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Understanding Transitional Spaces: A Case Study of three different phases of Delhi – Old Delhi, Colonial Delhi and Contemporary Delhi

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Abstract: ***Any space needs to be conceptualized by thorough study of environment, its surroundings and community needs. These spaces are planned to provide a distinct function but many spaces are created with no definite function and are used as a changeover between two spaces. These spaces are referred as 'Transition Spaces' and they generate a 'Spatial prospect' for many activities, rather than serving a specific function.***

In this changing time of urbanization, the skyline of the city is changing from traditional buildings to glittering glass and steel structures, overshadowing the existing fabric of the city. This change is sudden not gradual. One perceives the landmarks and left behind are the unrecognizable edges and nodes. These nodes and edges are spaces where people interact and intermingle and thus transition spaces are formed. These transition spaces play a vital role in environmental behavior.

The idea of this study is to understand the essence of a space in which one experiences a shift. This shift is important because that is the area where most of the activities happen. Space, like man, needs an identity else it would be lost in time. It is necessary for us to be able to distinguish between the ideas of such places, else understanding the transitions would be difficult.

'People and space depend on one another; they share each other their true colours.' (Hertzberger, 2000)

I. INTRODUCTION

Any kind of interaction, between people or spaces, is a combination of dialogue and meeting. It is very different from a non-transition space where one is engaged in personal activities. For example in a room, that can be a bedroom or a study, one has limited interaction, compared to the area from where you enter different rooms, has some liveliness. Thus, at every scale a transition space is important. Because it is deeply related to human being. The idea of succession is lost nowadays. We can see drastic changes in the built environment; a new phase of architecture is being noticed. The idea of change has become sudden. Spaces are designed very immaturely; everyday environment is not considered architecture. Thus, the character of a city is lost; the new development in all cities looks alike. Thus, one should think of sharing values and designing for change and permanence. This will help in coordinating the distributed design responsibilities. It demands not only great sophistication in designing but will also promises a architecture that will be more lively and dynamic, and complex than seen in the past.

'*Change must honour what was done earlier by other and permanence must offer space for who will come later'*. (Habraken, 2006: p.12-19)

Thus, with this understanding certain research questions arise. Such as:

- What qualities define a space for transition?
- What are formal and spatial attributes of transition spaces?

Delhi intrigues and amazes us for being our immediate surrounding. Therefore, this paper talks about transition spaces in Delhi at neighborhood level, from a street to a house. It invariably addresses various aspects related herewith.

- What kind of changes one experiences from a major street to the threshold of a house?
- What kind of transition spaces within this stretch of the neighborhood?
- What are the factors which make them as transition points?
- How the whole process of transition prepares one's mind to capture the change?

The area of research is limited to Delhi as an example, describing three different phases – Old Delhi, Colonial Delhi and Contemporary Delhi. Comparison of past from the present, and what should we imbibe from old and amalgamate in the new in order to keep intact the true essence of study of transition spaces.

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II. UNDERSTANDING TRANSITION SPACES

'Transitions are organizational points in our life marked by events – evocative points marking the recognition of change.'. (Lynch, 1972)

According to the "Oxford Dictionary" transition is a process of change from the original state or style to another, whether it is a physical change, or a visual change. Transition space is one which mediates between two different spaces. It is a space through which a person moves and experiences a change. It is the in-between space between two defined spaces. It prepares a person to experience the change.

'*A change in environment may be a growth or decay, a simple redistribution, an alteration in intensity, an alteration in form.*' (Lynch, 1972)

Transition happens at various levels and hierarchies. It is simplification of the process and the sequences. We transit so fast and frequently that we are not even aware of the presence of the transition space. It may be very interesting to know about it. We experience them from macro to micro levels. The role of formal and spatial attributes comes into play. Hierarchy of transition spaces is seen in any urban planning i.e. at city level, town level, district level, local level. The entire road network is a transition mode. Interaction spaces, gathering spaces, urban corridors, plazas stand as transition spaces in their own way. At macro level, Urban nodes can also be represented as transition spaces.

