The Research Frontline - Journal
(Vol. I, Issue No. 4, July - Sept 2026)

ALLAHABAD ACADEMIC PRESS
a publishing company

e-ISSN: 3139-2253 | DOI: https://doi.org/ 10.66871/trf-j.v1i4.011

Architectural Activism and Public History: Academic Interventions for the Preservation of Kaman Sarai, Gurugram, Haryana

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Abstract

This paper examines the role of academic institutions in partnering with civil society and cultural organisations to protect built heritage through science communication, academic outreach, and grassroots activism. Using Kaman Sarai in Gurugram, a neglected Mughal-era structure, as a case study, it demonstrates how the Sushant School of Art and Architecture (SSAA) used academic expertise, interdisciplinary pedagogy, and community networks to create public awareness and conservation debates. The initiative documented the site's architectural and historical significance through collaboration with local civil society groups, urban activists, and municipal authorities.

This knowledge was disseminated through accessible academic journalism, public exhibitions, heritage walks, and educational workshops, translating scholarly research into societal action. The case shows how architectural education can extend beyond the classroom to support heritage advocacy by linking academic research with public engagement. The project also built a contextual relationship between the site and local stakeholders. Shopkeepers and residents were actively involved and educated about the site's layered meanings, highlighting both physical preservation and its intangible memorial, generational, associative, and heritage values. The involvement of local political figures, including the ward mayor, encouraged shared ownership and accountability, offering a model for academic engagement in cultural preservation and sustainable urban development.

Keywords: Heritage Conservation, Academic Outreach, Science Communication, Community Engagement, Architectural Education, Public History, Urban Heritage

Received: 21/07/2026 | **Accepted:** 08/08/2026 | **Published:** 10/11/2026

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I. Introduction

While the social mechanisms by which heritage is made visible, meaningful, and supported by the public are comparatively little studied, heritage protection is frequently seen as a technical or administrative responsibility. Using the example of Kaman Sarai in Gurugram, Haryana, this essay examines the value of architectural education as a kind of public history and heritage advocacy. It examines how academic knowledge was converted into public-facing action and is based on the record of the Sushant School of Art and Architecture's (SSAA) "100 Days to Save the Sarai Challenge 2019". Architectural documentation, heritage education, school workshops, stakeholder interaction, public performances, talks, exhibitions, media involvement, and student-led lobbying were all part of the intervention. By framing the Sarai as a location of memory, everyday association, and urban identity rather than just a physical item that needed to be conserved, the effort connected the architectural history of the building with the people who came into contact with it on a daily basis. The study makes the case that academic institutions can serve as a bridge between governmental authorities, local communities, civil society, and technical legacy expertise. The Kaman Sarai case serves as an example of how comparatively tiny, inexpensive, and repeatable acts of communication can raise awareness of neglected heritage and have an impact on the public conversation about endangered historic sites. In the absence of institutional accountability, finance, legal protection, and priorities for urban development, the case also highlights the limitations of awareness-raising activity. Therefore, the article promotes a continuity of architectural activism that links documentation, interpretation, public engagement, and institutional lobbying, with architectural schools serving as both civic actors in the urban heritage landscape and venues of knowledge production.

1.1 **HISTORY, TYPOLOGY, and OWNERSHIP**

Kaman Sarai is situated near to Sadar Bazaar in Gurugram's old urban fabric, a region that has seen tremendous growth pressure and fast change. In the past, sarais served as halting stations or inns along transportation routes, giving visitors a place to stay and rest. (Jain & Dandona, 2012) With octagonal bastions at each of its four corners and an imposing doorway serving as its main elevation, the complex was intended to be a fortified haven of refuge. Its foliated arches and late Mughal architectural vocabulary are blended with clearly later additions from the nineteenth and twentieth centuries; a stone plate on one wing dates it to 1925 (Munjal, 2019). According to (Parihar, 1985) the sarai was constructed circa 1825. This situates the sarai in the broader medieval and early modern tradition of sarais constructed for pedestrians or those traveling by bullock cart along trade routes, where "people used to take a break from their long journeys of trade" (Singh, 2024).

The name of the complex itself is contested and palimpsestic, locally called both "Kaman Sarai" and "Cawn Sarai," one interpretation being that "Kaman" is a vernacular translation of the English "Command," referring to the site's history of cantonment or administrative power. (Parihar, 1985)

The significance of Kaman Sarai, therefore, is not confined to architectural fabric. Its value is produced through a combination of typological, historical, social and associative relationships. The site was located along a route associated with the movement of agricultural produce, nd interviews



Figure 1: Kaman Sarai entrance gate, 2019; Source: Author



Figure 2: Plaque showing the establishment of resthouse, 2019; Source: Author

recorded by the authors; describe farmers travelling towards the sabzi mandi (vegetable market) and stopping at the Sarai with their carts. Such accounts demonstrate how ordinary patterns of use can form an important layer of urban heritage, even where a structure has not acquired formal monument status.

