

*Reviewing the value assessment of Vaastu Shastra in the
Walled city of Jaipur*

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This article examines the literature available on architecture and planning of Jaipur's walled city through the context of the Vaastu Shastra, 'an ancient Indian 'science' of town planning and architecture' intended to achieve a balance among functionality, bio-climatic design, socio-cultural and religious beliefs that have been continuously adapted and reinterpreted since it was originally written in Vedic period. The walled city of Jaipur strongly reflects this approach to the organisation of the built environment at all scales, giving the city a sense of timelessness that still endures.

Vaastu Shastra and modern planning share similar approaches and concepts in the organisation and production of space, such as their emphasis on cardinal orientation, geomancy, topography, hydrology, etc. Both seek to achieve harmony between these spaces and the natural features and ecology within these spaces. However, in India today, Vaastu Shastra is widely regarded as "a pseudo-science",¹ as its concepts are based on a complex system of intuition, astrology, superstition and philosophy, which can only be partially explained by contemporary science.² Moreover, very less importance is given to Vaastu Shastra's methods in any literature on the built environments, even including writings about historic urban environments such as Jaipur. This relative absence raises an interesting question that forms the basis of this study: given the significance of the Vaastu Shastra to the development of In-

¹Vastu Shastra refers to the study of architecture. However, according to many rationalists and scientists, the way it is practised today has nothing to do with science or logic; it is in reality, pseudoscience and superstition in the current context.

²According to Sachdev and Tillotson, these biases were misleading since a thorough reading of the Vaastu Shastra literature demonstrates that the architect is free to modify the proposals to new materials and designs of architecture, layout restrictions and even non-square spaces.

dian historic cities like Jaipur and its resonance through modern planning, why is it not more recognised or better acknowledged by those engaged in the protection of these sites?

Jaipur, being one of the oldest cities planned according to Vaastu Shastra principles, stands as a very important example to understand this ancient approach to urban organisation and to question its scientific credentials. In this growing modern city, Vaastu Shastra has maintained the original planning intact throughout centuries, contributing significantly to the city earning the title of UNESCO World Heritage City in April 2019. Thus, the exceptional design of Jaipur by the royal architect Vidyadhar Bhattacharya might be considered an outstanding testimony to the Vaastu Shastra and its importance in the Indian city's spatial organisation. This necessitates further research to better understand how and why the Vaastu Shastra is not highlighted enough by historians as well as practitioners engaged in the built environment today- even when there is a good amount of literature available on the subject.

There has been a considerable amount of research when it comes to the history of the walled city of Jaipur. Unfortunately, there were no written records kept by Vidyadhar or Jai Singh, however, there are official works prepared by the government of Rajasthan state as well as the department of Home Ministry which are very helpful. They were then referred by historians like Jadunath Sarkar (1984) and A. K. Roy (1978). These original documents are mainly found in local and regional languages such as Rajasthani, Persian, Sanskrit and Hindi. There are also some other notable researchers whose works are considered as a valuable contribution, E. B. Havell (1913), Ramraz (1834), Kirk (1978) and Dutt (1925) to name a few. Works from numerous travellers who visited India in the 19th and 20th century also become very useful to get a new perspective while studying Jaipur. Research works and travel diaries of M. Konishi (1985) and T. Ohji (1990) make a valuable contribution. Comparison of their description of Jaipur to A. Nilsson's (1987) interpretation has helped many academics to come up with theories in order to understand the city's form in particular.

There are many recent studies done by N. Rajbanshi (1993), Kulbhushan Jain (1994) and especially Vibhuti Sachdev (2002) who carried their research with an aim to understand the concepts of architecture and town planning. This resulted in many theories and interpretations of architectural practice to come forward in recent times. Dr Shikha Jain's work under Indian Heritage Cities Network named 'Walking into the Microcosm of Jaipur' became one of the most appreciated works on the walled city of Jaipur. These works became an inspiration to explore in greater detail the architectural history of the walled city. After analysing their works, it can be determined that all agreed to one common idea that the walled city of Jaipur is indeed planned according to the ancient Hindu cosmology- Vaastu Shastra.

For the purpose of this research, it was then necessary to look at a vast amount of texts on ancient Indian science of Vaastu Shastra. This included looking at various ancient classical

works such as Manasara and Arthashastra which were relevant for city architecture and planning in ancient India. These texts were written in Sanskrit language but later translated into English (1834) by P K Acharya named Architecture of Manasara Vol I-V. Many Indologists then used these translations for academic purposes and circulated them amongst designers and Vaastu Shastra experts. These texts helped understand the positions, proportions and directions of architectural elements at all scales. Works by Vaastu experts such as Gupta (1995), Arun naik (2008) and Jayadevi Venugopal (2012) also attempted to create further awareness about Vaastu Shastra.

However, the amount of literature available on Vaastu Shastra principles, specifically used in the walled city of Jaipur is surprisingly sparse as it lacks original research to some extent and is largely based on the reinterpretations of previous works, specifically B V Doshi's. Pritzker Prize winner, architect Doshi's analysis of this city's Vaastu Shastra in 'City and Symbol' (1989) has been widely accepted by many researchers and designers as a seminal reference. His methods to explain Vaastu Shastra principles were even used while preparing Jaipur's UNESCO nomination for World Heritage status. Researchers such as G. Tillotson (2002), Deepak Kumar Singh (2011), Saumya Kohli (2011), Ashwani Kumar (2014), Vrushali V.Toraskar, Gouri A. Mhetar and Manorama R. Patil (2017) took inspiration from Doshi's work and contributed further towards the research on this subject.

Apart from these, many written works fail to give importance to Vaastu Shastra in terms of its importance to the heritage of walled cities. This absence can be due to the pessimistic perspective of people towards Vaastu principles. Two cases seem to come forward evidently while researching the literature on the walled city. In the first instance, literature on Jaipur's architectural history and town planning is found with only some references to Vaastu Shastra. They only mention it with a short description. These literary works were mostly by modern architects and researchers. In the second instance, a vast amount of literature is found specifically on Vaastu principles used in the walled city where Jaipur's case study is used as an example. But those are written by Vaastu experts and Vaastu consultants only-which gives a single perspective towards Vaastu Shastra rather than an inclusive one.

This gap becomes clear while reading the UNESCO nomination dossier for the World Heritage City.³ In the document, Vaastu Shastra and its principles are only mentioned a few times. First in the 'Description' to acknowledge that city is built with Vastu principles and

³Sites must be of "outstanding universal value" and meet at least one of ten selection criteria in order to be listed on the World Heritage List. These standards are outlined in the Operational Guidelines for the Implementation of the World Heritage Convention, which, in addition to the text of the Convention, serve as the primary working framework on World Heritage. The World Heritage Cities Programme aims to support States Parties in their efforts to preserve and manage their urban heritage.

More information is available at: <https://whc.unesco.org/en/criteria/>

later in the ‘Brief synthesis’ and ‘Justification of Outstanding Universal Value’ sections again with similar descriptions stating “It (Jaipur) was set apart from previous Rajput capitals which were typically established amongst or hills but Jaipur broke this mould as a city designed on the plains with a formal grid iron plan reflective simultaneously of the urban planning prescriptions from ancient Vaastu treatise as well as contemporary western city plans.” This cursory acknowledgement invites further research with which an attempt can be made to understand the importance of Vaastu Shastra intellectually and methodologically within contemporary contexts.

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