

Gender and Tangible Heritage: Repercussions for Tourism and Everyday Debacles-Insights from Kolkata

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Abstract—Urban tangible heritage is increasingly gaining importance in today's world because of its inherent value to development and latent potential to revitalize cities by attracting tourists and reweaving the urban fabric's relationship to citizens. Historically, heritage has had a defining role in the conception and construction of cities with the social and cultural contexts of its patrons embedded in it, in which gender dynamics was an inseparable contributor. So, to understand heritage completely and utilize its full potential, its gender dimensions must be understood. But gender relations and representations has been largely underrepresented in the heritage discourse both in context of everyday experiences of citizens and articulation of tourism destination image, often leaving women disadvantaged. This paper investigates the alliance between gender and environmental experiences with reference to tangible heritage in the city of Kolkata, a modern metropolis in India and sheds light on various insights that renders visible the hitherto invisible fabric of gender relations animating heritage environment.

1. INTRODUCTION

Heritage in reality is the repackaging of our physical, cultural and social past into modern mould for the contemporary consumer so as to unearth its value and transform it into an economic and cultural asset rather than an obstruction to development. Diverse gender inclusion in a space is a measure of its success and popularity, more so in the case of heritage environments as over the years the various contexts and processes within which they are situated get embedded within them. A pragmatic approach to heritage which includes gender discourse should be worked out which will benefit both the citizens and the tourism industry and in turn can invigorate the entire city.

1.1. Objectives

This paper sets out to articulate gender relations in the construction, production and usage of tangible heritage environments both in reference to tourism and everyday living experience of the citizens in Kolkata famously crowned with the title of 'city of Joy' and focuses on how the gender construct affects the cities potential to renew itself.

1.2. Methodology and limitations

This paper uses views of twenty women tourists who have visited Kolkata some times in last five years and were interested in heritage tourism and resident women of Kolkata who were asked about some of the most important issues regarding heritage buildings and how they fare in terms of gender inclusion and what needs to be done to make them more attuned to the needs and aspirations of the fair sex. The primary tourist data was collected from tourism review sites like 'trip advisor' and respondents were selected randomly and contacted over mail for their views. Citizens were chosen by convenience sampling, keeping in mind their educational qualification and level of familiarity with the city. The responses which repeat themselves are omitted here due to lack of space. Insufficient sample size presents a limitation and so this paper only aims to indicate certain themes and is by no means exhaustive.

2. GENDER: IT'S REPERTOIRE

2.1. Gender roles in society

"Gender is socially and culturally produced ideas about male-female difference, power, and inequality that structure the reproduction of these differences in the institutionalized practices of society." [1]. "Gender" indicates a set of qualities and behaviours expected from men and women by their societies and renders social identity to the person. Different genders experience and utilize the spaces differently which is often apparent by the reduced visibility and participation of women in physical spaces of the city and its dynamics due to different reasons. In the case of heritage environments, unequal treatment to women is particularly detrimental as this prohibits the utilization of immense knowledge of heritage bestowed with the womenfolk for greater good which in turn discourages the engulfment of economically unviable heritage establishment for private gain.

2.2. Gendered space

Gendered spaces are defined as any space or place which has both visible and hidden expectations, rules, and guidelines for different genders, reinforces gender roles and stereotypes, and helps to preserve existing norms and boundaries of society. Different space and time structures produce specific social patterns and relationship and specific experiences (like privacy) and places (such as landscapes) and which are the primary progenitors of gendered spaces[2]. Gendered spaces connect the two domains of public and private spheres and shape the opportunities and constraints applicable to women users of these spaces[3] and embody features that relate to either masculinity or femininity directly or indirectly, translating into the innate characteristics of place[4]

