

Reclaiming the Streets: A Vision of a Happier and Healthier Cities

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Abstract—Streets must be ranked amongst the most valuable assets in any city. They must not only ensure residents mobility, allowing them to travel from one place to another, but must be a place for people to meet, interact, do business and have fun; thus making city livable. Visualizing the street as a network of connected public open space translates into rethinking the political, social, economic and environmental issues in cities. Twenty years ago, a housewife would walk to the grocery store. Now she drives to the super market, thus confining all interactions to the market itself. Up to first half of the twentieth century entertainment was once a public event, it is now dominated by that singularly private mode of communication, television. In many towns children are driven to school by their parents or taken by bus. Telephone calls, whatsapp etc. have largely replaced the neighborly chat. Pedestrian promenade has in many environments, been replaced by automobile promenade. Traditionally, streets functioned as places as well as links. They incorporated various social and operational activities into an integrated. In Contemporary streets, the functions of place and link have been separated. India is urbanizing at a very rapid pace and many of our cities are struggling to keep up with this pace. Urban streets play an important role in how this increasing number of people in our cities move about, interact, conduct business, etc. Streets occupy approximately twenty percent of the total land area in a typical city, and they are the most important and ubiquitous form of public space. This research tries to emphasize that as urban designers we must understand that streets are the powerful tool of urban design and must take step towards redefining the street as an important public space rather than as a mere channel for movement.

Keywords: --Streets, Social space, movement channel, happy and healthy city

1. INTRODUCTION

Street

Street is the largest assemblage of public space in any and every city. It is meant to be available to all the people. It served as the center for commerce, information and recreation within cities. (On streets, towards an evaluation of transportation potentials for the urban street, peter wolf, pg. no 189) . Street provides an easy and efficient access and connectivity, light and air, utilities and services. The morphology of the streets has the ability to be both an

immediate and intimate public space for dwelling as well as a network of public spaces throughout the settlement that can link activities in both space and time. (Moudon, 1987 --- The Street A Quintessential Social Public Space)

According to Guttman, the street ---

Is a social entity and its design reflects some social and cultural motives;

Is three dimensional such that the buildings containing and defining the street space are as important as the two dimensional surface of the street.

Provides a link between buildings but also provides a link between people and facilitates communication and interaction
Has two parts, one for the movement of people and the other for vehicles.

The Street has two social functions.

Instrumental –

- To provide a link between buildings,
- Over which the goods and people necessary to sustain the agricultural, marketing, manufacturing, administrative and military activities of the settlement can pass.

Expressive ----

- As a link between people ,facilities, communication and interaction, thus serving to bind together the social order of polis.
- Includes its use as a site for casual social interaction, including recreation, conversation and entertainment,
- Its use as a site for ritual observances, such as processions.

All streets, whether predominantly in residential, commercial or in civic uses where public access is unrestricted. (at least during day time) Streets are dynamic spaces (there is a sense of movement). Streets is the main urban space, where all people have free access at any day and time. Pedestrian movement is complete with the notion of streets as social space. There is a symbiotic relationship between pedestrian movement and economic, social and cultural exchange and transactions.

'Streets' as both social space and as connecting rather than dividing elements within cities, emphasizing the association of streets with quality of public life [(Appleyard 1981; Moudon 1987; Hass-Klau 1990, Jacobs 1995, Loukaitous-Sideri's and Bane Hass Klau et al 1999; Banerjee 2001; Jacobs et al 2002), The Dimension of Urban Design, Chapter 4, The morphological dimension, The public Space Network]

2. STREETS IN INDIA FROM HISTORICAL TO CONTEMPORARY

Ancient Streets : A Historical Perspective

The Indus valley, (3,000 B.C.) Mohen jo daro



Fig. 1-17/10/2015, <http://unhabitat.org/books/streets-as-public-spaces-and-drivers-of-urban-prosperity/>, Streets as Public Spaces and Drivers of Urban Prosperity

Streets characteristics ----

- Interdependent mix of elements and functions of streets
- function as places as well as links; they incorporate various social and operational activities into an integrated.
- Dominated the Social, Economic, and Cultural life of the city

