STREETS AS PUBLIC SPACES: A CASE STUDY OF MANEK CHOWK

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ABSTRACT

India being a developing country, apparently the cities are going through rapid urbanization. Empirical statistics exhibits 28 percent gradual increase of population in year 2001 to 32.37 percent in 2014. The mega cities in Indian are among the most dynamic regions on the planet due to exponential growth of population. Comparative analysis of last five decades says, the growth of population of India (today 1.3 billion) has grown two and a half times, but the urban population has grown nearly five times. Land is a fixed resource. To met the prolific demand of increasing population in urban area the public open spaces are curtailed down.

Due to urbanization road and street network are developed rapidly, only left over spaces are designated as open space. In present scenario streets are dominated by vehicles and reserved for specific segment people, instead of considering it as common pool resource for everyone. Street’s primary use has converted as parking area or encroached by vendors. No consideration is given for pedestrians and bicycles. Fast living lifestyle eventually leads to hypertension and stress where as lack of recreational opportunities within easily accessible distances contributes to it.

The methodology includes detailed study of urbanization trend and its impact on Indian street to identify the reason for decreasing public open space. Since streets are the only continuous open area available in cities feasibility of converting street as an alternative open space is justified with relevant case examples. For understanding characteristics of streets which can play better role as public open space into street, case studies have been done.

Analysis says, that planned streets of new cities have defined segregation of land use making road and streets as barren: no eyes on street. Absence of activity between two nodes makes street unsafe, discourage the pedestrian movement and encourages vehicular movement. To formulate set of function and activities that makes a street as better public place and a better living place, study of Manek chowk of old Ahmedabad city is done which indicates, multi functionality of streets and adjoining land uses results into vibrant streets, better cultural interaction, better commercial viability, a safe street and ultimately a livable public place.
Key words: Public place, streets, livable, urbanization.


1. INTRODUCTION

“What defines a character of a city is its public space, not its private space. What define the value of the private assets of the space are not the assets by themselves but the common assets. The value of the public good affects the value of the private good. We need to show every day that public spaces are an asset to a city.” (UN-HABITAT, 2012)

Streets: can be defined as artery in a built environment, a public parcel of land connecting various built-up mass in urban context which can be candidly accessed, assembled and interacted. Streets are many times misunderstood with roads. The main function of road is transportation, while of street is public interaction and to provide safe commutation to pedestrians.

Streets can be classified as primary and secondary street or main and sub street depending upon the activities and interaction happening around.

Public Space: is communal space that is generally open and accessible to all, where social and economical exchanges occur and culture mixes. Good public spaces have following four qualities: easily accessible, activities for engagement, comfortable and sociable.

“Like few other places, streets are a public stage where life unfolds.” A place which is not just a means for mobility only, where as platform where we confront different people, interact, protest for injustice, celebrate, procession of festivals etc happens. Large area in city comprises of streets and is major public space community can have.

Streets are critical public spaces that contribute richness to the social, civic, and economic fabric of our communities. The changed trend in mobility has faded the vibrant character of street and readily replaced with parking area and dead ends or no eye on street. The research paper focuses on finding spatial and social characteristics to make street as safe and successful public space.

2. LESSONS FROM PAST: STREET AS PUBLIC SPACE IN ANCIENT ERA

“Streets in ancient cities were the result of a vision of civilization rather than a function of the economy.” (Clos, 2013) Like people, streets too have history. From ancient time cities were developed around streets. Streets were not only considered as links merged with road connection to connect different destinations whereas also served three functions i-e: commutation, commerce and social interaction. They are a key element in determining the form and function of a city, a neighborhood and community.
The traditional settlement’s streets radiated from the nucleus of the city, which was usually the seat of political power or place of worship, such as a mosque, a temple or a cathedral, or some other structure of political, commercial or cultural significance, such as a royal palace. It’s street pattern can be studied as following.

2. MOHENJO-DARO

The grid pattern, which is a type of street plan in which streets run at right angles to each other is characteristic of many ancient cities. The grid system was commonly used in settlements of the Indus Valley that date back to 2600 BC. A typical city of the Indus Valley Civilization was composed of two sections connected via large streets of about 30 meters of width intersecting at right angles: one located on an artificially raised mound and another at ground level. The layout of the grid system promoted social interactions and commercial exchanges that made streets play their full function as public spaces. In addition, it facilitated the provision of basic services.

Streets thus formed an integral part of the social and commercial fabric of these settlements. They shaped the urban form and structure by separating blocks and linking different places of interest within the city.

3. PINK CITY JAIPUR

The city of Jaipur was founded in 1727 by Jai Singh II. Planned according to the Prastara type of layout, which gives prominence to the cardinal directions. Thus plan of Jaipur is a grid of 3x3 with gridlines being the city’s main streets. First Order Street defines the sector size; second Order Street defines the neighborhood or block. Gridiron system is used for road network for procession paths.
Internal road network have hierarchy in terms of access and privacy, hence at the same time safe neighborhood is created. All the streets have certain character that creates every street identifiable. The huge squares of main streets, known as chaupers, are conveniently located so that they can be easily reached from any of the massive gates of this walled city. Those were the ideal places to observe or participate in any social activity which changes in every hour of the day.

