



Branding Cities - Citizens as Brand Architects

Karuna Gopal

Premise:

- ▶ The *Collective Knowledge, Pride, Attitude, Savvy & Self Projection* of citizens can become a *formidable and a Gigantic Force* to impact a city's Economic Growth
- ▶ Citizens can become the best *Advertising Tool* in a city Branding Process.

Backdrop:

The term Public Private Partnership has been around for a while and Governance as a process is becoming more inclusive. Today, In India, Public private partnerships have emerged as the core of government's policies and procedures. Many a model has emerged while the basic underlying principle remained the same---Powered by the Government and driven by committed private professionals.

A case for a Two way street: *True Partnering:*

Governments everywhere are working towards *Speed, Efficiency, Transparency, Consistency and Reliability*. And in an attempt to become *truly responsive*, are improving internal efficiencies, integrating services and introducing new services.

Can we, as responsible citizens become enablers? How do we perceive our role in the entire process of governance? Are we doing our bit as stakeholders?

We, as citizens, are considered to be the 'Raison d'etre' of the Government. Having become responsible for its creation, isn't it our responsibility to ensure that it delivers? In this context can we ask ourselves the following questions?

Can we reduce the *Quantity of governance* by partnering?

Can we enhance the *Quality of governance* by partnering?
Can we *Align, move in Sync*, and work *in Tandem* with the state Machinery?
Can we stop screaming for change and *Become change* itself?

Why Brand Cities?

We all know that Image and Progress always go hand in hand. Although it is true that Image is the consequence of progress rather than vice versa, its true that when *both are carefully managed in tandem*, they help each other along and create accelerated change.

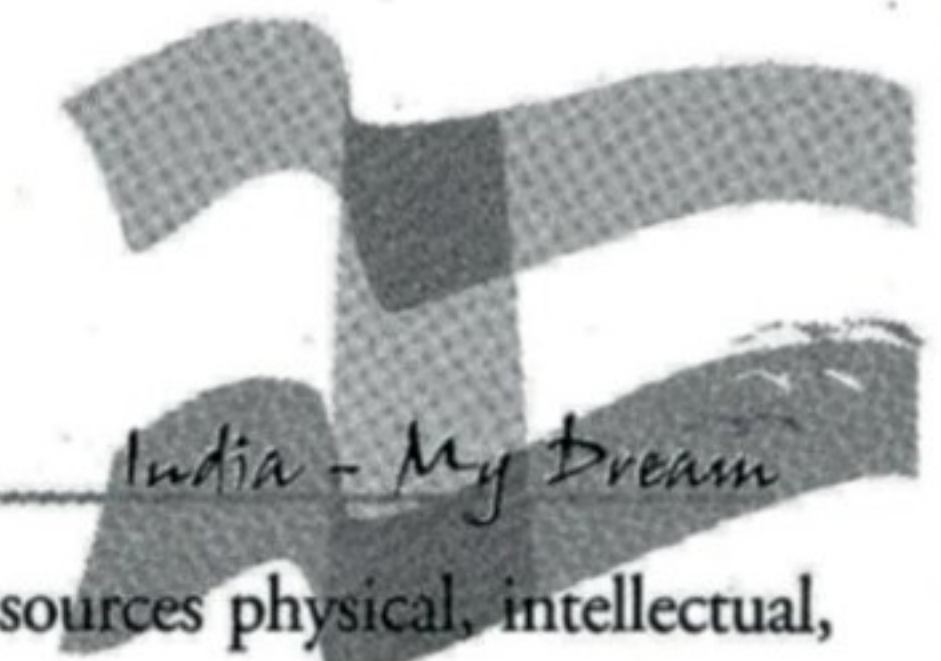
John F Kennedy said "We neglect our Cities to our Peril, for in neglecting them, we neglect the nation".

