

Analysis of Architecture of Contemporary Retail Commercial Built Forms Case of Gandhi Bazaar, Bengaluru

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Abstract

The architecture of built forms in urban public spaces, mainly the retail commercial sector, plays a crucial role in creating better places in the city for a wide spectrum of user groups. These are the public buildings which are required to be accessed by its citizens for their various needs of amenities, services and shopping. In contemporary times, the market streets in neighbourhoods lined with commercial buildings are fast changing towards becoming economically viable for landowners and businessmen rather than catering to the needs of all users. In this process of transformation, the architecture of the built and street interface has borne a critical characteristic that has impacted accessibility and inclusivity. This paper assesses one such case study in the city of Bengaluru - Gandhi Bazaar Street and its culturally rich market for the neighbourhood and the city as well. The study revealed that making certain amendments in the built form regulations can ease the approachability and accessibility to the built and street interface like provision of at-grade access, ramp; thereby making the built forms physically accessible, also facade designs that are visually appealing, socially inclusive and also economically viable for the retailers.

Keywords: Retail architecture, Facade, Contemporary trends, Inclusivity, Construction

INTRODUCTION

Bengaluru, the capital of Karnataka, a state located in southern India, is one of the fast-growing metropolitan cities. It was founded by Kempe Gowda I in the year 1537. The beginning of the 19th century marked the British rule in Bengaluru after the defeat of Tipu Sultan. Bengaluru was indeed an optimal choice owing to the climate and indigenous vegetation that gave its name “The Garden City”. It is located at 900 m above sea level. Markets have existed in the city for a long time in order to fulfil the needs of people. One of the prominent markets is the Gandhi Bazaar located in the vicinity of the Bull Temple in Basavanagudi. An annual gathering “Kadalekai Parishe” takes place here which is a groundnut offering to Nandi. Gandhi Bazaar offers a wide array of services to its residents and is well-known for the flower market that it hosts (M, 1997) [3].

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What is a city today was once a village. “Like a piece of architecture, the city is a construction in space, but one of vast scale, a thing perceived only in the course of long spans of time” as quoted by Lynch (Lynch, 1960) [2]. Markets have always been an indispensable element of a city. Be it the Greek Agoras or the Roman Forums, marketplaces have been more than a mere space for exchange of goods rather a sociological aspect, a place reinforced on the pillars of sensory experience,

human interaction. Market streets offer an arena for celebration and joy. The exchange of goods had a huge influence on the built structures. With time, retail commercial architecture has evolved continuously because of the new developments and innovations made in the construction industry (Messadat, 2015) [4]. The current trend of marketing may be online retailing and privatized but retail spaces have always bridged the gap as they are user-friendly, provide opportunities for diverse commerce and attract residents to access the neighbourhood services. Hence such markets and streets that host them still have a valuable place in the social system.

William Whyte said, “The street is the river of life of the city, the place where we come together, the pathway to the center. If there’s a lesson in street-watching it is that people do like basics – and as environments go, a street that is open to the sky and filled with people and life is a splendid place to be” (Whyte.W.H, 1988) [5]. In the case of Bengaluru, with the first British settlements here in the 19th century, the market areas slowly came into picture as the traders and workmen had to flock to the city areas to offer their services. This gave rise to various markets like Russell market, City market, Malleswaram market, M.G.Road and the area of our research – Gandhi Bazaar, Basavanagudi (Issar.T.P, 1988) [1].

A marketplace can either be extroverted or introverted depending on how it is connected to its surroundings (Lynch, 1960) [2]. In the case of Gandhi Bazaar, the place is rich in cultural heritage and is turned outwards. Traditional architecture was rooted in the context and catered to the users towards being accessible and the built structures were of human scale whereas the contemporary architecture has morphed towards being more emphasizing on economic gain rather than user friendliness. What was once a single storied retail outlet is now a multi-levelled structure with basement and rising over 3 floors above the ground level for maximum gain out of the urban site by the landowners. Owing to this, the direct access and approach to the retail spaces is now dissociated into multiple levelled accesses. Also, with the redevelopments in the street design taking place in the current scenario, there has been an influence on the façade of the retail commercial built forms and their interface with various user groups.

The impending research questions thus- How can façade architecture accommodate to the developments in the street design such that it caters to the needs of different users? How can symbiosis be achieved as the historical setting is undergoing metamorphosis with the contemporary trends of urban design?

