From the Editorial Board

We are pleased to introduce the second edition of our annual academic journal sub:version, with the theme 'Subcultures.' In keeping with the spirit of inquiry that defines RV College of Architecture, this edition explores the layered, often imperceptible currents of culture that shape and reshape our lived environments — subcultures that coexist with, and sometimes resist dominant narratives.

RV College of Architecture has always positioned the discipline of Architecture as one which is constantly shaped by design thinking, creative production, and critical appraisal. Sub:version occupies an important position in this discourse, in as much as it provides a platform for interdisciplinary as well as multidisciplinary reflections on the interplay of space and time in the context of place, across the sub-continental realm and even beyond.
As part of the second edition, we are privileged to have distinguished academics, practitioners, and scholars explore the notion of subcultures through the diverse lenses of geography, livelihood, and gender.

We place on record our sincere gratitude to Guest Editor Dr. Anant Maringanti, who has been instrumental in shaping this issue. His consistent engagement with the theme aided in no small measure by his vision, honed by a lifetime of rich experiences across public and private domains including teaching stints at NSU, SPA, NALSAR, and as the Director of the Hyderabad Urban Lab, has enabled a rich sense of clarity and insight to imbue this edition.
We thank all the contributors for their insightful and thought-provoking submissions which have enriched the conversation around subcultures.

We would also like to express our gratitude to the Rashtreeya Sikshana Samithi Trust for their unstinting support to all of RV College of Architecture's endeavours and in particular towards this initiative in fostering critical discourse through the journal sub:version.

Dr. Rakesh K. S.
Editor in Chief
Principal,
RV College of Architecture, Bengaluru

Forward from the External Editor

The Small Worlds That Keep Cities Alive

Dr. Anant Maringanti
External Editor
Director and Founder,
Hyderabad Urban Lab

As we worked through curating this volume, we kept returning to a question: how do we notice what lives beneath the surface of the city? In architecture, we are taught to look at culture in large frames—civilizations, traditions, monuments. But the everyday city is held together by smaller, improvised worlds that do not fit into neat categories. These are subcultures.

They are not curiosities on the margins. They are infrastructures of daily life. They appear in repair shops that keep machines and houses alive but never find a place in textbooks; in the friendships that form during long train rides; in the festivals that stitch neighborhoods together; in the music and reading circles that carry ideas across generations. Subcultures remind us that cities are not only built through plans and policies but through improvisation, memory, and resistance.

For us as students and practitioners of design, subcultures are not optional. Architecture is never only about buildings—it is about the life that surrounds them. Without recognizing the practices and solidarities that sustain space, our work risks floating above reality.

Think of the city as constant repair. Every day, drains are unclogged, shrines repainted, walls patched, corners decorated. These acts are small, but they keep urban life going. Yet repair hardly appears in pedagogy. Subcultures bring these invisible labors into view.

They also reframe scale. A subculture may be rooted in a street corner but connected to global flows—rap in Hyderabad, reading groups in Bangalore, citizen science platforms online. They teach us that architecture must move between the intimate and the planetary.

To engage subcultures is also to adopt a way of seeing: listening to fragments, paying attention to details, sitting with ambiguity. A scrap of graffiti, a neighborhood ritual, a half-forgotten memory—each opens larger networks of meaning. For designers, such attentiveness is not extra work. It is the ground of practice.

Subcultures are never neutral. They carry exclusions as well as solidarities, hierarchies as well as freedoms. To pay attention to them is to ask who belongs, who is left out, what is remembered, and what is erased. This is central to architecture too: design decisions can either protect or destroy the fragile conditions that allow subcultures to thrive.

At the same time, subcultures are not only about the past. They are rehearsals of futures. The book circles of 1950s Bangalore, the repair economies of bazaars, the digital networks of today—all imagine new ways of living together.

This Issue

This issue reflects that diversity in two ways. First, it spans a range of genres: essays and articles, interviews, poetry, illustrations, and a book review. Each form brings its own way of seeing and saying. Second, it spans a range of sites and contents: from farms and bazaars to parks and ponds, from train compartments to music studios, from inscription stones to neighborhood data platforms. Together these pieces show how subcultures thrive in places both ordinary and unexpected, and how they can be traced through very different registers of writing and making.

As editors, we invite you to read these contributions not for coherence but for resonance. Let them sharpen your ways of seeing, expand your sense of what counts as design, and remind you that the vitality of cities lies not only in their plans but in their subcultures—the small, improvised worlds that keep them alive.

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GEOGRAPHY

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Issue 02, September 2025

GEOGRAPHY

CITIZEN SCIENCE FOR PEOPLE-CENTRIC CITIES

Creating an online portal for public engagement

Kiran Keswani

In the context of the Indian city, 'street and public space design' manifests as a wicked problem. There are two reasons for this: one, these spaces are negotiated in dynamic ways on an everyday basis and two, there are interdependencies between the multiple stakeholders that result in a layered complexity. This generates challenges in the planning of the Indian city because the static master plan for a 10-15-year period that the present system supports does not work for a city that is changing on the ground every day, besides being governed by a regime that thrives on informality and ambiguity (Roy, 2009). The Master plan in some ways operates at the meta level and does not specify programmes and projects that can be implemented on the ground.

Currently, most cities in India do not have street design guidelines. The guidelines that do exist focus more on issues such as street hierarchies, transport networks, road safety and parking facilities that are based more on traffic engineering principles and less on the relationship between streets and the everyday life of people (Mandhan, 2018). Today, the thinking on cities across India, their planning and implementation seems to focus on developing streets that are car-centric and an urban landscape that will build a globally acceptable image. However, in India, the street is not just a 'connector' for people and cars to move, it is also a 'container' that holds the social, cultural, religious, economic and political practices of its citizens. One

Contribute your Experiences

We invite each one of you to share stories from your neighbourhood so that we may collectively work towards people-centric cities. In this sharing and collective sense-making, there can be new learning for all of us. How to contribute? You can use one of the ten options below to contribute easily.

Share What You Know	Ashwath Katte	Everyday Stories	The City Remembered	Discussion Forum
Experiences	Observations	One-min videos	Interviews	Reflections

Be a Citizen Scientist

Make Your Own Map	Life in the Streets	Urban Sketching	Project or Research	Best Practices
Maps	Photographs	Sketches	Reports	Success Stories

The Decoding Everyday portal - Homepage
Source: Author - www.decodingeveryday.com

The City Remembered

In this section, we hope to dialogue with people from different backgrounds about their thoughts on public spaces – their memories of a neighbourhood space from their childhood, their own usage and experiences of a park, a marketplace, a maidan and so on as well as any ideas they may have on places for social interaction in the public realm.

If you'd like to be interviewed or if you have a new topic for conducting oral histories, reach out to us via mail.

Oral History Series
The City Remembered
Interviewees: Anu, Rita and Abhishek
Interviewer: Vidisha Sahay

00:02   11:45

1x   15   ⏸   15

Listen to the 'Ask Your Grandparents' Series

In the first part of this Oral history series, we share conversations with grandparents who were kind enough to agree to talk to us. We asked them about the public places they go to, how they reach there, and how public life has changed over the years. We invite you to listen to their stories!

Dadi of Kirti
11/24/2021 | 4 min

Kirti's Dadi (76) is a nature lover and likes to visit near by parks in the morning. She is also very fond of shopping from her favourite places like, palika market or quila road etc. in the city. (Rohtak).Interviewee: Dadi of KirtiInterviewer: Kirti

Nanaji of Kirti
11/24/2021 | 3 min

Kirti's Nanaji is a simple person who belongs to a small village in (Hasanpur) Samastipur, Bihar. He likes to go for walks in the local college ground and here he has talked about his experience there.Interviewee: Nanaji of KirtiInterviewer: Kirti Kumari

Nani of Ayushi
11/24/2021 | 8 min

The oral history or City Remembered section on the DE portal
Source: Author - www.decodingeveryday.com

finds that the ways in which we use our streets differ from one neighbourhood to another, from one city to another. These differences on the ground level need to be recorded and analysed, if we are to understand how our cities work. We believe that every citizen can be an active participant in the production of knowledge about how streets and public spaces work, in their design and planning, and in their maintenance and governance. Hence, the need for active citizenship is felt in cities across the country.

Active citizenship for city-making

We, at the Everyday City Lab are in the process of developing an ONLINE REPOSITORY on streets and public spaces established under creative commons for a continual engagement with the public and to CREATE A NETWORK of people who would like to commit to making a change on the ground in their own neighbourhoods. In the DECODING EVERYDAY portal (https://www.decodingeveryday.com/), citizen participation is envisaged to help citizens to understand for themselves how spaces are being used in their neighbourhoods and to suggest ways in which the quality of life can be improved in simple ways.

Small acts of engagement on the portal by those who become members of the online community could bring them close to each other and their ability to be active citizens is likely to go up. The main endeavour of the project is to look at how to bring active citizenship into city-making.

The citizen science approach - where citizens collectively build knowledge on a subject, would allow us to record observations from neighbourhoods across different Indian cities. This would help understand how our urban spaces are shaped by social, cultural & economic practices in the public realm. In addition to this, we'd like to collaborate with professionals who like to work across interdisciplinary boundaries because city design in the Indian context needs inputs from diverse areas.

Pilot project: Decoding Everyday

In June 2021, when we started work on the pilot project, we decided to begin by sharing some work we had been doing on neighbourhood community spaces in Bangalore. We had studied the ashwath kattes (peepul tree shrines) as a sustainable urban space and have shared the data from this research on the

Decoding Everyday
About   Contribute   Cities   Data Bulletins   Urban Themes   100 Katte Mapping   Competitions   Volunteer   Everyday Community

Competitions

You could look at the featured entries from our PAST competitions here.

Make Your Own Map · Life in the Streets · Urban Sketching · Ecology and Public Spaces · Women and Public Spaces · Active Street Edges

Markets as Public Spaces · Celebrations in Public Spaces · Jugaad in Public Spaces · Changing Cultures, Changing Neighbourhoods · The Street Corner

The 'Competitions' section on the portal that helped enhance citizen engagement
Source: Author - www.decodingeveryday.com

portal. A map of Bangalore is uploaded which allows one to locate and visit 100 ashwath kattes across the city of Bangalore. These are elements of the Everyday City that are made accessible to the people through the portal.

For the section 'City Remembered' interviews were conducted with people from different user groups such as the elderly, women and children to know how they use the small, public spaces in their neighbourhood. The first set of interviews under the 'Ask your grandparents' series shares conversations with elderly to reveal the public places they go to, how they reach there and how public life has changed over the years.

In another section, 'Everyday Stories' a set of one-minute films are shared which depict simple observations about public spaces. The initial content for each of these sections was created by our internal team at the Everyday City Lab. These are shared on the portal as sample content for those interested to contribute stories from their own neighbourhoods, own cities. In addition to this, the portal has sections such

as 'Share what you know' with google forms to gather data on Women and public space; Social life in the public space; Shade and public space and so on. In Feb-Mar 2022, we ran a series of six weekly competitions on themes such as Ecology and Public spaces, Active Street Edges, Markets as Public Spaces and so on (Fig.3). These competitions helped improve citizen engagement and were made possible through a small grant from the Citizen Innovation Lab (CIL) at CIIE.CO where we were participating at that time in a citizen innovation hackathon.

In the 'Discussion Forum', the topic 'Safety in Public spaces' got a large number of responses with readers sharing a story from a street or public space where their experience was either enjoyable or where they felt unsafe. In another section, architecture & urban design students contributed personal geography maps and sketches.

Why the CITIZEN contribution matters

The portal is seen as a database built BY the people and FOR the people. If each of us contributes stories

and observations from our own neighbourhoods, it would generate enough data that can then be made available city-wise and ward-wise for use by local residents, RWAs, NGOs working on civic issues and interest groups who are working to solve civic issues. The contributions that come into the different sections are analysed and shared back again on the portal in the form of bi-weekly 'data bulletins'

We think that each component of the portal could be taken forward into an action plan at the neighbourhood level by citizens – either as an individual or collective effort. It could help generate street design guidelines for each city that takes into account how people use the spaces on a day-to-day basis. It can also be useful to policy-makers. For instance, the Urban Street Vendor Policy can be made context-specific for each neighbourhood if the locational choices of the informal vendors are understood better.

Pedagogical and research implications of a citizen science portal

In the long-term, this citizen science portal can potentially lead to developing programs for high school students where they could learn about how their marketplaces, parks, maidans or temple precincts work; why they are the way they are; and, how they can contribute in small ways to make them better. There is cognitive capability amongst college students and early graduates who could be engaged in both identifying and solving some of the problems at the neighbourhood level.

Today, the architecture schools across the country are conducting design studios that focus on imagined projects, often seeking inspiration from the buildings and public spaces of Singapore and New York. This citizen science project has the potential to move towards people-centric

The biweekly 'Data Bulletins' that share insights and analysis from the citizen data
Source: Author - www.decodingeveryday.com

approaches, perhaps changing the mindset of young architects and urban designers. It might bring a new focus to their imagination and a redefined purpose that is more relevant to Indian cities.

Conversations with users of this repository

We have had conversations with a few different user groups of this repository to validate the idea of the portal and to understand who would be interested in using the data generated and what form this data should take. In an interview with a Delhi-based Urban Planner who has been a Consultant in Participatory Planning for projects across the country, we learnt that it would be good to share this data with MLAs and Municipal Councillors who have a budget for their jurisdiction and may be interested in making small changes on the ground. She also suggested that the neighbourhood data be made available on the portal ward-wise so as to make it easier for Councillors, RWAs and NGOs working there to use it. Another Urban Planner who has been a Consultant for the Master Plans for Bangalore for 1995, 2015 and 2031, pointed out that while it is important to map everyday spaces at the neighbourhood level, the findings may need to be framed in a manner that can be consumed by both public and private organisations working in this domain.

A member of an RWA in Ahmedabad told us "This portal is definitely great as it has information available readymade. The insights from the 'Share What you Know' section in the form of Data Bulletins are what can help us with the first stage of the process i.e. discussing amongst our team members about concerns or experiences in the neighbourhoods to bring about a change. It serves as an evidence for us to make a case in front

of the Deputy Commissioner." Another suggestion from the RWA was that it was important to publicize or advertise the portal in the offline mode as well. If a few events could be held on ground, it could help build traction. One could devise a participatory game in which people could situate their everyday spaces so as to bring up other relevant information.

One resident shared: "I know the hotspots in my neighbourhood through exploring on my own. This portal already has that information which can be very beneficial for a new person visiting the city for a few days or for someone who has moved to the city and would like to explore & know their way around." Another insight from a resident was as follows: "As an avid reader, I would also use this portal to just engage with the different conversations going around in the discussion forum. The Data Bulletins are good-reads as articles. This portal can be used by common people to know the everyday stories and insights of cities unlike the news that they read in newspapers."

An architect and urban designer with a practice in Panaji, Ahmedabad and Bangalore shared that it would be good to see the data repository evolve into a combination of what the people contribute, the analysis and a design kit. Another urban designer who is also a member of an NGO shared that he had come across a similar platform, Safetipin, which discusses the usage of spaces for a specific user group. As feedback for the Decoding Everyday portal, he had this to say: "I really like the videos section, it is unique. Because people from different socio-economic backgrounds give insights into various contexts one gets to know different perspectives. It is an interactive tool and a good way to learn about new spaces, that

too they are 2-3 minutes so I can go through 3-4 videos in one go. Also, the data bulletins really worked for me as in just 1-2 pages, they give us both quantitative and qualitative data."

A student researcher who has been working in both Ahmedabad and Mumbai had the following to say: "The Data Bulletins are quite useful because they have already analysed people's responses and come up with a set of patterns. So, I would definitely like to use such an open portal for research and even contribute my own work, because we are always looking to get our work published and this is a good give-and-take." An architect and urban designer based in Bangalore shared that it was great to have these insights as an urban design practitioner or researcher, to have information in the form of excerpts, images, to understand how users occupy the space and to use it as evidences to make a case. However, he added: "Currently, it seems a little design centric. A person from the government or an RWA member may not get the hang of it in the first go while people from the design field might. So, you need to curate it from a larger audience's point of view as well." A member of the Bangalore Political Action Committee (BPAC), shared with us: "Citizens who are not from a design

background would definitely engage with something related to their city, like my mother would like to read about ashwath kattes (tree shrine spaces) as it is interesting for her. Even the interactive maps that have been put up would definitely be very useful. It will be great to have more of those so that anyone can look at them to understand different contexts. This is a much-needed portal for understanding and designing public places across India."

Going forward

We hope that Urban designers, Planners, Researchers, MLAs, Municipal Councillors and others will be able to put some of the learnings from this citizen science portal into planning neighbourhoods to function better. In working closely with a local neighbourhood RWA or NGO, we think it would be possible for them to interact extensively with the different stakeholders in a given area and to evolve a neighbourhood plan that works sufficiently well for each user group. We believe that the success of the portal will depend on an ongoing engagement from citizens who are keen to make a difference to the places where they live and from RWAs, Government officials and Civic groups who believe technology can be paired with on-the-ground work to take this initiative forward.

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Kiran Keswani is Co-founder, Everyday City Lab (https://www.everydaycitylab.com/), an urban design lab in Bangalore that focuses on understanding the everyday life in streets and public spaces in order to develop a people-centric approach to urban design and planning.

...a little design centric

CHANGING NARRATIVES

Anup Naik & Soumya S Warrier

A land of constant surprises, the anatomical makeup of India can be viewed as a labyrinth of sorts, with each turn fascinating one with something new, vibrant, and unique. Layers and layers of flavours and nuances are weaved in to the rich, and ever-evolving fabric of our cities that are in a constant state of flux. The city under discussion here is Mangaluru (Karnataka) and its changing associations with water over the years.

The coastline of Karnataka stretches around 320km with the city of Mangaluru located in the Dakshin Kannada district, nestled between two important west flowing rivers – Netravati and Gurupura. Towards the east are the Western

(top) Contextual setting of Mangaluru
Source for base map: Google Earth
(bottom) Regional context of Mangaluru city
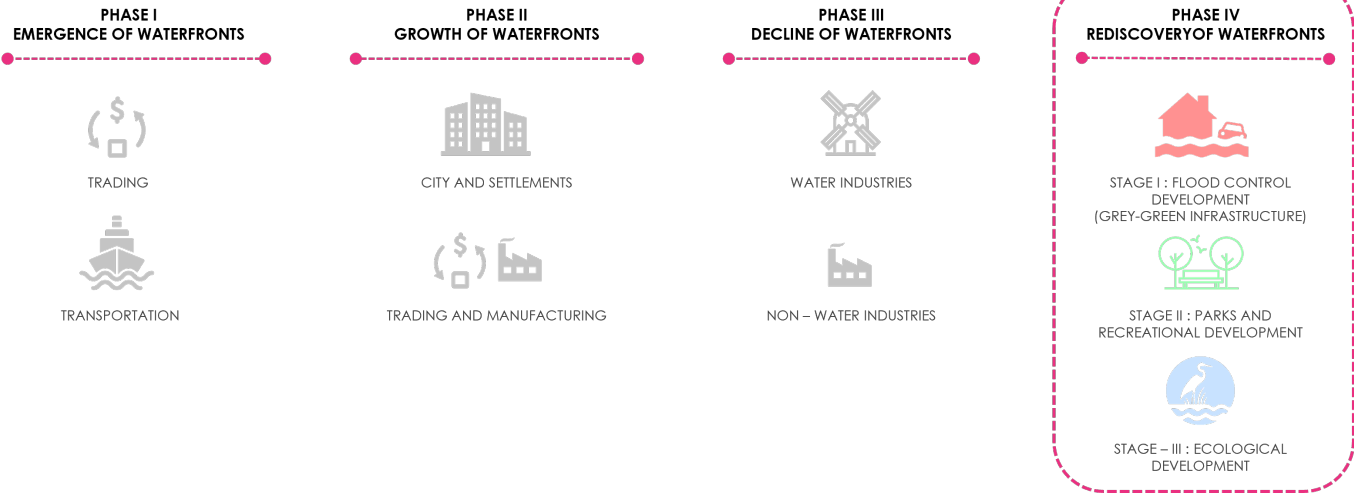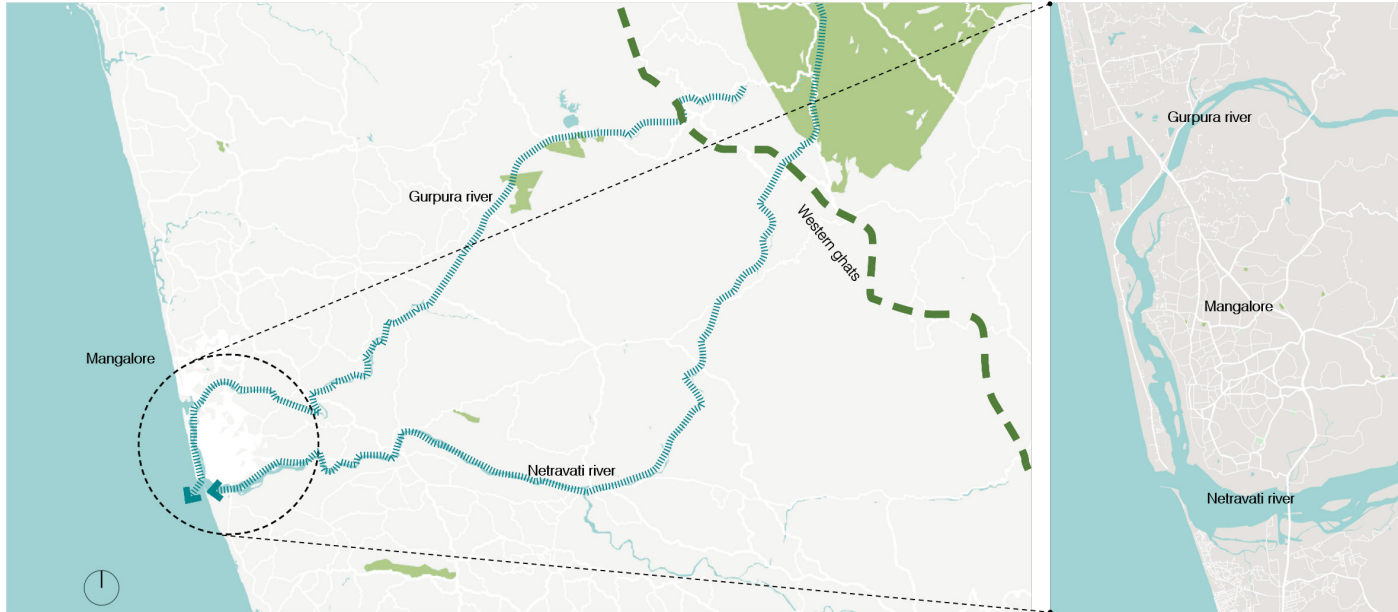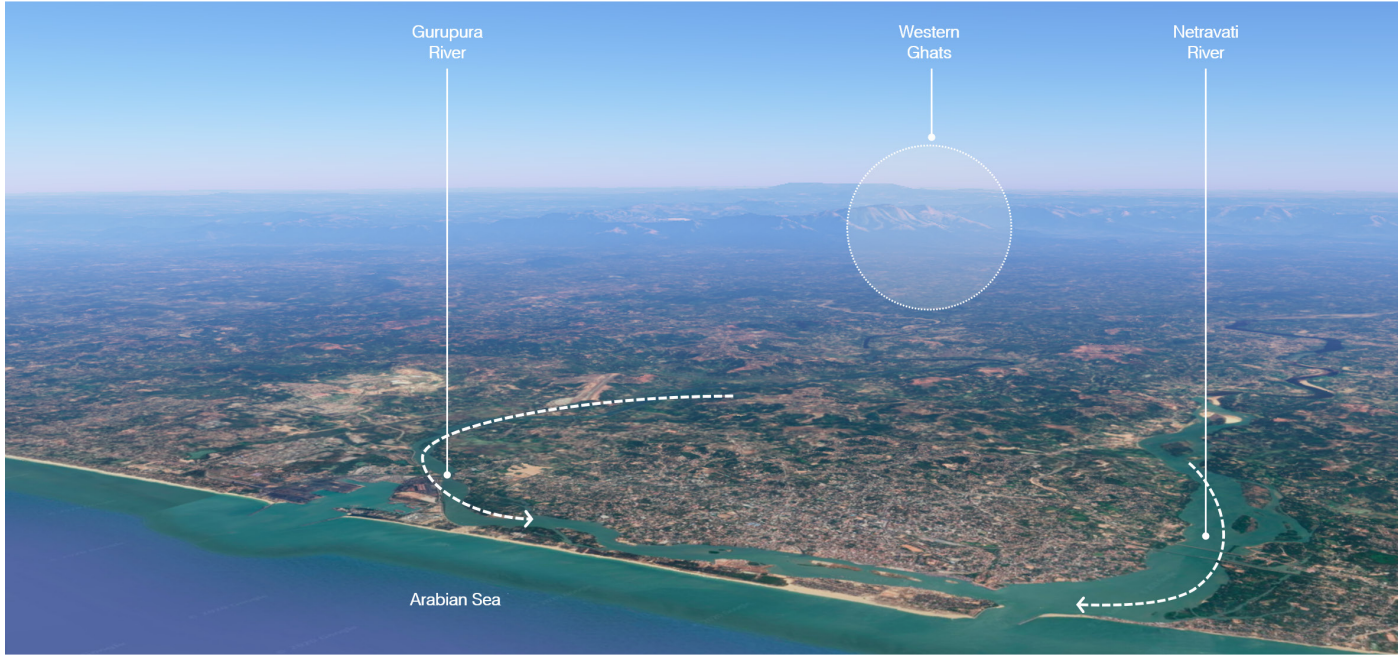
Evolution of waterfront cities
Source: World Resources Institute

Ghats from where these rivers originate, and towards the west lies the Arabian Sea, just beyond the Gurupura River.

The cultural legacy of Mangaluru can be experienced through its unique architecture styles, ornate celebrations, intriguing art & artforms, and elaborate coastal cuisines – many of which have a close association with water. The abundance and variety of natural resources, especially water, is a distinctive asset of the city. Be it the thodu networks that course through its undulating topography, the two rivers that form its natural extents, the expansive sea just beyond, or the beauty of the pouring monsoons – the city of Mangaluru nestled in the watersheds of Netravati and Gurupura is truly nature's blessing.

NEED FOR CHANGE

World over, waterfront cities go through four phases in their development cycle – Emergence, Growth, Decline, and Rediscovery. Even after being a city where water is of great historic and cultural significance, Mangaluru has had its back turned towards the water edge for a long time.

When the Government of India launched the 'Smart Cities Mission' in the year 2015 to promote sustainable and inclusive cities that provide the opportunity for rapid growth in infrastructure and governance, Mangaluru Smart City Limited took up its flagship project of developing the water edge of Mangaluru, with a proposed ring road (Mangala Corniche) along the riverfront of the city. The 1st Phase of this development will cover the stretch from Ullal bridge in the south to Kuloor bridge in the north.