The sarai is remembered as having functioned as a zamindar's rest house, situated on the major route of the sabzi mandi (vegetable market) road, where farmers travelling to sell their produce would stop and rest with their carts. When the areas surrounding the sarai were settled by the British following

Gurugram's designation as a district headquarters, the complex entered a second phase of use as a center of colonial administration. Following Indian Independence and the Partition of 1947, it entered a third phase, housing government offices, shops, and a printing press operated by migrants from Punjab (Munjal, 2019). Singh (2024) records that, until 2019, the site was occupied by the offices of the Proclaimed Offender's (PO) cell and the Special Task Force (STF) of the Haryana Police, indicating a further, more recent layer of institutional occupation in the site.





Figure 3: Proclaimed Offenders Office,2019; Source: Author

Figure 4: Special Task Force Office,2019; Source: Author

The question of ownership is central to understanding both the site's vulnerability and the difficulty of mounting a conventional legal defense of it. Singh (2024) establishes that the land on which Kaman Sarai stands was, prior to Partition, under the custodianship of the Waqf Board. Post-partition, it was transferred to the Government of Haryana and is now owned by the Municipal Corporation of Gurugram (MCG) (Singh, 2024). This history of custodianship is significant: it means that the entity that approved and executed the multilevel parking project that endangered the site was also the legal owner of the site, thus erasing the usual separation between a heritage custodian and a development authority. This blurring of roles is a common structural flaw in the protection of unprotected heritage in India.

By the time of the "100 Day Challenge" in 2019, Kaman Sarai was located next to a major traffic intersection in the middle of "old" Gurgaon. What remained of the historic built fabric was the main entrance gateway, parts of the perimeter wall into which shops had been inserted, a single bastion topped with a domed pavilion, and the 1925 wing. The open ground inside the complex, which local residents remembered as having housed the hundred neem trees, had by then been cleared and was being used for both formal and informal commercial activity, and, crucially, for vehicle parking (Munjal, 2019).

This existing informal use of the site as a parking area was, in a direct sense, the seed of the threat that catalyzed the "100 Day Challenge." In 2019, the Urban Local Bodies (ULB) approved the construction of two multilevel parking facilities in Gurugram, one at Sadar Bazaar and one at Kaman

Sarai itself, with the Municipal Corporation of Gurugram engaging the Delhi Integrated Multi-Modal Transit System (DIMTS) as project consultants (Singh, 2024, citing (Kumar, 2019).

Against this background, SSAA's 100-day challenge was not conceived simply as a conventional conservation studio. It used the resources of architectural education to make the site visible to people who lived, studied, worked, and traveled around it. The intervention combined research and activism, attempting to convert specialist knowledge into accessible public conversations.

This paper investigates that process through the lens of architectural activism and public history. It asks three questions: first, how can architectural institutions translate heritage research into forms of public engagement; second, what kinds of stakeholders can be brought into a heritage conversation through academic interventions; and third, what are the possibilities and limitations of activism when awareness is not accompanied by adequate legal, institutional and financial mechanisms for conservation?

II. Conceptual Framework: From Conservation Practice to Architectural Activism

Conventional heritage practice typically focuses on documentation, significance assessment, conservation planning, technical intervention, and management. These remain important, but the Kaman Sarai case suggests that conservation also entails a prior and ongoing process of making heritage legible to society. A building that is physically present but socially invisible can remain vulnerable even when its historical value is recognized by specialists.

Architectural activism is, in this sense, the conscious deployment of architectural knowledge, representation, pedagogy and public communication to intervene in the debates surrounding the built environment. It does not have to be a large institutional campaign. It can be mapping, documented measurement, exhibitions, school activities, public performances, heritage walks, media articles, lectures, social media communication and direct engagement with interested parties. The common thread is the transference of architectural knowledge across professional and academic boundaries.

Public history provides a complementary framework. Rather than presenting heritage as a fixed narrative produced only by experts, public history recognizes the importance of communicating historical knowledge in public settings and of incorporating memories, experiences, and associations held by communities. The Kaman Sarai intervention is significant because students and faculty did not merely tell the public why the structure was historically important; they also asked people around the Sarai what the place meant to them and what they imagined for its future.

III. Methodology

The *"100 Day Challenge: Save the Kaman Sarai"* was structured as a hundred-day sequence of public engagement events, integrated directly into the Second Semester studio of the M Arch BH programme at SSAA. This studio-embedded structure is methodologically significant: rather than

treating public outreach as an activity separate from academic coursework, SSAA folded outreach, primary documentation, and stakeholder consultation directly into the credit-bearing curriculum, so that the conceptual conservation and reuse proposals developed by students were informed by, and developed in dialogue with, the awareness-raising and consultation activities.

