- *Civic Architecture - Social Relevance and Convergence* –

Preface

Architecture mirrors the aspirations and achievements of a society. Every Society is continuously changing. Culture and traditions impart continuity to changing society (1).

Fig. 1 Vadakkunnathan Temple @ Thekkinkadu Maiden (Thrissur)

In broad framework the civic architectural identity of a locale / part of city could often be referred to as the biography of its people - a collective identity, which has evolved with time through profound behavioral and materialistic convergence. Resulting in identifiable whole depicted through built environment and its occupants. This experiential legibility cycle of reality/perception could be easily deciphered in Thrissur one of the most populous urban agglomerations of Kerala State, India.

Fig. 2 City Center Mall – Contemporary Outlook (Thrissur)

Architecture provides the spatial envelope for these transitions; it could be rationally correlated to the spatial imprinting of human behavior in a way that persists as a form while allowing for further and more developed interactions. The overall process of built realization could be linked to the sequence of universal correlation.
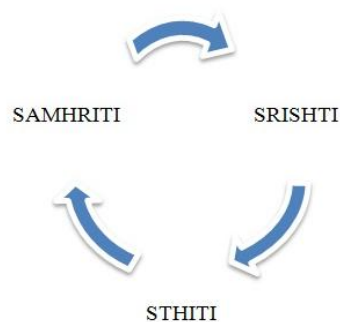

SAMHRITI   SRISHTI

STHITI

Fig. 3 The Cycle of Universal Correlation (2)

Fig. 4 Swaraj Round – Street Perspective – Transition in Built Morphology with Time

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The things that we human beings build or evolve are the result of our endeavors in two directions; on the one end we proclaim accomplishment of a purpose – a built environment to accommodate certain activities and on the other to nurture an expression that could communicate desired response based on the context (3).

Fig. 5 Brahmaswam Madham – Traditional Vedic Study Center (Thrissur)

Relevance of the aspect of characteristics is a critical component when comprehensive level appraisals are being done. It contributes relatively to realization of the aspect of diversity and continuity as well as elucidates the aspect of totality in civic architectural environments. Moreover the various parameters that contributes to the evolution of the imageability & functionality is profoundly highlighted. Mattancherry a small coastal town, located in close proximity to the commercial hub – Cochin, Kerala would be an ideal case that profoundly exhibits the social influx based on religion, economics & politics at built level.

The history of the city dates back to 13th century AD. The town of Mattancherry evolved with time to depict various elements of urban design – the growth pattern was natural in certain peripheries. Though evolved as a modest market harbor town, became the hub of economic and political activities. The heritage city with its unique and strong linkages plays a crucial role in communicating the diverse social fabric and vernacular foot print. The landforms and the lagoon system contributed to the concentration of economic activities on the water front areas. Ethnic – Religious grouping of people dictated the development of distinct residential zones engraved with vibrant character. The spatial, visual and aesthetical realization of built environment at an existent level, its transition with time is significant. It is closely linked to the social settings and common man.

Fig. 6 Mattancherry Artistic Impression

Such approaches have led to tangible outputs. Architecture and Urban Design, both in their formal and spatial aspects, are seen as fundamentally configurational in that the way the parts are put together to form the whole is more important than any of these parts taken in isolation (4). An in-depth review of urban areas that depicts a sequential growth would definitely help in generating a theoretical, graphical and decisive knowledge of socio – architecture influences on the foot prints of growth and development of a society.
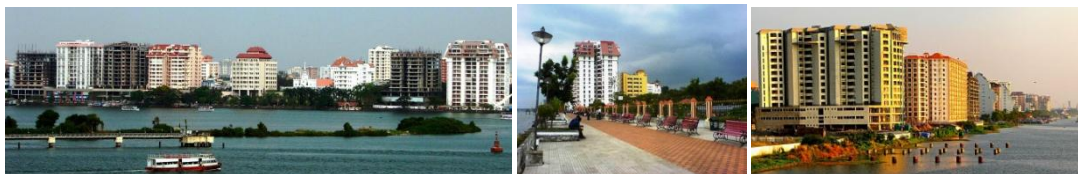

Fig. 7 Marine Drive, Kochi

The architecture of an urban environment tells history and frames images. This perceptive generated can be seen as stage set for various episodes and happenings to come about with transition of time. Regions in a town differ according to their evolutionary rationale and functions. It envisage a morphological image of architecture which is relatively permanent, however transition or change is imperative with time. Gradual commoditization of development and changing patterns of social life has brought about a paradigm shift.

