Chapter 15

Leaving the buildings behind

Conflict, sovereignty and the values of heritage in Kashmir

Tim Winter and Shalini Panjabi

Given recent events in Iraq, Afghanistan and the Balkans, the role cultural heritage plays in post-war reconstruction continues to be seen as an important and complex issue that warrants critical attention. There is a growing recognition that heritage policies need to address a multitude of agendas, and extend their goals beyond the restitution of objects or the reconstruction of buildings and other structures. However, if cultural heritage is to be integrated within wider goals of post-conflict economic reconstruction and societal recovery, stronger ties need to be made with today’s humanitarian or developmental aid frameworks. This chapter explores the possibility of such links within the context of Srinagar, the capital city of Indian-administered Kashmir. In particular it focuses on the issue of housing as a focal point for understanding the interweaving cultural and economic rights of Srinagar’s citizens.

With the conflict in the region enduring for more than 15 years, the city – regarded as one of the most important pre-modern urban landscapes in South Asia – has suffered extensive physical damage. Nonetheless, Srinagar remains the cultural and political heart of a wider collective identity rooted in the Kashmir Valley. As such, it presents a rich example of a city that would strongly benefit from an approach that recognizes the intimate dialogue between the built environment and the socio-cultural and economic needs of the population. However, as we shall see, if the heritage of a city like Srinagar is to be discussed in more holistic, less fabric-based terms, addressing wider goals of cultural sovereignty, multi-culturalism or security poses unfamiliar questions and challenges.

Humanitarian heritage

Global media coverage of the destruction of the Mostar Bridge in 1993 powerfully reminded the world about the impact war and conflict can have on sites of historical, religious or architectural value. Indeed, not since the Second World War and the widespread destruction of Europe’s cities has so much attention been paid to the destruction of the built environment and the enterprise of its reconstruction. For Barakat (2005b), this ‘reawakening’
occurred because the Balkans conflict became ‘a personalized war’ for the Western media as it took place in a region where Europeans and North Americans took their holidays. Paralleling, and interfacing with, this renewed media interest has been a steadily evolving heritage discourse – both in academia and policy – that has sought to grapple with the difficult relationships between heritage and episodes of war, genocide and armed conflict. The 1954 Hague Convention on the Protection of Cultural Property in the Event of Armed Conflict remains the definitive mechanism and point of reference for safeguarding heritage sites threatened with destruction. Its widespread ratification, of course, has not prevented buildings, sacred objects or artworks being damaged or destroyed. The Dome of the Rock in Jerusalem or Babri Masjid in Ayodhya are two notable examples of the many places that have become the focal point of inflamed hostilities or tensions in recent decades. In reflecting upon the challenges such places pose, Bevan (2006) and Chamberlain (2005) illustrate why creating effective strategies for protecting cultural heritage sites during times of conflict remains a difficult and sometimes illusive problem.

The threats of destruction or desecration are not the only challenges war poses to the heritage community. Equally problematic is the ‘commemoration’ of past atrocities and other difficult histories. Prolonging the memory of oppression, injustices or the loss of lives has long been the responsibility of the memorial or the preserved symbolic structure. Indeed, while the popularity of this genre perhaps reached its zenith in the aftermath of the First World War, parks, walls of honour, statues, museums or iconic ruins endure as universally adopted devices for capturing – or indeed in some cases invoking – a national or personal memory. Invariably these spaces or structures are set aside from the everyday; demarcated as sites of reflection, contemplation and peaceful tranquillity (Beazley 2007; Kirschenblatt-Gimblett 1998). Enduring debates surround the effectiveness of material culture as lieux de mémoire. Forty and Küchler (2001), for example, point towards the role forgetting plays in the process of commemoration. Robert Bevan’s (2006) book The Destruction of Memory also provides us with a historical panorama of such themes. As Bevan reminds us, the loss of memories caused by the destruction of architecture can in fact sometimes be an essential step towards reconciliation and the reduction of hostilities.