The hundred days combined several distinct modes of engagement, which can be classified as follows:

- School-based heritage education workshops at government schools in the immediate vicinity of site, targeting students from Class VI through Class XI. Campus-based awareness generation in form of a flash mob performance during SSAA's annual festival, iPAC 2019. Site-based street theater (nukkad natak) and direct stakeholder consultation at Kaman Sarai itself, targeting shopkeepers, residents and transport workers who used the space.
- Guest lectures and knowledge-sharing sessions with heritage professionals who had worked on comparable heritage sites and conservation initiatives. Professionals such as *Mousumi Chatterjee* and *Gurmeet Rai* were invited to share their expertise and experiences, providing participants with professional and contextual insights into heritage conservation and community engagement.
- Extra-local advocacy, in the form of a nukkad natak performance and public interaction at Lodhi Gardens, New Delhi, in collaboration with the Young Professional Members of ICOMOS India, timed to coincide with World Heritage Day.
- A closing civic event at the site itself, combining site cleaning (in partnership with MCG), a rangoli-making competition, a photobooth, and the lighting of lamps (diyas), attended by the Mayor of Gurugram.

This structure enabled the initiative to interact with a number of different constituencies – school-age children, the university's own academic community, immediate site-adjacent stakeholders, professional heritage practitioners, and municipal political leadership – over an extended period, rather than through a single, one-off event. The following section reconstructs this sequence in detail.

IV. The 100 Days Challenge: A Chronological Account

4.1 Day 1 (18 January 2019); Heritage Watch Day at the Government Boys' School, Civil Lines

The "*100 Days to Save the Sarai*" Challenge 2019 for Kaman Sarai was initiated on 18 January 2019 in collaboration with the Government Boys' Senior Secondary School, Sadar Bazar, located in the immediate vicinity of the site. As part of the initiative, students and faculty of the Built Heritage Master's programme at Sushant School of Art and Architecture (SSAA), Ansal University, engaged schoolchildren in discussions on the sarai typology, its historical and cultural significance, and the specific heritage value of Kaman Sarai.



Figure 5: SSAA team; M.Arch (BH) students and faculty at Govt. Boys school, Source: Author

The bilingual paper plane ideated and designed by Professor Dr. Vibhuti Sachdev, Associate Prof. Parul Munjal and Assistant Professor Parshati Dutta was used in an awareness building exercise – Soch ki Udaan (Flight of Imagination) – on how to protect built heritage in eight steps.





Figure 6a, 6b: Soch ki Udaan exercise with the students of Government Boys School, Source: Author

At the conclusion of the engagement, the students were invited to articulate their perspectives on the future of Kaman Sarai and suggest possible interventions for the site. The responses were particularly significant, as they demonstrated an emerging awareness among the students of the historical and cultural value of the sarai and its significance as a heritage space within their immediate neighborhood. This exercise demonstrated the potential of participatory heritage education in fostering local stewardship and motivating younger members of the community to participate actively in the future of heritage sites.



Figure 7a (left), 7b (right): Interventions for the site by students, Source: Author

4.2 Day 30 (16 February 2019) — Flash Mob at SSAA



Figure 8(a), 8(b): Flash Mob at SSAA to officiate "#SAVETHESARAI" at Ansal University. Source: Our Built heritage (Facebook page), 2019

On the thirtieth day of the challenge, students of the Bachelor of Architecture programme performed a flash mob during SSAA's annual festival, iPAC 2019, on campus. Initiated through whistle calls and concluding with a flight of the "Soch ki Udaan" paper planes, the performance culminated in the unfurling of a banner announcing the hundred-day challenge; guests and faculty were invited to photograph the banner and share it across social media using the hashtag #savethesarai, extending the initiative's reach beyond the immediate campus audience and mobilizing them as "agents of change". (Heritage, 2019)



Figure 9(a), 9(b): Dropping of SAVE KAMAN SARAI banner. Source: Our Built heritage (Facebook page), 2019

4.3 Day 35 (21 February 2019) — Expert Talk on Cultural Routes and Landscapes

Institutional documentation associated with the initiative records a talk delivered on Day 35 by Gurmeet S. Rai, a Delhi-based conservation architect and, at the time, President of ICOMOS India, on the subject of cultural routes and landscapes. Rai's presentation drew on her work on the Mughal/Imperial Highway project supported by the Punjab Tourism Department, addressing the role of political histories in determining which heritage typologies receive protection and which — such as stepwells, bridges, and, by extension, sarais — are neglected, and discussing the World Heritage Convention as a framework for establishing significance and translating heritage values into a quantitative basis for intervention. This session situates the Kaman Sarai initiative within a broader professional discourse on cultural route heritage and the politics of designation. (Heritage, 2019)

