

# Beautiful Facades versus Reality in and around Golden Temple, Amritsar, Punjab

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## ABSTRACT

*Amritsar, also known as the holy city due to the presence of Golden temple, has a history of about 570 years. The city has experienced various setbacks, like 1947 partition, and 1984 Operation Blue Star, but it has still not lost its glory and history. The redevelopment project namely the Heritage Street project from Town Hall to Golden Temple has been considered as a marvellous wonder for tourists, and pilgrims but its actual reality explains a different scenario altogether. As, behind the façade of stone cut latticework (jallis/ pinjrakari), there are a cluster of shops where no renovation has been done over several years. The aesthetically beautiful re-development project of Heritage Street has been restricted to a stretch of one km approximately. Some of the shopkeepers behind these facades are facing major hardships in terms of business. These older areas need preservation to overcome all the drawbacks. The present article examines a recent development that took place along the approach roads leading to Golden Temple. The authors have tried to evaluate the gaps in terms of infrastructure and facilities as well as other planning issues encountered during the study.*

**Keywords:** *Golden Temple, galiara, heritage walk project, façade, tourism, business*

## INTRODUCTION

**A**mritsar is a medieval walled city with its heritage and rich history dating back to about 570 years. The history is rich in mixed cultural

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entities of built forms, primary examples from Sikh architecture, British interventions, etc. with numerous public and semi-public spaces, commercial spaces, residential units, etc. Amritsar is known for its Golden Temple also known as Sri Harmandir Sahib and the whole city is built around it. The area around Golden Temple has experienced changes due to various reasons like partition of India and Pakistan in 1947 as well as operation Blue Star in 1984. To decongest the localities surrounding the Golden temple, Galiara scheme was first initiated in 1988 (pressreader.com). The scheme involved acquisition of new structures and areas for re-development and development of heritage street. Millions of rupees were poured, changing and altering the character of the area to the extent that the heritage street looks more or less like the amalgamation of various elements from Pink City, Rajasthan, that views the facades in one shade of sandstone finish only. This article presents the perception of various shopkeepers and how their business has been affected by the upcoming of new heritage street project.

### **Amritsar**

In 1577, Guru Ram Das ji, the fourth Guru of Sikhs founded Amritsar, which means 'The Tank of nectar/ immortality'. (investpunjab.gov.in). Originally, the city was known as *Chak Guru Ram Das* and later as *Ramdaspur*. The Golden Temple formed the nucleus of the city (Gauga, 1983). In the first half of 19<sup>th</sup> century, 1825, massive double wall of unbaked bricks was constructed by Maharaja Ranjit Singh in Amritsar (Gauga, 1983). According to Ahmad Shah, the fortification was twenty-five yards broad, seven yards high, and the circumference of the walled city was about five miles (Gauga, 1983). By 1849, during the period of annexation of Punjab, the wall started crumbling at places and on the whole it was in a neglected state, as suggested by the British military records (Gauga, 1983).

Located in the North West region of India, Amritsar has now become a major commercial and cultural hub in the heart of Punjab (investpunjab.gov.in). Amritsar served as a gateway for trade in Pakistan and Central Asia (investpunjab.gov.in). According to the 2011 census, the population of Amritsar was 1,132,761 (Wikipedia. n.d). (Refer Figures 1 and 2).

### **Beautiful Facades**

The Heritage Street was constructed to pedestrianise the congested traffic zone and to attract more tourists to the city. It was a kind of

**Fig. 1: Map of Punjab**



**Fig. 2: Map of Amritsar**



Source: <https://www.mapsofindia.com/maps/punjab/>

redevelopment project taken for beautification by the Government. The walk-through of Heritage Street is particularly extraordinary amazing attraction for anyone who visits Sri Harmandir Sahib in Amritsar (rediff. com, 2016). The Heritage Street has grandeur and aura of American streetscape with street lamps, benches on the street for tourists to sit, walkway and bollards (See Pictures 1 and 2).

The Heritage Walk project included:

- Façade upliftment – the component of the design and details carved in latticework (*jaali*);
- Restoration of the Town Hall (built during British reign);
- Street Furniture; and
- Public Art- the numerous statues as well as fountains along the Heritage Street.

### The Beautification Project

There is a cluster of shops behind the monuments and *jaalis*-like facades which have not been renovated over a while. The livelihood

**Pic. 1: Segregated pedestrian, vehicular movement**



**Pic. 2: Beautification through lighting**



Source: Authors

of many people was distributed by the beautification project and the redevelopment projects involved displacement and relocation.