It is an accepted fact that cities play an important role in economic growth and development of the Nation. Most cities are the state's financial and commercial capitals. They are nerve centers for entrepreneurial activity creating a very high visibility for the state and the Nation. Branding Cities can be a powerful exercise to enable economic development and wealth creation for the Nation.

What does Branding do?

Branding gives a distinct identity to the city by making it preferred to, competition. The brand value is not a tangible value. We can't measure it very easily but certainly it represents capital. Its as good as money in the bank...Cities can borrow against it, invest it. Branding helps attract more investments, attract quality human resources, resulting in more activity, more enterprise, creating more capital for the city. Cities can expect more Growth, more Prosperity and therefore more Salability.

Branding makes this virtuous cycle possible.



The art of Branding

Whose responsibility is branding anyway?

In India, CEOs of states are discussing passionately about Branding states. Some progressive states have crafted elaborate and univocal expression of their Brand Identities. Branding cannot be achieved by expensive advertisements and promotional campaigns by the state alone. It is a fundamental *Strategic Process* that involves every stakeholder in its delivery. To be effective, it has to. We citizens have to partner in true sense with the state machinery in its delivery.

How is it done?

A City's Brand Strategy should have a most Compelling Strategic Vision for the City. The Vision should represent a "Responsive entity" with an *inspiring history*, a *reliable presence* and *promising future*. This Vision should represent the collective dream of all the stakeholders.

The only limits are, as always, those of Vision"

----- James Broughton

Having arrived a compelling Vision, are we done with Branding? Can vision statements per se compel and propel cities to achieve?. It certainly is a starting point. If it is not *shared, enhanced, internalized* and *acted upon* by citizens, it becomes ineffective. How many corporate examples have we not seen where a brilliantly written Vision statement remained a beautiful picture on the wall, and many a powerful Mission statement failed to move the commitment muscle in the employees? Can a city song impact if it fails to become the tune that gets unconsciously hummed by every citizen?

This City's Vision is to be supported, reinforced and enriched by *every act of communication* between the city and the rest of the Nation and outside of Nation. These acts of communication include how it promotes itself for Trade, Tourism, inward Investments and recruitment. The way it behaves in acts of policy and ways in which these acts are communicated. The way it represents, promotes and shares its culture, the way its citizens behave when abroad and in other cities, how they treat visitors at home, what experience they give, how they treat, preserve



and enhance their city's resources physical, intellectual, spiritual and emotional...

Capital creation by living the Brand:

Consider the following points:

- ▶ People form opinions about our cities based on the *Image we citizens* project.
- ▶ Each one of us is *implicitly and explicitly* sending messages all the time that *collectively* add to the Image of our City.
- ▶ *Each one of us* irrespective of our profession & position is capable of marketing Products and services of the city, in fact *the city itself*.

When we choose to become open expressive individuals demonstrating the *City's core values* and what it stands for, we are creating value. By declaring our sense of belonging and pride all the time, we can create a new type of *Capital* that differs from the traditional physical capital. This type of capital is created when individual stakeholders openly *profess their love and commitment* for the city, sending powerful messages. These collective messages become the property of the city and can be capitalized upon. We, citizens can create a Formidable, Robust City Brand by just choosing to demonstrate a standardized behavior typified by "One Love, One Vision and One Song...Always..."

A city keen on Branding itself would have reached *critical milestone* if every citizen consciously indulges in this self-talk...

By doing what I am doing...

- ▶ Am I generating goodwill and doing my city proud? Am I adding to the Brand value of my City?
- ▶ Can I call myself a Brand Ambassador of my city?

It can claim that it has arrived, if every citizen incorporates this component of *Ambassadorship* as an integral part of his *unconscious pattern of Behavior*

Endnote:

This write up can be treated as a concept note to develop a Branding Strategy for a city. It is possible if all dimensions of the process are thought thru, i.e., the specific pay-offs for the citizens, and specific ways in which the state machinery can mobilize citizens' commitment by internal marketing.