



IDENTITY THROUGH ARCHITECTURE AND ART, CASE STUDY: RAMGARH, SHEKHAWATI

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ABSTRACT

Every city is unique. To give that unique identity to cities nowadays architecture is acting as power tool. Not every city is historically and culturally rich, so to give that unique identity iconic buildings are being created. These buildings act as main touristic attraction and employment hubs. Dubai is classic example of it. In present context every city is trying to be different with its architecture and is forcefully trying to grab attention. But most of the historic towns and cities have unique touch. Every historic region has distinctive architecture and art style which gives unique identity to place. In this paper case example of small town Ramgarh in Shekhawati region, India is presented.



KEYWORDS: Identity; fresco; temples; memorial buildings; water structures.

1. INTRODUCTION

Most of contemporary cities which are growing now are developing in haphazard way and lack unique identity. By looking at image of different cities it is difficult to recognise the place. Though even in that random, haphazard development there is some order but people find it difficult to relate to city. People living in historic or culturally rich cities associate with the city in more intense way, they often miss the city at every important occasion in comparison to people living in cities which has no particular identity. So identity of city can be defined as the way people related to the city. The way people relate to a city is combination of many factors like associational value with city, city's branding, culture, architecture and art etc. in first year B.Architecture studio of USAP, GGSIPU case study of a town is Ramgarh was done to understand uniqueness of the place.

1.1. Shekhawati

Shekhawati region in Rajasthan, India is famous for fresco paintings. This region faced many changes and its influence is visible in architecture of region which is beautiful blend of Islamic and Rajput Architecture. Rajasthani Architecture is famous for its intricately carved stone work of jalis, jharoka and other architectural element. But the Shekhawati region lack availability of hard stone which can be carved. So to complement and enhance building exterior and interior facades painting(fresco) were used, which is known as Shekhawati school of painting. Shekhawati region is famous as world's largest open art gallery as building façades are used as canvas to depict many themes related to folklore, religious stories and lifestyle of rich owners in the region.



FIGURE 1 PHYSICAL REGION OF SHEKHAWATI
SOURCE: RAJ/RAS BY JAIPDEEP SINGH

The different types of traditional buildings, structures and associated spaces that came into existence in the heart of the desert land constitute its rich built heritage. Buildings in the towns were constructed using traditional technology and locally available materials and have over the years come to represent an architectural vocabulary distinctive to the region. Ramgarh is typical town in the Shekhwati region established in 1791.

Geography of region

Shekhwati region is part of Semi arid basin which is extension of Thar desert. The region faces extreme weather condition and faces acute shortage of water. Due to which mostly settlement will a water storage facility in the low lying area around settlement. The climatic zone of shekhawati is hot and dry. Diurnal temperature is high in this region.

1.2. Ramgarh morphology

Ramgarh is often named as “Sethon ka ramgrah” meaning a “Merchant’s Ramgarh”. Ramgarh was promoted, conceived, and built by the Poddar clan merchants with the consent of the Rao Raja of Sikar. In order to abide by the rules and rituals pertaining to the foundation of a town, the Raja(king) built palace in the central portion of Ramgarh. The presence of this garh(Palace) is however purely representational which was used for short term stay of King Sikar and army. Town plan of Ramgarh is based on grid iron planning based on mandala. This was inspired by the planning of Jaipur. Town was protected with defensive wall around it. On four cardinal direction four defensive gates were situated and eight smaller opening were created in defensive wall for movement during night. Poddars established gaddis(commercial area) and havelis(residential building) and invited other traders to settle in Ramgarh. Main east-west axis is commercial on road side and rear side residential are is planned. Town has magnificent havelis compactly build by trader community. Size and detailing in haveli shows the status of owner. Many religious buildings temples are in town devoted to different gods. Chattris(memorial structure) are built on outer edges in remembrance of forefathers. To meet the requirement of water different water structures like johras(Shallow pond) and wells were planned.

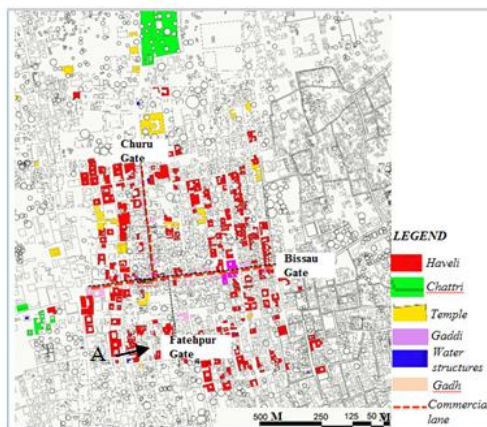


Figure 4: Ramgarh planning

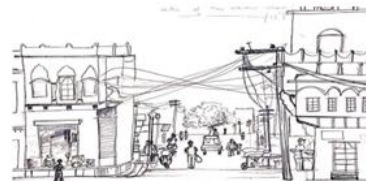


Figure 3 view of main east-west axis



Figure 2 View of main axis

Ramgarh has compact settlement pattern. Main axis road is not constant throughout but is approximately 7 m wide. Secondary and tertiary roads narrow shaded lanes of 3-4 m width or even less.



