

Bazaar Area: The Meeting of Tangible and Intangible Cultural Heritage in Mumbai

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Abstract

Tangible Cultural Heritage refers to physical artefacts produced, maintained and transmitted inter generationally in a society. Hence, a monument or building, a historic city or a landscape are examples of tangible cultural heritage. Intangible Cultural Heritage refers to the practices, representations, expressions, knowledge, skills as well as the instruments, objects, artefacts and cultural spaces associated. Thus language, food habits, costumes, oral traditions, performing arts, local knowledge, and traditional skills come under the aegis of intangible cultural heritage. Both are part of the cultural heritage. Although they are different, they are two sides of the same coin. Both, tangible and intangible cultural heritage are interdependent in order to bring out their respective significance and importance. For instance, cultural spaces are directly associated to a particular historic site, landscape or monument. So, the cultural aspects of a particular historic site or landscape brings out the importance of that region and in the same way the cultural aspects is treasured because of the region. The Bazaar Area of Mumbai is one such historic core areas with traditional and physical diverse locality. There is life, wealth, tradition and culture, which have remained consistent over the years. The research paper will be looking into Bazaar Area of Mumbai as the meeting place of tangible and intangible cultural heritage.

Keywords: tangible and intangible cultural heritage, mumbai, historic core, bazaars

Introduction

“He who denies his heritage, has no heritage.”—

Khalil Gibran, Lebanese

‘Heritage’ and ‘Culture’ are the words which are often used together. They have a lot of things in common, but there are some differences. Culture consists of the values, beliefs, systems of language and communication, and practices that people share in common. Heritage can be defined as those practices or features that are passed down through the years, from one generation to the next. Hence, it can be said that culture is creation of a particular group or society; whereas heritage is a part of culture which is inherited. In a nutshell, cultural heritage is the amalgamation of both tangible and intangible features of a group or society which are inherited from past generations, and are to be preserved for the future generations. Tangible heritage includes objects significant to the archaeology, architecture, science or technology of a specific culture. They could be buildings, historic places, monuments, artifacts, etc¹. Intangible heritage includes traditions or living expressions inherited from our ancestors and passed on to our descendants, such as oral traditions, performing arts, social practices, rituals, festive events, knowledge and practices concerning nature and the universe or the knowledge and skills to produce traditional crafts, food and medicine.²

Location and Brief History of the Bazaar Area

Bombay was a cluster of seven islands. The rise and growth of this great city can be largely attributed to the British who received Bombay as a part of the Portuguese dowry in the year 1661.³ The British transformed Bombay from a fishing village to a commercially developed port.

The appointment of Gerald Aungier as Governor of Bombay (1672-1675), had a significant impact on further development of Bombay as a trading centre and port.⁴ He laid the foundations of proper civil and judicial administration. He encouraged people of every religion and caste who could make a contribution to the island’s growth to settle in Bombay. The commercial growth of the city leads to influx of various communities and thus congested the Fort area, where the British resided. The area became overcrowded and the problem of encroachments within the Fort walls started increasing. It was hence forth decided that an Indian quarter be made for the Indian community to trade and reside. By 1758, some of the communities specializing in local crafts and living within the Fort were relocated outside the Fort area. In 1772, orders were then passed prohibiting all but Europeans from building south of the Churchgate Street. Indians thus began to construct homes outside the Fort walls to the north of Bazaar Gate. In the early hours of 17th February 1803, a great fire broke out.⁵ It devastated most of the houses within the Fort,

stimulating the development of the Native Town as it was called.

The Original Native Town or Old Town stretched westward from the Harbour but not reaching the Backbay. Its northern extensions, the new section, comprehending Dhobi Talao, Girgaum, and Khetwadi came to be known as the New Native Town or New Town.⁶ The Native Town, thus, comprised roughly a portion of the modern Ward B and Ward C. Ward B comprising of Mandvi, Chakla, Dongri and Umar Khadi areas and Ward C comprising of Bhuleshwar, Kalbadevi, Dhobi Talao, Kumbharwada and KharaTalao areas. This area comprised of some of the oldest bazaars in Mumbaisuch as Phool Bazaar (Bhuleshwar), Chira Bazaar (Dhobi Talao), Null Bazaar, Zaveri Bazaar, Chor Bazaar, and Crawford Market. Hence, the area during the course of the paper is referred to as the Bazaar Area.

Tangible Cultural Heritage in Bazaar Area

Bazaar Areas is an historic core area⁷ in Mumbai with traditional and physical diverse locality. The environment of the area still has visible connection to its past. This is noticeable in the building styles, forms and fields and other material manifestation of the area. Landscapes play an important role in both shaping and sustaining cultural values within the societies. A cultural landscape consists of collection of visible traits, a composite of images and impressions that define the region's culture.