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

This paper addresses the issues faced by varied user groups with respect to the façade of the built forms, primarily the street-wall interface between building and street. The qualitative and quantitative analogy has been achieved with photo documentation, live sketching of sections of different typologies of built forms, and a questionnaire that was conducted for the inference of the issues faced by different user groups. The questionnaire also assessed the inference of evolution of the built forms over the timeline. (Section B, 1.)

Gandhi Bazaar Main Road, (Figure 1) stretching between KR Road and DVG Road for a distance of 700m, is the prime shopping street in the heart of Basavanagudi, flanked by shops on either sides. It links the Bull Temple Road and the Krishna Rajendra Road. Hence a profitable amount of pedestrian movement is observed due to the wide array of commercial services provided besides landmarks like Vidyarthi Bhavan, Roti Ghar. Also as seen in the plan, the Gandhi Bazaar is located in the vicinity of BMTC bus service and National College metro station. There are about 65 bus routes passing this road that catalyze the pedestrian movement within the street. (Directorate of Urban Land Transport, 2022) [6].

There are 2 major typologies of retail in Gandhi bazaar i.e., organic goods and consumer goods. Organic goods include fruits and vegetables. Consumer goods include textiles like silk and other ethnic wear, temple offerings and wide varieties of flowers that are the major attraction in the street. (N, 2022) [7].



Figure 1. Map of Gandhi Bazaar Fruits and Flower vendors in the streets of Gandhi Bazaar.
Source: (Maps)(Source: Author)

The scope of this study is limited to the façade architecture of the retail commercial buildings in Gandhi Bazaar. A façade is the front portion of a building that acts as an interface between the retail and the people accessing it.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

(Section B, 2.-7.) Over the timeline, 3 broad types of structures have been noticed in the streets of Gandhi bazaar. (Fig.1) Type-A (Figure 2) About a century ago, there were fewer retail structures and many of them were initially residential buildings transformed into shops. Barrier free access was witnessed as the shops were user-friendly, easily approachable, and accessible through a small plinth with the buses stopping right in front of the market.

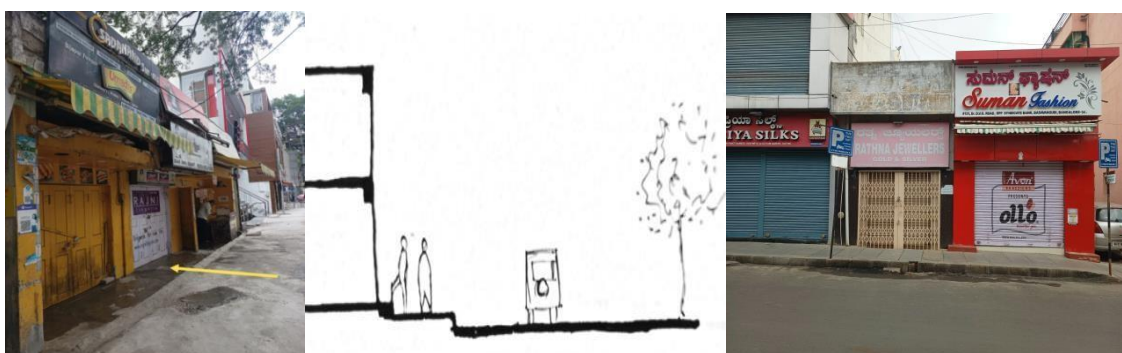


Figure 2. TYPE A (Source: Author).

(Figure 3) Type-B Over a few years, buildings began to be 2 floors above the ground level where there were exterior staircases for the first floor. Since the minimum height of 1 floor is 3m, the number of steps required with a standard riser of 150mm in order to reach the first floor would be 20 which is not advisable in a single flight. As a result of this many such structures grant access to the first floors through a flight of stairs with a riser of more than 150mm making it very steep.



Figure 3. TYPE B (Source: Author)

(Figure 4) Type-C Over a decade ago, the architecture of these built forms was fast adapting to newer interface between the street and the building. The retail landowners have moved the structure to a G+3 with a basement in order to gain maximum out of the given land. This type of structure is absolutely not barrier-free as it poses a threat to a wide range of user groups like the elderly, children, physically challenged persons, pregnant women as there are no ramps and handrails provided. The steep staircases that do not adhere to the standard dimensions, lack of handrails and less gap between the last step and the shop front have proved to be a menace to wide range of user groups. (Navya M.S., 2022) [8].

