



Analysis of Historical Areas, Structures, Lifestyles and Values: A Case of Amritsar

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Abstract

Historical Towns depict the values, the way of life, the social interaction, the security and social relations which are missing in the modern concepts of planning on the one hand and the building materials, the texture, the colour, the scale, decorative elements, streetscape, townscape, the craftsmen's skills on the other hand which have vanished or are on the way of vanishing. The present paper is an attempt to highlight the parameters for the analysis of historical structures/areas, lifestyles and values of an Indian walled City Amritsar. The paper is based on empirical study conducted of some areas of walled city taken randomly from different wards. The preliminary findings of different surveys conducted, have been used in supporting the statements in this paper.

1. INTRODUCTION

The Venice Charter highlights the relevance of heritage and stresses on the need and value of preserving our heritage. Heritage is often regarded as a symbol of cultural identity. The cities are the basic elements in the built environment of man. They mirror social existence and convey the diversity of human culture, history and traditions. They hold the living roots and give man his bearings in time and space. It is above all in historic towns that civilizational structures, fabric and traditions are steeped in time, that modern man finds the most potent visual links with his roots in the past. This vital presence of the past is essential to man's equilibrium both as an individual and as a social being. Never before, even in the recent past has this legacy been threatened with such imminent destruction. As a result of technical, economic and social upheavals, people are tending to conglomerate around administrative and industrial centers in huge numbers with huge implications for heritage. Both in overall size and in texture, these are completely out of scale with traditional towns. All over the world, the new is imposing itself on the old, stifling and bruising, if not destroying the ancient fabric.

No doubt, the life of cities is subject to evolutionary processes. The origin, growth and decay of cities are an inevitable organic process. The life of a city is, therefore, similar to the phenomenon of birth, growth and death in the life of an organism. There are various reasons or factors responsible for this decay such as:

- Time
- Improper maintenance

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- Population pressure
- Lack of awareness of Heritage
- Lack of urban amenities
- War/riots
- Other natural calamities

These factors will vary from place to place, for example, the effect of war will be more disastrous and will lead to more deterioration within short period of time as in the case of Gulf War. While on the other hand, if an area is not maintained properly, it will get deteriorated slowly and steadily. However, some factors may take less time while some may take more time for deteriorating an area but ultimately all the above factors lead to deterioration and decay of cities.

Although it is true that decay is inevitable but at the same time it is also possible to prolong this decay. Now the question before us is why to prolong this decay? The answer is quite simple i.e. the historic towns have such buildings and areas, the analysis of which depicts or brings before us very interesting and relevant issues such as the values, the way of life, the social interaction, the security and social relations which are missing in the modern concepts of planning on the one hand and the building materials, the texture, the color, the scale, decorative elements, streetscape, townscape, the craftsmen's skills on the other hand which have vanished or are on their way to vanishing.

The present paper is an attempt to highlight similar parameters for the analysis of historical structures and areas, lifestyles and values of an Indian walled city of Amritsar. The paper is based on empirical study conducted of some areas of the walled city taken randomly from different wards. The preliminary findings of different surveys conducted have been used in supporting the statements in this paper.

2. AMRITSAR : AN INTRODUCTION

Amritsar, known as the city of Golden Temple, symbolizes the spiritual heritage of the people of Punjab (a state of Indian union) is located in the north western part of India. It has grown on both sides of the grand trunk road and is divided by this road and broad gauge railway line into two parts i.e. the walled city and the later developments outside the walls. It is situated about 465 km from New Delhi in the north western parts close to the international border with Pakistan. The city is well linked with the rest of the country by air, road and rail.

In India a Class I city is that which has a population of more than 100,000 persons. Amritsar city ranks second among this class of cities of Punjab and is spread over an area of 114.95 sq km. Its population was 584,844 persons in 1981 which increased to 700,000 persons in 1991 and became a metropolis as per 2001 census. Population of the Walled City in 2011 is 222,259 persons and has not registered any change in the last four decades. It has a total area of 3.52 sq km and gross density of 631 persons per hectare as against 52 persons per hectare for the city as a whole.



The city of Amritsar has had many ups and downs in its physical growth and development. This physical growth has been classified into different periods on the basis of different rulers who ruled the city and brought changes in its physical development.

