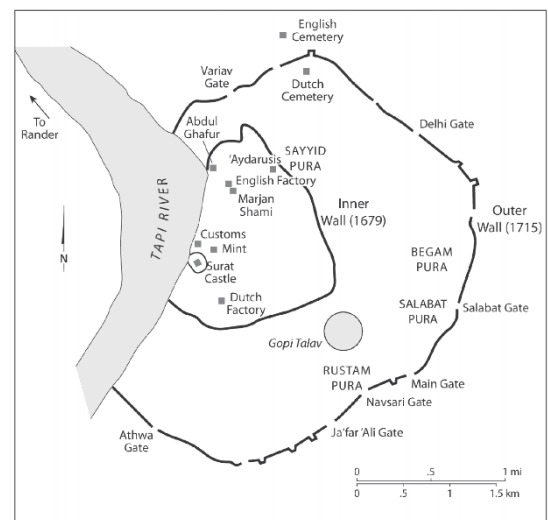


Effects of a Globalized History on the Urban Morphology of Surat, Gujarat, India



The urban morphology of Surat is still strongly tied to its history—its history as a fortress, a walled city, and a global port. The city core and the fortress which stands within it is the focal point from which the rest of Surat expands outwards. From village and street names, the semi circular roads that define the urban shape, the bazaars and economic culture, its industry and exports, to the organic town plan of the inner city, Surat's history is still alive. The culture and community has withstood the impacts and pressure of colonialism, globalization, and rapid urbanization, just as the walls and fortress once defended the flourishing port city.

Surat is a city in Northwest India in the state of Gujarat. It is situated on the banks of the Tapi River and in proximity to the coast of the Indian Ocean. This location gave Surat the ability to flourish as a vibrant city of merchants and artisans with connections all over the globe starting in the first half of the previous millennium. Its history as a major port city intrinsically ties its economy to the rest of the world. In 1800 Surat along with the rest of India fell under occupation of the British Raj. After gaining independence, Surat (or more specifically the Surat Municipal Corporation) felt pressure to modernize through the means of both westernization and shifting its economic focus towards a more globalized industry. The economy of Surat is reflected through its urban morphology in two major ways. The first way is that of its own local and historical



economic structure. Social relationships were the basis of the city's economic functions. These social relationships include the trust built between merchants and artisans, trades distinct to family units, religious values and practices, and the caste system. The second reflection of Surat's economic scope on the landscape is a result of the wide range of cultures brought by both merchants coming to trade as well as the succession of rulers, invasions, and colonialism.

Surat's key location on the Tapi River has been part of global trade networks since 300 BC (Udeaja, 2020) and has existed since the Mauryan period (around 321 B.C.E. to 185 B.C.E. (National Geographic Society)) (N Shah 2018, 2) but it grew to prominence in the 16th century. In the inner city, also known as the central zone or the historic city core, stands the focal point from which the rest of the settlement of Surat expands outward from— the fortress. The fortress, now often referred to as Surat Castle, still stands in the core of the city. The fort was constructed on the banks of the Tapti River in the middle of the 16th century (completed in 1541 according to Udeaja et al.) by a Mughal emperor. The fort gave Surat power, “emboldened by the construction of the fortress, the merchants and governors of Surat were taking an increasingly defiant stance” (Subrahmanyam) defending against Portuguese raids. Surat was already growing as a key port and center for trade activities which made it a target of frequent raids by the Portuguese naval fleets, sometimes burning down the whole city. (Subrahmanyam). Surrounding the fort through the 1600s were more artillery structures as well as buildings where Dutch and English merchants were required to go through customs processes in order to be let into the city (Moraes, 1950, p. 182). As the river became too narrow further inland, many boats landed on the banks of the river outside of Surat's boundaries. Because of this, paths from where the boats docked leading into Surat formed, and 17th century travelers made mentions of small market areas that began to pop up on the roads into Surat (Seshan, p. 436).

The two concentric walls that once surrounded the city are one of the most significant parts of Surat's urban morphology through history and to this day. The inner and outer walls were built in 1664 AD and 1715 AD. According to some sources, these walls served as another means of protection along with the fortress, and other sources describe them as being constructed of mud. Either by design or not, they may have also served to divide parts of the city between the upper and lower castes. These walls were important to Surat's function as a global port as it guided and controlled travelers' and merchants' entrance to the central city. In a traveler account from 1670, the walls “had seven gates, each named after the place to which the road out of it led” (Seshan 436) and this still presently holds true, although now what remains is the reminiscence of what were 14 gates. The neighborhoods and these same roads still bear the names of the activities and trade routes that once took place there (Desai 2018, 3). The walls are significant parts of Surat's early urban development and continue to play a significant role in current and future development plans. While the walls do not stand any longer, the imprint on Surat's town plan has not disappeared, and major roadways still define the land where the walls once stood.

