Reclaiming Urban Identity: Framework for Urban Regeneration of Patna City Area

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Abstract: **As cities continue to push beyond their erstwhile limits the old city areas have fallen prey to blight, neglect and an overall loss of importance in the sustenance of the city. The walled city area in Patna has a unique cultural heritage which is an amalgamation of economic, religious, architectural, archeological and historical values. Changing economic functions have reduced the flourishing household industries in the area to mere cultural relics. Failing physical infrastructure and a continuous churn in the resident population has disfigured the urban fabric well beyond recognition raising doubts about the existence of a coherent urban identity of the area. The paper delves into the issue of urban identity and explores its linkages to the built environment. This paper looks at ways in which the urban identity can be restored by using planning interventions. Urban regeneration use cases from various cities are drawn upon to create a holistic development framework relevant to the study area. A regeneration plan has been proposed to enhance urban engagement and identity.**

Keywords: **Urban regeneration, identity, cultural heritage, urban planning**

1. INTRODUCTION

India is home to many old cities which are flourishing today as important economic, social and political nerve centers. Most cities generate a decisive imprint on the collective memory of their inhabitants. People relate to one or many characteristics of the city and that in turn defines their impression and engagement with the city. A city is a multi dimensional organism that manifests itself in physical, social, cultural, economic and psychological realms. Each of these aspects can be a stimulus which generates a unique identity for the city. For example Mumbai is identified by its burgeoning economic order and high density living.

On the other hand Delhi's uniqueness lies in the political power that has shaped it through the ages, bestowing upon it a distinctive architectural style and grandeur. The city of Jaipur expresses its identity through its physical built environment whereas natural topography dominates our memory of hill towns such as Shimla. It has been generally observed that the presence of an identifiable architectural style makes it easy for us to define the identity of a place.

2. HISTORY AND EVOLUTION:

Patna is a city that has seen multiple layers of history and time. Today it remains a mere shadow of a city, struggling to find its place in the globalized world. It is a riverside settlement stretched upon the banks of the river Ganga and bounded by smaller rivers such as the Sone and Punpun. Its history dates back to almost 2000 years. The city was the seat of political governance for a series of successive dynasties that dominated North-eastern India between the 6th century BC and the 4th century AD. Originally known as "Pataliputra" it is mentioned by the Greek historian Megasthenes in his writings during the 4th century BC.

The ancient city of Pataliputra was defended by a wooden wall, pierced with loopholes, crowned with 570 towers and having sixty four gates. A ditch on the landward side formed the next level of defense for the city. With the fall of the Mauryan Empire, the city lost its importance. The Hun and Sasanka invasions in the 6th century AD further destroyed its sacred relics. As per Huen Tsang's memoirs dating around 640 AD all that was left of the great city was a small town containing 1000 houses. For nearly the next 1000 years, Patna remained in oblivion until Sher Shah built his fort here in 1541. The city burgeoning with opium and cotton trade had already started spreading beyond its ancient walls [1].

The rulers of Pataliputra extended their patronage to Buddhism, as well as to Jainism, another major world religion which also emerged locally around the same time. The city's association with religion has continues through the ages. Guru Gobind Singh, the 10th Guru of the Sikhs, was born in Patna in 1666 AD, and the city was also the founding place of an important Sufi sect, the Firdausi. Patna today remains the gateway to major international religious centers, and is a stop on numerous pilgrimage circuits.

2.1 Understanding urban identity:

The term *urban identity* can be understood as Urban + identity. While urban refers to "that of the city", identity can be interpreted as the uniqueness or character attached to the city in question. Stojkov B. [6] defines urban identity as an aggregating mental process practically inseparable from

human comprehension of their urban environment and directly corresponding to their system of values. Physical forms and structures, symbols (historic, spiritual) and landmarks, natural elements, geographical position and economic activities have been enumerated as the determinants of urban identity. Research points out that the identity of the city bears on the identity of those living in it, and vice versa: "the urban environment reflects human needs and values" [5]. The loss or erosion of urban identity of a city means forgetting collective sense of belonging to the place of living, and hence endangering urban prosperity, well being and sustainability. Researchers point out that urban identity is a dynamic concept. The city being a transcendental phenomenon can be associated with different symbolisms or memory capsules at different points in time. Cities with rich heritage value cherish their multiple layers of identity, each of which bears a symbiotic

relationship with the other. The idea of a fixed identity does not fare well with the present day reality of constantly evolving vibrant multi cultural cities. There is a very fine line which differentiates the concept of fixed identity from conserved or protected identity. While it is important to conserve any aspect which bears heritage value, the very term heritage is open to multiple interpretations.

