

Temporal Transformations: Space to Dynamic Place

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Abstract: City is no city without events. Events however large or small contributes towards shaping the form of city spaces. Festivals are events that contributes towards vibrancy of the city and give opportunity for interactions in today's busy urban life. Festivals are of two types Native and non-native, Native festivals are those which have designated space in both event calendar and city fabric. Contrarily, Non-Native festivals faces contestation in finding space for celebration and gaining existing community acceptance. Chhath Puja is one such festival that has slowly penetrated in the cultural calendar of National Capital Region due to presence of Large Migrant community from Eastern Uttar Pradesh, Bihar and Jharkhand. The Paper explores on how the festival of chhath have discovered a new Social Space or rather an active place hidden in neglected areas of city Landscape. Such temporal spaces adds new layers of color and vibrancy in cultural palette of city of Delhi.

Keywords: Urban Design, Place-making, Migration, Space Appropriation, Cultural contestation.

1. INTRODUCTION

The process of urban change is intricate, elaborate and multi-dimensional. Various elements, in a tangle of interdependencies, are responsible for framing every kind of change that takes place in an urban environment. Isolating one from the other is irrelevance. Hence, when we talk about urban processes in a cultural context, it becomes imperative to talk about the same processes in a migratory context and so on. It is possible, however, to talk about sub sets of urban processes and study how they influence the formation and transformation of urban spaces. Culture, Migration and festive spaces can, for instance, form such a sub-set. Migration to urban areas leads to the spread and confluence of ideas and philosophies, art and architecture, culture and politics, generating a new set of characteristics affecting the local culture, lifestyle, practices and urban space. New forms, and patterns of living within cities, influence the roles and functions of urban spaces.

One of the greatest manifestations of migratory influences can be seen in how the cultural practices in a particular region change. People are introduced to new ideas, and adapt accordingly. This adaptation is seen notably in the transformation of spaces. Activities, hitherto unheard of or scarcely practiced, gain new importance, as the number of people advocating them increase. These activities sometimes

acquire a physical space for themselves and are sometimes practiced intangibly, as in lifestyle changes. Festivals form an integral part of cultural representation. A festival is a very specific activity, depicting a very specific idea and representing a very specific community. Where a community exists, their festival can be expected to be celebrated. Festive spaces, thus, form vital community spaces. A study of how these festive spaces have evolved in an urban context gives an interesting insight into how a city absorbs and reproduces with time and context.

India is a fascinating example to study how migration of people and culture changes the local culture to give an intricate weave of co-existing habits, functions, and spaces. Delhi, the capital of India, is also the cultural capital of the country. Entirely inhabited by migrants from different backgrounds, religions and lifestyles, Delhi can be called a mixing pot of Indian culture. Festivals, and the spaces associated with them, naturally, assume a very important part in Delhi's cultural climate.

2. MIGRATION- MOBILITY

People moved from villages to small towns, from small towns to cities and so on. This movement brought about new dimensions in the lifestyle of people as the development of a place was no more restricted to just a better house, but to the whole community or a place and trying to create an identity of their own. The density and diversity of people gathered together in cities give urban social life a distinctive character.¹ Historical evidences and archeological excavations show that there is spatial and temporal transformation of habitat system due to give and take operations between corridors of cultural diffusion.

The census of India 2001 indicates that Maharashtra is the most preferred destination for migrants with 7.9 million immigrant population, followed by Delhi (5.6 million) and West Bengal (5.5 million). The total population of Delhi was 138.50 lakh consist of 82.04 lakh from within Delhi and 53.18 lakh as migrated population from various states (38% of total population). The regional contribution is summarized below, which clearly indicates a majority of migrants from Uttar

¹Lefebvre 1996: *Ludic City* by Quentin Stevens

Pradesh and Bihar contributing to 56% and their Influence can be clearly seen in cultural and spatial aspects of city.

1. Uttar Pradesh	43.56	5. Punjab	4.72
2. Haryana	10.26	6. West Bengal	3.18
3. Bihar	13.87	7. Madhya Pradesh	1.85
4. Rajasthan	5.16	8. Other States	17.39

In migration in Delhi: Regional contribution(Source: Census of India 2001)

Delhi lies within the Hindi-speaking culture region. Nevertheless there are significant cultural communities within the city in which Punjabi, Haryanvi, and Urdu language are dominant. Cultural characteristics are diffusing as never before, Social barriers are getting less isolated with modernization and the trend to pass on the culture is diffusing, but there is an infusion of accepting other cultures in their own domain.

