



Redefining Imageability Through the Lens of  
Oral Narratives of Procession Badshah Ki  
Sawari, Nathdwara

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# **REDEFINING IMAGEABILITY THROUGH THE LENS OF ORAL NARRATIVES OF PROCESSION BADSHAH KI SAWARI, NATHDWARA**

## **ABSTRACT**

An image of any place is not only a reflection of its built form but also the activities carried out by people. The formation of the place is connected with the circumstances of the time, society, education, mental set-up which portrays the overall image of the people and the place. Through social or cultural attitudes of an individual or a community, the cultural landscapes are formed which reflect the physical, biological, and religious character of those lives.

Procession is a form of dynamic activity which has both spatial and cultural dimensions. Route taken up for a procession is an outcome of the cultural memory of people and their connection with the place. Kevin Lynch has explained imageability and legibility through the cognitive maps developed by people to connect with the place using five elements: nodes, edges, landmarks, paths and district.

This research is an attempt to seek a modified model for the concept of imageability taking the case of an annual event, a religious cum political procession Badshah Ki Sawari in Nathdwara, Rajasthan. The oral narratives about the procession will be used as a tool to rethink about the urban design oriented approach and the concept of representation of time in place and visual perception of urban form by Kevin Lynch such that the historic urban landscapes are experienced not just as legible places.

## **KEYWORDS**

Procession, imageability, oral narratives, cognitive map, cultural memory

## **1. INTRODUCTION**

The need of association with surroundings is so crucial that it has long roots in the past and has practical and emotional importance to an individual. Traditionally people perform or take part in some sort of rituals or processions to get involve in social activities to become the part of the environment, that's how the connection between tangible and intangible forms. Man tries to connect with nature with the identification and interconnection of values. The spaces which have been affected, influenced or come to existence by human involvement are called as cultural landscapes. Three main categories of cultural landscapes have been identified by

the Operational Guidelines of the World Heritage Convention (UNESCO, 2008). The last Category is the associative cultural landscape, which possesses important religious, cultural or artistic associations to nature. Ken Taylor (2008) believes that the landscape is the repository of intangible values and human meanings that nurture the existence of people. The interrelationship between intangible values and cultural landscapes are dynamic as they both evolve with time. Understanding the human impact on the cultural landscapes requires insights into the interconnection between the communities and their surrounding environments.

In Kevin Lynch's existing model of imageability and legibility he primarily emphasizes the role of visual sense to understand the urban form, later in 2011, UNESCO adopted the Historic Urban Landscape (HUL) recommendation which is based on the recognition and identification of a layering and interconnection of values-natural, cultural, tangible and intangible, international as well as local that are present in any city. According to the HUL approach, these values should be taken as a point of departure in the overall management and development of the city. Rituals, processions and festivities are intangible values which built a connection between man and nature.

Processions are one of the social event of intangible values which have an impact on urban forms and spaces. Mapping of processions has been done by sociologists, anthropologists in terms of regional variations. Rath Yatra of Jagannath Puri, Dusherra of Kullu, Chaurasi Kos Yatra of Braj are some of the religious processions. Badshah Ki Sawari, a procession taken out in Nathdwara, Rajasthan is another kind of procession which has both religious as well as political dimensions. Taking Badshah Ki Sawari procession as a case to seek the modified model of Kevin Lynch, about imageability of the city using five elements: paths, edges, nodes, landmarks and district.

## **RESEARCH QUESTION**

The paper seeks to find the relationship between the elements of urban form defined by Kevin Lynch and intangible values recommended in HUL approach by oral narratives of people about the procession. To see if their association with various elements alongwith the physical, cultural as well as social characteristics can redefine the concept of imageability and legibility.

## **OBJECTIVES**

- To map the narratives of procession Badshah Ki Sawari;
- To identify the aim of the procession, which community takes part in it to understand their cultural significance;
- To identify the elements of Kevin Lynch theory hidden in narratives.

## **RESEARCH METHODOLOGY**

A case study method approach focusing more on qualitative research techniques have been the basis of the methodology for this study. Study relies extensively on interviews of five different categories who have variable narratives about the place. These narratives are incorporated in the study to map the urban form. This gave a better understanding of linkages of the intangible heritage with the physical form to be identified for our study. Dependent on the various interviews conducted onsite for the procession Badshah Ki Sawari, Shrinath Ji temple precinct and its context surroundings emerged out to be the area of study.

