Ayodhya - Study of Physical and Social Fabric of a Cultural Sacredscape

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Abstract— **"A rich cultural heritage depends on the ability of people to maintain their distinctiveness and unique identities". Cultural heritage refers to the physical items and intangible characteristics of civilization that have been passed down through the centuries. Intangible characteristics, as well as physical artefacts, characterize and identify a society's distinctiveness. Ayodhya, as a historic city, is rich in cultural heritage, and its environment, unlike many other cities in India, has a distinct character of its own. People of various religions and communities coexist in the city, which is regarded as a cultural sacredscape. The physical and social fabric of each town or city determines its characteristics and can be felt most strongly in its public spaces. One such public space is the town's streets, which clearly display its cultural heritage. The purpose of this article is to determine the impact of the city's cultural legacy on the physical and social fabric of the city. It is accomplished by studying a street in the heritage core of the city and determining the impact of cultural heritage on it. The paper, therefore aspires to establish a connection between the physical and social fabric and cultural heritage**

Keywords—culture, heritage, Indianstreets, ayodhya, settlement, urban, sacredscape.

I. INTRODUCTION

Various studies have been conducted on Ayodhya's cultural and sacred landscapes, as well as their impact on economics, politics, tourism, and so on. A comprehensive understanding of how cultural heritage shapes the physical and social fabric of the city is still unexplored. A survey based on the imageability and perceptions of Ayodhya was conducted using the imageability theory of Kevin Lynch and cognitive maps were generated in one of the articles established by Singh, Rana P.B and Kumar, Sarvesh (2018). The built environment is influenced by many tangible and invisible components of culture. However, no concrete research has been done to establish a link between cultural heritage and the built environment. Appadurai (1987, p.14) asserted that, "*With the possible exception of the railroad, streets capture more about India than any other setting. On its streets, India eats, sleeps, works, moves, celebrates and worships." "Indian streets bring people together socially and provide a physical setting for socio-economic activities"* (Jacobs,1993). As a result, an in-depth analysis is carried out by studying one of Ayodhya's streets and the impact of culture and heritage on it.

II. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

The research is done under two stages. First a comprehensive study of the settlement is done from literature reviews and internet sources.

Comprehensive Settlement study based on

1. History of the settlement
2. Architecture and identity

III. COMPREHENSIVE SETTLEMENT STUDY

1.1 HISTORY OF AYODHYA

"Ayodia was the first city founded by the race of Soorya. Its site is well known at this day under the contracted name of Oudh. Overgrown greatness characterized all the ancient Asiatic capitals, and that of Ayodia was immense" (James Todd,1873). Ayodhya, situated on the right banks of Ghaghara River (Sarayu), is a salvific city that has settlement continuity since 800 BCE. It is a sacred place not only for the Hindus but also many other religions in India such as Jainism, Buddhism, Sikhs and Islam. (Refer Fig 1) It was a composite civilization in the ancient times and its remnants are still visible.

| Time Period	Events
	Tharus (Tribals)
	Rajputs
7th - 6th century BCE	References in Buddhist texts such as Digha Nikāya; marketplace
5th century BCE	Annexed into kingdom of Magadha; Commercial centre
3rd century BCE	Part of Maurya Empire; Trade through river
2nd century BCE	Sunga inscriptions found
CE 150-300	Kushana and Mitra dynasty
CE 4th - 5th cent.	Gupta Empire; Jainism spreads

CE 320	Chandragupta I
CE 455-67	Ayodhya made capital; Ghats developed
CE 11th cent	Pilgrimage routes established
CE 1192	Period of Muhammad Ghouri
CE 1226	Delhi Sultanate; Capital of Oudh Garrison and administrative town
CE 1527	Invasion of Babar;Mughal rule
CE 1658 - 1707	Aurangzeb's rule
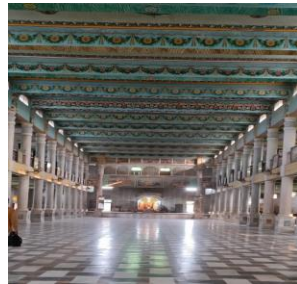
Top to down: Fig 1 Timeline cumulated from Rana P. B Singh, Hum sab ayodhya (article). **Fig 2**: Detail of a folio of Ramayana series ,1587-88 AD, Akbar's reign Source: Hum sab ayodhya(article) **Fig 3**: Hieun Siang arrives back in China. He was one of the many travelers to ayodhya who had written about the presence of Buddhism in Ayodhya. Source: Hum sab ayodhya (article) **Fig 4**: Valmiki Bhavan – epic Ramayana is inscribed all over its walls Source: author