In these studies we begin to see one of the two themes that dominate academic analyses addressing the relationship between heritage and episodes of war and conflict. Reflections on memory form part of an ongoing conversation about the value of destruction and restoration at the symbolic level, and the impact of such efforts on group identities. Operating at a more technical ‘fabric’-based level, other heritage studies have discussed the legal dimensions of heritage protection and the merits of different conservation ‘philosophies’. Given the sustained attention given to the symbolic level, it is not surprising to find that academics, along with planners, consultants and
architects have all concentrated on sites pertinent to ‘collective identities’, to use Stanley-Price’s (2007) term. The restoration of mosques, temples, statues or bridges is often seen as a powerful metaphor for a wider socio-cultural restoration. Moreover, projects undertaken in Bosnia, Sri Lanka and Cambodia have shown why a sensitivity towards the various symbolic values communities impart on sites is absolutely vital if reconstruction is to be used as a positive tool for reconciliation (Wijesuriya 2007; Winter 2007).

Whilst not denying the validity of such efforts, Ascherson (2007), however, suggests that the attention given to sites of ‘collective identity’ is somewhat misplaced. He argues there is very little evidence to show that collective identities are actually dissolved or undermined through the destruction or deliberate attacking of symbolically important sites. He states ‘assaults on group identity through cultural destruction, in short, very seldom work’ (Ascherson 2007: 22). Writing in After the Conflict, Barakat (2005b) builds upon this idea, arguing that greater attention needs to be given to the reconstruction of everyday structures, ones that combine functional and cultural importance. For Barakat efforts to protect or restore domestic residencies can be a highly effective tool for creating a sense of personal security and local ‘ownership’ over a post-conflict reconstruction process; both of which, he suggests, are critical factors for successful intervention programmes. Refugees from Afghanistan and Palestine who keep keys for decades are also cited as an example of the important role played by the home as a marker of memory and cultural continuity.

Similarly, within his analysis of the restoration of the built environment in post-conflict societies, Zetter claims domestic housing is of paramount importance for re-establishing a sense of socio-cultural security (Zetter 2005: 156). In shifting the attention away from structures that symbolically capture or project a collective identity towards structures like domestic housing, both Barakat and Zetter place great emphasis on understanding the connections between the built environment and their surrounding social, institutional and political contexts. This is deemed crucial if interventions targeting the physical infrastructure are to operate at multiple levels and achieve multiple ends. Indeed, Zetter’s focus on housing is underpinned by a concern for addressing the economic and social security rights of citizens. In harmony they suggest, however, that this is rarely achieved due to the emphasis given to technocratic approaches. As Zetter states:

By focusing on lower order deliverables and measurable outputs – e.g. contract completions, costs per housing unit, buildings restored – physical reconstruction projects have frequently failed to address or measure progress towards the ‘higher order’ objectives which they serve such as reintegration, social and civil society development, economic needs and strategies for peace.

(Zetter 2005: 160)
In order to achieve these ‘higher order’ goals he identifies four essential parameters that need to be followed: ‘building a strategic framework; linking relief and rehabilitation to recovery and development; rebuilding institutional capacity; enabling and empowering people as key resources in these processes’ (Zetter 2005: 160). Clearly, in making such assertions, these authors call for a better integration between reconstruction programmes focusing on the built environment, including heritage structures, and the wider agendas of post-conflict humanitarian aid.

This chapter considers some of the implications of adopting such an approach for the urban landscape of Srinagar, Kashmir. Of course, given that ‘the Kashmir question’ remains an emotive and violent one, it would be misleading to approach Srinagar today as a post-conflict space undergoing regeneration and restoration. Equally, however, treating the city as a frozen space ensnared by violence and tension would miss the everyday shifts between decay and regeneration, abandonment and reoccupation, and hostility and reconciliation. Our analysis is also given impetus through the voices of Srinagar’s residents, who desire to look to the future rather than merely waiting for the conflict to subside; sentiments that Barakat neatly abstracts and sees as universal:

Post-war reconstruction begins in the hearts and minds of those who suffer the horrors of war and want to change societies so that there is no return to mass violence. For them planning for reconstruction often begins during conflict and is an essential part of negotiating their way towards peace.