The intent of this project is to aid the city of Mangaluru to rediscover its once glorious water edge. The idea is to follow an ecological model sensitive to the water and edge conditions, thereby rendering a dynamic blue-green-grey network which would become the public corridor to the city. The three major vision drivers for the design are: Inclusivity, Ecological Sensibility, and Economic Viability.
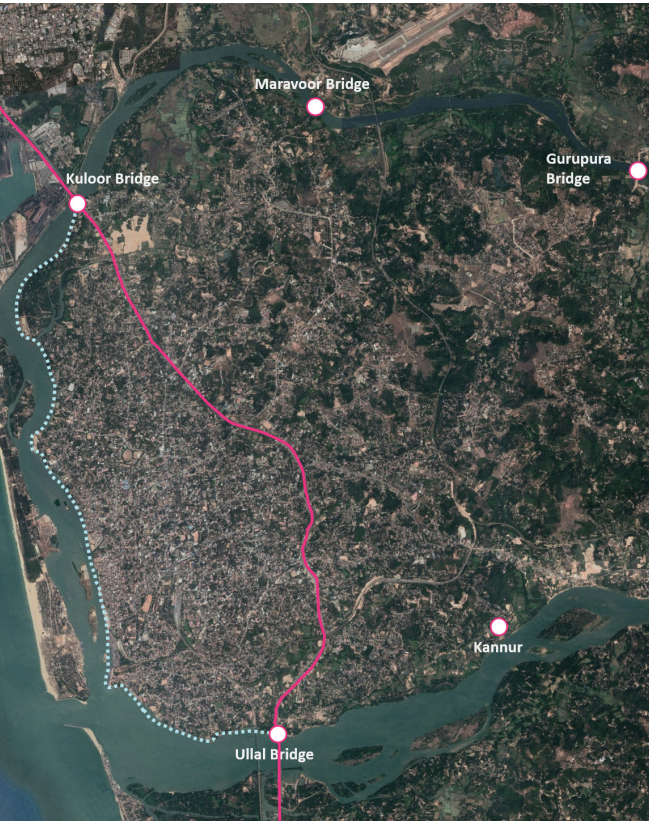
Indicative plan of Phase 1 waterfront development
Source for base map: Google Earth

INCLUSIVITY

ECOLOGICAL
SENSITIVITY

ECONOMIC
VIABILITY
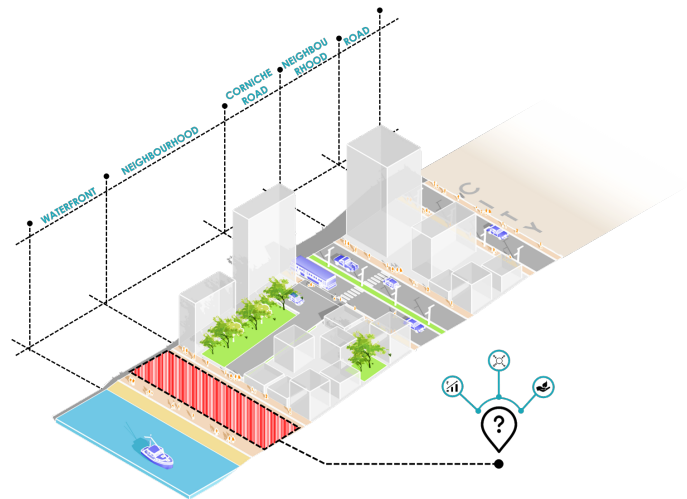
Vision for the waterfront

FSI

FSI
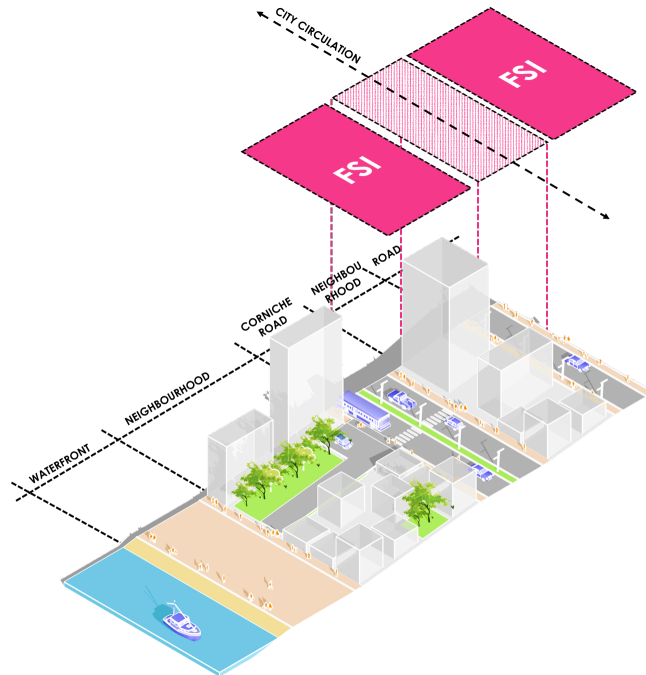
Proposed Mangala Corniche

The 18m wide Mangala Corniche Road that has been envisioned along existing the road networks, re-aligns to retain the green edges and pockets, proposing an ecologically resilient corridor to the city. The Corniche being an internal road allows for a pedestrian friendly water edge, and opens out potential plots with increased value on either side of the road for active developments. The city level Strategy Plan aims to integrate buildings of heritage value, enhance existing activity areas, preserve green edges that balance the ecosystem, and create activity nodes along the water edge.

As a part of this exercise, 36 subprojects were identified

that would initiate the activation of the 12km water edge. The identified sub projects from Netravati Bridge to Kuloor Bridge were categorised into Water Sports, Cruise & Other Water Related Activities, Leisure & Recreation, Economic Activities & Infrastructure. Based on the implementation model, land ownership, acquisition, proximity to waterfront, revenue generation, and stakeholder consultation, the sub projects were further categorised into Phase 1 and Phase 2. Of the 36 subprojects identified, 6 were taken up for the Phase 1 of design and construction, which are an exploration of the multiple ways in which the city would/could re-engage with its waters.

**Landmarks Along
Water Edge**

Recreational
Landmark Buildings
Commercial/ port
Historic Landmarks

**Activity
Zones**

**Ecology
Network**

Green Patches
Water Streams

Potential Plots

Mobility
Major Roads
Minor Roads
Mangala Corniche

Nodes

Gurupura River

Mangalore

Nethravathi River

Strategy Plan
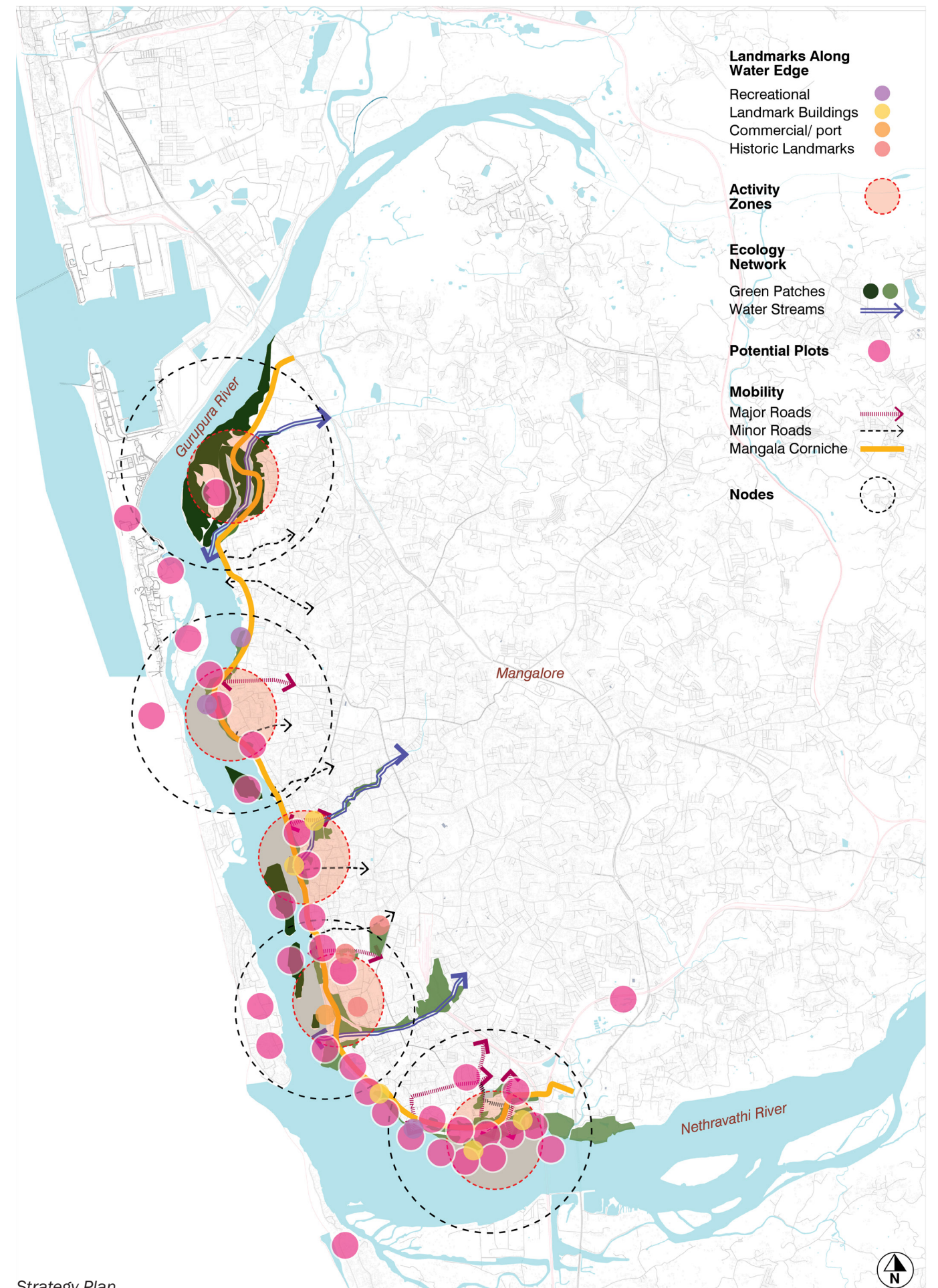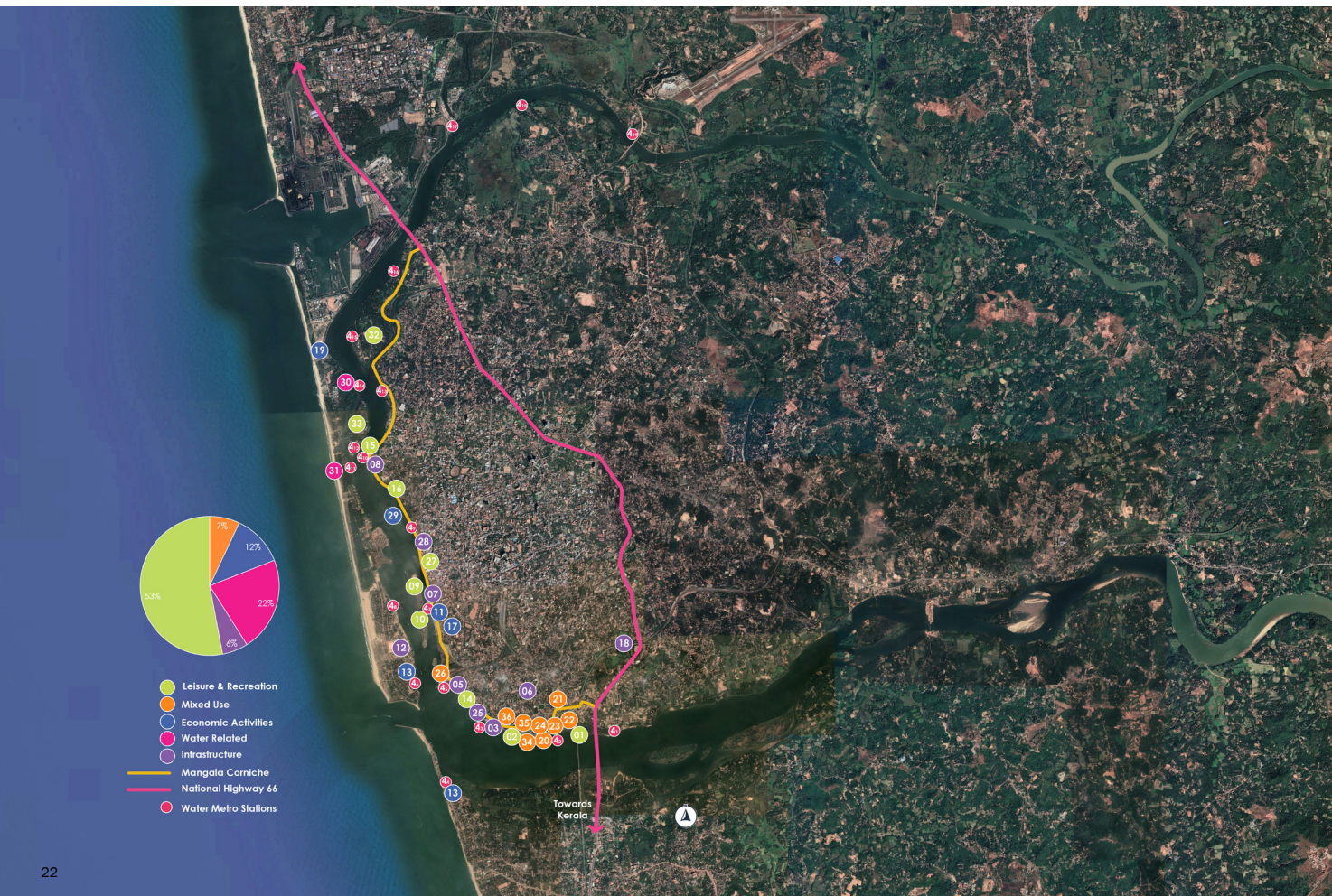
Location of subprojects
Source for base map: Google Earth

NO.	LOCATION	PROJECT
PHASE 1		
01	Netravati Bridge to Bolar Sea Face	Promenade Development
04	Various location along the waterfront	Water Metro
08	Sulthan Battery Area	Sea Link Development
15	Sulthan Battery Area	Area Development
31	Tannirbhavi	Area Development
33	Nayar Kudru	Open Air Theatre & Water Sports Park
PHASE 2		
02	Ice factory area	Open Air Theatre, Sports Complex
03	Bolar Sea Face site	Cultural Hub
05	Hoige Bazaar	Fisherman Community Rehousing
06	Jeppu Market	Multi Utility Building
07	Old Port Area	Sea link Development
09	Island - 1 (North)	Cultural Park (Yakshagana) & Light and Sound Show
10	Island - 2 (South)	Traditional Sports Island (Kambala)
11	Old Port (Commercial area)	Box Park
12	Bengre Island	Fishing Village- PMMSY & Solar Drying Farm
13	Bengre Island Ullal	Idling port Fish Landing Area for Fishmeal
14	College Road	Light House Restoration

NO.	LOCATION	PROJECT
16	Sovereign Tile Works	Adaptive reuse _ Maritime Museum & Wetlands Aquamarine Park to work like an Ecology Interpretation Centre
17	Old Port area	Revolving Restaurant
18	Fisheries College	Sports Complex
19	NMPT	Oceanarium
20	Near Cascia Tile Factory	Street mall
21	CCD Land near Gujjarkere	• Mixed Use development – Residential & Commercial • Mangalore haat (like Delhi haat) • CGH Earth experience hotel model • Luxury plotted development • Museum/ Art gallery
22	Commonwealth tile factory area	• Adaptive reuse of existing Factory as a Clay tile museum • Marquee Urban space for the city • Maritime museum • Cafeteria/Commercial hub
23	Mangalore club area	• Private Jetty Yard • Convention centre • Clubhouse Expansion • F&B facilities
24	South of Mphasis Campus	• Office Campus • Rentable event spaces • Mini performance areas • Public zone on the ground floor
25	Near Joyland Grounds	• Auditorium / congregation space • Improved sports facility
26	Albuquerque & Sons Tile Factory with green railway corridor	• Commercial adaptive reuse • Maritime museum (adaptive reuse) • City green space to Public Park facing sea front (wetland park)
27	Car Street End	Car Street Park connection to Sujith's playground
28	Karkane Mohyudeen Nagar Playground	• Development of community congregation space & playground • Boardwalk around ship
29	Kudla Kudru Island	Development of Party Island
30	Boat dock (Raftaar Terminal)	Adaptive Reuse of Boat dock for Non motorised water sport
32	Kuloor Island	• Biodiversity Natural Heritage with core conservation zones • Riverside public space
34	Near Cascia Tile Factory	Incubation Centre/ Experiential Museum/ Event facility
35	Opposite Cascia Tile Factory	Incubation/ Start-up centre
36	Opposite Ice Factory	Auditorium for performance, & Exhibition space

List of Sub projects identified

MOTION IN WATER – The Water Metro

Mangaluru has historically had movements along its waters, with the ferry system prevailing till date. The Water Metro Network proposed as part of the strategy plan envisions to become an affordable additional mode of transportation along the two rivers hugging Mangaluru city. Water metro points intend to connect all major existing and proposed landmarks along the promenade and towards the inner-city areas. The metro station locations were finalised based on the bathymetry data analysis, existing jetty points/water networks, existing city bus routes, proposed promenade development, public plazas/nodes, tourist networks, and ridership details.

Water metro locations
Source for base map: Google Earth
Existing ferry point
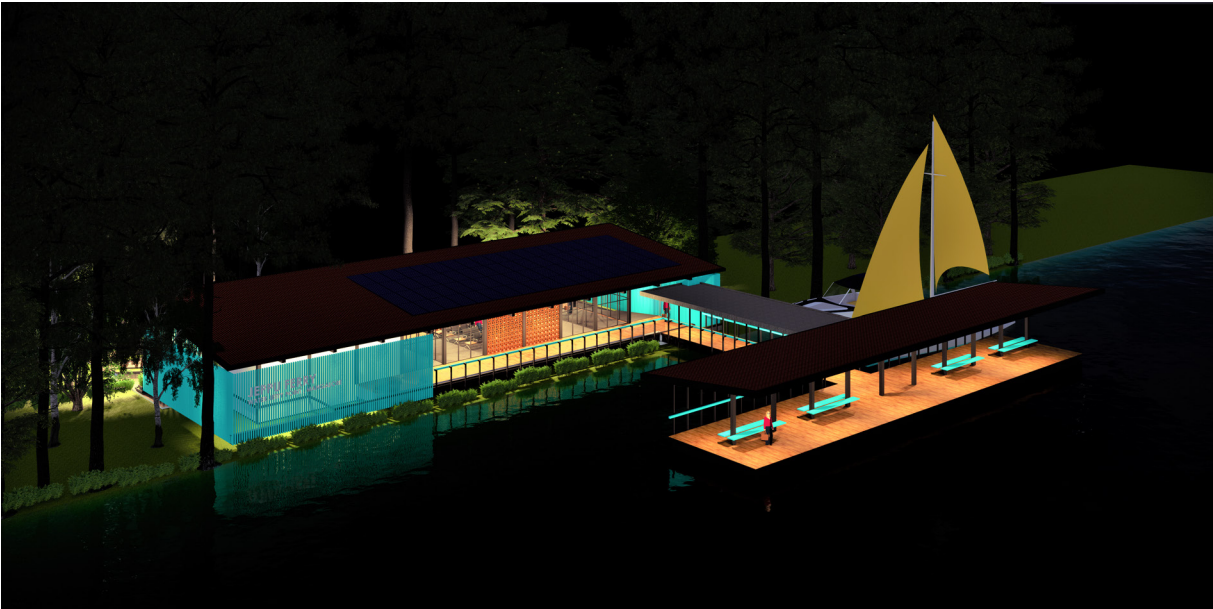
Proposed Water Metro station design – rear view

Proposed Water Metro station design – front view

CELEBRATING WATER – Waterfront
Promenade Development
The 2.1km waterfront Promenade is envisioned in a thread, bead, and pendant concept to re-engage the city to the water edge. The continuous network of walking paths and cycling tracks comprise the 'threads', and the 'beads' become important functional nodes or landmarks. These landmarks are further connected back to the city through a series of road networks that will act as 'pendants' between the city and the Promenade.

Cycle track

Plaza

Kiosks

Cycle stand

Toilets

Pedestrian walkway

Biodiversity zone

Boardwalk

Boardwalk

Biodiversity Interpretation Centre

Viewing decks

Viewing decks

(right top) Aerial view near the Netravathi Bridge
(right bottm) View of the mangrove cover near Netravathi Bridge
(left top) Proposed Biodiversity Park
(left bottom) Netravathi water edge
Source: Google Earth Pro

Promenade Master Plan
Source: Terra Firma Landscape Architecture

(colockwise)
View near Cascia Tile factory
Proposed South Point near Cascia Tile factory

View of the existing boat building yard

EXISTING LANDMARKS	PROPOSED NODES
A NETRAVATI RAILWAY BRIDGE	01 BIODIVERSITY PARK
B KANARA PLYWOOD FACTORY	02 BIRDWATCHING AREA
C COMMONWEALOTH TILE FACTORY	03 JEPPU FERRY
D MANGALURU CLUB	04 TILE FACTORY AREA
E TVS FACTORY	05 SOUTH POINT
F JEPPU TILEWORKS RUINS	06 WETLANDS
G CASCIA TILE FACTORY	07 OAT PLAZA
H ICE FACTORY	08 BOAT BUILDING YARD
	09 ACTIVITY DECKS
	10 BOLAR SEA FACE

south point
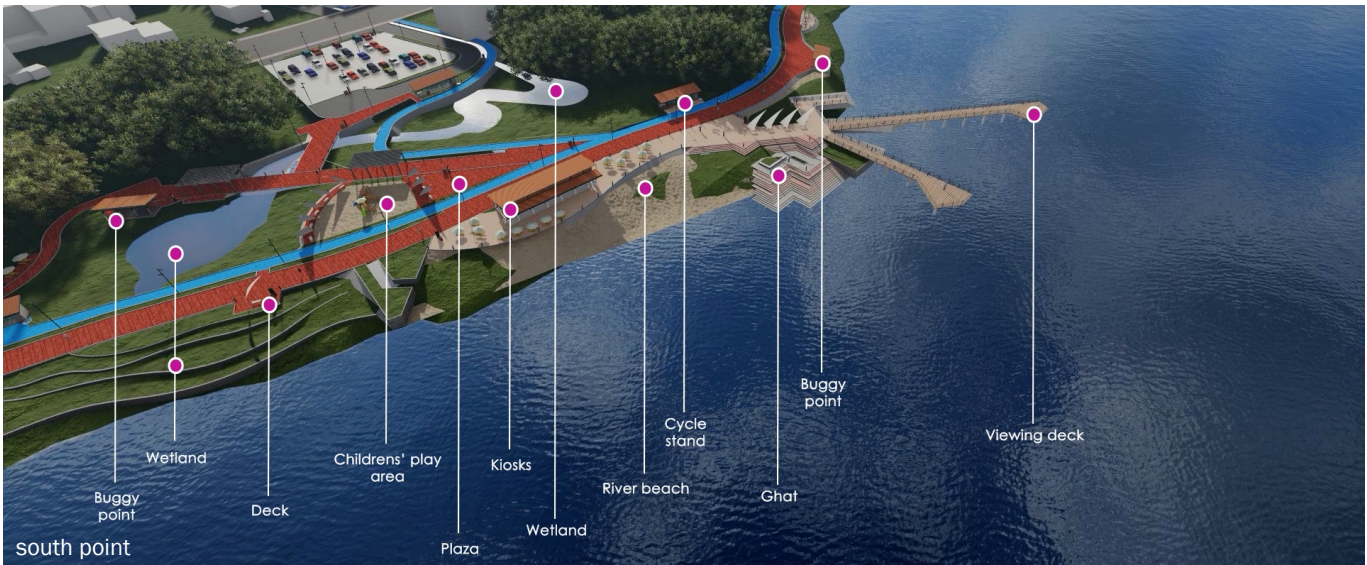
YOUTH DISTRICT

(clockwise)
Proposed Youth District
Proposed Biodiversity Park
Source: Terra Firma Landscape
Architecture
Stepped seating in Youth District
Source: Terra Firma Landscape
Architecture

Aerial view of Sulthan Battery area

Proposed Master Plan for Sulthan Battery area

WATER & HISTORY – Sulthan Battery Heritage Plaza

The proposed area development spanning 7.1 Acres in the Sulthan battery Area, is a 400m long recreational and cultural stretch along the Gurupura river edge. The journey begins with the historic bastion of Sulthan Battery in the north and culminates with the Sea Link landing plaza in the south. The pedestrian journey captures a native species garden, a maidan, an experiential maritime walkway museum, and a Mangalore Haat.

(clockwise)
Walking path & cycle track
Source: Terra Firma Landscape Architecture
Bolar Sea Face
Source: Terra Firma Landscape Architecture

Gurupura River

Legend
1 Sulthan Battery Heritage Site
2 Stepped Pavilion
3 Pedestrian Plaza
4 Jetty Point
5 Promenade
6 Pedestrian Walkway
7 Maritime Walkway Museum
8 Wooden Bridge
9 Maidan
10 Mangalore Haat
11 Toilet Block
12 Sea Link Landing Plaza
13 View Point
14 Native Species Garden
15 River Beach
16 Sculpture Plaza

ACROSS THE WATER – Sea Link pedestrian bridge

The proposed Pedestrian Sea Link at the Sulthan Battery Area spanning over 260m, intends to connect the Mangaluru mainland to the spitland, across Gurupura River, thereby making it the shortest walkable connection to the Tannirbhavi Beach and the Arabian sea from the city. The sea link bridge will be instrumental in binding the proposed Sulthan Battery area revitalisation to that in Tannirbhavi, and consequently anchor the future projects in the region. The viewing decks and pavilion at the access points and landings, create spaces for visitors to pause, engage, and reflect over the picturesque

(right side clockwise)
Sulthan Battery Public Plaza
Aerial view of Sulthan Battery development
(left side clockwise)
Drone view of North Mangaluru
Proposed projects in North Mangaluru

SULTHAN BATTERY PUBLIC PLAZA

WATER SPORTS PARK
1. GO-KARTING ARENA
2. WATER SPORTS PARK
3. NAYAR KUDRU JETTY POINT
4. OPEN AIR THEATRE

AREA DEVELOPMENT AT SULTHAN BATTERY
5. SULTHAN BATTERY HISTORY PLAZA
6. JETTY POINT
7. PROMENADE
8. MARITIME WALKWAY MUSEUM
9. MAIDAN
10. MANGALORE HAAT

AREA DEVELOPMENT AT TANNIRBHAVI
11. EAT STREET
12. JETTY POINT
13. PROMENADE WALKWAY

CRZ IA
CRZ II
HAZARD LINE
HIGH TIDE LINE
LOW TIDE LINE

(left top) Sea Link Pedestrian Bridge
(left bottom) View from the bridge

(right top) Shacks at Tannirbhavi beach front
(right bottom)View from the entrance plaza

visual of the river in front of them.
FRAMING THE WATER – Eat Street at Tannirbhavi
The proposed development at Tannirbhavi, planned in about 5300 sq.m of area, is an attempt to create an experiential arrival to the beachfront through a series of interesting markers and pause points. The proposed Eat Street, conceptualised in the lines of Smart City Streets for People design program, would strengthen, reorganise, and popularise the commercial activities in the area.