The dead space generated as the result of making the “Pseudo-facades”, makes no sense of urban fabric connecting the two spaces, i.e., the newly designed envelope, viz., existing structures. The infrastructural provisions such as overhead wires, cables, and plumbing pipelines remain the same behind the *pseudo facades*. The Picture 3 shows the reality behind the heritage street. All the vehicles of this area have been redirected as heritage street was objectified to be pedestrianised. The issues of Solid Waste Management (SWM) and problems of stormwater drainage can be seen extensively due to the presence of open drains at some stretches. The conditions of the old structures remained dilapidated. The socio-cultural interactions of typical medieval bazar remain everywhere else except the Heritage Street which follows the western concepts of displays, statues, fountains, dancing statues, sandstone buildings, paved streets quite similar to the examples from European countries losing the sense of belongingness in the new character of heritage street (See Picture 3 and 4).

### Objective of the Study

The major objective of this research paper is to understand the basic requirement of the walled city and its infrastructure. The methodology adopted was dividing the study area into three zones (Picture 5), followed by accessing the effect/ impact of the new development on shops and shopkeepers. Also the issues and concerns of existing infrastructure were assessed. A survey tool was designed and primary

**Pic. 3: Visible Overhanging Wires**



Source: Authors

**Pic. 4: Crowded and congested street with no prioritised movements**

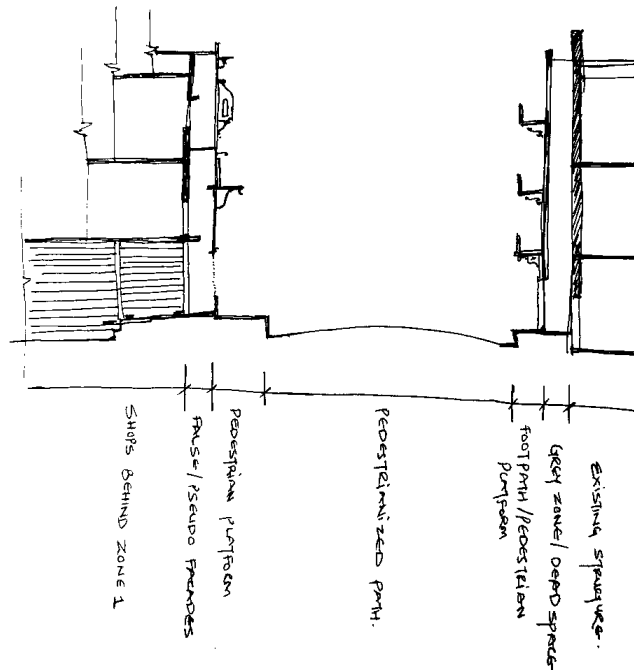


Source: Authors

survey was conducted for a 30 sample with size of 10 samples from each zone. Sample ranged from shopkeepers between the age group of 25 to 55, and shops were of traditional shoes (*jutti*), dress (*phulkari*), religious items (*rumala*), dry fruits etc.

**Zone 1**, comprising of old development, lies on the Heritage walk with a hidden approach behind the pseudo facades (Sketch-1).

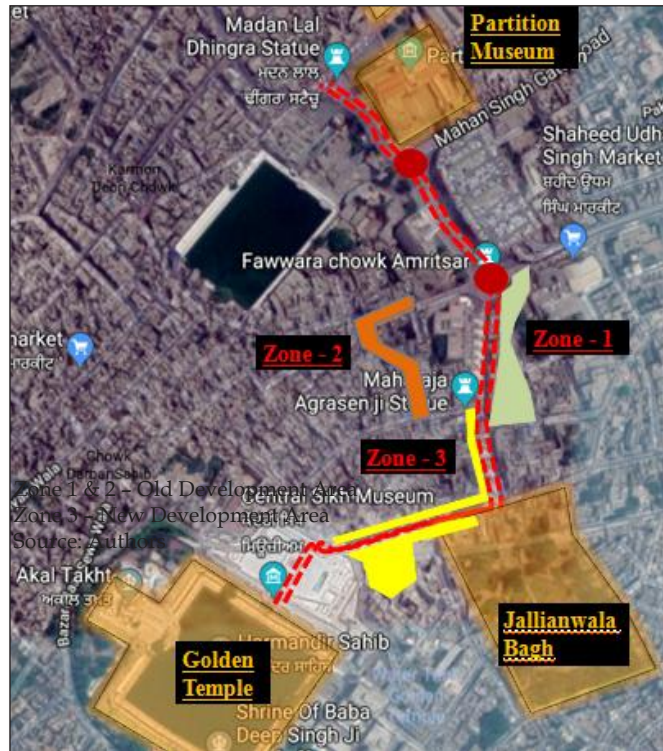
**Sketch 1: Section showing pseudo facade**



Source: Author



**Pic. 5: Google Earth/Map - Area Identification**



Source: Author

This zone has been covered by a Stone latticework — *jallis*, consisting of small access gates in between the shops. This zone is a commercial zone consisting of 35 shops in total, out of which 10 shops have been covered for surveying, interviews, and data collection. This zone lies on the *Fawwara* (Fountain) Chowk; hence it is considered important for the study. The shops in this zone mainly consist of Punjabi *Jutti* shop, *phulkari* shop, *rumala centre*, food joints, etc. (Picture 5).