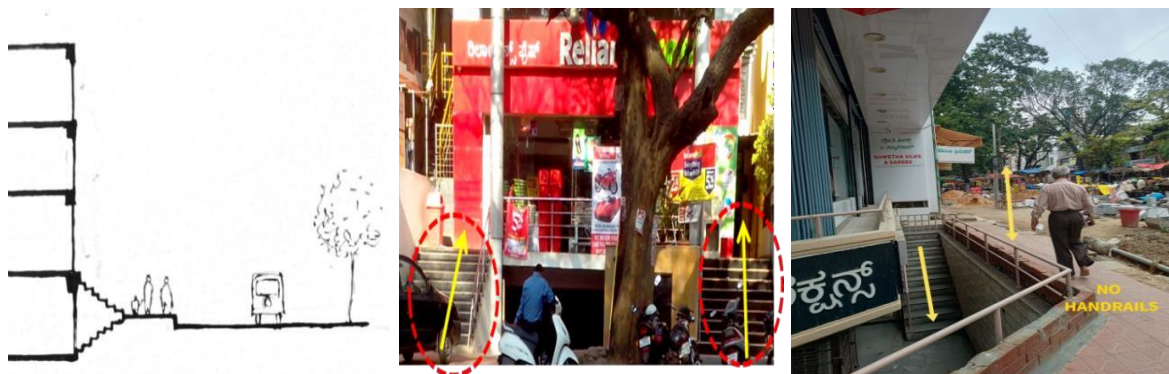


Figure 4. TYPE C (Source: Author).

Illustrations for Built-street Interface (Existing Scenario)

Redesigning the street of Gandhi Bazaar has influenced the façade architecture over the course of time thereby changing the façade of the built forms according to the economic needs rather than the user-friendliness. Change is constant but it should never be a hindrance in the spatial experience it provides to its users and the façade architecture should never compromise with the user friendliness, barrier-free accessibility and inclusivity. An ideal façade of a retail commercial built form would thus aim at creating a symbiotic relationship between the user groups and the retailers and thereby enhance the functionality of the market streets.

The government has initiated certain laws and policies to achieve universal accessibility and inclusivity over the years.

In the year 2015, Prime Minister Narendra Modi had launched the Accessible India Campaign or the Sugamya Bharat Abhiyan that aims to achieve universal accessibility and a barrier-free nation. Following this, in 2016, in a meeting organised under the Scheme for Implementation of Persons with Disabilities Act, 1995 (SIPDA), the proposals made by the South Delhi Municipal Corporation to make markets in India disable-friendly and inclusive, have been approved. (Today, 2016) [9].

CONCLUSIONS

The study reveals the threats posed for the people in response to the spatial experience resulting from the developments in the street design using contemporary designs of built with basement and G+3 structures in retail commercial zones along the street of Gandhi Bazaar in Bengaluru city core. To resolve the observed concerns of barrier-free designs and conducive pedestrian realms, the study embarks on strategic proposals.

Likewise, the approach to this issue would begin with the formulation of regulatory guidelines on arriving at ideal built forms such as the following in terms of architectural and urban design solutions. Inferences from the questionnaire survey (Section B, 8.) have also been analysed in devising the proposals.

- At-grade access from the sidewalk to the built forms with user friendly ramps and handrails.
- Avoiding steep steps to reach the basement or the floor levels above the plinth.
- Facade designs that are visually appealing and welcoming while keeping 'eye on the street' to create safer and comfortable public spaces along the built forms.
- Define the overall characteristics to the architecture of the marketplaces keeping in mind the city's cultural aspirations and attributes.
- The design should strictly be in compliance with the revised built-form regulations.
- The façade architecture should adhere to the government norms of barrier-free and inclusive designs.
- Preserving the heritage and values of a place with public participatory approach.
- A team architects and urban designers should be formed as a committee who can help regulate these guidelines and devise inclusive design strategies.

These guidelines shall aim at creating accessible, comfortable, safer, and visually ambient public architectural profiles in place. The physical and visual access to the merchandise at the shop front is enabled making the entire experience favourable to the user with creation of barrier-free and socially inclusive environments.

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APPENDIX A

User Group Interview

This interview was conducted on July 7, 2023, in the street of Gandhi Bazaar, to a group of 40 people consisting of various stakeholders like retailers, customers and residents. They belonged to the age groups 20-80 years. It was conducted in a structured manner through a preliminary set of questions to assure thorough data collection.