1.2 ARCHITECTURE AND IDENTITY

By the end of nineteenth century Ayodhya became a vibrant town with a major commercial spine – running almost north – south linking all the important nodes and terminating at the bank. The rich heritage of the different kingdoms that ruled in Ayodhya is evident from the various juxtaposition of architectural styles of the buildings and its remnants. Many heritage buildings exhibiting Sharqi style, Awadhi style, Bengal Chhatris are visible in the skyline of the city (Fig 5 and 6).
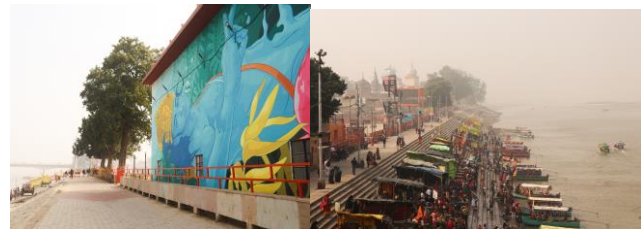
Fig.5 Elevation of Ram ki Paidi ghat depicting different styles of architecture. Source: Hum Sab Ajodhya and additions by author **Fig.6** Domes depicting different styles of architecture visible in the skyline. **Fig 7** A mural depicting Lord Saryu next to riverfront. **Fig 8** A view of Lakshman Ghat Source: author.

The city's identity is that of a sacredscape, transcending all religions, and is defined by its tangible and intangible cultural history, which the people of Ayodhya continue to practice. Every year, between 10 and 20 million people visit the city, and it has evolved into an important pilgrimage center. The city's fabric transports one back in time, and they strive to trace their ancestors. It is a place that connects people to their heritage and the culture in which they believe.

The second stage is the study and analysis of physical and social entities of one of the major streets of Ayodhya, and is done under primary survey. The street selected is in one of the heritage cores of the city (see fig.9) and is along the city's sacredscape that includes temples, chavnis, and other structures. Some of the parameters for study are based on "Identifying and measuring urban design qualities" by Reid Ewing, Otto Clemente, Susan Handy, Ross Brownson, and Emily Winston.

Urban level study of street based on

1. Morphology
2. Planning
3. Street network and accessibility
4. Building typology
5. Complexity
6. Imageability
7. Functions/ Activity Pattern
8. Informality
9. Transparency

IV. URBAN STREET STUDY AND ANALYSIS

2.1 MORPHOLOGY

Due to the physical circumscription of the landscape the settlement evolved from the river bank of Sarayu. There are

