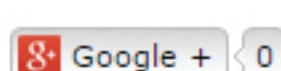


# More high streets, less shopping malls is need of the hour

*In core areas of the city, street-facing shopping should be encouraged up to the footpath line in residential and commercial buildings for energy and space-efficient use, economic vibrancy and safety-enhancing design.*



*Surendra Hiranandani*

More high-streets, less shopping malls is the need of the hour. The Modi government in its impressive plan of developing 100 smart cities and transforming 500 cities, must give adequate emphasis towards development of “high streets.”

Today, the most important concept of a good city is its high streets. How successful a high street is in a city will indicate how healthy a city is, how lively a city is. These city sidewalks, the city footpaths, the city pedestrian walkways provide the soul and life to a city, not enclosed areas where pedestrians hangout.

If you take away the high street shopping and put them into malls, you are taking away the life and soul of all street life which is the most essential factor in making a city look beautiful, look lively, look happening and be happening. Malls are basically an extension of the gated community concept. You are encasing people into an enclave. Closed, away from what is happening in the city. It's almost like imprisonment of something which should be very social and part of the fabric of the city.

Pedestrians should be out in the open, interacting with people and high street shopping encourages that. There's very little excitement you can get from only seeing landscaping and gardens. Imagine a pedestrian walking down a street and he just sees beautiful compound walls with miles and miles of bougainvillea's or flowers; Beyond a point it is not interesting!

You need the high street shopping to provide life to the street, to provide places to of course visit but also for civic amenities, cultural areas, restaurants and coffee shops to hangout on. This is the reason why in the most successful cities in the world they allow even the restaurants to put a few chairs and tables on to the sidewalk. Its encouraged because it adds life to the street.

Pedestrian friendly focus-concepts such as “walk-to-work” were laudably included in the 2014 BJP manifesto. Streets should be 22 to 30 metres wide with intersections 300 metres apart. Smaller pedestrian only lanes of 6 metres to 12 metres width should also be encouraged.

On street shopping and cafes should be encouraged. Retail shops and schools form the spine around which to attract residents. Street front retail will also help in creating an automatic safety measure against crimes and atrocities against people, especially women.

In core areas of the city, street-facing shopping should be encouraged up to the footpath line in residential and commercial buildings for energy and space-efficient use, economic vibrancy and safety-enhancing design. Commercial buildings need to compulsorily provide space for street shops and restaurants on the ground floor touching footpath line.

Buildings in the core areas must be to human scale design with street front programming and must touch the footpaths, i.e. they should have no setbacks. This ensures vibrant street life and accessibility, and prevents cocoons of the rich living in isolated towers with private parks, security and clubs.

In the first phase, on-street shopping and cafes should be encouraged and ground floor on-street shopping and restaurants can be made compulsory. This creates entrepreneurship, provides a stake in the city, and makes it safer to walk.

While multi-storey shopping malls can be beneficial, discourage malls with car parks in city centers as these congest central areas with vehicles. More people on the street also means superior opportunities for social interaction, and this will go long way in facilitating a socially inclusive community.

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