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Reimagining the city's identity by strengthening the inner core – A research enquiry for design intervention

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ABSTRACT

A city is its' past legacy and its present identity. While each city must strive to keep marching forward, and upgrade to suit the latest demands of its' residents, it is important to strike a balance between the past and the present. Flowing towards the future ambitions as an urban setting doesn't necessarily imply a disconnect from its past legacy. The legacy lends the city identity and gives the citizens a sense of familiarity. Therefore, modern urban planning must not only work towards embracing transition and change of modernity but also strike a balanced relationship between the urban and natural environment. This all-inclusive approach is the soul and crux of cultural heritage management as well. As modernization, commercialization and urbanization continue to threaten multitude of historical precincts and buildings, recording and celebrating their existence, acknowledging their contribution in national identity, preserving their associations with city's identity today and protecting them from extinction becomes chiefly important, corresponding benefit of which is promoting tourism as well. The heritage precincts of Aurangabad city encompass areas surrounding the multitude of city's gates of historical significance.

Keywords— *Architecture, Heritage, Precinct Development, Urban Planning, Heritage and Conservation*

1. INTRODUCTION

'The city of Gates' holds great potential not just in terms of tourism, but in terms of becoming a well-rounded example of a balanced city and its independent identity as well. However, mishandling and negligence towards some vital precincts and cores are causing their systematic deterioration year after year. The gates stand tall today, but the precincts have experienced vague and directionless development, because of which their potential of contributing towards city's historical experiences remain undermined. Their once strong associations with and influence over the precincts are fairly blur today. They still contribute very significantly in the road planning and infrastructure of the precinct, but one can't say that their complete potential is being exploited. The gates of the city are remarkable memories from the past, and therefore just an example of mishandled legacy of the city. Besides gates, there are entire precincts that can also very well become grounds for initiatives towards balanced and sustainable development.

In the context of a city that's rapidly expanding and growing under the influence of urbanization, it's important to heed attention towards conserving the unprotected and preserving the legacy before it's too late. Heritage gates of the city have always garnered interest and attention from the tourism point of view, but it's impossible to isolate the city's past legacy with just the gates. There are many more associations, many more grounds of possibilities wherein work towards establishing a balanced and sustainable city identity can be initiated. The full potential has never been sought to be exploited. This is majorly because the city is busy with the more apparent development goals. While there is nothing

Debatable about that, the need is to highlight the fact that conservation coupled with development is a major enough responsibility for it to fall alongside other primary development goals.

One can define comprehensive precinct development in this scenario as one that caters to all the aspects of city planning at large and the micro aspects of a community-oriented design at micro levels simultaneously. These precincts not only provide identity for the city at large, but they also help in organizing and uplifting the immediate associated communities, all while contributing to the historical importance and legacy of the city.

2. CONTEXT AND SITE RELEVANCE

Though the city of Aurangabad boasts the title of ‘The City of Gates’, the efforts to preserve and celebrate the rich heritage barely bolsters the significance that it holds. In the face of issues such as increased development pressure, inadequate development regulations, insufficient infrastructure, destruction and deterioration of the historic structures and incongruent redevelopments, the city’s vibrant culture and heritage is being actively side lined. An initiative for systematic and efficient management of the same is required. Through this exercise, the goal is to identify and analyze city’s heritage and culture, and uplifting it by reimagining and strengthening the city’s inner core.

In the context of a city that’s rapidly expanding and growing under the influence of urbanization, it’s important to heed attention towards conserving the unprotected before it’s too late. One can define comprehensive core or an urban area development in this scenario as one that caters to all the aspects of city planning at large and the micro aspects of a community-oriented design at micro levels simultaneously. These precincts not only provide identity for the city at large, but they also help in organizing and uplifting the immediate associated communities, all while contributing to the historical importance of the city.

The very idea of precinct development in the inner core of the city isn’t a micro ambition. This can be said in the sense that this core held significant importance back then when the city’s legacy was taking shape, and it is a major precinct today, holding significant responsibilities of city’s major circulation patch, economic significance etc. The chosen site, i.e., Hadaka Gate – Delhi Gate network has a storyline which talks about urban development triggered by and around a historical gate. It holds a certain traditional significance today, strengthened over time because of people choosing to settle around the Mughal Residence. Culturally, the site is renowned for its diversities in built heritage, fairs and festivals, rituals and art and craft. Architecturally as well, the influence of the Mughal architectural styles can be vaguely located, which was derived from the heritage structures present in the vicinity. The site as an area of historical relevance in terms of culture, economics, history etc. all calls for rejuvenation, thereby implying how it doesn’t remain a micro level limited impact proposal. If careful analysis and development of all of these are chased for conservation and development, the sheer volume and the spread of this inner core would make it a comprehensive guide for precinct development in a lot of different parts of the city. This would mean a much larger influence zone. The aim to bring in a balanced development approach towards what is a vital urban core and subsequently a Heritage precinct, therefore, in a city as such, doesn’t influence a single primary zone, but aids in uplifting the city as a whole as well.