The Eat Street comprises of establishments for food and beverages, kiosks for seashell artifacts, a clock tower plaza, parking lots, pavilions, seating spaces and other public amenities. The visual and pedestrian experience through the street culminates at the Mangaluru Frame which is designed to capture the sunset, horizon, and endless blues of the city. The Mangaluru Frame opens out to a podium that drops down to the Tannirbhavi sand coast, thus completing the journey to the beachfront.
WATER & PLAY – Water Sports Park and Open Air Theatre
Nayar Kudru, a small islet between Mangaluru and its spitland, owing to its topography, sparse development,

1 Promenade Pavilion/
Sea Link landing site
2 Shaded Walkway
3 Ferry Point
4 Clock Tower
5 Parking Lot
6 Toilet Block
7 Eat Street
8 Mangalore Frame
9 Pavilion
10 Beach-front
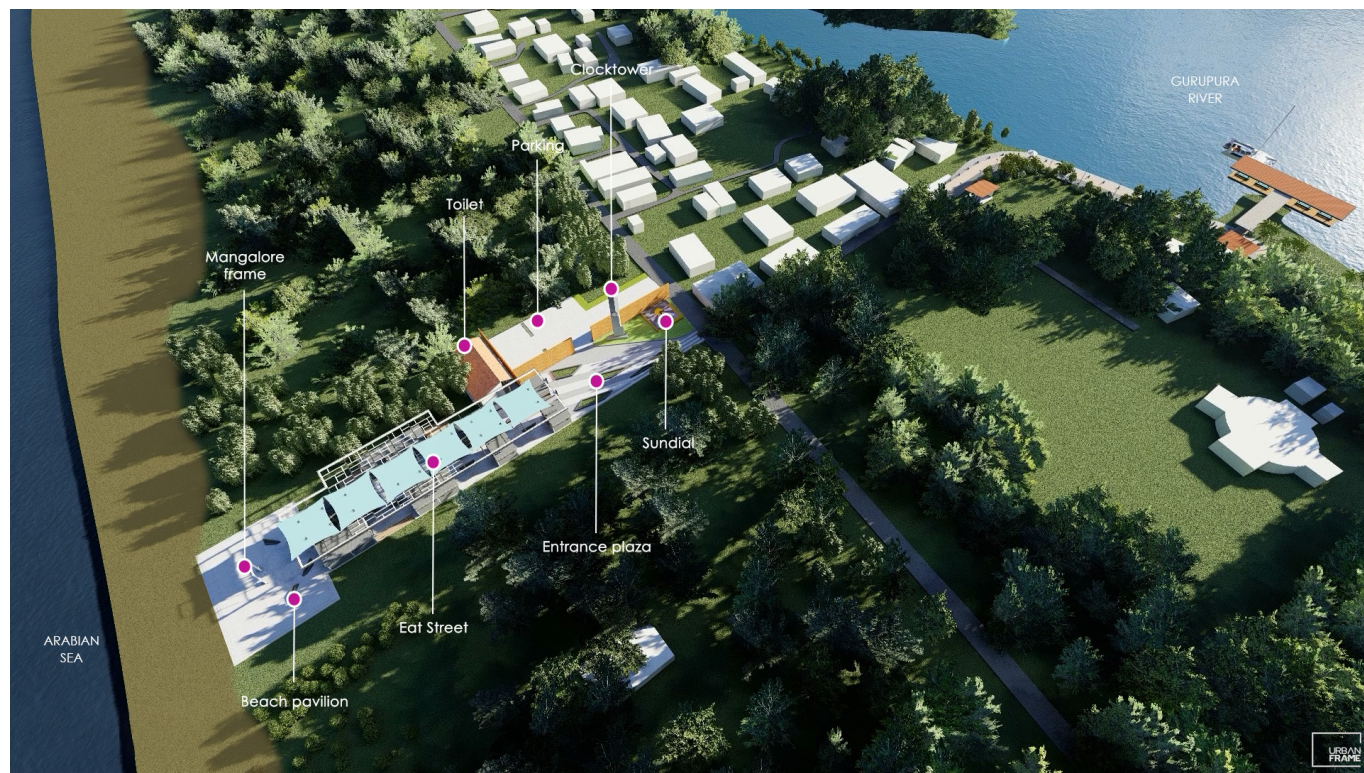
and natural setting, had immense potential to become an anchor for an active water related sports activity zone. The proposal comprises of a go-karting arena, water sports park, and an open-air theatre which together form the recreational and entertainment destination for the city.

The Water Sports Park is a mix of learning and playing, arranged within the Water Sports Block, Training Block, Museum Block, Pavilion Block, Jetty Block, and the Go-Karting Arena. The Open-Air Theatre at the southern tip of Nayar Kudru becomes a destination for celebration by being a city level congregation space. The OAT also provides a panoramic view of the Sea Link across the Gurupura, against the backdrop of the city skyline.

Master Plan of Tannirbhavi area
Aerial view of the Tannirbhavi development

Legend
1 Entry/Exit
2 Children's Playground
3 Go-Karting Arena
4 Water Sports Block
5 Training Pool
6 Training Block
7 Museum Block
8 Pavilion Block
9 Pedestrian Walkway
10 Walkway to Jetty Point
11 Plaza & viewpoint
12 Jetty Point
13 Open Air Theatre
14 F&B Facility
15 Parking Lot
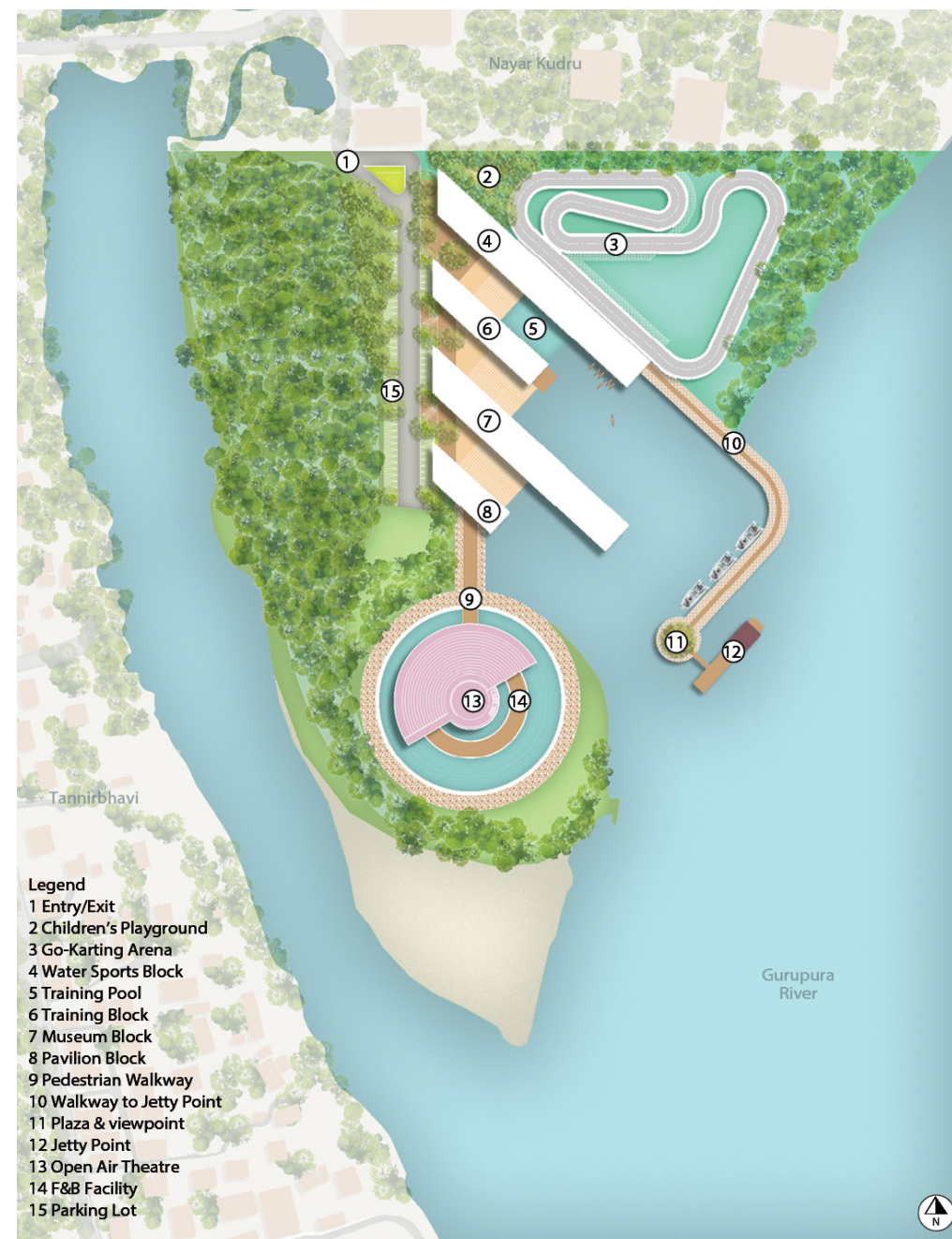
Aerial view of Nayar Kudru
Master Plan of the Open-Air Theatre & Water Sports Park

OPEN AIR THEATRE &
WATER SPORTS PARK

Design Team: UrbanFrame Pvt Ltd,
Terra Firma Landscape Architecture,
Shilanyas Design Consultants,
Vagish Naganur
Client: Mangaluru Smart City Limited
Graphics: UrbanFrame Pvt Ltd
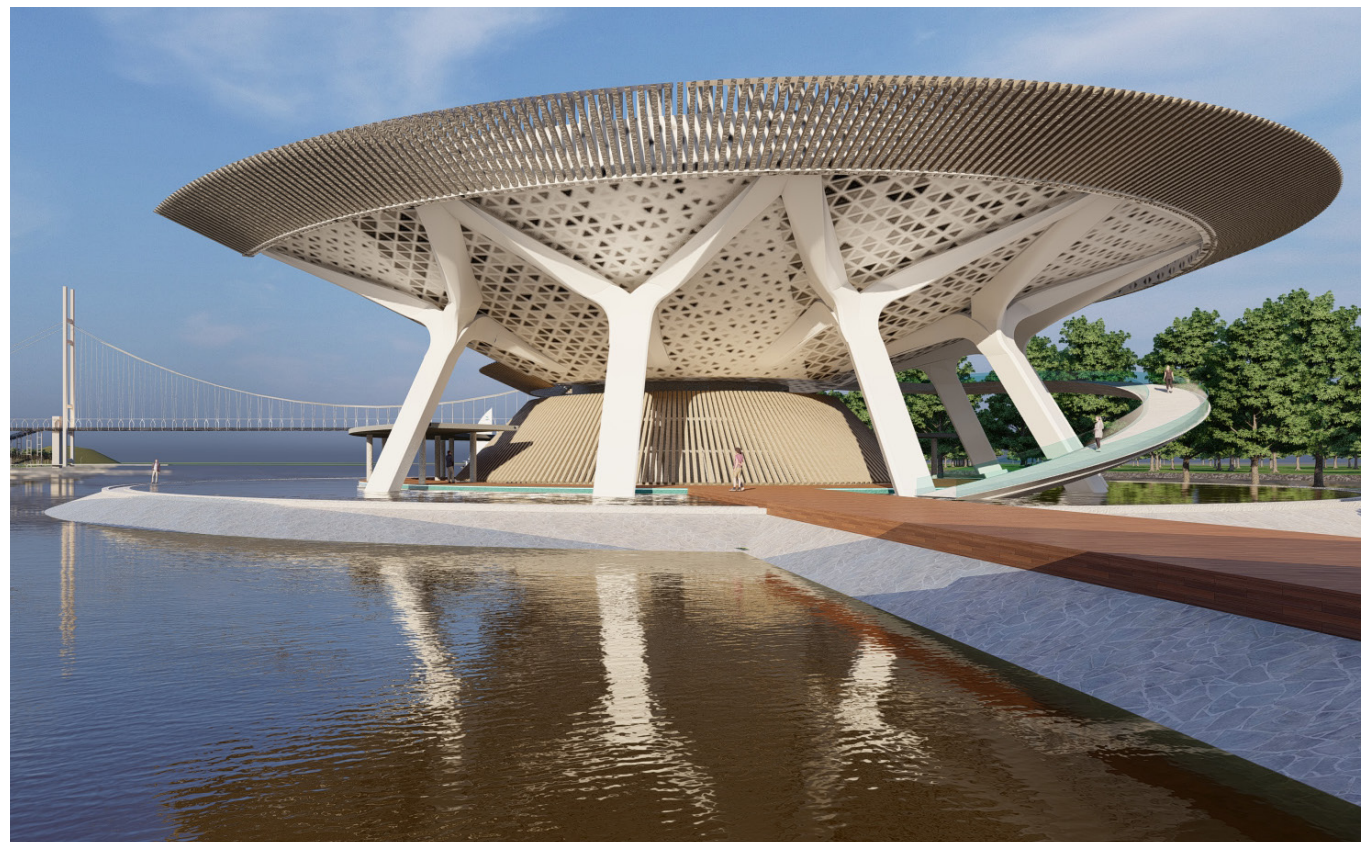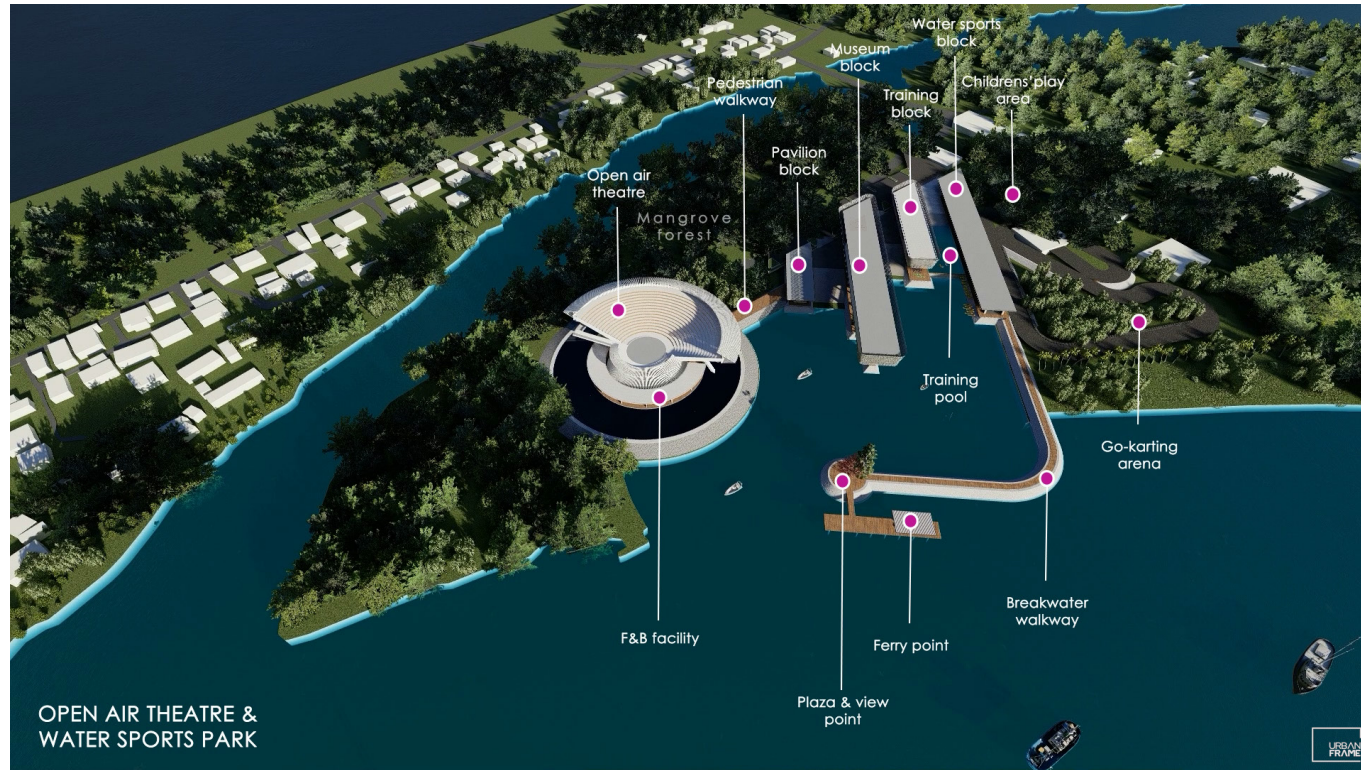
Embracing change

India, being a large cultural paradox is a collection of multiple cities and sub-cities that are in a constant state of movement. Over the years, the city of Mangaluru has adapted itself to the varying phases of engagement with water. The attachment, detachment, and re-attachment is an illustration of how cities are continually in transition.

One may observe patterns that may emerge, sustain, intersect, die, and for all you know, re-emerge. The dynamicity that cities today exhibit, all the more emphasises our role as designers to keenly observe these patterns, and offer effective design sensibilities that ensure inclusive, holistic, and viable cities that are capable of sustaining these changes.

(top) Aerial view of the proposed development in Nayar Kudru.
(bottom) The Open-Air Theatre against the Gurupura River
(left) View of the Training Block

Dr. Anup Naik is the Founder Director of UrbanFrame Pvt Ltd (A Space Matrix Group Company). He holds a PhD in Sustainable Architecture from VTU, Karnataka, with BMSCA as his research center. He earned his Master's in Urban Design from SPA, New Delhi, and Bachelor's in Architecture from BMS College of Architecture, Bangalore.
With 28 years of experience across countries including Morocco, Singapore, Malaysia, Thailand, Kenya, and Vietnam, Dr. Naik is also a Professor at RV College of Architecture and serves on advisory boards of multiple institutions. He has played key roles in the Smart City Mission - as Independent Director (Bengaluru), Built Environment Expert (Shivamogga), and Waterfront Consultant (Mangaluru). Passionate about user-centric and sustainable design, he has led UrbanFrame's multidisciplinary work across master planning, urban design, hospitality, healthcare, transportation, conservation, and more. His award-winning projects span master plans to high-rises, earning national and global recognition in sustainable architecture and urbanism.

Soumya S Warrier is an Urban Designer, Architect, and Architectural Journalist, currently Team Lead at UrbanFrame Pvt Ltd. She holds a Master's in Urban Design from SPA New Delhi and a Bachelor's in Architecture from College of Engineering Trivandrum. She is passionate about the dynamics of cities and people, contributing to both government and private sector projects. At UrbanFrame, she has led master planning for 17+ km, 60+ acres of public space, 273+ acres of institutional campuses, and large-scale residential, hospitality, commercial, and mixed-use developments. Her designs emphasize sustainability - preserving 740 acres of virgin soil and designing 9 million sft for green compliance, with 12 projects targeting Net Zero. Her vision is to create inclusive, responsive, and rooted public spaces.

THE SACRALITY OF EMBODIED SENSE SCAPE

An Archetypal Dimension of Memory Place-making in Bengaluru

Gagana G

BACKGROUND

Sacred events and celebrations in a city are spatialized acts of memory that layer in space and time to form a shared or collective memory of a place. These places include values, beliefs, and narratives that form the collective intangible cultural heritage a group or society holds. Such acts in the city as theatrical space celebrate the older axes and re-establish the sacred ecological connections of the city. However, if this collective memory and its markers are erased due to the increasing urban pressures, objectified and externalized memories are abstracted from daily life and become symbols displayed and publicized without the context of place. New inhabitants replace the older ones with no place attachment. The idea of place-making through the lens of collective memory need to address the following urban concerns - (1) Planning approaches lack recognition of the culturally important narrative between people and place over space and time; (2) The ritual scape of cities with experiences that formed, developed, maintained and revised the landscape have either diminished or substituted by transformation through commodification of land.

RESEARCH INTENT

This thesis intends to explore the process of sensorial embodied rituals and practices of a temporal event as a method to re-establish the people-place attachment and maintain cultural continuity in a city. It establishes design parameters that form the toolkit to guide the planning and development in the city of Bengaluru. The study demonstrates the mechanism in which the concept of an embodied sense scape can help implement a precinct regeneration program

RESEARCH OBJECTIVES

- To understand the concept of embodied spaces in a city
- To establish parameters of embodied

process by looking at sacredscapes in cities.
- Method to read and analyse the process of embodiment for the event
- To use the concept of embodied in preserving the intangible heritage that is culture - The tool kit of design parameters that helps to achieve heritage regeneration programs

METHOD TO STUDY

The fieldwork to capture the embodied spaces is done through primary data collection (Informal or focused interviews) to understand the sensorial dimensions of an embodied space. It follows a method of grouping of embodied practices, associated places and elements, meanings, and memories of selected individuals from a specific community whose collective memory is being looked at. The collective sensorial mapping identifies three kinds of places:
(1) place where associated meanings have been condensed,
(2) place where the meanings are substituted, (3) place where meanings have been dispersed.

WHAT IS EMBODIED SPACE?

Embodied space is the one that involves the active participation of the human with his surroundings. A process in which a group of individuals and their environment participate in moulding each other. It indicates 'the practices, representations, expressions, knowledge, skills as well as cultural spaces associated with specific native communities, groups and recognized as part of their 'Cultural Heritage'. Embodied space, in this study, is presented as a model for understanding culture as intangible heritage and the key role it plays in sociocultural place-making.

PARAMETERS OF EMBODIMENT

Embodied place-making can thus be considered to be the primary mode by which individuals, societies, and social systems reproduce themselves. Scholars such

Collective memory of Chickpete area, Bengaluru

as Iain Borden have demonstrated how such place-based behavior shapes us and evokes culturally sanctioned responses. The continual production and reproduction of the embodied condition involve four things: an acting subject, a mode of engagement, a condition of materiality, and resultant meaning and critique.

- Acting Subject: The element of embodiment that involves people's consciousness, actions, and interactions. Consideration of the bodies that engage with the place.

- Mode of Engagement: The study of embodiment is incomplete without drawing attention to the role of the human body and its performative and affective engagement with the material world.

- Condition of Materiality: A Physical environment that cannot exist without the human inhabitants who experience it in their everyday lives, whose meaning is dependent upon the larger economic and political contexts within which these individuals operate in any specific location.

- Intrinsic meaning: To embody something is to express, personify, and give concrete and perceptible form to a concept that may exist only as an abstraction. This act of making an abstract idea corporeal and incarnate occurs when we read place as a material product of human imagination and experience.

URBAN DESIGN CHALLENGE
Has the threat of getting substituted in the future: Our senses are biologically advanced and socially underemployed. An individual's interaction with the material environment through the senses is the most fundamental interaction that is often overlooked in development plans. Planning looks at exteriorizing and commodifying spaces. Sensorial environments are important for the mental image of a space.

In the process of getting eroded: Threats to embodied spaces in the city that appear and reappear only during important events or collective celebrations are not addressed in the typical planning approach. The connection between people and place needs to be looked at as a continuous reciprocal process.

Already Eroded: The cultural narrative and value system embedded in urban-scapes have completely disappeared today. This is due to the dispersed traditional communities in the city who were involved in the act of renewing the meaning of certain places and the lack of place attachment for the new communities.

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Parameters of Embodimen

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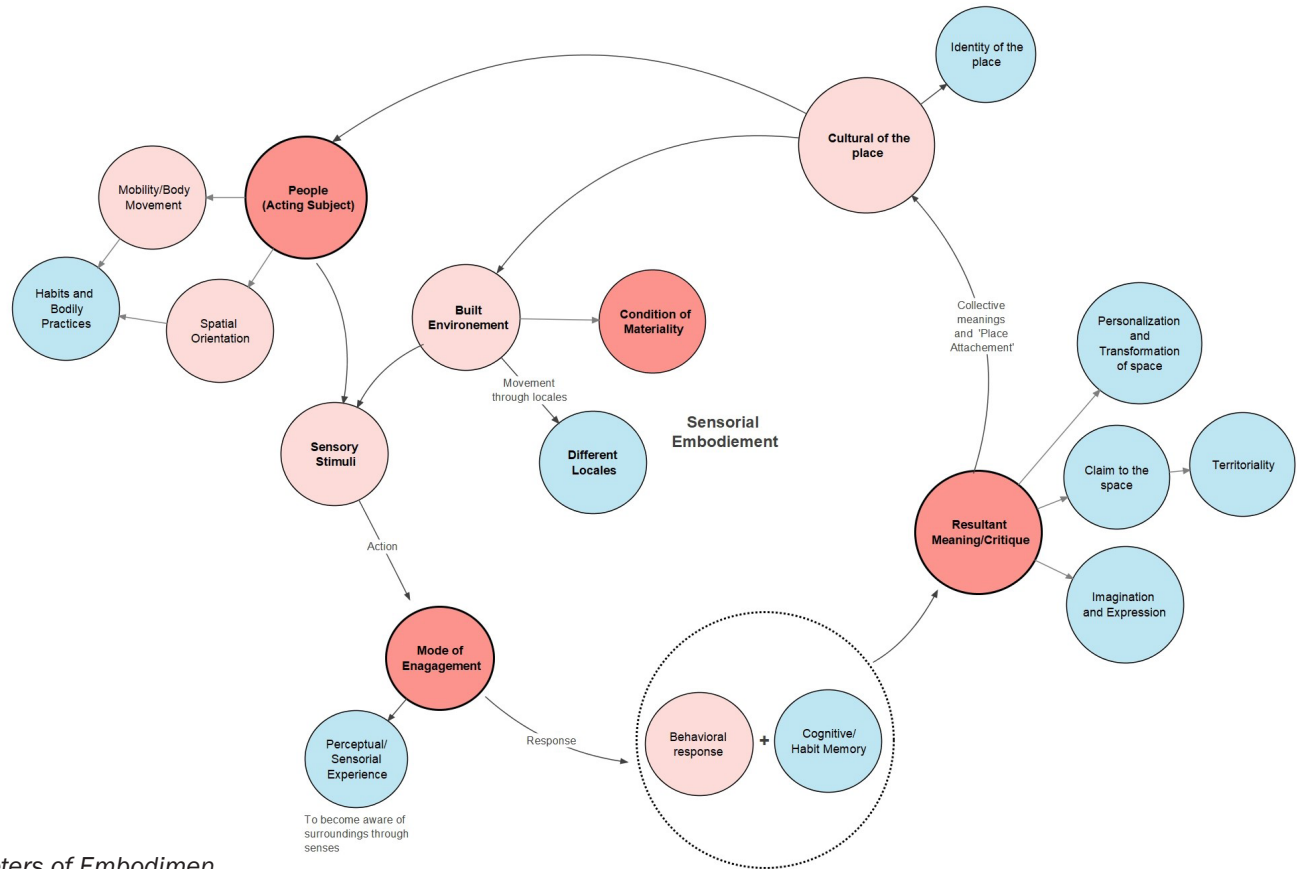
> *Karaga jatre sacrality is regularly spatialized and space sacralized, lending a different ontological status and meaning to the Vahnikula Kshatriyas' claims to the city's space.*

NEED FOR THE STUDY
The public realms in Indian cultural landscapes are a mosaic of mental and social constructions, memorial repositories, and ritual happenings embedded with cultural traditions. Planners and designers have seldom acknowledged the older niches and sacred axes in the city. Theatrical spaces have been replaced or dominated by sites for the artificial production of regional and national memories—museums, political and religious monuments, nature parks, and recreation sites. The planning approach needs to consider the complex web of cultural and physical meanings manifested through collective memory.

SCOPE OF THE STUDY
The study develops a toolkit for socio-cultural community-based neighborhoods in cities by acknowledging the differences of each unique memory to balance the grand narrative, keeping the collective memory of the place alive. Thus, collective memory can be looked at as a tool for contemporary memory-place-making.

CONTEXT STUDY
The legendary event of Bengaluru, the 11-day Karaga Jaatre, celebrated and embodied primarily by the Vanhikula Kshatriya community, has been taking place for the past 600 years in Bengaluru during the Chaitra masa of the Hindu calendar. The procession has a designated route in the old city, triggering the memories for many other communities. The crowds are thick, and the city appears as a vast pilgrimage site. The celebration is connected with the worship of nature, and water is marked by rituals at various historic tanks of the city.

SIGNIFICANCE OF KARAGA
- Karaga demonstrates the embodiment of multiple communities (centered around Thiggalas) where sacred is the centre of their claims to the city

- Production and reproduction of spaces occur through kinetic, oral, mnemonic, spatial, and ultimately political
- Geography of the city includes public realms of the sacred, markets, and the marketing of icons of the city.

- The memory landscape of Karaga is a means of accessing how various strata of society and different communities construct the metropolitan world, making it an embodied civic ritual

- The Karaga narrates the Karaga Purana based on characters and themes that are from the Mahabharata. It is also related to other myths, folktales, epics, or dramas that are a much localized versions in the city.

STORY OF PEOPLE, PLACE, AND THEIR INTRINSIC MEANINGS
Before the various zones of the city were cemented together by concrete, the urban area could still be seen as a patchwork of settlements (villages, suburbs, the City, and the Cantonment) linked together by horticultural land, parks, and tanks. The Vahnikula Kshatriya, also known as the gardeners, were an integral part of this patchwork. Many small nurseries in Bangalore were cultivated using wells twenty feet deep to supply water.

The uniqueness and the distinctive meaning of the Pete area is brought about by the unique community network of the Thiggalas and their place association, Chikpete, as a realm where the Karaga Jattre plays out as a civic ritual and lastly the intrinsic meaning and impact of such event on the city and its collective memory.