FIGURE 3 NOLLI MAP OF RAMGARH

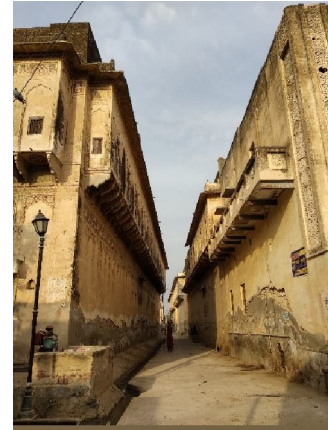


FIGURE 2 NARROW SHADED LANES

Architecture of Ramgarh

Ramgarh, Shekhawati has homogenous architectural character which is blend of Rajput and Mughal architecture. Ramgarh is famous for elaborate havelis(residential building) . it is developed consolidated with narrow streets from safety point of view which is pedestrian friendly. Ramgarh has quite high density of havelis. Within area of 1.5sq. Km has more than 120 havelis. Apart from havelis commercial lane, temples, memorial buildings(cenotaphs) and different water structures are architecturally rich.. Majorly all the structures are two storey high. Buildings in the towns were constructed using traditional technology and locally available materials and have over the years come to represent an architectural vocabulary distinctive to the region.



Figure 12 Haveli(Residence)



Figure 11 Chattri(Cenotaph)



Figure 9 Temple



Figure 10 Gaddi(commercial area)



Figure 7 Dharamshala(night shelter)



Figure 8 Johra (shallow pond)

Ramgarh is not that commercialised and urbanised and character of town is still retained. Architectural style is still authentic and preserved. Transformation in building is less in comparison to towns which as Touristic in nature like mandawa and Churu.

Art in Ramgarh

In past it was believed that the larger home and more number frescos are representation of power of the owner. Fresco is painting technique on executed on wet lime plaster with different pigments. The pigments used for fresco paintings were majorly red, green and yellow ochres and lamp black. As Ramgarh was merchant's town their inclination in art is visible in frescos painted on exterior and interior facades of buildings. Themes of frescos were derived from mythology, day to day activities and geometrical patterns etc. Some fresco paintings in Ramgarh are life scale

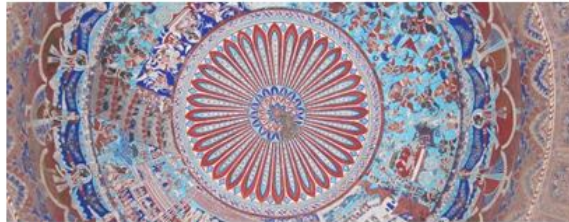


Figure 13 Fresco on roof



Figure 14 Fresco on wall

People's associational value

Many residents shifted from Ramgarh after independence to Mumbai, Delhi, Kolkata and other places leaving their residential and commercial buildings or they gave that to care-takers. Some influential people who migrated are now trying to get attached to their roots. Sh. Laxmanji who belongs to Ramgarh and stays in Mumbai has written a book on Ramgarh named "Apno Ramgarh (our Ramgarh)". So that people will become aware of this place. Mrs. Shruti Nadar Poddar whose ancestors belonged to Ramgarh is actively participating in publicising the heritage of Ramgarh.

People who are living in Ramgarh generally employed in small scale business. Due to lack of resources and time people stopped maintaining their buildings. Residents are not aware of the heritage value of the place.

Changing streetscape

On the main axis shops have been constructed spoiling the elevation of the main axis. Facades are painted by distemper and frescos are covered with it, damaging the character of the city. In the present day a few havelis have been converted into heritage hotels also.

The Master Plan is sensitive to the issue of heritage management and addresses it, though it does not specify particular measures to protect all the important structures in the town. The Master Plan addresses the issue of old city and new development. The Master Plan promotes geographical, social compatibility between old town and new development. But it doesn't have provision to achieve the same.

Havelis and mostly other important buildings are private properties and it is difficult to upgrade the condition of all the buildings as the up-keeping cost will be high. But the government also cannot do much because of the private ownership.

1.3. CONCLUSION

As Ramgarh is not very famous as a touristic location so the authenticity of the place is still intact. Most of the owners shifted to bigger cities for business so most of the buildings are still closed or a part of the building is given to a caretaker. Architecture and fresco are still preserved and in havelis which are abandoned because, in other havelis where people are living additional changes are being done which are changing its character. These painted buildings are unique to the town and worthy to be preserved.

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