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Narrative Environment

Fig. 8 Imagebility

| Street View | Public Square | Tea Stall |

Fig. 9 (Amidst a mosque - Ahmedabad)

Architectural expression is an outcome of integration of various domains, off this social and cultural parameter plays a decisive position. This perception often elucidates the overall identity at an urban context - macro level.

"Human Civilization that prospered all over the world was influenced by indicators like religion, politics and economics." (5). A prominent iconic structure that affirmatively substantiates this fact is the Teen Darwaza – one of the oldest gateways of Ahmedabad City. It was established in the year 141 A.D. by Sultan Ahmed Shah, who founded the city of Ahmedabad. This gateway is definitely an embodiment of the fine Islamic Architecture in India.

| Ablution Pool – Jama Masjid | Teen Darwaza | Street View |

Fig. 10 (Old City - Ahmedabad)

The narrative environments depict a realistic scenario by making use of symbolic elements to evoke a certain level of cognition. It also generates a universally acceptable level of understanding and meaning. Urban environments thus depicted cannot be an object apart from society. This sense of perception is often glorified by the embodiment of urban landscapes by civic architecture in totality. In Indian context the appraisal of various cities validates the thought of A.G.K. Menon - "The parameters of our built environment are circumscribed by the fact that our cities consist of three distinct entities: the historic town, the newly planned and unplanned developments, and the 'spontaneous' informal growth of the urban poor, both within and at the periphery of the cities."

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Imageability of a City

"Imageability: that quality in a physical object which gives it a high probability of evoking a strong image in a given observer. It is that shade, color, or arrangement which facilitates the making of vividly identified, powerfully structured, highly useful mental images of the environment." (6).
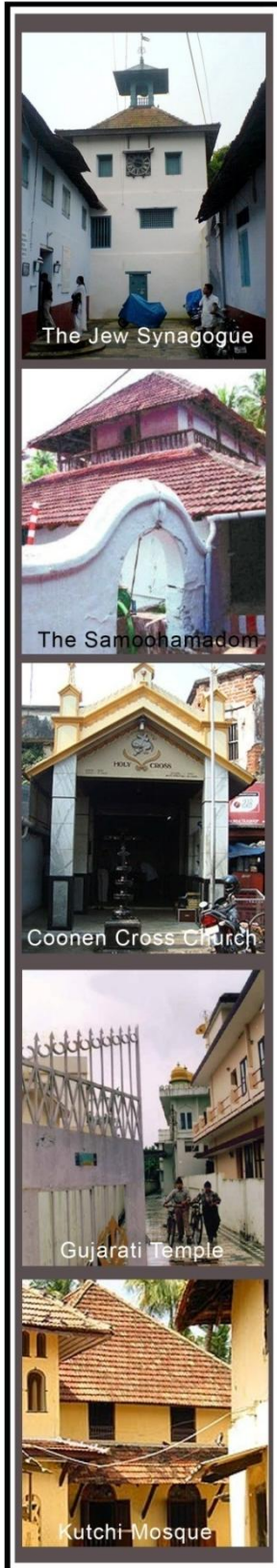

Fig. 11 Place, Time and People - Street View

For Lynch, the "imageability" of a city is directly related to the success of its urban plan. Lynch argues that the ease in which one can recognize the patterns and meanings of their environment, the more pleasure and utility they will extract from it (7). However each individual will have a differing perception of their environment. This is natural as everyone experiences the same city differently. The image of a city, however, can be thought of as the sustained composite of all individual notions with a sense of holistic order.

Fig. 12 Land Marks – Thrissur (8)

a. Brahmaswam Madham
b. City Center Mall
c. Shakthan Thampuran Palace
d. Sangeetha Nataka Academi
e. Town Hall
f. Basilica of our lady of Dolours
g. Anjuvilakku Junction.
h. Vadakunnathan Temple

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The Jew Synagogue

The Samoohamadom

Coonen Cross Church

Gujarati Temple

Kutchi Mosque

Order in habitat design is taken as a fundamental quality and is seen by most theorists as related to a larger order, that of nature. However Robert Venture refines the approach and relevance of order by proclaiming an affirmative thought process; 'A valid order accommodates the circumstantial contradictions of a complex reality. It accommodates as well as imposes. It thereby admits "control *and* spontaneity", "correctness *and* ease" – improvisation within the whole.' (9).