Surat's built fabric reflects its role as a prominent port city in more detailed or subtle ways as well, and this can be seen in the historic buildings that still exist today that reflect its religious and cultural diversity. The city consists of “a hybrid and eclectic form of built spaces, evident in the ephemerally evolved characteristic old core” (N. Shah et al. 2018, 4). In field work conducted by the authors of “Urban Heritage Conservation and Rapid Urbanization—Insights from Surat, India”, their findings include the architectural styles and the motifs carved into buildings, columns, temples that reflect the many different countries, cultures, and influences that settled in Surat or traveled through Surat's market. Observations include architecture and art that include styles of Gothic, Renaissance,

Art Deco, and Arabesque. Surat's architecture is influenced by the constant succession of occupancy "that have historically dominated and influenced the city" and have left a lasting impact on Surat's built fabric (Udeaja et al. 2020, 9-10). The imagery and carvings on columns or facades of buildings vary from animals to flowers to repetitive geometric patterns. In addition to the Portuguese as aforementioned, it was frequented by European powers including the Dutch, British, and French, and a traveler to Surat in 1663 took note of the presence of many more nationalities. This traveler wrote, "You can find at Surat Spaniards, Frenchmen, Germans, Englishmen, Hollanders, Flemings, men from Dankerk, Italians, Hungarians, Poles, Swedes, Tartars, Georgians, Scythians, Chinese, Malabarians, Armenians" (Moraes 1950, 182). Graveyards could also be seen scattered throughout and were distinctive to the various religious groups and nationalities. Through the 16th century, Surat grew to be the most important port of India (N. Shah et al. 2018, 2). Although during later centuries it experienced population decline due to emigration to other growing cities such as Bombay, it remained a prominent and globally connected city. Surat's architecture is influenced by the constant succession of occupancy "that have historically dominated and influenced the city" and have left a lasting impact on Surat's built fabric (Udeaja et al. 2020, 9-10). This is not only a reflection of simply being a center for trade, but also of its involvement in a larger global economic structure and struggles for power.

The economic functions not only globally but also on a local level also have impacted Surat's built fabric. As the author of "At the Core: Understanding the built heritage of Surat and Rander" says, "The port city's morphological evolution and urban development lay in money mechanisms, the mercantile population and trading communities settling in the city" (13). Religion, faith, community, and economy were the building blocks of society in pre-colonial Surat. It is important to note that these building blocks are not separate functions but coexist within the same system. The economy of pre-colonial Surat is sometimes described by various historians as a "trust economy" based in faith, relationships, and an upheld reputation of reliability. In the case of two locally famous money lenders in Surat, it was said "the inherited business of Atmaram Bhukhanwala could run without any expertise" and "his name was so important that people would buy gold from him without any doubt" (Jha 2016, 152) due to the reputation of a name. These relationships offered Surat's economy a sense of security and stability that was relatively maintained during the colonial period. Social structures that economic functions were organized around were family, caste, and relationships built over time between patron and client and between merchant and artisan (Haynes 1991, 45). Different industries were divided by family lineage or within subgroups of communities within a caste. Outside the inner core of the city, the socioeconomic organization within the outlying regions outside of the inner wall is reflected in its residential patterns where the "street patterns so formed are specific to the communities and they influence the manner in which houses communicate with the ones in the surrounding" (N. Shah et al. 2018, 4). Haynes describes these patterns to be of a "Cellular quality, clustered in small, well-defined localities... Tailors, washermen, basketmakers, and potters all had their own streets where they lived" (69).