For example, one is travelling from a street into a narrow lane, or park or a walkway to a raised or shady platform to enter a shop. On that platform, many artefacts are lying, which makes one feel that he is in a process of entering another place which is the ultimate destination. Here, street networks make the narrow lane, building partitioning is the raised platform which creates a difference from where one parks and furniture are the artefacts which keep changing configuration but are in control. So the series of actions and different levels are seen at every stage. It depends on activities taking place like form, scale of the space, context, function, density etc.

The spatial attribute helps in looking at control of space; it brings to light territorial hierarchies different from those found in physical form. It actually brings in the sense of restricted entry to avoid unwanted intrusion. This affects the human instinct and helps one to understand the degree of public-ness which creates hierarchy from public to private. One is demarcating zone between inside and outside. For an instance.

The shop leaves part of the side walk free for passage and positions its boundary somewhere between building and road… In the corridors of elegant apartments as well, inhabitants may place potted plants, doormats, and umbrellas stands in front of their entries. Their claim, paralleling the shopkeeper's is understood and respected as identification of territory. In both cases, the margin created softens and articulates the razor thin line of demarcation offered by architecture.'

(Habraken 1998:p. 130)

Within these examples lies the essence of transition space, it is just not a clear demarcation between inside and outside but there is a shift in territorial claims and it can be inside-inside space and outside – outside space. It's a space in succession. One cannot define privateness and publicness as static conditions. Thus, it tends to be classified as private, semi-private, semi-public, and public. Also, it depends on one's perspective.

Thus, understanding of these minute phases of change helps in reinforcing the experience of transition space. One can feel that building which have transition between streets and inside are most composed spaces rather than those which directly open off the street.

One can summarize the above thoughts with the statement:

The experience of entering a building influences the way you feel inside the building. If transition is too abrupt there is no feeling of arrival, and inside of the building fails to be an inner sanctum…. The transition must, in effect, Destroy the momentum of the closeness, tension and distance which are appropriate to street behaviour, before people can relax completely…In all cases, what matters most is the transit exists, as an actual physical place, between the outside and inside, and that the view, and sounds, and light and surface which you walk on change as you pass through this place. It is the physical changes and above all the change of view which creates the psychological transition in your mind.' (Alexander, 1977)

A. Case Study : Delhi

Delhi, the name itself derived from Persian word 'Dehleez'. A threshold referring to the location of city as an entrance to the Indian Subcontinent. Many empires came and gone, structuring the city in their own way which resulted in formation of seven cities that reflects the Indian life and activity. While travelling in the city, one finds different transitions of time, built fabric, people, language, religion and culture. These characteristics helps in creating spaces according to environ adapted.

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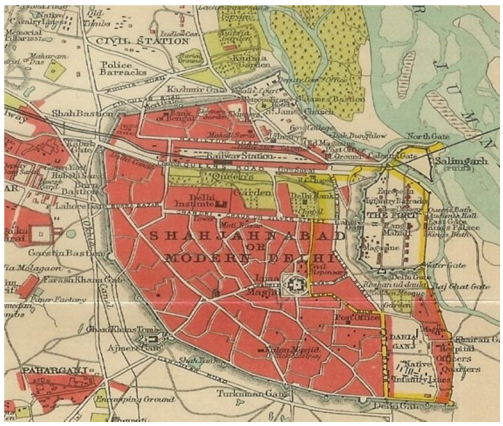
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Taking the case example as Delhi, one witness's various types of urban structuring, but the clear demarcation can be seen in three types which were in turn confined to three eras in the history of the city. With the transformation one can see major transition within each. These three parts were governed by different principles in their conception offering us distinct examples of urban structure, form design, organization and ideas at different periods. The medieval city – Shahjahanabad, the Colonial city and Greater Delhi in reality unites to form the entity that is Delhi, "As the study is about transition spaces in Delhi at neighborhood level", one should understand the existing character of neighborhood in three major urban structures mentioned above. Here's the description of each:

B. Old Delhi

Old Delhi also referred as Shahjahanabad, being the seventh city of the seven cities of Delhi. The plan of the city represents a semi-elliptical bow shape design called 'Karmukha 'for a settlement fronting a river. The streets run in the city connecting the gates along the circumference of the city wall. The emperor's palace was placed at the junction of the two axis. The remaining residential areas of the city vary in degrees of formality relying more on sectoral division rather than geometric ordering. Thus, the palace stands well separated from the residential fabric enhancing the concept of empire and making a distinction between the ruler and the ruled.

