. Green Infrastructure: Green infrastructure relative to parks, green roofs, and rainwater catchment systems has been developed as one means to enhance environmental quality and increase resilience.

²⁰ *Delhi Monuments Case (1996)*

²¹ *Indian Council for Enviro-Legal Action v. Union of India* {1989}

²² smartcities.gov.

²³ The Ahmedabad Fort, specifically the Bhadra Fort, is a significant historical structure located within the Historic City of Ahmedabad, which was designated as a UNESCO World Heritage Site in 2017.

Conclusion

Conservation of Indian heritage is a cultural imperative as well as a step toward achieving sustainable development. India and the United States provide an interesting contrast and yet are instructive case studies in pursuit of sustainable cities. As far as achieving SDG 11 is concerned, both countries have significantly advanced, but they face unique challenges and opportunities. Both countries therefore can learn from the experiences of others in order to work their way toward inclusive, safer, resilient, and sustainable cities for future generations. The march of India towards sustainable cities has to be thoughtful, balancing modernisation's requirement with the need to preserve rich heritage. It is something that would require a multi-pronged approach involving immense political will, innovative financing mechanisms, and engaging partnerships among governments, businesses, and civil society. By adopting strategies that promote both heritage conservation and sustainable development, India can create inclusive, safe, resilient, and sustainable urban environments that ensure benefits for the future generation. It is now time this call addresses these challenges in implementing effective strategies aimed at creating sustainable cities that can assure benefits for generations to come.

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