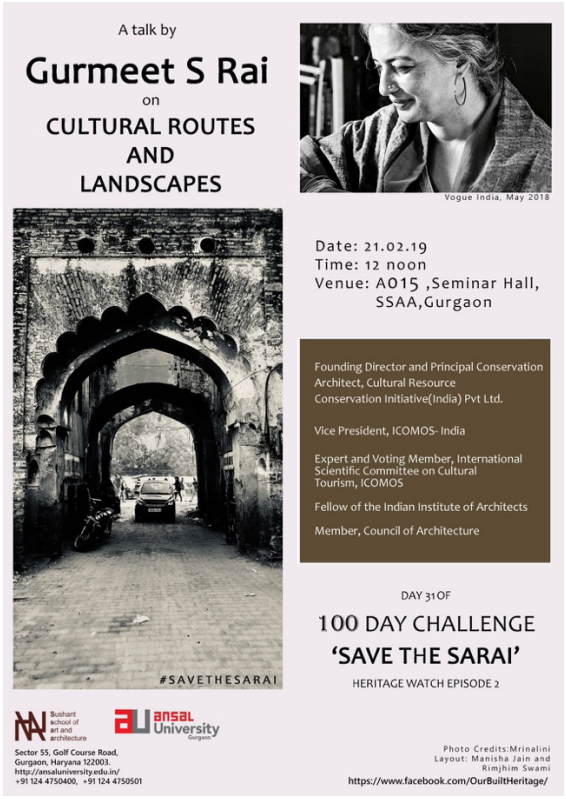






Figure 10(a): Poster of DAY 31, 10(b): Lecture by Gurmeet S Rai, 10(c): Showcasing of documentation work by students to Gurmeet Rai for feedback. Source: Our Built heritage (Facebook page), 2019

4.4 Day 76 (3 April 2019) — Talk on Grassroots Creativity and Historic Space

Day 76 featured a talk by museologist and heritage practitioner Moushumi Chatterji on "Regenerating grassroots creativity in activating dialog between people and historic spaces" hosted by SSAA. This was based on the "Creative Interruptions" project implemented at the Rambagh Heritage Precinct in Amritsar with support from the UK's Arts and Humanities Research Council. The project's methodology—identifying local change agents, undertaking immersive cultural mapping, and articulating five interconnected values (reverence, resonance, revelation, remembrance, and reconciliation) as a framework for a "People's Museum"—provided a template for interpretation grounded in everyday, commonplace narratives rather than dominant historical accounts, directly informing the values-based approach subsequently applied to Kaman Sarai in the SSAA studio. (Heritage, 2019)

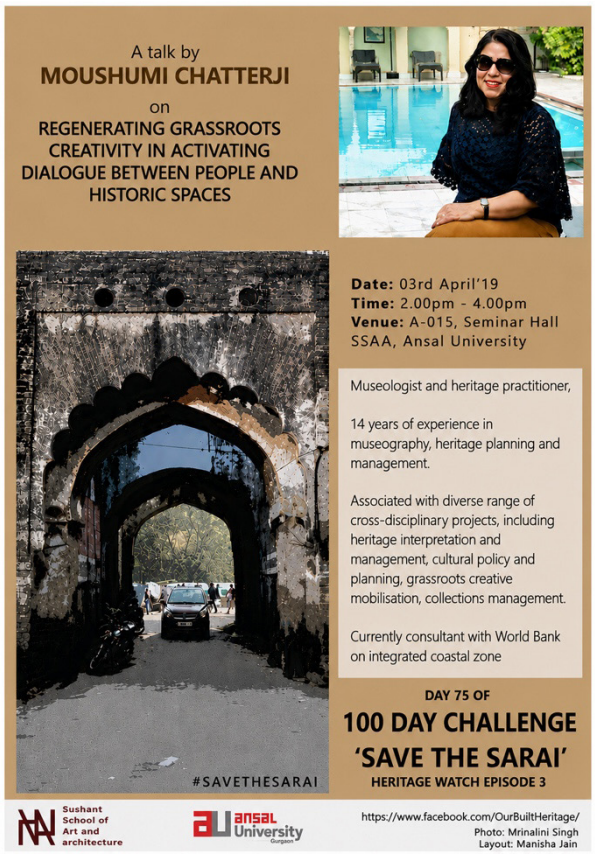




Figure 11(a): Poster of DAY 75; 11(b): Lecture by Moushumi Chatterjee. Source: Our Built heritage (Facebook page), 2019

4.5 Day 83 (10 April 2019) — Nukkad Natak and Consultation at Kaman Sarai

Day 83 marked the initiative's first sustained direct engagement at the site itself. M Arch BH students, together with students from the urban design, landscape architecture, urban planning, and interior architecture programmes enrolled in the elective "Reappropriating Heritage," led by Associate Profes-

sor Parul Munjal, performed a nukkad natak titled “Kaman Sarai bachana hai, virasat hamara khazana hai” (“We must save Kaman Sarai, our heritage is our treasure”) at the site. The performance drew the attention of regular tea-stall customers within the Sarai compound, shopkeepers, and autorickshaw and taxi drivers who used the space for parking. Students conducted structured consultations with those who gathered, recording their views on the current associations and desired future of the Sarai in light of the impending demolition and replacement with a multilevel parking facility. (Heritage, 2019) (Munjal, 2019)





Figure 12(a), 12(b): Consultation with stakeholders at Kaman Sarai, Source: Author



Figure 13: M.Arch(BH) students with program coordinator Parul Garg Munjal at the site. Source: Author

4.6 Day 84 (11 April 2019) — Workshop at the Government Girls’ Senior Secondary School, Jacombpura

The following day, a workshop was conducted at the Government Girls' Senior Secondary School in Jacombpura, Gurgaon, led by the Dean of SSAA together with faculty members and M. Arch BH students, engaging Classes IX to XI. The session included presentations on the lost typology of the sarai and on Kaman Sarai specifically, a repetition of the "Soch ki Udaan" paper-folding exercise, and an essay and drawing competition inviting students to imagine possible futures for the site. This workshop opened possibilities for continued coordination between SSAA and the school on heritage awareness and action, beyond the immediate duration of the hundred-day challenge.