**Zone 2**, also an old development, lies near the Heritage Walk. This zone is a residential-cum-commercial use (mixed land use), rich in heritage value having no direct connection with the heritage walk directly. It consists of 32 shops in total, out of which 10 shops have been considered. An introvert zone, it consists of old residential houses on the upper floors and commercial areas on the ground floor. The commercial shops mainly consist of old cloth traders, wholesalers in the cloth industry who have been running the business for years at the same place. This business community was not affected by the new development due to the nature of their job.

**Zone 3**, the new development, has shops which were already present on the road and now have merged with the new development. The new development comprises of an urban fabric which has improved tourism to a larger perspective. It consists of 94 shops out of which 10 have been considered. The new development elicited satisfactory responses from the shopkeepers because of increase in land value of the area. The Ghanta Ghar complex has been constructed to rehabilitate the shop owners of the shops removed from the Golden Temple Complex.

**Parameters undertaken for the study area as a whole:**

1. Land Acquisition
2. Protest of people before and during the construction
3. Frequency of Municipal Solid Waste collection and MSWM
4. Water logging/ Storm Water Management

**Parameters undertaken for studying each zone**

Municipal Solid Waste Collection; Ownership; MSWM Water logging and Storm Water Management; Public Toilets; Parking; and Prime reason for the project.

**Findings for the study area**

The overall scenario of the study area was generated by interviewing people on the new development and it is as follows.

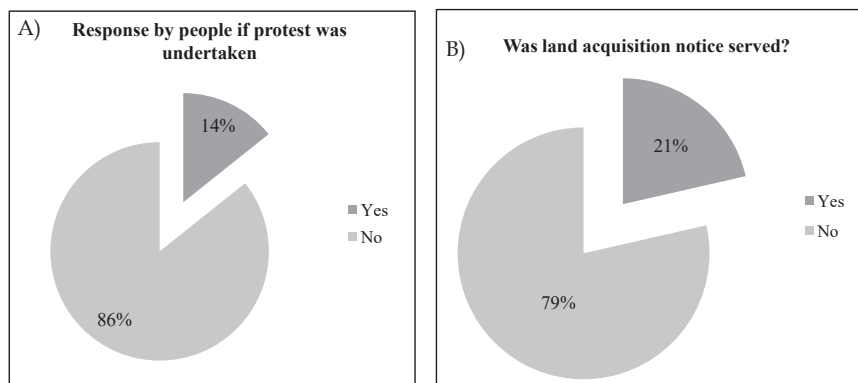
**Protest against the Heritage Street**

Knowingly or unknowingly the merits and demerits, and failure to forecast the impacts of the project, 86 per cent respondents showed that there was no protest against the development for Heritage Street while 14 per cent respondents stated that they protested against the coming of Heritage Street due to the impact on their business which had been running successfully for decades (Fig. 3a).

**Land Acquisition**

The project since inception lacked participation of people (the end-user or the people at large). This was confirmed by 79 per cent of respondents stating there was no land acquisition notice served and no community participation was involved (Fig. 3b). It may be due to the timelines of the project coinciding with the upcoming elections in that current year.

**Fig. 3. Percentage responses to protest against the Heritage Street and land acquisition**

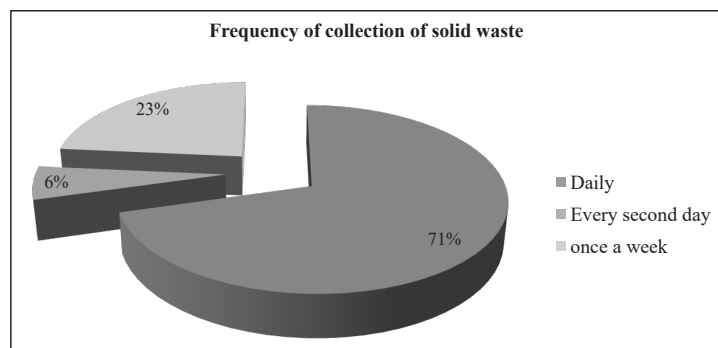


Source: Author

### Solid Waste Collection

Seventy one per cent of respondents stated that the frequency of collection of solid waste is daily and they are happy about it. The remaining six per cent stated that it is collected every alternate day and 23 per cent of respondents said that the waste is collected once a week by the municipal corporation (Fig. 4).