Hence streets or intersection of streets in form of chowks or chaupal, plaza were the major social interaction place where one can sit, socialize, walk, shop or get information of events.

4. URBANIZATION AND ITS IMPACT ON STREETS.

“If you plan cities for cars and traffic, you get cars and traffic. If you plan for people and places, you get people and places.” (https://walkablestreets.wordpress.com/roaddiets/)

India being a developing country, apparently the cities are going through rapid urbanization. About 377 million people from India’s total population of 1.21 billion are urban dwellers. Every year, more than 10 million people migrating to cities and towns, the total urban population is expected shout up upto about 600 million by 2031.

The concentration of people from different places to one place- city or town, leads to much more pressure on their infrastructure and housing and resulting in disordered urbanization.

The local authorities are more occupied with building arterial streets for motorized vehicles, thereby ignoring the needs of the biggest users of streets i-e, pedestrians. The poorly planned arterial streets neither sidewalks nor bicycle lanes are provided. This is common in most cities where a low proportion of land is allocated to streets and traffic congestion is a major concern. The city authorities put more emphasis on tackling traffic congestion than improving the mobility of pedestrians and cyclists.

Earlier when the usage of car was not popular, the main streets were really thriving. They served as transit spaces as well as spaces to linger, for pedestrians and for people using public transport and private vehicles. The streets bind and structured the vast city region, not only in terms of commutation but also in the minds of people as image of city. People took pride in them and strongly identified with “their” local high street.

The availability and affordability of car to citizens structured cities according to the vision of the car-oriented city and was a main driver of urban design. Huge amounts of public money were invested to turn streets from connecting spaces into dividing spaces, which focused on mass motorization
The consequences of the above turned dramatic: the width of sidewalks was reduced, planters eliminated, and in order to facilitate a smooth flow of traffic even tunnels or elevated roads were constructed, which segregated the complete neighborhoods from each other. As a result, the car dominated many urban public spaces and contributed noise, pollution and dangers which in turn deteriorated the main streets.

Rapid urban land expansion had a major impact on streets and inter-road networks. Changes in urban growth patterns were accompanied by changes in street patterns and only left over spaces were designated as open space. Hence the streets, for pedestrians and commerce were reduced down and encroached by vehicles either for commutation or for parking, making streets disconnected and isolated.

5. SUCCESSFUL EXAMPLES OF STREET, ACROSS THE GLOBE:

5.1. 16th Street Mall – Denver, Colorado
Denver’s 16th Street Mall is an important transit corridor that connects Union Station to the Colorado State capitol and also a pedestrian walkway with long tree-lined up on one side with hundreds of stores, restaurants, and cafés on the other side. Wide sidewalks and free shuttle buses run along the course of this 1.25 mile long makes street active and live throughout the day.

![Figure 4 Streets As Places Strategies: Wide sidewalks, Transit priority](image)

5.2. Temple Street Market – Hong Kong
Hong Kong’s Temple Street transforms every evening into a lively night market with hundreds of vendors selling delicious foods, fashionable clothes, and locally made crafts. Starting at 2pm, Temple Street is closed to vehicular traffic and vendors begin setting up their stalls in anticipation of the hundreds of locals and tourists who swarm to this bustling Night Market.

![Figure 5 Street s As Places Strategies: Market Street, Changing the street layout during different days or times](image)
5.3. Bell Street Park – Seattle, Washington

Seattle was developed as first shared street in the year 2014. Formerly an underutilized roadway, Bell Street’s new design allows the shared space to host a hybrid of park activities and street functions. With its curbless and continuous surface materials, Bell Street Park encourages pedestrians, cyclists, and automobiles to share this four block space. Intersection cues force vehicles to rise onto Bell Street through a driveway entrance, promoting slow driving speeds. Sidewalks were widened to create sidewalk café zones, adding to the liveliness of this street. Activities and events, including outdoor movies, markets, and live music further the park spirit of this street.

Use the "Insert Citation" button to add citations to this document.

Figure 6 Streets As Places Strategies: Shared street, Celebrations and special events, Curbless street, Special pavement material

5.4. Multi functional Street: Manek Chowk

“Streets in ancient cities were the result of vision of civilization rather than a function of the economy”. (Clos, 2013). Streets play multifunctional roles to satisfy wide range of objectives. One good example exits at Manek Chowk in collaboration act as connecting space, cultural space, open space, interaction space, commercial space.

