

Revitalizing Cultural Heritage: Conservation of Merewether Tower and its Impact on urban Morphology

Qurat - Ul - Ain Rehman ¹ & Rafique -Ul - Hassnain Soomro ²

1 Creative Industries Faculty,
Queensland University of Technology,
Brisbane, Australia
Quratulain.rehman@hdr.qut.edu.au

2 Faculty of Science & Engineering,
Queensland University of Technology,
Brisbane, Australia
soomrorafique@live.com

Abstract

19th century Karachi was home to the British occupiers and is therefore, rich in Victorian era architecture. Although most of these buildings are in a bad shape, the Pakistani government is working hard to preserve them. Although the pace of conservation is slow, the mere fact that the work is on going alone is relieving. One such building in consideration in Karachi is the Merewether Tower; a significant cultural heritage structure indeed. Even though this iconic structure is one of the few that are in a rather good condition, some sources claim that from the inside, it is slowly getting degraded. Once the gateway to the city, it has been forgotten by many although its name is renowned.

The objective of this research is to study and analyze the existing conditions of the tower as well as its surroundings, and assess how it can be revitalized in order to improve the morphology of the region. This paper also analyzes how conservation of a cultural heritage structure can enhance the urban character of a given place, and how it can link up with the communities that in turn, interact with it.

The research methodologies adopted are qualitative; case studies, literature review, field research and interviews from stakeholders. This research attempts to develop a methodology for revitalization and enhancement of urban cultural heritage. The research concludes that development and revitalization of Merewether Tower is essential not only in a beautification and heritage perspective, but also for the commercial development in the locality. A set of immediate improvements are expected to appear in the short-run after redevelopment, following the intended long-run benefits. Therefore, it is not merely a suggestion but a must for the city. The government needs to be sincere, and the communities and stakeholder need to cooperate for revitalization of this heritage landmark.

Keywords: Culture, Historical architecture, Heritage conservation, Revitalization

Introduction

Heritage is a part of the cultural tradition of any society (Khalid, 2010). The term 'heritage' in this study is to blend the architectural and historical values of buildings with the people – as users – whose own socio-cultural heritage that is encapsulated in their daily routines. Culture can be defined as the ways by which people live. It is diverse, and a change is always evident when a person moves from one locality to another. The factors that determine culture are religion, language, living standards, norms, traditions, etc. that are all intangible. However,

culture also consists of tangible aspects such as buildings, statues, places of worship etc. Since culture is always changing, important cultural heritage sites are ignored widely, leading to the destruction of the tangible facet of culture (Hassan, 1994).

Cultural Heritage merges both tangible and intangible dimensions. This vision considers heritage sites to be assets in any development processes. These cultural assets are seen as an important means to urban development as



Vj ku'ct veng'ku'iegpugf 'w'pf gt'c'Etgc'x'g'Ego o qpu'C w'kdw'kp/P qF gt'x'c'x'gu'
6Q'K'p'gt'p'c'k'p'c'n'N'ie'gpug'EE'D[/P F +

affirmed by Wijetunge (2011). These sites need to be saved so that the region's history may be preserved. Historical sites not only add beauty to a given region, they also serve as reminders to past in a way that no book can describe (Lari & Lari, 1996).

Keeping in mind the importance of heritage sites, it is widely accepted that no matter the condition they are in, they should always be preserved in a way that has a positive impact to society (Cheema, 2007). Therefore, culture needs to be revitalized to ensure that it lasts for posterity. The term 'revitalize' can be defined as to imbue something with new life. One way to revitalized culture is to conserve historical sites that take a person back several years to witness the culture that was present at that time. This needs to be done in association with the Merewether Tower.

Merewether Tower is one of the Victorian architectural gems that have survived the hammer in Karachi. It is located at a strategic place, waiting to greet people who arrive in to the city by sea. When the city was still young, foreigners and travellers arriving in the city would find this monument as a dramatic welcome (Hassan, 1993). Since Karachi was a station for soldiers, it had several sites that portray the culture of the time. Merewether Tower, erected in memory of Sir William Merewether in 1839, is a great example of Victorian high culture in Karachi.

