



THE HEART OF PUBLIC INTERVENTIONS IN HISTORIC CITIES: REFLECTIONS ON THE HRIDAY SCHEME

KOTHARI Swapna ¹

THAKUR Shivangi ²

1 Swapna Kothari, CWRS, Baroda
swapnakothari2@gmail.com

ORCID: 0000-0002-0918-9140

2 Shivangi Thakur, CWRS, Baroda
ar.shivangithakur@gmail.com

ORCID: 0009-0006-4874-5388

ABSTRACT: This article discusses two specific implementations from the Heritage City Development and Augmentation Yojana, also known as the HRIDAY scheme in India, specifically how they address public spaces in historical cities. HRIDAY (2014-2019) was formulated to provide holistic development and improve infrastructure, mainly in pilgrim towns, under the Ministry of Urban Development, now the Ministry of Housing and Urban Affairs (MoHUA). The scheme took into consideration the complexity of dealing with entire historic cities. This is especially challenging for local urban bodies focused primarily on the core of a city, i.e. its historic centre. The goal was to revitalise the city's unique character by "encouraging the development of an aesthetically appealing, accessible, informative and secure environment" (MOUD 2015). However, while the scheme ended, there are still many historic towns and cities across the country that could benefit from reflections and insights from already executed projects. To undertake any further development in line with the scheme, it is imperative to understand its application, specifically in terms of public space typology. HRIDAY primarily addressed the need to foster cultural identity by improving public infrastructure and promoting tourism. The article addresses how public chowks (squares) and market streets benefited from the scheme, basing on secondary sources about two selected cities.

Discussion covers additions of sanitation and public conveniences, development of venues for cultural events in existing public space and interventions such as creation of interpretation centres and improvement of paths. These analyses serve as the basis for the formulation of guidelines and theories that could inform future heritage development in sensitive urban spaces in cities and towns across India.

KEYWORDS: HRIDAY; public space; market street; Ghats; India

1. Identifying public space typology in Indian cities

Freely accessible space with no boundaries to its socio-cultural use is an asset in any city. In the Indian context, where bound private spaces are rife, public spaces become integral to building a strong community. Public space in India is usually characterised, according to its global image, as being crowded, chaotic, dirty and unsafe, but others may see it as displaying a celebratory vitality. The old city centres, now characterised as historic due to their tangible and intangible assets, were once traditional towns with multiple needs and diverse communities. This plurality contributed to inorganic public spaces with many layers of activities, rituals, traditions and functions, which would coexist in harmony despite great differences among residents.

For example, most of the old town or city centres consist of narrow, labyrinth-like roads lined with shops, leading either to open plazas (*chowks*) or institutional spaces, while serving different economic purposes. This seemingly unsystematic sequencing of space-activity has prevailed for hundreds of years but is dismissed in today's planning as "unorganised." The *raunaq* (charm) of organic growth, which allows vibrant public spaces to be created by their users, lies at the heart of the old city. Overall, an organic approach to public space typology in India calls for conservation efforts to make sure they remain both democratic and equitable without taking away a strong sense of community and commerce developed over many years. To continue the discussion of public spaces it is first necessary to settle a typology appropriate for India. The study *Celebrating Public Spaces of India* (Gupta and Gupta 2017) offers the following categorization of spaces:

1. ones around a public building, acting as monuments, plazas or greens;
2. city squares that are cultural spaces;
3. city-level urban parks and historical Baug;
4. bazaar streets and market places;
5. waterfronts;
6. religious spaces;
7. ancient heritage sites and monuments.

It is imperative to understand that there is no restriction on how historic public spaces can be viewed in the Indian context. However, for the purpose of this article, the view can be narrowed to points 2, 4 and 5. These come under the lens of conservation due to their importance for the larger narrative of a given historic city. The program in question refers to these types of public space within or around the core of historic cities, addressing their present challenges, rooted primarily in the growing needs of its diverse communities, as well as in changing land management and political governance.

