CITIZENS' PERCEPTION OF AESTHETICS: A STUDY OF THE WALLED CITY OF JAIPUR IN THE CONTEXT OF THE SMART CITY PROJECT

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Abstract

As a part of area-based development of The Smart City, many works related to the heritage and its conservation are taking place in Jaipur. In The Smart City Project, one of the focus of area-based development is 'Smart Heritage and Tourism' precincts. Redevelopment of Govind Dev Ji temple, Talkatora Lake as well as Ram Niwas Bagh, are also considered in the 11 projects under Smart Heritage and Tourism precincts, due to the highest number of footfall from the residents of Jaipur as well as the tourists. It is seen while we focus on shared identity of a heritage area, there is a substantial gap between how the residents and planning professionals perceive the aesthetics of the city. This study explores the perception of citizens of Jaipur about aesthetics of The Walled City. The study delivers a priority list of architectural elements which the citizens have recognized as the identity-forming characters of the streets of the heritage precincts.

Keywords: Aesthetics, Walled City of Jaipur, Heritage, User perception, Jaipur Smart City.

1. Introduction

A Smart City Project is an attempt by governments to make their cities world class by mechanising every possible thing. In a smart city, a grid uses sensors to collect information and data about users and moulds its functioning according to them. The main aim of a smart city is to effectively use and manage its resources, both human and material resources. The other side of The Smart City movement also exists. According to some socialists and economists, a Smart City Movement is way of the government to capitalize market and for wealth accumulation. Marcuse in his book 'Searching for the Just City: Debates in Urban Theory and Practice' raises a question of 'whose right, what right and to what city'. (Marcuse, et al., 2009) The answer given to this question 'the right of the corporate sector to accumulate capital from the smart city' is a very clear indication towards the mistake in approaching the problem. (Datta, 2015)

In this context knowing what exactly comes under a Smart City Project and what needs to be added more, for greater good becomes very important. The

importance of knowing the focus group can bring more clarity on the project intent and methodology. What needs to be conserved and why are the questions that need to be answered first before starting off with such projects.

This study is aiming to answer this question, in field of architecture, by telling what needs to be preserved in the Façade Improvement Jaipur Smart City Programme.

1.1. Need of the Study
"City identity is a distinct form of collective identity based on the perceived uniqueness and meanings of place, rather than group category and membership. A city's identity is constructed over time through architecture, which involves three sign systems – material, visual, and rhetorical – and multiple institutional actors to communicate the city's distinctiveness and identity." (Candace Jones C. ,Svejenova S. 2017)

The gap between the perception of a city for its citizens and its planners is visible very clearly in a lot of projects. Although the Jaipur Smart City Project is working very hard to preserve the visual identity of the city, there is a gap because of this perception problem. This study aims to identify the exact point where this gap is and fill it.

1.2. Aim and Objective
The study aims to reduce the gap between what a citizen perceives and what an architect understands when they look at architecture of a place. The study is an effort to find key element that citizens recognise for streets of Walled city of Jaipur so that the information can be used in The Smart City Project's Façade Improvement programme.

To achieve this aim a user survey was conducted and the results have been analysed to get the elements that creates identity. Several more elements can be recognised from the study but at this point the analysis has been stopped at only two results. Moreover only aesthetics of the street façade have been analysed, and not the planning or building components.

2. Background Study

The background study has been done in three parts:

- Semiology
- Street Façade Study
- Jaipur

2.1. Semiology

2.1.1. Semiotics. There are several definitions of Semiotics by different researchers. Semiotics is a field of study involving not only theoretical studies but methodological tools too. One of the broadest definitions is given by Umberto Eco, who states that *'Semiotics is concerned with everything that can be taken as a sign'* (Chandler, 2006) According to linguist Saussure, 'semiology' is 'a science which studies the role of signs as part of social life', whereas for the philosopher Charles Peirce referred to semiotics as the *'Formal doctrine of signs'* which was closely related to Logic (Peirce, 1931) According to him a sign is anything that stands as a visual representative of something else.

