

Towards conscious recognition of 'Living Heritage'

Prepared Under The Guidance
of

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by

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Preamble:

Heritage is universal, endemic and is a fact of life for all living things. It lives through the DNA, frameworks of reference and in case of Homo Sapiens, also, in the form of rituals, cultural constructs, beliefs and more. It continues to live, change and evolve so does it mutate, transform and thrive. Almost each passing day throws up a situation when awareness of this heritage helps reach better responses to issues that arise.

No knowledgeable person would ever debate or doubt the facts of heritage. It is another matter that, it being common place, it lends itself to being ignored in factoring the elements which go into decision making. The broad truths of life being what they are, one has to be conscious of one's heritage. This is true for individual, groups, corporates, societies and indeed nations and human existence itself.

The concept of 'living heritage' has design constructs to help face the facts of life with a sense of realism and in true traditions of longitudinal thinking.

Perceptions of Living Heritage:

To have idea of the broad range of perceptions existing with people on living heritage, a brief brainstorming session was conducted and the collations made of their thoughts. In this the participants included, Deepika Ahlawat; Raju Mansukhani Sabina Bailey; Perry Garfinkel; Hazel Jain; Meredith Etherington-Smith; Jyoti Jasol; Mayank Gupta; Poonam Malhotra; Deepthi Sasidharan; Richard Hanlon; Shikha Jain and others.

Their ideas are reproduced below in a random order:

- "Living Heritage is an accretion of shared identities and experiences, of regional memories and local stories, of stone and brick buildings peopled with the smells and sounds of the past and the present."
- "Living heritage has the inherent distinctive dynamism to trigger development of modern facilities in ancient environments."
- "Living Heritage is precisely about preserving everything of value that teaches us to treasure our past in the present and to safeguard it for the future."
- "Living Heritage can be defined as a collection of practices, traditions, expressions, skills, and knowledge that are passed from one generation to the next. This understanding forms a complex system of knowledge that is unique to a particular population within a specific geographical area."
- "Living Heritage can neither be bought nor owned; it can only be inherited. It is universal, it has to be shared and is greatly cherished."
- "It is a compendium of constantly evolving knowledge handed down from generation to generation by stakeholders who in return from time to time share with everyone their experience with pride and respect."
- "Living Heritage is a commitment to community."
- "Living heritage: time past is time present and time present is time future. Living Heritage is the process of remembering understanding and re-purposing the best elements of the past to enrich the present and adding on to them with the eyes of the present and the future. Living Heritage should be inextricably woven into the traces of our ancestors' aspirations and achievements. Living Heritage should be a continuous process of adding to our existing heritage the very best elements which our contemporary eyes can visualise."

- "Living Heritage should reflect the aspirations which come from our souls, with which we reach out to build the future inheritance for our descendants."

Inevitably, reference to House of Mewar and Udaipur came in and the perceptions were as follows:

- " Living Heritage is not about monuments, palaces and museums. It is much more than that. It is about a way of life - the Indian way of life, the experience of our way of life - that needs to be understood and preserved. Living Heritage practised in Udaipur, Mewar is also about balance - a little understood concept. The Legacy of Mewar is about oneness of mind and body, mind and soul, body and environment and society at large. And finally, life is about evolving - like the soul discards a body and accepts a new form, so we also should evolve as Mewar evolved over 14 centuries."
- "Living heritage is the reincarnation' translating into 'regeneration' which is the essence of Indian way of conserving-the sutradhar."
- "Living Heritage is the Vision for the House of Mewar. While we work towards Living Heritage, we are already the guardians of all other types of Heritage as well. It is therefore important to define the integral point of amalgamating these diverse points together. For me, the important focal point would be 'Community'. 'Community' falls within the ambit of 'Living Heritage' yet it is dynamic, vibrant and evolving. To create something singular in Udaipur we have to create something that is 'community oriented' and 'community driven'. I feel this is the way forward to achieve a sustainable model for Living Heritage. All other areas of our work like heritage conservation, establishment of art object galleries, promotion of education, outreach activities, media focus, tourism will then contribute to 'Living Heritage' and the high principles of custodianship practiced by the House of Mewar."
- "Living Heritage needs a force to keep it alive someone who cares enough to put in the hours to make it happen. It does not stay living without the effort and the tools, ie the lands, buildings or outside interests to support the heritage where it cannot be self supporting."