Before Merewether Tower was constructed, its site was a point for socialization and relaxation. It was a point where social meetings were held to discuss any issues in society. It is located at the point where two of the most important roads in the city meet – namely: I. I. Chundrigar

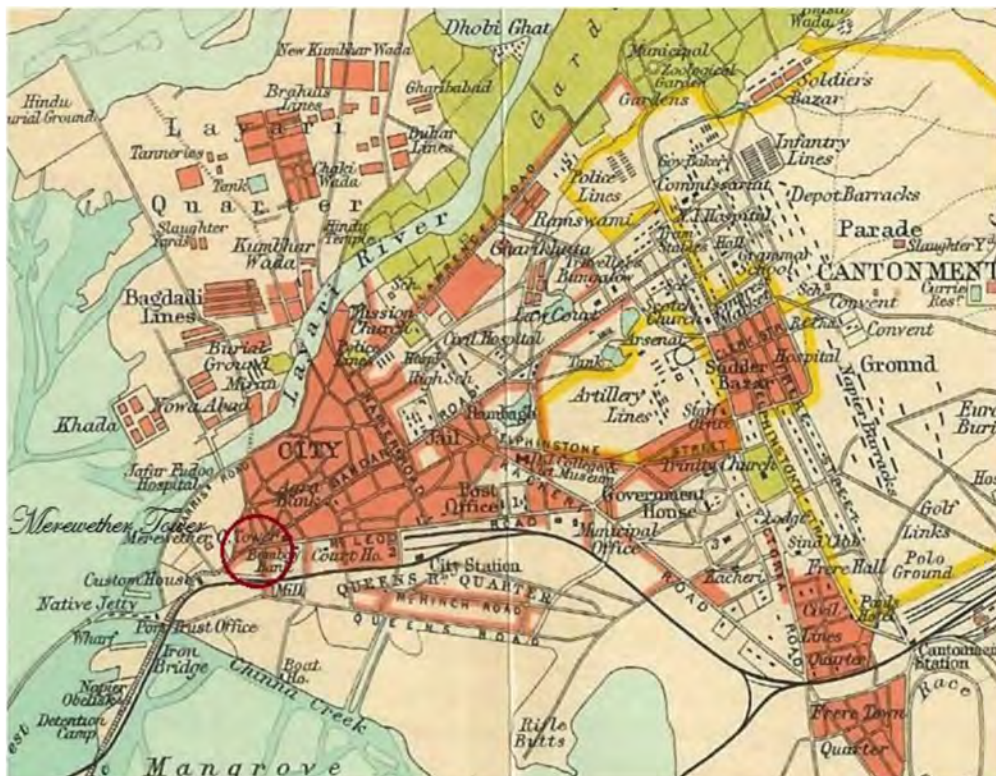


Figure 1: Old Map of Karachi

Source: Adapted from <<https://www.antiquemapsandprints.com/pakistan-karachi--environs-city-plan-cantonment-british-india-1929-old-map-392432-p.asp>>

Road and M. A. Jinnah Road (Bana, 1989). These were previously known as McLeod Road and Bandar Road respectively.

Merewether Tower which was raised by public subscription for a former commissioner in Sindh region is also a memorial to one Mr. J. Strachen, the municipal Engineer who designed it alongside of many other public buildings in Karachi. It is in the middle, Pointed Style of Gothic architecture, and has the form of an Eleanor cross. Standing on a 44 feet square base, it rises to 102 feet and carries at an elevation of 70 feet, a clock tower with four faces (each 7 feet in diameter). The large bell which strikes the hours, weighs 3 cwt, whilst the smaller bells, for the quarters, weigh 1 cwt. each. The foundation stone was laid by Sir James Fergusson who was the Governor of Bombay in 1884, and the completed structure was opened to the public and handed over to the Municipality by Sir Evan James in 1892. The total cost of the structure and the clock was Rs.37,178. (Gazetteer of the Province of Sindh, Karachi District, 2003). This tower portrays the high culture of the British, and serves as an evidence of past subserviance to the British rule in this region.

