

## Seven Heavens: The Divine Number of Jaipur

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Composite Culture, the word itself demands an explanation. Seeking to find meaning for Composite Culture this paper tries to explain the concept of culture, the problem of multicultural society and an effort to create composite culture. This paper also seeks to relate the concept of composite culture with the social practices of Jaipur State, an erstwhile Princely State of Rajasthan. Attempts to relate the social practice with composite culture takes this paper through the process of understanding contemporary relevance and implication of composite culture. It also makes an attempt to find the undercurrents of society that defy the mantle of composite culture and seeks its relevance in individual existence.

Living in Jaipur is a unique experience, a city which defied all attempts for socio religious division even in the worst periods of communal frenzy, a city of composite culture, a city of religious harmony, a city we all Jaipurites are proud to be a part of. But contemporary changes point towards a different truth, shaken by blasts, mutilated by riots are we really sharing the space or just bearing the political burden of imposed Composite Culture. The paper seeks to understand all these points.

Broadly speaking Culture is a system of beliefs and practices of a given group who among themselves share some semblance of cohesion, whether evident through external manifestations like language or internal cohesion of a shared philosophy of life. Every person is a product of his society, his or her personality by and large depend upon the social circumstances in which he/she has spend his/her childhood or formative years. We are moulded by the language we share, by the unspoken beliefs ingrained in every day practices and also by social acceptance and understanding of the group we are born as a part of. Culture of a society can be seen manifested in its language, its rituals, its symbols, its jokes and folk tales, its shared memories and in its manner of reacting to a particular situation. To the external world it is by and large evident through its music, painting, sculpture, architecture, literature etc. Culture is also defined in relation to family and social values, morality, customs etc.

India is full of different ethnicity, religions, and languages. These are the major sources of cultural diversity which is said to be the dominant feature of India. For a country as vast as India its diversity, biological and cultural, is not only an asset but also a major challenge. Bulk of Indian population is immigrant as the natural resources of land attracted people from all directions;

bringing together a great diversity of human cultures. But unlike other lands where usually the dominant/ invading race eliminated or absorbed the existing culture in India the indigenous culture was able to absorb and accommodate most of the foreign influences and still retain its originality through millenniums. In India this adaptability of nature has given rise to a unique blend of culture which is truly Indian in flavour despite of spices and aromas from the far away land of Romans and Greeks or Turks and Arabs being added along the flow of time in its main stream.

Although one may attribute this merging of cultures to political subordination of native race and its need of the hour strategy for survival, but I agree with Rajani Kothari when she says more than any political system, it was the inherent civilisational structure of India which promoted the ideology of unity amongst the people of the land. Sharing of space and culture traits indeed has been an ancient phenomenon in India, mainly on account of internal movements, migrations, pilgrimages and regular cultural – exchanges. People from within India as well as foreign land visited sacred places all over the country and thus a process of continuous interaction operated continually at the grassroots level in all historical phases. Regular exchange and sharing of cultural and religious traits, thoughts and ethos contributed to cultural synthesis.

Jaipur, the Pink City, the city which was dreamed to be perfect, came into being absorbing and amalgamating many varied influences in its panorama. Vidhyadhar ji Bhattacharya designed a city for Sawai Jai Singh Ji but the personality of the ruler and his successors was a decisive force in building this unique city which Bishop Heber in 1824 had compared to Moscow (notably one of the most beautiful cities of Europe). The inceptor of the dream called Jaipur, Sawai Jai Singh, was cosmopolitan in his nature and scientific in his approach. Living in troubled times and at the juncture of medieval and modern India he in order to strengthen his political power and expand his territory from Amber raised Jaipur or Sawai Jaipur as it was named originally. He like most of the Rajput families of Rajputana claimed descent from the Solar family and wanted incorporation of divine cosmic order within the town planning of Jaipur.

The detailed layout of every section of Jaipur plays a significant role in fulfilling this purpose and establishing the close relationship of Jai Singh with the celestial world. For example, the City Palace or Chandra Mahal is placed geographically in the centre of the town, the place in the Shastras for building the temple, and the temple of Govind Ji is within its premises. The main axial road, i.e. the wide road that runs along from east (the Suraj Pole) to west (the Chand Pole) -- the apparent route of the sun is in line with Galta, a pilgrimage site. The 'Dhruv Pole' forms the third angle of triangle and is situated in such a manner that is expected to provide divine blessing to keep the Kingdom stable.

The city plan of Jaipur is interpreted widely as a square Mandala. Some see it consisting of nine squares symbolizing the “nine directions of the universe” whilst others see it as a seven part

Mandala. The number seven is a significant number in Hindu religion as seen in the light of the cosmological way. Jaipur city was planned in such a manner that a major part of the city was built and populated within seven years of its foundation. Jaipur originally had Seven gates (Suraj Pol in the east, Chand Pol in the west, Shiv Pol or Sanganeri Gate on the north-south axis on the southern end, with two other gates - Kishan Pol or Ajmeri Gate and Ram Pol or Ghat Gate - also in the southern city wall. At the northern end are the Dhruv Pol or Zorawar Singh Gate, with the Ganga Pol at the northeast), the City Palace Chander Mahal has seven stories. The sector division of Jaipur into market streets results in seven main markets (Johari Bazaar, Sireh Deorhi Bazaar, Kishanpole Bazaar, Gangauri Bazaar, Chandpole Bazaar, Tripolia Bazaar and Ramganj Bazaar). The first Church built in the city had seven stories.

