

SPATIAL DESIGN GUIDELINES FOR OPEN AIR CREMATION GROUND (GHAT) ALONG RIVER GANGA

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ABSTRACT

Rivers and habitation have been closely intertwined since the beginning of civilization, the ghats have served as a bridge between the two, allowing for easy access. In Hinduism, rivers are highly revered as they are believed to be crucial to human life and can cleanse the soul. Varanasi exemplifies an ancient civilization located alongside the Ganga River, where there exists a significant connection between human life and the river. Demographic growth has led to rise in ghat rituals, making it impossible for rituals to continue in the same form from ancient to current times as it altering Varanasi's spaces, landscapes, and ecosystem. Undefined regions for the many rituals performed before cremating a body on the Manikarnika ghat allow flexible space use, but the same freedom is what has caused these places at the ghat to degrade. In order to uncover the spatial dynamics in and around the cremation ghats, concerns for better understanding the space were carried out using comparative analysis of Manikarnika ghat and Pashupatinath cremation ground as case studies. This research paper intends to study **spatial issues and provide solution with respect to the interventions done along these rivers.**

KEYWORDS: Ghats, Spatial Issue, Cremation Ground

1. INTRODUCTION

The majority of ancient towns were always located close to rivers, and residents' daily lives were intertwined with those of the rivers and their banks. Hence, rivers are used for a variety of religious and spiritual activities in addition to providing water. Since the dawn of civilization, rivers and settlement have been intimately linked, and the ghats have served as a physical junction between them. Hence, the ghat has always served as a point of transition between civilization and the river. As civilization began to advance, rivers became an essential component of life and were seen as the factor that changed life into death.

Hinduism accords rivers a high significance because it believes that from conception to death, human life is intimately connected to a body of water and that rivers have the power to purify the soul. Along riverbanks, people practise self-purification rituals such as bathing, flower giving, aarti performances, floating wicks, cremation and ash-spreading. The holy river Ganga is regarded as the goddess "Mother" in Hinduism. They hold that one needs take a holy bath in the Ganga, which will cleanse one of all sins, in order to obtain moksha (liberation from cycle of birth and death).

Varanasi is an example of an ancient civilization that is situated beside the Ganga River and where there is a strong sense of interconnectedness between human existence and the river. India's spiritual capital Varanasi is renowned for its ghats, each of which is linked to a certain industry. Urbanization and population growth are taxing already-limited resources, especially the ghats, which were formerly accessible to fewer people. The tremendous population growth that is changing Varanasi's spaces, landscapes, and ecosystem makes it impossible for rituals to continue in the same way from ancient to modern times.

One example of it is the cremation of corpses. Manikarnika Ghat, often referred to as Burning Ghat or Mahashamshan, is a location where some people think they may achieve moksha after death. On this ghat, on an average 100 dead bodies [8, 9] are burnt each day, placing a heavy burden on the Manikarnika ghat and the Ganga River, which also serves as a source of water for related activities. Undefined areas for the many rites carried out before to cremating a body on the Manikarnika ghat provide for flexible space utilisation, but the same freedom is the reason for the degradation of such areas at the ghat. Unorganized settings get chaotic as a certain number

of people arrive with each dead body for performing ceremony.

1.1. AIM

To research how the impromptu and ill-defined spaces used for funeral rites at cremation ghats are contributing to the deterioration of rivers' hidden sacred landscape.

1.2. OBJECTIVES

- To determine if any particular design solutions can be rendered to lessen the impact of crematorial activities along the Manikarnika ghats on the space's haphazard use.
- To investigate the cremation ghats along the river and comprehend the locations of funeral rites.
- Recognising the conditions at the Pashupatinath cremation site in Nepal and the Manikarnika cremation site in Varanasi, India

1.3. LIMITATIONS

Study is restricted to the Mankarnika ghat only and rest of the areas along the Ganga ghats are not taken into consideration. Further, only the crematorial activities are only studied but rest of the ceremonies happening around the area are not considered in this study. Government-issued guidelines for the preservation of historical sites may make it difficult to incorporate contemporary architectural features and materials.

