


INTANGIBLE INDRAPRASTHA 5

Reviving Glorious Past

A fresh initiative is needed to present Indraprastha in its entire political perspective, ancient global significance and reviving memories of several historic places

■ **Neera Misra**

“In the great books of India, an empire spoke to us, nothing small or unworthy, but large, serene, consistent, the voice of an old intelligence, which in another age and climate had pondered and thus disposed of the questions that exercise us,” said American Author RW Emerson. It is from one such great book, *Mahabharata*, (and of course from *Indrapath Mahatam*) that we know about the glorious legacy and significance of the empire of Pandavas and their beautiful city Indraprastha. We learn not just why, when and how this politically powerful city and kingdom was established, but also how it was administered. The *Rajadharma Parva* under *Shanti Parva* of *Mahabharata* discusses the duties of a king and in the process it discusses several aspects of state policy, governance and administration.

Such imperial majesty and its legacy have to shower its light in more tangible terms. The antiquity and significance of Indraprastha has been well known and established by renowned scholars. It is also a natural premise that to sustain the life of any ancient civilisation one needs to nourish and strengthen its roots. Even though our archaeologists have worked long, with much dedication, to show us the sequence of civilisations that existed here, it is a sad state of affairs that we are unable to actually see or experience this real antiquity of Indraprastha at its prime location of Purana Quila. Any visitor here

sees and hears only about medieval period, giving rise to false sense of history and umpteen misperceptions about its real personality and characteristics.

General visitors to our national capital see structures dating back to a few hundred years, creating wrong chronological perception. Seeing is believing. Thus it is imperative to showcase the real Indraprastha of our remote past here, restore its identity, and preserve it well and meaningfully for posterity too. This Knowledge, Culture and History of Ancient Bharat, and its capital city deserve special attention and ‘care’, its influence being invaluable and immeasurable in Asia and South East Asia.

The real history of our nation and its cities has not just been submerged under medieval and modern concrete, but also either erased or is found in minuscule in text books. This has deprived generations of knowing little or nothing about Indraprastha. The Purana Quila, or Indrapath Quila, as noted in Sultanat era books, can tell its own tale, and that of our capital, if only we manage to let it speak from the ‘depths’ of its heart.

There are many challenges in reinstating this grand ‘intangible’ city, considering its consistent damage through centuries of political upheavals and calamities. But its deep rooted foundation has helped it survive with its own intrinsic strength, ensuring possibilities of revival. We just have to nourish its roots with tender care, and provide it an opportunity to share its

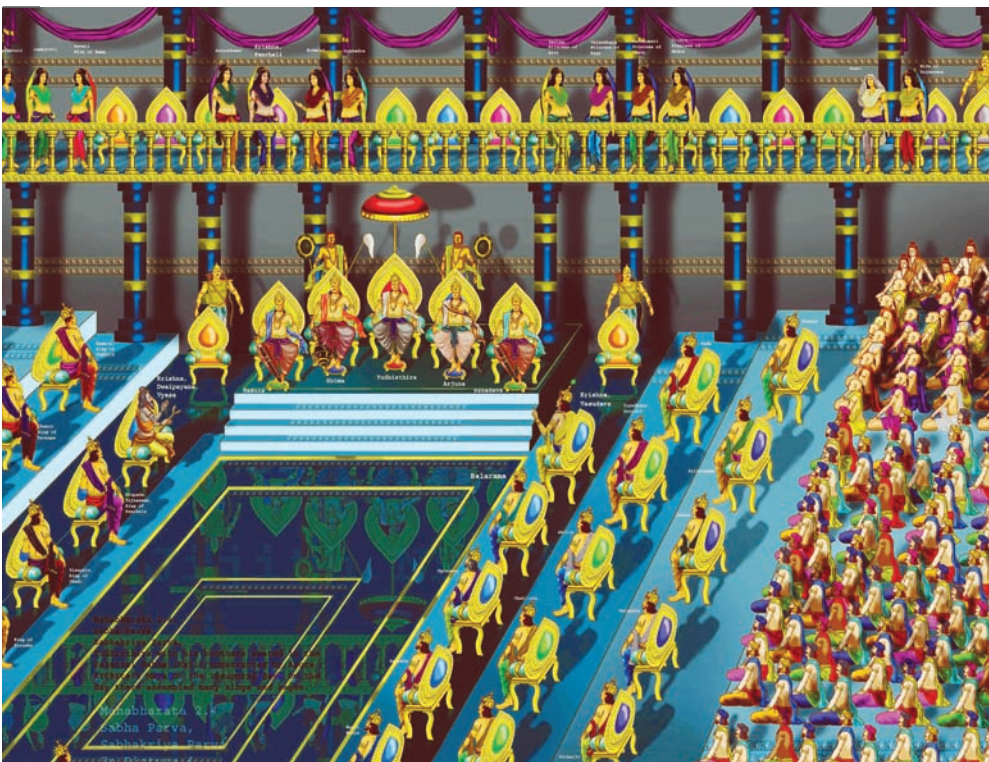


August Gathering at Yudhishtira's Coronation

story. “Cities were always like people, showing their varying personalities to the traveler,” says Roman Payne, in *Cities & Countries*. Only through travel we can know where we belong...