Figure 14a (left): Students at Govt Girls School; 14b (right): Students performing nukkad natak to raise awareness. Source: Author



Figure 15a (left) SSAA team with students and faculty at the school, 15b (right) Soch ki udaan activity with the students. Source: Author

4.7 Day 91 (18 April 2019) — World Heritage Day at Lodhi Gardens, New Delhi

On Day 91, which was also World Heritage Day, SSAA faculty and M Arch BH students visited

Lodhi Gardens in New Delhi and partnered with the Young Professional Members of ICOMOS India North Zone for another nukkad natak performance and public engagement with visitors to the gardens. This event was a conscious effort to expand the campaign beyond Gurugram and to place the local, site-specific advocacy for Kaman Sarai within the national and international frame of World Heritage Day and the professional heritage conservation community represented by ICOMOS. (University, 2019)



Figure 16 (a)(b): SSAA team with the Young Professional Members of ICOMOS India North Zone. Source: (University, 2019)

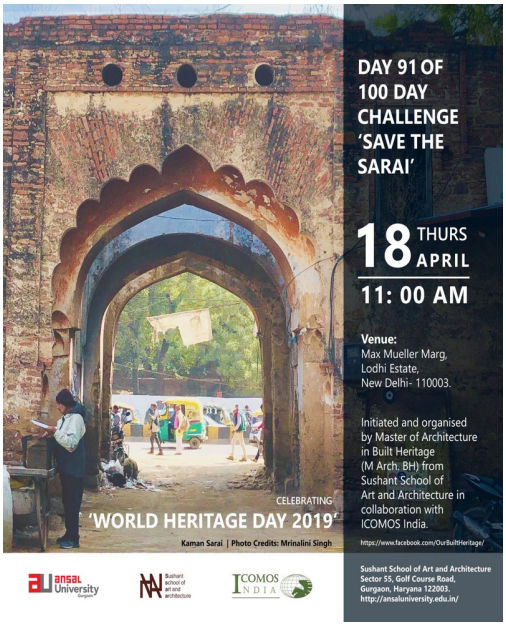




Figure 17a(left) Poster of the event, 17b (right) Author at Lodi Garden. Source: Author

4.8 Day 100 (27 April 2019) — Closing Event at Kaman Sarai

Prior to the concluding event, M.Arch. Built Heritage students visited the offices of the Municipal Corporation of Gurugram (MCG) to formally invite municipal officials to participate in the program. During this interaction, the students also highlighted the poor sanitary condition of the Kaman Sarai premises and requested basic cleaning of the site in preparation for the event. The request was taken up by the chief engineer of the MCG, resulting in the cleaning of the premises. The students' engagement with the municipal authorities thus extended the initiative beyond awareness generation to include direct civic intervention at the site. To commemorate the culmination of the 100-day challenge, ***Madhu Azad****, Mayor of Gurugram*, graciously accepted the invitation to attend the closing event as the special guest.



Figure 18: Authors at MCG office to invite Mayor of Gurugram for the closing event of 100 days challenge. Source: Author

The hundred-day challenge ended, fittingly, at Kaman Sarai itself. The event was organized by the faculty of SSAA in association with students of the M.Arch. Built Heritage program, and the closing event was attended by a diverse group of people including students of the Government Girls' Senior Secondary School, Jacobpura, local shopkeepers; MCG cleaning staff; autorickshaw drivers; a tea-stall owner; passers-by and Madhu Azad, Mayor of Gurugram.

The program included the 'Soch ki Udaan' paper folding activity, rangoli competition and the lighting of diyas at the historic gateway, as well as a cleaning of the complex with the support of MCG. A photobooth, with an image of the Sarai's arched gateway and the hashtag "#SAVETHESARAI" enabled participants to be photographed within the frame of the heritage structure itself, generating shareable social media content that increased the visibility of the campaign beyond those physically present.



Figure 19(a) Poster of the event, 19(b) Author with students for the Soch ki udaan activity. Source: Author



Figure 20(a) Students with the poster and airplane, 20(b) Drawings created by the students. Source: Author



Figure 21(a) Mayor Madhu Azad at the event, 20(b) Rangoli competition for students. Source: Author





Figure 22(a)(b): Photobooth with #SaveTheSarai. Source: Author



Figure 23(a)(b): Lighting of Diyas at the site by different stakeholders. Source: Author

V. From Awareness to Design: Studio-Based Conservation and Adaptive Reuse Proposals

The subsequent studio work clarifies the relationship of the campaign to architectural education. The 100-day challenge was successfully integrated into the second-semester M. Arch Built Heritage studio, where students developed conceptual conservation and reuse proposals for Kaman Sarai.