four major heritage cores in the city and are mapped out in the map (fig 9) They are Zone 1 – Riverfront ghats, Zone 2 – Ramkot, Zone 3 – Mani Parvat., Zone 4 – Gulab bari – Bahu begam Makbara Different religious sects are found in each heritage zone and it's observed that the settlement has grown around these heritage cores. There are 5 pilgrimage routes that run across the city namely Panchakroshi yatra, Chaudahkroshi Yatra, Chaurasikoshi Yatra, Antargrahi Yatra and Ramkot ki Parikrama and many religious buildings have come up along those routes. This has affected the evolution pattern of the settlement. (Figure 10 and 11).
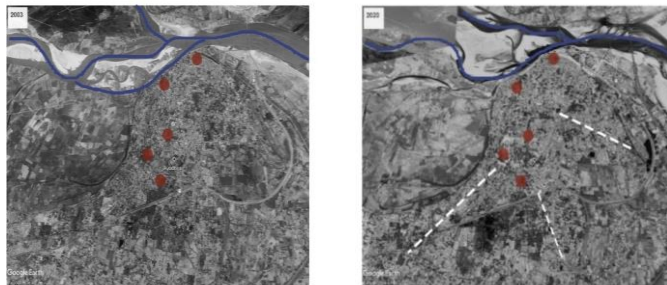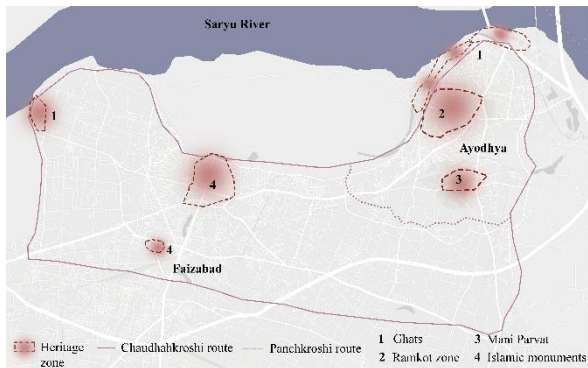
From top (anti-clockwise) **Fig.9** – Map showing various heritage cores in the settlement Source: Rana.P.B. Singh and author's addition **Fig.10** – Google earth map in 2003 Source: author **Fig.11** – Google earth map in 2020 depicting the evolution pattern. Source: author

2.2 PLANNING

The street under study is located within heritage Zone 2 (Ramkot) (see Fig 9) and connects three major heritage buildings, including Raj Dhvar Mandir, Dashrath Mahal, and Ram Janmabhoomi. The street network is designed in such that the locations of the heritage sites correspond to the descriptions given in the Ramayana, a Hindu epic (Fig 12). The Raj Dhvar Mandir, (Fig 13) located in the heart of the city, is considered the gateway to all of these monuments and is located in the epicenter of the city. This is used as a reference point, and other monuments are located to the south and west of it. As an effect of the culture, there is an influence on planning of the settlement.
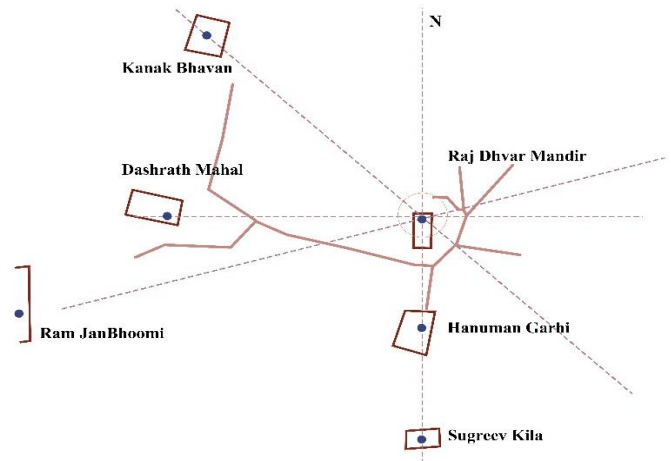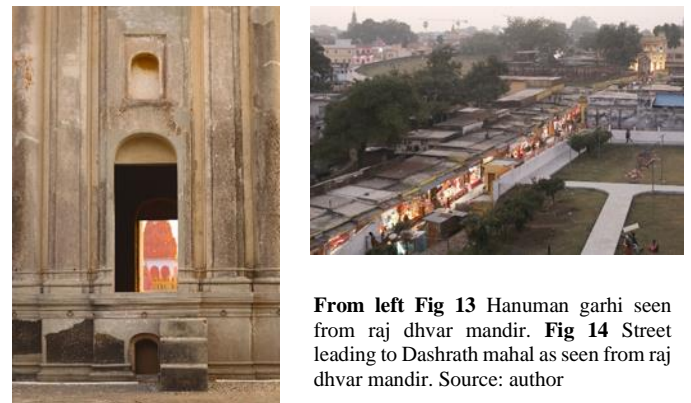