### **STAGE ONE- PRIMARY DATA COLLECTION**

**Stage One** involves the data collection in form of semi structured interviews of various stakeholders of Nathdwara. Five categories of stakeholders are identified for mapping the narratives about the procession date, purpose of the procession, procession path, communities involved in the procession and the activities performed during procession.

### **STAGE TWO - SECONDARY DATA COLLECTION**

**Stage Two** involves the study of literature to find an approach to connect with the primary data collected. In literature the theory of imageability by Kevin Lynch, cultural landscape and historic urban landscape approach will be studied in detail to analyse various geographical, social, cultural aspects of the place keeping procession Badshah Ki Sawari as a centre of discussion. Processions will be further analysed through the data collection and will be linked with the theory of imageability with the five elements- paths, edges, nodes, landmarks and districts.

## **2.RELATION BETWEEN IMAGEABILITY CULTURAL LANDSCAPES AND ORAL NARRATIVES**

Cities are not just a masterpiece of architecture but also a construction in space. Space is a vast scale which consist various places within itself. Human connects with places differently as everything is observed in relation to the surroundings and not in isolation. These observations or can be said experiences are actually the sequence of memory of events happened in past. This experience is structured an identified by all mobile animals on the basis of many factors that can be visual sensation of the colours, shapes, motion, senses such as smell, sound, touch (Lynch, 1960). On the basis of the factors mentioned, a mental image is formed as a product of immediate sensation and the memory of past experiences. This image has a wide practical and emotional importance to the individual. This need to get recognized in the environment is so crucial that it encouraged man to connect with nature by intentionally creating a landscape to fit in. Cultural landscape is the space that evolved through use by the people whose activities or occupancy shaped that landscape through social or cultural attitudes of an individual, family or a community. As defined by the World Heritage Committee, a cultural landscape is the "cultural properties [that] represent the combined works of nature and of man".

- 1)"a landscape designed and created intentionally by man"
- 2)an "organically evolved landscape" which may be a "relict (or fossil) landscape" or a "continuing landscape"
- 3)an "associative cultural landscape" which may be valued because of the "religious, artistic or cultural associations of the natural element."

### **CULTURAL LANDSCAPES AND PROCESSIONS**

Under the 3rd category of UNESCO World Heritage Committee, religious association with the place also give a sense of association with the nature. Procession is one of the major activity for the followers of the religions as well as part of local traditions. The idea of pilgrimage and procession is comparable in many respects, both involve a journey from one spot to another with great significance attached to the end of the journey. '*Yatra*' is the sanskrit word of procession. It describes the route that the pilgrim or the devotee follows during procession or place of worship. Thus, the word itself suggests the dynamic nature of the act. It also shows the importance of the journey to reach the goal. The procession in itself is formed or takes shape due to the coming together of individuals, thus there can in fact be

no procession without collective participation since the group in itself is a type of body moving through a particular space with particular orientation and in certain order. The notion of processional movement is significant since, in spatial and formal perception, it enhances our awareness of the external extensions and manifestations of meaning. One of the most significant dimensions of a procession lies in its repetition, which revives a story in a certain way, not so much by telling it but by reliving it (KANEKAR, 1992).

The celebration of processional rituals of festivity is a significant, dynamic, social and temporal dimension by which meaning are added to form, space and character of the built environment.

### **PROCESSIONS AND NARRATIVES**

Processions serves to revive and express the memory of a myth associated with an event, person or place. It may take the form of selective remembrance or the recapitulation of an event. Thus it is inextricably linked to memory. Ritual could thus be said to be a formal recreation of collective memory or celebration of collective memory beyond a functional level (KANEKAR, 1992). Oral history is a part of information transferred from one generation to the next in the form of verbal communication. The term oral history implies that is verbal, non-written belonging to the people and transmitted over generations. Oral history is a key to understand the 'value' association of a heritage in the lives of people- human experience rather than object-centred documentation (Upadhyay, 2017). Both narratives and memory are constructed through oral histories. Narratives extends over a broad range of human activities: film, folktales, oral memories, interviews, chronicles, poetic and prose epic. Memories of what is understood to be the same event change over time, as the person changes, and in response to the responses of audience for the story. Both children and adults learn what is memorable as they learn what can be, or should be told as a story, and how it may and may not be told to particular audiences. This kind of learning is part of the process of identity construction (Linde, 2015).