Religion is a fundamental part of Surat's culture to this day and always has been, and this can be seen in its early urban development patterns and built fabric. Hinduism was the most widely practiced religion, but Surat was also home to Muslim and Jain populations. Many neighborhoods within the city were built with reference to a central religious building such as a temple (Bipinchandra et al., 2020) or a mosque (Moraes 1950, 182). Within Hinduism there are certain moral codes often centering around the concept of purity that one must follow in order to become closer to god. These moral codes or standards to live up to vary by caste, age, gender, and the general role you have in the community. Success of wealthy merchant families "depended on a

family's general image of respectability" (Haynes 1991, 56). Much of this 'respectability' came from the aforementioned religious standards. Different religions had slightly different standards, but most were concerned with social and moral obligations to the community as well as purity and devotion to the particular god being worshiped. For example, Haynes says, "The ideal Sheth was one who scrutinized his books closely but who sacrificed large amounts of his wealth in sacred causes rather than accumulated capital or spent his resources to maximize his personal comfort" (58). Gift giving was an easy way for wealthy merchants to increase their Dharma and social reputation, and this resulted in funding for public services and development as well community buildings such as temples or wells (121).

What seems to define colonial Surat from pre colonial Surat is leadership. In pre colonial Surat, the leaders of social groupings held power to uphold the standards they set based on religion and social reputation. The leaders were leaders of a trade, or a neighborhood, or of a religious sect. The leaders were still part of the group. By the later years of colonial Surat, from around the 1880s (153) to post World War I, the elite "projected a self image that cut across the boundaries of Surat's ethnic groupings" (Haynes 1991, 145)... "They proclaimed an identification with the welfare of the city and a concern with education, industrialization, agricultural development, and improved sanitation" (152). After World War I and Britain's funds were gone, few of these development projects were realized. Still, due to the foreign investment in local industry and the exchange of Indian goods for professional services from the British, by "the time of Indian independence, the port cities were homes to some of the best schools, colleges, hospitals, universities, banks, [and] insurance companies" (Tirthankar 2015, 7).

The economy of post colonial India saw a drastic recoil from globalization to nationalism. India and its port cities have been globally connected through history, but through the independence movements in the first half of the twentieth century to post independence in 1947, nationalism became the prominent rhetoric. Global Marxist theory that rose in 1960s argued that in colonized countries, the "openness of their economies made the Third World poorer" due to an unequal exchange of exported goods and imported services that made the colonizers and the "traders-moneylenders-landlords engaged in agricultural exports [become] richer" (Tirthankar 2015, 3). After being colonized for a century and a half, India's political language was already structured by a colonial framework and the recoil of nationalism was not sustainable. Any efforts towards progress and modernization were shaped through a colonial lens and western standards. India's economies still relied on foreign investment for funding. Progress was difficult without conceding to the forces of the global economy.

Towards the end of the 20th century, as India's economy trended towards neoliberalism, India's major cities became increasingly globalized and faced pressure to become "investment friendly" in order to accumulate the capital needed for development (Singh 2018, 11). This has often led to a loss in a sense of place in such cities. Yet, considering Surat's history as a major port city and trading center, Surat's marketplaces have maintained cultural identity and community despite global economic shifts and pressures. The "trust economy" still exists in Surat's modern day commercial centers and shopping malls, and the intertwinedness of religion and economy persists. Vendors, who are outsiders and often disliked for their inconsistency, crowd the shopping center by strategically locating their stands in front of the "well established" stores within the larger shopping complex. But the shop owners familiar to and trusted by the community benefit by how the vendors' cheap prices bring in customers. In this symbiotic relationship, "the reputation of the shop/seller adds value to these vendors... the generational trust endowed in the shop gets an extension and embraces the

vendor sitting in front” (Jha 2016, 157). In Chauta Bazaar, a large marketplace located in the center of the historic core and near the fort, “faith in the authenticity and in bringing good stuffs is renewed through narratives that have passed from generations and the fact that still this place has maintained its quality and standards” (Jha 2016, 145). Local customers are loyal and consistent, and a sense of community remains strong between residents and shopkeepers (many of whom are both and whose house and business are the same plot of land). The Chauta Bazaar is an open air marketplace where small shops line the narrow roads, and the marketplace and residential areas are woven together. Old temples remain a central part of the marketplace, both spatially and functionally. According to one local, the sustainability and growth of the bazaar is directly linked to the temples, because “anyone who comes to this area flourishes because of the spiritual element in the soil” and it is the donations to the temples that are “how god blesses this place” (Jha 2016, 147-48).

The population of Surat increased from a quarter of a million in 1951 and over doubled in 20 years. The population rose another half a million by 1991 and almost doubled again in 2008. In 2011 with a population of 4.46 million, the UN predicted the population would hit 5.57 million by 2025 (Sharma et al. 2012, 6). Currently, it is already at 7 million. This exponential increase in population is due, in part, to the expansion of the city limits. Surat Municipal Corporation city limits in 1961 resided inside of the wall totaling just over 3 square miles. The city limits were expanded in 2006 to 126 square miles (Sharma et al. 2012, 7), and in 2020 it was expanded again to now 177.9 square miles (SMC).