Fig. 12 Map depicting the locations of heritage places in ramkot. Source: author

From left Fig 13 Hanuman garhi seen from raj dhvar mandir. **Fig 14** Street leading to Dashrath mahal as seen from raj dhvar mandir. Source: author
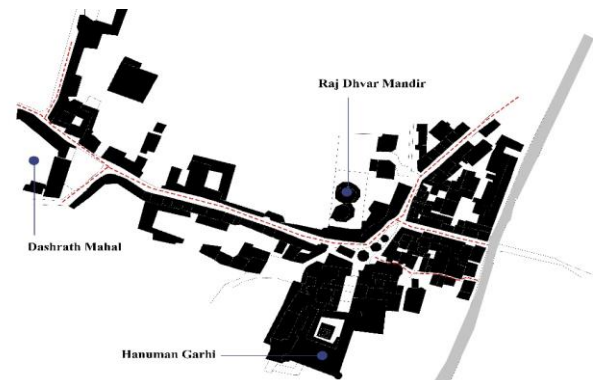
2.3 STREET NETWORK AND ACCESSIBILITY

Fig 15. Figure ground map of the area of study. Source: author

From left: Fig 16. Archway from Chowk Ayodhya Road to the street. **Fig 17** Archway leading to Hanuman garhi. Source: author

It is observed from the figure ground map (Fig 15) of the study area that the area surrounding the street has no open spaces and It is observed from the figure ground map (Fig 15) of the study area that the area surrounding the street has no open spaces and is densely packed. A street starting from the Chowk Ayodhya Road (Fig.16) through the houses and temples leads to the Hanuman garhi, where two more streets meet to form a node. Nodes, as a result are formed around heritage monuments, emphasizing their significance. The streets leading to the monuments have an ornamented archway which highlight the path and stand out. The street pattern hence has evolved in consideration with the heritage of the place.
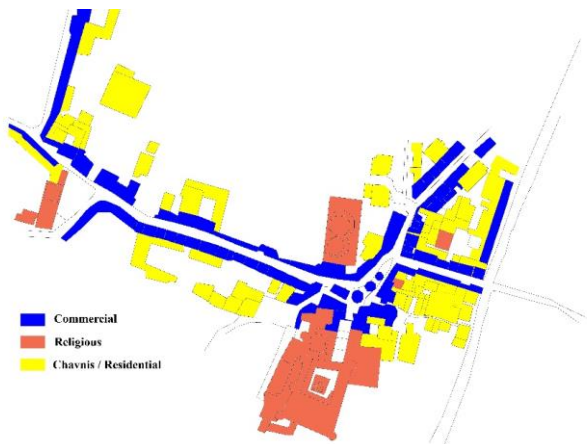
2.4 BUILDING TYPOLOGY

Fig 18. Building Typology map. Source: author

From left (clockwise Fig 19 Raj Dhvar Mandir Fig 20. Chavni Fig 21. Commercial zone Source: author

The majority of the plots surrounding the heritage monuments are owned by various temple trusts. The frontage of all of these temples is rented out to locals to house shops. The tradition has been carried on for 300 years, and the shops have been handed down from generation to generation. This kind of a system has ensured the longevity of the buildings. The shops liven up the street and serves as a bazaar connecting the heritage monuments. Behind these commercial establishments (Fig 21) are houses that also serve as temples (chavnis) (Fig 20). These are semipublic spaces which have an indirect access from the street via smaller passageways. In Ayodhya a courtyard House

is the basic module of built form which confirms to local climatic needs and cultural practices. A temple acts as a focal point in the courtyard and the courtyard acts as a gathering space for people visiting the temple or for gatherings during festivities. Many temples are built in the form of houses with the deity considered to be a permanent resident in the principal room, and almost all ashrams and chavnis [houses] have a temple inside. This is a unique typology of built with both public and private uses in the same premises which has formed as result of the cultural practices in that place.