2. METHDOLOGY

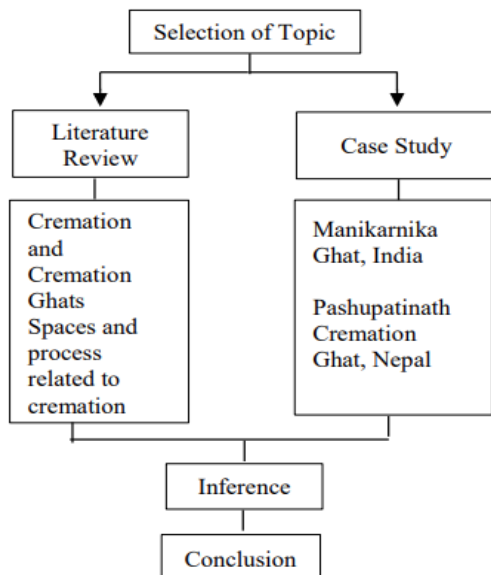


Fig.1.Methodology Flow Chart (Source: Author)

2.1. LITERATURE REVIEW

Hindus believe that death is a crucial event in life because it ushers in both the end of one life and the beginning of the next. So far as Hindu rituals go, funeral rites are among the most intricate.

The ceremonies known as antyesti are carried out to commemorate a person's demise. Washing and preparing the body for cremation make up the ceremonies. The goal of the Antyesti ritual is to transform the body into the elements that it was made of at birth -- water, air, fire, earth, and ether -- so that it can return to the universe when it dies, completing the cycle of life at the microcosmic level and maintaining the cycle at the macrocosmic level. [1, 2, 3]

Funeral Rites and Spaces related to it:

Spatial Seclusion: The entire family is in an impure state at the time of death due to the occurrence of death.



Fig.2. Spatial Seclusion (Source: Author)

Congregational Space: By placing the corpse in the north-south axis, the space is defined axially. The body of the deceased is placed at the front door, facing south (i.e. reflecting a return to a lap of mother earth).



Fig.3. Congregational Space (Source: Author)

Auxiliary Space: This area is used for performing rituals (puja), where homa is performed and kumbha are blessed. Male participants, on the other hand, shave their heads.



Fig.4. Auxiliary Space (Source: Author)

Space Privy: The area where the body is prepared is cleaned, and fresh clothing is worn.

Cremation Space: It is closely related to the wash area (river). Ritual performing areas are proximity to the cremation areas.



Fig.5. Cremation (Source: Author)



Fig.6. Procession (Source: Author)

SPATIAL ASPECTS OF FUNERAL ON GHAT [4,7]

On the ghat, a number of rites are done before the body is cremated. Three to four locals (Doms) are often present when a person enters the ghat for burial ceremonies.

Space For Purifying Body: The location where the body is bathed in the Ganga River and dressed in fresh clothing.



Fig.7. Purifying Body (Source: Author)

Drying Space: After being dipped in water, the body is left to dry while funeral pyres are planned and selected by family members.



Fig.8. Drying Space (Source: Author)

Cremation Platform: The Dom-in-charge assigns platforms to people based.



Fig.9. Cremation (Source: Author)

Space for immersing ash: Following the cremation, the deceased's close family members take a ritual bath in the nearby River Ganga.



Fig.10. Ash Immersion (Source: Author)

Space for Pind Daan: Puja is done on the tenth day, and rice balls (pind) are offered to the body of the departed.



Fig.11. Pind Daan (Source: Author)

2.2. CASE STUDY

Manikarnika ghat in India and Pashupatinath cremation ghat in Nepal where the majority of cremations occur each day, it is analysed to better understand the spatial issues relating to burning ghats.