2. Heritage City Development and Augmentation Yojana (2014–2019)

Heritage City Development and Augmentation Yojana (HRIDAY) was a fully funded central-government scheme initiated in 2014 by the then Ministry of Urban Development. It was

intended for capacity building in Indian heritage cities, which were transforming rapidly due to twentieth-century urban planning policies. The scheme was meant to address urban development issues such as local economy, livelihood and infrastructure provision in areas defined as urban heritage. Despite multiple initiatives targeting the development of these historic cities, its urban heritage conservation did not link with “city urban planning processes/tools and local economy and service delivery aspects” (MOUD 2015). The HRIDAY *yojana* (i.e. scheme) was floated to furnish dense historic urban cores with basic services and infrastructure. It was also to address the complexity of functioning between multiple institutions, and the unclear regulatory framework for financing and managing urban heritage assets and landscapes.

HRIDAY targeted the old urban centres as they were considered the cradle of many cities, bearing immense economic and tourism potential as well as intended to match with the rest of the city by strengthening existing infrastructure. This was carried out through targeted revitalization of cities’ unique historic assets, making them more accessible, informative and visibly appealing to both residents and visitors. The scheme focused on infrastructural development in four main areas in order to attain its vision of an integrated and well-developed historic core, comprising celebrated tangible spaces within a rich, intangible setting: (i) physical, (ii) institutional, (iii) economic, and (iv) social.

There was emphasis on adaptive reuse and retrofitting of existing built structures, while generating heritage awareness amongst all stakeholders and building the capacity to enhance avenues of livelihood by necessary skill development. Accessibility and comfort provided by modern technology was brought to existing public spaces while also developing new cultural venues for tourists. This included installing CCTV cameras in public spaces, increasing accessibility through design, and using GIS technology to make maps available to tourists. Selected urban local bodies (ULB, i.e. municipal corporations) were provided with the following objectives (MOUD 2015):

- to develop an inventory of built, natural, cultural and living historic assets for urban planning, growth and service provision; to prepare a heritage management plan (HMP) for the city/town, and to develop a detailed project report (DPR);
- to plan, document and implement heritage-sensitive infrastructure and cultural identity;
- to revitalise heritage cores for both tourists and residents, and to directly connect with the city’s cultural infrastructure and assets;
- to improve basic services like sanitation in terms of provision of public toilets, water taps, drinking water facilities, and proper lighting, especially in public spaces;
- to identify and create effective linkages between natural and cultural assets and between tourism and cultural facilities.

Funding by central government meant the HMP and DPR could be developed at the national or city level with the help of various public works organisations, special bodies or public sector projects, achieving the above objectives. Funds were allocated to agencies only on recommendation

from the National Mission Directorate under the Central Ministry. The National Institute of Urban Affairs (NIUA 2016) was designated as the National Management Unit for the HRIDAY scheme and the entire project was supposed to base on the partnership between the government, academic institutions and local communities, involving the best affordable technologies.



Fig. 1. Map of India highlighting all twelve cities under the HRIDAY scheme in the context of state boundaries and major rivers. After: D-maps (https://d-maps.com/carte.php?num_car=4181&lang=en), with the authors' additions

HRIDAY initially targeted twelve cities (fig.1), with others later invited to submit their historic value assessments and connect with its stated purpose. However, as the scheme concluded and Ministries were reshuffled and consolidated, there was a growing number of cities that wished to submit their own historic socio-cultural urban centres to such a scheme. The HRIDAY scheme was taken over by the Ministry of Tourism (now the Ministry of Culture and Tourism) in 2018 and renamed PRASHAD (Pilgrimage Rejuvenation and Spiritual Augmentation Drive). Cities previously under HRIDAY were reassigned to the new scheme, except for Warangal and Badami, which were replaced by Kamakhya in Assam and Kedarnath in Uttarakhand.