**Fig. 4: Percentage responses to Solid Waste Collection Frequency**



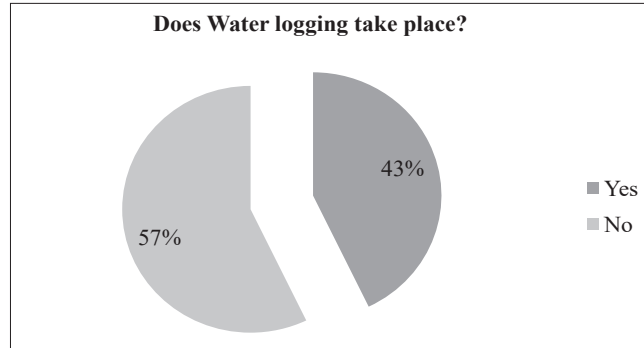
Source: Author

### Water Logging

Fifty seven per cent responded that there is no water logging in the area while 43 per cent said water-logging occurs to quite an extent in the area (Fig. 5). The datum lines formed due to water logging in the area can be witnessed at many points along the facades.



**Fig. 5: Percentage reponses to water logging in the study area**



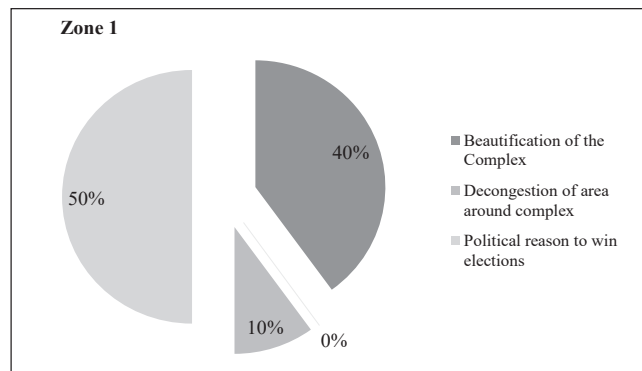
Source: Author

### Zone Wise Findings

#### Zone 1

**Zone 1**, the old development zone, 50 per cent respondents think that the prime reason for the development project was the political reason to win elections while 40 per cent think the project was done for enhancement and beautification of the complex and 10 per cent of respondents stated that project was conducted to decongest the complex (Fig. 6). Zone 1 occupants are the most affected people due to their shops being hidden behind pseudo facades of stone *jalīs*.

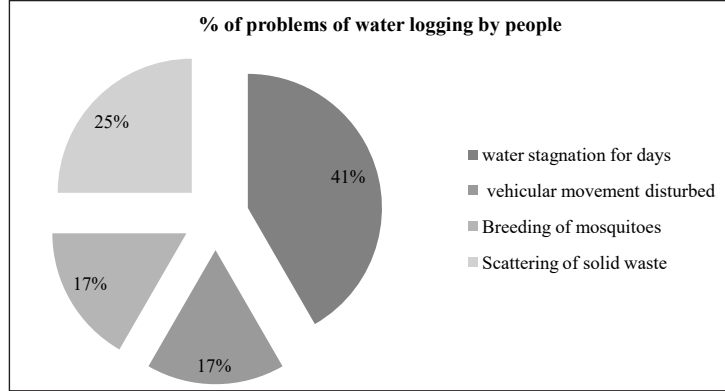
**Fig. 6: Percentage response to prime reason for the project**



Source: Author

Zone 1 is the most affected area, as it does not have any stormwater management and was not part of the new development. 41 per cent of respondents stated that during the monsoons, water stagnation remains for days in the old zone resulting in many problems like disturbing vehicular movement, breeding of mosquitoes as well as the scattering of solid waste (Fig. 7).

**Fig. 7: Percentage responses to water logging**

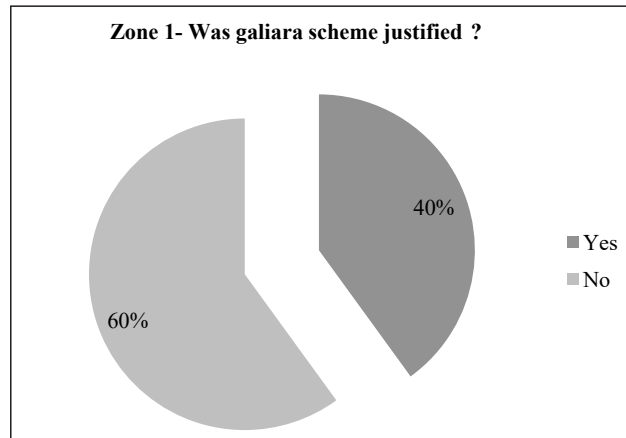


Source: Author

### Was Galiara Scheme justified?

Sixty per cent of the respondents do not think in zone 1 that the scheme was justified as their businesses were evicted overnight by shifting their shops behind the façade (Fig. 8). The shop owner/ keepers were doing good business before the heritage project. Their sales went down, by the coming up of a new façade.