3. FESTIVE SPACES

Urban spaces are changing in context and texture through history. New forms and patterns of living in cities have changed the roles and forms of urban spaces. The interventional Powers include politics, economics, government, religion, ethnic impact on the forms and functions of urban spaces. Urban spaces are important because they have impact on human behavior and quality of urban life in contemporary society. Most of them have changed and replaced according to people needs, wants and demands.²

Urban texture is integration of mass (built) and space (open). Generally, spaces between the buildings are recognized as the city spaces (Gelh, 1987) but there are other components in cities that have specific role to establish an urban space. Important aspects for identifying urban spaces in the cities such as; Socio-spatial components, Natural Environment, Geometries of urban Space, Nature of space, urban form and historical processes. The distinction between urban spaces and other spaces in the cities could be through attendance of people and amount of social interaction. The social interaction spaces gain importance at the time of major social gathering and celebrations, which create the feeling of oneness. They give a boost to the cultural or sporting life of the neighborhood and increase local pride and self esteem. Festivals are part of the area's 'experience economy' to use Pine and Gilmore's (1999) term, creating a temporary 'creative space' which can attract visitors (Richards and Wilson, 2006).

² Transition Process of Urban Space in Iran, Rahman Tafahomi, Hasunddin Lamit and Ahmad Bushri

4. FESTIVAL

It's something exceptional, something out of the ordinary, something that must create a special atmosphere which stems not only from the quality of the art and the production, but from the countryside, the ambience of a city and the traditions of a region³.

According to Turner (1982: 11), people in all cultures recognize the need to set aside certain times and spaces for communal creativity and celebration and festivals have long constituted a vehicle for expressing the close relationship between identity and place. Ekman (1999) says 'festivals are occasions for expressing collective belonging to a group or a place'. They constitute arenas where local knowledge is produced and reproduced, where the history, cultural inheritance and social structures, which distinguish one place from another, are revised, rejected or recreated.

Delhi, being the capital city employs people from all over the country resulting into an intense mix of communities, these communities' binds the city together contributing to the cities dynamics by developing its own way of celebration, protests and expression and is perceived through the social interaction and cultural expression which is the backbone of the society weather its durga puja, Nevratri or Dussera. There are festival driven transformations which change its overall structure for a specific period of time. Various festivals from various states native as well as non-native not only add color to the city but have created settlements of migrated communities; the popularity and scale of celebration of the Chhat puja and Ganesh Chaturthi is a clear interpretation of the non-native cultures in the city.

Past few years have witnessed a huge inflow of people from Bihar and eastern Uttar Pradesh which has Introduces a new Poorvanchali culture, these migrants turn out to be enriching to the existing culture as migrant culture brings new food, traditions, smells, customs, languages, etc. and Chhath puja as a mega event to the city where by space for this event itself becomes a kind of platform on which cultural difference. These people are finding acceptance and Identity in recent years. Native traditions of a region and Political influence can also be experienced in the City because of these migrants. Chhath refer to austerities like fasting, standing in water in 6 stages and on 6th day of kartik month.

Through this festival, people express their thanks and seek the blessings of the forces of nature, mainly the Sun and river. The Chhath festival shows how the factors such as cultural roots are expressed externally on non-native grounds. **The banks of a river or pond are the ideal prayer location where devotional music and folk songs reverberates in the air, purifying the whole atmosphere. Millions of people throng the banks of**

³ De Rougement, quoted in Isar, 1976: 131)

river Yamuna. Apart from ghats, the city street become processional path and act as a space for performance of rituals.⁴ The long journey to and from ghat is paused by pandals which are much vibrant and loud as compared to the ghats which are comparatively calm.