Fig. 13 Jew Street

Emphasizing the relevance of whole and the interdependence of its part (elements that make up a habitat) in establishing an order of the narrative environment, Jane Jacob states that the look of the things and the way they work are inextricably bound together, and in no place more than in civic architecture (10).
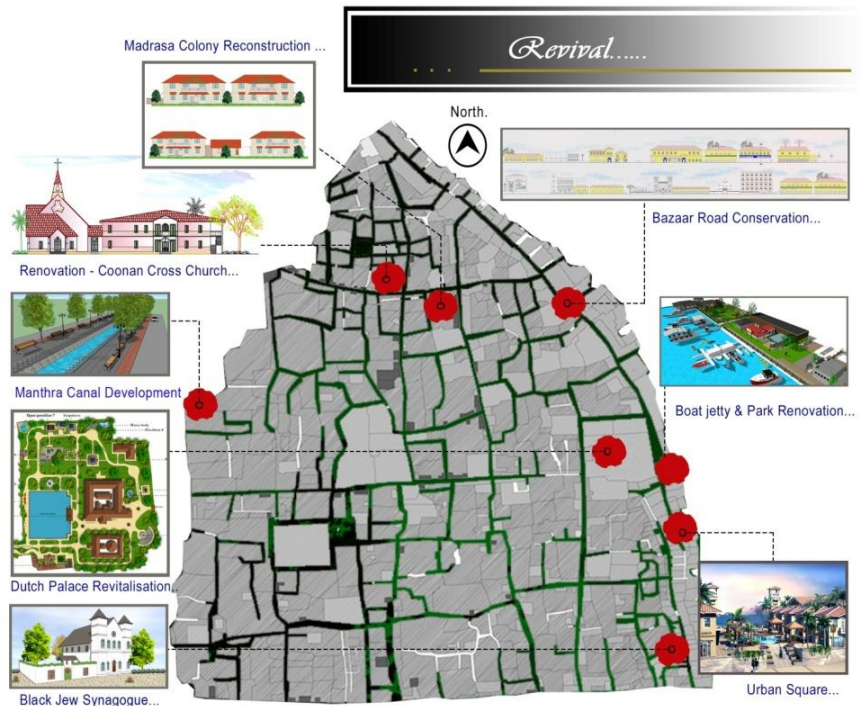

Fig. 14 Mattanchery Key Plan (11)

Fig. 15 Baazar Road

It is certainly apparent that the so-called 'simple' act of experiencing structure - environments and planning interventions for present as well as future activities at a macro habitat level involves thorough understanding of various dimensions that aid in the process of shaping the environment.

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Context

The etymological roots of the term "Society" could be traced to Latin word *societas*; sociological domain plays a dominant role in civic architecture. In most cases the legible images of settlement patterns found in this context have evolved with social stratification playing a vital factor. Various other parameters have also played a critical role in the process of evolution of the general imagery of the urban environment. The legibility of the spaces so realized and its cognition is a major aspect for reviewing the quality of built environment and its utility.

