

The Impact of Heritage Rehabilitation on the Cityscape of Urban Bengaluru

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Abstract — As globalization moves the world towards homogeneity, governments around the world are working to ensure their cities retain their uniqueness. Think Prague and you think of old buildings, not its malls. Think Paris and you think of Eiffel Tower, not Disneyland. Can we hope that Bengaluru too will carry its past into the future? Can Bengaluru be defined as much for its graciousness and old world charm.

Keywords—rehabilitation; conservation; heritage; globalisation

I. INTRODUCTION

Heritage is all that has been passed from one generation to the next generation. Heritage is also found in moveable possessions, from national treasures in museums, to family heirlooms, and in the intangible such as history, traditions, legends and language. In architecture it takes form in the built environment, spaces of work, spaces of worship and in unbuilt spaces such as parks and gardens. Heritage also shapes the cityscape and is present in the arrangement of fields, villages, towns and cities.^[1]

Underpinning this research is an assumption that heritage rehabilitation is an integral part of civil society. Cultivating this role should ideally be one of the abiding concerns in architecture. Rehabilitation shapes the society in which it is situated and in turn is shaped by the needs and dynamics of that society. Yet how rehabilitation is approached and undertaken vary from culture to culture.^[2]

The term rehabilitation itself has varied meanings and connotations. In certain contexts, “rehabilitation” signifies the entire field or realm of cultural heritage preservation, and conservation. But the broader definition refers more widely to rehabilitation as a complex and diverse social practice.^[2]

A. The need to rehabilitate

To quote Ernst Johnson, colleague of Eero Saarinen “Architecture has been called the art of building beautifully, a fixation of man’s thinking and record of his activity.... Keep in mind that last phrase. It is important.”^[3]

Rehabilitation plays an integral role in conservation of heritage. It becomes the balance between conservation and development in a rapidly developing urban space such as Bengaluru. Rehabilitation of cultural heritage can give people

a connection to certain social values, beliefs, religions and customs. It allows them to identify with others of similar mindsets and backgrounds. Rehabilitating heritage buildings can provide an automatic sense of unity and belonging within a group and allows a society to better understand previous generations and the history of where they come from. Since cultural heritage can take the form of buildings, townscapes, and even in archaeological remains, another benefit that comes from preserving cultural heritage as a whole is the communal support. (Fig 1) Those that identify strongly with a certain heritage are often more likely to help out others in that same community. In addition, vernacular heritage and the building practices offer an affordable, environmentally sustainable and aesthetic solution. Their value however is often not recognized. Rehabilitation and conservation provide vernacular and community practices with recognition that is so often denied.

B. The Heritage of urban Bengaluru

The capital of Karnataka, Bengaluru has a unique cultural identity with elements of Hindu, Christian and Islamic architecture. The historical monuments of Bengaluru are a rich reservoir of Cultural, architectural, historical, political, traditional and religious legacy. The forts and palaces manifest professionally competent town planning in architecture at the time of some of the earliest dynasties and have become iconic emblems of modern Bengaluru. The cultural heritage of Bengaluru consists of contributions and influences of successive dynasties that ruled it such as the Kadambas, Hoysalas, Chalukyas and the Vijaynagar Empire. The Mughals and the British reigned in Bengaluru as well.^[4]

The city’s nomenclature from Benda Kaalu Ooru by the Vijayanagara Kings to Bangalore by the British, and now called as Bengaluru has seen a sea change in its Culture, traditions, development and Growth.

Heritage does not end at the gates of temples and palaces. The Halasuru houses with their jagalis and elaborate doorways, the monkey-topped houses of the cantonment, the parapet-roofed Basavanagudi houses set in large gardens these are what give each locality of Bengaluru a unique identity. It is these

ordinary buildings that give a street its defining character and a cityscape, its heritage.

Bengaluru, which was once a retirement city due to its salubrious Climate has now become Silicon Valley of India and a hot pot mix of Culture, diversity of ethnicity and a vibrant young workforce with high purchasing power and disposable income.