WHY ARE SACRED SPACES EMBODIED SPACES?
The cultural landscape as a network of sacred embodied spaces helps us to examine several underlying urban issues in core areas of cities with overlapping community networks and ritual centers. The reading of the concept of embodied through sacred-scapes also helps in the interpretation of how cultural and religious life in general, and power relations in particular, are constituted, reproduced, and contested. The conventional planning system needs to go beyond the consideration of the formal properties of a landscape as a system of communication between symbolic meanings and individual intentions. The diagram below highlights the various characteristics of a sacred embodied space as described by Rana P B Singh. The uniqueness and the distinctive meaning of the pete area is brought about by the unique community network of the Thiggalas and their place association, Chikpete, as a realm where the Karaga Jattre plays out as a civic ritual and lastly the intrinsic meaning and impact of such event on the city and its collective memory

PARAMETERS CONTRIBUTING TO PLACE ATTACHMENT
The embodiment of the Karaga jatre, together with other legal and institutional interventions, opens up a realm of political action for Vahnikula Kshatriyas in Bangalore and facilitates the construction of a complex management system at a city scale. Some of the efforts include fire-born ancestors, fire sacrifice, fiery lineages, and their location in the narratives and practices of key shrines in Bangalore. These coordinates and axes create an arena of operation for the Karaga jatre that also embodies them through ritual, oral, and kinetic practices (Srinivas, 139). The urban social memory is transmitted and transformed through the performance and practices of the body linked to it.

CONCLUSION

Bengaluru's existing master plan focuses on 13 features, which elaborates on the preservation of architectural and heritage monuments in Bangalore and promotes 'Heritage Tourism' to showcase the region's history and culture. The proposal for the 2031 Bengaluru master plan should not only look at urban artefacts but also examine the need to attach the people and memory to its terrain through embodied place-making. Karaga maintains the cultural associations evoked by the act of jatre. The performative anthropological and sociological angles should not be separated while analyzing spaces like the pete area. Thus, this study demonstrated the capacity of the physical form of a cultural landscape to regenerate itself when associations, ideologies, and continuity are re-established and maintained. The term 'archetypal' for the thesis title thus justifies the cultural phenomena of Karaga as the original event from which various other suburban cycles emerged through a network of community associations.

RECOMMENDATIONS

The laws governing the memory place-making of this thesis are a set of frameworks to be applied in other heritage precincts within the city to create a network of urban realms with heightened experiences resulting in vibrant spaces. Hence, rather than representing cultural groups like Thiggalas as a parallel reality of the contemporary city, there is a need to recognize these strata of society who produce the city in real terms and who are involved in the act of renewing the meaning of the city. This study can be taken further by examining the event scape of old core of cities across multiple communities and generations to capture the strongest collective memory of place. The study can also be further explored through the aid of technology in mapping the behavioural and sensorial factors in the historic precincts. The study provides a base framework to strengthen the preservation of intangible heritage through the stories of land and people. Focusing on cognitive habits and memories of people is the key to the comprehensive planning of heritage precincts.

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	Tangible Heritage		Intangible Heritage	
	Acting Subject (People)	Condition of Materiality (People)	Mode of Engagement	Intrinsic meaning or Critique
Embodied Sensescape	Individual	Visual landmarks, building signages, places of olfactory and auditory triggers, Materials and textures, microclimate of the environment, natural features	Visibility, Auditory, Olfactory, Kinesthetic percpetions, bodily practices, everyday rituals, accessibility	Sense of belongingness, sense of orientation, ambient qualities, rootedness of a place, individual memory
Embodied Sacredscape	Community	Sacred places and landmarks, ritual spaces, social spaces, elements of green and blue, neighborhood territory, temples, shrines,	Cultural symbolism, collective memory, space appropriation, collective expression,	Sacred axis, sacred geometry and ecology, sense of place attachment and identity, sense of territoriality
Embodied Eventscape	City	Urban artifacts, historic landmarks, urban form, processional routes, avenue of trees and plants, visual axis and avenues, place aesthetics, land and building use	Strong associations, Value system and transactions, environment of sensory phenomena, legibility of the city, rituals, performances and celebrations	Complex landscape of communication, dichotomies, temporality and ephemerality, continuity, multiplicity

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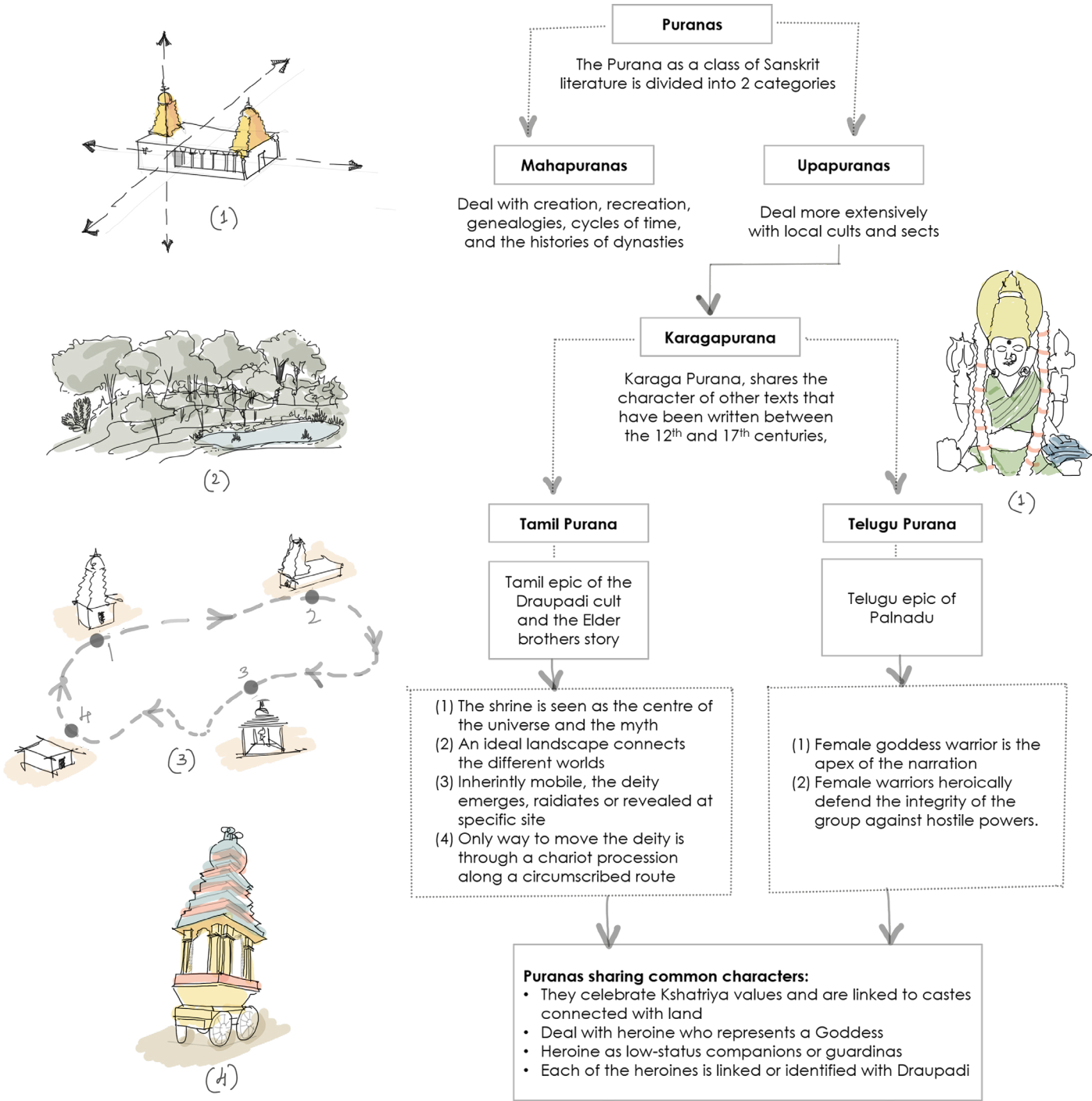
Karaga Puranas as described by Smrithi Srinias in "Landscapes of Urban Memory."

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Gagana is an urban designer with a deep-rooted passion for cities, sociology, and cultural narratives. Her early interest in painting urban life evolved into a career focused on inclusive street design, urban research, and policy advocacy. She currently works at WRI India, a research-based non-profit that promotes sustainable city development with state and local governments. Her work blends academic research with on-ground engagement, including capacity-building workshops and policy development. Inspired by everyday city life, film forums, and community-led walks, Gagana's design and writing often explore themes of history and cultural identity. Her postgraduate thesis was nominated for the COA Award for Excellence.

Parks and Recreation

The Hidden Rhythms of a Neighborhood

Deepika Varadarajan

If you've lived in Bangalore long enough, you can spot the green and yellow-painted compounds of the neighbourhood parks. I consider myself fortunate to have moved into a first-floor apartment facing one such park during the second wave of COVID-19, just as the lockdown began. Taking time off work to reflect and recalibrate, I later positioned my desk by a window overlooking the park. What started as a passing distraction gradually became a profound connection, and these daily scenes, quietly unfolding below, have shifted my perspective on life in more ways than I can count.

The park is a microcosm of the world around us, teeming with diverse lives, rhythms, and routines. Right from the time the park lights are switched on at 5 AM, I get to see and observe people and how they transverse through life with their varying human experiences.

Hailing from a city that had more playgrounds than parks, I was initially struck by how this park fosters a walking culture that goes beyond physical exercise. I believe that meetings and conversations greatly influence people's mental health and well-being. It almost feels like everybody who walks the park has a different agenda—some who just want to get the exercise out of their way, some who have been advised to walk, solo walkers who have a phone in their hand in the 90-degree position and watch old Kannada songs while they walk, some IT professionals who get their work calls done during the walk, some women who come in small groups and discuss their private lives, young parents who converse about how they get through their hectic lives and parenthood, and dog moms/ dads stopping by as their dogs play with each other.

Equally intriguing is how the park and its approach road serve as a backdrop for varied moments of life - photoshoots/ video shoots for pre and post-weddings, pregnancies, and birthdays, capturing life's varied milestones against a natural setting. Photos with blooming Bird-of-Paradise plants, Instagram reels and YouTube shorts never fail to entertain me.

The approach to the park, where the rich canopy above and the fallen leaves below provide a peaceful setting for quiet reflection

The park's ability to provide a consistent backdrop for diverse activities is truly captivating. For instance, from 11 AM to 3:30 PM, the gardener has the park to himself, often humming while diligently tending to tasks like de-weeding, cleaning, composting, and watering the plants and trees. It's heartening to witness his children playing joyfully with the water sprinklers, dragging dried palm branches, and racing around the park on an old bicycle at high speeds. The park offers a peaceful afternoon shade to the BBMP workers who diligently sweep the leaves from the streets each morning. In the afternoons, it becomes a setting for their friendly banter, adding a sense of camaraderie to their routine.

Though these moments are as fleeting as the shifting light in the park, they are also constant in their return. I've come to notice the rhythms—the people who arrive at the same time each morning, the familiar faces who pause for a chat or a shared smile, and the sense of community that quietly flourishes.

The park also gives me the space to reflect. Over time, I've become attuned to its daily rhythms. I hear the songs of birds every morning as I wake up, and as the park slowly comes to life, I too find myself anchored. There is a meditative quality in these daily observations, like watching a slow, unfolding symphony. Whether it is the father wearing his daughter's bright pink Dora bag after preschool walking with her, the oldest ajja or the friendly custodian of the street with his walker who stops and has a conversation with almost every passerby, or the neighbourhood dogs that get belly rubs from the kids and the garbage collector, or the man in the RCB t-shirt, with his oversized headphones as he takes his evening walk, or the brown street dog that follows a regular walker and does exactly three rounds in the morning, or the middle-aged woman who used to gently hold her husband's hand during their morning walks, especially when his illness made it difficult for him to stay on course. Additionally, there is the man on his morning walk with a bag of chips, adding a simple yet delightful moment. His relaxed demeanour and enjoyment

of this small indulgence amidst the natural surroundings further enrich the diverse experiences that unfold daily in the community park.

During the lockdown, the rhythm was simply watching from my window. The park was my anchor in a world turned upside down, a steady presence that allowed me to recalibrate. Over the past three years, as life has slowly returned to its usual pace, the park has remained a constant, its presence comforting in its predictability. Even now, when I look out the window, I feel a sense of connection to something larger than myself. Over time, I've grown attached to these small, quiet moments—the absence of certain individuals leaves a lingering sense of concern, and their return brings a quiet joy.

Each day, the park and its surroundings evoke emotions—a sense of joy, a touch of jealousy, a moment of tranquillity, a cry for help, a realization of contentment, a sense of wonder and awe, an inspiration for life, a love for the unknown, and gratitude for everything I have. Just as the gardener finds solace in his humble hut in the corner of the park, I, too, find a sense of grounding here. The park has become a sanctuary, a quiet place where life unfolds in its many forms and where I, too, find moments of peace amid the bustle of daily life.

Deepika Varadarajan is an architect and an academic with over 10 years of diverse experience. Her career has been marked by a series of impactful teaching roles across architectural institutions. Her architectural pursuits are grounded in holistic building traditions and approaches, such as encouraging locally available materials, traditional construction processes, and culturally and climatically appropriate building design. Some of her research interests include architectural philosophy, architectural theory and history, and climate and the built environment.

Photos and Instagram Reels being shot - the park turns into a photo studio, and everyone is a model for the day
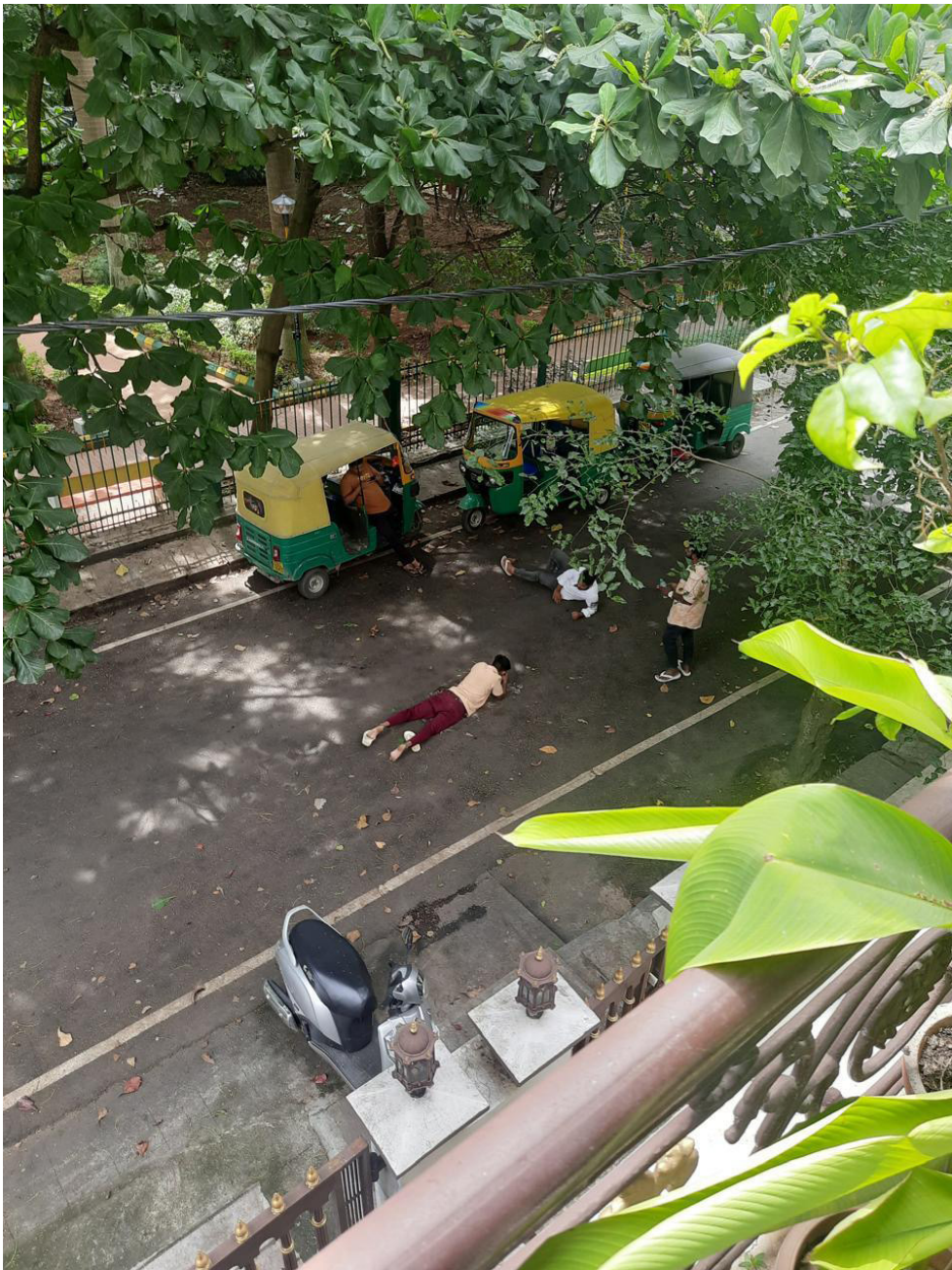
Dogs to pet, cats to admire, and snakes to spot – life in and around the park in ever amusing

DECOLONISING REPRESENTATIONS
The subcultures of drawing

Ujjayant Bhattacharyya & Priyanka Mukherjee

Every image drawn, rendered, or photographed should tell us a story—a story of its time, situation, culture, and spirit that engages the viewer in a captivating narrative. This narrative evokes emotions, memories, and experiences while remaining simple, aesthetic, and easy to understand. As a seminal approach, The style adopted by our Architectural Practice visualizations in context reflects an intentional shift away from conventional Western representational methods. It embraces a more democratized process, responding to the evolving subculture of architectural drawings and representations, which prioritizes inclusivity and contextual relevance and eventually emerges as a subculture of Drawing and Representation in the sub-continent. This ethos of visual democratization resonates

Durgabari

....between line and color, between drawing and production,....

with the works of architects such as B.V. Doshi and Charles Correa's architectural visualizations, which are deeply rooted in Indian knowledge systems, represent a departure from Western drawing conventions. Doshi's works, such as Sangath and Aranya Low-Cost Housing, reflect traditional Indian concepts of space, climate, and community. His sketches blend organic forms with regional construction techniques, capturing the fluid interaction between architecture and cultural practices. For instance, the layout of Aranya mimics Indian village clusters, emphasizing community living, while his sketches for IIM Bangalore channel ancient educational models like Nalanda, fostering open, collaborative spaces that integrate nature. These visualizations move away from photorealism, instead focusing on storytelling and the emotional connection between people and their environment, aligning with the subculture of architectural drawing that seeks to democratize representation by making it more inclusive and contextually resonant.

Similarly, Correa's drawings, such as those for Jawahar Kala Kendra

and Belapur Housing, incorporate Indian metaphysical principles like Vastu Shastra and cosmic geometry. His visualizations use diagrams and symbolic representations, as seen in Jawahar Kala Kendra, where the building's layout is based on the Navagraha mandala. His sketches prioritize cultural and environmental sensitivity, reflecting traditional Indian urban planning principles that emphasize organic growth. By integrating indigenous art forms and narratives into his designs, Correa's visualizations communicate cultural identity and spiritual symbolism. Both architects' methods reflect the ongoing evolution of architectural representation in India, aligning with a broader subculture that rejects conventional Western methods, embracing regional and vernacular forms that resonate with local contexts. In alignment with these principles, the technique as a practice, we employ—Hybrid Diagramming Montage— that combines traditional manual drawing with digital montage. Hybrid, because of the negotiation that exists in the image, within the sacrosanct of manual drawing and innovative digital montage. Hybrid, also because it juxtaposes modern

archviz trends with traditionalism as the technique is inspired by the minute details and characters of regional and vernacular representational art forms in India. It draws heavily in the form of style, palette, and aesthetics from the Mughal Miniature paintings and the Pichwai paintings of Maharashtra as it attempts to de-colonize and frame the time, space, and culture of the built and the unbuilt in picturesque imagery that aims to resolve the split between proponents of traditional forms of representations, architectural drawings, and immersive expressions. It attempts at becoming a negotiated image of the situation between line and color, between drawing and production, between manual and digital means of working in order to galvanise several methods and elements of architectural and artistic representation. Unlike hyper-realistic renderings, which focus on replicating and amplifying reality to the highest and sometimes an impossible degree of the overall, this hybrid technique however, serves as an antithesis to that, instead relying extensively on picturesque imagery of a situation, expressed as a collage, focusing on detail. Hence, with the images

in context, one can observe how the drawing combines elements and characters of what works best from the overlaps of intent, medium & methods. Through an exchange between these entities, emerges the process. This hybrid image is further digitally curated to capitalize on the qualities of multiple media.

The style adopted for the visualizations of the projects in context hence focuses on a technique that uses a hybrid system of simple humble drawing and collage as a means of conveyance. The simplicity of the technique focuses on framing the Architecture as a character in the middle of a conversation. The conversation being, its relationship with the context, time & Users. The first image is of Durgabari, a Durga temple for communities in a village town of Assam. The representational elements of the visualization hence attempt to freeze that spirit of celebration, the context of sub-urbanity, and the culture of the way the Temple converses with its situation and vice-versa using the technique. The temple is visualised as the central spatial protagonist in the story of a carnival in the site. Secondly, for Moortighor, Urban Revival of the Kumartuli Idol Maker's Colony, using the same Hybrid Diagramming Montage, the image intends to reflect and translate the core intent of

the design in one single frame : "To dignify the dwelling of the idol makers". Adopting a local stylistic approach inspired by character designs of the legendary Jamini Roy, the visualisation overlays these characters in an Architectural setting. The third image, imagines Smaarak, a multi-faith cemetery in Thane, located at the outskirts of the city on the banks of the Ulhas river. The imagery attempts to capture the project as a world of its own. It embodies the cemetery as a utopian vision, with its own language of form and aesthetic, that delivers a traditionally rooted futuristic speculation of death. The hybrid method emerges as a negotiation between line and color, manual and digital, and traditional and contemporary techniques. Unlike hyper-realistic renderings, which amplify reality to an often exaggerated degree, this technique relies on detailed, picturesque imagery expressed through collage. The result is an image that seamlessly integrates multiple media,framing architecture not just as an object but as a participant in a broader cultural and contextual conversation. Through this hybridization, our visualizations serve as a tool for democratizing architectural representation, offering a narrative that is accessible, culturally resonant, and evocative.

Ujjayant Bhattacharyya is an architect and educator. He is the co-founder of STHAAN, a design studio recognised for its research-led and contextually grounded approach to architecture. His academic journey spans Piloo Mody College of Architecture and Chandigarh College of Architecture, with further international studio experiences at the Vāstu Shilpā Foundation under B.V. Doshi and RCR Arquitectes in Barcelona. He has taught under Prof. Neelkanth Chhaya at the Avani Institute of Design, and currently tutors the Housing Studio at RV College of Architecture, Bengaluru. At STHAAN, Ujjayant has co-led projects that have been exhibited and awarded nationally and internationally — including A Flux in Ayodhya, selected by the Ministry of Culture, Government of India for the India Art Architecture & Design Biennale 2023. The studio was recently awarded the Ultratech Latitude Design Excellence Award for Drawing as Craft, and has previously won the IIA Best Young Practice Award, the World Architecture Award, and was featured in the DesignXDesign 20under35 showcase for emerging practices.

Priyanka Mukherjee is an architect and researcher. She is the co-founder of STHAAN, a design studio known for its thoughtful, research-driven work that bridges drawing, memory, and lived experience. A distinction graduate from Piloo Mody College of Architecture, her thesis on Linguistic Museums received national recognition and laid the foundation for her continued exploration of language and architecture. She has worked with ASG Associates and with CnT Architects under Ar. Prem Chandavarkar, contributing to a wide range of urban, residential, and institutional projects. At STHAAN, Priyanka co-leads projects that foreground community, storytelling, and the craft of drawing. She co-led A Flux in Ayodhya, which was officially selected by the Ministry of Culture, Government of India for the India Art Architecture & Design Biennale 2023. The studio's work has been widely celebrated — receiving the Ultratech Latitude Design Excellence Award for Drawing as Craft, the IIA Best Young Practice Award, the World Architecture Award, and inclusion in DesignXDesign 20under35, which highlights emerging voices in Indian architecture and design.

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Smaarak
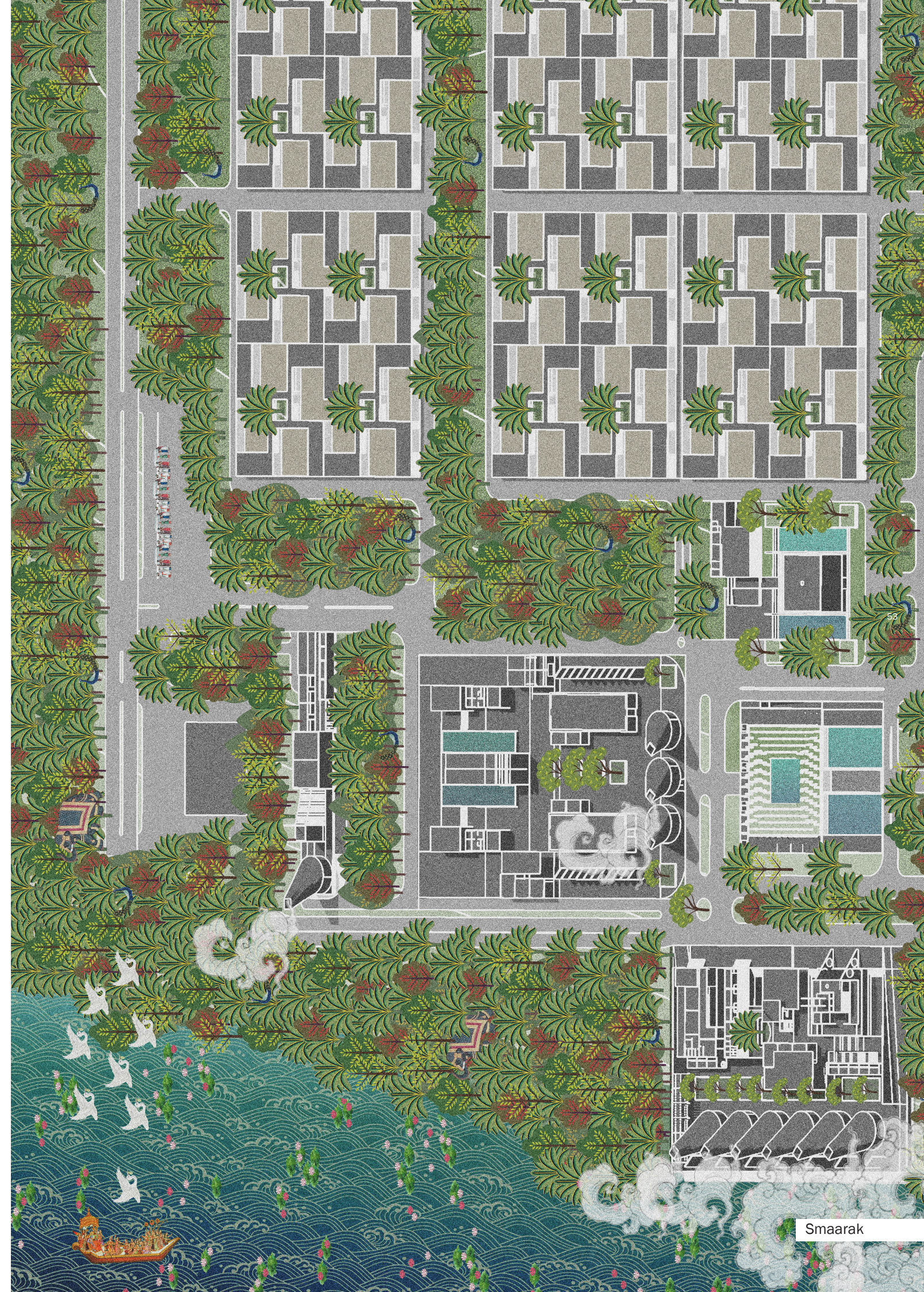
PLURAL VOICES : SINGULAR PLACE

A Review of The Making of a Campus: IIM Bangalore by *Kiran Keswani*

Megala Gurumurthi

Not all architecture is spoken through blueprints—some reside in the voices of those who have passed through, paused within, and peopled the place. This is the spirit that animates Kiran Keswani's The Making of a Campus: IIM Bangalore. At its core, the book is a compelling and meticulously researched account of the inception and evolution of one of India's most iconic educational institutions.