(Barakat 2005a: 1)

For Barakat then, cultural heritage needs to form part of a vision for development and societal reconstruction that is planned for in advance. The vernacular heritage of Srinagar’s old city presents a number of valuable opportunities here. As one of South Asia’s most intact pre-modern urban landscapes, its extensive housing stock represents a heritage resource that can help strengthen a sense of security and participation among the city’s residents. Indeed, if we follow the arguments of Barakat and Zetter, any intervention towards conserving the historic architecture will be most effective if it forms part of a humanitarian effort that is geared towards peace and stability. This means, by implication, that an outside intervention would not claim neutrality in the conflict, but instead orient itself towards human rights concerns. In such a context heritage becomes part of an agenda promoting economic and physical security, financial independence and a right to a choice of housing. According to Zetter, prioritizing the issue of housing to achieve such goals is warranted because it ‘constitutes social capital and an important and cultural commodity which reflects the rights of people to live where they choose’ (2005: 156). Clearly then, if we are to take the con-
ervation of Srinagar’s heritage in such directions a number of logistical and philosophical issues need to be addressed. The remaining sections of this chapter sketch out some of these challenges.

**Srinagar – ‘perhaps the most threatened yet valuable site in India’**

The World Monuments Fund (WMF) has declared the old city of Srinagar as ‘perhaps the most threatened yet valuable site in India’, placing it on its 2008 List of Most Endangered Sites.¹ As the capital city of Indian-administered Kashmir, and the political, economic hub of the Kashmir Valley, Srinagar has a rich and extensive vernacular heritage. Situated in a mountainous valley, and oriented around the Jhelum River and many lakes, most notably the Dal Lake, the city has a unique material culture comprised of houseboats, wooden bridges, mosques, bazaars and hundreds of wooden houses. It is also home to some of the finest and most elaborate Mughal gardens in the region (Khan 2007).

Records indicate that Srinagar has existed as a settlement from at least the third century BC. Not surprisingly, the built environment today reflects a long, complex history of shifting religious, cultural and political influences. Around the time the city was established, Buddhism was being introduced to the Kashmir Valley by emperor Ashoka. By the end of the fourteenth century Hindu and Buddhist rule came to an end across the Kashmir Valley as the region came under the control of various Muslim rulers, including the Mughal emperor Akbar. It later came under the influence of the Sikhs and then the Hindus, after the treaty of 1846 between the British and the Dogra rulers of neighbouring Jammu (Zutshi 2003). The Dogra rulers discriminated in various ways against the Muslim populace, and the anger against this rule intensified when the Dogra ruler Hari Singh acceded, under pressure, to India in 1947 – when the country gained independence and was partitioned. With India reneging even on the limited promises of autonomy, and with support from Pakistan, the movement turned violent in 1989. For the next 16 years, the valley was caught in a web of intensive and horrific violence. The situation has been returning to ‘normalcy’ in recent years, though the political situation remains largely unchanged.

Srinagar, as a physical space, remains unique in various ways. Set at a high altitude in a mountainous valley, a lot of the architecture of the city is oriented towards either the Jhelum River or one of the lakes. There are wooden bridges and bathing areas (ghats) along the river, apart from the numerous old and beautifully crafted houseboats that, while they are a favourite of the tourists, are also home to many residents of the city. The long, joint rows of timber and masonry structures, with their sloping roofs and carved windows and doors, create a cityscape that is quite different from any other. At the crossroads of various civilizations, Srinagar has a rich cultural past that is
reflected in its many mosques, shrines, temples, grand houses, gardens and bazaars. As Langenbach states:

Srinagar, and other cities and villages in Kashmir are distinguished today for more than their monumental buildings and archaeological sites – they are unique in the world for their vernacular residential architecture. It is an architecture generated out of a distinctive use of materials and way of building, but in the modern world it is being rapidly displaced by reinforced concrete and other modern materials and systems.