Shahajanhan, known to be a thoughtful emperor, paid much attention into building his empire that is Delhi. Therefore, one can observe a socio-cultural along with a occupational setup which gives a unique formal and spatial structure to the city. This has helped in providing a social cohesion at different scales and levels.



Shahjahanabad – karmuka plan
Source: Google maps

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The linkage system imbibed in the network of city organizes well the streets and chowks. Streets serve as commercial outlets and chowks for resting and gathering. Within this also we find no. of residential streets and smaller chowks. The hierarchic order leads to four different types of classification … gave rise to a classification of streets in four types:

1) Primary streets
2) Secondary streets
3) Tertiary streets
4) Galis, alley lanes or kuchas' (Narian, 1990, p.88)

Chandni Chowk, the primary street which is wide and extremely congested known for having processional use and honorific status. From this primary street various secondary streets radiate out, where main bazaars (market) lies. The tertiary streets lead to residential areas which are marked by a gate, which is symbolic transition of entering a mohalla. The gates through which one enters a katra or a mohalla are named either after the trade predominates in the street's bazaar or after the occupants of its largest haveli (house) or after its prominent citizen. Buildings lying in tertiary streets have homes usually above shops or behind them. Branch out into are dark alleys, very narrow and dingy cul-de-sac. These mark a stark contrast to the houses in upscale Delhi which are well spared out.

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Pictures 1,2,3,4 showing urban fabric of Old Delhi.
Source: Google images

In this hierarchy lies the chowks which are 'swellings' within a street. They are the major transition nodes within the fabric. They form an integral part of the residential urban neighborhood where they functioned as places of gathering, or as spillovers and points of relief in an otherwise narrow labyrinthine system. They also served as important sources of light and ventilation. They were found to articulate intersections, street corners, and terminations and eventually formed the focus of the residential unit itself. Katras or mohallas were built or formed due to the patronage of wealthy families as well as occupational character of the street. However, later on it was divided on the basis of caste, family and place of geographic region.

Thus, a character of organic nature is seen with a network of streets and cul-de-sacs knit in the dense fabric with dense population residing, visiting and inviting people over the years. In this whole web lie spaces where they interact, as most of the activity lies in there, a transition takes place from one to the other.

