

Guiding Urban Development in a Traditional Neighbourhood: Case Application of Kolkata

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Abstract : Urban development in traditional neighbourhoods of cities is undergoing a sea change due to imposition of irregular development patterns on a predominantly inclusive urban fabric. In recent times, traditional neighbourhoods of Kolkata have experienced irregular urban development which has resulted in transformation of its immediate urban character. The goal is to study and analyse impact of new urban developments within traditional neighbourhoods of Kolkata and establish development guidelines to balance the old with the new. Various cities predominantly in third world countries are also experiencing similar development patterns in their traditional neighbourhoods. Existing literature surveys of development patterns in such neighbourhoods have established 9 major parameters viz. edge, movement, node, landmark, size-density, pattern-grain-texture, open spaces, urban spaces, urban form and views-vistas of the neighbourhood. To evaluate impact of urban development in traditional neighbourhoods of Kolkata, 3 different areas have been chronologically selected based on their settlement patterns. Parameters established through literature surveys have been applied to the selected areas to study and analyse the existing patterns of development. The main sources of this study included extensive on-site surveys, academic archive, census data, organisational records and informational websites. Applying the established parameters, 5 major conclusions were derived. Firstly, it was found that pedestrian friendly neighbourhoods of the city were becoming more car-centric. This has resulted in loss of interactive and social spaces which defined the cultural heritage of Kolkata. Secondly, the urban pattern which was composed of dense and compact fabric is gradually losing its character due to incorporation of new building typologies. Thirdly, the new building typologies include gated communities with private open spaces which is a stark departure from the existing built typology. However, these open spaces have not contributed in creation of inclusive public places for the community which are a significant part of such heritage neighbourhood precincts. Fourthly, commercial zones that primarily developed along major access routes have now infiltrated within these neighbourhoods. Gated communities do not favour formation of on-street commercial activities generating haphazard development patterns. Lastly, individual residential buildings that reflected Indo-saracenic and Neo-gothic architectural styles are converting into multi-storeyed residential apartments. As a result, the axis that created a definite visual identity for a neighbourhood is progressively following an irregular pattern. Thus, uniformity of the old skyline is gradually becoming inconsistent. The major issue currently is threat caused by irregular urban development to heritage zones and buildings of traditional neighbourhoods. Streets, lanes, courtyards, open spaces and buildings of old neighbourhoods imparted a unique cultural identity to the city that is disappearing with emerging urban development patterns. It has been concluded that specific guidelines for urban development should be regulated primarily based on existing urban form of traditional neighbourhoods. Such neighbourhood development strategies should be formulated for various cities of third world countries to control irregular developments thereby balancing heritage and development.

Keywords : heritage, Kolkata, traditional neighbourhood, urban development

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