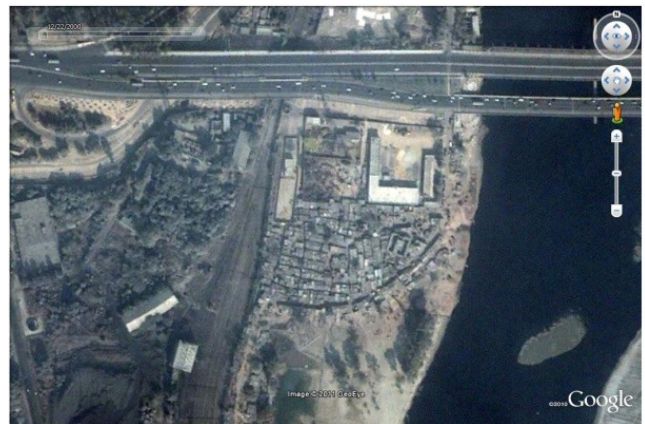
There are 72 chhath puja ghats on Yamuna (8 Nov 2013, Sakshi Chand, Chhath Puja, The pioneer) in Delhi, 40 lakh

⁴ Chhath puja rituals include people walking and dancing barefoot on roads, some moving on their chest, women holding aarti and pots.

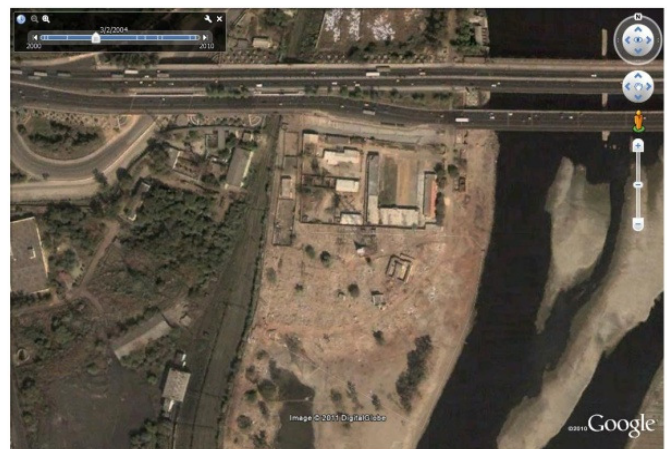
people participated in Chhath puja last year and a hefty amount of 1.5 crore was allotted by Municipal corporation for the cleaning of ghats (8 Nov 2013, Delhi celebrates chhath; Congress BJP leaders visit ghats, Times of India) . This not only influenced the actual space but also preparations like markets, decoration, and poster creates temporary vibrancy. The festival also induces hindrances in movement of traffic in and around these spaces, Overcrowded railway station and puja residue on water bodies for several days.

Image Source: wn.com, www.hindu.com, tribuneindia.com

These newly introduced spaces have Changed and modified the city fabric to a great extent. The squatter settlement on ghat along ITO bridge was removed as a part of Yamuna action plan, but the religious activities continued. These religious activities slowly transformed the ghat every year with festivals like durga puja, ganesh chaturthi and Chhath also every day rituals do take place in this ghat. The transformation can clearly be seen by the satellite images below.



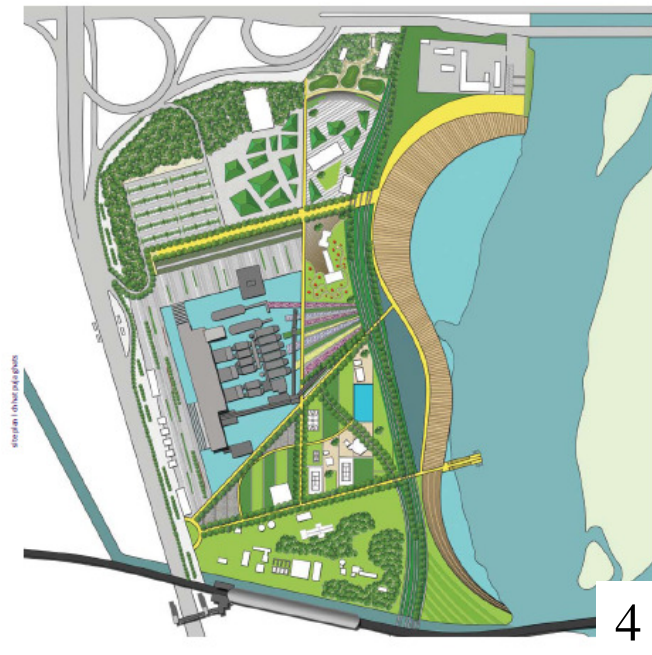
(Dec 2000) 1



(Feb 2004) 2



(Oct 2010) 3



Satellite Image showing transformation of space along Yamuna river in past 10 years, from a squatter settlement to designated Chhath Puja ghat and Future Proposal for the Ghat by Morphogenesis

5. MAKING OF A PLACE

The spaces for festivals slowly and steadily strive to get established and identified in urban fabric. The formation of these festive spaces is based on following aspects-

BY Default- These are the spaces with historic, symbolic or cultural importance. The default spaces refer to sacred spaces which are the most desirable place for celebration of a ritual.