The period from upto 1764 was a period of anarchy. This period is marked by extensive destruction because the temple as well as town was destroyed during this period. The Mughals earlier attacked the city many times due to which period can be termed as of destruction. During the period from 1765-1802, the city was under the rule of Sikh Misls. Various developments that took place during this period include Katras (neighbourhoods), forts, gardens, tanks, *havelis*, (house with courtyard) Bunga (rest houses). Many of these were named after the names of the rulers such as Katra Jaimal Singh, Katra Sher Singh. They are still existing and displaying the typical way of life, values and lifestyles or intangible heritage.

The next period began from 1802-49, the rule of Maharaja Ranjit Singh (the golden period). During this period many areas developed which show the traditional character like walls, gates, forts, gardens, akharas (centres of learning), and so on. The spread of the town was confined to the walls which prevented horizontal expansion. It started growing vertically (not more than 3 storeys). Narrow lanes linked with houses belonging to a particular group of people with the same profession or trade or caste, a typical feature of the walled city e.g., Gali Suniarian (Street goldsmiths). All these features contribute for the derivation of values and social relations. These show *mohallas* with caste, occupation and religious background and thereby the concept of community feeling is visible in these areas.

The next period starts from 1849-1947 (British Period) and is marked by many developments. Most of the developments were outside the walled city. Housing designs also changed from row housing to detached bungalows with sufficient spaces in the form of setbacks. The walls and gates in the western side were demolished and moat was filled. The gates were reconstructed on the western side by themselves. It was during this period that the physical growth started beyond the city walls. These new developments were based on modern principles and techniques of urban planning and thereby had influence on the way of life, lifestyles, values and so forth.

The last period starts from 1947 to 2011. This period seems very crucial as the major redevelopment projects were undertaken during this period and at the same time many unplanned and planned areas came on the map of this city having their own problems and prospects. But the major setback to the built heritage of the city was marked by the redevelopment projects. Redevelopment, in its restricted meaning is considered equal to demolition not only in this city but in the country as a whole. This has resulted in the loss of many heritage areas namely traditional bazaars, *mohallas*, (residential clusters) of the walled city.



3. LIFESTYLES AND VALUES

In this section an attempt is made to analyze certain components of the historic towns which depict the lifestyles, values, way of life and social interactions.

3.1 Street

The street is one of the major design elements in town planning and especially the medieval street used to have many functions. There are various terms being used interchangeably such as road, avenue, mall, way, highway, path, boulevard, promenade and street. But here the meaning of street is related to a line of movement which runs between the lines of houses or rows of housing. To quote Jane Jacob, 'streets and their sidewalks, the main public places of a city, are its most vital organs. Think of a city and what comes to mind? Its streets. If a city's streets look interesting, the city looks interesting, if they look dull, the city looks dull'. The form of cities is influenced more by the arrangement of their streets and squares than by any other consideration (Crawford, 2010). Traditional town planning focuses on designing communities for people, not cars by drawing from numerous traditional small town elements.

Now if we observe the circulation pattern of the walled city of Amritsar, we find that streets used to perform and are still performing many functions. It has been observed in the study of Cheel Mandi locality in ward number 26 and Chowk Passian locality in ward number 24 of the walled city. The various functions which a street is performing are:

Unity in design: It shows unity in design or streetscape, an effect which enhances social interactions. The width of most of the medieval streets varies from 4 ft to 20 ft. The balconies are the important elements which help in enhancing social interactions from the first and higher floors. In both the localities under study most of the internal streets are narrow and acting as an important element of urban design thereby enhancing social interactions.

Social Relations: Walled city of Amritsar and even many other walled cities still have similar importance of streets. People sit in the street in the evening and share their day to day experiences and problems. On the one hand, it solves the problems and on other hand enhances social relations. The study of Cheel Mandi and Chowk Passian areas of walled city has shown these intimate relations. Public opinion survey indicated that 100 percent respondents are of the view that they have good neighborly relations.

Place for Recreation and Play: Medieval streets are still acting as a place of recreation for school going children. Due to the absence of proper parks and open spaces near residential areas, children play traditional as well as modern games in the street. Sometimes it is becoming harmful as the modern games such as cricket can damage window panes thereby resulting in conflicts among the residents. The study of the above mentioned two areas shows that the popular game amongst children is cricket and they play it in the street due to non-availability of any other open space nearby.