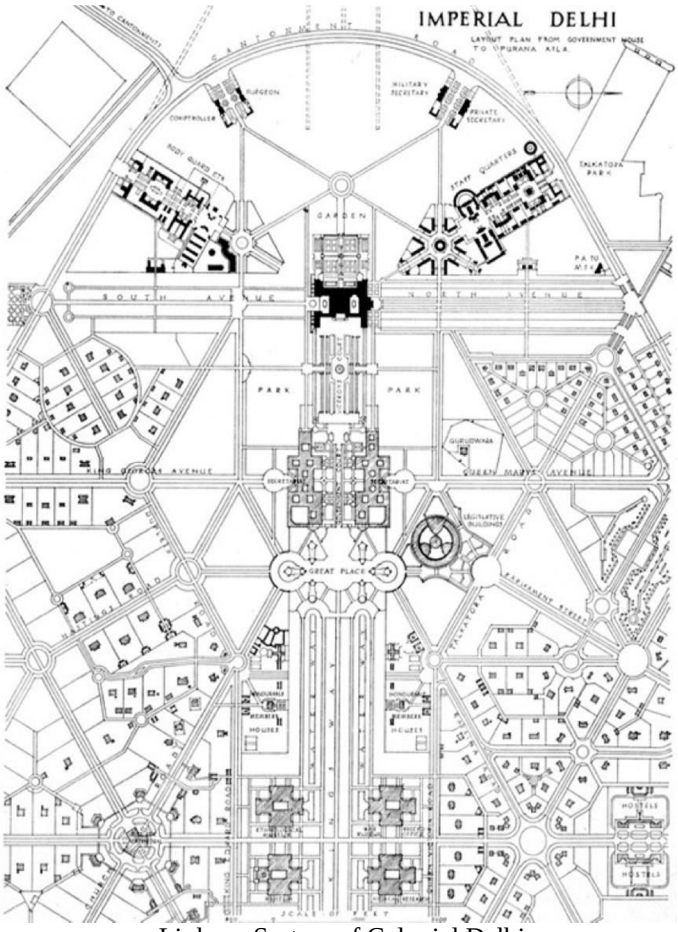
III. COLONIAL DELHI

British Raj actually led to the existence of what we call today as 'Colonial Delhi'. With the very mentioning of structures such as the Rashtrapati Bhawan, Sansad Bhawan, India Gate the image of informal Purani Dilli shifts into a sophisticated locality.

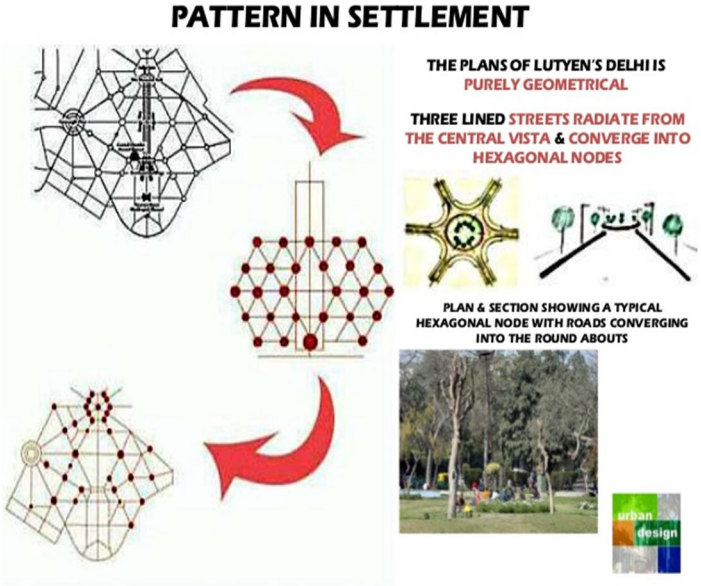
As one moves or walks along the Rajpath a sense of being a part of the Central province is felt. This path forms an axis to the India Gate. The formal arrangement of various departments, Bhawans, along this axis is a magnificent example of linking such a large space and understanding the scale of working. There is a symmetrical placing of several ministries on the very same road, their scale and the coexistence without interference is what is remarkable about this place.

The plan of the area was designed by Lutyens'. There are two distinct grids here: one, a narrow, rectangular and monumental grid; and second, a hexagonal residential grid. The linkage system functions purely as movement spines following organized geometric guidelines and creating vistas. It comprises of the movement spines which are supported by series of nodes.

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Linkage System of Colonial Delhi.
Image Source: https://in.pinterest.com/pin/368380444491958021/



Two primary roads of colonial Delhi showing major nodes leading to secondary and tertiary network
Image source: http://www.archinomy.com/case-studies/1158/changing-image-of-Delhi

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The edges of these roads are formed by the boundary walls of the residential compound trees in front which formed a screen of sorts. The roads are divided into three types: primary roads, secondary roads and tertiary roads. The hierarchical system determines the nature of road, its width, type of bungalow flanking it and the position of its occupants in the society.

The widths of roads very wider main roads to the narrowest service roads. There are green patches, gardens, and water bodies. These buffer spaces are important as they separate the regular hustle-bustle around the areas surrounding the ministries. Along with tranquility one is greeted with lively playgrounds where one sees elders and children alike.

Ministers travelling in their Government owned vehicles and regular citizens travelling in their own vehicles or public transport are seen here. Both moves side by side on the wide roads of Rajpath without disturbing each other, thereby preserving the importance of the statement: 'sharing of qualities in same locality is what makes a good environment.'

The threshold of colonial Delhi houses, the verandah is used for relaxing facing towards the landscape. Also, it used as an area to interact with servants. Thus, it is a physical space where multiple activities can be seen.