3. Selected cities and their public spaces addressed by HRIDAY

Over the last decade, many government policies and interventions for heritage conservation have come to the fore, for example Adopt-a-Heritage (Monument Mitra), HRIDAY, PRASHAD, National Cultural Heritage Conservation Policy (revised), National Monuments Authority, etc. These have been initiated under Ministries of Housing, Urban Development, Tourism or Culture, and addressed the situation of heritage across India. The purpose behind studying central directives

in the land of multitudes was to find what was identified as the underlying common concern for the state of public space heritage. These common denominators would provide the basis for the allocation of central or state funds or resources (guidelines for additions and changes, or resources like manpower and central support) necessary to carry out the conservation of given spaces. The HRIDAY scheme specifically addressed the needs of cultural tourism in historic cities and identified the underlying concerns of infrastructure holding back tourism.

For the sake of understanding the applicability of the HRIDAY scheme in relation to public spaces, two are examined in depth. Despite all twelve having considerable differences in terms of their historic aspects of cultural tourism, much conservation work on selected types of public space was carried out early, especially in the cities of Amritsar and Varanasi.

In both of these cities, the realized interventions particularly addressed the needs of the socio-religious fabric to carry out the vision that the ULB (Urban Local Bodies) developed for their historic assets. Under HRIDAY, interventions were intended for a broader historic fabric, but this study has been narrowed down to focus on particular changes like the introduction of physical infrastructure (green spaces, public conveniences, tourist facilities and amenities, etc.) and social infrastructure (local capacity enhancement, communication technology, security based on surveillance and modern apparatus, etc.), examining how they impacted public streets and markets (*chowks, bazaars*). The findings are presented in table 1, outlining prime historic assets, distinguishing specific zones from others (cf. maps in figs. 2 and 3), identifying the needs of particular zones, and listing infrastructural improvements carried out under HRIDAY in given zones. Notably, this research has been carried out entirely on the basis of secondary sources, including City Heritage Plans, government documents and press materials. Since the conclusion of HRIDAY there have been instances where certain projects would not have been implemented directly under it but converged with other government schemes or projects.

Amritsar: In Zone 1, the Ramdaspur Heritage Zone, a comprehensive road development and upgradation of 21 major roads leading to the Golden Temple, critically including interventions towards improved storm water drainage as well as streetscape and landscape development and creation of a 300-meter buffer pedestrianized zone around the Golden Temple was identified as the major project (CHP Amritsar Vol. II, 2016). This earmarked development in Zone 1, especially along the road from the Town Hall, crossing Jallianwala Baugh to the Golden Temple, inclusive of the Bazaars, was studied as it included a prominent and highly relatable public space typology. The historic walled city of Amritsar with the central Harmandir Sahib or Golden Temple (as it is popularly known) has been associated with some of the greatest historical figures from the region, giving the town a particularly “sacred and socio-political geography” typified especially by streets and traditional market spaces. It is said that the earlier leaders of the region envisioned the interplay and interdependence of the temple and the businesses around it, thus giving importance to the crowded, chaotic yet vibrant street bazaars visited by tens of thousands of people every day.

Historic Assets: Golden Temple, or Harmandir Sahab, sacred sarovars, the Ram Bagh Garden, the Gobindgarh fort, the Bazaars of Amritsar, Phulkari, weapons made by Sikligars, parandas, tilla jutti, Amritsari Kulche and chhole or chole Bhatore, Amritsari wadiya

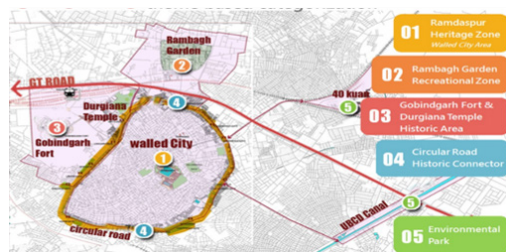



Fig. 2. HRIDAY identified zones in city of Amritsar.