Architectural achievements rank among a culture's proudest expressions of identity and capability. Architecture is a reflection of a culture's assertion of identity and capability. These could be religious architecture, domestic architecture or public architecture.

Religious architecture is especially expressive, and other buildings include religious motifs, adopted from temples, Jain temples or derasars and mosques. The temples in the precinct shows the glimpse of Gujarati and Rajasthani architecture. Religious articles of every religion are available here. Jain temple is characterized by its carvings in its pillars, ceilings, walls and floors. The walls of the Jain temples are adorned with Jain mythology, saints, gods and goddesses, monks, devotees or religious motifs in marble and rock. The Shaare Raison Synagogue was constructed in Mandvi in 1843. It's known for the peculiar shape of the walls of the entrance gate and the fine

country-style wooden roof⁸. Mughal Masjid in Imamwada, built in 1853, is considered to be one of the biggest mosques in the city. The entrance of the mosque is of Irani architecture and has two large minars on the either side of the entrance. Minara Masjid near Mohammad Ali Road, built in 1870, is a two-storied mosque, constructed in Porbandar stone. Beautiful carvings has been done on the façade of the mosque⁹.

Domestic architecture or the architecture of people's houses, constitutes a key element in any region's cultural landscape. The colourfully painted residential houses stood cheek by jowl in irregular and narrow lanes and streets. Many of the houses and temples in the precinct drew inspiration from the vernacular architecture of Gujarat and Rajasthan- regions from which its residents had come. The houses in the area have wooden frames with interesting carvings not only of decorative arabesques and arches, but also with figures of rishis and musicians that serve as supportive brackets for the balconies¹⁰.

With the spread of industrialization, workers were housed in chawls or chawls by entrepreneurs and later by improvement trusts to house the new immigrants from rural areas. The first chawl was built in 1860. Chawls meaning a passage way or corridor in Marathi, are high density developments generally consisting of rows of single- room dwelling units along a corridor or continuous verandah. The complex usually comprised of six four storeyed buildings arranged in three parallel rows. Each building has between 80 and 120 single room dwellings on either side of a central corridor. There is a common latrine block on one side¹¹. Chawls were scattered in the Bazaar Area, specially in Girgaum, Dhobi Talao, and Phanaswadi areas. Today, their numbers are decreasing as some are razed for developmental purposes or they have undergone redevelopment.

Public architecture are the buildings of universities, libraries, markets and sports arenas. The public architecture in the Bazaar Area not only reflects the colonial influence but also the cultural and religious ethos of the people residing here. Public architecture is dispersed throughout the Bazaar Area in the forms of markets, water fountains, dharmshalas and wadis. Ornamental art continues to form a significant element in its cultural landscape.

Representative sculptures depicting figurines, animals and religious motifs are often depicted on the buildings.

Crawford Market constructed in 1865, was designed by Mr. William Emerson. The style of building used here is described as the 12th century French Gothic as features like unglazed rose windows with complicated bar tracery inserts and lion head dripstones are used.¹² The main building consists of a central hall with three main entrances. It is surmounted at the North West corner by a clock tower, two of the openings over the main entrances being filled with sculptured marble tablets.¹³ The plaque to the right of the central entrance depicts agriculture and processes involved in the growing and selling of vegetables. The plaque to the left illustrates the sale of fruit products in a generalized market scene.

Many Art Deco buildings are also found in Phanaswadi, Kalbadevi and Cowasji Patel Tank areas. The building of Hindi GranthRatnakar, possibly the first publishing house in the city, built in 1912, is one of them. But the ornamentation of the building has regional influence. It features a panel with a cow and lion eating from the same basket, a Vaishnav and Buddhist- Jain theme that in the presence of the great one, even opposites come together and there is an ever lasting peace. Another panel has a tree filled with fruits and goodies of life and human being clinging to it desperately.¹⁴

The Bazaar area is characterized by several baugs constructed by wealthy residents¹⁵. After 1880's, dharmashalas (which were sometimes also referred as wadis) were built throughout the area as a way for merchants to encourage those from their native place or their community to come to Bombay for education or business. Many wadis such as Madhav Baug, Lad niWadi, Ram Baug and MorarBaug in Bhuleshwar, Kalbadevi, Phanaswadi and Cowasji Patel Tank areas were built during colonial period. The architecture of these baugs and wadis reflected the cultural ethos by the people who constructed it.