**Fig. 8: Percentage Responses of Galiara Scheme**



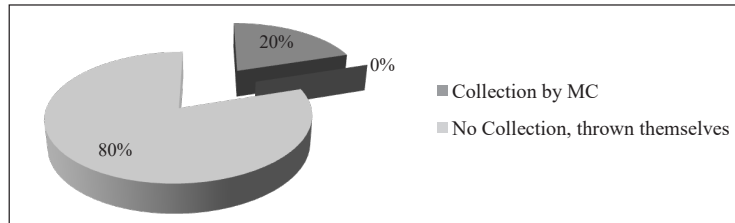
Source: Author

### Solid waste collection

Eighty per cent of respondents from zone 1 stated that there is no collection of solid waste and it is thrown in the nearest point thereby increasing more solid waste in this zone (Fig. 9). Piles of garbage heaps

are noticeable in old zone as there is no sanitation and waste collection in this zone.

**Fig. 9: Percentage Responses for Solid Waste collection by Municipal Corporation**



Source: Author

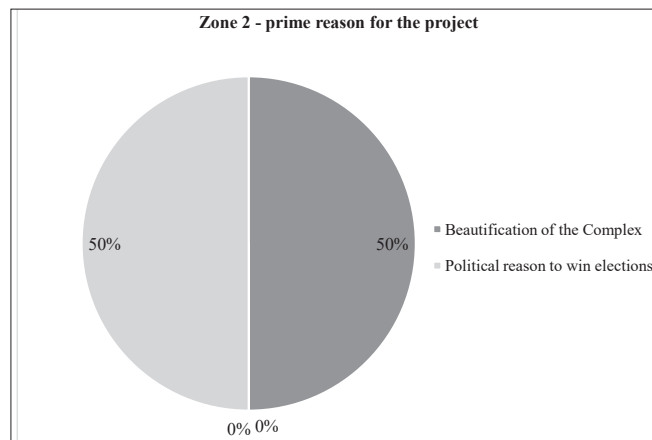
### Issues of Zone 1

Issues faced by people, traders, shopkeepers of Zone 1. are: no public toilets available in the area, hence everyone has to travel far for using public toilets; collection of Municipal Solid Waste by Municipal Corporation is nil (or very poor) the shopkeepers make their internal arrangements to handle solid waste; the stormwater drainage and water logging are also the major issues faced by the shopkeepers in Zone 1. Appropriate measures need to be taken care by the authorities to improve Zone 1.

### ZONE 2

In Zone 2, 50 per cent respondents stated that both beautifications of the complex and political reason to win the election were the prime objectives for the project to take place (Fig. 10).

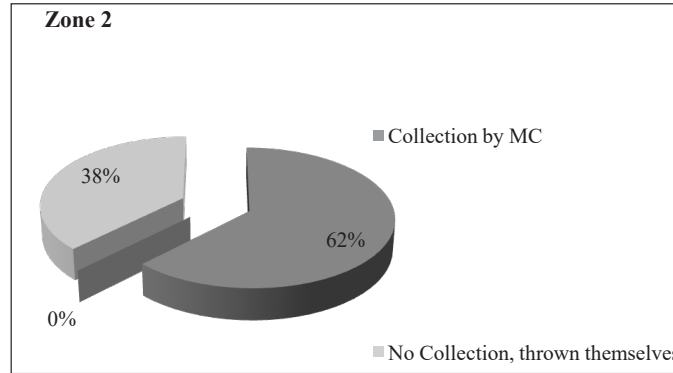
**Fig. 10: Percentage Responses to Prime Reason for the project**



Source: Author

In Zone 2, 62 per cent respondents stated that solid waste is collected by Municipal Corporation, and 38 per cent respondents stated that it was thrown by the people themselves (Fig. 11).