Streets in 15th to 18th century 1400 to 1750 ,Shahjahanabad

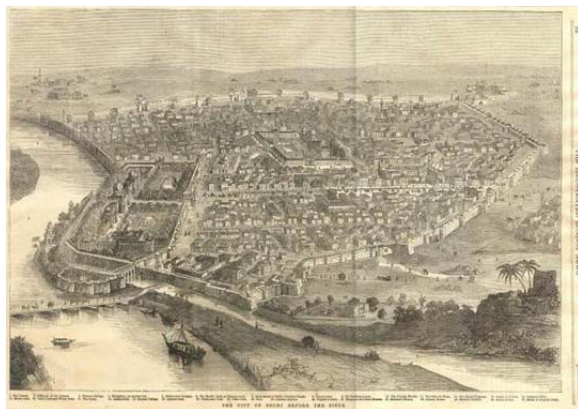


Fig. 2 - India Habitat Centre, Habitat Library & Resource Centre, IHC Walk: Dec 13, 2014, 3:00 pm

A Rare Assemblage of 18th & 19th Century Photographs of Various Monuments of Indian Cities

<http://www.bl.uk/georgian-britain/articles/the-rise-of-cities-in-the-18th-century,12/10/2015>



Fig. 3 -A mid 18th Century vintage photograph of the Old Court House Street of Calcutta"

A Rare Assemblage of 18th & 19th Century Photographs of Various Monuments of Indian Cities <http://www.bl.uk/georgian-britain/articles/the-rise-of-cities-in-the-18th-century,12/10/2015>

Street characteristics ---

- Planned Everything on a large and noble Scale.
- The Principal Streets Of The City Flanked With Avenues, and Boulevards .
- The layout of the buildings, gardens, and the shops in the city were well equipped to satisfy the need of all users.

19th Century Streets



Fig. 4 - Bhendy Bazaar Road, Bombay," by Bourne and Shepherd, 1880's"

A Rare Assemblage of 18th & 19th Century Photographs of Various Monuments of Indian Cities ----
<http://www.bl.uk/georgian-britain/articles/the-rise-of-cities-in-the-18th-century>, 12/10/2015



Fig. 5 - An archaic of a vendor selling various daily need products at his shop in old streets of Chandni Chowk-Delhi, 1862-CE.”

A Rare Assemblage of 18th & 19th Century Photographs of Various Monuments of Indian Cities ----
<http://www.bl.uk/georgian-britain/articles/the-rise-of-cities-in-the-18th-century>, 12/10/2015

Street characteristics

Walking, Linger, Shopping, Eating, Standing in group, Sitting, etc all activities happening simultaneously on the street such the streets function both as social and operational integrately.



Fig. 6 -A picture of Old Chandni Chowk Street, (the present Chawari Bazaar Street) taken from Jumma Masjid (Jama Masjid) in Year 1870”

A Rare Assemblage of 18th & 19th Century Photographs of Various Monuments of Indian Cities ----
<http://www.bl.uk/georgian-britain/articles/the-rise-of-cities-in-the-18th-century>, 12/10/2015

Early 20th Century Streets

Street characteristics – activities happening on the street

- ‘The shops are simply boxes, set on end, [where one can] stand and watch the other street activities.
- The tailor stitching and cutting, [and] the coppersmith hammering at bowls and dishes’ (Low 1907: 24) while all around people can be seen ‘dressing, shaving, washing, and sleeping, and even a good deal of eating’ (Low 1907: 23).
- On its streets, India eats, works, sleeps, moves, celebrates and worships’ (Appadurai 1987: 14).
- Indian streets are defined by a profusion of personal encounters: ‘The food carts and people around them and the simple act of eating made the place appear intimate’ (Ahuja 1997: 50).



An 1906-CE archaic showcasing two men tuning dholaks and three young girls from a street vending *Nautanki Group*, dancing on the streets of *Old Delhi (India)* to earn their livelihood.

A Rare Assemblage of 18th & 19th Century Photographs of Various Monuments of Indian Cities ----
<http://www.bl.uk/georgian-britain/articles/the-rise-of-cities-in-the-18th-century>, 12/10/2015



Fig. 7 - A 1947-CE vintage photograph clicked on the eve of Independence Day, when the Indian National Flag used to be hosted atop the Ghanta Ghar/Clock Tower located at the main Chandni Chowk Street of Delhi.”