2.5 COMPLEXITY
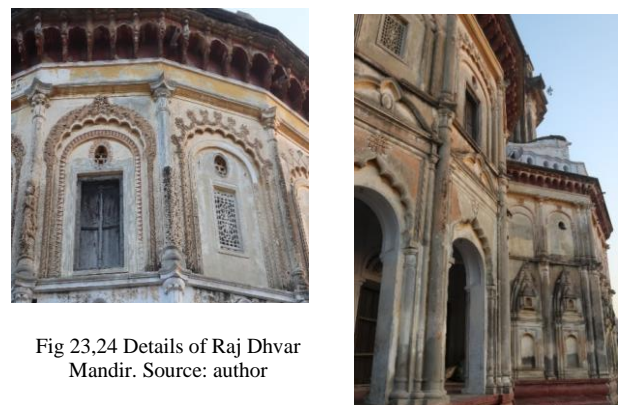

Fig 22. Building age map. Source: author

Fig 23,24 Details of Raj Dhvar Mandir. Source: author

As derived from the building age map (Fig 22) there are no buildings in the study area that are less than 50 years old. The heritage monuments date back 900 years and have been altered over time. Various architectural styles are seen in these monuments which are a testament of its long history and culture (Fig23,24) forming a juxtaposition of elements that makes it more complex. This complexity has given it a unique identity and character to the street. Since there is no change of ownership from a long time these old buildings have not been demolished and some of them have been restored back to its old form.

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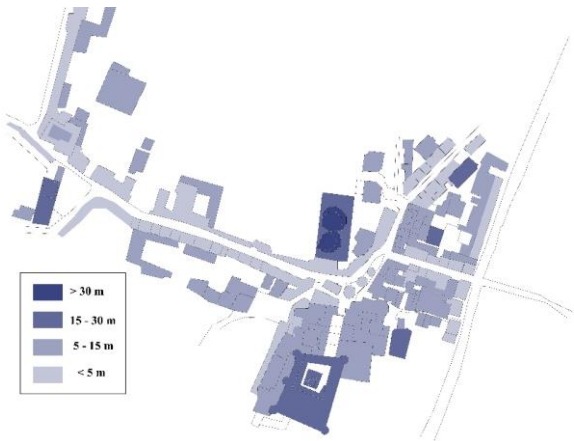
2.6 IMAGEABILITY

**Fig 25: Building Heights map. Source: author**

From top: Fig 26: Raj dhvar mandir seen from the street. Fig 27: View of Hanuman Garhi Source: author

The heritage monuments are taller than the rest of the city's buildings. According to the Ramayana, the tallest structure in the city is the Raj Dhvar Mandir and the building is in accordance with that statement. No other structures overpower the heritage monuments and their magnificence can be felt from the streets (Fig:26). The buildings closest to the street have the shortest heights, with the height increasing behind the street frontage and is a direct link to the area's heritage. It improves the imageability of the street and many vantage points are created for the public walking through it.