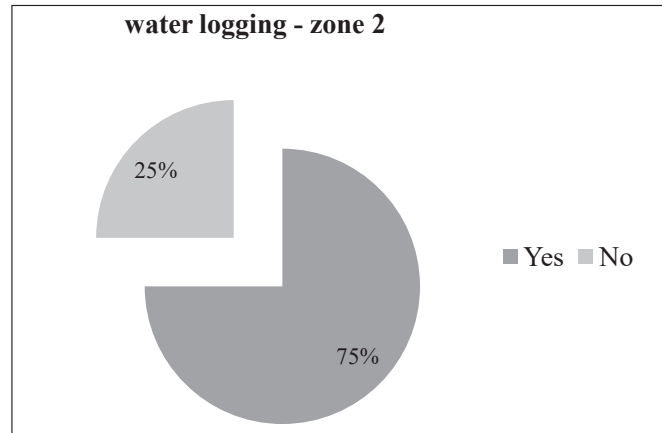
**Fig. 11: Percentage Responses to Solid Waste Collection**



Source: Author

In Zone 2, water logging is a problem with 75 per cent of people stated that there was a huge problem in monsoon which disturbed their day-to-day activities (Fig. 12).

**Fig. 12: Percentage Responses to Water Logging**



Source: Authors

In Zone 2, people stated that they were 100 per cent justified that the project was executed.

### Issues of Zone 2

In Zone 2, there are no public toilets. Hence, it is a huge problem

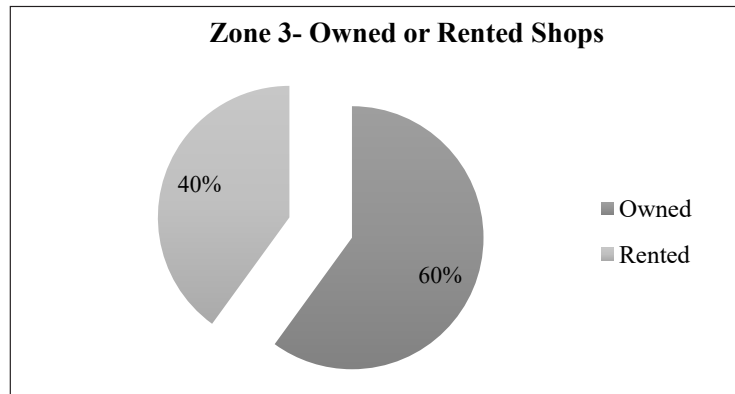
for the shopkeepers and tourists visiting this Zone. Also, there is a problem of stormwater drainage and waterlogging in this zone as well as in Zone 1.

### Zone 3

In Zone 3, 60 per cent shops are owned and 40 per cent are on rent (Fig. 13).

This implies that 40 per cent have either moved away or given their shops on rent to other people who are already running shops. It also implies that the majority of the shopkeepers are running their own shops and are the owners.

**Fig. 13: Percentage Responses of Shop Owners or on rent**



Source: Author

In Zone 3, 60 per cent of respondents said that the reason behind the improvement of the complex was the beautification of the whole complex while 40 per cent responded that there were political reasons to win elections and hence beautification was the main objective behind the vote banks (Fig. 14).

In Zone 3, 70 per cent respondents said that public toilets are available near the Golden temple and there is no difficulty as compared to the other two zones (Fig. 15).

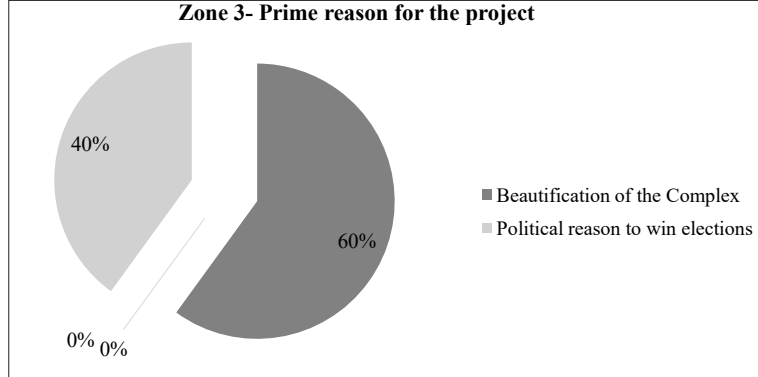
In Zone 3, 79 per cent of shops are owned and 21 per cent of shops have been rented out for the three zones. Hence, this explains that commercial areas have been majorly owned and operated by people.

