South Asian Vernacular Architecture

Challenges to its Continuity and Strategies for its Future

CONFERENCE, COMPETITION, DEMONSTRATION AND EXHIBITION

10 - 13 December 2015

CHARTER

FOR THE PROPAGATION OF VERNACULAR CONVENTIONS FOR ARCHITECTURE IN SOUTH ASIA

13 December, 2015

This Charter is prepared in collaboration with the three organizations mentioned below, and the participants of the SAVA conference whose names are appended. We propose to disseminate, promote and pursue it collectively,

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CHARTER FOR THE PROPAGATION OF VERNACULAR CONVENTIONS FOR ARCHITECTURE IN SOUTH ASIA

- **Cognizant** of the need to release the energy locked in vernacular and its potential to meet consequences of the massive shortfall in the building stock needed to shelter society;
- **Aware** of the deteriorating quality of the urban and rural habitats due to the forces of iniquitous economic development and the impact of climate change on these habitats;
- **Recognizing** the paucity of human and material resources to meet the challenges of the regions' spatial needs;
- **Celebrating** the continuing saliency of the diverse vernacular architectural traditions of the various regions of South Asia;
- **Recognizing** the imperative to generate employment in the rural and non-formal sector of the economy;
- **Addressing** the problems created by the uncontrolled and distress migration of rural population to urban areas.

The School of Planning and Architecture, Bhopal (SPAB), the Indira Gandhi Rashtriya Manav Sangrahalaya, Bhopal (IGRMS) and the Indian Trust for Rural Heritage and Development, New Delhi (ITRHD) organized an International event from December 10th to 13th, 2015 on the theme of "South Asian Vernacular Architecture", with the intention of formulating guiding principles in the form of this Charter for the Propagation of Vernacular Architecture to undertake integrated habitat development in the region and meet the socio-economic aspirations of society. This document is the beginning of a dynamic process of collaborative consensus building.

A. ORIENTATION

- This Charter recognizes that vernacular architecture as a vital mode of cultural and environmental self determination and identity building for local communities. It is inclusive of cultural responses of communities to the geographical, natural, historical, environmental conditions that go into making of civilizational elements of collective life. The collective is such that what is good for the individual is also good for the collective and vice versa;

- It also acknowledges that these cultural responses are both of the tangible and non-tangible nature;

- It recognizes that cultures are a complex network of social, religious, crafts, technological, cultural, philosophical, economical characteristics of societies which form cultural landscapes, cultural routes, cultural markets collectively called civilization;

- It accepts that the existence of vernacular architecture is critically necessary to perpetuate cultural diversity both individually and collectively;

- It recognizes vernacular architecture as a product of sustainable human capital using material capital as building strategies and planning;

- It believes that vernacular architectures are living, vibrant, dynamic, relevant and appropriate forms of built environment both diachronically and synchronically;

- It understands that in an increasingly globalized world, the vernacular architecture traditions of the region provides the societies of South Asia with an opportunity to politically, culturally and sociologically confront its entropic forces of current forms of development.

B.   TERMS OF REFERENCE

- **Vernacular architecture** is a body of knowledge, symbols and plural traditions of building. It is used here in an inclusive way and embraces all indigenous, folk, and traditional and community architectural practices, from a single building to the entire settlement from forts, palaces and traditional engineering structures constructed out of local material and by indigenous people (singly or collectively) with their inherited knowledge of culture, materials, technologies and resources.

- **Pedagogy** is defined here as the process of linking vernacular architecture practice to theory, in a structured manner along the axis of field-text-studio.
- **Policy** is defined as guidelines that support frameworks for catalyzing vernacular initiatives to serve the future spatial needs of society.
- **Research** represents the contribution to existing knowledge on the subject of vernacular architecture through examination and scientifically accepted, replicable, testable methodologies and experiments.

- **Skills** means the knowledge-system of building embedded in local communities which enhances social, cultural, economic, environmental and political capacities.

- **Materials** means those building materials that are locally available in proximity to the building site.

- **Context** refers to those processes, including social, cultural, economic, environmental and political, which improve the quality of life of the local community in a sustainable manner.

C. CHARTER FOR THE PROPAGATION OF VERNACULAR ARCHITECTURE IN SOUTH ASIA

POLICY: TO INCLUDE

Article 1

Documentation: to Observe

1.1 Multi-disciplinary teams with the help of local communities should carry out the identification, documentation and classification (including typologies) of the different elements of the cultural landscape, to determine its value and relevance, and record the details of its forms, structure, materials and catalogue the use of crafts practices and its practitioners.