Source: CHP for Amritsar by CRCI

Public Space	Need/Vision	Solution
<p>City squares as cultural venues, bazaar streets and marketplaces (Hall Gate to temple, Golden Temple Road, Ghanta Ghar Chowk).</p> <p>Implemented by/under:</p> <p>HRIDAY; Government of Punjab; JNNURM II (Municipal Corporation Amritsar); Directorate of Cultural Affairs, Archaeology and Museums (DCAAM); Ministry of Tourism, Government of India (Punjab Heritage Tourism Promotion Board [PHTPB]); PWD under relevant scheme/local government (MCA and PSPCL); Asian Development Bank (ADB) – Tranche I/II/III.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Need for equitable distribution of road space, distinguishing between street type and character. • Lack of footpaths in this zone; only one street from Hall Gate to Harimandir Sahib had a footpath, which was also dilapidated. • Lack of street lights on the main bazaar road, and existing lighting not in the best condition, while access to markets at night was not considered safe. • The junction and residual spaces along this stretch were unsuitable for organised traffic. • Surface of the streets on this stretch was reportedly waterlogged, especially near jallian wala bagh, the town hall and in the market street leading to Harmandir sahib, with open water drainage. • Basic directional signage existed in the city but there was no information panel or museum celebrating or informing the public about the city’s history, located in the most frequently visited part. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Improved mobility in the Walled City through strategic interventions relieving developmental pressures. • Streetscape and landscape improvements, including hardscape and softscape interventions through road surface replacement, street furniture, dustbins, street lights, tree gratings, standardisation of building thresholds. • Drain design, with specific focus on the chowk improvement, including refuge island, bollards, softscaping, street furniture, dustbins and an illumination scheme. • Cleaning of existing storm water drains, installation of storm water drains (creating a combination of underground and surface drains matching road width). • Improvement of street façades through standardization of shop front signage in terms of their proportions and placement. • Public Convenience Module in open spaces (including toilet, kiosk, playground, rain shelter, drinking water facility, information desk, bicycle stand, vendor area, and seating space).

Varanasi: Known as one of the oldest cities of India, and mentioned in almost all religious texts, Varanasi is the penultimate pilgrim town of the country, often lovingly called Kashi (a dham for moksha). With its unmatched cultural fabric seen and felt in the labyrinth of streets and institutional spaces leading down to the River Ganga, it was imperative to select Zone 1 – River Ganga (The Ghats): Development of Road leading to Dashwamedh Ghat, to Godowlia square. In this zone, the Dashwamedh Ghats is an integral part of the urban fabric of Varanasi and is directly accessed through the city centre of Godowlia. The stretch from Godowlia (a public chowk) up to the Dashwamedha ghats occasionally sees huge numbers of pilgrims and tourists, especially for the Ganga Arti, the boat rides that access other ghats via the river.

<p>Historic assets:</p> <p>temples, mosques, gateways, Kunds, wells, residential buildings, Dharmshalas, civic buildings, institutional buildings, Ghats, Pokhras, old bazaars</p>	 <p>Fig. 3. HRIDAY zones in the city of Varanasi. Source: INTACH CHP, 2011</p>	
<p>Public Space</p>	<p>Need/Vision</p>	<p>Solution</p>
<p>Waterfront spaces (Development of the road leading to Dashwamedh Ghat, to Godowlia square).</p> <p>Implemented by/under: HRIDAY (Ministry of Housing and Urban Affairs); PRASHAD (Ministry of Tourism); Government of UP State Construction and Infrastructure Development Corporation Limited; Varanasi Municipal Corporation, Namami Gange Cleaning Campaign</p>	<p>Ghats:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Lack of visitor amenities and facilities at Dashashwamedh Ghats. Overcrowding of the stretch from Ghat to Dashwamedh Ghat to Godowlia Square. The fish and flower market near the Dashwamedh Ghat was actually displeasing for the public accessing the ghat for the aarti. Some of the ghat steps were missing proper top surface due to constant use, which could lead to public mishaps in future. <p>The Godowlia Market:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> As the city centre, it was frequented by locals for shopping and by tourists visiting this area, who would either go to the Dashwamedh Ghat or to Kashi Vishwanath Temple. As a result, due to constant traffic, congestion was a frequent problem. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Placement of additional facilities such as changing booths, toilets, drinking water facilities, cloakrooms and temporary shelters. Pedestrianisation of the whole stretch from the Godowlia square to Dashwamedh Ghat. Demolition of the market and construction of a new complex with housing for tourists and pilgrims, along with a commercial complex. Provision of a multilevel parking lot. Provision of proper signage, bollards, streetlights, plaques and signboards about the heritage city of Varanasi.