II. LITERATURE REVIEW

India, being a land of rich cultural heritage, is a treasure house of historic buildings and monuments. There are as many as 26 cultural and natural sites in India have been included in the World Heritage listing by UNESCO. In addition, until 2005 approximately 67,000 listings covering 200 places and 25 states in India were completed outside the World Heritage listing. While the Archaeological Survey of India is responsible for preserving designated ancient monuments of national importance, another non-governmental organization INTACH (The Indian National Trust for Art and Cultural Heritage) is more extensively dedicated to preservation and conservation of heritage sites.^[5]

In a comprehensive approach, one has to look at the potential of “preservation”, “rehabilitation”, and “restoration” of historic structures. “Preservation” involves maintaining and stabilizing the existing form and integrity of a historical structure so as to protect its heritage value. “Rehabilitation”, on the other hand, entails making possible a continuing or compatible contemporary use of a historic building through repair, alterations and additions, while protecting its heritage value. So far as “restoration” is concerned, it refers to making a historic structure reflect its original state as it appeared at a particular period in its history.^[5]

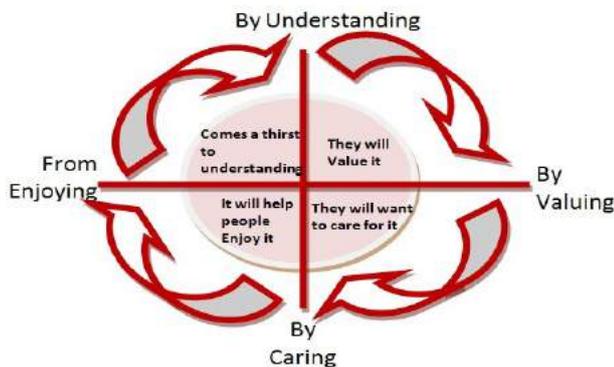


Fig. 1 Heritage cycle

Most of the modes of conservation demand a very rational and scientific approach which starts with a study of structural integrity. On the whole, conservation involves intervention at various levels that are determined by the physical conditions, the causes of deterioration and the on-going needs of the place and surroundings. By and large, a policy of minimal intervention is generally desirable. Further, the settings of

heritage buildings are often of great relevance and therefore, buildings alone are not considered in isolation.

It is not only enough to restore, rehabilitate or preserve a historical building. It requires to be maintained thereafter. It is the continuous protective care of the fabric, contents and setting of a place that is crucial to the conservation of heritage buildings. Hence, an appropriate and timely maintenance is an important component of any cost-effective conservation programme. The pattern of damage is different in the older structures and repair demands breathable and compatible materials.^[5]

III. REHABILITATED HERITAGE BUILDINGS IN BENGALURU

Some of the Iconic Buildings or Heritage Sites in Bengaluru have been Restored and Conserved and hence have become Certain Landmarks of the City.^[6] They include;

A. Track and Book Society

Established in 1912, the building belonged to the Bengaluru Tract and Book Society which was affiliated to the London Religious Tract Society. Records show that in 1953, the first President of India Dr. Babu Rajendra Prasad and the first Chief Minister of Karnataka Kengal Hanumanthaiah visited the society. In 1961, Queen Elizabeth II and Prince Philip also paid a visit to the auxiliary and were presented a copy of the Bible. The British-style gothic European building has a high-roofed sloped structure with a frontal edifice that gives a bungalow look to the classic building.

Currently, the 9,000 square foot area is broken into three sections – two main halls that are now Hard Rock Café’s bars and an open courtyard. It has become a famous landmark in Bengaluru and speaks volumes of the legacy left behind.^[7]



Pic. 1 & 2: Track and Book Society, M.G. Road, Bengaluru

B. Mayo Hall

Mayo Hall is an administrative structure that was built in memory of Lord Mayo, the viceroy and governor general of India from 1869 to 1872.