2.2 Urban identity-the theoretical dissection:

The sense of urban Identity- often termed as urbanity by modern urban scientists can be understood as a juxtaposition of the physical, visual, social, economic, cultural and political realms. Each of these factors determine the way in which an individual or community identifies, relates and engages with the area.

Table -1: Aspects of urban identity

Physical	Visual	Social	Economic	Cultural	Political
Location and setting	Built environment	Communities	Production and resourcing	Engagement, pride and identity	Administration
Physical surroundings	Architectural style	Social interactions	Livelihood and employment	Memory and projection	Justice
Level of infrastructure	Colors and features	Gender and generations	-	Recreation and creativity	Sense of freedom
-	Street experience	Sense of belonging	-	Belief and meaning	Sense of allegiance
		Security			

Case studies of various national and international examples of urban regeneration were carried out to understand if and how the factors described can be made to work together for the realization of an urban identity. European is replete with examples where visual identity is given prime importance. On the other hand we also have the example of the heritage city of Mostar [7] where built form and economic revival was a part of the overall urban regeneration programme. In India we have the example of urban regeneration programme carried out by the Aga khan trust in and around the Nizamuddin area in Delhi [8].
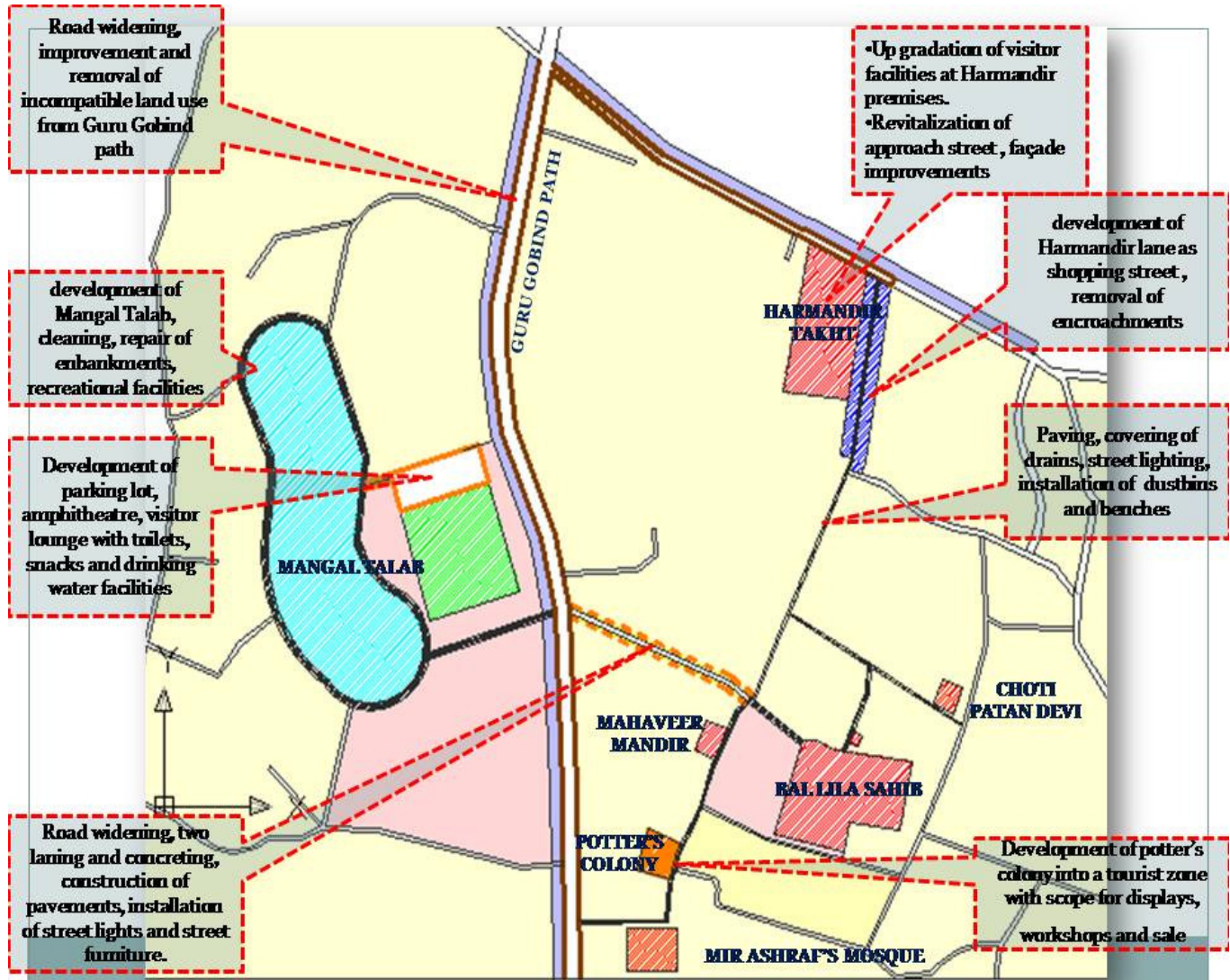
Here community engagement, social interaction, livelihood generation were carried out on an equal footing along with the conservation of heritage structures. One can conclude that urban regeneration programs should be essentially case specific. A comprehensive program for urban regeneration would be one which takes care of all the aspects mentioned above. The economic aspect is worth special mention here because trade, livelihood and employment are necessary to sustain any urban settlement. Any plan which neglects this