The other reason for the growth in population, however, is also due to immigration into the urban areas as the rising tech industry brings more jobs to the city. The town plan of the inner city core of Surat struggles to accommodate the rapid urbanization and population increase. Through field work, researchers observe of Surat:

“The walled city of Surat is a high density residential zone. Residential structures are most commonly ground + 3/4 stories that is low rise high density development. The organic growth of the walled city do not allow horizontal development, hence in order to meet with the growing family needs, the residents tend to expand their facilities vertically. This has a major impact on the scale of building to street relationship, as the narrow streets are perceived narrower due to tall edge. There is a major lack of neighborhood level shared open space” (Bipinchandra 2019, 5491).

The lack of open space is a common theme noted in analyses of the morphology of Surat, especially the historic inner core. In the latter half of the nineteenth century when the British government began to impose and enforce housing bylaws and regulations on Surat’s residents, the citizens resisted, as “This distinction between public and private space was new for the Surtis who had generally built their shops and homes on whatever free land was available” (Haynes 1991, 112). For example, the new law imposing a limit to the ratio of building to open land on a property was met with resistance because the entire area was needed in order to get the most out of the land financially and to be able to afford it. This dense, organic growth in the city core as well as in the outer city zones is in conflict with

modern day urban development. Surat's narrow streets and traffic congestion are another way that Surat's early settlement patterns conflict with the current growth of the city and its industries. As of 1995, the roads in Surat are still very old and narrow, described as "centuries old and archaic" where a "hierarchical order of roads is totally missing" (Shetty 1995, 5). While residents have a variety of transport options including scooters, mopeds, rickshaws, cars, buses, and bicycles, all of these take place on the same narrow roads (6). The city also has limited public transportation options, and the only buses serving the outlying suburbs of Surat are restricted to the few roads wide enough to accommodate them.

With a rapidly growing population, city planners and developers often opt to demolish historic buildings as part of an urban renewal movement to make room for new high-rise structures to accommodate the density and increase land value and appeal to foreign investment. This means that "Surat's urban fabric is under consistent pressure to "modernize", leading to the continuous disappearance of traditional skills and crafts that are part of the intangible cultural heritage" (Udeaja et al. 2020, 15). An example of how economic modernization pressures have affected historic sites in Surat is that of Gopi Talao in Gopipura. Gopi Talao is a historic area important to Surat's history and has been subjected to the recent urban renewal efforts. Gopi Talao was a water tank that once supplied the entire city of Surat with water. It was built in the 16th century by a wealthy merchant as Surat began to establish itself as a city. Now Gopi Talao is only full of water after a rainstorm. Developers hope to replace the situation of "central open land, slum encroachment, poor linkages, and surrounding graveyards" surrounding Gopi Talao with a vision of a "ultimate tourist destination" (S.J. Shah et al., 4). The plan includes the demolition of 1,400 houses and 140 shops in the area to make room for entertainment, recreation, and activities to incentivise tourism in the hopes of generating revenue to maintain the area.

This is part of many projects and plans throughout the city of restoring heritage, but these plans are still limited under the constraints of what is "financially viable" (S.J. Shah et al., 5). This makes genuine preservation and restoration of heritage buildings and culturally significant places a difficult endeavor. Heritage preservation may not seem like it holds priority or value in comparison to urban planning projects related to infrastructure, housing, and environmental sustainability, but it has an immense impact on culture and placemaking. Sometimes it seems as if the ability to experience the identity of a place while moving through city space "has been lost in the traffic, noise and congestion of overcrowded and overburdened urban roads" as well as "encroachments, heterogeneous traffic, haphazard parking, abandoned street edges, hoardings and advertising elements" (Desai 2018, 2) due to factors such as combination of traffic congestion of narrow and disorganized roads, crowded and eclectic built fabric, and demolition of buildings that are part of the Surat's history and character.

Surat has been a globally and economically connected city throughout its history as a major trading center since the 1500s and now a city establishing its place in the world economy as an IT center. With a culture so intertwined with the economy, the city of Surat is especially vulnerable to change. The residential, commercial, and otherwise urban areas now reflect a mixture of both the historic cultures and architectural practices and modernization. Even so, the community, culture, and traditions of Surat continue to hold strong.

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