

Bikaner as a City of Happiness: A Peep Into the Cultural and Historic Evolution of an Unorganized Initiative to Develop a Happy City

Trilok Kumar Jain

Suresh Gyan Vihar University, India

Neeraj Anand

Chitkara Business School, Chitkara University, India

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This is a case study on the relevance of the culture and heritage of a city to overall happiness and comfort of the citizens. India ranks at 136 in the World Happiness Ranking as per 10th World Happiness Report 2022. A happy city is a city that focuses on building infrastructure for get-togethers, interactions, parties, and socializing of the residents. This case study takes a look at the evolution of culture of Bikaner city and identifies key elements of this culture. It is located in Thar Desert and has extreme climatic conditions. It has geographical disadvantage but has many distinct advantages also. The city has been able to maintain its unique identity and culture despite the changes and pandemic the world has undergone over the decades. This city has been able to preserve its heritage and its deeply rooted traditional values. The authors have highlighted unique cultural characteristics of the city and also raised some concerns to be addressed to develop it as a preferred destination while developing it as modern city of happiness. The case study leaves many questions to ponder.

WHAT MAKES A CITY HAPPY AND SMART?

A smart city is one which has adopted the latest technology in urban management. This makes the city an advanced city because all the amenities are technologically accessible such as digital payments etc. Plenty of wi-fi hubs enable people to use the internet and technology very easily and connect with the resources of the city. Smart cities offer residents all the modern amenities with ease of access – infra-

structure, transport and telecom connectivity etc. India ranks at 136 in the World Happiness Ranking as per 10th World Happiness Report 2022. A happy city is a city which focuses on building infrastructure for get-together, interaction, parties and socializing of the residents. Happy cities are known for creating warmth and excellent hospitality in the city with plenty of celebration points and plenty of traditions for promoting mingling of the local residents such as Picnic spots (*Goth*), sand dunes, historical monuments, lily pond (Public Park), Bawri (Shivbari) and ancient temples- Shivbari, Laxmi Narayan temple, Bhandasar Jain temple, Garh Ganesh, Nagnechi etc. Traditions like Wearing Safa (turban), Pataa culture (elderly people sitting on a cot in the street side in the city), eating together in the smaller groups in one thali (plate) in weddings and social gatherings, playing Holi in the city with paint and water, offering fodder to cows and roti to dogs, food grain to pigeons, going for morning walk in the city/Vradh Jan Path, temples; chewing supari (*kircha*) and consuming paan etc. Most of the residents staying outside Bikaner visit the city during weddings and social gatherings, they prefer this city as the wedding place even if they have been staying in other states for more than 50 years.

Every city is a living organization because it has some traditions, common values, cultural roots and some common beliefs. This is a study of a cultural city, which has existed for over 500 years carrying a set of beliefs and values. This city is often termed a “Big Village” because many people confuse the values of this city with those of rural societies. However, this city has its own identity and it has been able to maintain its unique characteristics in spite of the challenges of modern society.

Culture and values are based on the common beliefs and mindset of the people. What most people assume to be common beliefs become the center of a cultural backbone.

While most cities are striving for becoming smart cities, Bikaner continues to remain a “Happy City” - the city remains glued to its old forte - being happy, complacent and remaining attached to joy and happiness. There is a lack of ambition among common people, but this is a merit here because people are content with what they have. People give higher weightage to happiness, their family members and therefore, they devote more time towards spiritual activities, family get-togethers and community meetings in comparison to professional or occupational goals.

EVOLUTION OF BIKANER CITY

Bikaner was established in 1488 and it is located on Western Rajasthan (bordering to Pakistan). This city is located in the Thar Desert area and therefore water scarcity has always affected this city. The population of Bikaner is approximately 8 Lakhs. Being a border city, it has always faced challenges relating to infrastructure. It's connected with Delhi through rail with the distance of 463 km and well connected through National Highway with Jaipur, NCR, Gujarat via Jodhpur. Industries could not be developed due to lack of infrastructure and political will. Still, we may witness limited industries in the field of wool processing, insulators, carpet, edible oil and other industries. The desert climate is its strength as well as weakness. Being a dry climate, this city has the best environment for food production such as lintel, bajra etc. This city has grabbed this opportunity and has become the largest food item producing city of India. Well-known brands of Bhujia (namkeen) such as Bikanerwala, Bikaji, Haldiram, BC, Milan etc. have originated from this city. The city has been producing almost 80% of the country's Gypsum and POP (Plaster of Paris) requirements. The city has huge milk production and is known as ‘Denmark of Rajasthan’. The city has been known for its crafts including paintings, Usta art, miniature painting, manihari jewelry, jadau, bandhej, doria and The city is also known for its unique culture, heritage and

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