

## Small Town Ramtek A Traditional Sustainable Community in India

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### ABSTRACTS :

*The traditional settlements all over world are observed to have been developed near the natural resources like water bodies and/or the forest resource looking into availability of food and fodder. With time it grew in terms of population, economic activities etc. bringing changes in its settlements. The population increase gave rise of demand for the resources thus encouraging for the search of options for food, fodder, clothing and shelter. Ramtek is situated at the foothills of Ramgiri the last range of Satpuda mountain located at 45 kms on the North East of Nagpur in the vidarbha region of Maharashtra state of India. It has seen the history of hundreds of years since the early settlement of Jainas on the North Western foot of Ramgiri hills. With time it observed the settlements by different communities like hindus and muslims. Today, it is observed to be one of the major religious centre in Vidarbha for Hindus, Jainas, Muslims and Buddhists with sufficient percentage of other communities. All these Communities have developed their own areas. With time they have got connected to each other and what we observe today is the small town connecting all the earlier traditional community settlements. If we look backward to use of resources the early settlers might be using the resources from the local but with time and developments the footprint of the human resource has gradually increased. As per census 2011 Ramtek shows the population 22,310 souls. Moreover it has seen the developments in the form of residential areas, education centers, Industries, commercial areas etc. With these developments there is observed the change in the way of living, types of materials, construction techniques, water supply and drainage system, sewerage system. With this pace of physical growth can we expect the town Ramtek to be sustainable for the longer time? Whether this switchover is transforming the sustainable traditional community into unsustainable one? These are the types of questions which needs to be thought by the architects, planners and sociologists..... This is an attempt to search the answer for the same by taking the example of Ramtek from Vidarbha region of the Maharashtra state of India.*

**KEY WORDS:** *Small Town, Organic settlement, Physical Growth, Sustainable Community, Modern development.*

### 1. Introduction:

Unsustainability has become a common issue in the large urban Developments in India and at the worlds level. All developed nations are trying for achieving the sustainability by adapting various ways and means. For Developing countries the issue is not so severe. The reason for that is the existence of small and medium towns and the rural community. Small to

Traditional settlements in India present a physical fabric, truly responsive to social, cultural and climatic requirements. In addition to these, there is a naturally evolving balance between the built and open spaces, between community and personal needs. Religion has played a major role in the way of life of the people in India compared to any other country. The religious buildings in most of the cases were the nucleus of settlement thereby shaping their socio cultural profile. The religious areas not only functioned as a religious place but also as a cultural and philosophical center and the same time supported the economy through their activities.

Ramtek is one of those strategically located areas wherein diverse civilization and cultures met in past. The various hills – Kaikai hills, Ramgiri hills, Nagarjun hills, Hidimba hills covers the area. The Sur river and Kapila River flow through the region. This area was very much famous for its natural beauty and also its association with the lord Ram. It is believed that lord Ram had stayed in this area while in exile. Due to this mythical association this area started developing as a pilgrimage center. This area was known as the “Mahadwar of Kashi” (gate for Kashi) as the pilgrimage route started with this area for the people going to Kashi. Ramtek is also called as kashi of Vidarbha.

At present Ramtek is a small town (C category) in Nagpur District on Northeast of Nagpur city with a human resource population 22,310 (census 2011). It is bounded by Madhya Pradesh state on its Northern side, and Bhandara district of Maharashtra on eastern side. It is connected with the other areas of Nagpur District through the boundary of Maharashtra state. The National Highway No. 7 Nagpur Jabalpur Highway passes through this area. The state highway no. 249 (Mansar – Tumsar) passing through the Ramtek town joins this national highway at Mansar.

## **2. Historic Development of Ramtek:**

Historic Development of Ramtek shows organic growth with the settlements from different religious and cultural background. It was an important site in the Vidarbha Region. The area is rich in natural resources with the presence of forest, water bodies, black cotton soil etc. The occupation of the people in the historic period was mainly agriculture and allied activities with the use of appropriate materials for the household activities and for construction of buildings.

Jain settlement is one of the oldest settlements observed to have developed in this region. In the Mourya period, this area was under great Ashoka. The architectural history dates back to the Satvahana period (250 A.D.). The excavated site at Mansar shows the evidences of a rich architectural development in that period. The Devakulam (Royal Temple) and the palace complex show that this area was an important political center in that period.

After the fall of Satvahana, the next rulers were the Vakatakas of Purika from Central India. They defeated Satvahanas in 350 A.D. and established their empire in Vidarbha up to the some parts of Deccan. After the first Vakataka ruler Pravarsen- I, this empire got divided into 4 parts. The archaeological findings show that the one capital was the Vasim in Vidarbha and other one was Nandivardhana near Ramtek (5 kms on south of Ramtek). Other two places are still unknown. In 395 A.D. the Vakataka ruler Rudrasen- II, shifted his capital to Nandivardhana. This was the time when this area was of utmost importance, as this empire was extended almost all over the Vidarbha. Nandivardhana became the politically important center. In the same period the queen constructed the temple of Lord Ram on Ramgiri hills near Nandivardhana due to its association with lord Ram.