1.2 The documentation should identify the processes of evolution that have taken place and the current levels of its integrity and authenticity in comparison to known ideal types.

1.3 A directory of the human and material resources that exist to produce the vernacular architecture of the region should be prepared and mapped in a geographic database accessible to all stakeholders including women.

1.4   Documentation should also identify those practices and policies which are inimical to the sustainability of vernacular architecture of the region in order to inform future development strategies and mitigate their influence.

Article 2

Protection: to Identify

2.1   Identify and catalogue existing framework of laws and bylaws pertaining to building construction work:

a.   building bylaws and codes, including National Building Code, National Housing Policy etc;

b.   structural codes;

c.   fire and disaster mitigation codes;

d.   Schedule of Rates (SOR).

2.2   To maintain the cultural and environmental context of vernacular architecture, it is desirable to sustain and preserve its natural and traditional settings. This will require the appropriate modification of Town and Country Planning laws and regulations for the regulated development of the region.

2.3   Mechanism should be devised to ensure the availability of local materials to carry out vernacular architecture

activities.

2.4   Vernacular architecture gets its character and identity from the craft skills which have developed through traditional practice. Identification of craftsmen and transfer of their crafts to the next generation through appropriate training should be developed.

2.5   Vulnerability atlas should be produced to map vernacular architecture and inform decision-making relating to the development of land, particularly the destruction of Commons.

Article 3

Adaptation: to Reflect

3.1   To recognize the need for the vernacular architecture to remain relevant to the contemporary society, it is necessary to define the degrees of adaptation that could be practiced. These definitions should be made on case-specific basis by specialists.

3.2   The degree of intervention to be adopted should be defined by the specialists in consultation with the local community.

3.3   Solutions for emerging concerns such as disaster prevention, mitigation and post-disaster reconstruction and

retrofitting improvement, to the health and safety of inhabitants, should be developed with the help of local communities.

3.4   The changes which are implemented should be documented.

Article 4

Funding: to be Socially Accountable

4.1   There must be mechanism to fund (i) construction of new structures with vernacular traditions, material and technique, (ii) conservation of the existing vernacular structures with the traditional material and technique and (iii) adaptation of vernacular architecture in new materials and techniques. Mortgages should be made available for upgrading old buildings.

4.2   Special provision of funds should be identified for including research, dissemination of data, development of tools and technology and transfer of knowledge and skills.

4.3   Preservation and maintenance of vernacular architecture should be included in the regulations for Corporate Social Responsibility.

Article 5

New paradigm for development

5.1   Propose framework for integrating vernacular architecture in the development framework through multidisciplinary teams to produce the guidelines on structure, material and skill required to carry out the vernacular architecture activities in the contemporary milieu.

5.2   Legislations pertaining to the promotion of Panchayati Raj institutions and government sponsored schemes should include the promotion of vernacular architecture practices.

5.3   Planning in vernacular rich sites, landscapes, precincts and buildings should adopt sustainable practices prevalent in the area, and must have anthropologist/sociologist/planner as a member of the planning team.

5.4   All new development schemes in the vernacular rich sites, landscapes, areas, precincts and buildings should prepare Impact Assessment Studies to assess its potential to damage the vernacular heritage of the region.

5.5   Availability of appropriate material for reconstruction, maintenance, extension and continuation of vernacular architecture practices should be assured through specific policy intervention, if required.

5.6   Establish purpose oriented cells in existing administrative departments within the government to propagate vernacular architecture.

PRACTICE: TOWARDS THE ETHICAL

Article 6

Research and Documentation of Practice: to Enquire

6.1   Academic institutions should take the lead in promoting the practice of vernacular architecture, to meet the contemporary development needs of our society.

6.2   Institutions should develop inter-disciplinary projects and studies in the field of vernacular architecture

6.3   Regional centers should be developed to address issues of regional importance.

6.4   Best practices and innovations in vernacular construction methodologies should be identified, and information on them should be disseminated widely.

6.5   Guidelines on the principles of practice on vernacular architecture should be prepared based on research and documentation, and disseminated widely.

Article 7

Knowledge, Skills and Technologies:

7.1   Skills, and knowledge within the communities by master craftsmen, are key to the continuance of vernacular practices. A carefully drawn out new program of apprenticeship and scholarship should be formulated, and implemented for community youth in existing technical institutions at local level.