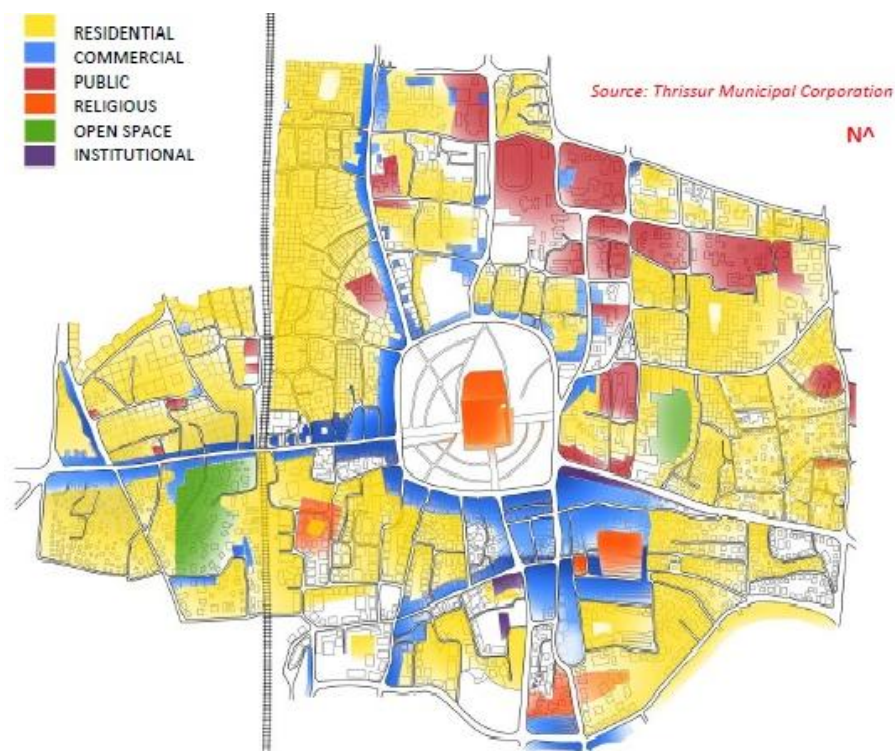Fig. 16 Landuse Evolution Chronology

Fig. 17 Landuse Plan (1985) Thrissur City (12)

Interaction between Spaces and Users; architecture and its surroundings are important aspects which make architecture appropriate for its Place, Time and People (users) (13). Which to an extend communicates the image about the urban fabric as well as social identities of that particular area.

The settlement patterns that communicate the legibility often accommodate the process whereby society communicates meanings, express its identity, define value systems, and express a way of life. Functional and Spatial elements give rise to Civic Architecture. In the specified context: a historic temple situated on high ground as a focus, a concentration of urban functions that have grown up around it to create a central area. This is emphasized by a focal live center of retail/markets with peripheral zones of administration, business, educational, residential and religion in close spatial proximity defining the edges of the core of the settlement.

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Urban Morphology

Urbanism is the word used to describe the process that drives people to live in cities (14), in this context the study of the physical form and structure of cities is the study of urban morphology. The term urban structure refers to the pattern or arrangement of development blocks, streets, buildings, open space and landscape which make up urban areas. It is the interrelationship between all these elements, rather than their particular characteristics that bond together to make a place.

Fig. 18 Street Layout

The perception of identity is a latent quality rather than an inherent quality. Urban structure does not imply any particular kind of urbanism explicitly: it applies equally to the centre and to the suburb and everything in between; and of course it applies equally to the city, the town and the village (15). At a city level – were various dynamic layers of activity are linked by inter as well as intra dependency on various hemispheres of habitual activity zones. It's only upon identification that architectural expression of civic identity can manifest at this macro level, this phenomenon plays a critical role in cognition.
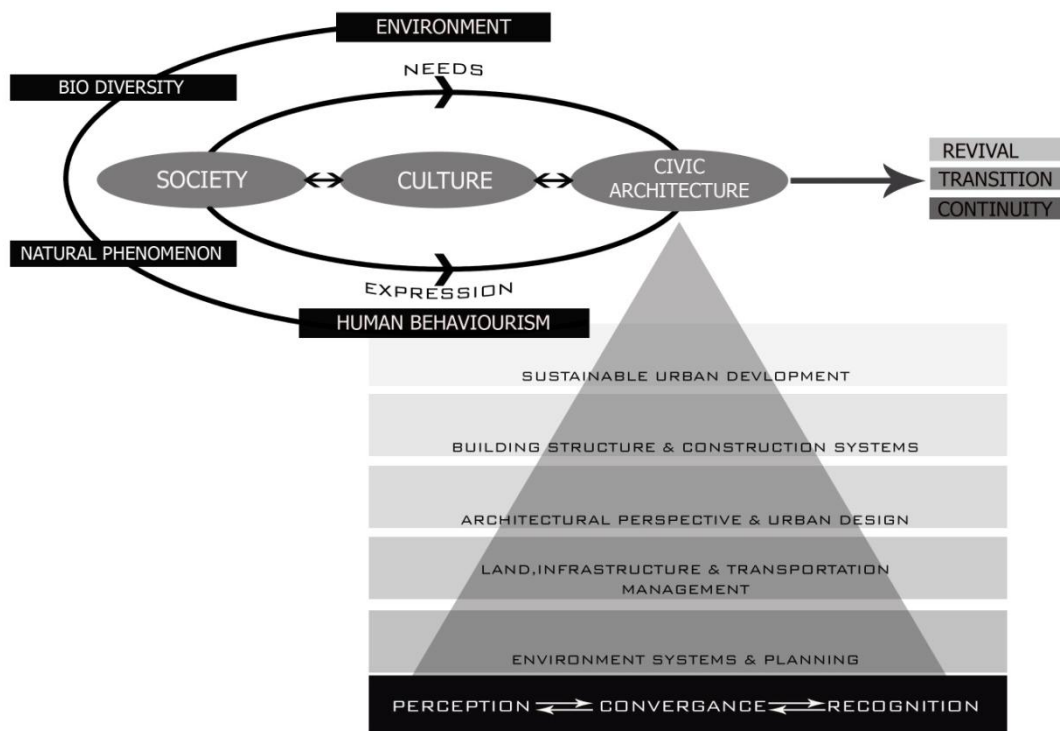