Figure 7 Manek Chowk, Ahmedabad during day time

Manek chowk is located in the heart of historic walled city: Ahmedabad, Gujrat. It is situated between two nationally protected monuments, the Tombs of the King and Queen of Ahmedabad. Manek Chowk is a traditional business centre and also one of the most important public spaces of the Walled City. It comprises of formal and informal commercial activities, religious and cultural sentiments, and a vibrant public life. The commercial activity
in Manek Chowk is as old as the city of Ahmedabad. Its central location and easy accessibility are the main reasons for the commercial activity to flourish.

![Figure 8](image)

**Figure 8** Basic movement of pedestrian at Manek Chowk

A large proportion of visitors at Manek Chowk are pedestrians or non-motorized transit users. During the peak business hours, on an average, 1 person per second enters or exits Manek Chowk. Manek Chowk is demonstrative of an excellent urban public space developed on traditional city planning principles and thrives as a vibrant anchor community space in the contemporary context. The activities in the public place change several times in a day to serve specific needs and gives way for effective usage of place.

The northern edge of the Manek chowk opens onto the one of busy road- Gandhi road. The shops here comprises of large variety ranging from junk jewelry to hosiery products. The southern edge of chowk mainly comprises of the gold and silver shop. The shops in this location are small in size, approximately 6 by 6 feet but are well renowned because of family name of the jeweler which attract customers from far and wide. The small pocket of space between the two edges is taken up by hawkers who sell steel utensils and cheap music cassettes from their laris.

Manek Chowk remains active for 20hrs a day. From cattle grazing activities in the early morning hours, heavy commercial and business activities through the day, to a vibrant street food market that is active late into the night; Unorganized vending activities cause congestion and bottlenecks for movement; Shop extensions on to footpaths and streets reduce space for pedestrian movement.

During the day Manek chowk is the liveliest market in Ahmedabad where traditional steel kitchen and table utensils, fruits and spices are sold along with specialized fabrics of Gujarat’s traditional hand work. The central plaza have various gold and silver shops with a wide varity of display of jewelry. The night food junction crowd in the square at night serves as security for the jewelry stores. At night the, the square is transformed into a large outdoor restaurant complete with tables, chairs, vendor booths and huge crowd of food lovers.
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**Figure 9** Early morning: Cattle grazing

**Figure 10** Day time: Commercial activity

**Figure 11** Congested Parking

**Figure 12** Night Time: Eating junction
The most fascinating character of this chowk is the changeover that happens as the night approaches. With almost clockwork precision the lariwallahs execute the changeover as if the shift changes in a factory. It is busy commercial street during the daytime and acquires a festive character in night.

Human Scale of Public Spaces Manek Chowk is a small public square of about 2500 sq. m. Builtup mass are closely placed which helps in mutual shading. The public spaces of human scale had supported public life through centuries; however, in the present context they are dominated by vehicles.

The built edge offers opportunities for trading and socializing. A multitude of businesses and their relation to the neighborhood and the Walled City provide an active, and relatable human scale to the Chowk and the way it is being used.

Commercial functions continue to be the central attraction of the Chowk, however its attractiveness is hampered due to compromises of comfort, which in turn would have a long term impact on the businesses in the area. It symbolizes the flexibility of the old city of Ahmedabad. A place that continues to transform during the day to cater to the changing needs of its people.

6. STRATEGIES FOR PROMOTING STREETS AS PUBLIC SPACE

Accessibility and connectivity: Accessibility can be correlated with connectivity. With good street connectivity, the cities can enjoy high productivity with optimal commuting time to work and other services. The more intersection in a street network, the more walkable the streets are. Such street has a high productivity associated with reduced traffic congestion and improved walkability.

Land allocation and diversity: Sufficient land must be allocated for streets and should have priority defined right of way available for vehicle and pedestrian moment. Sufficient land allocation provides opportunity for various commercial and recreational activities. Diversity in land use enhance multiple activity and commutation within the area.

Activity and safety: Street should be promoted with 24 hour day activity with consideration for pedestrians and vehicles moment. Variety of activity in street makes street live round the clock, which in turn results in safety of user i-e eye on street.

Identity and character: Street should have urban design or architectural features, which gives identity to street. Effective use of plants and trees also add to characteristic of street, making it identifiable among the rest of similar kind. Identity and characteristic of street help in developing mental image and remembrance.
Interactive and social: With variety of activity on street, specific street furniture, shades and lighting should be provided for user so that interaction and socialization can happen.

7. THE PARAMETERS PROMOTING STREET AS PUBLIC PLACE.
To make any street successful public space it should be safe, interactive and social, unique, accessible, flexible and variety of activities. The streets should be designed as places, not just as thoroughfares. They should encourage social interactions and create distinct and inviting spaces that people choose to experience. Streets should be places where people walk, shop, play, relax, sit and talk. The use of public art can help to create a sense of place and a unique quality.

Study of streets of Mohenjo-Daro, streets of Jaipur, modern streets of Europe and US and finally multifunctional street of Manek chowk concludes to generate factors that can make street a better public place.

REFERENCES