7.2   Cultural landscapes anchored by particular vernacular architectural traditions should be defined, and should form the guiding parameters of development of the region.

7.3   Concept of building centers as promoted by HUDCO and other such organization should be revised, reinvigorated and reintroduced into the mainstream of skill development program of the government.

7.4   Skilled craftsmen should be recognized as the living heritage of the country, and accorded with due recognition and certification.

7.5   An Encyclopedia of vernacular architecture should be taken up and drafted in all the vernacular languages.

7.6   Multimedia Programs should be produced to promote the practice of vernacular architecture in the different regions of the country.

7.7   Integration of traditional knowledge of vernacular architecture with the current researches and technology

should be accepted as a model of sustainable development.

7.8 Trans-generational knowledge should be recognized, documented and accorded with IPR protection to benefit the communities.

Article 8

Context and Sustainability: to Enrich the Social

8.1 Continuation of natural social and built environment critical to tangible and non-tangible cultural practices should be identified and protected through traditional/ modern methods.

8.2 Access to materials of vernacular architecture should be ensured.

8.3 Innovative research and development should be carried out to help use vernacular materials and practices scientifically and imaginatively for present and future spaces.

8.4 Rules regarding land use, zoning, FAR, etc. should be reviewed to accommodate the imperative to promote vernacular architecture.

Article 9

Funding: to Mobilize Awareness

9.1   Suitable methods of evaluation such as Schedule of Rates should include costs of materials and labour, with intention to facilitate bank loans, government grants and other funds..

9.2   Intervention in the present government sponsored rural housing schemes to incorporate funding to self-help vernacular housing.

9.3   Bank mortgages should be available to fund vernacular architecture projects.

PEDAGOGY: TO DISSEMINATE

Article 10

From Learning to Education

10.1 The vernacular architecture studies should form an important part of academics at all levels of the education spectrum in terms of theory, technology and practice.

10.2 Academic curriculum should be integrated with the vernacular architecture skills, material, knowledge and technology through apprenticeship, electives, full courses and short and long term training programs.

10.3 Well-documented techniques and technological studies on vernacular architecture of various cultural regions should form part of the curriculum of architecture, history, geography and cultural studies.

10.4 Tools for transfer of knowledge gained out of research on skills, materials, technology, contexts and sustenance through training of students and professionals should be developed.

10.5 Efforts should be made to engage master craftsmen in contemporary teaching practices.

10.6 Higher learning courses in vernacular architecture should be developed.

10.7 Authentic, empirical studies on historical and current settlements, environments, contexts and other aspects of vernacular architecture should be published extensively for referencing and promoting academic discourses.

10.8 References to such studies should form the backbone of all developments in areas of vernacular architecture and landscapes.

RESEARCH: TO DISCOVER

Article 11

11.1 An intense effort should be carried out to initiate, sponsor, conduct and stimulate research on vernacular architecture.

11.2 Well-developed scientific, anthropological and sociological based approaches should be used to develop appropriate tools, techniques, methodologies, laboratories and databases for research on all aspects of vernacular architecture, settlements, and for generating cultural and vernacular practices.

11.3 Institutes of higher learning and research should be involved in undertaking multi-disciplinary research and to address past, present and future issues of vernacular architecture.

11.4 Research should form the backbone of Policy, Practice and Pedagogy.

11.5 Research on vernacular architecture should be co-directed by the community representatives/experts.

ACTION PROGRAMME

Article 12

12.1   Detailed, phase wise action plan should be developed to pursue the objectives of the Charter and should be reviewed periodically.

12.2   A travelling exhibition on vernacular architecture should be mounted to spread wider awareness among societies.

12.3   Regional museums should be established to become repositories of the vernacular architecture assets of the region, and initiate research programmes.

CONTRIBUTERS: EXPERTS, STAKEHOLDERS GROUPS AND FACULTY FACILITATORS

Several stakeholders, expert members, coordinators and faculty members contributed for the SAVA Charter. They were involved in different stages for the collective participation and feedback in the preparation of the Charter.

EXPERT GROUPS

This includes artisans, researchers, policy makers, academicians, practicing professionals working with vernacular material and construction techniques, museum researchers curating vernacular architecture exhibitions and displays, multi-disciplinery experts, government and non-government organizations working with vernacular techniques and materials etc. They were involved before and during the preparation of the Charter. Groups have following members:

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I G R M S

Indian Trust for Rural Heritage
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