Today the place where the tower stands is one of the most choked areas of the city. Its location has attracted a lot of street vendors that have congested the site. Owing to the fact that along with street vendors, the place has over the years become a famous bus stop, it remains crowded for most parts of the day; especially in the evenings. This overcrowding has indeed led to the neglect of this place. As it is also a major bus stop in Karachi, and one of the major nodes of the city, people travelling in buses are familiar with this term as bus conductors always shoutout “tower” to suggest that the area the buses will be travelling to. In this way, even those who have never visited this place are in turn familiar with it.

In the recent years, it could be observed that people have increasingly begun to value the heritage of the city. In this regard, the passing of the Sindh Cultural Heritage Act in 1994 paved way for the conservation of several key British-era pieces of architecture that are

considered priceless in a city where heritage sites are being constantly destroyed to make room for modern buildings (Hassan, 1994). This act gave the government an opportunity to preserve some of the most important cultural heritage sites and consequently, development work started in order to restore them. However, due to the turbulent law & order situation of the region as well as the dilemma of maintenance, most of the beautiful architecture here remains unnoticed. Although the government has done a great job to protect and renovate some buildings, it has failed to implement a steady policy whereby the structures renovated could be maintained.

The objective of this paper is to determine the current condition of the Merewether Tower and its impact on urban morphology; in order to determine what has to be done to preserve it. Promote a positive impact on its surrounding in intrinsic to this exercise.

Finally, initiation of discussions with relevant stakeholders pertaining to the conservation of Merewether Tower and the revitalization of the area is taken up. This will also raise awareness about the critical state of the tower as an important of heritage building, and the impact that its revitalization will have on the local environment. It is a well-known fact that the revitalization of heritage sites has a positive impact on the morphology of the region. In any urban development process, cultural assets are the most important feature, especially in the areas where cultural heritage is rich and has the ability to improve tourism (Khalid, 2010). Therefore, it has been assumed that the renovation of the Merewether Tower will help people to realize the importance of urban renewal.

The employed research methodology of this study are as follows.

- existing literature review on the topic and Merewether site,
- feedbacks from stakeholders through structured & semi structured questionnaire,
- interviews and
- case studies.

Literature Review

A comprehensive research was conducted by Fatima Bana in 1989 in which, she analysed and addressed the current state of the Merewether Tower and its surroundings, and also proposed a way to redevelop the place. In the report, the main focus was the improvement of the streets and solving of the traffic issues, which in fact, is definitely the major concern of the locality (Bana, 1989).

However, in this report she did not critically examine the government's role in sustaining of this heritage. Considering the fact that it is the government's responsibility to maintain such heritage, the deterioration of this site clearly shows the failure on its part in addressing this issue. This site can never be redeveloped unless the government takes promising steps to ensure the sustainability of the site. However, the proposals to redevelop the area can be considered as valid even today, since it gives a good description of the things that are missing and what needs to be done in order to restore the area.

It has been 29 years since the report by Fatima Bana was compiled in 1989, and numerous changes have taken place since then. By comparing the analysis of maps provided in the report with the current map, it can be seen that the population in the area has grown substantially. The population of the entire city has also increased by a huge number thus, putting pressure on its infrastructure. The structure in question itself has by now degraded due to pollution as predicted by Fatima Bana in 1989. The state of neglect by the government can be judged by visiting the site. Its heartbreaking as the community watches a masterpiece slowly fading away. Infrastructure around Merewether Tower at the time of its construction was configured based on the population of that time, and with the rising population of this metropolitan city, the surroundings of the tower have not been developed with respect to present-day needs, thus, putting pressure on local infrastructure (Figure 2 and 3).



Figure 2: An image of Merewether Tower at the time of early 1900s when the city was developing and was under British rule Source: Adil (2018).



