

Exploring the Evolution of Historic Markets: A Case Study of Gol Bazar

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Abstract—Historic markets in India are integral to the socio-cultural, economic, and architectural fabric of urban settlements, serving as vibrant centers of commerce and community life. This study aims to explore the spatial organization and heritage significance of historic markets. However, rapid urbanization, shifting consumer preferences, and inadequate urban planning have threatened their architectural integrity, cultural relevance, and functional viability. This paper investigates the historic markets as dynamic entities embodying tangible and intangible heritage, emphasizing their architectural features, cultural significance, and evolving role in urban development. As a representative example, conducting an overall case study of Gol Bazaar, Raipur through literature review and analysis.

Index Terms—Gol Bazaar, Raipur, Historic market, urban planning, Tangible Heritage, Intangible heritage

I. INTRODUCTION

Markets are essential public spaces where goods are traded, and communities interact. The term "market" originates from the Latin word *Mercatus*, which is the place for trading, buying, and selling. (MOHAMED & MOHAMED, 2019) Historically, markets have been integral to human civilization, serving not just as commercial hubs but also as cultural archives and spaces for social exchange. Over time, markets evolved in layout, typology, and function to meet the changing needs of society. Markets shape various aspects of cities, including socio-cultural, environmental, economic, spatial, and technological factors. The heritage area does not only refer to the old, historical monuments and buildings but also its adjacent areas, where people of different religions, cultures, and ethnicities have lived for ages, share their memories with the place, and associate themselves with the strong cultural roots of the place. Though

visiting markets has been a routine experience since childhood, their architectural, cultural, and historical significance is often overlooked. Markets are an integral part of this heritage. Markets have two types of cultural heritage; some of them are tangible, like buildings and structures, and some are intangible, like cultural festivals, celebrations, religious practices, etc. These two types of heritage elements form the value and associations for people, which create an identity for the community. Their living and working spaces, spaces for social interaction, cultural gatherings, and formal or informal spaces are all part of cultural heritage.

II. LITERATURE STUDY

A. Market Typologies

1. Open-Air Markets- Temporary setups in open spaces, often shaded with cloth or other makeshift structures.
2. Street Markets- Linear layouts on public land, allowing flexibility for expansion.
3. Markets in Public Buildings- Enclosed or semi-enclosed spaces with open arcades for trading.
4. Market Sheds- Rectilinear structures with open sides supported by piers or columns.
5. Enclosed Market Building- Fully enclosed spaces popularized in the 19th century with open-plan interiors, enabled by cast iron construction.

B. Components of market

1. Spatial organization- The traditional market's spatial layout is intended to organically lead customers along its paths; mobility is primarily guided by the interaction of built and open spaces. Market arrangements are often modular, with main pathways intersecting smaller ones to provide fluid flow. Customers may see products

as they pass with linear layouts, the display area is improved, and monotony is broken with zigzag paths that add visual excitement and surprise. Permanent stalls are positioned around the periphery of rural markets, while stalls are arranged around a central, shaded area for visiting traders.

2. Individual Unit Layout- A store's interior and exterior communicate its identity to shoppers, making space management a top priority for sellers. Store layouts separate space into two sections: the selling area, where racks, tables, or counters are used to display products, and the non-selling area, which is used for client circulation. A well-balanced arrangement of these sections is crucial. Shops at roadside markets can be either temporary setups where products are on display within the seller's reach or modest, permanent stores with separate display areas.
3. Buyer and seller- The design and location of a marketplace dramatically affect buyer-seller relations by providing visitors with a sense of safety and community. Speaking the native language also makes them feel more at ease. Unlike high-end shopping centers, street markets allow for direct conversation and strengthen bonds between consumers and vendors.
4. Recreational spaces- By creating a feeling of community, recreational areas like food vendors, tea shops, seating sections, and performance areas improve the market experience. They make a lasting impression on tourists by showcasing regional customs and culture.
5. Temporary and permanent structure- Products, that are constructed of materials like wood or crates and are intended to be conveniently accessible to clients, are displayed on either temporary or permanent platforms. Portable structures like umbrellas or basic demountable setups with canvas or plastic roofs supported by steel, bamboo, or wood frames are frequently used by traders. Additionally, market officials may provide shops for rent, which covers the price of the stall and the space. Because they are portable and provide security by enabling vendors to remove both the cart and their wares after business hours. These carts need accessible, reasonably priced storage facilities. Trees frequently provide natural shade, and shading