Pictures 5,6 Showing urban fabric of Colonial Delhi
Source: Google images

IV. CONTEMPORARY DELHI

The third phase of development was contemporary Delhi and it all started with the proposal of master plan in 1962 which helped in the phenomenal growth of city's population. The urban area of Delhi is divided into various zones, each of which is self-contained in terms of workplaces, residences, recreational areas and shopping centres.

The master plan gives a brief about the land use, open areas etc. of each zone. The linkage system in this area is a network of roads, which are arterial, sub arterial, primary secondary and tertiary. The area of the study is urban neighborhoods. Urban neighborhoods are of two types government built and people built.

Government built is mostly grouping housing, which shows a controlled expression in spatial character and homogeneity in form can be observed. People built colonies depict a diverse range of built form, thus plot divisions and bye laws are defined.

In the broader sense, the character style of housing in this area is that of row houses although different forms of style were used. These houses differed in size, design, individual's economic and cultural stability. Government houses designed here are for specific income group of people who may or may not have same designation. The transition spaces in these areas are the buffer from the major streets. Then in houses the front and rear setbacks are transition areas, where cars are parked, people enjoy sitting out in the evenings as garden or planters are the only connection with the nature. In housing, the transition spaces are really small scale, like the staircase or the lift lobby.

The shopping areas are complexes which are designed as a building, trying to give a feeling of street shopping, but mostly fading that character. There is no spilling space in front of shops, everything inside the shop. Thus, the transition spaces are of limited character, every space has a defined area for everything.

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Pictures 7,8,9,10 showing urban fabric of Contemporary Delhi.
Source: Google Images

V. COMPARATIVE ANALYSIS

In all the three case studies, there is drastic change of scale and built form. Basically, these are identified on the linkage pattern of the urban structure and thus it lies between primary, secondary and tertiary streets.

The design principals in all three are very different. Old Delhi is planned according to Indian settlement ideologies, whereas colonial is based on the garden city concept, and contemporary is like the extension, where people have built according to their needs under some byelaws.

If we compare in terms of phenomenology, the perception of transition spaces is that they are more active and there is hierarchy in terms of sound, light, colour, texture etc. when approaching a house from the primary street. There is combination of various activities without much chaos. Everything is varying but still they are well balanced.

In case of colonial everything seems to be uniform, quiet calm and serene. The amount of light achieved is also uniform in all the transition spaces because of the scale and proportion. In contemporary, it varies according to kind of lifestyle people have, but a combination of both can be observed.

In terms of function based analysis, transition spaces act as major interacting nodes in old Delhi, some are really chaotic while some are less. In colonial, there is no as such use, major nodes act as traffic junctions and minor as thresholds to house, the intermediate ones are guarded. The contemporary also have the same character as of colonial, but intermediate transition spaces may or may not be guarded. The thresholds may or may not act as activity zones for example shops etc.

In terms of formal and spatial character, there is clarity of structure in terms of linkage system in old and colonial but in third case highways and roads are built according to demands of the scenarios. The porosity is more in the old fabric, in colonial it is huge porous and penetrating. The feeling is airy and cool. In contemporary, moderate kind of porosity is seen. In old Delhi there is feeling of enclosure in spaces, in colonial, it seems like object in landscape thus more open, and in contemporary varied mix of sizes and shapes can be observed.

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VI. CONCLUSION

From the analysis of transition spaces in three different case studies, one can conclude that essence of transition space lies in for what it was meant for. With all diverse people and their socio-cultural, economic and technological factors, spaces are formed, evolved and transformed. Every space suit the given environment based on some factors, methods and variety of use. Every space changes the moods of the user. These spaces can be isolated, space within space or adjacent spaces. A space portraying a character is solely responsible for the experience one goes through and is thereafter reflected by the mood of the users. This is then further responsible for the human behavior.

These have been achieved and are existing from many years some may require changes, in terms of less chaos or traffic congestion but still we see that if all spaces become same and convenient to human beings as per their needs, there will be no excitement or liveliness which every space acquires its own. Sometimes they also create buffer zones for activities within trying to insulate those areas. They contribute to the whole, retaining their identity.