Insight into The House of Mewar:

The Mewars embody the best of what it should mean. As you often say, one foot in the past, one in the present and with one eye on the future to make sure those things of value from the past endure into the future, not as bronzed memorials to the past, placed on shelves and dusted from time to time, but as living presences in our lives.

Mewar having been brought up as a concept more than as a geographical identity has recognized it over its last 1400 years of existence. This has helped it to become the living legend that it has become, as a complete entity. The model of Mewar is significant because it has given to the living legend of Mewar a sense of proprietorship to all who are of Mewar and believe in Mewar.

'Eternal Mewar' a brand of Living Heritage:

The challenge, therefore, for Shriji was to bring the different identities of inheritance under one umbrella.

Eternal Mewar was conceptualized to provide the vision for the 21st century, it expresses, embodies and encompasses the core values, principles and the legacy of the House of Mewar.

Eternal Mewar covers all the activities of the House of Mewar.

Eternal Mewar has also emerged as a unique heritage brand exemplifying hospitality, cultural preservation, philanthropy, education, sports & spirituality for global audiences.

Shriji Arvind Singh Mewar:

The present Custodian of Mewar, affectionately referred to as 'Shriji', is the 76th in the unbroken succession of Ranas going back to the 8th century A.D. He has captured this continuous reality and given it a context and meaning in contemporary terms.

The challenge for the current custodian was to find sustainable models to preserve this way of life, this culture that needs to be preserved, without being regressive, by being dynamic and looking into the future and integrating it into the future. Some fifteen years ago, Shriji began a process - part introspective, part cautious, that would eventually lead to defining a strategy for the growth and development of the House of Mewar; its significance and representation today and where can it go from here. For Shriji, it became imperative to seriously address these important issues and this comprehensive strategizing gave birth, in 1995, to the document 'Inheritance 76'. This treatise emerged as the first structured blue print of The Futuristic Master Plan for the House of Mewar.

From this emerged the concept of a City within a City, a fairly comprehensive solution to the issues of progress and expansion that had earlier irked ASM. The resolution so arrived upon, ultimately became this vision. Within The City Palace Complex in Udaipur this concept is witnessing the development of educational institutions, sports, academies, medical, technical and engineering colleges and centres for excellence in fine arts and performing arts. At the centre of the concept, lies the Maharana of Mewar Charitable Foundation that will facilitate and perpetuate this model. It is important to say that all the above models - from Inheritance 76 to Eternal Mewar were/are intended as strategies to sustain the Living Heritage of Mewar with changing times and, learnings from these models will feed into the 'Living Heritage Policy' now being evolved by MMCF.

Shriji is today focusing on the challenges that Udaipur will have to face in the future. "I am now concentrating my thoughts on developing a model of a Living Heritage that will also be a practical model of sustainable development." This concept takes away from singular cultural identification. In Udaipur, the endeavour is not to identify the city with any one particular monument, or any single concept and idea, however unique it may be. Udaipur is not merely a tourist destination. It is envisioned as the embodiment of a living heritage that is sustaining the essence of the past, yet continually updating itself with modern elements.

Shriji says "Today we are a living palace complex. Tomorrow I can see this idea grow to become a model of self-sufficient and self-reliant multifaceted enterprise that is able to generate revenues and meet the expectations of not just the people of Udaipur but also the international and national visitors who are coming to this historic city and contributing to its growth." He sees a tremendous synergy in the philanthropic and corporate activities of the House of Mewar. "In a word, we are here to serve," he says emphatically.

With his ability to convert practice into precepts and reconverting precepts into a practice by upgrading it, he has made Mewar the ultimate symbol of a living heritage. It is both forward looking and capable of handling contemporary challenges.

By a continuous adaptation and modification of the living heritage to applicational principle, Shriji has made Mewar and its living heritage something to look at very seriously, if one wants to survive, with identity, in the knowledge era.

If a man is known by his vision, then Arvind Singh Mewar's vision of a Living Heritage is set to earn him a rightful place as a befitting successor in the lineage of Bappa Rawal the founding father of the House of Mewar. It is a daunting task. "I realise that I will not be able to foresee its entire completion in my lifetime. I can, however, set an example that others may wish to follow in the future, a future that is so inextricably linked with the legacy of the past." says Arvind Singh Mewar.