(Langenbach 2007: 9)

Located in an area prone to earthquakes, the traditional, vernacular architecture of Srinagar is also noted for its resilience to seismic activity. In describing this earthquake-resistant vernacular construction, Langenbach identifies two distinct styles: *taq* and *dhajji dewari*. Although not specifically a Kashmiri term, *taq* refers to a type of building that employs a system of ladder-like horizontal timbers bedded into masonry-bearing walls. These timbers ensure the brick, mud or stone of the walls are held in place and tied into the wooden floors. Whereas the Persian term, *dhajji dewari*, literally meaning ‘patch quilt wall’, refers to a style of panelled construction comprised of tightly packed wood and masonry (Langenbach 2007). Characterized by hundreds of structures built from these two construction styles, the ‘old city’ remains a remarkable example of a large, relatively intact, historic urban landscape; one that endures as a dynamic ‘living’ city characterized by residences and shops in use today that have been passed on through generations.

It should also be noted that, in other respects, the ‘old city’ remains similar to other old urban settlements in South Asia. It is a crowded space characterized by narrow, winding lanes and buildings abutting each other, with a mix of residential, commercial and religious structures. The city consists of many *mohallas* (quarters or neighbourhoods), demarcated variously by trades and communities. Some *mohallas* are identified as Shia Muslim or Hindu, and the streets and bazaars are often distinguished by the predominance of one trade like silverware or spices or utensils (Khan 2007).

The ongoing conflict has had a paradoxical impact on the architecture of the old city, with some areas being destroyed while others have actually been preserved by the war. The political and economic isolation of the region since the early 1990s has meant Srinagar has not witnessed the modernization and ‘concretization’ that has become commonplace in other Indian cities. However, this isolation, along with the ongoing conflict and resultant economic ‘poverty’ has also meant the old city lies in a bad state of disrepair with hundreds of buildings literally crumbling away (Figures 15.1 and 15.2). The civic infrastructure too has been neglected through this period, and the river and the lakes need to be urgently revived. The reclamation of waterways has also occurred at a more rapid pace, and with roads being built
Figure 15.1 Residential structures along Jhelum River, Srinagar (Tim Winter).

Figure 15.2 Abandoned houses, central Srinagar (Tim Winter).
over canals, it becomes a challenge to interpret the overall layout of the city
today. Quite simply, as one of the most important historic cities in South
Asia, an urban landscape of immense cultural and architectural significance,
Srinagar urgently requires far greater attention than it has received to date.

At this point it is worth noting the prevailing factors that have contrib-
uted to the neglect of Srinagar as a heritage site, as they will undoubtedly
continue to inhibit the development of any heritage discourse in the coming
years. Since 1990 the city has been the site of sustained violent conflict. The
conflict has still not been resolved, and the Kashmir Valley remains tense
with regular incidences of violence. Naturally the preservation of the past is
considered a relatively low priority for both residents and local bureaucrats
who are understandably more concerned with the everyday challenges of
living in a conflict zone. Moreover, as a pivotal political and symbolic hub of
the Kashmir Valley, Srinagar acts as an epicentre of the disputed territory of
Jammu and Kashmir. This means that the material culture of the old city is
a place that constantly reminds residents of past hostilities and enmities,
bereavements and regrets. And as we shall see shortly, the governance and
stewardship of the built environment have contributed to the contours of the
conflict.

Currently administered as part of India, Srinagar falls under the remit of
the country’s national heritage programme. However, in recent decades the
principal focus of the heritage movement in India has been directed towards
the monuments and religious structures of ‘classical’ eras. While organiza-
tions like the India National Trust for Art and Cultural Heritage (INTACH)
have endeavoured to widen the scope and time frames of the heritage dis-
course in the country, vernacular, wooden architecture less than two centu-
ries old remain low on the list of conservation priorities. In the case of
Srinagar, this means that whilst the World Monuments Fund has identified
what they refer to as the ‘Srinagar heritage zone’, no such legal or policy
frameworks exist on the ground. In 2005 INTACH completed a cultural
resource-mapping report, and although this has provided a comprehensive
documentation of the heritage of the city and its environs, little progress has
been made towards developing some sort of legislative or protective
framework.