The memories that make the spaces on campus into a 'place'

The campus has been a place for reflection for both faculty and students. Prof. Devi Vijay who studied here as a PhD student and is currently a faculty at IIM Calcutta as well as a visiting faculty at IIM Bangalore believes that spaces shape your subjectivity, your sense of self. Even today, she finds calm in the walk to class through the spaces of the campus and

Narrative : Metanarrative

Keswani brings out the complexities of the IIMB campus design by employing a metanarrative structure coupled with a reflective tone. The campus is presented not merely as a physical environment but as a living philosophy—an embodiment of intellectual and cultural aspiration shaped by openness, continuity, and inward reflection. The book weaves together history, design intent, and evolving outcomes, framing the campus's identity across time —past, present, and imagined futures.

At its inception, B.V. Doshi, does emerge as a visionary who intuited the kind of learning environment India needed. With many prominent architects such as Achyut Kanvinde, Sanjay Mohe, P N Medappa contributing to the design of the evolving campus, the narrative is not singular and not that of the architect(s) alone. Keswani layers the voices of stakeholders, faculty, students, administrators, architects, and other users, that recognizes how lived experiences often evolve from original design intent. In doing so, she disrupts the conventional architect-as-author paradigm, offering a

more democratic and participatory reading of architecture.

While most institutional architecture books focus on master planning, typologies, iconic design, and technical innovation, Keswani foregrounds how spaces are lived and felt—how corridors become social condensers, how silence and light shape behavior, how stone floors register footsteps as memory. This human-centered lens restores user agency and repositions architecture as an experiential, responsive practice.

The book frames the campus not only as built form but as a cultural artifact—deeply embedded in pedagogical values, institutional philosophy, urban ecology, material choices, and socio-spatial patterns.

The Campus as Urban Subculture

One of the compelling inquiries that this book invites, is whether the IIMB campus functions as a subculture within the fabric of urban Bangalore. With its meditative silences, stone colonnades, and deliberate openness to nature, the

campus stands in stark contrast to the city's fast-paced, vertical chaos. This way, does it become a counter-space—slow, inward, and contemplative?

Keswani portrays the campus as a dialogic space, where institutional mandates, architectural visions, and personal experiences intersect. This spatial ethos fosters a culture of reflection, discourse, and community-making—qualities rarely afforded by conventional urban space. The campus cultivates a shared language and identity among its users, forming a bounded *cultural microcosm* within the metropolis.67

Each chapter suggests that the campus enacts an alternate urban imaginary—one that prioritizes slowness, meaning-making, and human connection. In this sense, IIMB becomes both a cultural enclave and a quiet critique of mainstream urbanism.

In Context with Other Institutional Narratives
Compared to other architectural monographs on institutional campuses, The Making of a Campus is notably subversive. Building Ideas: An Architectural Guide to the University of Chicago by Jay Pridmore takes a conventional chronological and project-based approach, focusing on stylistic and planning aspects. Learning from Harvard, written by faculty, offers a more critical, comparative narrative focused on pedagogy and form-function. Making of a Campus, however, stands apart through its ethnographic and narrative-driven structure. Authored by a researcher and urban designer rather than an architect, it centers user agency, lived experience, and evolving meaning—resulting in a compelling reimagining of architectural storytelling.

A Quiet Subversion
Keswani's work is quietly radical. The use of the gerund "Making" in the title suggests an ongoing process—reflections in continuum. The book resists dominant architectural narratives of authorship, fixedness, and visual spectacle. Instead, it offers a participatory, pluralistic, and open-ended view of institutional architecture—as a framework for learning, cultural life, and collective memory.

In an age of hyper-aestheticized architectural culture, The Making of a Campus reclaims architecture as a practice of listening, care, and adaptation. This, perhaps, is its most powerful—and necessary—subversion.

The light filtering in through the skylights in the corridor with faculty offices 2nd floor

...7 This was found

Megala Gurumurthi is an architect, academician, and writer whose practice extends beyond the visual, to explorations through wordplay and poetry. Her work aims to contribute to the broader discourse on architecture through teaching, research, and interdisciplinary collaboration—situating design within a larger cultural and intellectual framework.

Note: All images clicked by the Author are a part of the book review included in this article. Credits to the contents of images are with the publisher and the author of the book reviewed in this article titled 'The Making of a Campus: IIM Bangalore.'
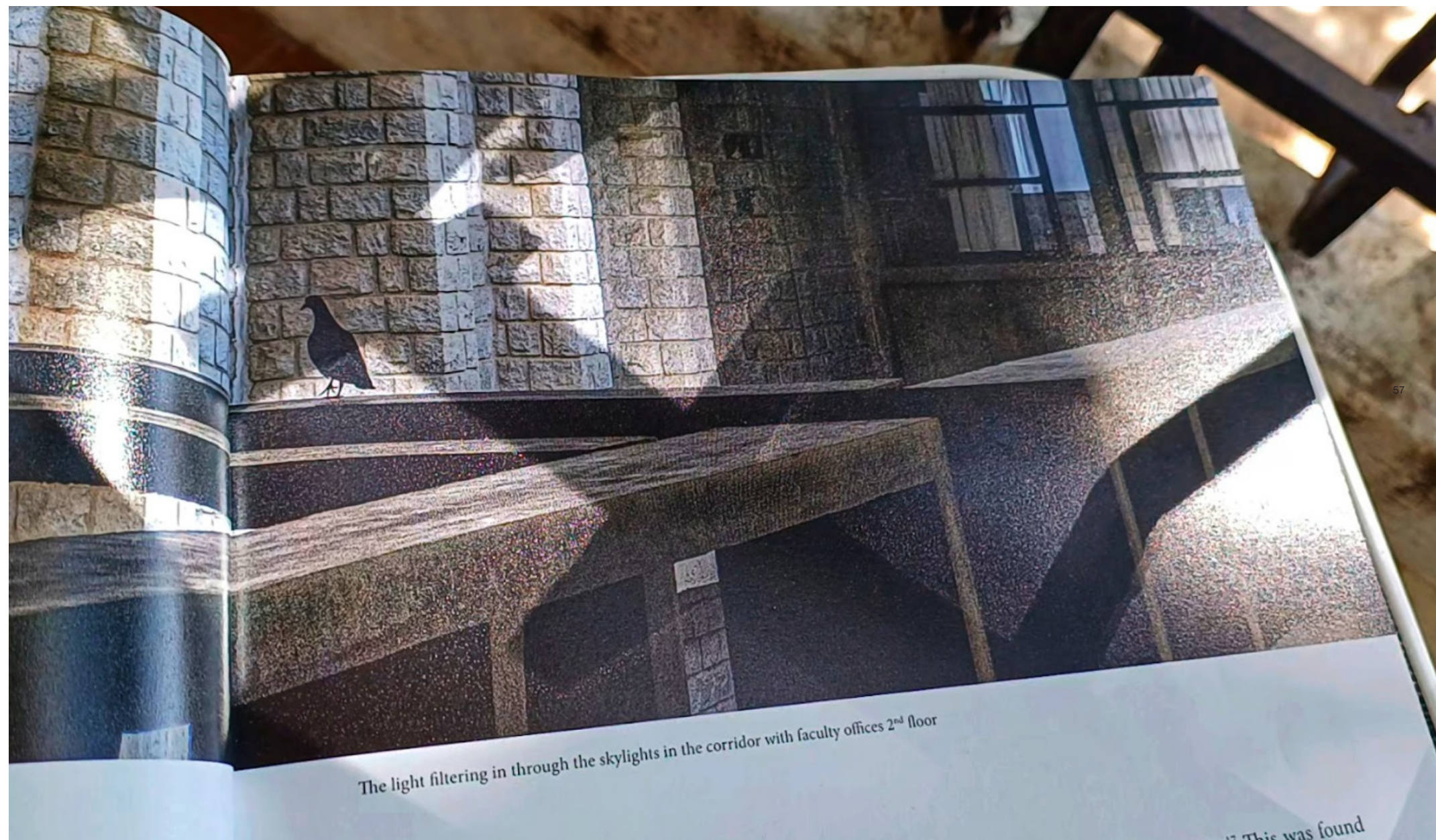
The MUMBAI in a MUMBAI locals local

Raji Sunderkrishnan

Date: Jan 2024
Location: Mumbai to the world but Bombay to me.

5:00 am – I walk briskly from home to Andheri station.

5:08 am – I join a surprisingly long queue of almost fifteen people to buy a ticket.

5:15 am – We say "Arre, dhakka mat maaro" to each other, as the slow progress of the queue makes us all restless.

5:18 am – I hand over ten rupees for my ticket to Churchgate, a distance of 25 km by road. I shed a tear of joy at the price.

5:22 am – I board a Churchgate fast and realise there are no seats vacant. I shake my head in disbelief. I stand by the compartment's door instead, capitalising on the only time we get cool breeze in Bombay.

5:50 am – I alight at Grant Road station and queue up at the station's bus stop with a dozen others. A vada pav stall nearby emanates tantalising hissing sounds as the first few vadas of the day hit the hot oil.

6:00 am – Our bus has been cancelled due to road closures for the Mumbai Marathon. I overhear a couple say that they're headed to my destination. I offer to share a taxi.

6:08 am – We alight and pay our share of the fare. The taxi driver returns two rupees chutta to me. I shed a joyful tear again, being now used to Bangalore's heavily rounded-up fares.

6:10 am – I join the enthusiastic bhangra drummers motivating the very first of the Mumbai Marathon runners who have begun turning up at this tough, uphill stretch of Pedder Road. We onlookers clap encouragingly at passing runners. I keep an eye out for a familiar face.

P.S – Earlier that morning, at 3:45 am, my incredulous-and-nervous-about-the-transport husband had left Andheri for his race's starting point at Mahim, 12 km away, by merely stepping out of our building and hailing a passing auto. No refusals or khit-pit (Bambaiyya for hassle). Many runners and volunteers for the marathon had chosen to travel even longer distances by the Mumbai local, with special trains being run 2:15 am onwards to facilitate this. In most cities, this plan would have been impossible to execute had each of us not had our own car.

Mumbai's suburban train – aka the 'local' – much loved and much reviled, makes a certain ease of life possible. It's a unique world unto itself - one that's part and parcel of every Mumbaikar's life, but one that seems exotic and intimidating to those new to the city. The 380 km long suburban rail network, with its three lines of Western, Central and Harbour, carries 7.5 million (75 lakh) passengers daily, in about 3000 train runs. During peak hours, there's a train every 2-3 minutes. This, India's OG suburban train network, has been Mumbai's lifeline since its first electric train ran in Feb 1925 from Victoria Terminus to Coorla, along the Harbour Line. But steam trains had already been chugging regularly between Churchgate and Virar since 1867!

Popular films like Saathiya, Ek Chalis ki Last Local, A Wednesday, and The Lunchbox, to name a few, have captured everything from train romances to train fights to Mumbai's iconic dabbawalas. Local train travel has created a strong sub-culture in Mumbai, something that the other modes of transport cannot stake a claim to. If trains and railway stations are the backdrops, the movie comes alive due to its millions of protagonists – the Mumbaikars.

The Mumbai local can keep people- watchers entertained for hours, and provide fodder for film scripts and books. They say that life is often stranger than fiction, and those who travel by these trains have seen it all; nothing fazes them - a quality described in popular media as a Mumbaikar's nonchalance. But come in the way of them and their train, and they can make you very aware of your inconsequence in this world.

Presenting, an array of train commuters - a bunch of people united by strong bonds forged over the trains' conveniences as well as struggles, and following unwritten and unspoken codes of conduct. Watch and learn.

The last-minute runner

All along the over-bridges leading down to a station's many platforms are people furiously scanning the timing display boards in front of each staircase. "Should I take the 9:27 Churchgate fast? Or should I risk the 9:19 Churchgate slow? Which one is probably running late?" Such are the calculations occupying the last-minute runner's mind. To corroborate the train's displayed ETA, they also crane their neck out and squint at the horizon, trying in vain to spot the train from a kilometre away. But once spotted, they calculate its speed and distance and hence its arrival time (the display boards have not yet earned their trust), make a split-second decision, and run down the long flight of steps to their chosen platform. They will ruthlessly push all the "slow" passengers on the stairs out of their way, so beware. Qualification required for this type of passenger – a degree in advanced mathematics. Or an equivalent field experience of travelling by local trains for 10+ years. Others needn't apply.

The sleepy traveller

This traveller often works night shifts and returns home in the morning, or is a rare, stress-free human who can induce sleep at will. While the other travellers display peak energy levels during train commutes, the sleepy traveller falls asleep as soon as they sit down, leading us to wonder how they can sleep so peacefully in such a hostile environment. Some anxious co-passengers may worry about them missing their stop, and occasionally wake them up to check where they want to alight, and also offer to wake them up on time. The sleepy passenger though is often unconcerned – probably a believer of the adage that the journey matters more than the destination – and doesn't mind backtracking a few stops in case they miss theirs. Highly skilled sleepy travellers inspire awe by sleeping while standing in a crowded train, with one arm clinging to the swaying handle above them and cradling their head.

The grumpy traveller

"Arre, jaldi andar ghus", "Arre, utar!", "Tera chatri mereko lag raha hai" – some key indicators that the person is not to be tampered with. Other visual and aural cues given by a grumpy traveller include icy glares, regular eye-rolls, snorts and grumps, and spreading their legs to occupy more space and mark their territory. As you've probably noted, grumpy Mumbaikars love the word "arre". Bambaiyya, our chosen dialect of Hindi, also has a strong disdain for gender rules, according respect to people, and textbook grammar, and is every new-to-Mumbai Delhi-ite's nightmare. Some grumpy travellers are also experts in dadagiri, the local art of bullying, and seasoned travellers will tell you "Inke mooh nahin lagnekaa" (don't argue with them). The only grumpiness Mumbaikars will cut some slack for is that

from the hapless commuters of the infamous Virar local, traversing a distance of almost 80 km. Virar-ites are territorial about their lifeline, and should you dare travel on it until merely Andheri (a stop that's roughly midway), they are open in their contempt. "Tereko aur koi local nahin mila kya re?" referencing that you could have taken a short-distance train instead of adding to the crowd on their route.

The fourth-seat demander
Train widths haven't changed much over the decades, but passenger density sure has. So seats built for three are occupied by four. This fourth seat though is "unofficial", so you must be prepared to be denied it, especially on sweltering hot days, or in the monsoon, when sitting packed like sardines, with squishy wet clothes, is beyond the tolerance of the usually stoic Mumbaikar. But these unwritten rules don't prevent certain eternally optimistic people from saying "Zaraa sarko", for the chance to park no more than one of their butt-cheeks on the edge of the seat. If they are lucky, they get enough space for half of the second butt cheek too, subject to the collective widths and inclinations of the other three seatmates. Sitting on the fourth seat is known

to be a great workout for your core strength, glutes and quads. Tips – best avoided if you struggle with physical intimacy or strangers' elbows in your waist. Though sitting sideways on this aisle seat alleviates some of the distress. Whether the fourth seat is a better alternative to being in a full-length sandwich while standing is a debate that hasn't yet been resolved.

The great seat-catcher
They have mastered the art of snagging a guaranteed seat. Whether it means travelling only by a 'starting train' (which originates from the station), or throwing a bag or large object onto an empty seat as a train arrives (a handkerchief no longer cuts it), or even travelling for a few stops in the ulta (wrong) direction so that they have an assured seat when the train resumes its journey in the reverse direction, the great seat-catcher has perfected these strategies over many years. Another trick involves becoming a 'train friend' with someone, with the friend then being assigned the tough job of fiercely guarding a spare seat for them. However, the most risk-free and conflict-free method is the 'booking system', where you enquire with everyone seated around you about the stop they will alight at, and then make a suitable "reservation" of the seat that will free up first. This booking is under oath and must be honoured by the currently-seated party, else they risk jinxing their future seat chances.

The reluctant and the petrified
They can be identified by their dead give-away eyes, perennially widened in fear. The reluctant have usually been coerced into riding the train by their companion, a hardened Mumbaikar. Sometimes, lone reluctant individuals can be spotted too; these have been ill-advised by some local into believing that this is the best way to travel from A to B. The petrification sets in when they arrive at the station and witness utter chaos, leading to a momentary desire to flee. Alas, it is often too late, as they could be pushed by the surging crowd into the very train they were debating whether to take. During the train journey, this category of passengers is also known to pray furiously, pledge coconuts to deities for their safe return, and nervously ask co-passengers "Dadar kab aayegaa?" until they are violently ejected from the train at the said station. Having been pushed out through gaps they never even thought were traversable, they are now left rethinking the laws of physics and biology. Once in a while, unable to exit at their station, they scream in fear, only to be consoled by people saying "Tension kayko leneka? Next station pe utaar denge."

The one with all the children
Travelling solo on a Mumbai local is a tough skill, so I'm sure you'll find this category of traveller worth venerating. It requires daredevilry to live in Malad and plan a picnic to Chowpatty with many nieces or nephews or friends of their children in tow. 'The one with all the children' (let's call them OAC) has to herd a bunch of gaggling kids into a train, find seats for all of them, and ensure they don't accidentally get thrown out in the tide-like movement of people in and out of the train at every station. When exiting, OACs need to keep the children huddled in front of them and push each one out, while remembering to not mix them up with kids from another bunch. And all this while dealing with the stares and sniggers of their fellow-passengers, aghast at their prolific procreation. The OAC also knows that people are wondering whether they bunked the class about birth control at school. And that somebody who noticed that the troupe boarded at Malad is bound to make a Mala-D joke (Mala-D was a very popular contraceptive, widely advertised on prime television). The OAC feels compelled to sheepishly grin every now and then and clarify to the other passengers "Sab mere bachche nahin hai."

The long and the short of it
Simply put, nowhere drives home the benefits of being tall than a Mumbai local. Having your head above everyone's armpits, feeling the strong breeze on your face, and being able to see as usual is an incomparable privilege, as is being able to cling to the handle on the ceiling without the threat of dislocating your arm from its socket. Compare this with the vertically challenged, whose view only encompasses people's backs and bags; during peak hour, they are sometimes unable to even see which station has arrived, and rely on the chants from the crowd to decide their move. If you are a child, it is worse, having your face pressed against butts. The only equaliser for all heights was this - decades ago, when fisherwomen used to carry baskets of fish over their heads in the passenger compartment, the tall had to deal with the scent and the sight of sometimes-still- weakly-flopping fish, while the short had to deal with a shirodhara-type drip of fish water over their heads. There were no winners in that scenario.

The "rich" first class traveller
The first class compartment, identified by striped paint over the entrance door, is where you go if you're in the mood for a little splurge. Have 100 rupees? Treat yourself to a first class ticket from Andheri to Churchgate. For 10X the usual ticket fare, you get hit, pushed and yelled at fewer times. Other perks include some semblance of a physical boundary around yourself, and fewer 'train massages'. In fact, "Yeh first class nahin hai" is a taunt you'll often hear in the second class aka the regular compartment, if you complain about somebody's foot being on yours. The first class is mostly filled with

"posh" travellers, so you even hear an NRI accent or two. It is also filled with college students with anxious parents, who have decided to lessen the chances of their child getting hurt; and also elderly Mumbaikars with anxious children, for the same reason. But the biggest flex is having a separate ticketing counter at the station - many live for the jealous expressions of those queued up, as they walk straight up front and say "Ek Borivali first class dena". It's the equivalent of the fun of business class pre-boarding in flights, for a mere fraction of the price.

The wish maker

Mumbai comprises of multiple islands, which means that railway lines often cross creeks (khaadi in local lingo). A khaadi would almost always announce itself a minute or so before its actual appearance, due to its infamous foul smell that could probably revive the comatose, or conversely, cause those with a heightened sense of smell to faint. If you inexplicably miss the pre-warning smell of an oncoming khaadi, the train gives you a sure-fire signal with the unique rattling sound it makes on the metal bridges over these creeks. This is where the wish-maker leaps into action, throwing coins into the creek followed by a quick prayer. Nobody knows whether these wishes come true, but that doesn't stop them from repeating this at every creek crossing. The khaadi also doubles up as an alternative to a holy river, and sometimes flowers, coconuts, and other offerings are dumped into the creek encased "conveniently" in a plastic bag. I bet that creeks have been fervently wishing for the disappearance of these wish-makers, and given that Gpay and Paytm have led to no more coins being available with most people, I guess the creeks' wish has come true after all!

The enterprising home-chef

This person boards like any other unassuming commuter. Once seated, they smile benevolently and make eye contact with whoever reciprocates. Soon, that large bag they've been carrying has done its job, and there's a fragrance of home-made deliciousness

wafting out; many commuters have begun sniffing around, looking for signs of the food. That's when the entrepreneur strikes, opening up the bag and pulling out goodies – khakra, chivda, other assorted farsan, papads, seasonal pickles and anything else that reminds you of grandma's kitchen. It's a losing battle – might as well open your purse and succumb to the temptation. The smiling lady does brisk business and answers all questions efficiently, while also handing out her phone number, calculating the total of somebody's purchase, and doling out change to a third customer. The enterprising home-chef is always a welcome co-passenger.

The train friends

Train friendships and train romances have a lot in common: when you take the same 8:53 local every morning, and see the same people every day, sooner than later, you start smiling at each other. A few days or weeks (some Mumbaikars are tough nuts to crack) later, there's a casual exchange of names and where you work and where you live. Before you know it, you've switched loyalties from your 5:17 evening train to the 5:22, only so you can synchronise your commute home with your train friend. And then you reach a milestone stage where your friend places a handbag on the seat next to them, risking great ire, only to give you a fleeting chance at sitting together. A train friendship is different – you may never hang out at restaurants or visit each other's homes, but you celebrate everything from birthdays to festivals in the train. You also offer each other a shoulder to cry on along with free counsel. Exclusively train friends are now a dwindling tribe, and the comfort of the strangely high intimacy that comes with the relative anonymity has been lost.

The lovebirds

With trains so packed that the handles are redundant to hold on to, sometimes friendship surreptitiously slides into another territory. And romance blooms at close quarters, literally. Most Mumbaikars couldn't care less about

the adoring glances lovers exchange with each other in a jam- packed train, so they are both in a sense alone in spite of the crowd. But dare they not snap out of that reverie at every stop, resulting in blocking someone's exit at say, Bandra, the lovers will be showered with the choicest barbs, the mildest of which are "Arre, hato" or "Phillum (film) samajh rakha hai kya?". Trains offer love-struck couples in Mumbai a judgement-free space that can be easily built into their daily routine, and a convenient alibi to give their families.

The eavesdropper and truth dispenser The eavesdropper usually prefers seats around people who are having conversations, be it live or over the phone; this serves as their entertainment during the commute. They are sometimes so hooked to the conversation that they chime in with encouragements or words of wisdom. They can be brutally honest in their feedback, since they are invested in you but absolutely unrelated to you and will likely not see you again; this sort of feedback is often helpful, because friends and family will never be that candid. You can spot these eavesdroppers thanks to their fixed gaze locked on their subject, and their facial expressions reacting to the topic of discussion. If you didn't know about the eavesdroppers, you'd probably think they're an actor rehearsing for a play.

The news debaters

These commuters begin their day by grabbing the day's newspaper from the magazine stall at the station each morning and silently reading it during their commute to work. By the time they return in the evening, the news has been digested, opinions have been formed, and the itch for a debate has emerged. So they eagerly wait for their friends, and then both parties begin the loud and detailed exchange of news. Sometimes, we are treated to them having collated the news from multiple newspapers throughout the day, along with the added bonus of their expert insights. It could be seen as a public service of sorts, because

you can now go home and spend your time doing something else instead of watching the nightly news broadcast. This facility is either a delight or a nightmare for the other passengers, with the delighted chiming in with their points, and the annoyed scouting for another vacant seat so that they can escape this forced news bulletin.

Clubs on wheels

Until the advent of the smart-phone, the Mumbai local housed many informal clubs. Morning commutes were more sombre, with people engaged in silent prayer, reading the newspaper, or catching up on sleep. But come evening, the train's hospital-white fluorescent lighting along with the setting sun creating coloured screens at every window became the ambience for raucous fun.

Adding to the pub-like character were the advertisements plastered all over the compartment, promising help with your sexual troubles, or a miracle oil to regrow hair, or a work-from-home job that can apparently make you a millionaire. Against this backdrop, card games were played – largely in the gents' compartment – with the morning's newspaper ingeniously spread across two or four people's laps, doubling up as a table. Money often changed hands, though these were playful bets of small amounts. Elsewhere, another group would be loudly playing antakshari, venting out the day's frustrations with expressive singing – Mumbai's version of music therapy. The more spiritually inclined were part of bhajan or folk music groups, accompanied by cymbals too. Nowadays, all this has been largely replaced by people glued to their phones and their own world of online clubs.

Pop-up flea markets

A Mumbai local is a space for thriving business, and vendors expertly jump on and off the trains with their wares, in a bid to avoid being caught by the police. They make sales that aren't strictly legal, but are much loved by commuters, who couldn't care less about legalities. Mumbaikars support everyone's honest attempts at earning

a living, for they know how hard it is to survive this city. In return, the vendors cater to popular demand with a wide variety of seasonally changing wares: earrings, hair-clips and scrunchies, bracelets, and bindis are the most popular 'fast-moving' items. But books, pens, handbags, and snacks also deserve a mention. These vendors offer competitive prices and have been experts at targeted advertising much before today's ad gurus learnt it from their expensive MBAs. It's a win-win for the vendors as well as the commuters, and is a popular way to pass time.

MasterChef India: Mumbai local edition
Women (and rarely, men) chopping vegetables during their evening commute home used to be fairly common, especially on long routes. Though born out of the desperation for time- management, this was a fun way to get a head-start on dinner prep, surrounded by train friends and exchanging recipes and gup-shup (Marathi for gossip). For the rest of us, the suspense was akin to a reality show: What's the menu? Will they prep everything before their stop? Will they avoid slicing their fingers? It used to be fascinating to see knife skills in a fast-moving, vibrating train, deftly slicing onions held in their other hand. Meticulous 'train chefs' had two bags on their lap – one for peels and one for chopped veggies. But making jaws drop were commuters with what seemed like a portable kitchen – they'd casually pull out a chopping board, a knife, and even a peeler from their handbag, which seemed endowed with magic. You half-expected a mixer to emerge from the bag next, to grind masalas. This sight of vegetables being chopped has almost fully disappeared in the past decade though. However, it still is an iconic imagery associated with Mumbai locals.

A jeweller, a fisherwoman and a dabbawala walk into the sunset.

The local train has always been a great leveller: rich or poor, we use the trains to commute. Until the early 2000s, most Mumbaikars didn't see the need to own cars. So it was fairly common to see jewellers and diamond merchants on the Mumbai local, sporting 'safari suits' (do look up this legendary power statement), coolly carrying briefcases with goods worth lakhs. Not anymore, though.

Another childhood memory is of Koli fisherwomen with baskets of fish on their heads, their hair in a bun with a fresh jasmine strand, transporting that morning's catch to the dockyards or markets; they were eventually mandated to use the dedicated luggage compartment that is there on every train, as were the dabbawalas and any other vendors or businessmen carrying large consignments. But barring on some early morning trains, or along the Harbour Line, the sight of small-scale fishers transporting fish has sadly almost disappeared.

The dabbawalas, though not as ubiquitous as before, still use the Mumbai locals. It is heartening to see their livelihood and unique system occupying space amidst the Swiggys and Zomatos of today. The comfort of receiving a home-cooked lunch is something many Mumbaikars seem unwilling to forgo, leading to the dabbawalas retaining their much-loved and appreciated presence in the city.
What has hopefully and thankfully disappeared for good is the gory news of gangsters chopping up their rivals in trains; is it an exaggeration, is it not? We'll never know.