### *Zone 3: Response to New Development*

The response of the shopkeepers towards the New Development was

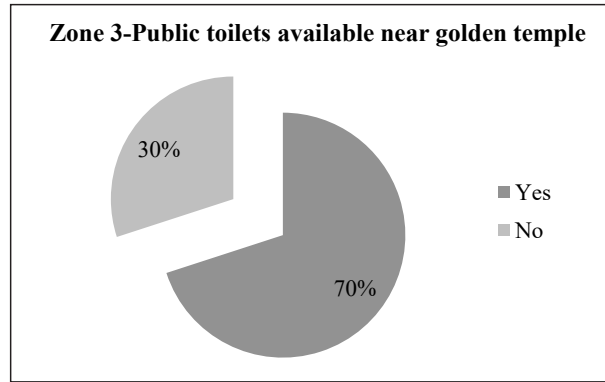


**Fig. 14: Percentage Responses to the Prime reasons for the Project**



Source: Authors

**Fig. 15: Percentage Responses to availability of Public Toilets**



Source: Authors

very positive. 79 per cent of the shopkeepers were happy with the development while 21 per cent of the shopkeepers were not happy. The implications for the same has been explained further as a satisfied and non-satisfied response:

**Percentage respondents satisfied with these developments from Zone 1, 2 and 3**

**Satisfied Response** - From the 79% of the satisfied response, people either have increased business and profits or the development has not affected their business to much extent. Satisfied response was seen by the shopkeepers of **Zone 3 - New Development Zone** and **Zone 2 - Old Development Zone** explained as 41% of people thought that the new development areas increased walk-in clients for them and profits too. (New Development Zone) 59% of people thought that their business

was not affected much so they were happy too, while for the Zone 2 Old Development, people somewhat had happy responses based upon the fact that their business was not affected much by the new development as it mostly included cloth traders 40-50 years old who had fixed clients and walk- in clientele was very less for them.

### **Percentage respondents not satisfied with these developments from Zone 1, 2 and 3**

**Not satisfied Respondents in Zone 3** – was 21 per cent, who were unhappy towards the new development as the displacement has resulted in losses, restricted tourists from visiting old development areas, etc. In Zone 1, the 33 per cent non-satisfactory responses thought that the new development areas resulted in loss of business, 33% shopkeepers faced decreased cliental engagement, 17% thought that this development affected the reputation of their family business, 17% considered both losses in business and decrease in cliental engagement as the reason for high losses. Other problems included that the shops affected by hindrance and deviation - The Gates of the brick *jalli* have been kept so small that they remain unnoticed by tourists and this has resulted in fewer walk-in clients, ultimately affecting the business. Also, no hoardings are allowed outside the gates and there is no provision of signboards for these shops by the authority.

### **Infrastructure – Public Toilets**

Golden Temple attracts huge tourist flow to the extent of about one lakh per day, hence public toilet is one of those infrastructural needs which has to be taken care of urgently. For such a huge complex, only 1 public toilet has been constructed in the Golden Temple Complex, maintained by Sulabh Social Service Organisation (SSSO). One more public toilet was constructed near the *fawara* (fountain) chowk but it never became operational. Hence people end up using toilets of multi-level parking which are in bad shape and always stinking causing problems to pilgrims coming from far-flung areas, Jallianwala Bagh, Food Outlets (Shudh Dhaba, Mcdonalds, and Subway), and Showrooms.

#### ***A) Public Toilet maintained by SSSO***

This is the only Public Toilet available in the Golden temple complex near Ghanta Ghar Complex, which is being maintained by the Sulabh Social Service Organisation.

It is majorly used by tourists and shopkeepers of the Ghanta Ghar complex. One of the major drawbacks here is that being the only public toilet, it still has paid access to the people. It may not be

accessible to wheelchair users as the steps act as a barrier with no facility of the ramp.

***B) Public Toilet by Municipal Corporation - not in working condition***

Another public toilet was constructed by - Municipal Corporation but was found in non-working condition. This toilet is located near the *Fawara* Chowk but never recognised for public use, for which the corporation has no answers.

***C) Shopkeepers having no access to toilets***

The 75 per cent of the shopkeepers who do not have access to the public toilet end up using the toilets of multi-level Parking, Jallianwala Bagh, Food Outlet (Subway, Shudh Dhaba, and Mcdonalds), or Showrooms. With no specific public toilets, people access the following: Majority of shopkeepers 57 per cent use toilets of multi-level parking, 24 per cent use showroom toilets, and 19 per cent the food outlets such as Shudh Dhaba. Multi-level Parking, being the closest, is the toilet used by majority. While the Jallianwala Bagh toilet is the only one used by tourists and not by shopkeepers. Hence, public toilet is an area of concern, especially in these zones where approximately one lakh tourists visit the holy shrine on daily basis.