3. HERITAGE ENVIRONMENTS AND GENDERED LINKS

Gender perspective of studying heritage particularly hinges on two issues of interrelationship between the two, the issue of identities and self; and power play between the two genders. Heritage is not just about space or property but it encompasses people, their livelihood, culture as well as natural, economic and political aspects and so has a considerable impact on how citizens and tourists experience the city as a whole. Many scholars have proposed that heritage has a gendered value, which usually favors the masculine ideals and perceptions [5] and neglecting the gender quotient in heritage and urban planning has created spaces which are nonresponsive to the feminine needs e.g. most often women find the 'public spaces' in cities fearsome[6]. Smith argues against the 'spatial expression of patriarchy' by saying that if women are invisible and devalued in the way they are portrayed through a nation's heritage, this will reinforce the contemporary values and inequities given to women's identities, social values and experience.

3.1. Heritage and the citizens-everyday gendered encounters

3.1.1. Investigating the links

In any city citizen's relationship with tangible heritage can be established by investigating two promising links, the first being between heritage (historic environment) and sense of place, and second between sense of place (as developed through heritage) and social capital. Heritage's link with gender is shaped, perceived and felt through representations (or lack thereof), meaning, identity, status and power reflected in prevalent gender norms.

- Historic environment can be linked to sense of place through place distinctiveness (what makes a place distinctive), place continuity (the way a place supports people's sense of continuity) and place dependency (how a place enables people to realize their goals) [7]. How people interpret and value 'heritage' and how heritage spaces support social interaction and activities transforms

urban heritage by adding a strong sense of place to it. Place identity focuses on the way in which the inhabitants of a set geographic area view themselves, the significance they attribute to their place [8] and in case of heritage building it is definitely gendered as different genders have different expectations from different places. So, heritage which represents both genders equally influences urban communities positively by encouraging them to protect their own history [9] and gives them a stronger identity. Heritage monuments are often important ecological sites, in many cases preserved by women community members and are intricately related to sense of place [10].

- Social Capital refers to benefits in terms of wellbeing, good health and civil engagement which is generated through the interactions between people. Link between sense of place (as developed through heritage) and social capital are manifested through place attachment and place dependency which are strong when they include historic environment facilitating non-heritage specific activities in addition to heritage based interactions[7]. Females are an active participant of social capital, they mould its characteristics and while doing so take cues from collective memory, of a representation of the past and a stable symbol of place which are provided by tangible heritage [11]

3.1.2. Heritage environments as public spaces

Heritage environments when ingrained in a city as public spaces can serve as an effective tool to reinstate and nurture mutually enriching relationship between the city and its inhabitants as cultural and social context which forms the identity of the citizens are already amalgamated in it and project an coherent image of the city to the tourists. Particular design attributes of heritage buildings and their assemblages are most evident display of gender relations impregnated within them and have profound effects on women's use of space. Monumental scale, too much closeness with built forms or presence of unknown humans scare women in all contexts including heritage environment and small details like distance of clear vision, height of enclosure, level of fencing across public places are as important as the building itself. Gender mainstreaming in heritage environments can inspire other public spaces to follow the footsteps and in the process can emerge as a tool for equitable gender representation in city spaces.

4. HERITAGE AND TOURISM: GENDER PERSPECTIVE"

4.1. Gender as an antecedent to TDI

'Quest for the other or the true self' is a dominant motivation which drives the tourist as well as is hidden in the citizen trapped in everyday routines of the mundane activities and heritage environments exactly deliver that. A place attracts tourist by its Tourism destination image or TDI [12] which is

“the sum of beliefs, ideas, and impressions that a person has of a destination and conveys certain identification with the location, in various forms which can range exoticism, eroticism, naturalism to militarism to the targeted audience [13]. Heritage influences people's perceptions and evaluations and thus, one's cognitive and affective image of place and is said to have a decisive influence on destination image [14] Women being the torchbearer of cultural processes and evolution are the most important stakeholder in development of TDI as among others, gender paradigm influences important issues like the decision making of potential tourists, public perception of place, and nature of modalities to be adopted to deliver intended experience through physical dimensions [15]

