RENEWAL OF BUILT HERITAGE: A CASE OF GOPI-TALAO, SURAT

Sapana Jayeshkumar Shah¹, Prof. Himanshu J. Padhya², Prof. Bhasker V. Bhatt³
M.E, Civil Engg., Sarvajanik College of Engg. and Tech., Surat, Gujarat, India¹
Associate Prof., Civil Engg., Sarvajanik College of Engg. and Tech., Surat, Gujarat, India²
Associate Prof., Civil Engg., Sarvajanik College of Engg. and Tech., Surat, Gujarat, India³

Abstract: Real challenge for urban local body through developers, architects, and professionals is to protect and preserve the built heritage. Most difficult task ahead is to conserve the local traditional and cultural values of communities for future generations to appreciate. This paper discusses a case for the renewal & restoration of historical Gopi-talao, Surat that is accomplished by Surat Municipal Corporation and on the verge of completion. This study comprehends on the past, and present conditions and development undertook for restoration and redevelopment. Further, the administrators of the city have planned for a grade separated road along the partial periphery of Gopi-talav that will add to beautification feature of the lake.

Keywords: Gopi-talav, Heritage, Restoration, Surat, Urbanisation, Urban Renewal, Walled city.

INTRODUCTION

India population has grown two and half times while urban population increased five times in the last 50 years. (Cochin, 2013) Urbanisation in the country with the level of 31% where more than 40% of urban population living in 53 metro cities (Census of India, 2011). Country is trending towards metropolitan development. Most of the major cities are centuries old, and about 2.8 percent of total geographical area of the country is under urban settlements. So, urban renewal is needed to revitalise the city or a part which has been plagued by the ills of urbanisation. In Surat, Gopi-talao is a built heritage water body. It was constructed by Malek Gopi – a prosperous merchant in 16th century A.D. Its main purpose was to provide water supply to Surat city, but the pond has dried out & is filled only during rainy days. In the other duration, the bed is used as a playground. Gopi-talav has the only step-well in this area having steps to go down from all four sides availng ground water. The step-well is with 25 footsteps, within the 35 square metres structure, and 15 metres deep compared to water body depth of 12 metres. (India, n.d.)

History suggests that centuries ago, “Gopi-talao” was among renowned objects having worldwide attention. The lake’s exquisiteness evoked elaborate chapters penned to pronounce its glory, not only by Indian intellectuals, but also by European travellers in travelogues about their trip to India.
Gopi-talao, situated in the walled area of Surat having various features like,

- **Strategic location:** It is a place in which will give the better indicator for development because it is in the central area of commercial activity.
- **Sources of water storage:** It was the prime source of water storage & storm water management point in ancient time.
- **Topographical condition:** It is low lying area that leads to water logging problems in that field.
- **Significant Recreational Activity:** It has recreational activity like boating & places of attraction like gardens, mango orchards.
- **Socio-cultural importance:** The main reason for the construction of Gopi-talao was economic to cultural development.

**Situation around Gopi-talao**

Whole area around Gopi-talao decay due to various parameter & having present situation like central open land, slum encroachment, poor linkages, and surrounding graveyards shows in the above figure. Existing situation demanded the renewal of Gopi-talao.

**Renewal of Gopi-talao**

Surat Municipal Corporation (SMC) decided to renewal the Gopi-talao & initiated a mega demolition to remove 1,400 houses and 140 shops around Gopi-talao. Apart from opposition shown by a few people, the drive remained peaceful as all home owners have been allotted flats for economically weaker section (EWS) at Bhestan. The civic body aims at redeveloping Gopi-talao that once existed at the spot and developed it through inspiration by Kankaria Lake, Ahmedabad. Re-development of 13,934.88 Sq. Mt. of land outside Gopi-talao will give the historic 16th-century lake site a magnificent view. This SMC property is in front of DKM Hospital and stretch is to the front portion of Navsari bazar. (India-Bilkulonline, 2014)
PRESENT DEVELOPMENT

The development of Gopi-talao area has reached up to a stage where the realisation of the project has triggered many positive changes in the development scenario of the old city of Surat.