The one with the bragging rights
That's people like my husband; remember the beginning of this essay? A non-Mumbaikar, he began his tryst with the Mumbai local by being a reluctant and petrified commuter, successfully conned by me into taking it everywhere. In due time, he graduated to the fourth seat demander, and an occasional window shopper. He is now a huge fan of the freedom afforded by public transport and can navigate the train network without my supervision. Though not always fully accustomed to the Mumbai local, the ones with the bragging rights have learnt the ropes enough to survive, even if with some injuries. And the stories of what they see or go through? Those grant them the bragging rights with family, friends, and any future children or grandchildren. Their travel tales are often spiced with extra masala, but they've earned their stripes the hard way and can be indulged.

And who am I?

The nostalgia seeker
They are true-blue Mumbaikars currently living in another city. They miss the ease of commute. They return home a few times each year, and make it a point to travel extensively by the local. They haunt their favourite stalls at every station, sighing with nostalgia. They are sometimes caught unawares by changes – the station entrance has changed, the ticketing counter has moved, the 'Energee' stall no longer exists, and strange new AC trains sometimes turn up. A few platform numbers too may have changed, throwing them off their well-oiled routine of decades. They dread not knowing about these changes and having to ask somebody, who could then ask them "Aap kahaan se?" and erase their whole identity. The nostalgia-seeker sighs wistfully and frequently, including indulgently at all the fellow passengers and their idiosyncrasies. They're sometimes so driven by nostalgia that they feel the need to photograph and document the station, the train, the crowd, the windows, the handles, and everything else; but they don't do so because, you know, which REAL Mumbaikar does that?? So the only thing they do is take mental photographs and maybe write about the people of the city that will always be home.
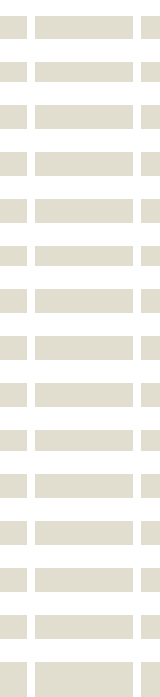
Circling back to that day in Jan 2024, after waving to my husband at the Pedder Road leg of the Mumbai Marathon, I took a train to Churchgate, using my morning's still-valid ten-rupee ticket, well in time to cheer for him at the finish line at Azad Maidan. After the race, we walked to Churchgate station to take the train back home, as did many runners and their families. I stopped at the station's vada pav stall to buy us both celebratory vada pavs.

Since Churchgate is a starting stop, and the trains are relatively empty on Sundays anyway, all the runners – identifiable by the shiny medals and sweaty towels around their necks – had the rare chance to sprawl out on the seats. Some could even stretch their sore legs to the seats across. The Mumbai local, usually scented by fish, smelly khaadis, and sweaty armpits, was redolent with the sweet smell of their success and accomplishment.

And this 9:10 Virar fast, which I had chosen to board just for the thrill of it (Sunday was the only day I'd dare to!), deposited us in Andheri promptly at 9:40 am. We walked home to our 450 square feet 'matchbox apartment' – tiny apartments that befuddle and entertain non-Mumbaikars just like the local trains do. But that's another story for another day.

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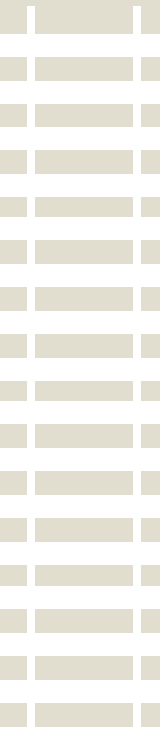
SUB-CULTURES AS SPACES OF SOCIAL CHANGE

Srajana Kaikini

Cultures, in their most widely studied and appraised form, emerge from communities. Communities that may be imagined or derived, churned around shared social practices, shared values, and a shared understanding of identities and desires. In a manner of speaking, a culture often becomes the pre-cursor to ethical social systems. A norm is made when a culture proclaims itself to society, whatever the consequences of this proclamation.

Forms of artistic expression evolved differently and distinctly from each other, evolving as genres, schools of thought, stylistic movements and so on. The history of art hinges on the idea that art belonged to different epochs/eras. The recognition that art from different regions acquires distinct aesthetic identities is firmly rooted in the implicit pre-supposition that cultures express themselves in art and design in a way that no individual expression may claim to express. These distinct identities and processes form what theorists today may call aesthetic norms – whereby to inhabit or adopt a particular aesthetic implies being consciously implicated in its cultural history.

The emergence of cultural studies and cultural history as a discipline of study gained wide currency 1950's - 60's, influenced largely by the socialist interest in unpacking and examining the implicit and explicit forces that govern our social lives and selves. Meanwhile, discourses on cultures also started becoming synonymous with the idea of relativism. The idea that anything that is culturally specific implied that they were also interpreted through the frame of relativist ideas of truth and experience. This meant that cultures were pre-supposed to have a necessary component of non-translatability or non-transferability. This kind of relativism is challenged by philosopher Martha Nussbaum who says in her well-known essay In Defence of Universal Values that contrary to the buzz on relativism, cultures do thrive foundationally on some understanding of universal values.

These views point us to the in-between space that cultural studies as a discipline inhabits; the conceptual terrain of 'cultures' appears to be thriving on paradoxes and contradictions. Given these contours, it appears to be more convenient to imagine cultures to be a relativist subset of society as opposed to thinking of cultures having absolute or universal essences – however, it also appears given that human connection are founded on a certain capacity of shared understanding edging on certain universal ways of being, one may also begin to wonder how an expansive interdisciplinary analysis of culture-forming may help in the imagining progressive and emancipatory futures in the design of societies at large.

The idea of the counter-culture, for instance, presupposes that all cultures operate as forces. However, are counter-

The Appalachian hills recollected by bell hooks in her book Belonging: A Culture of Place (2009) (Source: Wikimedia Commons)

cultures synonymous to sub-cultures? Here-in lies the tease of the argument. While counter-cultures, in their contemporary understanding, stage themselves on an equal footing with the cultures they aim to counter, sub-cultures are a very different kind of creature altogether and perhaps should be engaged from a very different standpoint. Sub-cultures recognize that there exists a certain absolutist tendency in culture forming. The very basis of what we call a 'Sub' culture is embedded in the idea that there is a hierarchy – a structure of evaluation where-in one may identify a strata superlative and a strata diminutive. Sub-cultures, could be understood as cultures of groups, communities or practices and rituals that are not the status quo – not the mainstream – not the center.

Sub-Cultures reside in-between. They live in between destinations, at bus stops and train stations, enroute migratory trails, in the waiting rooms, in cafeterias and the hostel dorms, on the footpaths, at traffic junctions, under bridges and flyovers. The sub-cultures of a city pop into existence when the status quo is getting too much – when the status quo needs to be broken, diverted, subtracted, subverted – like rivulets branching out from an ebbing river in full flood.

The question of urban sub-cultures is a peculiar one. To begin with, it is a paradox. The city in the history of social spatialization took center-stage of sociological discussions for a long time now. It would be no exaggeration, then, to say that urban spaces took the medal as favorite child in the family drama of social design. Cities upstaged all other kinds of spaces – the dessert, the hills, the farmlands, the coalmines, the flatlands, the forests. To take conscious stock of the 'subcultures' in cities is a step towards turning the monolithic image of the city into a porous idea.

bell hooks, in her book 'Belonging: a culture of place' makes a poignant argument when she says 'nature was the foundation of our counter hegemonic black sub-culture'. In that environment, she says, 'dominator culture [...] could not wield absolute power. For in that world, nature was more powerful.'

Speaking about her childhood experiences of living in the Appalachian hills of Kentucky, hooks says that this life amidst the 'hillbillies' or the mountain folk was 'my first experience of a culture based on anarchy.' Here is a very powerful proposition made by bell hooks; the idea that nature functioned as a model for sub-cultures which were anarchic and counter-hegemonic.

The heart of the city and its fringes are thriving ground for sub-cultures to emerge. A classic case to look at would be the art forms that emerge from such cultures – the rituals of leisure and play, remembrance and grieving that emerge from their spaces. Old men playing carrom and chess by the pavement, small time thieves on the streets, orphans and trans-genders at traffic signals, women weaving flower buds or cutting vegetables in heaps inside sub-urban trains – these are some Indian vignettes that come to mind. They could all very well be hashtagged as 'Thug-life'. Thug Life, a very popular phrase, meme, concept in contemporary usage today in the digital sphere emerged as a sub-cultural cry against oppression when first used by American rapper Tupac Shakur, or 2Pac in the 90's. A call against oppression of any kind, the phrase in fact was also an acronym for The Hate you Give Little Infants Fucks Everybody. Thug life became a sub-cultural revolutionary moment for urban America in the

Screenshot from a typical dinner scene from the series Sopranos (1999)

Screenshot from a typical living room scene from the series Banegi Apni Baat (1993)

*Thug Life digital insignia
Source: Shutterstock*

light of mass incarceration of African American folk as criminals and thugs at the turn of the 20th century. In rebellion, communities started reclaiming the phrase in way that it honored their journeys of struggle and oppression.

Thug-life transformed an identity thrust upon a community into a movement that signaled a way of life. Today, thug-life memes are pervasive all over the internet. A similar rise of rap music in the Indian urban consciousness, can also be seen as a manifestation of the rage and the euphoria that resides in the sub-spaces of our societies. The rap of Sumeet Samos which embodies and advocates for a situated lived experience of caste-based oppression particularly outside of the urban imagination, for instance, is very different in aesthetic from the rap of Baba Sehgal or Apache Indian, where their form is at most a stylistic adaptation but has nothing to do with

the artist's cultural and structural conditions of emergence.

The Sub-Urb and its Stories
In the post-liberalization India of the 90's much like the post-Fordist America of the 60's, the 'sub-urban' atmosphere accrued a sense of ennui – a lackadaisical lackluster mood that functioned as the by-product of a hyper-productive city center or the Central Business Districts. Sub-urban lethargy synonymized a culture that was domesticated, leisurely and often functioning in implicit structures of domination and subjugation. The proverbial sub-urban lack of aspiration in any other direction except towards being upwardly mobile, economically finds apt metaphors in the slow transition from contents on

billboards in our cities. For instance, as one travels from the Fort area in Mumbai all the way through the sub-urbs upto Thane, billboard hoardings selling cinema, stars, magic, dreams, entertainment slowly and unanimously start selling real estate, homes on EMI's and gated apartments.

Through the 80's and 90's, popular culture started tapping into the suburb as the quintessential setting for long-running family dramas. Indian television series like Banegi Apni Baat (1993), Nukkad (1986), Kacchi Dhoop (1987), Hum Log (1984) all tapped into narratives from this unique domestic culture of the aspiring middle class in Indian cities between urban and sub-urban identities. Meanwhile in America, The Sopranos lived in New Jersey, the Gilmore Girls lived in Hartford, both well-known sub-urban residential neighbourhoods, gentrified and marked 'safe'.

A marked shift took place across the world in these past two decades after the 90s. As conservative governments took over the majority of the world, the complacent sub-urb also turned into a cauldron of conservative ways of life. Caste lines deepened, class lines deepened and the sub-urb often turned into an oozing superfluous mood of populism, harbouring undercurrents of banal violence and injustice.

It is in this context that a new sense of 'sub-culture' has begun to emerge in the heart of cities – one that seeks to critique and voice the obvious. Cultures that are interested in imagining new forms of governance and new forms of infrastructure – tacit and implicit.

The stories of new intermediate layers of self-governance are the beginning for sub-cultural transformation. The Namma Yaatri App is an interesting example in Bangalore in this regard – tapping into the corporate to help the drivers of Bengaluru's auto rickshaws directly ; a story of the auto-rikshaw drivers of Bangalore who got together and formed their own union, Bengaluru's Auto Rickshaw Drivers' Union (ARDU) and made the city pay them directly instead of being bonded to the multinational corporate schemes of Uber and Ola. The sudden surge of independent bookshops, for instance, is yet another sharp-edged sub-culture emerging in cities like Bangalore and Chennai – harboring books and ways of thinking newly as opposed to the self-help gurus and myth mongers who have colonized the shelves of all the popular bookshop fronts.

In the 70's and the 60's, the Pune-Bombay circles of literature saw a strong rise of a peculiarly fierce sub-culture in its Little magazine movement. Anjali Nerlekar in her book Bombay Modern: Arun Kolatkar and Bilingual Literary Culture (2016) recalls a time where print embodied radically new forms of expression at the margins and through the cracks of the mass-mainstream media. Little magazine literature renewed itself by re-imagining new material legacies for itself. The wide-spread emergence of Artist Run Initiatives (ARI's) thriving across the globe are the result of a strong urban sub-culture that aim at re-instating the power of art economy in the hands of the artists.

Spaces of Social Change: Learning from Nature as a Model
As for bell hooks and her call for looking at nature for answers - how may we understand nature as a possible model for counter-dominant movements? The age-old positivist discourse of culture as opposed and in tension with nature, has always posited that the natural must be in some form or the other measured, categorized, analysed and mapped into the discourses that constitute culture.

Post-colonial, post-modern and decolonial thinkers propose a complete dismantling of this forceful distinction in the history of ideas of the world. Perhaps an acknowledgement of nature as a foundation of certain metaphysical ways for the world would be a good place to begin with. For no

dominant culture could ever empirically give you enough tools to make you realise, that the limits of our knowledge inform the limits of our growth. To be the majority, to be dominant is a cage of its own knowing. Only the minor, only the striving know they need to be free of their condition. True growth, true change may happen from a place that is outside of reason and understanding, causal structures and known facts and perhaps the impulse to grow, comes from a desire to know and be more.

In her call for the counter-hegemonic subcultures to take on the model of 'nature' – perhaps bell hooks is alluding to the sheer force, inevitability and unpredictability that marks all things natural. The 'natural' is committed so forcefully to growth that it is able to find any means and ways possible to grow. Trust a tree to grow through a barbed wire or crack open a concrete wall.

Perhaps if our urban sub-cultures today begin emulating nature in their own ways, they may take on that very vital role in communities of becoming conscience-keepers; always attempting to disperse the invisible imbalances of flow or power or resources in a manner that the system does not fossilize or crash. Thriving as ecologies of excess, urban subcultures symbolize all those social processes without which cultures would merely accumulate, ossify and eventually land in museums. Sub-cultures are therefore, our vital spaces for social change.

Srajana Kaikini (PhD) is a philosopher, artist and writer. Her book of poems The Night the Writing Fell Silent in response to works by Jogen Chowdhury (long listed for the Oxford Art Book Prize) was released in 2023. She writes regularly on topics in metaphysics, aesthetics and culture. She teaches philosophy and aesthetics at SIAS, Krea University and is based between Bangalore, Mumbai and Chennai.

URBAN SUBCULTURE "WATERWAYS"
A LIVE SKETCH ESSAY OF DIFFERENT PLACES

Suman Paul

Life happens where the land meets the water.

Maheshwar is a town adjacent to the Narmada river in Madhyapradesh. There is a beautiful ghat slowly rises up from the water and touches the temple complex and a palace. It has embedded history in it which tells the story of its evolution.

The palace complex and the temple complex gradually opens up to the ghat and eventually touch the water. On the other side of the town grows organically keeping an invisible anchorage to the ghat. That creates a multiple routing from the entire town towards the water. And all the daily or occasional life celebrations are tied back to the waterway. This has been happening for long and has become a culture of that land. One can say it as a subculture in an indigenous urbanism.

The ghat is dotted with many small and medium shrines which are used by the locals everyday. On various occasions, the entire ghat premise becomes vibrant and people come from all over to celebrate. On a regular day, the same ghat is used for many purposes - taking bath, doing rituals, washing clothes, boating, lazying around, taking a nap under the tree, smaller shops, food outlets, horoscope, walking, running, kids playing, gossiping, drying clothes, yoga, exercises, and so on.

Kochi city has evolved respecting the ocean and backwaters. Fishing as a profession acts as a reflection of the local culture here. One type of fishing is in a static format which happens in a particular location depending on the time and flow of water through the Chinese fishing nets.
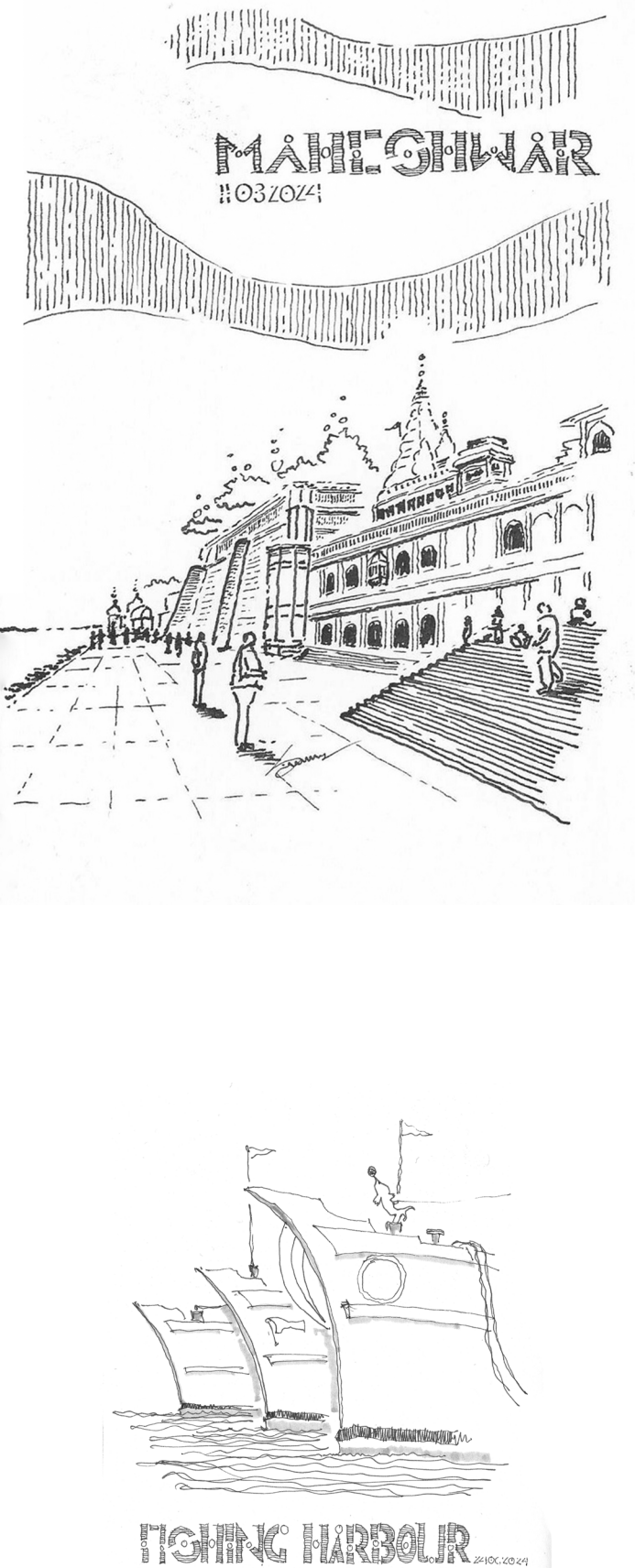
Another type of fishing happens through an elaborate system of fishing trollers which go deep inside the ocean for a longer time to fetch large quantity and then change hands through auction, storage and retailing. This is a subculture of urbanism in terms of different community, activity, mechanism, economy, food habit etc. purely connected with waterways.

KOCHI BOATMAN

This subculture is both individualistic and pluralistic by nature that directly feeds into the common culture of the land.

Shipyard is purely a place where the global and the local have dialogues between each other. Even if it seems very silent and apparently not recognisable but inherently there is a constant exchange happening at the shipyard.

KOCHI SHIPYARD
23 Oct. 2024

VYPIN . KOCHI

Transportation through water unites land masses. That itself is a subcultural aspect.

KOCHI FERRY

Taking the ferry to reach on the other side of the water is a sort of lifeline at many places. Different walks of life are combined through this unique travelling mechanism and it contributes very significantly to the entire urbanism.

KOCHI PORT
23 Oct. 2024

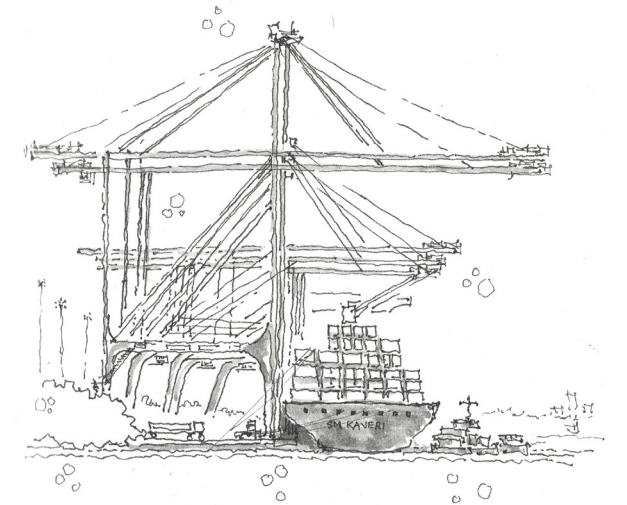Water and the waterways become the lifeline of many. This has been the culture from the ancient time. Waterways is one of the three major milestones of human evolution where the other two being agriculture and metallurgy. So as a whole, one can equate waterways as a subculture of various levels of urbanism keeping in mind that urbanism is referred as holistic systematic growth of living environment for human, animal, plant and any other form of living being.

Suman Paul is an architect with extensive experience in corporate architectural practice at WS Atkins, Jurong Consultants, and CPG Corp, he has collaborated with international designers on numerous projects in India and Singapore. At CnT Architects, where he practiced for over a decade, he led several award-winning designs across healthcare, residential, institutional, hospitality, and public infrastructure sectors. He currently runs his own practice, Rainmaker Studio. His notable works include one of the world's most advanced underground nanotechnology labs in Bangalore and one of India's largest hospital buildings, which won the IDAC 2020 award for sustainability and was presented as Building as a Therapy at a design conference in Manipal. Suman has lectured at architecture schools and shared his research at forums including ISRO. He has designed over 15 million sq. ft. and built around 5 million sq. ft. of architectural projects. He is also deeply interested in architectural and urban illustrations.

TRAM IN THE CITY

CALCUTTA TRAMWAYS Co Ltd

- STREET TRAMWAY
- RESERVED TRACK
- OTHER MAIN ROADS
- RAILWAYS
- DEPOTS

SCALE OF MILES

CITY IN TRAM
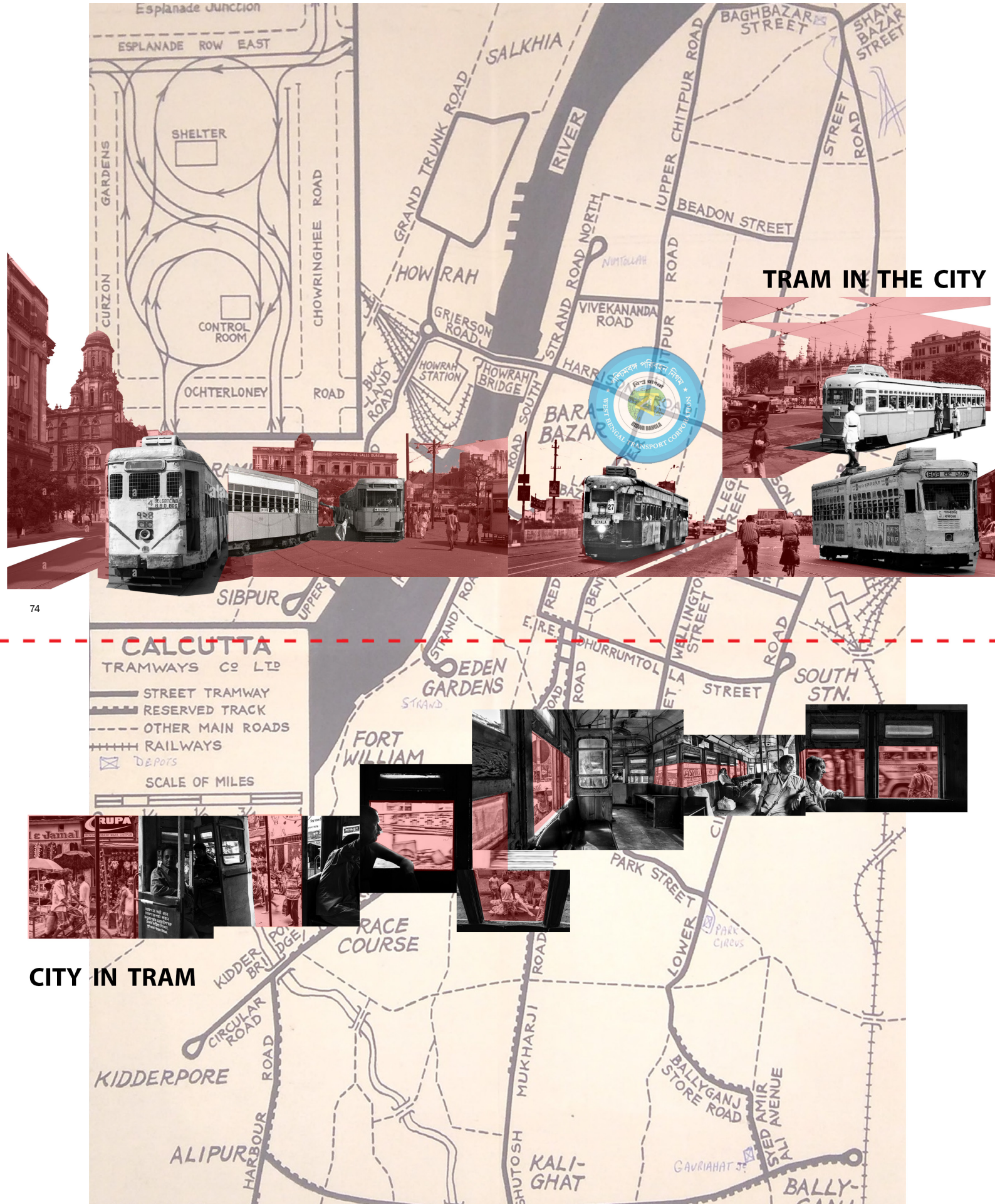
Tram as collective memory- Tram as an object in the city that becomes a part of the everyday experience of the people in the city. Another part of it is, the way in which the city is experienced from inside of the tram in frames for a person to experience the city. Hence becoming a part of the subculture of the city .
Image sourced: https://suvorc.weebly.com/, Calcutta tramways, Jagdish Agarwal

Ekla Cholo Re

The Resilient Spirit of Kolkata's Trams in a Modern World

Shweta Pedaparthi

Kolkata's tram system is more than a mode of transport; it's a living subculture deeply embedded in the city's soul. Since their introduction in the 1800s, trams have become symbols of nostalgia, community, and continuity, shaping how Kolkatans view and interact with their city. Each tram ride brings a sense of connection, a link to memories, tales, and the familiar rhythm of bell chimes and conductor banter—elements that make Kolkata's trams unique among urban transport.

Far from being relics, Kolkata's trams are cultural icons connecting the city's past and present. Trams journey through historic neighbourhoods, past landmark buildings, offering passengers fleeting glimpses into Kolkata's architectural heritage and social evolution. Each line narrates stories of shifting demographics and urban growth, fostering a sense of community rarely seen in modern modes of transport. Here, people greet one another, conversations flow freely, and strangers often become friends—building a collective heritage that binds the tram community.

Beyond their functional role, trams have inspired art, literature, and cinema. Artists capture trams in paintings, writers pen poems on the unique journeys, and filmmakers use them to depict the city's essence. Tram enthusiasts and preservationists fight to keep this culture alive amid challenges like route closures and modernization pressures. Initiatives like cultural festivals, themed rides, and onboard art exhibitions celebrate trams not just as remnants of the past but as evolving components of Kolkata's identity.
Yet, the trams face significant challenges today. Urban demands for faster, more efficient transport have marginalized their once-central role. Technological advancements and the rise of private vehicles have led to shortened routes and dwindling services, slowly eroding the social bonds that trams once fostered. Today, the few trams that remain are seen by some merely as slow-moving vehicles rather than cherished cultural treasures. The tension between heritage conservation and urban progress is palpable, with critics arguing that the trams' historical significance often outweighs their practicality in a fast-paced, modern city.