The M.Arch Built Heritage Semester II students developed adaptive reuse proposals for Kaman Sarai that investigated ways of preserving the historic character of the structure while incorporating uses that respond to the needs of the surrounding community. The ground floor can maintain the existing printing press, while offering a more organized office space and fitting storage facilities. The upper floors can be adaptively reused as a book café and vocational training center, creating spaces for learning, community interaction and skill development.



Figure 24: Adaptive reuse proposal by M.Arch (BH) students. Source: Author

The existing Post Office and STF office spaces could be converted into heritage museum and open exhibition spaces that provide opportunities to interpret and display the history and cultural value of Kaman Sarai and Sadar Bazar.



Figure 25: Adaptive reuse proposal by M.Arch (BH) students. Source: Author

The open parking area could be reimagined as a flexible community space, functioning as a weekly market and including a children's play area. This would enable the space to meet the everyday needs of Sadar Bazar residents while activating the site as a vibrant public place.

The proposals were subsequently presented and reviewed during an external jury by Sangeeta Bais, conservation architect and director of Dharohar, a conservation practice. The jury provided an opportunity for the students to present their adaptive reuse strategies and receive professional feedback on the conservation, functional, and community-oriented aspects of their proposals.

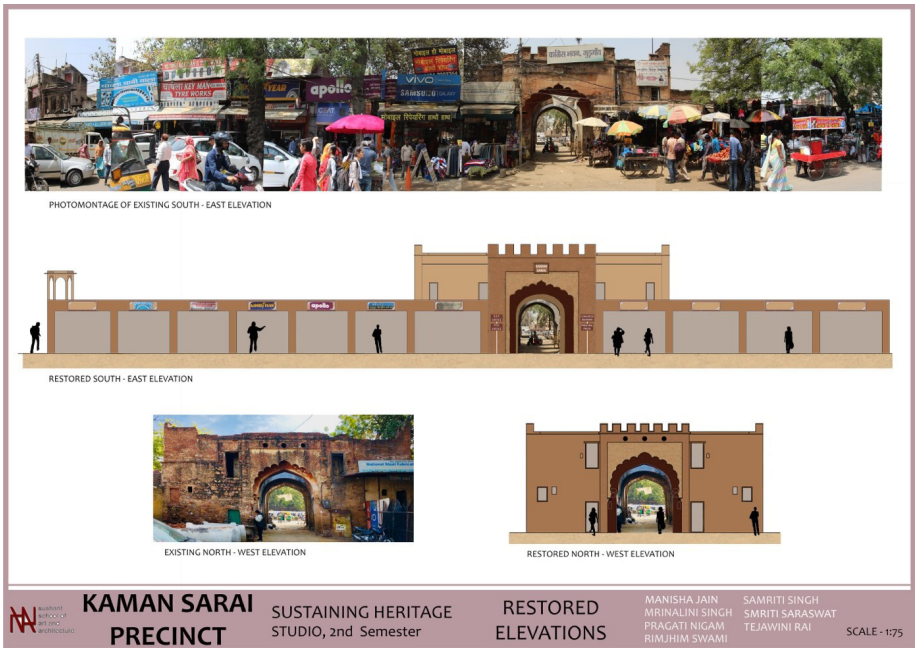


Figure 26: Elevation upgradation proposal by M.Arch (BH) students. Source: Author



Figure 27: External review by Sangeeta Bais, Source: Author

Overall, the proposals aim to establish Kaman Sarai as a living heritage space, where conservation is

integrated with contemporary community needs and the historic structure continues to remain relevant and actively used.

VI. Outcomes, Impact, and Limits of the Initiative

The " 100 Days Challenge" identifies outcomes for individual activities, including increased awareness, sensitization, expressions of support for revitalization and reuse, stakeholder concern about the proposed parking, and opportunities for continuing heritage education. These outcomes indicate that the campaign succeeded in generating participation and making the heritage question more visible to multiple audiences.



Figure 28(a) (b): Scenario in 2019. Source: Parul Munjal

At the level of physical outcome, however, the initiative's success was partial and, in the terms in which it was originally framed, incomplete. The multilevel parking project was not halted: excavation of the central ground began, and construction proceeded from 2021 onward. "The awareness generated during the '100 Days to Save the Sarai Challenge' helped in saving the gate of the serai while the officials went ahead with the new construction of parking" (Singh, 2024). This is a significant and particular achievement: the campaign is not credited with preventing development at the site, but with ensuring the survival of its single most legible historic element, the fortified entrance gateway, within a redeveloped site otherwise substantially altered by the parking structure. The "100 Day Challenge" achieved a form of partial, negotiated preservation, rather than an outright conservation victory, consistent with the broader Indian pattern, in which unprotected heritage survives, if at all, through informal negotiation rather than legal prohibition.