Main four features of Redevelopment:

- Redevelopment of Gopi-talao as a lake
- Restoration of the heritage vav, development of play area & fountains
- Development of a snowpark, IMAX & other allied entertainment activities as a part of Gopi-talao area redevelopment
- Development of newly acquired land parcel on kotsafil road

A. Gopi-talao Special Development Zone (GTSDZ)

For practical implementation of the project, it is proposed to divide the entire SDZ into parcels.

Parcel 1: Commercial Development
Parcel 2: Slum Rehabilitation – Site & service scheme
Parcel 3: Graveyard development
Parcel 4: Informal & Formal market redevelopment with parking

Total area of Gopi-talao is approximately ten hectares with several zones in below table with its area.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Location</th>
<th>Area (sq.mt)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Water body</td>
<td>34254</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>History zone</td>
<td>4220</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Environment Zone</td>
<td>5310</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Diamond Zone</td>
<td>5215</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Surat nu Jaman</td>
<td>5880</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Textile zone</td>
<td>5290</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Commercial harmony zone</td>
<td>6161</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Future Zone</td>
<td>9480</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Table 1 Zone in New Development**

SMC is carrying out the redevelopment in 3 phases:

**Phase-1:** Work completed in this stage is 3 Nos. of platform, two no. of Ghats, open amphitheatre, viewing jetty with approximately amount of 6 crore.

**Phase-2:** Work completed in this stage is inner, outer & D. P. Roadside compound wall, C.C road development cost of about 3.40 Crore.

**Phase-3:** Development of different types of zone (approximately cost of 10 crore).

- **History Zone:** Having 300 years old existing vav is restored in this area with an office building
- **Environment Zone:** Mass plantation work with Nirmit & the Sunshine fountain around open Amphitheatre.
- **Diamond Zone:** development of walkways & other area look like diamond shape, in a centre Kohinoor shape fountain will be placed.
- **Surat nu Jaman:** Total 17 nos. of food stall & landscape work.
• **Textile zone:** Development of walkways, benches & look like any textile print. Children play area in this Zone with rubber flooring.

• **Commercial harmony zone:** Meditation & gathering platform for senior citizens with landscaping.

![Redevelopment Proposals in parts of Gopi-talao](image)

**Figure 4 Redevelopment Proposals in parts of Gopi-talao**

II. **RESTORATION OF VAV AT HISTORY ZONE**

The step-well built at Gopi-talao in Gopipur area of Surat city in the 18th century is a significant heritage structure. Mir Alamsha Binkhan built this Gopipuravav in 1718. (India, n.d.) He was a friend of Haider Kaun Khan, in charge as Surat governor during 1715 to 1718. Haider initiated building of the fort across Surat city known as Alamanah Fort. Alamsha acquired some of the stones meant for the fort & had the step-well built outside Navsari Bazar at Gopipura lake. It is the only step-well in this area having steps to go down from all four sides. Hence, it is called as “Chatusmukhi Vav”.

![Before After](image)

**Figure 5 Chatusmukhi Vav**

**OTHER DEVELOPMENTS**

Development of Snow Park, I-max, laser show & other entertainment activities in Gopi-talao area as PPP arrangement with following vision:

- Initiating latest activities for entertainment so as to have the world class experience of recreational in the city.
- Giving guidelines to develop PPP model to suit the vision
- Providing such types of entertainment activities so that all age-group & income group people can get involved.
• Generating a financially viable model for SMC to generate revenue to maintain other facilities at Gopi-talao.

Other activities planned at Gopi-talao are Speed & Paddle Boating, Balloon Riding, Water Zorbing, Trampoline, Trumping, Mechanical Bull and Indoor Play Zone.

![Image](image_url)

**Figure 6: 3-D image for proposed development**

**PROPOSED FLYOVER ON KOTSafil ROAD**

As the redevelopment of Gopi-talao project is in the last stage of development, for quickly reach Gopi-talao from Ring road, there is a proposal of approximately 1.5-2 Km long flyover. It will be the 3rd largest flyover if Surat city. Due to this flyover the average travel time from Gopi-talao to ring the road will decrease to 2 minutes from 10-12 minutes. It will also give the aerial view of whole Gopi-talao.

**CONCLUDING REMARK**

• This project develops a unique activity plaza for the people of immediate surrounding & the city at large.
• It creates an identity & opportunity for the city & will trigger the regeneration of the surrounding & subsequently the entire old town.
• This project will also motivate other cities to restore their built heritage & to maintain their cultural values.

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