Intangible Cultural Heritage in Bazaar Area

The character of an area involves not only its prevailing spatial organization and visual appearances, but also its noises and scents and even its pace of life. The mode of dress of the people, the food culture, oral traditions, performing arts, and social practices—all reveal a

distinctive cultural environment. This cultural environment is not necessarily confined to a single culture, it is often a distinct combination of various cultural traits, which gives a character to the area. Since the development of Bombay as a city, people from different parts of the country settled here. With them came their culinary habits and they set up restaurants to cater to the hordes of migrants, which basically served home liked food to different communities.

The Irani restaurants sprang up in Bombay during 1920s when the Irani started settling in Mumbai. They are inextricably involved with our colonial legacy. A Irani restaurant is distinctive institution in itself where the walls display large mirror as well as instructions to the customers are neatly written. Shelves are lined with biscuits tins and soft drinks crates and the cash counter sells chocolates, cakes, pastries and breads. They were Mumbai's equivalent of coffee shops in Delhi or Kolkata, where one could spend hours by chatting with friends while sipping the famous Irani tea and brun-maskha. There were many Irani restaurants in the Bazaar Area, but most of them have been shut down owing to steep competition from the fast food outlets. But there are still few surviving Irani restaurants like Kyani Bakery and Co and Sassanian Boulangerie near Dhobi Talao which have still retained their old world charm.

Since the Bazaar Area has many markets, it attracts many sellers as well as customers. Due to the mercantile nature of the area, people prefer food that was quick and pocket friendly. May be that's how KhauGallis, which literally means 'eating street' started. There are several KhauGallis in Mumbai, among them the three very famous are located in the Bazaar Area. They are KhauGalli at Zaveri Bazaar, other at Mohammad Ali Road and third at Pakmodia Street. KhauGalli was first started in the Zaveri Bazaar Area, when the bullion trade evolved on Sheikh Memon Street in 1920s. Today, Khau Galli has kept pace with the growth, serving largely vegetarian food from hot jalebis, vadapavs, dosas to papads on charcoal stove.

If the Khau Galli at Zaveri Bazaar is known for its vegetarian delicacies, The Pakmodia Street and Mohammad Ali Road. Khau Galli are famous for its non-vegetarian food. The Bohri Mohalla in Pakmodia Street is known for its bara and nauhandi shops, which literally means twelve and nine vessels. These quaint eateries are lined with couple of functional tables. Sweet breads and other meats are cooked in either nine or twelve individual

vessels arranged over a charcoal oven. Typically, the handi shop will have a roti maker next door who supplies the naans to go with pipping hot meat dishes. Minara Masjid near Mohammad Ali Road area, hanging from metal skewers lining the streets are all kinds of meats served with baida roti. During Ramzan, the KhauGalli here, attracts patrons from across the city with its bright lights, nonstop clamor, mouthwatering food and eastern bazaar setting.

The cow being sacred to the Hindus has its space here in Bhuleshwar. Panjrapolor asylum for aged and diseased animals, situated near the Cowasji Patel Tank, was founded on 18th October, 1834.¹⁶ Today, it has nearly 2000 cows. It is said that the milk needed in the nearby temples as well as other temples in Mumbai is supplied by this shed.

The noises, smells and visuals cannot be separated from the intangible cultural heritage. In the tiny lanes of the Bazaar Area, you will find gods, humans, animals and commodities jostling for space. In its narrow lanes, one will find wholesale markets, roadside restaurants, tiny shops and hawkers selling varied items, as well as dozens of intricately carved temples dedicated to a different god, thus showcasing the hustle and bustle of the area.

Conclusion

Cities are not simply random accumulations of buildings and people. They possess functional structure: they are spatially organized to perform their functions as places of commerce, production, residence and education and much more. People of all cultures have spatial memories, or mental maps, that form part of their equipment to function in their activity spaces.

Bazaar Area, as we have learnt above, is a meeting place of tangible and intangible cultural heritage. The real heart of the city is located here. In terms of cultural heritage, it is no less than its neighbouring Fort Area. However, many people are of the opinion that the Bazaar Area is not given its due when compared to the Fort Area. Today, the Bazaar Area is going through rapid changes due to various infrastructural and redevelopment works. Although such urban development should be undertaken, but it should at the same time be sensitive to the existing cultural landscape. For instance, the architecture of the buildings should reflect the local ethos and should not stand out as a sore. The approach of 'one size fits all' also should not be followed. Each locality in the area has its

own peculiarity, be it Bhandi Bazaar or Chira Bazaar. Efforts have to be made to identify and solve the problem areas for protection and preservation of our cultural heritage. Government bodies, Non-governmental organizations, urban planners, historians as well as the locals should come forward and work as a team for this purpose. Instead of looking West for our solutions, we should be looking for home-grown solutions.

End Notes

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