QUESTIONNAIRE INSTRUCTIONS

This questionnaire consists of questions pertaining to the interview for the analysis of façade in the street of Gandhi Bazaar.

Section 1: Respondent Information:

1. *Age group*
 - a. 20-40yrs
 - b. 41-60yrs
 - c. 61-80yrs
2. *Gender: F/M*
3. *Are you a resident/ customer/ retailer in Gandhi Bazaar?*

Section 2: General Perspective

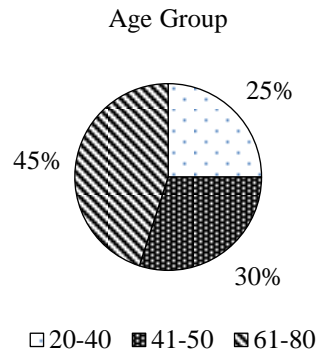
1. What is the history of Gandhi Bazaar?
2. Do you think Gandhi Bazaar is universally accessible?
 - a. Yes
 - b. No
3. Do you face any difficulty while accessing the stairs?
 - a. Yes
 - b. No
4. Is the tread size small?
 - a. Yes
 - b. No
5. Are the stairs too steep?
 - a. Yes
 - b. No
6. Are the stairs slippery?
 - a. Yes
 - b. No
7. Are there the following elements in Gandhi Bazaar:
 - i. Lifts
 - a. Mostly
 - b. Very few
 - c. Nil
 - ii. Ramps
 - a. Everywhere
 - b. Very few
 - c. Nil
 - iii. Railings
 - a. Everywhere
 - b. Very few
 - c. Nil
 - iv. Ample space for wheelchairs access
 - a. Everywhere
 - b. Very few
 - c. Nil

8. What do you think can be done to resolve this issue?

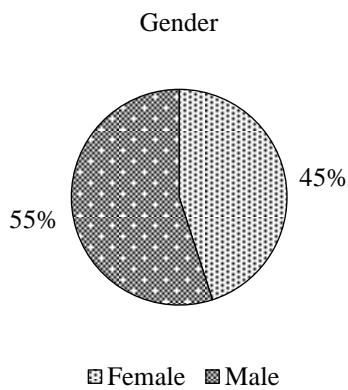
APPENDIX B

Data Analysis

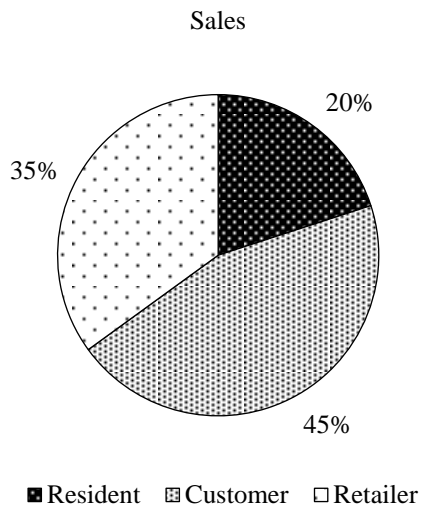
1. Data in %



2. Data in %



3. Are you a resident/ customer/ retailer in Gandhi Bazaar? (in %)



Section 2: General Perspective

1. What is the history of Gandhi Bazaar?

S.N.		Yes		No			
		No. Responses	Of %	No. Responses	Of %	No. Responses	of %
2.	<i>Do you think Gandhi Bazaar is universally accessible?</i>	4	10	36	90		
3.	<i>Do you face any difficulty while accessing the shops?</i>	34	85	6	15		
4.	<i>Is the tread of staircase size small?</i>	35	87.5	5	12.5		
5.	<i>Are the stairs too steep?</i>	36	90	4	10		
6.	<i>Are the stairs slippery?</i>	34	85	6	15		
7.	<i>Are there the following elements in Gandhi Bazaar?</i>	Everywhere		Very Few		Nil	
		No. of Responses	%	No. of Responses	%	No. Responses	%
i	Lifts	0	0	31	77.5	9	22.5
ii	Ramps	0	0	18	45	22	55
iii	Railings	12	30	19	47.5	9	22.5
iv	Ample Space for Wheelchairs	2	5	10	25	28	70

8. What do you think can be done to resolve this issue?

The data obtained for the open-ended questions i.e., questions (1.) and (8.) have been analysed and discussed in the paper.