4.2. Gender as articulator of destination image

Gender, a part of the sociological framework influences image creation and thus play a dominant role in formation of TDI. In societies where females are subjugated, TDI conveys male views [4] accommodates male gaze and male preferences and creates gendered space which disfavors the fair sex. Also, in tourism sphere gender is used in a strategic way to promote a certain type of feeling or emotion. For instance, when attempting to promote a product or destination with a feeling of relaxation or intimacy, marketers often use women and if the place has masculine characteristics, man is portrayed [16]. In destinations , where women are considered unequal to men, the images portrayed often depict women as objects to be used or experienced, in provocative and sensual positions. In contrast, societies where women are vested with power equal to men they are often depicted in more luxurious and sophisticated ways and are used to portray feelings of luxury and comfort [4]. Gender inequality diminishes the quality of a destination image whereas fair representation of feminine gender in TDI of a destination makes it attractive to a wider population .

4.3. Politics as a moderator of gender role

Heritage is a potent instrument of voice and representation in politics [17] and spatial dimension of power relations decides the characteristics of gendered spaces .When the political structure sports more women in the position of power more resources are deployed by the planning and implementation machinery for the cause of gender equality which also reflects in renovation, maintenance and various operational aspects of tangible heritage thereby improving its latent potentials. Heritage is burdened with political aspiration and in a male dominated power structure represents strong masculine heroes, militarism and nationalism totally ignoring the feminine contributions thereby making them an object of male gaze and male ego satisfaction.

4.4. Gender role in shaping tourism products

A better understanding of the gendered nature of the destination in heritage environments serve as a valuable cue

for shaping products and services according to visitors' preferences and become important when heritage is seen as an potential tourist interest. Gender is a possible approach to market segmentation and heritage tourism can reap benefit by a deep understanding of the gender specific motivations and preferences [18]. TDI must address women as Pritchard and Morgan suggested that women play the leading role in the choice of family holidays and participate more actively in the various activities going on in the tourist destination [19].

5. KOLKATA-AN INTRODUCTION

Kolkata, capital of the Indian state of West Bengal also known as "The City of Processions", "The City of Palaces", and "City of Joy", is located on the east bank of the River Hooghly and is a bustling metropolis of modern India with a population of 4.8 millions. It was founded in 1690 by Job Charnock by amalgamating three villages called Sutanuti , Kalikata and Gobindapur, became the capital city of British India in 1773 [20] and remained so up to 1911 [21]. Kolkata underwent rapid urbanization since the onset of 19th century and since then has faced a number of urbanization challenges, establishing a balance between development and conservation of heritage being just one of them. The city has been noted for its revolutionary history and a cultural past that fused European philosophies with Indian tradition and has rendered the unique image by which it is identified today.

5.1. Kolkata and its Heritage

Kolkata's heritage buildings are an integral part of citizen's as well as tourist's mental landscape and in addition to having inherent nostalgic value, if utilized well can usher in a range of very practical and modern benefits, like increased tourism revenue and sustained renewal of the city .But Kolkata with its many palaces has now become a 'City of Ruins' as almost every heritage structure is either covered in posters & banyan trees or not maintained at all. Heritage ensembles are increasingly being challenged by mad proliferation of real estate development and concrete chaos and many are in bad physical condition or have legal litigation [22].



Fig. 1: Writers' Building, Kolkata



Fig. 2: Kolkata Port Trust Headquarters and The Marble palace,Kolkata.”



Fig. 4: Kolkata High Court and the National Library

In the past, Kolkata was divided into a White town and a Black town which sported distinct spatial philosophy and building characteristics. The White Town was centered around Lal Dighi, a water tank which provided drinking water to the town, earlier called Dalhousie Square, now renamed B. B. D Bagh (World Heritage Site declared by UNESCO) which served as British administrative citadel and the central business district of the nascent city and some of the city's earliest and grandest buildings are located in this square. Notable heritage buildings built here in colonial style are Writers Building (built in 1780), the Government House (presently the Governor's House, built in 1804), Bengal Bank Building built in 1806; demolished in 1996), Town Hall (built in 1813), etc. Many of these beautiful buildings are still in use, providing a glimpse of Calcutta's living British heritage and narrating the story of the growth of Calcutta, from its early years to modern days.