Social Security: There are intimate relations among the residents and they can watch the movement of everybody in the street. Any stranger can be easily identified. This is the reason burglaries and thefts are rare in the traditional residential areas of the walled city. The study has shown that in case of Cheel Mandi some respondents felt theft is the main crime whereas in the case of Chowk Passian area 100 percent respondents said that no crime occurs in this locality. The reason seems the location of these two localities, one where thefts are occurring is on the edge or outer side of the walled city, whereas the other is located in the centre of the walled city, the first residential locality.

Check on through Traffic: This is especially true in the case of the dead end streets which are very common in the walled city. As no through traffic is possible, no stranger can enter the residential cluster. This is one of the important reasons that people especially the children, ladies and old people sit in the street and chat.

3.2 Surprising Open Spaces and Squares

Squares are the places which really give you the feeling of surprise. The term surprising open space was coined by Hellen Meller of Nottingham University. These are existing generally in two locations - the first is where three or four streets meet and there is a tree (ficus religiosa or banyan) on one corner or sometimes in the centre with a temple under the tree. This is a place of religious importance as well as a space which enhances social relations and interactions.

The second type of location certainly gives feeling of surprise because a narrow street leads to a square with residential buildings having big tree in the centre. This tree is an important point for the old people to sit and play cards. Moreover, this tree provides oxygen twenty four hours continuously. Surprising open space exists in Kaddan Wali Gali in Chowk Passian area. It has a temple near the tree which is a symbol of inculcating religion values.

3.3 Bazaar (Commercial Market)

The layout of most old centers is based on their original core of streets and property boundaries. In the 19th and 20th century, buildings were often remodeled or rebuilt but the pattern of streets seldom changed. Consequently the centers of our towns, designed originally for the pedestrians and slow moving vehicles (animal driven) are now creaking and splitting under the strain of modern traffic. With the new general acceptance of the pedestrian precinct as a desirable planning aim, the old scale of human movement for which the streets were designed, again appears to become acceptable.

Now if we see the commercial areas in the walled city of Amritsar, they are of a typical character. The reason is that the city continues to be the leading centre of trade and commerce. The general business areas and wholesale trade areas are all located in the walled city. There were about 23 bazaars in the walled city, many of which were founded during the period of the Sikhs. They deal with the



wholesale as well as retail trade. The trade flourished in the streets radiating from the Golden Temple. Observations of the location of these bazaars reveal that nearly all bazaars form a continuous pocket i.e. one bazaar leads to another.

Another important feature of these commercial areas is that most of these bazaars have residential use on the upper floors and commercial on the ground floors. Due to this there is a life in these areas most of the time which also helps in checking the anti-social elements. Further, some of these bazaars are specialized in particular items and are named after that particular item, for example, Bhandian Wala Bazaar (utensils market). But the change of land use is badly affecting these areas. Most of the respondents have replied that the problem of traffic and noise pollution as a result of increasing traffic especially by two wheelers has worsened. Other vehicles cannot enter.

3.4 Mohalla (Residential Cluster)

Mohalla is a typical small residential area comprising of twenty to thirty houses. Generally, these houses are in a row with a street in-between. In many cases it is a dead end street and there is a gate at the entrance which is used for safety at nights. Such *mohallas* are a common feature in the walled city of Amritsar. One special feature of the *mohalla* is that the people of the same caste and in many cases same profession used to live in together. This independent relationship between people and place is important and must be nurtured with care (Historic San Juan Bautista). The basic positive point of the *mohalla* is that there is “We feeling”. The scale of the *mohalla* is small and compact which enhances the social relations and social interactions and ultimately leading to social security. They depict special character. It is the character and life styles that makes it unique (RBF Consulting Urban Design Studio and Tom Hudson Company, 2011). Here, it is necessary to point out that we have not bothered while planning new settlements, commercial areas and residential areas of such mixed land use; thereby various social problems have dominated such areas.