tools like fabric or plastic sheets can be used to protect against bad weather.

C. Evolution of traditional markets

Markets have historically been shaped by their socio-economic context. From the organized trade hubs of the Indus Valley Civilization to temple-centric markets of the Chola period and the symmetrical layouts of the Mughal era, markets evolved as spaces combining commerce, community, and cultural exchange. The Maratha period introduced vernacular designs with multifunctional courtyards responsive to climate and fostering communal life.

1. Indus Valley Civilization- The Indus Valley Civilization was a bronze-age civilization. It is considered one of the oldest and largest civilizations in the world. It was located on the banks of the river Indus. Harappa and Mohenjo-Daro were the two major cities of civilization. Numerous areas in Harappan sites have been identified as marketplaces or shops. Wide streets of 10 to 12 meters, open areas, and large squares were all bustling commercial hubs. With primary roads flowing north-south and subsidiary streets east-west, streets connected at right angles. Centrally located markets featured both temporary platforms for visiting traders and permanent brick shops encircling squares. There were different levels provided for buyers and sellers.
2. The square had double-story structures with shops on the ground floor and houses or workshops on the first floor. There was a stage located in the center which was used for announcements and other recreational activities.
3. Mahajanapadas and Early Kingdoms- The areas were open-air marketplaces tucked away in the center of busy towns, frequently close to temples or intersections, reflecting the simplicity of their era. Instead of establishing through rigorous planning, they developed organically as trade routes moved through them. Despite being impermanent and constructed of wood and thatch, the stalls were alive with activity as sellers shared commodities, culture, and stories. The market served as a gathering place for communities in addition to being a business place.
4. Mauryan Empire- The Mauryan Empire brought order and organization. Markets were envisioned

as essential components of cities, and urban planning became intentional. More permanent stalls were constructed, made up of brick and stone, and protected from the sun by colonnades. Zones for various trades were established, markets were regulated, and prices were tracked. During the post-Mauryan period, diversification emerged. Markets became entry points to the world as trade spread over continents and regions. The opulence of long-distance trade was reflected in the widespread use of pillared halls and domed pavilions reflecting the grandeur. These marketplace designs became as cosmopolitan as the items they held as they changed to accommodate both major fairs and everyday trades.

5. Gupta period- This classical era's wealth was reflected in the highly organized markets that were incorporated into urban planning. These spaces were situated in strategic urban zones—near temples, palaces, and main roads—making them accessible and central to city life. Architecturally, they combined functionality and style with their permanent stone buildings, which included shaded corridors and halls supported by pillars.
6. The Chola period- Markets flourished around massive temple complexes, turning temple towns into bustling hubs of trade and culture. These markets were laid out as extensions of sacred spaces, guiding pilgrims and traders alike through vibrant bazaars before reaching the temples. Long colonnaded streets lined with shops and expansive courtyards for fairs reflected Chola's architectural brilliance.
7. Mughal period- Markets were a key part of the Mughal city layout and were usually situated near significant urban nodes like royal courtyards, fortifications, or transit connections. This marketplace architecture prioritized grandeur and order, creating a well-structured rhythm with its wide streets and regular store rows. The feature that highlighted the Mughals' architecture is harmony and visual coherence was symmetry. It showed both creative talent and practicality to combine sturdy materials like stone and brick with delicate ornamental elements like carved arches and latticed screens. Natural light was carefully incorporated into arcaded corridors and

flowing courtyards. The spatial organization encouraged simple mobility, with distinct spaces for different commodities ensuring efficacy and accessibility.