A Possible Initiative of Promoting Concept of Living Heritage:

Prepared by Dr. Shikha Jain for MMCF - July 2012

LIVING HERITAGE OF MEWAR - An approach

1. Definitions

a) by UN Agencies

UNESCO (Convention 2003) has recognised living heritage in the context of 'Intangible Cultural Heritage (ICH)' which 'means the practices, representations, expressions, knowledge, skills - as well as the instruments, objects, artefacts and cultural spaces associated there with - that communities, groups and, in some cases, individuals recognize as part of their cultural heritage. This intangible cultural heritage, transmitted from generation to generation, is constantly recreated by communities and groups in response to their environment, their interaction with nature and their history, and provides them with a sense of identity and continuity, thus promoting respect for cultural diversity and human creativity.'

ICCROM, the Advisory Body to World Heritage Committee, UNESCO has recognized Living Heritage in promoting a people-centred approach to conservation. There is a growing demand for people-centered approaches to deal with many facets of heritage conservation including

- the recognition of the custodianship of people for the long-term care of heritage;
- the link of heritage to the sustainable development of society; and relationships with a wide variety of non-professionals.

b) The Living Heritage of Mewar

In words of Shriji Arvind Singh Mewar, the 76th Custodian of the House of Mewar: "The difference between heritage and living heritage is that while one is history the other is living, dynamic and changing and you need to embrace the change." Since 566 AD, the Mewar family has followed the timeless concept of Custodianship. This legacy commits the family to the principles of 'custodianship form of governance that has evolved through changing times' and 'continuity of the timeless traditions, rituals

and festivals of Mewar' thus ensuring the sustenance of the Living Heritage of Mewar.

2. Recognition and Promotion of 'Living Heritage of Mewar' and/or recognition of the 'Notion of Living Heritage'

The Living Heritage can be recognised at the UN Level in two possible ways:

a) UN Recognition of Living Heritage of Mewar:

Propose 'Eternal Mewar Festivals' or any other identified aspect of the Living Heritage (Music, Cuisine) of Mewar to be included in the Intangible Heritage List of UNESCO.

Minimum Time Period: 2 years

b) UN recognition of the 'Notion of Living Heritage': Target UN Recognition to celebrate a committed day in the year as a 'Living Heritage Day'.

Time Period: 2-5 years

Feasible Steps to achieve this:

Step 1: Organise National/ International Level Seminar in Udaipur in collaboration with the UNESCO New Delhi office, International Experts from Advisory Bodies of ICOMOS, IUCN and ICCROM to explore the definition and dimension of Living Heritage across India. (Scheduled 27th - 28th November 2012).

Step 2: Work out a calendar of events/ seminars/ forums in Udaipur and link it with parallel presentations on Living Heritage by MMCF in International UNESCO workshops on the subject.

Step 3: The official proposal for Living Heritage Day can be forward to the Director General UNESCO, Paris after creating sufficient momentum with Step 1 and Step 2.

This proposal can be taken forward in 2 ways:

i) The Proposal is forwarded collectively through NGO's and Advisory Bodies and presented to the Governing Council of UNESCO.

or,

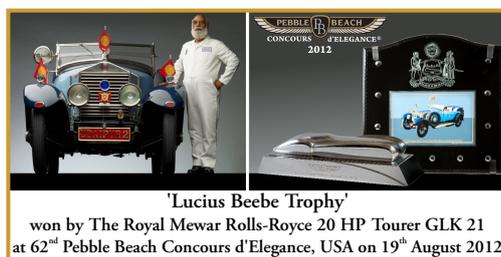
ii) The Proposal is forwarded with support of the Government of India through the Ministry of Culture and the Indian National Commission for Cooperation with UNESCO.

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सूर्यवंशी न्यास का ये रश्मि रथ चलता रहेगा।
पीदियों के रत्न में इसका सुरास पलता रहेगा।।
शिवि शुकुल की विसे शिव से विरासत में मिली हो।
अधियों में वह दिया जलता रत्न जलता रहेगा।।