The Jhelum Riverfront in Srinagar

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The city of Srinagar, a historic urban habitat more than 2000 years old, evolved and expanded over centuries through various historical periods. The city’s foundation is said to have been laid down during the reign of Emperor Ashoka around 250 BC, at the location, presently known as Pandrethen, close to present day Badami Bagh Cantonment area. The advantage of selecting this site for the capital has been attributed to its close vicinity to the River Jhelum as also protection against the frequent floods, which the hill-slopes must have afforded. The earliest period of King Ashoka was followed by numerous kings of Kashmir who moved the capital city to other locations – of prominence among which are the cities of Parvarapura, founded by King Parvarasena in the 6th century AD close to the Hariparbat hillock, and also for a brief while to Parihaspora, close to present day Pattan on Srinagar-Baramulla road, founded in the 7th century AD by King Lalitaditya.

Of all the various locations that emerged & fell during various Kashmiri Kings, Parvarapura (or present Srinagar) rose to unprecedented prominence. The city was established mostly on the right side of the River Jhelum and included vast areas for building activity. The site chosen was at a relatively higher ground and assured a certain protection against floods – which was a persistent problem the Kashmir had to deal with.

The main development along the riverfront took place from the 14th Century onwards with the establishment of the Sultanate rule in the region, resulting in a settlement that is illustrated by close-knit mohallas, interwoven with narrow, organic maze-like streets and alleys. Over a period of time the city evolved and expanded to its present form, stretching from Ompora Karewa in the south to Omerheir in the north.
While the serpentine course of River Jhelum was the defining feature along which the city grew and sustained, there were a number of smaller canals that the river spilled into and helped regulate its flow. On the banks of these canals, smaller, secondary settlements developed in good nature. The Jhelum riverfront, as also the canal front consists of a high stone embankment wall lined with a series of ghats and dotted with prominent religious buildings like mosques, shrines, khanqahs, temples, and secular & public structures. Abutting each other and lining the riverfront are linear stretches of three or four storey residential buildings that could be approached through the narrow cross-lanes which were in turn approached from a wide flight of steps (ghats) rising from the river’s edge. The continuity and variety of the building facades facing the river give the city its unique characteristic features. The traditional riverfront stretches along both the banks of river from Zero bridge up to Safa Kadal. It is this part of the city that contains the most of vernacular buildings, based on taq and dhajji dewari in Srinagar.

Today, even after the passage of eight centuries the Jhelum riverfront survives as a cohesive and continuous urban unit marking the peak of Kashmir’s art, culture and vernacular architecture that continue to remain in use. As such it is of utmost importance to preserve this urban landmark for the coming generations.

The riverfront has been identified as a Grade I heritage site, on the basis of its historical, archaeological and architectural significance, in the Cultural Resource Mapping of Srinagar City (2004-2005) carried out by INTACH, J&K Chapter.

Some of the most prominent buildings located along the riverfront are:

- Khanqah-i-Mir Syed Ali Hamdani
- Shergadi Palace complex
- Divisional Commissioners office
- SPS Museum
- Erstwhile Loyds Bank
- Lalded Memorial school

The riverfront also includes prominent civic structures like mohallas, alleys, ghats and traditional wooden bridges.

**Significance of Jhelum Riverfront**

The site is a prominent historical and urban landmark of the historic city.

- The riverfront represents the physical and urban development of the city.
- Represents the most prominent architectural achievements of Kashmir.
- Marks a unique synthesis of different usages namely public, private and religious.
- Marks a balance between the natural and the built environment.
- Represents the traditional historic face of the Srinagar city.
- Is inextricably linked with the socio-cultural achievements of the region.

The urban structure of the Srinagar city shows a close connection the city had with the Jhelum River. The ghats, alleys and the main road parallel to the river are the original urban elements of Srinagar city along the river. On the connection points where the parallel roads of the Jhelum River meet the streets at bridge crossings, major
included removal of encroachments along the banks as well as constructing retaining wall and beautifying the river front. However, many of the buildings, alleys and ghats along the river front still show an advanced state of decay.

**PROPOSALS**

The Proposal invited by the Jammu & Kashmir Government, entails the preparation of revitalization plan of Jhelum river front in its historic setting with a view to restore/preserve various buildings/structures along the river front. The revitalization proposal envisages undertaking steps which will help in reviving the riverfront and also help in rejuvenating its lost glory. The main thrust of these proposals is to encourage visitation in the inner traditional city and consequently generate income for the people in these areas. Since this part of the city has been traditionally associated with arts and crafts of Kashmir, such proposals will also help in reviving these crafts in their historical setting. The various proposals are:

**Shikara Rides:**
Revival of traditional waterborne transport system by organising shikara rides along the riverfront. The rides can also incorporate wider circuits of travel via-Tsunth Kol-Dal Lake or Shah-Kul-Kut – Kol. As part of this programme it is proposed to revive certain select major ghats along the riverfront.

**Heritage Walks:**
Reviving tourist activity along the interiors of the settlement parallel to the Jhelum riverfront by designing heritage walks. These walks can be co-ordinated with the proposed shikara rides and will include trips to major historical sites in the old city, significantly improving awareness about the socio-cultural importance of the riverfront.
The Proposal will also determine a strategy for better maintenance, management of the riverfront along with reuse strategies for the abandoned buildings and sites.