Fig. 6: Traditional houses of North Kolkata.

North Kolkata's heritage is characterized by thousands of houses, some among them palaces like Shovabazar Rajbari and grand zamindar (Landlords houses) with red-oxide floors and sleepy green-shuttered windows, the spacious porches on

the ground floor, with their intricate cornices, elaborate wrought-iron grills, and open terraces [23]. These houses give Kolkata its unique old-world charm and reflect the amazing architectural ethos of the city. In most areas of north Kolkata, the Indians constructed buildings following European styles, but modified parts according to their own social customs, individual choices and dictation – thus introducing a new style which was termed “Bengal Baroque” by some and generally called the “indigenous style”. Other old buildings also follow certain architectural typology and bear the history of eminent personalities of the society, thus constituting an overall cultural setting [22].

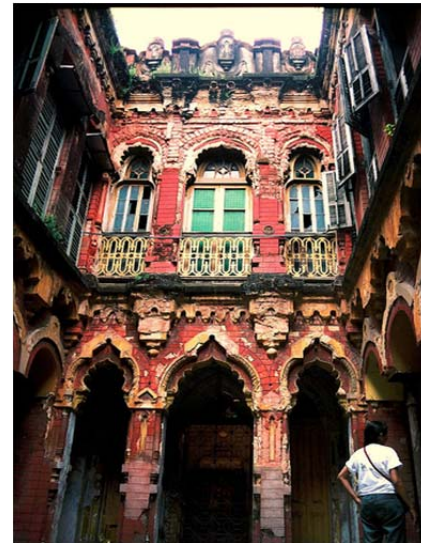


Fig. 7: Courtyard view of traditional North Kolkata house

5.2. Women in Kolkata

Though Kolkata has been progressive in providing equal right to women from 19th century onwards, the city's urban spaces have not considered women as equal participants. The Bengal renaissance elevated social position and status of women, but did not ensure their autonomy and independence [24] after independence there was a change in social landscape, women started stepping out of house in large numbers. Women authors, women centric films and other social movement's films examined conformism related to gender roles thereby ushering in reincarnation of women into confident and liberated citizens, as opposed to passive stereotypes of patriarchy. But this movement failed to spillover to urban spaces and public spaces of the city excluded females by intimidating them either through monumental scale (in B.B.D Bag area and central Kolkata) or organizing localities around meandering, narrow streets which were visibly unsafe with gathering spaces and entrances dangerously concealed. The zamindar baris and banedi baris (houses of aristocrats and landlords) of old Kolkata had separate Baharmahal and Andermahal (the zenanas, where the women were expected to stay), thereby curtailing women's right over space use even in

houses .In the scale of city, many famous man were honoured by naming countless streets, buildings and facilities after them women of same caliber were not acknowledged (Sarojini Naidu Sarani,Nalini Guha Sarani, Rani Rasmoni Avenue, Madam Curie Place, Neli Sengupta Sarani, Victoria memorial are the few exception) .The biggest fallout of this attitude has been general decline of safety in public spaces which alienates women and heritage buildings and public environment around them have borne the brunt to a great extent as they are living testimony to generations of unequal gender representations in urban spaces .

5.3. Reflections from Women interviewees

Views expressed by women tourists and the resident females on the heritage and its implications for the gender paradigm shed light on what heritage means to them and what are their needs and aspirations regarding these .