aspect runs into the danger of forming a mere museum out of the city.

In the present day scenario most cities are attempting to regenerate their blighted core city areas which were once the hub of all urban activity. Years of neglect, lack of physical infrastructure, growing population pressure and unrestrained economic activity have in most cases almost erased the identity that was once associated with the old areas of our cities. These core areas are today mere mangled remains of the erstwhile era offering limited sense of belonging, pride and opportunities to the new generations. Most urban regeneration exercises are attempts to attract economic investment and tourists into the area. Urban planning authorities try to refit the existing areas into the new paradigms of urban planning. While the provision of basic utilities such as water supply, electricity, drainage and sewerage are absolutely essential the efforts to transform the old city areas into a so called "planned area" replete with necessities of urban living may sometimes deprive the area of its erstwhile charm and essence.

The revitalization program for the private residences can be carried out as a two step initiative. In the first phase repainting and minor facade repairs can be sponsored by the government agencies. The second phase would be to invite partnership with local residents to improve building condition and encourage adaptive reuse. Strict Enforcement of guidelines related to facade and urban form would help in attaining a unique, identifiable image for the area.

3.3.4 *Tourism* activities can give a major boost to the dwindling economy in this area. The presence of several religious attractions pulls tourists round the year. However facilities such as drinking water, toilets etc need to be provided around the major tourist centers. Several spots such as the Mangal Talab area and the potters' colony adjacent to the Mir Ashraf Mosque can be further developed to become important tourism destinations.

Micro level development plans can be prepared for each of these sites. A pedestrian circuit encompassing sites such as the Harmandir saheb Gurudwara, Bal Lila Saheb Gurudwara, Choti Patan devi, Mir Ashraf Mosque and other religious and cultural attractions in the area can be developed to cater to the modern urban tourists.

3.3.5 None of the above initiatives would be possible without large scale community involvement at every step. The *community programs* can be subdivided into three major categories, namely community awareness, built heritage and household industry support programs. Along with spread of basic education and capacity building it will be necessary to sensitize the residents regarding the benefits and risks that come along with tourism. Citizen's groups can be formed for maintenance and community surveillance to ensure residents' as well as visitors' safety.

Table -2: Community programs

Program-1: community awareness	Program-2: built heritage	Program-3: household industries
To spread awareness amongst the residents about the cultural heritage and importance of the area. Basic education and capacity building; Awareness about benefits that tourism can bring with it and risks involved Creation of vigilance groups for community surveillance	To educate people about the built heritage of the area Promote local building materials and techniques Workshops in building conservation, restoration, safety standards Promote adaptive reuse of buildings Toolkit for new construction and alterations	Inventory of household industries in the area Financial and skill based support to dwindling industries Training and capacity building programs to promote entrepreneurship Creation of direct selling shops

3. CONCLUSIONS

The initiatives described in this paper can be useful tools for overall development of the Patna city area. Researchers would agree that development brings with itself diverse risks and vulnerability for the resident communities. Efforts have been put to ensure that the program prescribed is sensitive towards the needs and aspirations of the community. An ideal regeneration program would be one where the community takes the centre stage becoming both the "doer" and the "receiver". Any sense of identity or belongingness can be reinforced only when the community stands on strong economic foundations and feels secure about its future sustenance. While the physical, visual and political identity can be regenerated by institutionalized efforts, the cultural and social dimensions require willingful involvement of the community.

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