

RESIDENT WARRIOR: BENGALURU PLANNERS MUST FOCUS ON PUBLIC SPACES TO FULFILL PEOPLE’S RECREATIONAL, SOCIAL NEEDS

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By Vaidehi Raipat

A city with palimpsests of cultures, Bengaluru has a heart of a village and at the same time the lifestyle of a metropolis. The growth of Bengaluru is credited to the growth of IT industries, but the city never lost its traditional textile market or its art and culture. I moved to Bengaluru as a young architecture student in September 2007, celebrating my 10 complete years in the city; I look back upon my first experiences.

Roads like green avenues, trees buffering the noisy traffic, a pleasant weather in July and cool winds on a sunny day. Bengaluru a giver, not just provides for whatever its citizens need, but does so without expecting care, love or even belongingness from all the generations of professionals it abides. Today the city is passively accumulating dissatisfaction and irresponsible behaviour from its users; with nobody on this side to attend to their distress. With constantly changing trends and

desires at a pace much faster than before; developing a polemic has become an urgent necessity. A city which dates back to the 15th century has its roots still immersed in the past. To conserve these roots is the most important aspect for urban designers today.

Bengaluru was planned in amalgamation with green spaces, neighbourhoods planned around parks and temple squares. Known as the “City of lakes” 280 lakes spread across the city. The beauty of the city are its gardens, palaces and the heritage markets. The indigenous elements that define the architectural value of these heritage built spaces have never been constant, they have grown as the culture expanded.

Amalgamation

Today Bengaluru is an amalgamation of cultures, lifestyles and societies. As TJS George quoted in his book Askew, “The speed at which information technology altered the sociology as well as economy produced an inevitable backlash”. He also mentioned in his book a popular statistic, “Bangalore had potholes and dangerous medians per kilometre than any other city”. The unprecedented growth in the city is the cause. Planners and designers have been busy planning for basic infrastructure, focusing on economic growth and development hence ignoring the most important aspect of urban design: The public realm. A 584% growth in built-up area over the preceding four decades, with vegetation declining 66% and water bodies 74%. The highest increase in urban built-up area in Bengaluru was evident between 1973 and 1992—342.83%. Decadal increases since, between 1992 and 2010, have averaged about 100%. [Modelling the Spatial Patterns of Landscape Dynamics Review. Bharath H Aithal and Ramachandra TV. CES Technical Report 127, Energy & Wetlands Research Group, Centre. Centre of ecological Sciences, IISc (2012)]

Most public spaces in Bengaluru that exist till date are the ones that have survived the test of the evolution, urbanisation, industrialisation and migration. Many of the public spaces that exist today are a legacy of the colonial period. The streets and bazaars of the Indian city continue to function in a similar way as before independence. South Parade has transformed into MG Road, but continues to be a fashionable shopping and business street. Cubbon Park and Lalbagh Garden are as popular as ever. With the changes in urban structure and demography of the city have come some changes in recreational activities, which have implications for the types of public spaces and their uses in Bengaluru. While recreational uses have changed over the years, for the most part the traditional public space types of parks, gardens, streets, markets, and maidans continue to serve Bengaluru’s needs. However, the changing demography and lifestyle has resulted in new needs, which are not being fully met by the traditional public spaces. It is important to transform the unused public spaces into social active spaces which are safe and inclusive of all the present trends.

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