Daniel Libeskind has said, “Cities are the greatest creations of humanity.” Indraprastha stands out as the City of Cities, the most noteworthy creation of Pandav brothers and Vasudeva Krishna. Should not such a precious place be honoured, and as a tribute, be recognised, restored and reinstated to its original glorious status?

How do we showcase the first planned city of our National Capital Territory? The first important step is the political will to support our efforts in this direction. The ground level work being accomplished by our archaeologists, next step requires the Archaeological Survey of India (ASI), under the Ministry of Culture, to play its key role. All significant sites of ancient period fall under the ‘protected site’ list of ASI. In the specific case of reviving and showcasing Indraprastha, it is essential to re-expose the structures which were once excavated and then filled up. Exposure of those structures would show the continued cultural sequence of Indraprastha, at least for 3,000 years, if not more. The



tion at Indraprastha. An artistic impression by Jijith N Ravi, a WIPRO Executive in Bengaluru



controlled environment. Connecting Indrapath Quila to other related ancient sites will give a wider perspective about the dimensions of the past affluence.

Besides creating a platform for improved knowledge base, the archaeological exposure will facilitate in strengthening our case for Heritage Tag for our Capital City. The whole world knows and now accepts that our civilisation is thousands of year old, not few hundred years old. It was incorrect and politically mischievous to ask for Heritage Tag based merely on medieval buildings of our capital, as was being tried some years back.

We have wasted millions in terms of precious money and time due to the misperceived interpretation of our past. A fresh initiative to present our capital city in its entire political vicissitudes, its ancient global significance, reviving several old places and blending the various eras into a journey of enriching cultures will bring out the 'Indra-dhanush' colours of this immortal Indraprastha. This will make for a strong case for Indraprastha World Heritage City, the real capital of Bharat.

William Arthur had said, "Opportunities are like sunrise, if you wait too long you may miss them." This is an opportunity to honour Indraprastha. Our archaeologists have made it possible for us. This is also the city that identifies with our core principles of Karma and Dharma, the inspiration of the Bhagwat Gita. Let us face truth about Indraprastha and make the intangible, tangible.

"You take delight not in a city's seven or seventy wonders, but in the answer it gives to a question of yours." (Italo Calvino, *Invisible Cities*). Indraprastha gives us the answer of our identity, our originality, beliefs. Not just this, but all famous cities of Mahabharata and Vedic era are representatives of what Bharat stands for. We must travel through each of them to enrich our lives. Let us embark on a journey of discovering our identity and nourishing its roots.

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excavated site inside Purana Qila has been found to have, from the top downwards, structures ascribable respectively to the Rajput, Gupta, Kushan, Shunga and Northern Black Polished Ware (NBPW) periods, the last one dating back to the 6th-7th century BCE. The several excavations and scientific explorations have further revealed that below the NBPW levels are the remains of the PG Ware Culture, associated with the Mahabharata period.

This exposure would be in consonance with the best practices followed in conserving ancient sites in the world. Israel and many European countries are so proud of their history and have done remarkable work in preserving and bringing them to public awareness. We have competent archaeologists, architects and visionaries who, with latest technologies can create a world-class centre depicting our archaeology, history, art and culture at this site of immense worth, implication and impact.

This will reveal the real olden times of this area, and earliest civili-

sations that flourished here from archaic to modern times. It will further aid in exposing correct knowledge and awareness about our capital's historical journey. Exposing the general public to realities of our history of this region will remove misperceptions that have been created due to the concrete structures overshadowing the intangible realities of earlier times. The revelations will also help in better understanding of our nation's actual history, which has been long misrepresented due to neglect and insensitivity towards ancient periods.

The easy access and central location makes Purana Quila a very popular Tourist site for all visitors. This Old Fort, popular during Sultanate period as Indraprasth Quila, in fact, has the potential to be the 'First & Must Visit' site for any tourist of / to India. This Quila can be a central point for an Interpretation centre covering all periods of history, their rulers and achievements. It has enough space to also develop a Panorama of Bharat Heritage. Besides the "Archaeological Walk Through" at the excavated site, preserving it under

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