The political situation in Kashmir also creates major obstacles for inter-
tentions by the international heritage community. As an important step
towards any future policy UNESCO produced a lengthy report in 2007 enti-
tled Guidelines for Preserving the Earthquake-Resistant Traditional Construc-
tion of Kashmir (see Langenbach 2007). However, any move towards adding Srin-
agar to the World Heritage List or List of Endangered Sites would require its
nomination by the State Party, i.e. India. For Kashmiris seeking autonomy
for the region, or its accession to Pakistan, any collaboration between Delhi
and a United Nations organization such as UNESCO would be politically
charged. Indeed, any such interventions are likely to be seen as attempts to
further integrate Srinagar within an Indian national heritage, and as such be regarded as a threat to the cultural and political sovereignty of the region.

Clearly, the all-enveloping context of the Kashmir dispute presents a series of significant obstacles to the development and implementation of any effective heritage programme. This does not, however, mean that progress cannot be made. The recent initiatives undertaken by INTACH, UNESCO and WMF noted above indicate the real urgency for raising awareness and resources for heritage conservation. However, as the following two sections illustrate, if a cultural heritage programme is to be developed which achieves ‘higher order goals’ to use Zetter’s term, then it needs to be incorporated into the wider agendas of a humanitarian conflict-transformation effort.

Crafting stabilities

For the residents of Srinagar the violent period of the conflict is a continual reference point. Discussions on most matters veer to the situation pre-militancy as compared to post-militancy. It was – and is – a conflict that has affected all sections of society and physically impacted upon the built and the natural environment in various ways. This is apparent all around today: in the accelerated reclamation of the Dal Lake, in the bunkers and the sandbags on nearly every road, and even in the surge in construction activity in the suburbs – that ironically is fuelled by money made by some sections in the conflict. The ‘old city’ though has been the area most affected.

As the physical and ideological hub of the movement against the Indian state, it bears many scars from the years of violence. Most of the demonstrations and police action centred on this area, and many structures also suffered extensive damage from battles between militants and the police, and between different militant factions. A few prominent Sufi shrines were gutted, amidst conflicting allegations between the militants and the armed forces. However, even as the ‘old city’ was emerging as the focal point of the conflict, it was losing its vitality as the social and commercial centre of the valley.

A critical event here was the departure of Hindu residents in early 1990, many of whom fled because of the conflict. Perhaps most significantly, the departure of Kashmiri Pandits – a Hindu minority indigenous to the Kashmir valley and strongly in favour of Indian rule – altered the fabric of the city in various ways. After a spate of selected killings and deadly threats being issued by the Islamic militants, most Kashmiri Pandits abandoned their houses and fled en masse from the valley over the course of a few days. Many of them had occupied high positions in the bureaucracy and in educational institutions, and their social and cultural impact was always disproportionate to their numbers in the valley. They had a significant presence in Srinagar’s old city and some of the most beautiful houses belonged to them. Many neighbourhoods have been strongly affected by the exodus of the
Pandits, and in various ways they have lost their original character and purpose, despite not having changed much physically. Officially, tenuous hopes are still held that the Pandits will return, and so in a sense any redevelopment is in abeyance. However, the Pandits are highly unlikely to ever return and they have begun selling their houses over the last couple of years. In many cases, their erstwhile Muslim neighbours, who need the space to accommodate their growing families and start new businesses, are buying the houses. To some the abandoned houses also represent a commercial opportunity, waiting to be exploited. In consonance with the needs of the new owners, many houses are being altered substantially, often beyond recognition.