8. Maratha period- Maratha period markets were anchored in local customs and used local materials like wood and stone with climate-responsive architecture like sloping roofs and shaded passageways. They were designed to accommodate different vendor and tourist needs and were centered around open courtyards or pavilions.
9. The British era- The British era brought a marked shift in the architectural character of markets, emphasizing formal planning and utilitarian design. The organic layouts of earlier times gave way to grid-based configurations, reflecting the colonial administration's desire for control and efficiency. Markets became enclosed or semi-enclosed structures, integrating modern materials like iron and steel for durability and fire resistance. High ceilings, large windows, and wide entrances were introduced. The architecture reflected the colonial aesthetic, with elements like pediments, columns, and decorative moldings leading to a sense of order and authority.

III. HISTORIC MARKETS AS BEHOLDERS OF INTANGIBLE HERITAGE

Cultural heritage definition according to The United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO), changed widely in recent decades to include inherited traditions and living expressions, such as “skills to produce traditional crafts, social practices, rituals and festive events”, beside monuments and collections of objects. Traditional markets as places for gathering and social activities are considered as valuable Intangible Cultural Heritage resources in historic cities. Street markets are the places where contemporary and traditional practices are mixed with living conditions to create the identity of the place. Traditional market activities, which are a mix between inherited traditions from the past along with contemporary urban and rural practices form a type of intangible cultural heritage where all diverse cultural groups of the society have the right to participate in. Traditional markets as intangible cultural heritage are important for the

transformation of knowledge and skills from one generation to the next, along with the economic and social values of these markets as catalysts of urban regeneration and the main factor of livability of historic districts. (MOHAMED & MOHAMED, 2019)



Figure 1- Historic Indian market of Mumbai, Colaba market

Source-

<https://www.india.com/travel/articles/shoppers-delight-heres-how-to-reach-colaba-causeway-in-mumbai-3229961/>

IV. IMPORTANCE OF PRESERVING HISTORIC MARKETPLACES

There is a need to understand the social factors to conserve heritage areas while doing an urban renewal. The spaces, which involve community interaction, build their memory and identity, and provide economic opportunities to local people, should be well conserved. Awareness of local history, heritage, traditional art, craft, etc. should be promoted in this process. Conservation should be perceived more from place place-making point of view instead of the preservation of structures. (Seth & Dutta, 2023)

V. DIFFICULTIES TO CONSERVE/PRESERVE HISTORIC MARKETS

A Bazaar is often an organically developed series of shops that eventually become an urban space. The planning of this space does not take place formally in the offices of the City Planning departments in India. According to the National Association of Street Vendors in India (NASVI), vendors of fruits and vegetables have never been allocated space in the city

in a pre-planned manner. However, the morning market or the weekly market has always existed in India. Today, there is a threat to the Periodic bazaar as land prices in the inner city escalate making both the traditional street bazaar and the historic market building of less economic value though their cultural and social value remain the same.

The main conservation challenge of historic markets—as living urban systems – is to create an equilibrium between modern needs and traditional image without compromising the physical historical texture. Open urban spaces were considered the main planning nuclei of cities historically, functions of these spaces vary between political and religious but are mostly connected with commercial activities, some eventually turning into open street markets. Then, with the change in public lifestyles and shopping behavior, these open markets start to shrink from the main city spaces into some defined places, normally inside the old parts and historic center of the city. Historic markets with traditional street vendors reflect the quality of urban life in the historic city center, they are considered to be one of the main tourist attractions and are a key element of defining the historic city identity. However, these markets and vendors are creating a negative poor image of the historic city. They cause pollution due to solid wastes, smells, and noise. Above all, they produce crowding which blocks transportation within historic zones along with many other urban problems. (Keshwani, 2013)