Tab. 1. Findings from the cities of Amritsar and Varanasi

4. Discussion of findings

The primary aim of this article is to offer guidelines for heritage conservation of public space in other Indian cities by providing for the cultural and economic needs of users of particular spaces. For this purpose, the outcomes envisioned under HRIDAY were examined through the lens of their design guidelines, which emphasised remaining true to the historical character of cities. Despite the limited time frame of the discussed scheme, it focused on improving basic physical and social infrastructure, targeting frequently visited public spaces, and implemented the following in both cities:

- a clean and improved sanitised environment throughout the historic core, in both natural and cultural tourist attractions, enhancing convenience and safety for locals and visitors;
- improved urban services: road developments, drainage, lighting, sanitation or public conveniences (dustbins, street furniture, public toilets, drinking water facilities, etc.);
- improved basic urban infrastructure at all existing and emerging tourist destinations and gateways, including development of venues for cultural events, interpretation centres, secure paths leading to major identified cultural landmarks, proper signage for wayfinding, etc.;
- greater participation of local communities in tourism-related activities as well as ones related to economic livelihood; better visual connection with customers, and pride to engage with the space's historicity, etc.;
- improvement in social safety and reduction in crime, especially in traditionally crowded market spaces, by introducing CCTV, centralized command centres, etc.;
- substantial improvement in local economy and residents' quality of life.

Moving to specific findings, the cities managed to achieve the following within the scheme:

1. Amritsar:

- generated planning and design guidelines for a 300-metre buffer zone around Sri Harmandir Sahib, thus creating a secure context by introducing a pedestrian zone with improved streetscape, air quality and soundscape, bringing attention back to the Holy Centre;
- enacted a strategy towards risk preparedness by widening and pedestrianizing the main path leading to Harmandir Sahib, which sees heavy pedestrian traffic throughout the year;
- standardised shop front signage design, thus providing more equal opportunities for vendors;
- engaged multiple stakeholders in the city (via meetings) to collect oral histories about historic sites, which were then incorporated into the signage.

2. Varanasi:

- enhanced the path to the Dashashwamedh Ghat, ensuring better passage and security for both tourists and pilgrims;
- created awareness about the upkeep and the heritage of the city by introducing heritage walks;
- upgraded existing heritage assets for tourists and pilgrims by tapping into their reuse potential;
- improved upon the basic infrastructure in the most frequented areas by providing a tourist interpretation centre, streetlights, and a tourist plaza with more shops;
- accommodated the National Disaster Response Force close to the ghats.