3.5 Religious Places and Sarovar (Holy Water Body)

Religion plays a very important role for the smooth functioning of any society. Amritsar is primarily a religious town. The town was founded by the 4th Guru of the Sikhs around the world famous Golden Temple. There are still many historic temples. These temples are having a water body as an important component. If we analyze these religious places they are not only serving as the spiritual strength to the residents but also being used as open spaces especially in the evening time. These places are also helping in enhancing social interactions. These are open to people from all religions, all castes and people from all over the world. These are very important in the modern society where tensions are increasing rapidly. These are having their impact on the way of life of the residents of this city. Since the walled city is on pedestrian or human scale, each locality is accessible with a walking distance of 20-25 minutes, and thus has religious impact on the residents.



3.6 Gates and Wall

There were 12 gates which were constructed during the period of Maharajah Ranjit Singh. A massive wall of unbaked bricks, with a double moat was constructed in 1825. This fortification was 25 yards broad and seven yards high. The basic purpose of these gates and wall at that time was security and defense. But now they are acting as an enclosure and show the limit of the walled city. No doubt the condition of gates which were reconstructed during the British period is tolerable but the wall is in a very poor condition and most of it has been demolished. The wall was acting as an enclosure, an important element of urban design. But due to neglect it is vanishing and has been converted into different uses as buildings are constructed on it and being used for residential, commercial use and in this way the city is losing its identity and character.

Thus the above parameters are still very useful for casual interactions including recreation, conversation, entertainment as well as act as useful for ritual observances. But the increasing vehicular traffic has become a threat to the streets and squares. The rapid movement of traffic in large volumes requires large roads. Unless some limit is placed upon traffic volume and its freedom of movement, destruction of streets and squares will continue unabated leading to degradation of local environmental quality.

4. HISTORICAL STRUCTURES AND AREAS

If special attention is to be given to certain buildings of particular merit or interest, it follows that the first requirement is that they should be identified. For identification physical and visual survey is an important stage of the planning process for conservation. However, before deciding upon the contents of a visual and historical survey, we must determine the objectives of the survey and the way it will be used in relation to the preparation of a conservation policy. There is no point in gathering unnecessary quantities of information. As the pressure for change and the character of towns differ, any outline of a survey, such as given here, can only be a general guide. A large town may be talked as a number of areas of specific activity. A small town may be considered as a whole. Generally, the smaller the area the more detailed the approach must be. Thus the character of the town will broadly determine the type of surveys and their contents. For the analysis of structures and areas, the following parameters can help.

- Age - period
 - Building materials used architectural and architectural and decorative elements arches, pillars, jharokhas, allas, eves, windows, floral designs, murals/wall paintings, texture/color
- Facade
- Architectural, historical, religious importance
- Personality lived in
- Location



- Surrounding use
- Building use

These parameters will help in the derivation of the analytical statements about the structures. On this basis, some of the buildings have been classified in the city of Amritsar.

- Government offices
 - Town hall
 - Tehsil office
 - District Courts
 - General post office
 - Mahindra house
- Railway Station
- General Post Office
- Circuit house and PWD rest house
- Maternity and Victoria Jubilee hospital
- Educational institutions
 - Government High School
 - Khalsa College
 - Hindu College
- Religious Buildings
 - Gurudwaras (Sikh temples)
 - Hindu temples
 - Mosque
 - Church
- Monuments
 - Burj Baba Phoola Singh
 - Bunga Giannia and Ramgarhia Bunga
 - Akharas
 - Watch towers, Direction Pillars
- Gates and Walls
 - Residential Buildings and Areas
 - Commercial Areas
- Parks and Gardens
- Forts and Palaces
- Townscape and streetscape



Now if further classification of the above buildings and areas is made, it has been found that the buildings and areas belong to three periods:

- Sikh Period
- British Period
- Post-independence Period

Out of the above, the first two categories are still dominating the walled part of Amritsar and there is difference in the use of building materials, craftsman skills, and decorative elements in both these periods. Some buildings of Sikh period show different murals depicting the specific features of the society of that period which can help in understanding the lifestyles and value systems existing in the society at that time.

5. CONCLUSIONS

Thus, since such historic towns are really the heritage of the future we must identify and analyze them and preserve them for the future. At the same time, it is also important that while planning new towns and areas, certain elements of these historic towns should be incorporated which will give identity to the towns and show lifestyles and ways of life of past residents.

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