The situation is complicated further by a deep ambivalence that characterizes many reactions to the flight of the Pandits. With most Muslim families in the city too having suffered deeply through the conflict, they may on the surface seem unbothered about the Pandits’ plight. However, almost any discussion on the issue evokes a sense of sorrow – and even guilt at their helplessness to reassure their neighbours and friends, and prevent them from leaving at the time. There is nostalgia in Kashmir today of a time when different communities lived together harmoniously. The loss of the Hindus is bemoaned in various ways; it is a loss of a way of life as remembered. This also gets intertwined with a general sense of despair and sorrow in the valley, and is seen by the Kashmiris as an indication of troubled times. However, concurrently all the residents of the city also feel a need to move on, and to begin rebuilding their lives. The rows of abandoned, dilapidated Pandit houses, unlikely to be ever reoccupied by their owners, are a poignant sight, and to many in Srinagar the continuous reminder is also painful. Coupled with the shortage of housing space in the old city, this results in the desire to reclaim and possess these old houses. If these aspirations and rights for personal security are respected and duly considered, the challenges to conservation are many. Often as new owners take occupation of these properties structural changes are made for practical reorganization reasons. Such moves that create a rupture between the past and present represent a major obstacle for conservation.

Across the city, the Indian army has also occupied a significant number of historical structures over the last 16 years to accommodate the large number of troops in the valley. Throughout this period these structures have remained off limits for local residents. Among these are the many Mughal inns and other fortifications, including the prominent fort of Hari Parbat in the heart of Srinagar. The fort is perched on the top of a hill and commands a good view of the city, which makes it a strategic vantage point (Figure 15.3). As part of recent efforts at normalization, the army has just begun to cede control over the fort. Kashmiris have consistently resented the occupation of these structures, which for them are tangible embodiments of their rich past. There has also been little involvement of Kashmiris in even the
small efforts at conservation undertaken by the Indian government and its armed forces. The *Vienna Memorandum on Historic Urban Landscapes* is pertinent here as it advocates ‘a vision on the city as a whole with forward-looking action on the part of decision-makers, and a dialogue with the other actors and stakeholders involved’ (UNESCO 2005: 3). In essence the memorandum recommends replacing ‘top-down’ approaches to conservation with initiatives that foreground community consultation and a more open mode of governance. Such an approach seems particularly appropriate for developing heritage policy frameworks that attend to the layered socio-cultural histories of Srinagar. However, in a situation of continued conflict and tension, how can such a dialogue be fruitfully undertaken? With an ever-shifting political landscape and a multitude of voices, whose position should be privileged is a question that will need to be confronted in some way. Moreover, how can calls for restoration and preservation be made relevant to a population living in a conflict zone, struggling to lead a ‘normal’ life?

Despite such obstacles, the distinct cultural identity of Srinagar and its pivotal role within the history of the Kashmir Valley strongly point towards the importance of establishing a heritage discourse that captures the ‘character’ and ‘life’ of its urban environment: the elements which together constitute its distinct sense of place. As we have seen, however, Srinagar equally illustrates the significant challenges that arise when that sense of place is politically charged and associated with a violent conflict. Indeed, for many of
Srinagar’s residents, it is an urban cultural landscape that has become intimately tied to their right to claim cultural and political sovereignty – a Kashmiri identity distinct from neighbouring India and Pakistan.

**Negotiating regeneration and modernity**

Given that this identity has become intimately linked to years of violent struggle, the dominant mood in the valley today is of gloom. It is the sadness that comes from the trauma of nearly two decades of violence, made worse by the realization that it has largely been futile. The Kashmiris have not gained any major political concession and are no closer to autonomy than they were in 1989 – and many of them hold the militants responsible, as much as the Indian and Pakistani governments for this mess. The need to move on now and rebuild their lives is thus constantly expressed. The consciousness of what it has ‘cost’ them is made more acute by the rapid economic development in India through precisely this period, a developmental curve that has physically and socially transformed many cities. There is a strong desire now to catch up, and go the way these cities have gone – with shopping malls, concrete houses and industries. The residents also aspire to the revival of certain trades and forms of commerce that gave the city’s neighbourhoods their distinctive character. There is no desire to freeze the city as an architectural museum. The cultural identity of the Kashmir Valley captured in the urban landscape of Srinagar is inextricably bound up in its histories of business and commerce. The regeneration of the city’s commercial infrastructure and the resultant modernization will thus lead to another set of challenges. If these aspirations and the right to economic security are to be respected, and thus approached as a ‘place’ inextricably tied to the dreams and hopes of residents, then any heritage policy will have to contend with these shifting needs.