Despite this, many Kolkatans remain steadfast in their love for trams, championing their ecological benefits and potential to alleviate traffic congestion if integrated thoughtfully into modern transport networks. Innovative efforts—such as themed rides, tramway museums, and art performances—aim to rekindle public passion for trams. These initiatives don't just preserve Kolkata's tram legacy; they redefine its role for the future, positioning trams as heritage icons that offer both nostalgia and modern convenience.

Kolkata's trams are at a crossroads, embodying a delicate balance between past and future. Revitalizing the tram system involves more than just updating infrastructure; it requires honoring the emotional, historical, and cultural significance trams hold for Kolkatans. Planners and policymakers face the challenge of modernizing while retaining the community spirit and heritage trams inspire. The vision is not just to preserve the past, but to craft a sustainable future where tradition and modernity coexist.

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Most importantly, this tram subculture evokes a nostalgia that resonates deeply in Kolkata, yet it must also adapt to the demands of a growing, diverse urban population. The tram's story is not only about historical value but about adapting its legacy to the city's evolving landscape. As Kolkata navigates this journey, the goal remains to rekindle a sense of closeness and unity through trams, not merely as vehicles, but as enduring symbols of Kolkata's resilient spirit.

Tram at the threshold of past and future being a common thread through time and events of a city.
Tram at the confluence - Past, Present
Image sourced: AFP, CTUA Archive, Debashish Bhaduri

Shweta Pedaparthi is a Senior Assistant Professor and practicing architect with a strong focus on sustainable design and construction. Her undergraduate thesis, titled "Urban Insert at Esplanade, Kolkata – Reviving the Existing Tram Network," explored the potential of Kolkata's iconic tram system as a cultural and architectural medium. Since 2017, Shweta has served as a Senior Assistant Professor at RV College of Architecture, Bengaluru. Her current research focuses on alternative building materials and sustainable technologies.

Illustrations and Graphics: **Pratham Rathi** is a final-year architecture student at RV College of Architecture and an urban enthusiast passionate about cities and the urban realm.

BOOKED IN BANGALORE

Chandan Bilagunda

Bangalore was founded eons ago by a local chieftain. Today it is on the western side of town. It was anything but European and was all things Indian, the eastern side of town on the other hand was all things European having been built by the righthonourable John Company (very well known for venerable misexploits) for it's soldiers & hanger ons. As is one's wont in such cases the two sister towns looked upon each other with suspicion lest one rob the other of their vaunted ways & mores. The western town called the Pettah by the ever mispronouncing Brittons and the Pete by it's true denizens, went about it's ancient ways unfettered by the "evil" new influences except of course in cases whenever the influence was found to be "spirit-ually" convenient to mind & body.

Same could be said about the cantonment folks who thrust their nose in the air and went about their business like they were in good Ol' Blighty, without a spot of bother for the native blokes.

Now our lil' piece of Britain used to be the poor man's la la Land for all those white chums who couldn't make it to the hills filled with pompous lords of the EIC. Perched a bit high up on the gentle slopes of south Indian hills, it had a climate of similar disposition, gentle, cool and breezy, yet sunny at the same time. None of the hot blazing Sun of the Indian plains nor the bone crunching chill of it's northern mountains but filled with tree lined avenues and tropical fruit gardens in every compound. Aside from the fact that homes of non-Europeans were in quite closeted neighbourhoods, the town was made up largely of quaint colonial bungalows adorned by some unique local features called Monkey Tops, with large tree laden compounds and ship loads of soldiers set up in equally spacious airy barracks. Just the right setting for a steaming cup of tea or strong coffee perhaps in this case and a thick book on your lap that smells, like an old worn out book on a lazy cloth chair in the colonnaded verandah.


Bowring Institute, Bengaluru (Source: Old post card image provided by the Author)

This easily moth eaten European invention of communication came to Indian shores hidden in the racks of those merchant ships like mice in a ship's dirty lower decks. The Indians of the yore didn't take to this inexplicable import instantly, being suspicious of its true intentions but by & by took an earnest interest as they probably suspected it might contain the secret to the white man's craftiness.

Bangalore's Cantonment was a military town filled with an assortment of characters whose primary endeavour was to make their pile by providing utmostsatisfaction from all means possible to the army and its shenanigans. A brief hop across it's leafy streets suggested a colourful line up of soldiers, officers, merchants, servants, hawkers, sparkling white ladies in hats & umbrellas, anglicised natives in turbans, armenians, jews, afghans, horses, bullocks, monkeys, donkeys, pet spotted hyenas, ah yes ferocious beasts lounging in the local botanical park, lost stray leopards or an odd elephant. This vibrant atmosphere had to have its weekly quota of games, races, hunts, parties, picnics, balls, costume balls, secret duels, sunday services, concerts, weddings, affairs, saucy scandals & mandatory court martials for incorrigible mischief makers who would inevitably become sick of the loathsome stifling regimen. Speaking of affairs, while most served as much needed fodder for mouths

starving for material, a silent hushed affair that stood out was the one with the books in this cosy atmosphere fittingly conjured up for that. A good book anyday was an incomparable companion, from telling tall excitable tales to elevating one's low faculties to high brow wisdom, it kept one away from regular mischief.

A century ago, one such young witless officer in town, who fell to the inevitable allure of books was a stumpy fellow named W L S Churchill whose worldly goals until then had circulated around chasing polo ponies. Up & down the country he went with his mates, popping up in every decent tournament of note, lifting a royal cup here and losing a penny cup there, until he lost his head trying to outwit bright fellow officers dipped & roasted in Eton sauce. His Sandhurst schooling had added no extra brilliance about the world at large except for a staid stiff point of view of a military man. He resolved to dust off his petty station in life to rise and shine as a true snobby English gentile. It was up to his mother's considerable resources to send over cartloads of overbearing books authored by unpedestrian names like Plato, Gibbon, Schopenhauer, Malthus, Darwin, Aristotle and such unspeakable sorts. Ergo, a storm in the teacup possessed the reader's mind, shattering all pretensions of past lowliness. Thus emerged a world renowned unflappable statesman fit to run
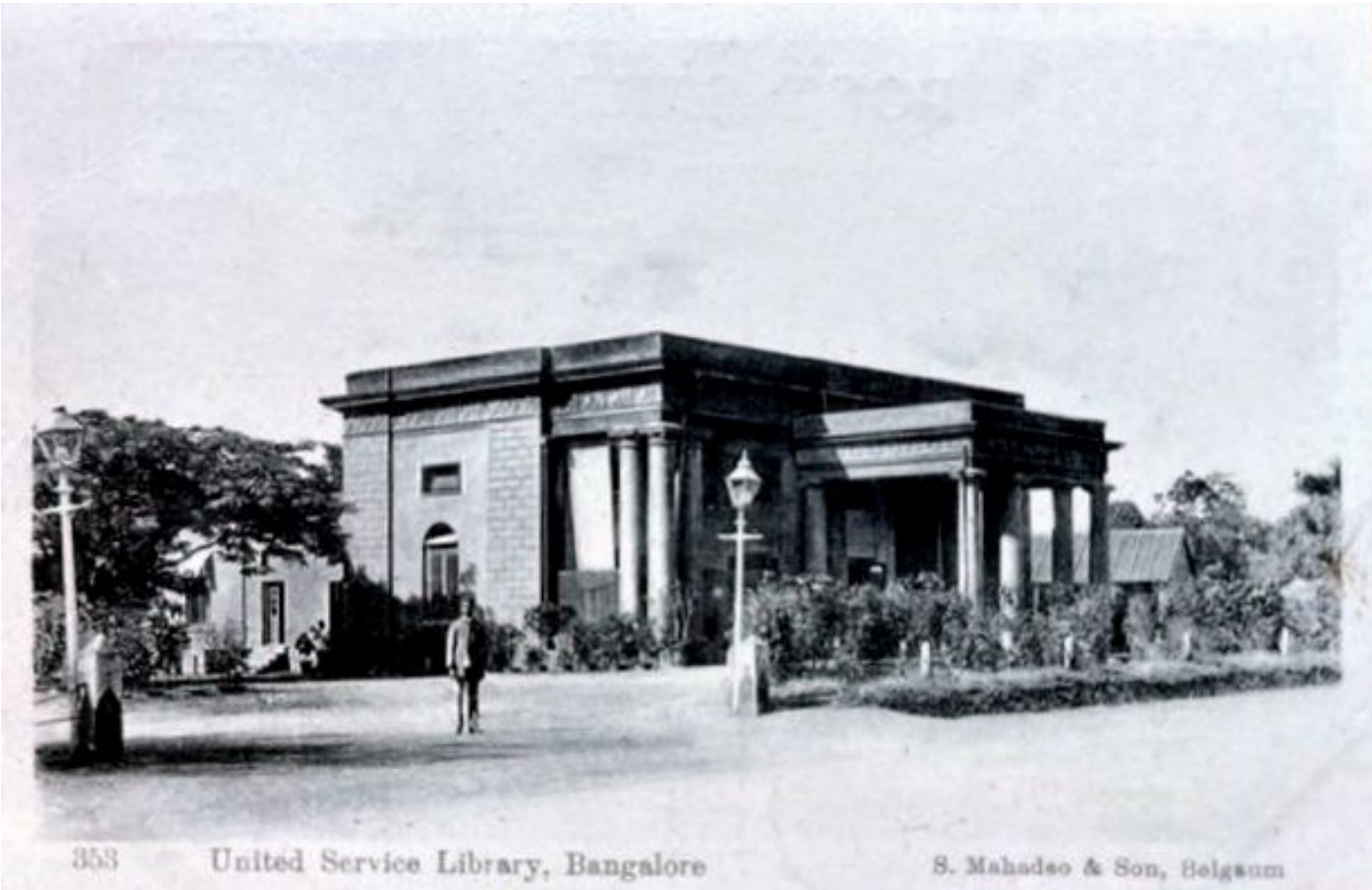
Old Lending library on East Parade road
Source: Old post card image provided by the Author

Sheshadri Iyer Memorial Library
Source: Old post card image provided by the Author

down an evil dictator or two, moulded through considerable heavy lifting done under the incessant orchestra of chirping and squeaking of little birds & squirrels of Bangalore compounds.

The old Pete meanwhile lay at the crossroads of ancient south Indian trade routes, in the midlands where the twain from both the east and west coasts of India met. Over the centuries the effects from every part of southern India had churned up a warm welcoming merchant town. Every era would see a multitude of people descend upon it's streets to sell & dwell for the foreseeable future. Thus a medieval trading metropolis had become a coveted faberge egg for many a bickering power of the Deccan. An urge shared enthusiastically by the foxy Brits too. This throbbing town held an attraction for both the man of the sword and pen alike.

So as time rolled by, the above inimitable charms of the town made it a mecca for book lovers and many a aspiring author. The unhurried pace of the town was complemented by an intrinsic love for the imagination of science and arts, well represented by institutes of national importance that began to be installed at the turn of the century. As such the first prime minister would one day proclaim Bangalore as the "City of the Future". As it hopped towards becoming a modern technopolis weaving together technology and the thought economy of India, it would do so as one of the literary capitals of India under the ever looming shadow of the grand capitals of commerce; Calcutta, Madras & Bombay where wheels of industry spun at breakneck speed. By now natives had already warmed up to the thrills and chills of the printed word. The early Christian missionaries were pioneers who braved the feared jungles of India to spring many European inventions upon the antiquated

Indian mind such as the first newspapers, dictionaries, translations of local clerical material, maps and what have you. The native saw light in the power of the Book. Bangalore's status as political and cultural capital of the region, would make it burst with writings in both English and Kannada.

Modern Kannada literature which had its beginnings in early 1800s with stately encouragement by Mysore king, Mummadi Krishnarajendra Wodeyar would mature by early 1900s, fascinating the native mind towards an ethnic form of the book. By mid 1940s a revolution bannered as Navodaya in this ancient vernacular would engulf Bangalore and Karnataka uplifting them away from the ancient themes & structures focused mostly on mythological themes to the new wave of modern literary thinking intertwined with social evolution. By the 1950s another literary movement mimicking pop themes from influences of modernist philosophers like Kafka, Camus, Sartre and Freud, called Navya would upstage Navodaya. It would also extend itself illustratively using another modern art innovation, the movies to better express itself, carving out a parallel literary cinema movement. Kannada greats who were part of this movement were the likes of Lankesh, Girish Karnad, Nisar Ahmed, Chandrasekhar Kambar, B.V. Karanth, Baraguru Ramchandrappa, C.R. Simha.
The quaint high lanes of colonial South parade, Brigade road, Commercial street & Infantry road & the Pete were packed with bookstores selling wares from every corner and variety of author. Unfortunately the only one still standing from that era is Higginbothams. Surprisingly today it's the once unexceptional lane of Church street that's become a nucleus of modern book shops. Libraries too came up in all respectable neighbourhoods & snooty city clubs to feed the

love for reading, the most famous of all, the classical looking Sheshadri Iyer memorial library aptly placed within the flowery roundabouts of Cubbon Park.

Over the years many bookshops became mainstays for passionate book lovers such as Gangarams who began as Bangalore book bureau, were famous early on for their large multistoried bookstores, one of which would unfortunately crash while under construction in the early 80s, the biggest news then. Sapna book store of Mr. Shah, who is well known for supporting upcoming local authors and also for the biggest bookshop in India. Other good names were Strand, Bangalore tract and book society, International Book house, Cooper & Co, The Bangalore circulating library etc. Not just large bulging buildings there were small cosy book shops hidden within its lazy lanes. The master pen wielder from far away hills Ruskin Bond, would sometimes pop by the Select bookstore of Mr. Murthy sniffing about for any rare titles, somehow lost and only found in Murthy's tiny cave. Then there was Shanbhag's Preimere bookshop in the corner of Museum road haunted by such high literary souls as Girish Karnad, Ramachandra Guha and even a star like Kamal Hasan. Ruling the roost today from a couple of decades in the same lane are Mayi Gowda's Blossom, Krishna Gowda's Bookworm, and in the nearby neighbourhood the Sankar couple's Atta Galata.

It was the time for notable writers of local flavour to bloom. Bangalore's liberal yet rooted to the soil ethos gave them ample material for wide exploration of social themes while keeping the text as unpretentious, modest and connected to the reader. A vivid example of such storytelling was R K Narayan. Though in effect a Mysorean, from Bangalore's sister city, the murmur in the grapevine is of how he was inspired by Bangalore's two famous neighbourhoods Malleshwaram & Basavanagudi to create his fictional Malgudi. It guides you into typical middle class south Indian lives of the colonial era in transition very accurately, keeping the narration in simple humour without any grandiose prose.

It wasn't only fiction, there were tales from the variety that only real life mysteriously affords. Kenneth Anderson known as the Jim Corbett of South India wrote of hunting man eaters and his daring exploits with other trouble makers of the forest.
Shakuntala Devi the superhuman maths calculator wrote about that insolvable maths stuff & magic with numbers, astrology, women issues and everything she thought about. B V Raman, considered one of the greatest modern astrologers would churn out authoritative texts to periodicals on astrology for the clueless peeping toms of the future.

Bangalore also chuffs itself up, for the lot that's being written about it to quite a bit mired in it. Some of the best reads about Bangalore are The City Beautiful by T P Issar, Bangalore: Roots and Beyond by Maya Jayapal, Past and Curious by Stanley Carvalho, Bangalore by Kerry James Evans, Bangalore Through the Centuries by M.Fazlul Hasan, In First Person Singular by Mahesh Bhat & Bangalore A Century of Tales from city and cantonment by Peter Colaco. Bangalore's nooks & corners and the town's earthy protagonists come alive in the stories of Aditi De, Anjum Hasan's 50 year old Qayenaat's wanderings, Anita Nair's bumbling inspector Bore Gowda , Swede Bangalore in law Zac O'Yeah's gully Hero, Andaleeb Wajid's wonky teenager.

If you got heaps of booklovers and writers piled up in a small town you also need book readings, writing workshops, launches, lectures, debates, discussions & all that a book mad population usually get up to. By the holy cows of the road, there's always some such thing or the other happening in the city's numerous book shops, auditoriums & public halls every blimey day.

Even though present day new generations have teleported themselves into the wacky tacky world of digital gadgets, Bangalore's streets are still packed with bookshops still puffing along for all & sundry. Book lovers & students can't miss a jolly good time with that charming ancient contraption of communication.

Chandan Bilagunda is technology design and business consultant having an eclectic 3 decades plus work experience in advertising, technology design & business advisory. Presently working with technology startups to project advisory for all govt & generic industry sectors. Personal interests include delving into history research, sociology, urban design, social enterprises and creating historical conservation plus awareness projects.

The Weatherman's Paradise

Bangalore Memories and the Built Form

Arun Swaminathan

As a child I would look up and see the rising Weather Balloon and wonder about the daily stories that it would tell from the skies above Bangalore.

I would hear visitors to our City asking why Bangaloreans were always talking about the weather!!!

A Non Fan Station

Around 1945 sometime before Victory over Japan Day, 23 year old Lt G Swaminathan, was posted to Bangalore. He was stationed at what is now the Sai Baba Ashram in Whitefield. Part of his duties was to liaise with the Bangalore Sub Area on Cubbon Road. One can still see some very well preserved Colonial buildings on that road and particularly within the Sub Area.

One of the first things he discovered when he was posted to Bangalore was that in the Sub Area Records, Bangalore was declared (then) to be an "NFS" or a "NON-FAN-STATION". Incidentally Poona was also classified as such by the Army during the British times.
Little did my father know that he would return to Bangalore about 10 years later to settle down and raise a family here.
My Maternal Grandfather Maj RV Sitaraman after his retirement from the Railways at Jamalpur wanted to put roots down in a place like Dehradun or Bangalore because of the pleasant weather conditions. My grandmother prevailed over him to choose Bangalore as they would be nearer to the relatives in Madras... and so he built a lovely Streamlined Moderne - Art Deco house in Malleswaram inviting my parents to move to Bangalore and stay upstairs in a design of their own.

As a teenager in 1977, I clearly remember a moment heralding a different future for this "Garden City" or "Pensioners' Paradise" (both terms taught to us in Geography in the 4th Std at Bishop Cotton Boys, School when we got ONE ceiling fan for the Living Room...It seemed like a novelty then but when I look back to the time before the coming of that fan I reminisce about the times when I had a frequent cold and that not a non-winter day

went by without wearing a sleeveless pullover or a jacket. Winter was never extreme like the Northern Winters but I was most fond of my TurtleNeck Sweater.

It was normal for children to have sniffles or fall ill... Sleeveless pullovers were common and one could see early in the morning motorcyclists (and even sometimes cyclists) donning gloves. A Jacket or Windcheater was useful to carry around to ward off the wind chill factor especially when it rained.

In fact in the late '80s a Norwegian friend who boasted of his extreme winters ended up borrowing my blazer one rainy night.
Morning mists (with egrets visiting) were par for the course, so much so that when my parents took me to the movie "DHUND" I thought the film was shot in and around Bangalore...!!!

I remember cycling from Malleswaram through Cubbon Park to Bishop Cottons...I used to wear a Blue Windcheater which my mother got me from Germany... it used to get damp cycling through the misty mornings in Cubbon Park...

I have strong memories from my childhood of buildings with a whiff of lime plaster and fresh air within with chill draughts which had to be controlled by thoughtful shutting of certain doors and windows...
My school classrooms did not have glass windows but swivelling wooden shutters with adjustable louvres inset...

My late father would have been aghast with the recent soaring of temperatures in our once fair city. He used to say that more and more Tar- Macadam roads were assisting solar radiation which was increasing the city temperatures.

Then something called "Glassitecture" hit our city with hitherto unheard of Air Conditioners increasing the respective manufacturers' profit margins...The heat gain outside these numerous buildings today can easily be seen with thermal imaging...I would rather not see these images!!!

I remember politely refusing a well meaning and highly prosperous industrialist as he wanted a Victorian Bungalow...I said I will not be the suitable Architect for
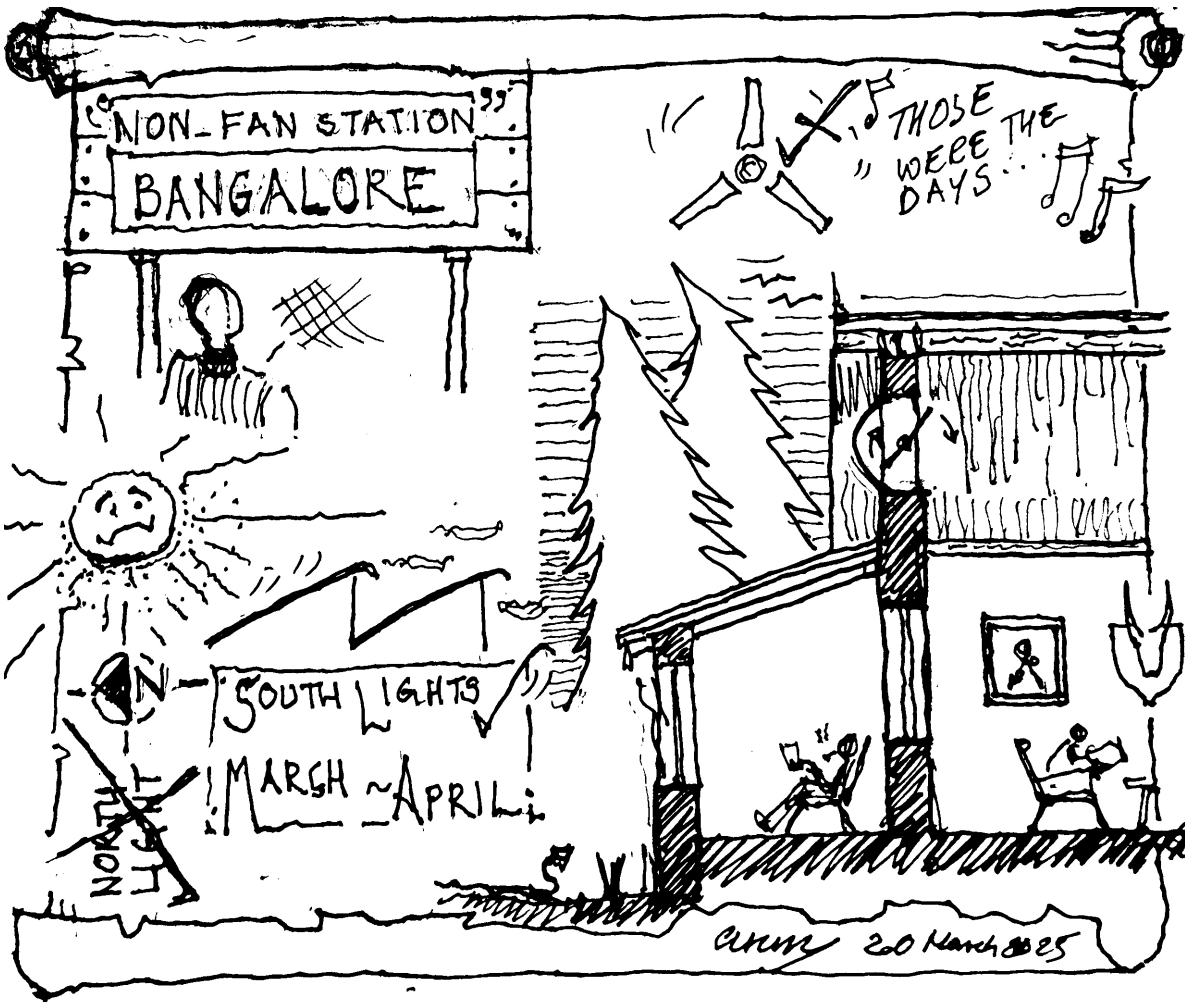
Artwork by Arun Swaminathan (Author)

I remember cycling from Malleswaram through Cubbon Park to Bishop Cottons

him as I can not replicate the Architectural Elements with that Neoclassical style… However, I said I could give him the quality of spaces through verandahs, high roofs, etc. with the skin comfort which is what makes those old Colonial Bungalows so memorable…

Colonial Architecture in India evolved with responding to the microclimate of the regions where these buildings came up… Verandahs which served as a climatic buffer also served as a socially neutral space (especially in the Tea and Coffee gardens).
High ceilings with ventilators that could be controlled by a rope from below had mosquito mesh placed within semi cylindrical frames to accommodate the swivelling of the ventilator shutter.

Weathersheds (now almost invisible in new buildings) helped shade the windows and give adequate protection from the rain that could pour at any time of the year… I still remember visiting some of the old Cantonment Bungalows with my father at Christmas time and him telling me that the weathersheds (the shading element over the window) were affectionately known as "Monkey Tops"… I vividly remember one bungalow which had Green and White Candy Stripes painted cheerfully on the GI Sheet placed on top of a wooden frame which made this particular Monkey Top…
Of the myth of the North LIght and the Bangalore Summer
In Climatology all of us are taught about North Lights and the Indian Summer.
My father alerted me that it does not make sense to have North Lights in Bangalore as the Sun is in the North during our brief but high glare summer which is in March - April and not in June - July as in North India.

The Kanade Brothers also would corroborate this with their students. They would also say that skylights should never be horizontal but allow reflected light from the sides with adequate ventilation to let out the hot air. The late Navnath Kanade told me that the best solution to the Bangalore Summer was to paint the Asbestos (then the main lightweight roofing material) Roof Black in the Stair Cabin to induce heat and a convection current which would draw out the hot air from within the house!!!
Just before the advent of our imminent Bangalore Summer is it a small wonder that Aero India is always around February with its sharp blue cloudless skies?

Bangalore has many memories - Global Memories from well before the advent of the IT Blitz…way back to Roman times with their coins being found in AGRAM… through the World War with the Americans at HAL, … The British in the Cantonment, Yelahanka, Jalahalli … The Italian Prisoners of War… to the other Expats who contributed to a new Industrial India…
The city is changing and has changed beyond recognition…the micro climate has gone for a toss…

Perhaps this is an appeal to the future Architects and Planners as well as Builders to keep what's left of Bangalore's old soul and that the embers be kept alive... Well....here we are...with fading memories of a bygone Bangalore ...

Arun Swaminathan is a graduate of the School of Architecture, CEPT University, Ahmedabad. He is an architect, academician, writer, children's cartoonist, and illustrator. His wide-ranging interests include model aircraft, military history, literature, and the outdoors. His academic journey began with teaching school children through NIE and "Each One Teach One," leading to a career in architectural education. He has taught at several institutions, most notably RV College of Architecture, where he served as Design Chair for six years and continues as Adjunct Faculty. He has also been part of Boards of Studies and had a formative three-year stint at Rishi Valley School under the Krishnamurti Foundation. In practice, he focuses on projects with personal, social, or environmental relevance, staying away from commercial work. His research interest lies in lightweight structures, for which he conducts student workshops nationwide. He is currently developing educational cartoon projects and writing on Indian military history.

LIVELIHOOD

Mandi, Kalka, 2020
Photo Credits: Ujjayant Bhattacharyya

EVOLUTION OF MOBILE REPAIR BUSINESSES AT AHMEDABAD.
Changing Dynamics of location.

Himadri Das

Introduction
In their book 'Innovation Delusion' the authors argue that repair is a subset of maintenance and care. They posit that industries which have excess of innovation jobs today will have maintenance jobs tomorrow. They show how the Information Technology industry is a good example of this (Vinsel & Russel, 2020).

In the context of the Indian city, we imagine development configured on consumption-led growth. The cities of our country need to be developed further in order to accommodate the demography that will fuel this growth. But what of the city that already exists? What is it that keeps cities functioning on an everyday basis? It is in fact the labour of scores of maintenance staff that that keeps the city functioning.

Whether it be our everyday infrastructure of water, electricity, sewage or maintainers of the roads, parks and public spaces, be it municipal cleaners, sweepers or those who give medical care, be it our neighbourhood

shop for maintaining all our daily household electronics or the waste workers whose livelihood depends on the mountains of waste generated by our society (Corwin & Gidwani, 2021) (Gidwani & Maringanti, 2016).