Parameters	Manikarnika Ghat (Ganga River), India	Pashupatinath Cremation Ground (Bhagmati River), Nepal
Planning	Haphazard and unorganized space Fig.12. Plan of	Planned and organized



Manikarnika Cremation Ghat (Source: Spaces of Cremation-The Invisible Sacred Landscapes in Indian Cities)



Fig.13. Plan of Pashupatinath Cremation Ghat (Source: Death and Life giving water, Terje Oestigaard, Jan10 2005)

Zoning	No social Hierarchy	Social Hierarchy (based on caste system)
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Accessibility	Pedestrian (Gallies - Narrow Galli)	Pedestrian as well as vehicular
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Space Allocation for Performing Cremation Rites	Undefined spaces except for burning pyres.	Carefully defined space for each rites
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Fig.14. Cremation Platform (Source: Google)



Fig.17. Cremation Platform



(Source: Google) Fig.18. Washing Area (Source: Google)

Fig.19. Drying Area (Source: Google)

Fig.15. Washing & Drying Space (Source: Google)
 Fig. 16. Procession & Blessing (Source: Google)



Manikarnika Ghat, also known as the Great Cremation Ground, is one of the great ghats along the Ganga. It is the primary cremation location in Varanasi, where on an average 100 dead bodies [8, 9] are burned every day. The ghat is located in the middle of the Ganga River, where the Varuna and Assi rivers converge. There is never a moment when a body is not burned. It is one of the busiest ghats in Varanasi.

Pashupatinath Temple [7], one of Nepal's most important Hindu temples, is located close to the Bhagmati River. On the ghats by the Bhagmati River, open-air cremations happen every day. Non-Hindus are unable to enter this temple. Hindu mythology holds that Lord Shiva was born at Pashupatinath and is still there today in the main temple's form of a linga. The mythical Bhagmati River unites life, death, and water as it emerges from Shiva's skull. As a result, for Hindus in Nepal, it is the most fortunate and preferred location to pass away and be cremated. On the ghat, 12 to 50 people are cremated every day [7].

Issues	Spatial Ecological Traffic congestion	Spatial Ecological Social – Allocating space based on caste.
Analysis	Improper space segregation. Gallies – leads to traffic congestion. Manikarnika ghat is unplanned stretch thus the spaces are not defined and planned for any funeral rites which results in overlapping of rituals.	Designating a specific area for ritual performance. No traffic congestion. Cremation ground is divided based on caste system - limits the use of space to certain social groups.

3. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

From above studies following inferences are drawn:

- The participants should be given enough room to do their rituals without interfering with or obstructing other activities. Places should be allocated so that circulation is not hampered.
- At the upper level, platforms ought to be offered. The cremation platform should be clearly marked, and there should be enough room for individuals to move between the two cremations platforms.
- To prevent confusion, places should be properly segregated.
- Circulation: At the same time, different user groups (locals, visitors arriving for cremations, and tourists) travel the same route. For various users, specific pathways should be made available. For performing ceremonies, the cremation ghat needs privacy.
- It is best to avoid allocating cremation space based on a caste system because it constricts user space.

4. CONCLUSION

Segregation of different User Groups:

Separate channels for various user groups should be offered in order to prevent any congestion. Particularly, a separate route should be made available for those who are travelling to cremate a body.

Cremation platform:

Built Space: A concrete space defining the set location for the cremation should be made available. Also, it makes it simple to clear the ashes after the cremation procedure, keeping the areas around the cremation space nice and clean and preventing the unbuilt cremation ground from deteriorating.

Raised Platforms: In order to prevent them from being submerged in the water during the monsoon season, cremation platforms at the ghats should be elevated above the water bodies.

Distance: The two constructed cremation platforms should be separated by a minimum amount of space that allows people to stand close to the blazing pyres.

Clarity of Spaces for Different Activities:

To prevent any confusion or congestion, all the actions should be planned. It should have a proper notice board with directions.

Connection between Activities:

Spaces should be organised such that everything is close to everything else, making it simple for people to carry out all rituals quickly and easily.

At regions with a strong sense of cultural identity, such as traditional ghats, there are several religious rites and rituals that must be carefully observed (in India and Nepal). It is impossible to ignore how strictly some customs, like as the main procession,

puja, and sanskara, have been observed over time. The issues with cremation can be solved with careful adaptation of diverse ways to such cultures.

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