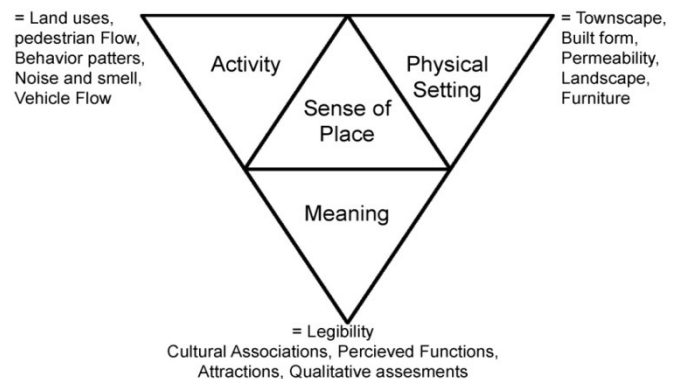
For example religious precinct water body which is always considered as sacred and has myth or belief.

By planning- When a new city is formed a number of community spaces are provided for social interaction which vary from place to place and community to community. The designated space in master plan for various events and rituals.

By Political forces- When people from a specific community migrate into a new city they gain attention from political parties and are looked at as a vote bank, thus they are provided with spaces and supporting rules and regulations for their support. These events provide them space for showcasing their power and support for that specific community.

By Need- There are certain communities which are not supported by any of the above factors but they have will and faith in their religion and are strongly associated with them. These communities wherever migrated create spaces for themselves small or large depending upon their power and availability of space.

If we think of space as that which allows movement than place is a pause, each pause in movement makes it possible for the location to be transformed into place⁵. Spaces for celebrations or performing rituals are not organizing or structuring element of a city but are event driven temporal spaces. They are sometimes **everyday streets** transforming into **processional path** or spaces for social interaction hosting communal **gathering** or **sacred spaces** with symbolic importance. These are the spaces formed or erased from the urban fabric with changing social and cultural structure and need of the city. Aspects that contribute towards a place-



Sense of place: John Punter(1991) and John Montgomery (1998).

The above image shows how various aspects, i.e. Activity, physical setting and meaning of that particular space contributes to give the sense of place to an urban space. It shows how a space needs activity and meaning to complete itself as a place.

⁵ Yi-Fu Tuan: *Space and place the perspective of experience*

6. CONCLUSION

The success or failure of a space to which people relate to depends upon a number of aspects. These spaces changes with course of time and turn into places to which people relate to thus aspects contributing to a successful festive space are-

Satisfaction of Inner self — Religious faith and duties gives a rightful path to human being and is expressed through Prayer, rituals and festivals.

- **Abundant choice** — people enjoy the freedom to choose from an abundance of offers, even if it is more than they could possibly see or do in the time available.
- **Moments of amazement** —while—most people come with a specific aim to see or buy, they get greater pleasure in discovering something new in the process.
- **Shared experiences** —the main event is often only the pretext for the real purpose which is to enjoy the company of friends. This can take place in public spaces or cafés, bars and restaurants away from the main venue. Places to meet before and celebrate or chill-out afterwards are vital to the experience.
- **Local distinctiveness** —the landscape and townscapes, the local food and drink can become the sensory cues associated with the experience which give the event or location its distinctive and memorable appeal.
- **Holistic evaluation** —another lesson is to remember that customers evaluate their experiences not through a checklist of individual attributes and service dimensions but as a whole. For example, they don't complain about slow service just because they expect to be served quicker, but because they are worried that they will miss the start of the next show.⁶

In today's fast stressful urban life, human beings require occasions for experiencing their cultural roots in form of

festival and celebration and, for many in our society, these opportunities are fundamentally religious and spiritual in nature as we mark them at high points in our different traditions. Festive spaces are not just a facility but a necessity for today urban life where there are limited opportunities to stay connected to our roots. Temporal spaces such as chhath puja ghat can cater to not only chhath rather a number of similar festive occasions where water is an integral component and contributes towards community cohesion.

We find that the migration from different cultural backgrounds has impacted life not only at local level, but at regional level. Instead of slowly losing their significance these communities have merged and added new hue to the vibrancy of the city.

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⁶ Michael Morgan; *Festive spaces and the visitor experience*