VI. CASE STUDY- GOL BAZAR, RAIPUR

Population of Raipur- 1871,000 (According to India metro area population 1950-2024)

Tier classification- Tier II

A. Introduction

One of Raipur's oldest and most significant marketplaces, Gol Bazar has been around for almost a century. It has long been recognized as a hub of trade and culture, offering a vast array of goods from daily essentials to traditional Chhattisgarhi crafts, making it a one-stop center for both residents and visitors. Known for its vibrant ambiance and the old saying that “anything not found elsewhere can be found here,” Gol Bazar is intertwined with Raipur’s identity and economic fabric. With origins that stretch back around 150 years, Raipur's Gol Bazar is one of the city's most

ancient commercial districts. Gol Bazar gained importance as a bazaar mostly due to the influence of the Maratha Empire. With its lanes organized by certain vendors or product categories, the market's design is evocative of the way historic Indian bazaars were organized, where the positioning of trade divisions was sometimes dictated by local or regional connections. With its lanes arranged according to certain items or sellers. Due to the tendency of vendors from similar geographic areas or business types to operate close to one another, this structure facilitated efficient trade management and fostered community networks. This organization allowed for specialization, where certain lanes became synonymous with certain goods, such as textiles, spices, or household items, aligning the space with trader's regional affiliations or shared trade types. This market was famous for its variety and was known as the place to find almost anything.



Figure 2- The circular structure was used as a check post during the 18th century but is currently used for shops.

Source- Author

B. History

Raipur initially came under Maratha control around the mid-18th century, following invasions led by the Bhonsle dynasty of Nagpur. At that time, the Haihaiyavanshi rulers of Raipur, along with nearby Ratanpur, became tributaries to the Marathas. In

Raipur, Maratha rulers and local merchants established Gol Bazar as a central marketplace to serve the local population, as well as to facilitate trade along the expanding Maratha-controlled trade routes. The circular structure near the fort served as a “check post” or a watchtower, its circular design facilitated panoramic visibility. It enabled authorities to monitor market security, mobility, and commerce. The lanes of Gol Bazar developed organically and were often associated with specific groups or trade specialties. The British established the Gol Bazar in the 19th century to facilitate trade and unite commerce in Raipur. The colonial authorities carefully constructed markets along important trade routes to guarantee tax collection and improve control over economic activity. The colonial era's practicality is reflected in the market's design. Because the market was set up in concentric circles or blocks that radiated outward, it was simple to navigate, and the vendors were positioned methodically.

C. Intangible heritage

Gol Bazar's intangible legacy is essential to preserving its customs, regional handicrafts, and cross-cultural interactions. This place was not properly planned from the start and has been developed in phases and grown organically concerning the requirements and necessities of the residents over a long period. Apart from all the physical elements, the tradition and culture of this region play an important role in the imageability and identity of this road (M.G. Road, and Malviya Road both are the primary roads connecting to lanes of Gol Bazar). (Golchha, 2021) Some of the major processions like Ganesh Jhanki, Mahaveer Jayanti, etc. are part of this road and are carried out from this major road only. Ancient skills and expertise that have been passed down through the years are maintained during the festival through the production and sale of festival-specific goods such as traditional decorations, clothing, and cuisine.

VII. CONCLUSION

In conclusion, India's traditional marketplaces are not just commerce centers, but they are the living expression of the architectural, social, and cultural heritage. This study emphasizes the significance of these marketplaces in preserving intangible customs, fostering community relationships, and creating urban

identity. However, problems like urbanization, neglect, and changing consumer behavior pose major threats to their survival. Understanding the spatial structure, architectural features, and cultural significance of these marketplaces might help us identify their increasing importance in urban development. The Gol Bazaar example highlights the importance of integrating cultural preservation with modern urban development to ensure that these vibrant places continue to thrive and contribute significantly to city life.

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