Fig. 19 Critical Proposition Theory

Focus could be on understanding the urban community model of a city and its influence on built environment. An urban community model reflects on the social characteristics of the urban setting (16). Physical and economic landscapes, land use and ownership, street patterns, planning regulations, and political events influence the physical design and pattern of a city.

The critical proposition theory is drawn from different factors influencing the physical design, social and cultural aspect of the city. In short it is a synthesis of the spatial relationships of various elements and reflections of the paradigm shifts associated with the transition – progress of a community. A board level understanding of the effective parameters that constitute the theory would induce better understanding of the built environment and resultant imageability as a whole.

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Critical Proposition Research Model

An onsite intervention at a micro level under the frame work of a legitimate methodology would increase the realization of the study areas value and potential. This could be visualized as a specific study task; a systematic probe into the existing urban fabric of cities – the influence of socio – convergence on architecture. This perspective would definitely elevate the understanding of affective aspects of the users as well as the direction of transition of built environments and their built morphology.
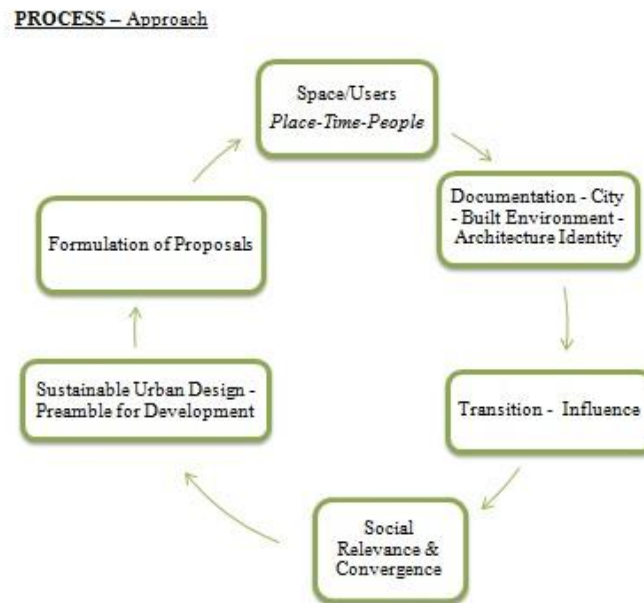
PROCESS – Approach

Fig. 20 Research Cycle

A thorough perceptive of the various domains that influence the affective parameters of the users is the critical resource for cognition. Appreciative recognition of the transition through time of a society would help evolve better design solutions that incrementally or significantly improve the inherited situation.

Relevance

> ➤ A process to study and reflect on the existing state of affairs – evolve preamble for positive intervention.
> ➤ Generation of possible theoretical, graphical and decisive knowledge of socio – architecture influences on the foot prints of growth and development of a society.
> ➤ Development of deeper, broader participation and awareness building among the citizens-civil society at large regarding the aspect of Transition and Revival.

Transition has brought about drastic changes in functional requirements, structural possibilities etc – architecture has proliferated far beyond the limits of contemporary approaches. The spatiality's and related approaches have to be properly understood/communicated to the young generation. Therefore such studies have a critical role to play in nation building.

Concluding Remarks

Successful realization of such a broad minded studies would lead to enhancement of city image and identity, integration of the same into development of value systems. In short it would help in evolving innovative proposals for the re-use, re-development and regeneration of the built environments as well for successful realization of new development proposals.

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