A narrative most typically is understood as a representation, or a construction, based on a sequence of events in the past, that communicates something from the memory of the narrator. Narrative usually presents an episodic memory, that is, a story about a specific sequence of personal events in the past and that is the reason that narratives can be subjective. Narrative and memory are both social processes. A narrative normally begins with an orientation, introducing and identifying the participants in the action: the time, the place, and the initial behaviour. The orientation section provides answers to the potential questions,

“who? when? where? what were they doing?” In the minimal narrative. The narrative approach of analysing interviews is posited to have the ability to capture social representation processes such as feelings, images, and time. Narrative offers the potential to address ambiguity, uncertainty, complexity and dynamism of individual, group, and organisational phenomena. Narrative analysis can be used to record different viewpoints and interpret collected data to identify similarities and differences in experiences and actions (Egudo, 2003). Stories are essentially individual constructs of human experience, and have limitations that may affect objectivity in presentation. The use of other approaches to complement the storytelling technique has been recommended (Egudo, 2003).

### **MAPPING OF PROCESSIONS**

Rituals, festivities and celebrations have been studied extensively by anthropologists and sociologists, but unfortunately less has been done so by architects and urban designers. Aldo Rossi makes an interesting relationship between monuments and ritual, both being the 'permanent conserving element of myth' and both thus being linked to the idea of retrieving the memory of the past. The fact that at times monuments are transformed and adapted is what he calls 'permanences.' Both these aspects can be thought of as ways of reviving the memory of the past, one permanent dimension and the other in temporary dimension (KANEKAR, 1992). Kullu Dusherra, Jagannath Rath Yatra, Braj Chaurasi Kos Yatra, Mysore Dusherra are some processions that has been mapped by anthropologists.



Kullu Dusherra

Source:Bhaskar.com



Jagannath Rath Yatra Source:Jagannath.in



Chaurasi Kos Braj Yatra

Source:Vrandavan Today

### 3. NATHDWARA A LAND OF LIVING HISTORY

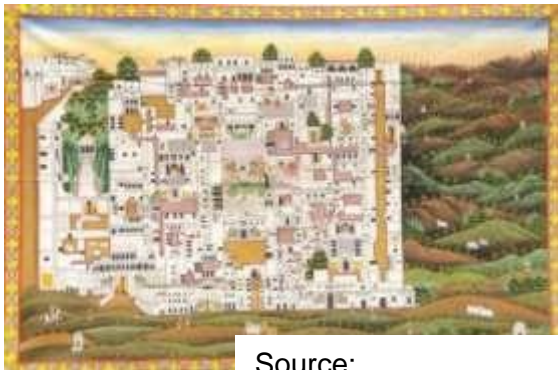
Nathdwara, a small town in the Rajsamand district of Rajasthan, India, is a land that claims for itself a long and rich historical lineage. It is a significant Vaishnavite shrine pertaining to the Pushti Marg founded by Vallabha Acharya. It is reverently placed in the Hindu textual traditions that articulate the rich diversities that have surrounded it. The land of Nathdwara is linked with the historical past of *Braj* or *Brajbhoomi*. The town is famous for its temple of Krishna which houses the deity of Shrinathji, a 14th-century, 7-year-old "infant" incarnation of Krishna which was originally worshipped at Mathura. The land of Braj claims for itself a rich, ancient historical past much of what is remembered of the town of Vrindavan carries a strong prevalence of syncretic traditions of the subcontinent's medieval pasts (Anon., 2017). Vrindavan also known as Brindaban, is a historical city in the Mathura district of Uttar Pradesh is the land of lord Krishna and people residing there are called Vrajvasis. It is a cultural landscape setting where lord Krishna has spent most of his childhood days as per Hindu mythology. One of the most significant chapter in the history of Vrindavan is the presence of the Gaudiya Vaishnav community in the region beginning from the medieval period (Anon., 2017).



Map showing the present shortest route from Mathura to Nathdwara



In memory of people, the town Nathdwara got its identity from the lord itself. Through the interviews done onsite, people collectively talks about how the idol came from Mathura and chooses to stay at the village Sihad which is now known as town Nathdwara in present. And after lord's arrival the town started getting its shape as people from various parts started settling in the town for the *seva* of the lord. In oral history lord himself chooses his place but whereas in written history as Gazetteer Of Rajputana, Mewar Residency states that the idol shifted to Sihad village as Rana Raj Singh of Mewar invited the descendants of Vallabhacharya to set apart the village of Siad for the idol.



Source:

Pichwai painting depicting the cultural landscape of Nathdwara. Life revolving around the main diety Shrinath Ji



Source:

Pichwai painting showing the image of main diety Shrinath Ji.