Figure 3: Recent aerial view of the Merewether Tower that illustrates increasing population and the traffic around it Source: Ali (2016).

It is vital to conserve built heritage for sustainable development of a given area, in order to represent and perpetuate the cultural and historic identity of it (Doratli et al., 2004). Manente (2000) identifies three interrelated objectives of urban conservation; physical, spatial and social. The project will convene the needs of locals, tourists as well as the hosting place, by balancing these objectives. Valid strategies to conserve the Merewether Tower can be adopted from several sites from the world over. The following are some examples of similar historical sites renovated in order to preserve the history of the region:

Bab Al-Saraya – Lebanon



Figure 4: Bab al Saraya- Lebanon

Source: Al-Hagla (2010).

The rehabilitation of Bab Al-Saraya in Lebanon is a good example of how a site that was in a shabby condition was transformed into a major tourist destination. Before rehabilitation, the site was in a bad shape with broken structures and sanitary issues. The rehabilitation included the renovation of the site as well as its surrounding areas in order to restore it. This included the reuse of historical buildings as modern shops and promoting the local food industry. The rehabilitation project had a comprehensive vision that focused on cultural tourism for the sustainable economic and social development. It used ‘heritage trail’ as a strategy that had the ability to relate different development features within a comprehensive understanding that includes place, tourism and local people for their shared and successive areas of interaction. These areas are namely conservation and rehabilitation practices as well as heritage interpretation and local economic development. Overall, the rehabilitation of this site was a major success, which resulted in the protection of an important piece of cultural heritage (Khalid, 2010).

Gateway of India – Mumbai



Figure 5: Gateway Of India-Mumbai

Source: Kathpalia and Bharucha (n.d.).

Just like the Merewether Tower, the Gateway of India in Mumbai welcomes passengers who arrive by the sea. However, the major difference between the two is that the Gateway is well preserved and is a major tourist attraction in the country. Nature played its part in corroding the surface of the structure and it faced decolorization. Along with this, the number of people visiting this place increased significantly leading to overcrowding. Therefore, in 2008, the Government of India began a major restoration project to preserve its beauty. It also developed the surrounding areas to reduce the issue of overcrowding, making it a proper tourist destination and pedestrian-friendly area (Kathpalia & Bharucha, n.d.). Although not as old as the Merewether Tower, the Gateway has been continuously maintained by the government that ensured that this site maintains its status as a major tourist attraction of India. Keeping in mind the overcrowding of the areas around the Merewether Tower, these areas need to be developed in a similar way it was done with the Gateway of India, in order to provide easy access to the site.

Arc de Triomphe – France



Figure 6: Arc de Triomphe, France
Source: Wijetunge (2011).

The Arc de Triomphe was built in 1836 and is a major tourist attraction in Paris. Despite its age, it is very well maintained. It does not look old as of its age, though it was constructed 36 years before the completion of Merewether Tower. This structure is surrounded by ample greenery, which improves the urban environment and provides a soothing sight in comparison to the hustle and bustle of rest of the city. Such a magnificent structure requires constant maintenance. The interior was renovated from 2006 to 2008, giving viewers a spectacular view of its details (Arc de Triomphe, 2009). In contrast to the Merewether Tower that has been continuously ignored, this building is evidence for how a structure can survive for decades if continuous care is taken to maintain it. If the Pakistani government changes its stance towards the Merewether Tower and maintains it continuously as the French government has done with the Arc de Triomphe, it can definitely last for years to come. Along with this, revitalizing its interior just like that of the Arc de Triomphe can give visitors a great view of this historical masterpiece. As Merewether Tower is a heritage listed structure, its inventory is mentioned below which have been prepared by the Heritage Cell, DAP NED UET in February 2006. This photographic documentation of the existing condition of the Merewether Tower shows that the structure is still in good condition, and if proper care is provided, has potential to become an important part of the sustainable development of the city.