In this period, it is believed that the great poet Kalidasa composed one of his fascinating poems, “Meghaduta” sitting on the hills of Ramgiri. The description of the place in Meghduta signifies it as an Indian sense of cultural landscapes.

The other temples constructed on the Ramgiri hills like Rudra Narsimha temples still exist. Vakataka disappeared from the historical scene from 550 A.D. Vidarbha was then taken over by Kalachuries of Mahishmati. (Modern day Maheshwar). Ramtek region was also ruled by the Kalachuries though no remains

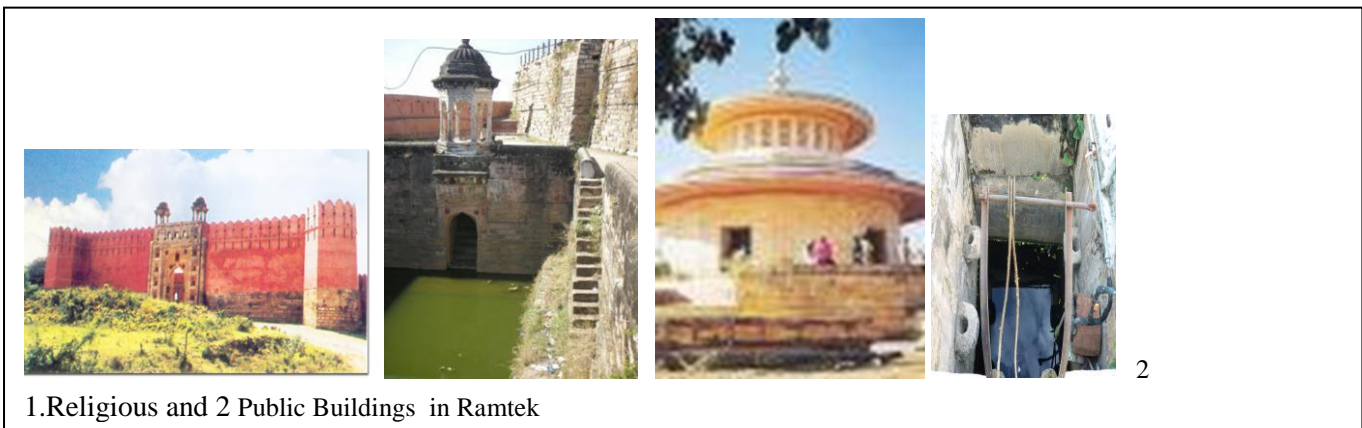
of this period are to be found at the site. The Rashtrakutas were feudatories of the Kalachuries and ruled directly over the Vidarbha Region. The last Kalachuri king Buddha raja was defeated by the Pulkeshin II of the early Chalukyas. During the reign of the later Chalukyas, a part of eastern Vidarbha was occupied by the Paramaras of Dhar.

In the last quarter of 12<sup>th</sup> century A.D., the Yadavas of Devgiri came into prominence and ruled over Vidarbha. In the year 1204 A.D. the Yadavas were defeated by Allauddin Khilji and had to pay tribute to the Delhi. The Hindu Kingdom of Devgiri ended in 1318 A.D. Hence Yadavas rule over Vidarbha and Ramtek region came to an end. The Yadavas were prolific temple builders. They propagated a style of temple building known as Hemadpanthi named after the Amatya Hemadri, minister to the Mahadev and Ramachandra Yadav. Hemadri hailed from Vidarbha.

After the fall of Yadavas, till the entry of the Mughals on the historic scene, the gonds chieftains of the central India were free from any political dominance.

Ramtek was later under the Gond house of Devgad (Devgad was under the house of Gadha- ruled by the famous Rani Durgavati). Jatba's grandson, Bakht Buland founded the city of Nagpur and later shifted his capital there. He died in 1706 A.D. Ramtek appears to be a pleasure resort for the Gonds since then. Gond rule in Vidarbha came to an end in the mid eighteenth century when the Marathas under Raghuji Bhosala –I, made forays into the reign. With the coming of Britishers the Ramtek was under C.P. & Berar. Today Ramtek is the tahsil headquarter in the Nagpur District.

During above historic periods the centre was at Ramgiri hill (Ramtek) and the developments were happening around it. All the religious cultures were developed in the separate areas/ zones. The types of buildings observed to have been constructed are Temples, Mosques, Stupas etc. under Religious type, baolis, lakes, wells, chhatris, monuments, fortress, police station and other government offices under the Public buildings, Hospitals and Educational Institutes under institution type, palaces and houses under Residential type.