Figure 29(a)(b): Scenario in 2021, Source (Wangchuk & Bannerjee, 2021)



Figure 30: Scenario in 2022, Source: (Kumar, 2022)



Figure 31(a)(b): Scenario in 2024. Source: (Sikkawala, 2024)



Figure 32: Kaman Sarai in 2026. Source: Google Street View

This result illustrates a more general point about the connection between academic activism and municipal development authority. When there is no legislative protection and when there is a lack of institutional capacity for heritage management, community mobilization of the kind demonstrated by SSAA can influence the terms under which development proceeds, for example, by securing the retention of a single emblematic structure without necessarily changing the underlying development decision itself. This is not a complete success or failure; it is evidence of the real, if limited, power that sustained public engagement can exert even in the absence of the legal and institutional tools that, in cases such as Ahmedabad or Jaipur, allow heritage considerations to be directly embedded in statutory planning processes.

VII. Way Forward: Recommendations

The Kaman Sarai case highlights several recommendations that can guide future conservation proposals for similar heritage sites:

1. **Seek formal heritage protection** by identifying and consulting the appropriate state or local heritage authorities at an early stage.

   Many historic structures, particularly those associated with local trade, transportation, community life, and everyday urban activities, remain vulnerable because they are not included in official heritage lists. The Kaman Sarai case illustrates how the absence of a recognised protection framework can limit the effectiveness of conservation advocacy and leave historic structures exposed to redevelopment pressures.

   A systematic process of identification, documentation, and evaluation should be undertaken in consultation with the appropriate state heritage authorities, municipal bodies, and other relevant institutions. This process should establish the site's historical, architectural, social, and cultural significance, supported by archival research, measured drawings, photographic documentation, and oral histories. Where applicable, the structur should be considered for inclusion in municipal heritage lists, state protected heritage inventories, or other relevant statutory and planning frameworks.

   Formal recognition should also be accompanied by clearly defined conservation guidelines, development controls, and responsibilities for maintenance. Establishing an appropriate legal and administrative framework at an early stage would help ensure that heritage significance is considered in future planning decisions rather than addressed only after development-related conflicts emerge.

2. **Conduct a Heritage Impact Assessment (HIA)** prior to any new construction, redevelopment or infrastructure project around a heritage site. Consult stakeholders and local communities throughout the planning and design process to ensure proposals respond to local needs and existing patterns of use.

The assessment should extend beyond the historic structure itself to examine the surrounding streetscape, pedestrian movement, traffic patterns, visual relationships, adjoining buildings, public spaces, and local economic activities. It should also evaluate cumulative impacts arising from multiple development projects in the vicinity. Based on these findings, alternative design options and mitigation measures should be developed to avoid, minimise, or appropriately manage adverse impacts.

Stakeholder consultation should form an integral part of the assessment process. Localresidents, shopkeepers, property owners, heritage practitioners, municipal officials, and educational institutions should be involved from the initial stages of planning. Public consultations, site meetings, interviews, and participatory mapping can help identify patterns of use and community priorities that may not be evident through architectural documentation alone. This would enable conservation proposals to respond to local needs while protecting the site's heritage value.

3. **Translate academic proposals into policy action** by submitting conservation and adaptive reuse proposals to relevant government bodies, municipal authorities and decision-makers. Establish heritage awareness programs, especially in collaboration with nearby schools and educational institutions, to build long-term community ownership of heritage. Such engagement should not be treated as a substitute for statutory action. Instead, it should support a sustained process of dialogue, documentation, and follow-up through which research-based recommendations can be considered within formal planning and policy frameworks.

4. **Adopt an area-based conservation approach** rather than treating the heritage structure in isolation. Proposals should consider surrounding streets, public spaces, signage, heritage walks, mobility, and local economic activity.

   In the case of Kaman Sarai, an areabased approach would consider the relationship between the historic structure, the surrounding commercial fabric, pedestrian movement, parking, street infrastructure, signage, and adjoining public spaces. A local conservationplancouldidentifyimportantvisualconnections,pedestrianroutes,heritagenodes,andopportunities for improving the public realm without compromising the site's historical character.

   Possible interventions could include improved pedestrian access, context-sensitive sensitive signage, interpretation panels, heritage walks, sensitive lighting, streetscape improvements, and better management of parking and traffic. Local businesses could also be integrated into heritage-based initiatives, allowing conservation to contribute, to economic activity and neighborhood entity.

5. **Set up dedicated institutional mechanisms** such as a Municipal Heritage Cell or designated Heritage Officer to coordinate conservation, development and stakeholder interests. Such a mechanism could maintain an updated inventory of heritage assets, review development proposals affecting historic sites, coordinate HIAs, and monitor compliance with applicable conservation guidelines.

   The institutional mechanism should also facilitate communication between municipal au-

thorities, academic institutions, conservation professionals, property owners, and community representatives. For sites requiring intervention, it could help prepare management plans that define maintenance responsibilities, monitoring procedures, funding requirements, and timelines for implementation.

6. **Develop long-term academic-government partnerships** so that student-led documentation, research and design proposals can continue beyond short-term projects or campaigns.