2.1.2. Architecture and Semiotics. To study architecture with a semiotic approach, three modes are possible in which this study considers semantics. In semantics the emotional feelings of people are considered to understand architecture. The emphasis is given to the representational meaning is overridden by the narratives of the people. The time and space become two most important factors for the study here.

2.2. Street Façade Study

The vantage point from where a viewer looks at a view is called viewpoint (Inc., 2003). It can be of two types:

- Dynamic: When the viewer is moving
- Stationary: When the focal point is constant

The views seen from a view point, framing an important structure, built or unbuilt, natural or manmade is called view- scape. (Hinchliffe, 2014). According to various researches there are different types of streets like commercial, residential, multi-purpose, semi-residential. (Moughtin, 7 June 2007) The streets of The Walled City of Jaipur qualify to be studied as urban heritage streets with blend of old architecture with new activities where there are important street end views. (Inc., 2003)

The ornamentation can be seen at edges of districts, at entrances of streets, at corners, at crossings, traffic pause points, major view scape, etc. The amount of ornamentation is also determined by the maintenance needed for the ornaments and where they are placed. (Moughtin, Oc, & Tiesdell, 1999)

2.3. Jaipur

The primary architectural style followed in whole city was Maru- Gurjara style, which directly translates to architecture of desert. Maru stands for desert and Gurjara to the community that originally inhabited the place, as explained by one of the respondents in

survey. Surveys also revealed about lesser known fact that the city was developed in phases and each phase made certain changes in the existing structures. The present form that we see now is a result of many years of evolution and exposure to various ideologies. (Jain, 2010)

Johari bazar was chosen as the study area due to variety of activities and presence of landmarks. The area has commercial, mixed and residential built use and religious buildings too that brings in various users with very different background. This variety of built use and various backgrounds of users brings in different perceptions to study.

The stretch that was studied started from Sanganeri Gate and ended at Badi Chaupar. The main landmarks of this road are:

a- The Jama/ Jame Masjid

b- The Snaganeri Gate

c- Badi Chaupad/ Chaupar

3. The Study

The survey comprised of a user group of 30 people, who visit and use the walled city market on a daily basis. The group was divided in three parts, the shopkeepers, visitors and the residents, each comprising of 30 respondents. (EWING, 2001) To start with the survey a questionnaire was prepared which comprises of four sections, totalling to 50 questions. The part of questionnaire that is used for this study comprised of images of architectural elements that are mostly seen on a multi-functional street. The elements were characterised on the basis of place of their occurrence. (Burcher, 2005) For example: Background of the street façade had roof-scape and its shapes and designs, while middle ground has major ornamental elements on fenestration and walls like *jharokha*, *jaali,* wall painting, etc. The fore-ground had elements that occur on interaction of horizontal and the vertical plane, like shop front design, columns, cornice and signage.

People were asked to look at the images from questionnaire and pick the photographs that they consider to be from Jaipur. Their answers had an elaborate description of how they recognised the elements. From these answers the most selected images were chosen for the analysis. Some of these images are shown below in figure 1 (a-h).

Figure 1-a Bangaldar Chhatri

Figure 1-b The Door

Figure 1-c The dome from Albert Hall

Figure 1-d Roof-scape Design

Figure 1-e The Cornice Design

Figure 1- f The Pointed Arch

Figure 1-g The Signage Design

Figure 1-h The Gateway

To analyse the architectural element that people chose, these were broken into meta-elements and all possible relations between them were studied. This process used one of the tools of semiotic analysis, called *Homologation: The structural relation analysis*. The results of the analysis are will be discussed in the next section.

4. Results

After the enquiry into all possible relations that people used to recognise elements from Jaipur it was found that wall colour plays a major role in it. The colour of *surkhi* plaster is the key identity element that also gives the city its name 'The Pink City'.

Apart from that, the repetition of a particular shape is seen in all images that people chose. Several people had identified *chattri, jharokha*, doors, etc. by this shape, as they said. After searching for the meaning of this shape in history of the place, it is found that it has a strong cultural meaning for the people here. The images below – figure 2 (a-f)- show repetition of this shape in various elements.

