Restoration of Ahhichatragarh

Nagaur, India

Architects
Minakshi Jain
Ahmedabad, India

Clients
Maherangarh Museum Trust
Jodhpur, India

Commission
1993

Design
1998 - 2001

Construction
1998 - 2001

Occupancy
2001

Site
141,638 m²

Ground Floor
6,892 m²

Total Floor
8,103 m²

Costs
US$ 527,301

Programme
The Ahhichatragarh (or fort) of Nagaur is a large complex housing palaces, pleasure pavilions, gardens, courtyards, service buildings, temples, a mosque and an elaborate water system. After years of neglect, much of its historic spatial ambience has been restored through a conservation programme funded by the J Paul Getty Foundation and the Mehrangarh Museum Trust. The restoration has brought a private structure into the public realm. Tourist facilities have been discreetly introduced, and planned future activities include a crafts training programme, workshops in conservation and restoration, cultural performances, fairs and festivals.

Conservation and Restoration of Ahhichatragarh, the Fort of Nagaur
OBJECTIVES ACHIEVED:
The years 1999, 2000 and 2001 have dramatically changed the face of this monument. The Fort Complex of Nagaur is emerging as a significant landmark in its historic role as a center of culture, patronage, and community aspirations. Conservation has ensured longevity and historic ambience. It has brought back the possibility of rejuvenating the water systems, paintings and gardens. Conservation work took cognizance of future use, prompting introduction of modern tourist facilities discreetly. Now a tourist attraction and a live research site, activities such as crafts training, conservation seminars, cultural performances, workshops for children, fairs and festivals, can be conducted here. The capacity for transformation of architectural heritage embodied in the Ahhichatragarh Fort is tested for its suitability to become a museum city of tomorrow.

DAMAGED STATE, RESTORATION CONSIDERED AND JUSTIFIED:
The handsome complex at Nagaur had been deteriorating rapidly due to paucity of funds, inappropriate or non-use and neglect. Parts of the Fort wall were collapsing and encroachments around it were growing. The gardens, the grounds and the roofs were completely overgrown. Stone jaalis, parapets, chajjas, and jharokhas had fallen down. The unique historic water system and fountains no longer worked. There were structural and finishes’ damages. Beautiful wall and ceiling paintings were hidden under layers of whitewash. However, none of the buildings had collapsed totally; and so it was possible to conserve them.

CONSERVATION ISSUES AND APPROACH:
Conservation avoided clinging to a rigid or any single theory and opted for a multi-faceted exploration, sympathetic to the existing architecture. No major alteration or additions were to be made. The approach was in the spirit of minimum intervention. Accretions were removed, restoring historic ambience. The scope of conservation was extensive and varied, involving the historic nature of the buildings, damage, and future use. The work methodology was varied accordingly, from prevention of further deterioration to preservation, consolidation, restoration, stabilization or reconstruction.