**Infrastructure - Parking, Encroachment & Bollards**

Parking has been found out to be a huge concern. A multi-level parking was constructed for parking 4-wheeled vehicles only that too for tourists. But 2-wheelers were not given any consideration. This has resulted in problems for the shopkeepers. For them, the multi-level car parking is too far away and they end up using 2-wheeled vehicles more often for which there is no dedicated parking and to restrict the vehicular movement upon the Heritage Street, bollards have been implemented on-site which has now resulted in encroachments as people end up parking their vehicles till the point, they are accessible i.e., near the bollards. The authentication of Heritage Street looks disturbed by this situation as we see 2-wheelers parked everywhere around, also disturbing the urban fabric.

In the context of parking facilities for Shopkeepers - 100 per cent of shopkeepers say that there is no parking for them, they park cars in the multilevel parking and 2-wheelers as a part of the encroachment.

Zone 1 - Uneven and unorganised placement of 2 wheelers parked

anywhere, is disturbing this zone. It is also reducing the right of way of the already narrow roads. Hence, this situation is very critical and needs immediate attention.

Zone 2 - This zone experiences a similar kind of problem as seen in Zone 1. Being the residential area, the vehicles are haphazardly parked by the shopkeepers disturbing the lives of people staying there. Again, it reduces the right of way of the already very narrow road.

Zone 3 - This zone does not have directly parked vehicles upon its streets due to the restricted entry due to bollards and barricading.

### **Bollards and Encroachments**

With the development of new area of the Heritage Street, automatic bollards have been implemented to restrict the vehicular movement on Heritage Street. These bollards are beneficial for Heritage Street but have resulted in other problems such as encroachments by the two-wheelers, disturbing the scenario to a larger extent. These have resulted in prioritisation of movement, but have resulted in impacts along the same time. These have resulted in the restriction of movement and often act as a barrier for the tourists, reducing the right of way.

Zone 2 (Old Development) -Fixed Bollards have been found out in some places in this zone resulting in a barrier as they cannot be changed according to the requirement. The street in this zone is too narrow, though fixed bollards have been provided at the exit; entry is unrestricted allowing two-wheelers lined up across the street.

### **Character of Bazaar**

The character of Bazaar includes the urban design and related features of heritage, building, material, design, and the style it follows. These areas are such that they massively need preservation and enhancement to overcome all the drawbacks. The 36 per cent of the area here belongs to the new development area which maintains unity in design and similarity in signboards. The 64 per cent is from the Old Development areas where no character has been maintained as such.

### ***New Development Zone***

While the Heritage Street around the Golden temple has been turned into wonders, in fact, the entire 1-km stretch now looks like a huge, open monument a La-European Style destinations such as Rome, Venice, or Florence.

*The Amalgamation of Different Styles* - The Character of the new development includes the amalgamation of different styles ranging from Rajput Architecture, European Style Architecture. The question here arises in the mind is where is the Built heritage of Punjab, the elements and design principles of architecture of Traditional heritage has been lost in these newly built styles or so-called replicas of the Western world.

*The Similarity in signboards* - The New Development Zone maintains the similarity in signboards taken as an inspiration from the markets of Jaipur. The question here arises can a state have its form of unique urban design guidelines or form-based codes, especially for the walled cities under which the strict guidelines can guide them better development.

*Power Transmission System* - Underground Power Transmission System has been followed in the new development zone which is a good initiative.

*Provision for Sitting Area* - The wooden benches are as per standards. The seater is not bulky and only 400 mm wide.

### **Old Development Zone**

Non-uniformity in design has been experienced in Zone 2 of the old development area whereas Zone 1 has been made with a traditional entry, but not integrated with the functions behind the screen (Pic 6). Zone 1 has no street lighting covering the 36 per cent in the pie, lighting arrangements have been done at the individual level only. While 64 per cent consisting of Zone 2 and 3 have proper lighting arrangements.

**Pic 6: Beautiful facade at the front and Reality at back**



Source: Field Survey, Feb 2019

### **CONCLUSION**

It is concluded that this project if implemented in an integral way taking in the considerations of Urban Form and Urban Functions could have been a huge success. Public Toilet has been identified as the most basic requirement which is missing in Zone 1 and Zone 2 which are not part of



new development. The old development comprising of Zone 1 and Zone 2 has basic infrastructure issues like collection of MSW, water logging during monsoons, even congestion and parking problems. These are the areas of immediate concern. The authorities should intervene and look in the vicinity of Zone 3 as well, which is not the case in the present scenario. Zone 1 and Zone 2 are total neglect while a lot of money was poured into making heritage street by changing its character and urban design making them European style and aesthetically more like Jaipur in Indian Context. It can also be concluded that according to the scope of the project, Heritage Street will not just be restricted to a stretch but accessible to a larger area in and around, benefitting the shopkeepers as well as tourists. Public participation being the most important should have been taken into consideration while planning and designing Heritage Street considering not just the street but the entire Heritage Zone.

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