The question now arises that where is the cultural synthesis or composite culture in the conceptual design of Jaipur city. It seems so predominantly Hindu in all its aspects. Certainly the layout plan is based on shashtras but the people involved in complete planning were learned in all the three popular religions of the period, i.e. Hindu, Islam and Christianity. Jai Singh himself was a learned person, in laying of his Jantar mantar he had sought advice from Father Emmanuel de Figuerego, who, under the authority of Jai Singh, led a legation to Lisbon in search for the latest astronomical knowledge and advances. Subsequently, the French Jesuits took over the responsibilities in offering assistance to Jai Singh in 1734. Raj Guru Jagannath was a close associate of Vidhyadhar Ji and was employed in planning because of his Arabic linguistic abilities and knowledge.

Practical reality points to the fact that the architecture of Jaipur has cultural elements of all the religions.

Dr. Ram Pande in his book *Jaipur Sanskritik Vihangam* has along with other architectural aspects of Jaipur has referred to the mystery of number seven. Number seven he says is sacred to all the ancient religions. There are seven verses in the first chapter of Quran, seven heavens Paigamber crossed to meet Allah, there are seven gates to hell, seven rounds to be completed around Kaaba , pilgrims walk nor run seven times between Mount Safa and mount Marwah, seven stones to be thrown at devil's wall.

Seven is associated with Christian Scripture, seven symbolizes completeness or perfection. On the seventh day God rested from his labours and creation is finished. There are seven feasts of the Lord (Passover, Unleavened, First-fruits, Pentecost, Atonement, Trumpets and Tabernacle). The Bible, as a whole, was originally divided into 7 major divisions. They are 1) the Law; 2) the Prophets; 3) the Writings, or Psalms; 4) the Gospels and Acts; 5) the General Epistles; 6) the Epistles of Paul; and 7) the book of Revelation. There are at least seven men in the Old Testament who are specifically mentioned as a man of God. They are Moses, David, Samuel, Shemaiah, Elijah, Elisha and Igdaliah. Jesus performed seven miracles on God's holy Sabbath Day (which ran from Friday sunset to Saturday sunset), thus affirming its continued sacredness to God and necessity in the life of the believer.

Seven is a sacred number to Hindus too as it is associated with multiple aspects of religious life like Sapta Rishi, Sapta Nadi, Sapta Padi, Sapta Matruka, Sapta Rudraksha Sapta Puri. Sapta dweep, Sapta Chiranjeev etc.

Architecture of the city reflects composite culture in many ways. The building style of Jaipur at inception was Indo Mughal. The gardens were laid in Mughal style, decorations reminded one of Mughal Court at Delhi and Agra. City had temples (400 is the number claimed by the old timers; which probably is why Jaipur is also called Choti Kashi) along with Mosques and Churches. The court patronised all philosophies and knowledge stemming from them. Unani Tibb was as much trusted as Ayurveda and in due time western medicine also found a way in. Festivals and festivities of all were observed and living quarters/ areas were provided to all. Honours were showered not according to religion but according to distinction of services. Hawa Mahal, Jal Mahal all speak of cultural synthesis.

Culture finds its manifestation in many things and so Jaipur developed composite culture to cater to its everyday needs over the years. Holi celebrations were incomplete without Gulaal Gota in yesteryears and even till date the traditional holi celebration within the fore walls of palace and many old families enjoy their use. ***“Baaba Khan, a 57-year-old M.F. Hussain lookalike, is a lac artist. Heading one of the last families still practising this art, Khan is a busy man around Holi when he has more business on his hands than the entire year. Apart from the usual lac artefacts like jewellery and stationary that he makes round the year, in the spring he manufactures a large number of gulaal gotas”***. (Ref: The Hindu archives. Report by Mahim Pratap Singh, 23<sup>rd</sup> March 2013.)

Marriage requires bangles and they come from the house of a Muslim artist who creates beautiful lac Chura for a Hindu Bride and also fills her Gold Bangles with lac to make them auspicious. The Akbari Masjid of Amber and the Jama Masjid right in the heart of city indicates the acceptance of Muslims as a part of city and its culture. Unani Hospital and Tibbi College were state sponsored as Jaipur state continued its policy of multiple patronages,

Influences of the British changed the outlook of times. The power at the centre was European and Sawai Ram Singh II made significant changes Jaipur city. New buildings were raised in the Indo-Saracenic style. Mubarak Mahal, Naya Mahal or Vidhan Sabha etc. are examples of changing tradition. The extension outside the walled city respected earlier planning to an extent by retaining the principle southward axis of the Tripolia Gate, the Palace and the central Govind Dev temple. This axis extended into the magnificent British period garden immediately outside the walled city, i.e. the Ramniwas Bagh that was later enhanced with the visual focus of the monumental Albert Hall Museum, displaying INDO SARACENIC architecture.

Thus grew the city of Jaipur from a medieval city to a modern metropolis. The Capital of state of Rajasthan came a long way from 1727, absorbing lots of influences and creating a composite

culture where Ramganj was inhabited by followers of Allah. Where festivals were celebrated with harmony, where all belonged to a big family of Jaipur. After all no kite can fly without manzha which came from a muslim home.

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