Respondent 1(A tourist from London) said, “If you embark on any street in Dalhousie square, you almost think that you are in England somewhere. Old buildings, monuments, churches give you a real feel of the British rule some 100 years or more back. BBD Bagh is the place where hundreds of companies and the state government have their offices. The place is always busy throughout the day but peace starts coming in with people leaving their offices. One can easily walk up to the river side from here.BBD Bag's history makes it a heritage place, and strangely, the local governments have done little to maintain it like Connaught Place in New Delhi has successfully done. Other than the GPO and Writer's Building, where you may still smell the rich tradition of Bengal from the great old days it's just an office area, and trust me, there are much better office areas in other cities across the universe. As a backpacker tourist if you are visiting BBD Bagh get ready to be dwarfed when you are crossing these buildings.”

Respondent 2(A tourist from Portugal) expresses her views as: “Kolkata is deeply ingrained with heritage, may it be buildings or lanes in formerly white or black towns. I will take back my memories of narrow winding lanes of the black town (now they call it North Kolkata) and vast expanse of B.B.D Bag framed by wonderful buildings but the clear lack of legibility and poor quality of buildings particularly in old parts of black town, makes it difficult for a solo women traveler like me to freely walk on her own. She must take a chaperon, essentially a male companion.”

Respondent 3(A housewife living in North Kolkata) is of the view that “In Kolkata the historical heritage is obscured from view due to overcrowded disposition, absence of enough viewing point , narrow lanes and absence of green lung. Heritage can only be experienced vaguely while moving, but not usually considered as a place to visit on a holiday. Nobody is interested in upkeep of old buildings. The hidden, obscured view creates unwelcoming, unsafe space for females. Kolkata has many beautiful monuments, most of it uncelebrated – if

only they were looked after, it is possible to find peace in the midst of all the hyper growth and spurt of new malls “

Respondent 4(A female from the city who daily visits B.B.D for work) said, “Though my office is in an overcrowded, nearly dilapidated heritage building in B.B.D Bagh, I have a feeling of pride when I visit this area every day. The buildings around are imposing, provide a royal enclosure to the streets and entering it transfers one to another era when Kolkata was grander. When I came here for the first time, to locate the stairs and entrance to my first floor office space, amidst dangerously dangling electric cables and coco phony of signboards was an uphill task.”

Respondent 5(A female from the city who frequently visits B.B.D for hanging out with friends) expressed her views as “Though in the daytime hanging around B.B.D Bag, Victoria Memorial and Writers Building is quite enjoyable but as dark sets in, the buildings which mostly serve as offices of varying sizes are closed and the entire environment transforms into a scary landscape with empty streets flanked by dark buildings and dangers lurking in each turn and corner. Public transport also becomes rare. It's important to get out from this area before evening sets in”

Respondent 6 (A housewife residing in the city) speaking on the issue of heritage and gender said , “City's historic grandeur has always celebrated masculine greatness especially in white town, through monumental buildings flanked by wide roads. In black town, narrow winding lanes comprising small nooks and corners for masculine gatherings pushed women inside houses as they felt uncomfortable being outside because of lack of safety.”

Respondent 7(A female scholar studying Gender relations in University) believes that Kolkata women's struggle to rightfully occupy a space in the city has historic roots. We have fine monuments. But our museums, our historic sites have not sufficiently valued women. Matangini Hazra has played such a prominent role in Indian struggle for freedom but nothing stands to her contribution to history .Dakhshineswar kali temple, a place of pilgrimage not a monument comes to the rescue of Rani Rashmani and pays tribute to her. No woman is celebrated like the Rabindra Sadan , Madhusudan Mancha,Sishir Mancha(All great poets and novelists of Bengal) though there have been many females holding same rank in Kolkata's cultural sphere. So I think in post-liberation India, where women are visible in the public space, women are not acknowledged ,there is a fear and resistance to them and you can see this now through the high crime in city's public spaces. We must show that women have always been important to the city to create a safe environment.