A Rare Assemblage of 18th & 19th Century Photographs of Various Monuments of Indian Cities -- <http://www.bl.uk/georgian-britain/articles/the-rise-of-cities-in-the-18th-century>, 12/10/2015

20th Century, Mumbai

Street characteristics ---activities happening on the street

- On the residential street in front of the apartment a woman selling tea,
- An occasional banana vendor as well.
- Children play on a scooter while his father washes his auto rickshaw.
- A cigarette and pan vendor appears across the road.
- A vendor toasts sandwiches , a man selling nimbus and vegetables from a pushcart.
- A raddiwala cycles by, collecting old newspapers. An itinerant barber, his equipment stored in a small briefcase, sits in the shade of a shoe repairman's roadside stall.
- A cluster of women sell vegetables, a man fries pakodas from a small metal stand, etc.
- Beneath an old tree, magazines are displayed next to two young men repairing tires,



01/11/2015, <http://www.gettyimages.in/detail/photo/street-scene-of-bombay-india-20th-century-high-res-stock-photography/142450884>

3. MODERN TRANSFORMATION

Streets in 21ST Century

Street Characteristics

- From the introduction of motorized transport at the turn of the century, the middle of the road is not the place for to walk in a leisurely way) (quoted in Hazareesingh 2007: 66)
- Skywalks are shaping city.
- Navigating crumbling surfaces, dodging garbage, shit and vanished sidewalks,
- Streets are dense, dirty and chaotic.
- The erection of fences meant to keep pedestrians separate from automotive traffic, efforts to reshape the street practices in India have largely failed (cf. Chakrabarty 2002).
- The fence had an opposite effect, as more people chose to walk amidst traffic (cf. Ranade et al 2005).
- Safety, social interaction, sense of belongingness, vitality, adaptability, permeability, diversity such street qualities are lacking in 21st century streets.



https://www.google.co.in/imgres?imgurl=http://static.indianexpress.com/mimages/M_Id_139158_skywalk.jp,19/01/2016



View of a main bazaar street, Jaipur
http://www.planningindia.org/docs/Inclusive_India.pdf,
 12/10/2015

4. COMPARISON – HISTORICAL STREETS AND CONTEMPORARY STREETS

Characteristics of Historical Streets

- Full of diversity and contrasting developments.
- Street layout is one of the important aspects of planning.
- Streets in Indian cities can hardly be channels of circulation.
- Most activities, including living, occur or extend into the streets.
- The residential neighborhoods streets are an extension of the verandah, or living spaces for that matter.
- Streets of the old cities are always full of the hustle of hawkers, festivities and procession.
- On its streets, India eats, works, sleeps, moves, celebrates and worships'

Characteristics of Contemporary Streets

- Streets have come to function less as social gathering spaces and market areas and more as conduits for an ever increasing volume of traffic.
- Struggle to reconcile the competing needs of mobility and livability.
- Private motor ownership grows and government attempt to accommodate the additional vehicles.
- City Street has become in some cases a place of danger for citizens, so that it forces people to stay within their privacy of their home.

5. CONCLUSION

Contemporary image of the street

- Streets have been reduced to a more restricted role of serving as conduits for the movement of automobiles.
- Is interpreted as the roadway, pedestrian way and flanking buildings are exist independently of one another.

- The functions of place and link have been separated. This represents the reduction of the idea of the street to the concept of road marked out on the ground of traffic.
- The separation of building system and streets system is the main characteristic of the contemporary street.

Indian cities

Indian cities are struggling to reconcile the competing needs of mobility and livability. Private motor ownership grows and government attempt to accommodate the additional vehicles. Becoming more and more difficult to retain adequate space for the social and economic activities that traditionally have taken place in our streets.

Over the time, streets have come to function less as social gathering spaces and market areas and more as conduits for an ever increasing volume of traffic. It can be assumed that for the next 10-20 years the private cars will remain an important means of urban transport. The modern city street has become in some cases a place of danger for citizens, so that it forces people to stay within their privacy of their home. There is a need to change the character of urban roads --- and to re-discover them as 'streets' to re-conceive them as connectors rather than dividers.

The most important form of public transport is "walking". In a city like Mumbai, half the people walk to work. The ratio is higher in small towns. The vast majority of people walk all or part of each journey, Yet footpaths, pedestrian crossings, are rarely given priority in Indian urban planning. To build next-generation cities on the basis of density and walkability. This needs to be internalized in our urban thinking as soon as possible because it is very difficult to change urban form retrospectively.

Vision

Much of urban India is yet to be built and we have an opportunity to change our model of town. In that case there must be modifications on the basis of extensive observations and learning's from the old settlements. Streets are the powerful tool of urban design and must take step towards redefining the street as an important public space rather than as a mere channel for movement. Town planning legislation and building codes should be appropriate for the time and for the society they serve.

Design cities with people in mind not cars. While designing cities, priorities to be given to the qualities of the street in the past to have happier and healthier cities.

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