5. Recommendations for the future

Indian urban public space is a complex entity. At first glance or via tertiary experience it appears crowded, dirty, chaotic and mismanaged. However, experiencing the small nuances of its streets, plazas (*chowks*) and special spaces such as waterfronts reveals layers of dynamic and celebratory nature. The idea behind studying the application of a governmental heritage-conservation scheme was to gauge its applicability in the larger context of diverse Indian cities and towns. Each of these might have similar city squares and *bazaar* streets with markets, while some boast waterfront spaces too. Still, they all vary in terms of scale, cultural essence and associations as well as historic built fabric and traditional user groups. The HRIDAY scheme highlighted that a world view of “one size fits all” needs to be amended to satisfy local needs and conditions. This is especially true for understanding the physical infrastructure upgrades done in the studied cases. However, in the course of this study, it has emerged that each public space was primarily considered problematic; hence, proposals of sanitised environments were made. This could be rooted in the fact that in the intensely globalised world understanding highly contextualized social and cultural realities of dense historic spaces is very demanding. With global urban planning references overtaking the Indian ULB manual, understanding the diversity of scale among Indian settlements, at times also based on caste and religion, is slowly being side-tracked. Further, historic cores of Indian cities are often unplanned, with multiple communities partaking in creating public spaces, with or without socio-cultural boundaries. Such public spaces reflect the society’s culture, where usage of space depends on the events that take place in it. The inadequacy of theories and policies applied here consists in the lack of extended, innovative and applicable paradigms based on contemporary local context (Szmelter 2021). Strategically located within the overall dynamics of a city, public spaces are the result of the city’s or neighbourhood’s general evolution. The category of traditional streets, markets and waterfronts is a combination of “historic, incidental yet conscious design” (Gupta and Gupta 2017). The chaos perceived by some needs to be celebrated as the *raunaq* (charm) that one can only experience in spaces without centralized control.

Undoubtedly, it is commendable to notice the need to bring a sense of order through equitable economic ideas and to boost visitor numbers, especially among those who are shying away

from these spaces for lack of facilities. This can be achieved, as demonstrated by guidelines for pedestrianizing market spaces (restoring their original form), standardising shop fronts (providing equal opportunity from the era before neon lights and glaring signage), providing for additional spaces both in front of shops and at street crossings (similar to what was seen at *chowks*, with large trees in the middle, eventually replaced with traffic signs), and most importantly giving power back to the people – the primary stakeholders – who use the space to spread knowledge and govern its usability for others from the city and beyond.

HRIDAY brought forth the multi-layered and multi-functional Indian public spaces. Its approach to physical and social infrastructure as the first order of business (in the context of discussed cases) is a reality check for other similar cities across the country. However, to move forward with any implemented changes studied in this article it is necessary to remain context-sensitive and interpret according to the need of the hour and space. India's public spaces are in general vibrant and democratic in nature, facilitating human interactions over purely transactional functions. The spaces can remain safe and in use to full capacity if certain infrastructural changes are adapted with respect for both local needs and the setting.

References

- Architectural Heritage Division (2011). *Heritage City Development Plan of Varanasi*, New Delhi: INTACH.
- Architectural Heritage Division (2016). *Preparation of City HRIDAY Plan Including Civic Infrastructure Development Plan for Varanasi*, New Delhi: INTAH.
- Celebrating Indian Public Spaces. Gupta, A., & Gupta, A. (2017). *Celebrating Public Spaces of India*, first ed. Ahmedabad: Mapin Publishing.
- CRCI (India) Pvt. Ltd. & IPE Global Pvt. Ltd. (2016). *City HRIDAY Plan for Amritsar* (Vols. I, II, III, IV, V), first ed. Municipal Corporation of Punjab.
- Desai, J., Joshi, R., Rai, G. (2017). *HRIDAY Reflections. A Monograph on the Heritage City Development and Augmentation Yojana*, first ed. Ahmedabad: CEPT University, ICOMOS India.
- Ministry of Urban Development. (2015). *Guidelines for HRIDAY* New Delhi: Ministry of Urban Development. <https://mohua.gov.in/upload/uploadfiles/files/GuidelinesHRIDAY.pdf>.
- National Institute for Urban Affairs. (2016). *Heritage City Development and Augmentation Yojana*, second ed. New Delhi: Ministry of Urban Development. <https://smartnet.niua.org/content/7663306a-7610-46a0-919f-d0688d9493e8>.
- Szmelter, I. (2021). *Alert in the 21st Century. Changes in Theory of Heritage Protection in Tangible, Intangible and Digital Signs. Protection of Cultural Heritage* (12): 55–70. <https://doi.org/10.35784/odk.2872>.