Respondent 8 (An architect practicing in the city) noted,” The remnants of British architecture makes the city grand. But now Kolkata is by and large an architectural mess, trying to put together different alien architectural forms, which generate an incoherent city. So here you will find group of buildings

which don't actually fit the context with each one competing for space. This discordance in architecture leads to the loss of sense of place, identity and safety for women."

Respondent 9 (A woman who commutes from suburb of Kolkata to city daily for work) stresses that Kolkata's spatial character has always been masculine and has limited women's access and mobility in the city. Women cannot access public spaces including heritage ones like the Victoria Memorial due to fear of crime.

Respondent 10 (A woman living in the city) said, "we know we are living in a heritage city but cannot think of going to Victoria memorial alone, to see the musical fountain due to lack of safety and transport woes like harassment in public transport like autos, buses and taxis, overcharging, refusals, faced rude behaviour are the common problems."

Respondent 11 (A city women who has migrated to Delhi but comes back to the city for regular visit) reminisces, "When I was a teenager and walked the pathways alongside these structures in BBD Bagh I used to feel proud of being a Calcutta. It gave me a sense of pride that Calcutta was once the capital of the British Era before they thought of shifting base to Delhi. But, look what the capital has become while Calcutta still languishes in its past glory without any effort to adapt it to changing realities."

Respondent 12 (A woman tourist who returned to the city after a long gap) had the following remarks, "The Writers Building is behind sandbags with no access and can't even get a good distant view of this grand old British building. Lal Dighi often remains closed (for renovation) not maintained at all and once around you are continuously pestered by beggars and homeless. So, unsafe and scary!"

5.4. Issues highlighted: Insights on heritage and gender nexus

- Sense of place and pride in history is the recurrent theme apparent in above discussion. Tourists relate the atmosphere of B.B.D Bag area with that of European towns and feel at one with the place. Citizens are proud of the historic legacy and heritage buildings being a part of their legacy, plays a part in shaping sense of place and identity for the Kolkata women. Heritage as landmarks often attract a large number of people and so provides them mental affirmation of being in a safe city. Respondents are worried about conflict between history and modernity in heritage environments and the consequent loss of sense of place and identity.
- Need for gender perspective interventions like creating mix of land uses which would strengthen round the clock safety is stressed as land use zoning of yesterdays where women would be at home most of the time and they would hardly venture out after dark is totally irrelevant today. Female tourists are most concerned about legibility and safety in vicinity of heritage.

- Strengthening and recognizing heritage belonging to women seems to be an important aspiration. Heritage building and the city spaces like streets and squares must include and acknowledge women for an equitable gender paradigm.
- The discussions linking heritage and women's identity closely relates to another theme – that of the high rate of violence women face in the city's public spaces including the historic monuments and how this limits women's access, mobility and participation in city spaces. The key issues that contribute to women feeling "unsafe" are poor lighting, poorly maintained buildings, sparsely populated areas, no access to emergency assistance and safe public transport. Adding features like musical fountain, lighting on heritage buildings, improving visibility by removing unnecessary fencing and billboards and creating defensible places in and around heritage ensembles are some ways to render heritage attractive to women.

6. THE WAY FORWARD

As emerging powers like India progresses, the role of heritage in planning and urban development is likely to become more prominent and it cannot happen without an equitable gender paradigm. Heritage as it stands today in Kolkata is far from embracing gender equality as aspired by the female tourists visiting the city and the women residents who considers them backdrop to their daily activities. Heritage buildings and ensembles are still engrossed in past ethos of male attitude and dominance which generated them rather than adapting to the gender equations manifested in present day lifestyle. This study therefore brings affront the issues latent in the interrelationship of heritage and gender incorporation and stresses that issues identified here must be included in urban planning as a whole in addition to heritage discourse for bringing in equitable gender representation. Perhaps, than heritage which has lost its relevance for a major section of citizens (the feminine gender) might regain it and its hidden potential can be used for inclusive growth of city and its citizens, rather than razing these gems of past to make way for modern development.

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