It was noted earlier that since the beginning of the violence the city has been insulated from rapid economic development. As such it provides a rare example in the subcontinent of a pre-modern city that has not been overcome by concrete and steel. But with stability new conflicts arise, and old ones raise their head again. It is clear that while the violent conflict has impacted the city in various ways, it is not the only reason for the neglect of Srinagar’s traditional architecture. Many of the issues around the conservation of Srinagar’s ‘old city’ are not much different from those facing other old city centres across India, and precede the conflict by decades. Like elsewhere, the city’s vernacular architecture was neglected in the years prior to the conflict. Many structures were allowed to go to ruin, in other cases they were rebuilt in a new style, and encroachments were not controlled. This has been the general story throughout India: there is lack of urban planning, and when people sell out or renovate their houses or shops, the aspiration is invariably towards the new – with concrete replacing wood and masonry. The strong desire to modernize leads to the old often being equated with
‘poor’ and ‘backward’. The consciousness of heritage is also often missing, and the maintenance of old structures comes at considerable cost. Indeed, rebuilding houses using ‘modern’ construction materials such as brick and concrete is considerably less expensive (Figure 15.4). Modern materials have also become a metaphor for the modernization of the urban environment, and thus the economic recovery of its communities.

Moreover, there are logistical problems with materials not being available and skills in various crafts having been lost. Discussions with the owner of the Jalali Haveli, a Persian-style grand mansion located near Srinagar’s old city, indicated that he is currently unable to secure the craftsmen capable of repairing the intricate woodwork of the windows. The decisions are not just difficult for individuals; governments too have tended to override calls for preservation. A notable instance here is the large stone-lined Nalla Mar Canal, which was distinctive for the arched bridges and the many fine, old houses lining its sides. In the 1970s, it was covered over with a road built on top. The bridges and most of the houses were demolished too. When discussing Srinagar’s heritage today, many older residents lament its destruction. In this respect, we can see the ‘conflict of progress versus preservation’ was apparent in the city long before the political conflict turned violent (Langenbach 1982).

![Figure 15.4 Housing with modern construction materials and techniques (Tim Winter).](image)
Conclusion

Given the years of violence such issues and tensions receded into the background. However, with some semblance of ‘normality’ being restored, they are re-emerging with a stronger force. In essence the complex situation in Srinagar today is characterized by two distinct and divergent trends. On the one hand, there is a desire for maintaining the unique political and cultural identity of the city and the Kashmir Valley. As we have seen, however, there is also a widespread desire for economic and social mobility – for modernization and a sense of inclusion in the wealth and prosperity enjoyed elsewhere in India. The residential architecture of the ‘old city’ is enmeshed by these two desires. To fully appreciate such processes it is thus necessary to develop a cross-disciplinary approach that directly connects cultural heritage with other spheres of conflict transformation; an approach that enables heritage to contribute to the economic and political stabilities of conflict-affected communities, the reconstruction of their civic identities, poverty alleviation and the harmonization of community relations. The reconstruction of the urban environment, including domestic housing, can precipitate the revival of trust and dialogue within and across Srinagar’s communities.

As Logan (2008: 439) states, ‘local communities need to have a sense of “ownership” of their heritage; this reaffirms their worth as a community, their sense of going about things, their “culture”’. Indeed, in recalling the arguments made by Zetter and Barakat seen earlier, it is apparent that the city’s residents must become the ‘curators’ of their environment, whereby a heritage consciousness emerges through initiatives that prioritize community-driven reconstruction.

Notes

1 For further details see: www.worldmonumentswatch.org, accessed on 20 November 2007.
2 For further details see: www.intach.org/architectural_heritage.asp, accessed on 20 November 2007.

References


