

Sacred Spaces as Centres of Urban Regeneration

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Abstract : Historically, it has been recognised that urban religious spaces hold great significance in the majority of city centres and ancient cities, serving as unifying forces within the urban environment. Nevertheless, as time passes, these areas progressively diminish in value and significance, transforming into degeneration zones characterised by crime, unmaintained green spaces, and urban voids. While these locations possess the capacity to serve as catalysts for urban renewal throughout the entire city, given their status as vital thoroughfares in historic towns, they must regain their significance and provide the city with social spaces, open spaces, and economic development. The objective of this research is to demonstrate the influence that religious spaces have had on the revitalization of Old Cities. The fundamental approach to research involves examining the instance of Jammu Old City. The Urban Religious Spaces of Jammu are crucial to the evolution and morphology of the city. These areas of the city have historically served as hubs for public and communal activities. However, this significance has diminished over time, resulting in the emergence of a scarcity of social spaces within the city. Restoring the city's urban communal spaces would enable it to fulfil its social, economic, cultural, and environmental requirements, in addition to regaining its former reputation as the "city of temples."

Keywords : Urban regeneration, urban religious spaces, Sacred Spaces, Jammu, Temples of Jammu.

Introduction

Sacred spaces serve as poignant symbols of spiritual and cultural heritage within urban landscapes. These sites, spanning diverse religious traditions, possess intrinsic value beyond their religious functions. They hold the potential to become focal points for urban regeneration, breathing new life into surrounding communities.

At their core, sacred spaces embody centuries of architectural brilliance, artistic expression, and profound spiritual significance. Preserving these structures is paramount not only for their historical value but also for maintaining a city's cultural identity. Restoring and revitalizing these spaces often involves meticulous attention to detail, drawing upon local craftsmanship and traditional building techniques.

Beyond their architectural splendour, sacred spaces serve as vital hubs for community engagement and social cohesion. They provide gathering places for religious ceremonies, cultural festivals, and communal activities, fostering bonds among diverse urban populations. Through outreach programs and social services, these spaces extend a helping hand to the marginalized and vulnerable, embodying the principles of compassion and solidarity.

Economically, sacred spaces contribute to urban revitalization by attracting visitors, pilgrims, and tourists. Their presence stimulates local businesses, spurs entrepreneurship, and creates job opportunities within the vicinity. Moreover, these sites often inspire the development of cultural tourism initiatives, drawing attention to lesser-known facets of a city's heritage.

Materials and Methods

Developing a methodology to explore the role of sacred spaces as centres of urban regeneration involves several key considerations and steps.

Literature Review: The initial phase involves conducting a comprehensive review of existing literature on sacred spaces, urban regeneration, and related topics. This review helps to identify theoretical frameworks, key concepts, and research gaps that inform the methodology.

Site Selection: Identifying and selecting a diverse range of sacred spaces within urban settings is crucial. This process may involve considering factors such as religious diversity, architectural significance, historical context, and community engagement.

Stakeholder Engagement: Engaging with various stakeholders, including religious leaders, community members, urban planners, policymakers, and local residents, is essential. Stakeholder consultations help to understand perspectives, concerns, and aspirations related to sacred spaces and urban regeneration efforts.

Results

The temples, which are constructed in the Nagara style, are an integral part of the inhabitants' daily lives and safeguard the cultural legacy of the city. Historically, these religious sites have been hubs of public and social activity. Numerous talabs were built in close proximity to sanctuaries and temples. Eleven Dhakis (hilly stone/brick pedestrian pathways) connected the city to the river and returned. At a minimum, each of these dhakis maintained a temple. As a consequence, regular visits to temples led to their transformation into communal areas. The monarchs utilised these as well when addressing the populace.

These areas hosted a multitude of festivals and celebrations throughout the city throughout the year. Principal elements of the religious network:

1. Temples, Mosques, and Churches: The Old City district alone encompasses an estimated fifty religious edifices, lending the city the epithet "City of Temples." A few of these historically significant and highly regarded temples and sanctuaries are located within these religious structures: Raghunath Mandir, Ranbireshvar Mandir, Jamia Masjid, Peer Kho Temple, Gummat Dargah, Pajakhtar Temple, Ram Mandir, and Radh-Krishna temple. Numerous individuals, including pilgrims, travellers, and members of the local populace, pay homage to these temples, which enjoy immense renown.
2. Adjacent urban religious spaces: These encompass the pavements, markets, vendors, green spaces, bookstores, and thoroughfares that are linked to religious establishments or religious observances.
3. Procession trails—Ganesh Chaturthi, Moharram: This category includes the pathways, nodes, open and confined areas that are annually utilised for processions. The majority of these processions occur in the city. The Ganesh Yatra begins at the Lakshmi Narayan Mandir in Pakki Dhaki and concludes at the River Tawi in front of Vinayak Bazar. En route, it passes by the Mubarak Mandi Complex, Ram Mandir, Kanak Mandi, and Raghunath Ji Mandir. The Moharram Procession commences at the Sehen of Pir Mitha Dargah, carrying the banner of Anjuman-e-Imamia. It proceeds in a circuitous route, stopping at Karbala Complex, Office of Anjuman-e-Imamia in Jammu, and traverses Lakhdara Bazar, Ghas Mandi, Kanak Mandi, Shahidi Chowk, and Wazarat Road en route.
4. Festivals and fairs The city exuberantly observes a multitude of festivals, including Ganesh Chaturthi, Krishna Janmashtmi, Eid-ul-Fitr, and Eid-ul-Azha, particularly in the vicinity of mosques, temples, and Eidgahs. The requirement for social spaces and ecological spaces, which must be met at the neighbourhood level, is neglected. This requirement can be readily fulfilled by utilising vacant structures and accessible green spaces in an efficient manner.

Discussion

Based on the examined parameters, it is indisputable that a comprehensive revitalization of the city can be accomplished by means of rejuvenating sacrosanct spaces. This renewal may be integrated into numerous significant undertakings, including:

1. To restore the social spaces of the city, traditional public spaces including talabs, chaugans, chowks, and temples should be revived.
2. Renaissance of the city's religious landscape and cultural heritage: By reinstating the historical religious network, the city's religious spaces can be utilised as unifying elements, lively public spaces, verdant, open areas, and breathing spaces.
3. In order to improve livelihood opportunities, it is crucial to implement integrated tourism development that is built upon stakeholder analysis and community participation. The revitalization of the tourist trail that connects all major religious sites, heritage sites, and transportation nodes is possible, as is the establishment of resource centres and hotels, as well as bus services and public amenities at strategic locations.
4. A plan for the integrated public transport network that guarantees connectivity in the final mile, includes designated parking areas and para-transit facilities.

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