SEQ 00077



Merewether Tower

1884-92

SR-101 I. I. Chundrigar (McLeod) Road/M. A. Jinnah (Bunder) Road

Other References

Enlistment No: **1995 -077**

H.F. Register Ref. No: **KAR/SEQ/001**

G

Public Monument

#Name?

Present Usage

Ground Floor	-	-
First Floor	-	-
Second Floor	-	-
Third Floor	-	-
Fourth Floor	-	-

Ownership: **Government (Provincial)** Occupancy: **Owned**

Present Status: **Well Maintained** Threat Level: **Good State of Condition** Alterations: **-**

Prominent Architectural Features

Columns, Arches/Arched Decorative Window, Round/Rosette, Pilasters, Clock Tower, Spire.

- Parameters for Merit:
- (10pts) external architectural features, including decorations, etc.
 - (10pts) representative of typical or unique plan typology.
 - (10pts) evidence of unique craftsmanship.
 - (10pts) record of variation in construction materials and building technology.
 - (10pts) representative of social, cultural and economic values.
 - (10pts) contributes to the group value of an area or cluster.
 - (20pts) landmark value.
 - (20pts) rare survivor & expression of a cultural tradition.
 - (20pts) unique building type.
 - (20pts) independent compound with public open spaces, visible from main road.

GPS Coordinates:



Location Map



Photos of Details



SRI LANKA QUARTER
 FEBRUARY 2019

Figure 7: Inventory of Merewether Tower
 Source: Heritage Cell, DAP NED UET (2016).

Physical Field Survey

Interviews from Stakeholders

The stakeholders selected include 50 hawkers, 20 bus drivers, 50 workers/employees of the adjacent government and private offices, and 50 students. Interviews were conducted in order to assess the views of all these stakeholders. The important points of the interviews were recorded in order to determine the proportion of people giving specific opinions. A summary of the interviews are as follows:

Hawkers:

When asked about their reaction if they were to relocate, every hawker claimed that they would never move out of this region since they earned their living by selling various things on the streets around Merewether Tower. The adjoining area of Kharadar is very populated and is a good source of income for these people. However, they were interested for a properly designed and pedestrian friendly market area.

Bus Drivers:

The reaction of bus drivers were the same as hawkers. Merewether stands at the junction of two important roads and surrounding area of the tower serves as a bus stop. Therefore, bus drivers suggested that there is no way they can be relocated since important roads lead to

this place. Although these buses are one of the main causes of traffic jams in the area, they were reluctant to accept this fact. Another perception which was found common among the hawkers and bus drivers was that both parties claimed that they would be pleased if the tower would be developed as it will increase their business, and would be a beautiful addition for the city

Workers / Employees:

Workers and employees were praying that the government redevelops the area as it will not only beautify the it, but will hopefully get rid of traffic jams caused by bus drivers and hawkers who setup their stalls on the road; thus, narrowing it. They were also aware of the historic value of the building and were interested to know more about it. The beauty of the locality would also improve, as a result attracting visitors and increasing the business of the local community.

Students:

Fifty students were interviewed between the age of 12-20 years, and they were perhaps the most ambitious of all the people interviewed. They all wished that the tower and adjoining areas would be developed and have more green space where they can sit, study and relax. Judging that the children were ambitious, they were also asked of their view on how this place could be redeveloped and they all came up with interesting ideas.

The factors that should be considered while deciding to redevelop the region that came out of the interviews were as follows:

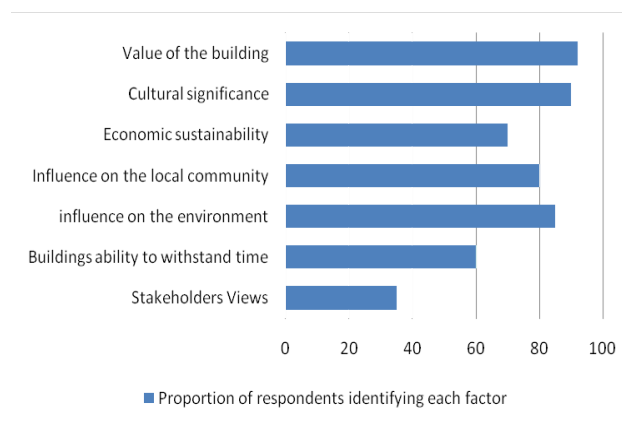


Figure 8: Bar Graph Showing Proportion of the Respondents on Identifying Each Factor
Source: Author (2018).