Figure 2-a Bangaldari Chhatri with the shape highlighted

Figure 2-b The Design in Signage with The Shape highlighted

Figure 2-c Repetition of the Same Shape in The Dome

Figure 2-d The Door with The Shape Repeating in Cornice Design
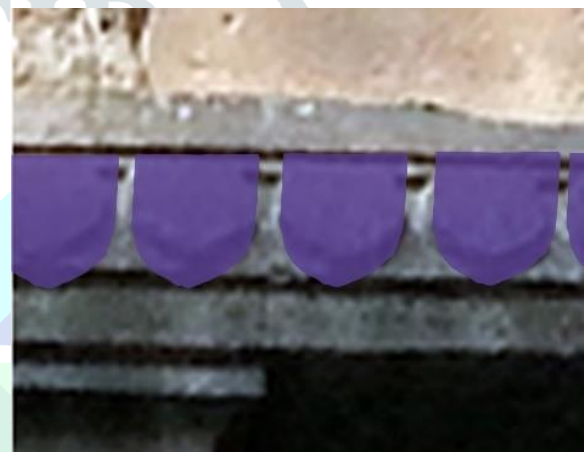

Figure 2-e The Design used at Eaves for Ornamentation

Figure 2-f Repetition of The Shape in The Gateway

The shape has a denotative meaning for the people of The Walled City. This shape is seen at several places that are very important for the heritage identity of the place.

- **The Coat of Arms:**

This shape is seen as a symbol in the Coat of Arms of Jaipur Province Army. Throughout the evolution of the symbols of army, shown in figure 3 (a-d) this shape has remained constant and people relate to it. All the images are taken from

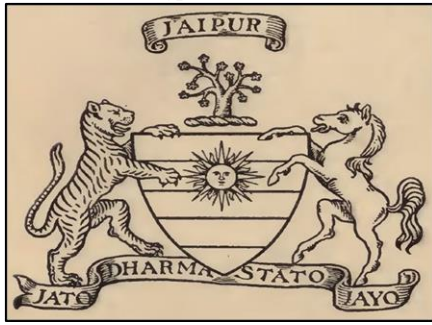website '*The Rajputs of India*' on the url *www.indianrajputs.com.*

Figure 3-a The First Coat of Arms Symbol

Figure 3-b The Coat of Arms Symbol, seen on an Official Letter in 1940s

Figure 3- c The Coat of Arms in early 1900s

Figure 3-d The Current Coat of Arms Symbol for Jaipur

- **The Jaipur Province Stamp**

The stamp of Jaipur Province had the same shape repeating at the border too. It can be seen in the image below, figure 4.

Figure 3 The Jaipur State Postal Stamp

5. Conclusions

The study shows that for common masses the architectural identity of a place is not what we, the architects perceive. Kevin Lynch has said about the collective identity of a place, with the perspective of different people, their experiences, their backgrounds, their life and routines, etc. (Lynch, 1960). The people living in the Walled City of Jaipur exhibited the same tendencies in developing visual identity for the place.

The survey results show that the people do not recognise architectural elements as a whole. They break down whole complex systems of street façade and memorize the aspects that are deep rooted in their subconscious. The repetition of a particular shape in cornice design formed the major recognition factor here.

Taking results from this study, the information can be used by designers and planners for planning facade designs for The Walled City. Moreover, similar study can be done in future to get more elements that bring architecture close to people and makes it relatable.

To sum up it can be said that the Walled City of Jaipur has unique architectural identity which needs to be preserved/ conserved. The smart City project has taken into account this need by including Façade Improvement Programme under ABD Project. But to make this unique identity a shared one for the citizens, it is important to recognise the elements that bind the architecture together, for common masses and use it in the new faced design.

6. Acknowledgements

study was done as a part of my M. Arch. thesis. I would also like to take this opportunity and thank all the people who were a part of this study, for providing me with information that up to my knowledge was found to be genuine and true.

7. About the Author

I am an architect and currently working as assistant professor at Deen Dayal Upadhyay Kaushal Kendra, under the School of Architecture at Central university of Rajasthan. I have a keen interest in research, and human centric design, design methodology and sustainable architecture form my key interests.

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