   Such partnerships could be formalised through Memoranda of Understanding (MoUs) between universities, municipal corporations, state heritage departments, and relevant cultural organisations. These agreements could establish shared objectives, defined responsibilities, data sharing protocols, and mechanisms for periodically reviewing research outcomes. Architecture and planning students could contribute through measured drawings, condition assessments, historical research, stakeholder interviews, mapping exercises, and adaptive reuse proposals. Faculty members and conservation professionals could guidethis work to ensure methodological rigour and technical reliability. Municipal authorities, in turn, could provide access to relevant records, identify local planning priorities, and evaluate the feasibility of proposed interventions.

7. **Prioritize phased conservation and adaptive reuse**, especially where only fragments of a historic structure survive. Integrate existing elements sensitively with contemporary infrastructure rather than treat them as obstacles to development. A phased conservation strategy should begin with detailed documentation, structural assessment, material analysis, and identification of elements requiring urgent intervention. Immediate measures may include stabilising vulnerable fabric, managingwater ingress, improving drainage, and protecting exposed masonry. Subsequent phases could address repairs, public access, interpretation, and the integration of compatible contemporary infrastructure.

   Adaptive reuse may offer opportunities to retain the relevance of historic sites by introducing functions that respond to local needs. Depending on the condition and significance of the structure, potential uses could include a small interpretation centre, a community space, a neighbourhood information point, or a venue for heritage-related activities. Any proposed use should be based on a feasibility assessment and should avoid alterations that compromise significant historic fabric or spatial relationships.

8. **Ensure continuity of advocacy and monitoring** following the completion of a conservation initiative so that recommendations remain active and can inform future planning decisions. Academic institutions and heritage organisations can support this process by maintaining digital archives, publishing periodic updates, and involving successive student cohorts in monitoring activities. Community members and local businesses can contribute by reporting physical deterioration, unauthorized alterations, or development activities that may affect the site.

The Kaman Sarai case demonstrates that the conservation of urban heritage depends not only on the architectural significance of a historic structure but also on the institutional, social, and planning frameworks within which it exists. Formal heritage protection, early assess-

ment of development impacts, community participation, policy engagement, and area-based planning are necessary to establish a foundation for effective conservation. Equally important are dedicated institutional mechanisms, long-term academic–government partnerships, phased interventions, and sustained post-project monitoring.

These recommendations collectively emphasise the need to bridge the gap between academic research and implementation. Documentation and design proposals can initiate the conservation process, but their long term effectiveness depends on whether they inform planning decisions, secure institutional commitment, and respond to the needs of local communities.

For similar heritage sites in rapidly urbanising Indian cities, Kaman Sarai offers an opportunity to develop a more integrated and accountable approach to conservation, one that recognises heritage as an active component of urban life rather than a remnant of the past.

VIII. Conclusion

Kaman Sarai shows that the preservation of built heritage is not just a matter of fabric, law or finance, but of visibility, meaning and public agency. The "100 Days to Save the Sarai" Challenge shows how an architectural institution can use its pedagogical and professional resources to generate a public conversation around a neglected historic place. The campaign translated heritage research into accessible forms of public action through school workshops, performances, stakeholder interactions, lectures, media engagement and participatory activities.

This case also demonstrates that architectural activism works better when embedded in wider conservation frameworks. While awareness can create visibility, visibility cannot guaranty protection. For unprotected heritage to exist in the long term, it must be recognized through legislation, owned by institutions, financially sustainable, appropriate for urban planning and subject to continued community participation. Academic institutions can contribute to all these processes through the provision of evidence, training of students, facilitation of dialog and maintenance of public attention.

The key lesson of Kaman Sarai is thus not that students of architecture can 'save' a heritage structure. Rather, it is that architectural education can contribute to society's awareness of what is at stake before heritage disappears. By bridging research with public history and technical knowledge with lived experience, academic institutions can become meaningful civic actors in the conservation of India's rapidly changing historic environments.

Kaman Sarai, even seven years after the 100 Days Challenge, continues to tell a remarkable story of persistence and advocacy. In 2026, the construction of the proposed parking lot has not yet begun, although the site had been dug up in 2020–22. The gate, however, still stands intact, continuing to showcase the glory of its yesteryears. This survival is not just a coincidence. It is, in many ways, a testament to the advocacy undertaken by the M.Arch students in 2019, who documented, engaged with, and brought attention to the significance of Kaman Sarai. Their efforts demonstrate how student-led heritage advocacy can create a lasting effect—and how, sometimes, simply keeping a historic structure visible and valued can be a significant victory.

In this respect, the Kaman Sarai case positions SSAA, and by extension comparable academic programs in built heritage and conservation, as a viable and replicable model for institutions seeking to translate scholarly research into societal action, practicing, in effect, a form of public history and science communication in which the classroom, the street, the school, and the municipal office become continuous sites of engagement rather than separate domains. As unprotected heritage across rapidly urbanizing Indian cities continues to face comparable pressures from infrastructure development, the methodological template documented here combining values-based documentation, sustained multi-audience public engagement, studio-based design proposition, and comparative institutional analysis, offers a transferable framework for future academic interventions in built heritage advocacy.

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