The results of interview showed that the locals value this Victorian era building as their very own cultural asset, as the history of the city is associated with it. They acknowledge the fact that the city of Karachi was developed by the British as well as the Parsis, and it has always been multicultural and diverse. Although, most of the major stakeholders were reluctant to dispende effort individually and did not agree to relocate, but almost all respondents valued this building and wished that it should be renovated so that the beauty of the locality would be enhanced. Consequently, this masterpiece of British architecture would survive the test of time.

Existing Condition of the Merewether Tower and the Surroundings

The Merewether Tower faces the same neglect as other heritage buildings in the country although it is the government's duty to preserve it. From far, the building looks to be in good shape, but a close inspection reveals that it will need a complete restoration. The tower is in a state of neglect although the Karachi Stock Exchange did carry out some work in order to beautify the small portion of land where the tower stands. Since stairs leading to the top is broken, there is no way to keep the clocks in a working condition, and the tower is gradually eroding.

The lack of effort from the part of government and the increase in pollution around the site is destroying the tower. Human activity around the tower is also destroying its beauty. Activities such as pasting posters, wall chalking, broken pedestrian pavements, electric and telephone line wires, occupation by drug addicts and hawkers' illegal encroachments are destroying the tower's beauty. The rest of the tower is constantly facing the elements of pollution from vehicles, which is evident from the pictures here.



Figure 9: Electrical lines around the tower



Figure 10: Encroachments of hawkers & drug addicts around the tower site



Figure 11: Environmental degradation through heavy smoke



Figure 12: Lack of maintenance and care



Figure 13: Kiosks, hawkers residing onsite



Figure 14: Broken door, wall chalking & posters

Existing Condition of Merewether Tower

Source: Author (2013).

A closer inspection of the area reveals that there are many streets leading towards the site. Since those streets were not designed to accommodate today's traffic in Karachi, the absence of a proper traffic

management system keeps this place always congested; as it is evident in the map below. Adjacent to this tower is the area of Kharadar, which houses several thousand homes and shops, thus adding to the complexity to the issue.



Figure 15: Merewether Tower and surrounding

Source: <https://earth.google.com/web/@24.84862668,66.99987779,18.80516587a,888.05481854d,35y,31.92847278h,18.31912486t,0r/data=CIUaUxJLCiUweDNiYjMxNWZmNDBiZDI5ZDU6MHg2NTFkZ-jM5OGI0ZTUwYzlyGTr3aLfT2ThAIVGpyNfUv1BAKhBNZXJld2V0aGVyIFRvd2VyGAIgASgC>

Expert Advice

Expert Advice was taken from Mr. Kamran Ahmed (2013), an employee of the Pakistan Heritage Foundation. He suggested that the Merewether Tower has to be renovated as soon as possible because it is deteriorating quickly due to neglect and pollution. The conservation of this site will not require much effort, but the redevelopment of the adjacent area will be a monumental task involving several stakeholders. He pointed out that despite the area around the tower being fenced, it is used extensively by drug addicts who sleep by it at night. The solution can be the guarding of the place throughout the day. Overall, Mr. Kamran informed that the government has already conducted surveys of the site but the proposal to redevelop the site remains on shelf.

Another discussion was done with Arif Hassan (2013); an architect, socialist, academian and researcher. He states that the Merewether Tower and many other British era buildings are at the heart of the significant cultural heritage of the Karachi city that has been destroyed in the saddar and old city. He also stated that the heritage buildings are no longer used for the purpose for which they were built. He

suggested as practical solutions that revitalizing the building can only be done either through function which can revitalize the environment and adaptive reuse, or by bringing back the original spirit of the building.