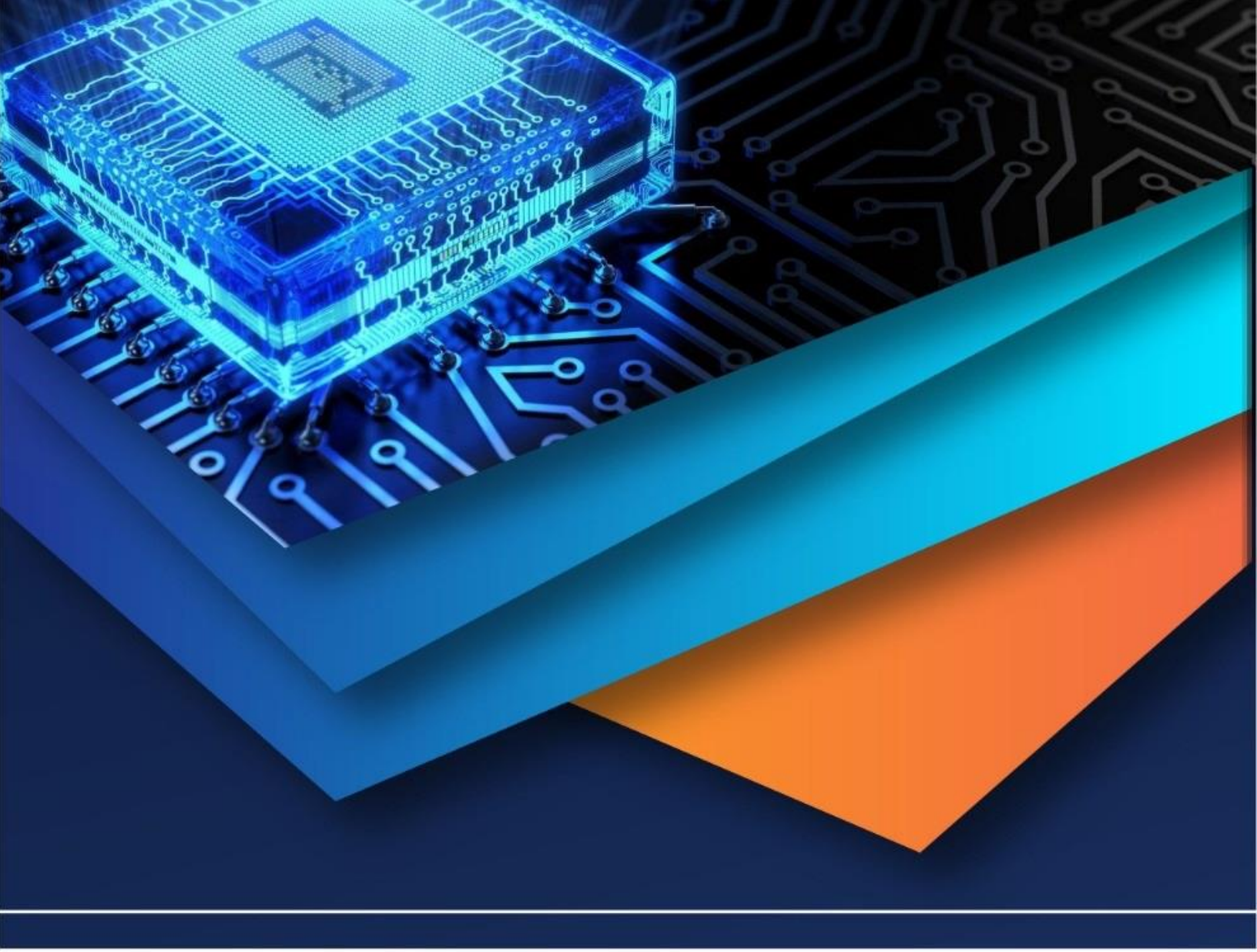
The process of entrance, the transitional quality of spaces is often under-addressed or weak. The idea of threshold, a constant that can be found in architecture can be enhanced by offering a multitude of transition spaces in order to enrich the experience of users and create a stronger bond between the building and its physical and sociological context.

Their existence makes an expression, without which the character, the soul of a space seems to be incomplete. They create a live ability factor which is continuing and will continue. Such in-between or so called transition spaces thus play a major role to play in establishments.

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