Pic. 3 & 4: Mayo Hall then and now



The stone and mortar structure now houses the departments of the Bruhat Bengaluru Mahanagara Palike. The Mayo Hall has tall columns and the mouldings atop have minute friezes in mortar. The building in elevation is noted for its composition of architrave and pediment windows, varied with key-storied arches and Greek cornice. [8]

C. Bengaluru Rifle Volunteer Theatre

Pic. 5



Pic. 6



Pic. 5 & 6: BRV Then & Now

The original building demolished in 1905 and rebuilt to the present tiled-roof stone-covered structure in 1912. This building used to house a ladies room, billiards room, reading room, and a bar on the ground floor. The regimental offices, stores and other rooms can be found on the first floor. The B.R.V. was famous for its main gallery which is 120 feet long and 60 feet wide and easily accommodates 1,000 people. The place has donned many roles from armoury to theatre to defence services canteen. Built in the Tudor style of architecture, the building's gabled entrance-porch gives its medieval style even today.

Now, the theatre is non-existent although its spacious rooms house an army canteen. Although BRV no longer lives to its former glory it is still conserved by the military units that dine there. [9]

D. The Seshadri Iyer Memorial Hall

Pic. 7: Bengaluru Central Library, Cubbon Park



Pic. 7

The Seshadri Iyer Memorial Hall in Cubbon Park was built in the honour of the Dewan of Mysore Sir K Seshadri Iyer built in 1915 AD in a classic European Style and houses a luxurious library which offers literary classics that are not found anywhere else in India.

E. Negative spaces in the Cityscape due to Deterioration of Heritage Sites

Pic. 8,9,10 – Some of the Colonial Bungalows of Bengaluru in ruins



Pic. 8



Pic. 9



Pic. 10



Pic. 11

Pic. 11- Bhoga Nandeeshwara Temple near Nandi hills from the early 9th Century

In a population dense urban space like Bengaluru, old colonial bungalows with large courtyards were abundant. Due to lack of funding and maintenance, they deteriorated which lead to a large number of negative spaces in the city. Since the land costs are exceptionally high in urban setups, only large companies invest in these heritage sites and bring them down in order to provide for the on- going needs of society around.

The Buildings and the memories we will have to forsake for the generations to come like the ones we have already lost. [9, 10]



Pic. 12: The Victoria Hotel which has now become the Central Mall behind Mayo Hall.

Pic. Courtesy: aPaulogy, Paul Fernandes' Gallery of Curious Memories



Pic. 13: The Plaza Theatre which was once a landmark on M G Road is erased out.

IV. CONCLUSIONS

“We will be remembered only if we give to our younger generation a prosperous and safe India, resulting out of economic prosperity coupled with civilization heritage.”

A. P. J. Abdul Kalam

Bengaluru's vast number of heritage buildings are getting destroyed due to the rapid development and rampant urbanisation. The International organisation, UNESCO, the National body ASI and non profit organisations like INTACT are working towards restoring and rehabilitating heritage buildings. However they cannot compete with the pace of urbanisation nor are they able to cater to the conservation needs of minor but historically important buildings. Hence regional efforts need to be stepped up and expanded. These efforts should include following activities such as:

- ❖ A Heritage Connect
 - An intervention at an Urban Design/ Planning level to Connect all heritage sites/ buildings so that one can understand, study and also visit all heritage places at ease.
 - Re-create the Cultural Identity of our City.
 - A point of reference for the generations to come as they look for inspiration to design the future.
 - Broaden the range of culturally significant Monuments/ Heritage Sites which can potentially increase the inflow of Tourists.
- ❖ Adopt a Heritage Building/ Site
 - Bengaluru being a dynamic and tech savvy city has recourse to a vast number of corporate houses, which need to be encouraged to pitch in their efforts for adoption and restoration of heritage sites as part of their corporate social responsibility activity.

These Heritage Buildings or Sites if restored or rehabilitated or conserved can become prominent Landmarks of Bengaluru City which can redefine the Image of the City.

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