An annual procession Badshah Ki Sawari is taken out on the day before Holi in commemoration of Mughal emperor Aurangzeb. For the study, semi structured interviews were conducted onsite to get the oral narratives about the procession.

#### **4. PROCESSION BADSHAH KI SAWARI**

Badshah Ki Sawari is an annual procession taken out in a day before the festival Holi in Nathdwara in commemoration of Mughal Emperor Aurangzeb, as told in oral history that Mughal Emperor Aurangzeb came to the town Nathdwara to destroy the idol of Shrinathji under his scheme of iconoclasm to destroy the Hindu temples. As he entered the temple to destroy the idol, some miracle happened and the emperor lost his sight. Then the priest of the temple suggested him to apologize the lord and gift him one of the valuable thing to the lord then only his eyesight could come back. The emperor followed the advice and did the same but before that he took the *parikrama* of the temple, gifted a diamond to the lord. And as a apology he cleaned the steps of the stairs of Suraj Pol by his beard as beared is considered as the sacred in Muslim.



Procession route mapped on Google map



Source:

Procession Badshah Ki Sawari



Source:

Badshah cleaning the steps of the temple

Five people were interviewed onsite,

- 1) priest of temple
- 2) person who portrays as Badshah in procession (Gurjar community)
- 3) Shopkeeper of Nathdwara ( traditional crafts)
- 4) Dweller of Nathdwara (the 'Brajwasis')
- 5) Pilgrim(not dweller of Nathdwara)

From the narratives of various stakeholders about the procession Badshah Ki Sawari, the elements from Kevin Lynch's theory comes out to be-

**1)Paths-** Parikrama Road, Badshah Ki Gali, Delhi Bazar Road

**2)Landmarks-**Shrinathji Temple, Badshah Ka Ghar, Dwarkadheesh Temple

**3)Nodes-** Chawpatty, Bada Bazar Chowk, Gurjarpura Chowk

**4)Edges-** Street dividing Shrinathji Temple and Gurjarpura

**5)District-**Gurjarpura,Chitrkaron Ki Gali, Temple Precinct

In Kevin Lynch's Image Of The City, he says, "Every citizen has had long associations with some part of the city, and his image is soaked in memories and meanings." He also concerned with how we locate ourselves within the city, how we find our way around. To know where we are within the city, therefore, we have to build up a workable image of each part. Each of these images will comprise;

- our recognition of its "individuality or oneness" within the city as a whole,
- our recognition of its spatial or pattern relationships to other parts of the city,
- its practical and emotional meaning for each of us.

**PATHS:**As defined by Lynch, A familiar routes followed "are the channels along which the observer customarily, occasionally, or potentially moves. They may be streets, walkways, transit lines, canals, railroads .."These are the major and minor routes of circulation that people use to move out. A city has a network of major routes and a neighbourhood network of minor routes. The sawari starts from Badshah ki Gali in Gurjarpura and comes to Vallabhपुरa Road then takes the parikrama path which is the periphery of the temple precinct.Path followed for the procession clearly shows an association of two communities i.e. Vallabh Sect and Gurjars. In this case, path of the procession is not just an outcome of legibility and experience of the observer but an intangible aspect of involvement of two communities.



Badshah ki gali



Vallabhपुरa Road



Parikrama Path

**NODES-** As defined by Lynch, centres of attraction that you can enter are points, the strategic spots in a city into which an observer can enter, and which are intensive foci to and from which he is travelling. They may be primary junctions, places of a break in transportation, a crossing or convergence of paths, moments of shift from one structure to another. A node is a center of activity. Actually it is a type of landmark but is distinguished from a landmark by virtue of its active function. The procession takes the halt at various points, the important nodes that comes out to be Gurjarpura Chowk, Bada Bazar Chowk and Chaupatty. As the name suggests, the nodes become important with the community. The Gurjarpura chowk got its name from the community 'Gurjars' from the mohalla they residing in. The community has identified that chowk as an important node. Bada Mohalla is the node that is behind the temple precinct where shops of traditional crafts exists. Chaupatty is the node where food stalls are present for the pligrims or visitors.