Research Findings

Keeping in mind how the historic sites discussed in case studies were developed and preserved, it shows that the same can be applied to the Merewether Tower. It can be made as an interactive public space and major tourist attraction in the city. One thing common in all three sites mentioned above is that they are pedestrian friendly, thus reducing the impact of pollution. In order for this to be realised, an extensive survey will have to be conducted in order to improve the surroundings and to revamp the locality. The main focus should be to first restore the structure, and then, continuously maintain it in order to preserve its beauty.

Recommendations for the Revitalization of the Merewether Tower

Judging from the results of the study, the Merewether Tower site requires a huge

redevelopment programme. This redevelopment project should encompass the renovation of the structure, relocation of hawkers, maintenance of modern bus stops near the site, reconstruction of streets leading to the site and finally, provision of basic amenities to residents of the region

Renovation of the Structure

Since the main structure is intact, it will not require substantial renovation. However, the interior of the tower and the clocks needs to be completely renovated. This work can be achieved by using materials that are easily available. Cleaning and preservation of the stone is required as the façade stones have all turned gray due to pollution, and has chalking on two of its sides. The entrance door is also broken and needs repairing. The expertise of conservationist will be required to give the building its original outlook.

Relocation of Street Hawkers/ Redesigning Street Market in an Aesthetically Pleasing Manner:

The street hawkers are reluctant to move away from the site. The provision of a properly designed temporary market around or nearby will be ideal although this particular heritage site is considered as the ideal and acceptable for the hawkers. If such is provided, the stress on the heritage site will reduce, and will start making a positive and publicly viable impact.

Development of Planned Bus Stop

Considering the fact that the tower is located at an important junction, it is not possible to relocate the current bus stop. Therefore, it has been suggested that a planned bus stop be built near the tower in order to facilitate passengers. A transport management system will ensure that the streets do not get congested.

Reconstruction of the Streets

In order to facilitate the people of the locality visiting this magnificent place, the streets leading up to the Merewether Tower require upgrading to give the place an aesthetically pleasing look. This will also increase the business in the area and benefit the urban morphology.

Provision of Basic Amenities

The provision of toilets and drinking water will be essential to attract tourists and increase the number of visitors to the site. These amenities were once present, but are now dysfunctional.

Conclusions

The significance of heritage sites expands beyond the value of their monuments and artifacts. They have to be seen within a broader perception that relates to the tangible and non-tangible aspects of heritage. All of these aspects of heritage work, as creating community assets, can be utilized to benefit of communities. Revitalizing cultural heritage is a domain through which, the communities can connect with its cultural heritage assets. The basis of urban morphology depends on the quality of life in a given region, and includes several factors such as housing, infrastructure, beauty, environment as well as recreation. The main goal of developing Merewether Tower is to improve the beauty of the locality and give the residents a recreational space. The rejuvenation proposal includes a properly designed street market, a planned bus station and other supporting amenities as well as services that may be offered to divert the crowd from the site instead of removing them. This alone shows that the redevelopment of the Merewether Tower will bring about a major improvement in the morphology of the region. The advantages of such renovations are limitless. In the short-run, the place will notice a major change in the attitude and living standards of the people. However, in the long-run it will provide further benefit to the region as it develops aspects such as tourism and help increase in community's commerce. Therefore, the redevelopment of heritage sites is essential for the preservation of history, and for improving the morphology of the surroundings. The conservation of the Merewether Tower is not an option, but a must for the city. Ignoring it will result in the whitewash of an important part of the city's colonial history. This project requires significant effort, but the advantages are vast. By revitalizing – apart from being important

to the culture of the city – preservation of this tower will lead to an improvement in the lifestyles of the community in question. Improvement of ecology through providing a function of site as a space of social gatherings is also vital. Considering the fact that the city is growing in all directions, the redevelopment of this site will lead to the construction of a peaceful environment compared to what it is presently. This will lead towards a long-term harmony.

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