

## Editor's Note



***'...Urban forms are made out of not only materials and things but out of meanings, language and symbols. It can be relatively easy to knock down a building but it is much harder to demolish a space which is composed around memory, experience or imagination.'***

- Tonkiss (2005:3)

This first edition of sub:version is dedicated to the city of its birth, Bangalore-Bengaluru, its multiple meanings, arrangements and identities. The journal may perhaps be the first attempt in print media to provide a common platform for city-makers of all hues, experts and learners, theorists and practitioners to explore Bengaluru through varied lenses and mediums, as it transitioned from its proto and prehistory into various versions – a planned fortified settlement in the 16th century; a Maratha provincial outpost; a 17th century technological and horticultural innovation centre in the days of Haider Ali and his son, Tipu Sultan; a prominent British cantonment in the 1800s and the administrative capital of a progressive princely Mysore state under the Wadiyar dynasty and unified Karnataka thereafter. In the years to come, Bengaluru would also be seen as Nehru's 'City of the Future'; a verdant Garden City; quiet 'Pensioner's Paradise'; a fast-paced Pub City; Start-Up City, Fastest Growing City in the Asia-Pacific, and even India's 'youngest' city.

Bengaluru has been all of this and much more ever since, and long before its establishment as a fortified urban settlement in the sixteenth century. The excavation of prehistoric objects and artefacts, coins minted during the reign of Roman Emperor Tiberius (between 14-37 CE) and inscription stones found in and around what we now consider to be the 'city' confirm that its antiquity as a settlement, trading site and even battlefield (referencing the ninth century Begur stone inscription, E.C., Vol.IX, Bn 83) predates this period. This physical evidence challenges the various urban legends attributed to its name and origins, as well as the popular, one dimensional view of the city as just a modern-tech hub with a relatively recent history. It also points to the layers of percolated meanings, ancient memories and stories that gradually came to be embedded in its substrata. They now constitute the invisible bedrock of the city, and endure, despite the cycles of change that have irrevocably altered it at eye level.

The journal therefore hopes to explore the trajectory of visions and challenges as Bangalore went from a Garden City to Information City in the post-Independence years, where even as the *pete* (market) grew, *kere* (lake) and *thota* (gardens) shrank, reflecting its changing fortunes and political economy. Villages are still being drawn into city boundaries, migrant populations arrive daily, and new, altered demographic patterns have emerged to influence and modify not only the urban landscape but also perceptions of the city's yesterday, today and tomorrow.

Accounts of change, transformation, displacement and disparity are not unique to Bengaluru. But what is

unique is how they unfold locally in the city's complex and contentious terrain of narratives and counter narratives to create new layers of meaning and memory.

Theme Bengaluru is a shape-shifter that is rarely seen for itself. It continuously rearranges its identities to accommodate projected aspirations and fantasies, dissolves into other forms, or allows for new forms to emerge to fit its inhabitant's imaginations. It is all at once, a mythic space and a site of lived experiences, of ambivalence, uncertainty, alienation and accommodation, fragmentation and juxtapositions, emplacement and displacement, disorder and new possible orders, erasure and reconstruction, conflict and contestation, both accessible and impenetrable in parts, and a vast patchwork of heterotopias. Through all this and much more, it lives on - sentient, dynamic and in constant dialogue with its inhabitants, continuously producing and superimposing various versions of itself, on itself - a palimpsest.

A palimpsest is composite and layered. A palimpsest is both addition and effacement, where the new replaces, omits, conceals, overruns, denies, but cannot completely hide the old. Seeing the city as a palimpsest reflects our acknowledgement that the city is never *tabula rasa*. There was always something before the next thing arrived, and the next. The *kere*, *thota*, *kote*, *pete* spatial arrangements of the sixteenth century urban settlement remain central actors in Bangalore's origin tales and current imaginaries. Yet, these myths and fables are but a few chapters in the endless story of a city that ceaselessly remakes, reinvents and rebuilds. For, the city IS process, with no beginning and no end.

As a curatorial approach, invoking the poly-semantic city as a palimpsest emerged from a process that also chose to view it through the lens of the temporal (ephemeral and perceptions), social (transactions and intersections), and the spatial (transitions and trajectories). In order to place the contributor's responses to the city - articles, photo stories, essays, project case studies, graphic stories and poetry - in a manner that offers context, meaning and relevance to the reader, the curatorial approach and framework looked to the spatial arrangements and their symbolic meanings that defined the early urban settlement of Bengaluru - the city as a nurturing, nourishing waterbody or *kere*, a garden/grove or *thota* where dreams and desires come to life, take root and blossom, the market-town or *pete* that offers the promise of possibilities and future potential (for instance, Bengaluru as a global-tech marketplace) and the *kote* or mud fort, a representation of protection, safety, solidity and security that goes beyond its

essentially military purpose (What is safe and protected in the city today?) Several centuries later, these invisible layers of symbolic meanings still constitute a vision for the city. They are a bridge between Bengaluru's tangible past and present intangible identities.

Therefore, the invisible underlay of this issue pays homage to the *kere-thota-pete-kote* as sections, wherein the focus area of the contributor's work is placed contextually, with colours assigned as codes/ differentiators. An attempt has also been made to view the contributions differently, both in terms of information and experience design. Interactive elements (in the form of hyperlinks) take us away to external experiences and information and then return us to these pages. The 'Book in Question' presents book reviews as unique, reflective first-person responses to the work from the authors themselves.

Finally, the city is its people. In the city, people converse, connect and conflict in shared stories, encounters and spatial practices. In doing so, they all make up the city. The journal is an endeavour to provide a shared, interactive space for contributors and readers to peel/ unveil/ reveal the layers under layers, cities within the CITY, histories long past, the unfolding present, and futures unseen. We thank and acknowledge all those who have contributed to these pages in different ways for their time and trust in this, the first inaugural issue of sub:version.

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(Guest Editor)



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