Source: Author

**BADA BAZAR CHOWK**



Source: Author



Source: Author

**GURJARPURA CHOWK**



Source: Author

**CHAUPATTY**



Source: Author

SHRINATHJI POSHAK SHOP,  
PRASAD SHOP, BADA BAZAR



Source:

BADA BAZAR

**LANDMARKS-** As defined by Lynch, Landmarks are another type of point-reference, the observer does not enter within them, they are external. They are usually a rather simply defined physical object: building, sign, store, or mountain. Their use involves the singling out of one element from a host of possibilities. Some landmarks are distant ones, typically seen from many angles and distances, over the tops of smaller elements, and used as a dial references. In the town, the temple is the major site of attraction and the major landmark but contradicting to Lynch's definition of Landmark that observer cannot enter the Landmark. The temple is infact most happening centre of activities. The temple is identified not just on the basis of legibility but

Source: Bhaskar.com

s of raasleelas going in

Source: patrika.com

SHRINATHJI TEM

SIGHTS, TEMPLE PR



Source: Author



Source:



Source: GAATHA.COM



Source: GAATHA.COM

**DISTRICTS-** As per Lynch, Districts are the medium-to-Large sections of the city, conceived of as having two-dimensional extent, which the observer mentally enters "inside of," and which are recognizable as having some common, identifying character. Always identifiable from the inside, they are also used for exterior reference if visible from the outside. Most people structure their city to some extent in this way, with individual differences as to whether paths Or districts are the dominant elements. It seems to depend not only upon the individual but also upon the given city. In the case of Nathdwara, the districts are predominantly identified from an intangible characters i.e. the communities have certain mohallas that are showing the identities of the physical form as well. The temple precinct which belongs to Vallabh sect, majorly responsible for taking care of the deity and carries a patronage of Shrinathji sewa. In Gurjarpura, the mohalla of Gurjars residing adjacent to temple precinct who were fighters or goons and used to stop the attacks on the temple have very different character which is not just identifiable from outside but also from this intangible aspect. The physical, social and cultural form is quite different from each other.



Source: Author

TEMPLE PRECINCT



Source: Author

ACTIVITIES, INSIDE TEMPLE PRECINCT



Source: Author

HOUSES IN GURJARPURA



Source: Author

HOUSES IN GURJARPURA

**EDGES-** As per Lynch, Edges are the linear elements not used or considered as paths by the observer. They are the boundaries between two phases, linear breaks in continuity. They are lateral references rather than coordinate axes. Such edges may be barriers, more or less penetrable, which close one region off from another; or they may be seams, lines along which two regions are related and joined together. These edge elements, although probably not as dominant as paths, are for many people important organizing features, particularly in the role of holding together generalized areas, as in the outline of a city by water or wall. But in the present case, the procession Badshah Ki Sawari consist of two different communities. The imaginary lines exists which divides the physical form into two different areas apart from the physical form.

Processions are important as it adds a special character to form the physical environment which links various focal points together of social/ religious or political significance. The procession route becomes one of the most significant factor in urban form as it shows a significant way to revive the memory of an event/identity of the place. The formal elements along the route incorporate gathering spaces, but this is not always necessarily so. These gathering and dispersion points are especially important. Processions frequently ends at the places of great significance either physical or metaphysical(KANEKAR,1992)

Analysing various characteristics of processions, it can be further classified into various types-

**1)One the basis of circuits formed by the dynamicity**

**2)One the basis of geometry**

**3)One the basis of circulation and movement**

**1)One the basis of circuits formed by the dynamicity**

a)One-Way route processions which starts from the one point and ends at the last. Showing irreversible nature of the path.(Figure 1a)

b)TwoWay route procession which starts from a significant point and return backs to the starting point showing a reversible movement. (Figure 1b)

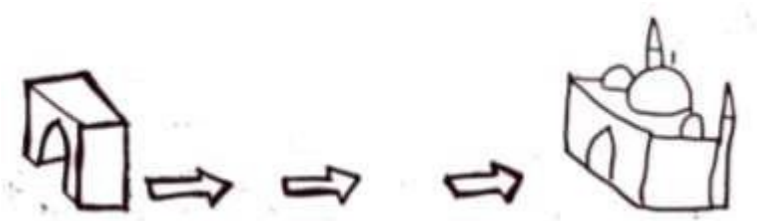


Figure 1a

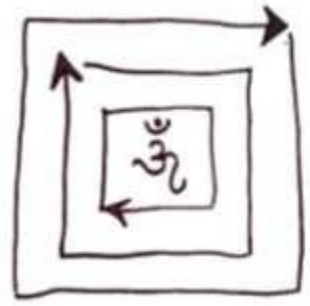


Figure 1b

## 2) One the basis of geometry

The procession can ends at a certain focal point or geometrical centre. (Figure 1c, 1d)

## 3) One the basis of circulation and movement

These could be due to presence of any significance structure. A temple/mousque/shrine/ghats/gateways.



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