2.7 FUNCTIONS/ACTIVITY PATTERN

When accessing the temple Hanuman Garhi, three peculiar circular shops are located at the node and function as both a commercial and a public space. The story as recorded from one of the shopkeepers is that 300 years ago, they were tree positions where shopkeepers sold their wares. The activity developed into a tradition, and later many people occupied these spaces and used poles to demarcate their boundaries. The shops have been owned by the same family for generations. With the same demarcated boundary for each shopkeeper, it has been converted into shelters a decade back. (Fig 30). This is considered as intangible heritage, and it has had an impact on the street's-built fabric.
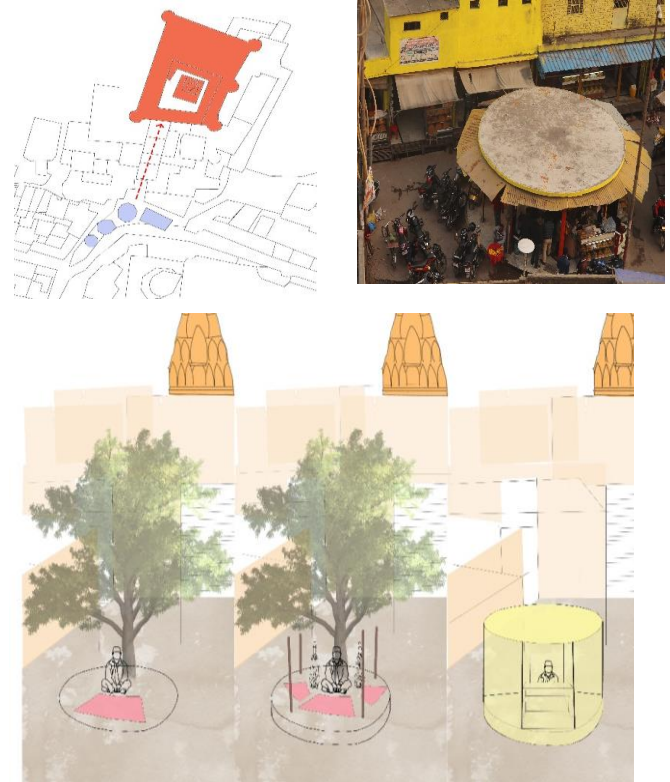
Clockwise from top: Fig 28: Map highlighting hanuman garhi and its frontage Fig 29: Circular commercial shops. Fig 30: Evolution of the circular commercial shops Source: author
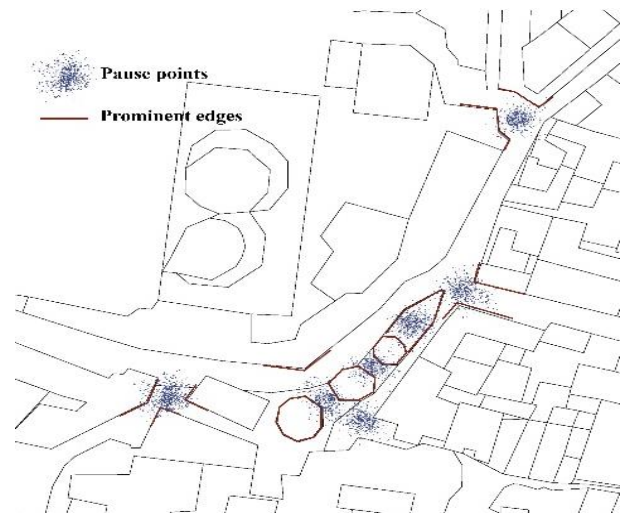
2.8 INFORMALITY

Fig 31: Map showing edges and pause points around edges. Source: author

Fig 32: Around the edge of shops. Source: author

Fig 33: Edge of a street. Source: author

As seen in the map (Fig 31) the edges of the commercial buildings with open spaces act as pause points and spaces for social interaction for the public. The edges formed due to influence of culture and heritage on the street also affect the social fabric of the city. They act as pause points and points of social interaction for the people and break the monotony of the continuous stretch. Introverted edges of the street (Fig 33) are used as doorways to the preceding houses and temples and hence not disturbing the public traffic to the heritage monuments which allows for easy flow of circulation through these streets. The edges and spaces formed around the heritage places promote informality of the street.

2.9 TRANSPARENCY

Fig 34, Fig 35 Depicting various facades through the street. Source: author

The facades of the street are dominated by the presence of taller heritage structures. The commercial shops have a collapsible overhang and no other element is visible. The shops are placed adjacent to each other with maximum opening and shops being transparent to the public. The preceding houses and temples of the shops have a setback from the street with the setback width being that of the shops and there is no super

structure above it. This is in turn is used as a terrace for the people to watch the street activity and processions when age old festivals are celebrated. (Fig 34) Hence the terrace acts as an element of transparency for the people residing to watch the street activity.

V. CONCLUSION

Cultural heritage is the soul of any city, and it is what keeps it alive. It is deduced from the various parameters used to study the physical and social fabric of the city that the influence of culture and heritage has a direct or indirect impact on it. The influence of culture and heritage does not necessitate a review of its credibility, contrary to popular belief. This research paper is an attempt to prove that a belief or tradition, whether true or false, can have an impact on the built fabric if it is followed by people. The built environment in places such as Ayodhya has its own identity and is distinguished by vibrancy and liveliness that is lacking in many places today. Meanwhile consideration should be given to conserving and sustaining the culture and heritage that contribute to the city's essence. Steps must be taken to preserve the physical heritage through conservation and restoration methods which will as a result enhance its social fabric. Future developments in such areas should consider the value of cultural heritage and should contribute to it rather than compete with that quality in order to sustain it.

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