### 3. Physical Growth of Ramtek:

Increase in the population has given Physical growth of Ramtek. It can be observed in phases as follows.

Phase I: Early settlement on north at Jain Temple

Phase II: Settlements at the western side foothills and near the water bodies (Lakes)

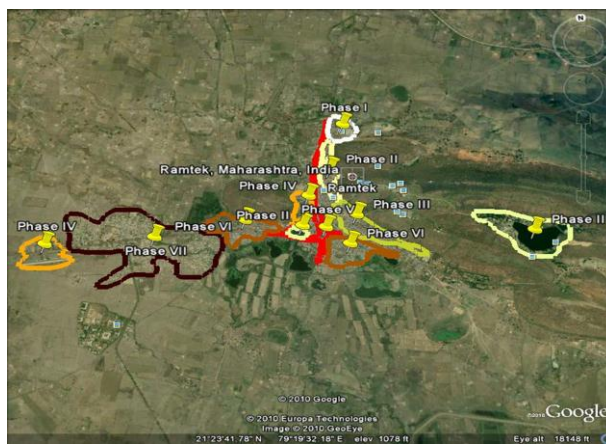
Phase III: Extension of settlements on the south side of the foothill

Phase IV: British period settlements and government offices

Phase V: Bazar area, Extension or road from Bazar to Jain Mandir

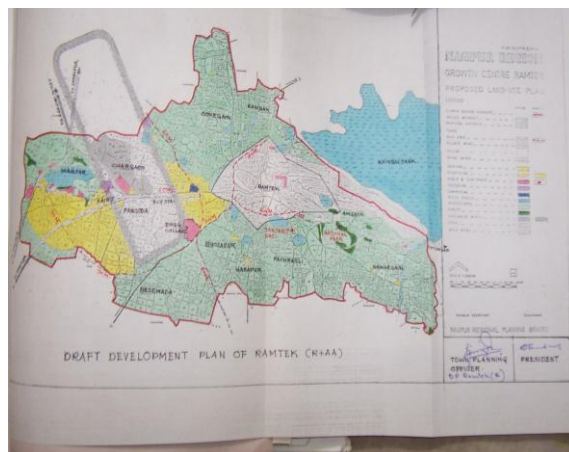
Phase VI: Area near Bus stand

Phase VII: Contemporary/ Modern Developments



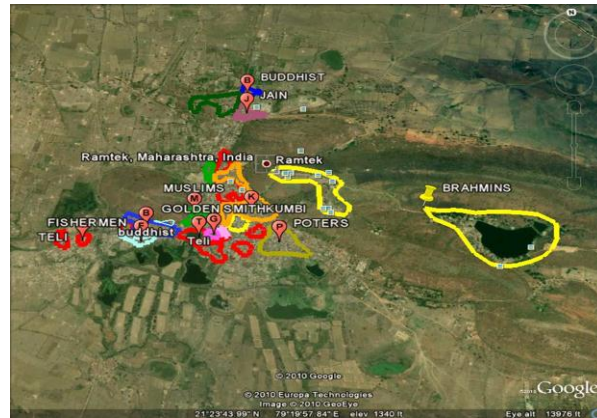
3. Google Map of Ramtek showing the phasewise physical growth pattern

Contemporary and modern developments are observed outside the boundary of the development plan I (1993). Development Plan II proposal gives the physical growth outside the municipal boundary hence the proposal is there to increase the municipal boundary for the Ramtek town.



4. 2013 Development plan, Ramtek

The Ramtek observes the distribution of population as per their Religion and caste / occupations as follows:



5. Google Map of Ramtek showing Dominating Religions/ Castes and occupations in areas

Due to physical growth and the modern developments in the region the human footprints are increasing and natural resources like water, land, forest are being overused. As a result of which the resources are getting scarce. This is adding on to environmental degradation at micro level.

#### 4. Future of Ramtek Settlement:

Development is demanding the modern life style which provokes the use of the unsustainable materials which is degrading the environment on day to day basis. Also, Migration of population observed is under the sectors of economy thus disturbing the balance.

With the present rate of development many of the natural resources are on the verge of getting scarce, environment is getting degraded. In such situation future of the settlements like Ramtek seems to be dark unless there is strict observation of sustainable materials.

#### 5. Conclusion:

As the world's population grows, improving living standards without destroying the Environment is a Global challenge. Most developing countries with rapid population growth are facing the urgent need to improve living standards. As we exploit the nature to meet the present needs, we are destroying the resources needed for the future.

It is made therefore necessary to make the old continue to co-exist with modern Development. Hence urban conservation should encompass the entire built heritage, together with the living environment. If we fail to do so then all such settlements may have to face the problems due to scarcity of resources and the other environment related problems which is not inviting for healthy life.

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Photographs: Courtesy the Authors

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