3. LITERATURE REVIEW

An undeniable aspect of the project was Heritage management. Though each design intervention didn’t actively only look at heritage conservation, but it did impact the overall approach some way or other. Therefore, literature that has explored the essence and fundamental of Heritage management and conservation was seen as prominent (but not the only) guiding force for the project. The process of heritage management becomes all the more difficult when it comes to the conservation of a Heritage Precinct situated in an urban area, because of several issues and concerns. ‘Heritage Management’ would include all the efforts involved in the preservation, conservation, restoration and reconstruction of any tangible and intangible assets of a Heritage Precinct under consideration. There are several problems faced during Urban Heritage Precinct Management. Urbanization pressures, lack of awareness, absence of regulatory framework, lack of goodwill, selfish interests of builders and developers, structural failure and weak institutional mechanism. Heritage guidelines give a regulatory framework including architectural controls, institutional mechanism, funding mechanism and the process of building plan approval for any newer interventions. There is no thumb rule to managing urban heritage precincts. But solutions have to be carved out depending on the location, significance, political will, available funding sources and other consequences.

Three core elements underpin active precincts, all of which are necessary to create truly connected cities:

1. Connected decisions: Facilitating and enabling connections.
2. Connected Communities: Who to connect and for what outcome.
3. Connected Activities: The physical and digital modes of connection.

Principles of Facilitation, Inclusion, Proximity, Urban Fabric, Catalyzes, Activation, and Mobility are some vital tools that are employed for precinct development in an Urban Scenario. Cities need connectivity to enable vibrancy and to truly thrive. A balance between commercial needs and human needs is critical for success.

4. AIM, OBJECTIVES AND METHODOLOGY

4.1 Aim

The goal is to comprehensively develop and rejuvenate the inner core of the city and the precinct in a manner that is inclusive of both, their historical importance and their stature as precincts of a modern developing city.

4.2 Objectives

Conservation management first called for recognition and classification of heritage assets. Once these were systematically listed, the goal was to narrow down on a certain precinct in the inner core of the city. Several nodes and precincts with respect to their cultural and heritage textures were analyzed. Once the site of Hadaka Gate – Delhi Gate network was arrived at, exploring its cultural and heritage further and enlisting the values and nature of the specific area was the next step. Post thorough investigation and compilation of all the necessary characteristics of the context, solutions were brainstormed. A list of comprehensive strategies that address a range of issues around cultural celebration and heritage preservation in the selected context were listed. These were encompassed in an elaborate conservation management plan for the precinct.

As part of developing design strategies and aspirations, the city's history and selected precinct's evolution were studied and several case studies undertaken. Data of three pilot sites was comparatively analyzed to identify the most suitable site for the said purpose. The strongest and most relevant site of Bhaddakal Gate – Delhi Gate network was selected for further. Through a series of maps such as land use, building typology, land ownership, road networks, activity mapping etc., and the site was documented. This data helped in identifying issues such as congestion, inefficient space management, dead spaces, presence and spread of illegal properties and activities and more.

4.3 Research Question

Following is the prime research question for the exercise-

How can the inner core of city Aurangabad be used as tools for embarking on careful development initiative? How can rejuvenation in an urban time accommodate and celebrate the legacy that dictated the identity that the inner core holds today. All while maintaining and promoting their historical importance? This question will help in forming an approach that directly addresses the goal of precinct development.

4.4 Methodology

The exercise can be systematically broken down in two kinds of methodologies that shall be employed cohesively for the completion of the exercise: Research Methodology and Project Methodology.

Research Methodology- For the purpose of research for this exercise, a number of primary and secondary research tools will be used. Data collection shall be done through demographic and site surveys, case studies, interviews, personal observations and assessments, expert and peer reviews, testimonials, journals and document reviews etc. Direct observations shall be made through site visits, field trips, parallel studies, personal experiences and interviewing people.

Project Methodology- While the research methodology tools shall assist towards bringing the essential data together, project methodology tools shall help in handling the acquired data for project completion. The project methodology can be broken down into four steps

- (a) **Identifying Precincts-** Narrowing on a time period; establishing sub-categories i.e. cultural & heritage values; identifying and choosing buildings and precincts with architectural values.
- (b) **Documentation** - Recognition of building and precinct narratives; architectural, material, and construction studies; timeline of the precinct development over the years.
- (c) **Identifying Development and Conservation Processes-** Defining methods and processes for conservation; brainstorming on specific actions for suitable for precinct conservation and rejuvenation; archiving the documentations.
- (d) **Design Intervention-** Micro and macro design interventions for precinct conservation; designing auxiliary and amenities for value addition; Customizing the experience for historical interpretations.

5. RESULTS AND FINDINGS

Several Goals have been thereby listed, together that form the design intervention:

1. Defining street edges and systematizing/segregation of blocks.
2. Segregating/designing the vehicular and pedestrian movement; incorporating public amenities.
3. Traffic management around the main circle.
4. Lake treatment to tackle drainage dumping.
5. Proposal of Stadium; Slum Redevelopment; maximizing active usage of land.
6. Restoring Old Dargah, rebuilding the bridge.
7. Proposals for proper pedestrian circulation; defining ingress and egress in and on site.

To achieve the set goal, the following objectives shall remain crucial throughout:

1. Identifying precincts that need attention.
2. Documenting the importance of these precincts to measure the intensity of attention they demand.
3. Studying them thoroughly, to understand the causes of their ill-development and undesirable results that have been birthed through these causes.
4. Brainstorming over solutions that respond to the existing context in a sensitive manner, while working towards strengthening them.

6. CONCLUSION

Heritage precincts have shown a lot of promise as triggers for achieving the larger goal of city planning in multiple examples. In the city of Aurangabad, provided the number and the locations of similar network or precincts such as the site, with a bold presence of a historical gate and traditional, cultural and historically relevant characteristics spread out across the city, development of heritage precincts around them can very efficiently serve the dual purpose of restoration of historical importance and development and planning goals that serve the city at large. The opportunities that the gates provide must therefore be exploited.

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