- Conservation/Reuse Plan for approximately 20 historic buildings along the river front as tea houses, cafes, restaurants as well as Craft Centers etc.
- Restoration of Ghats
- Face lifting/conservation proposal for identified public heritage buildings from Peerzou to Safa kadal including major shrines, mosques, khanqahs as well as temples.
- A guide map and write up of the structures/monuments.
- Audio guides for tours along the river front, audios for pertinent heritage walks.
- Areas to be demarcated as de-embarking points for visitors along the riverfront along with provision for public convenience in the vicinity.

The above proposal is a short term list of activities that can be undertaken forthwith. Following these, a long term revival plan shall be prepared which shall be driven by the resident community, State agencies, urban local bodies and trade and travel fraternity.

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CM inaugurates Central Asian Museum at Leh

The Museum was established with active support of INTACH, J&K Chapter

In order to review the development status of the region, Chief Minister J&K, Mehbooba Mufti visits Leh. She inaugurated a state-of-the-art Central Asian Museum in the town, built by the Tourism Department in collaboration with a local community service group, Anjuman Moin-ul-Islam. The museum was actively supported from the inception by INTACH, J&K chapter. INTACH provided linkages and coordinated the efforts of Tibet Heritage Front (THF); A German based NGO who have been doing pioneering work in preserving the vernacular heritage of upper Himalayas, Anjuman Moin-ul-Islam and INTACH. THF took a lead role and mounted an international effort for technical and financial support for the museum. Andre Alexander, the head of THF also designed the building, layout and supervised the construction. The then Secretary Tourism, J&K Mr. Naeem Akhter provided generous support for the concept and main funding for the project. The first ever concept flyer was prepared by INTACH in 2009. The contents of the flyer are reproduced below for giving a background of the museum.

For Centuries Ladakh has been a place for the transmission of goods and ideas from many different locations. From the tenth to twentieth century trade routes have been a vital factor in determining the course of Ladakh’s political and economic development. Leh, in particular, was a key staging post on central and South Asian trade routes and the region hosted visitors hailing from Srinagar to Samarkand, Beijing to Banaras. Ladakh’s material and visual cultural reflects this cosmopolitan; whether it be in the form of raw materials, stylistic influences, or the physical presence of craft makers bringing their skills into the area and intermingling with local artisans.

As a tribute to this rich past the society for the preservation of Trans-Himalayan Art & Culture, a society registered under J&K Societies Act, is setting up the Central Asian Museum in the grounds of the Tshas Soma (“new garden”) complex in Leh. Tshas Soma covers an area of 18,000 square feet, is centrally located in Leh market, and consists of Leh’s oldest public mosque, two Balti bakeries and a cluster of old buildings. In 2007, as a start to the project, Anjuman Moin-ul-Islam and Tibet Heritage Foundation (THF) have completed the restoration of the mosque. This project serves a landmark for the restoration of Ladakh’s built heritage, which is a unique blend of architectural forms representative of Buddhist Tibet and Islamic Kashmir.
NGO headed by Mr. Gani Shaikh, the renowned ladakhi historian. The other members of the society included Mr. Saleem Beg, Convenor INTACH, Monisha Ahmed, an anthropologist associated with Ladakh, Dr Mohammad Deen, Janet Rizvi and two members of Anjuman Moin-ul-Islam.

The museum has four floors, each floor representing a cultural segment of Himalayas like Ladakh, Kashmir, Tibet and Central Asia. The museum has the artifacts, manuscripts and pieces of heritage collected from Central Asia, Tibet and Kashmir, some of which are 400 years old.

Speaking at the occasion, the Chief Minister announced a grant of Rs 20 lakh for adding more artifacts to the museum.

Currently, the museum houses pieces of rock art, ancient Ladakhi day-to-day instruments like weighing balance and old abacus, coins from several Central Asian states, old caravan water heater, utensils from Yarkand, manuscripts like Bodhi and Turkish interpretation of the Koran, ancient handwritten chronology of Prophet Mohammad, copies of Sahih Bukhari and Fatwai Aalamgiri, besides articles of daily use in ancient times in the region and prototype of an ancient Ladakhi kitchen.
Nowruz, an Intangible Cultural Heritage of Humanity says UNESCO & UN

United Nations (UN) declares March 21 as the International day of Nowruz.

"Nowruz transcends national borders, religious divides and other differences to unite communities with bonds of goodwill. Such common purpose can help humanity rise to this moment in history."

(Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon)

International Nowruz Day was proclaimed by the United Nations General Assembly, in its resolution A/RES/64/253 of 2010, at the initiative of several countries that share this holiday (Afghanistan, Albania, Azerbaijan, the Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia, India, Iran (Islamic Republic of), Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, Turkey and Turkmenistan.

Inscribed in 2009 on the Representative List of the Intangible Cultural Heritage of Humanity as a cultural tradition observed by numerous peoples, Nowruz is an ancestral festivity marking the first day of spring and the renewal of nature. It promotes values of peace and solidarity between generations and within families as well as reconciliation and neighborliness, thus contributing to cultural diversity and friendship among peoples and different communities.

NOWRUZ

Nowruz is the traditional Iranian festival of spring which starts at the exact moment of the vernal equinox, commencing the start of the spring. It is considered as the start of the New Year among Iranians. The name comes from Avestan meaning "new day/daylight". Nowruz is celebrated March 20/21 each year, at the time the sun enter Aries and spring begins.

Nowruz has been celebrated for at least 3,000 years and is deeply rooted in the rituals and traditions of the Zoroastrian religion. Today the festival of Nowruz is celebrated in Iran, Iraq, India, Afghanistan, Tajikistan, Uzbekistan, Azerbaijan, Kazakhstan, and Kyrgyzstan.

Sources: www.un.org
www.crystalinks.com