In her article, Malini Sur talks about the cargo cycles of Kolkata that are used to ferry heavy loads of jute bags sourced from the narrow streets of the city. During the summer and monsoon months, truing of wheels of such cycles becomes a highly sought after skill (Sur, 2020).

In fact, this is particularly true in the Indian context. The Repair related awareness in the developed economies are looked upon as a means of achieving sustainability. In the Indian cities repair is ubiquitous, it provides livelihoods to scores of families. Repair is, in fact ingrained in the cultural context of India and indeed many other developing countries where lack of resources has resulted in innovative solutions for everyday needs (Hill, 2011).

So is repair as much a part of the development story as consumption-led growth? Have repair businesses evolved over the years to rival or even partner the consumption businesses? What does location of repair businesses tell us about their evolution?

The evolution of repair was closely linked to the evolution of specialized markets in cities, not only in the Indian sub-continent (Doron & Jeffrey, 2013) but also further east in China (Bai, 2011). In the city of Ahmedabad, repair businesses were clustered within the walled city (Ray, 2008). Starting out during the colonial era, through the post-independence era uptill the post liberalization-era, repair largely existed in markets to take advantage of large number of potential customers. At the turn of the twenty-first century, there was a departure from the earlier trajectory of location-based growth. There was a disaggregation of markets due to growth of the city, which consequently impacted repair businesses. The population of the city increased to more than double at 8.7 million in 2023 from 4.1 million in 1995 (wup2018,

2023). The increase in the urbanized area of the city had all but kept pace with increase in population. The area of Ahmedabad city grew most rapidly at 163% during the decade from 2000 to 2010. The sprawl was concentrated towards the north east and south west of the city (Ramachandra, Bharath, & Sowmyashree, 2014).
This research looks at mobile repair businesses to understand the disaggregation as a response to the growth of the city. The research approaches the disaggregation from the perspective of the dynamics of location. While disaggregation led to setting up of new businesses in the extensions of the city. One important factor that made this disaggregation possible was mobile telephony and use of internet. As Assa Doron and Robin Jeffery describe so eloquently of repair businesses in Banaras, in Lucknow, in Kerala (Doron & Jeffrey, 2013). Repair businesses were set-up in new- extensions of the city in far flung areas. The change was made possible because the businesses did not have to be in geographical proximity of potential customers in order to function.

Commercialization in the Old City of Ahmedabad
A paper by Dr C. N. Ray in the context of Ahmedabad's walled city, describes the traditional neighbourhoods. It highlights the demographic changes that the city has undergone, right from its inception in the early 1400s. This study tries to understand the traditional neighbourhoods of the old city called Pols in the context of broader metropolitan growth of the city. Another study by Dyan Bellippa in 1992, highlights the ingress of commercial activity into the pols and the simultaneous exit of residents. The change in level of commercialization explains the development of the spatial clusters where-in firms and their ancillaries including repair, looked to expand in nearby areas (Ray, 2008).
This was made possible as many residents who were now impacted by the nuisance of growing commercial moved out to the south western and north eastern extensions of the city.

Spatial logic of repair in the extensions of the city:
The Historic city of Ahmadabad has been inscribed in the UNESCO heritage list in the year 2017 (Ahmedabad Municipal Corporation, 2023). The dossier of heritage

listing includes maps which documented among other details, 'specialized products markets including craft communities' (Refer to Figure 4 on page 17). Based on the mapping documentation, explorations of the old city of Ahmedabad revealed a number of repair clusters. Significant among these were electrical goods market at Gandhi road, tailoring equipment market at Gheekanta, musical instruments market at Dabgarvad, cycle bazaar near Panchkuva darwaja, Conversations with repairers and craftsmen at these markets reveal an interesting phenomenon. Many of the crafts clusters still remain one-of-a-kind in the city and they also see decline in their numbers as the subsequent generations move to other trades.

A reconnaissance survey by the author reveals that the listing does not include many trades such as two-wheeler repair, air-conditioner repair, keys and locks repairers, scissors repairers, mobile-selling, spare-parts and repairs market. Two-wheeler repair and air-conditioner repairs are located in Shahpur and Mirzapur. Keys and locks repairers, scissors repairers are located near Dilli chakla. Mobile selling, spare-parts and repair are concentrated around 'China market' on Relief road near Gheekanta. This market was named 'China market' because it was a place for selling imported Chinese electronics in the days before it graduated to become the mobile market of Ahmedabad in the late 1990s.

While trades like air-conditioner repair and two-wheeler repair disaggregated to locate themselves in new extensions of the city. Air-conditioner repair has evolved to a few locations in the new extensions such as Juhapura, Memnagar and Dudheshwar. Two-wheeler repairers and mobile repairers have become ubiquitous in the new extensions of the city. In the case of mobile repair, the company-authorised and other repairers collaborate with each other. The repair businesses consisting of small firms found ways to locate themselves in the new-extensions of the city. While locations for shops are difficult to find due to large format of commercial spaces in the new city, some informal sharing strategies were evolved to ensure business could serve customers. The strategies were about using 'shared' space. Sometimes urban villages provided possible locations. Businesses thrived by locating themselves in areas with

diverse and complex tenures or by operating as an 'informal vendor' in which case it is a 'negotiated' public space of the city (Solomon, 2008).

This allows the mobile repair businesses to negotiate their presence in most of the new-extensions of the city, more so than two-wheeler repairs. A parallel mapping of mobile repair businesses through google search shows that they have located themselves along the main transit-corridors of the new extensions (Refer to Figure 3 page 16). For the very fact that they are most prolific and widely distributed, mobile repair businesses emerge as the most interesting case of disaggregation among the repair trades.

Methodology

This study focusses on understanding the evolution of the mobile repair business in Ahmedabad city, over the last two decades. Although the mobile repair business story begins in the period post 1995, the major changes that are visible, came post the turn of the century. The period after CoVID-19 saw an acceleration of the changes for this business in the city.

The study was limited to urban areas of Ahmedabad city. Businesses were identified in the city, using a snow-balling method. Subsequently, A google search was initiated for 'mobile phone repairers in the localized areas identified from snowballing'. A structured questionnaire was administered to respondents from the repair businesses. The data collection was done in order to establish the dynamics of location in the new extensions of the city from 30 respondents across the city.

The number of respondents from each area depends on a combination of snow-balling method and google search. More samples from the snow-balling method were taken from Maninagar and Relief road as these are the old hubs for mobile repair. Similarly, snow-balling method was used at Ashram road and Gita-Mandir as these are new hubs for mobile repair. More samples from google search were taken in Vastrapur and Navrangpura as these are relatively new commercial zones within residential areas. Areas of Gurukul road and Naranpura, near A.E.C. crossroads have evolved as markets for mobile selling accessories as well as repair. Drive-in road and Nehrunagar offered only a few samples as these are specific locations with isolated shops.

	Survey Locations in the city	Locational Primacy		Below 15 years of experience		Above 15 years of experience		Total
		Y	N	Y	N	Y	N	
Old Hub	Relief Road	3	1	1	1	2	0	4
	Maninagar	3	3	3	2	0	1	6
New Hub	Gita mandir	0	2	0	2	0	0	2
	Janpath	1	0	0	0	1	0	1
Western Suburbs	Navrangpura	2	1	2	0	0	1	3
	Vastrapur	3	2	1	2	2		5
Along Major Roads	Drive in road	1	0	1	0	0	0	1
	Gurukul road	3	0	2	0	1	0	3
At locations in western Suburbs	Naranpura	2	1	2	1	0	0	3
	Nehrunagar	1	0	1	0	0	0	1
	Total	19	10	13	8	6	2	29*
	Total (%)	66	34	45	28	21	7	100

Locational primacy by years of work experience of the owner

Locational Primacy of surveyed repair businesses, disaggregated by years of work experience of the owner. Source: Survey. (*) total no of responses for this question were 29 out of 30.

	Survey Locations in the city	Rented			Owned			Total
		High Visibility	Medium Visibility	Low Visibility	High Visibility	Medium Visibility	Low Visibility	
Old Hub	Relief Road	0	0	2	0	0	2	4
	Maninagar	1	0	0	3	0	2	6
New Hub	Gita mandir	1	0	1	0	0	0	2
	Janpath	0	0	0	0	0	1	1
Western Suburbs	Navrangpu ra	1	1	1	0	1	0	4
	Vastrapur	3	1	0	0	0	1	5
Along Major Roads	Drive in road	0	0	0	1	0	0	1
	Gurukul road	1	0	0	1	1	0	3
At locations in wester n Suburbs	Naranpura	1	0	1	1	0	0	3
	Nehrunagar	0	0	0	1	0	0	1
	Total	8	2	5	7	2	6	30
	Total (%)	27	7	17	23	7	20	100

Visibility of surveyed repair businesses by rented or owned properties

Degree of visibility of surveyed repair businesses, disaggregated by rented or owned.
Source: Survey

Discussion

Location is still important but with a difference:

The primary determinant of location holds good for 66% of the respondents. While 34% say that location is not the only important determinant. But a clearer picture emerges if we separate-out businesses that are more than 15 years old and those who are less than 15 years. While businesses older than 15 are clear on the matter with 75% in favour of 'location is primary'. Businesses lesser than 15 years are 62% in favour of 'location is primary'

The respondents with more than 15 years of experience are located in the traditional hubs of Relief road, Ashram road and Maninagar as well as new areas of Vastrapur and Gurukul road. These businesses are dependent on the earlier logic of 'primacy of location'. Though the dynamics of an evolving city such as Ahmedabad are such that a location may not be as advantageous after 15 years. So a repairer in Maninagar says that his business prospered because people find it difficult to drive to the old city. There is no parking available there, he says. So 'primacy of location' itself is not something un- changing. Over a period of time a location may not remain advantageous.

Locations in the city provide a wide range of options for rented and owned spaces that may not be directly in the path of potential customers. So upper floors of markets and basements become highly sought after for setting up a non-space-intensive repair shop. In some cases even if the visibility of the approach is not good, but the customer makes it very easily to the repair shop with the support of google location and some basic landmarks in the address line.

Repair does exist in high value areas:

Looking at it from the perspective of ownership, the respondents were equally represented with 50% rented and 50% owned properties. Among the rented properties, 93% are located in primary streets and 53% have high visibility. So repair does exist in high value, high visibility areas. In such locations, the pre-dominant strategy is to have a repair counter within a shop that can afford to pay a high rent. 27% of the respondents in rented, high visibility locations are using this strategy. The shop in this case, sell new-mobiles and mobile accessories Among the owned properties, 73% are located in Primary streets and 47% have high visibility. As is evident in such cases, the owned properties are less in Primary streets.

Repeat customers by customer catchment					
Customer Catchment	Below 30% Repeat customers	31% to 60% Repeat customers	61% to 90% Repeat Customers	91% and above Repeat customers	Total
Ahmedabad	2	3	7	2	14
Ahmedabad and Gandhinagar	2	0	0	0	2
Gujarat	2	2	1	2	7
Outside Gujarat		1	1	1	3
Total	6	6	9	5	26*
Total (%)	23	23	35	19	100

Impact of repeat customers on customer catchment among repair businesses.
Survey (*) total no of responses were 26 because 26 responded out of 30

Mobile Shops (1-3)
Mobile Shops Market (120-300)
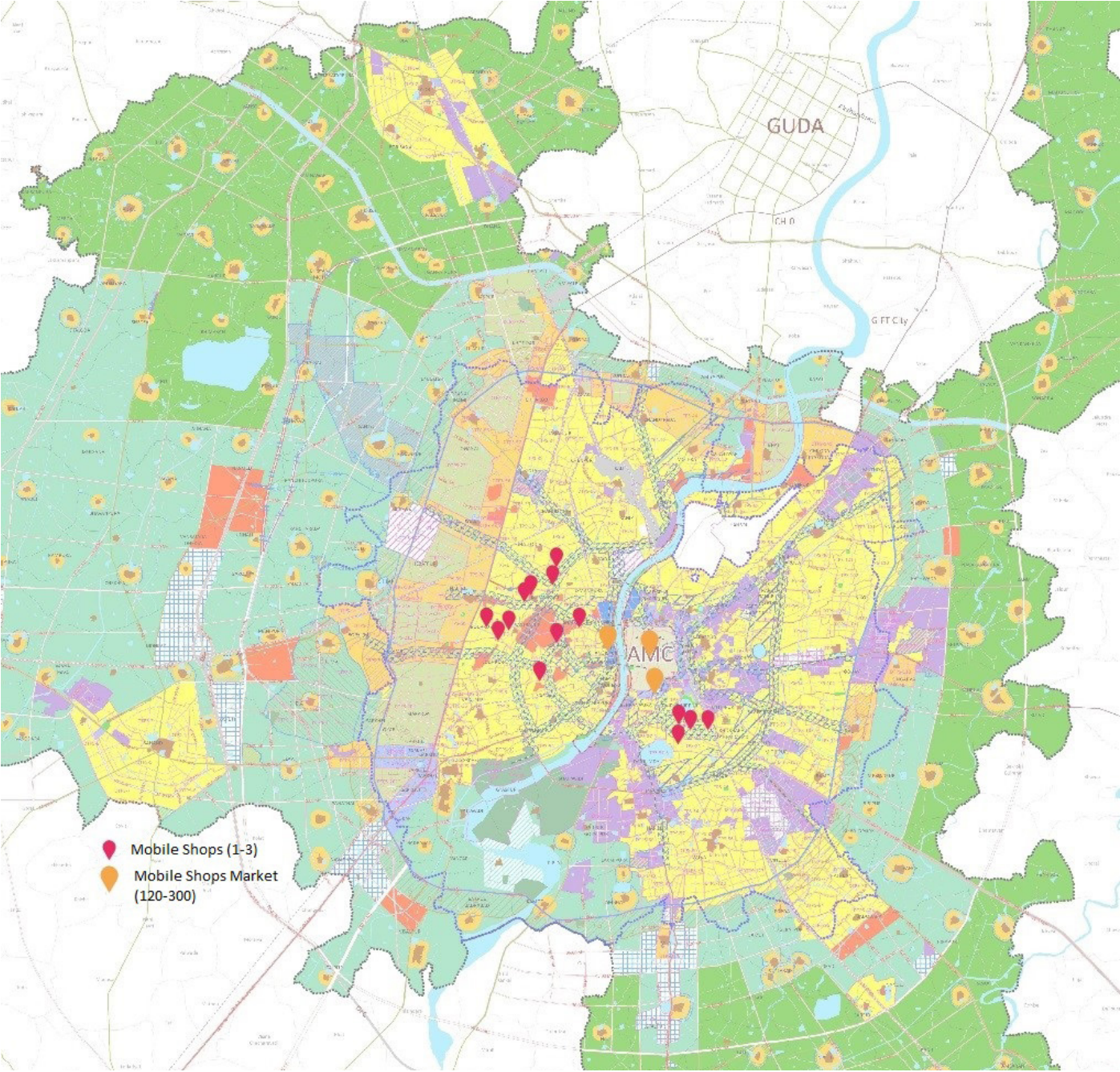
Location of surveyed mobile repair businesses
Source: Survey based on Draft Development Plan AUDA 2021

Repair is a reference business:
Mobile repair business is a reference business. This is supported by the fact that 18% of the respondents say that they have over 91% repeat customers and another 39% say, that they have over 61%-90% repeat customers. The interesting positive relationship emerges between higher number of repeat customers with a wider catchment of customers

During the interview one of the respondents mentioned, that repair is a 'reference business' and that customers will continue with him even if he moved to another location. He said this was proven during the CoVID-19 days as he worked from home and customers came to him there.
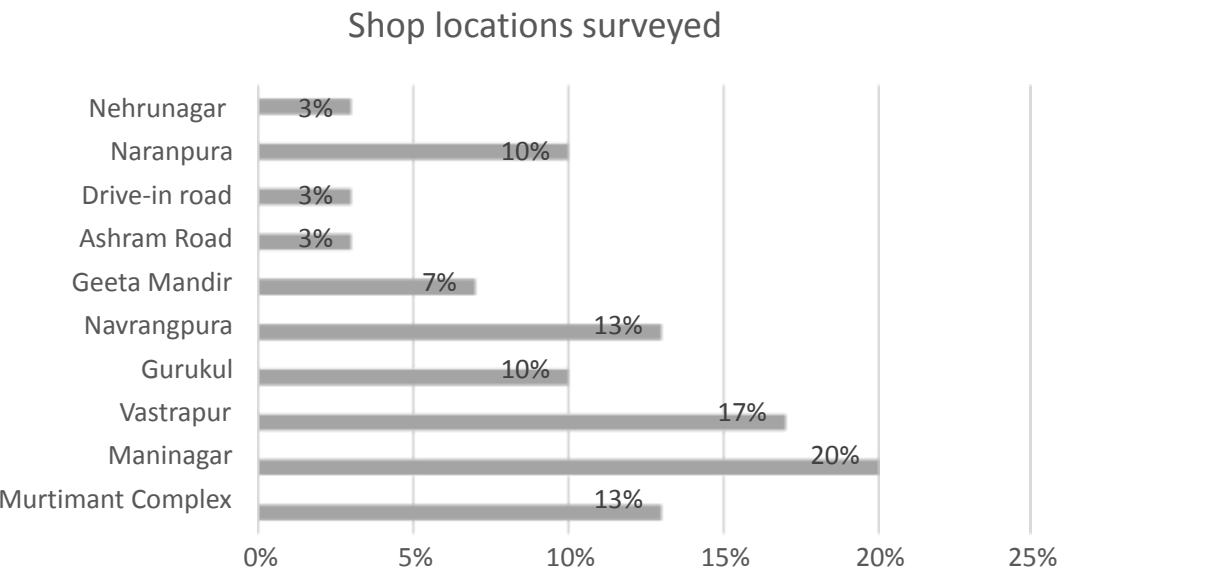
Changing Dynamics of Location:
Dynamics of location have changed but just so. Location is still important, then what has changed and why? Earlier the mobile repair business was highly concentrated in the area of the walled city. This location was

favourable not only from the perspective of customers from the city but those from outside the city as well. It would be very normal for dealers and repairers from other cities to come to Ahmedabad by train with many small errands to be taken up. Today the business has grown manifold. There are many more customers but there are many shops as well.

While there are strategies deployed by repairers to take advantage of high numbers of customers, like the mobile-phone-wholesale-accessories market at Gita-Mandir State Transport Bus-stand. There are also strategies to try to leverage the online market. Repair counters inside shops selling new mobiles and mobile accessories is one such strategy to take advantage of high numbers of customers. A repair counter can be advantageous to both the shop and the repair business but there are limitations. A repair counter is normally a work space of 3 feet by 2 feet, it normally has a glass window on the front and two sides at the

Shop locations surveyed

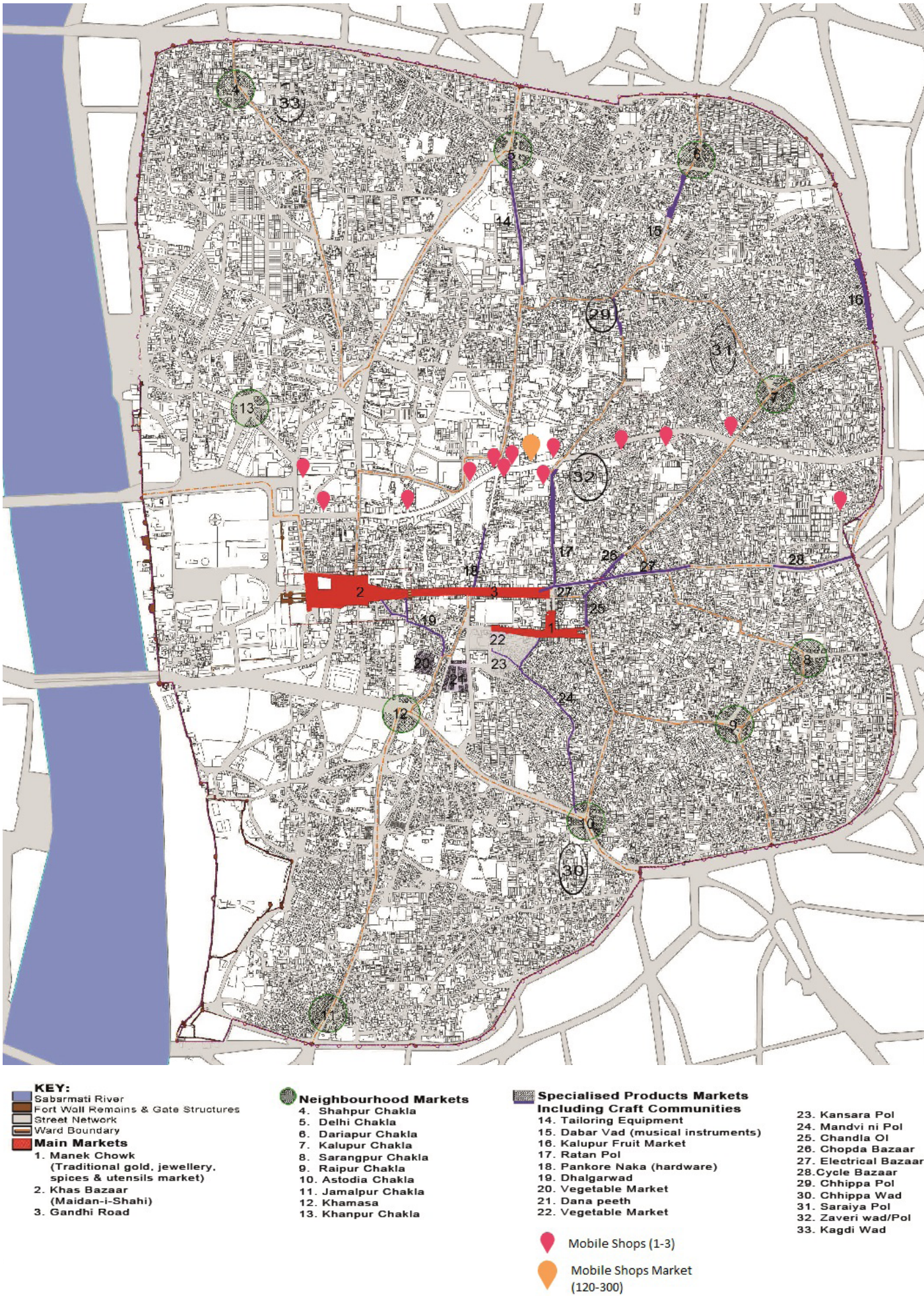| Location	Percentage
Nehrunagar	3%
Naranpura	10%
Drive-in road	3%
Ashram Road	3%
Geeta Mandir	7%
Navrangpura	13%
Gurukul	10%
Vastrapur	17%
Maninagar	20%
Murtimant Complex	13%

Percentage of surveyed businesses by location
Source: Author

top. It is only a space for working on repairs and some storage, there is no space for display or customer servicing. Such a small space along with a chair for the repairer is offered for 25000 INR per month in high value locations. The limitations of having counters is, that more complex repairs which need sophisticated instruments, cannot be taken up in such a space. Normally a repair counter is linked with a repair shop nearby that would take all the complex repairs. The repair counter is not a recent innovation, the market on Relief road has many repair counters in spare parts shops for many years.

On the other hand, online repair is a relatively new phenomenon. Online repair is an example of complete negation of 'primacy of location'. The initiatives like Cashify and Phixman started out as portals, the idea being offering of services through kiosks or online means. But today these companies are forced to open physical shops in the city. The repairers in these shops insist that customers want to interact with repairers. They say, when a refurbished phone is bought, the customer wants a face she/he can interact with in case of complaints. They will only give their phone to someone they trust.
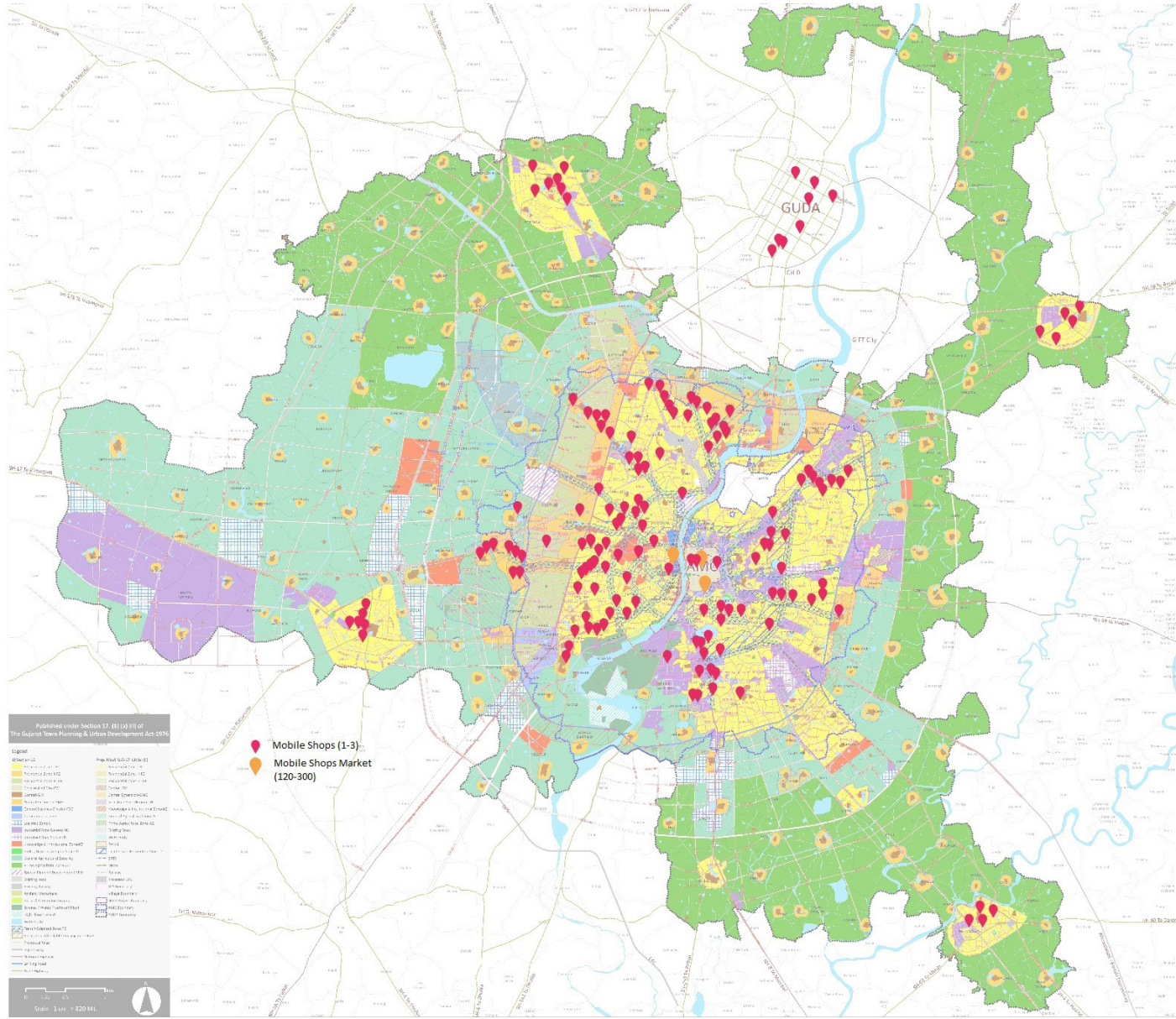
Disaggregation of Mobile Repair businesses in Ahmedabad
Source: Map Based on AUDA DEVELOPMENT PLAN 2021

KEY:
Sabarmati River
Fort Wall Remains & Gate Structures
Street Network
Ward Boundary

Main Markets
1. Manek Chowk
   (Traditional gold, jewellery, spices & utensils market)
2. Khas Bazaar
   (Maidan-i-Shahi)
3. Gandhi Road

Neighbourhood Markets
4. Shahpur Chakla
5. Delhi Chakla
6. Dariapur Chakla
7. Kalupur Chakla
8. Sarangpur Chakla
9. Raipur Chakla
10. Astodia Chakla
11. Jamalpur Chakla
12. Khamasa
13. Khanpur Chakla

Specialised Products Markets
Including Craft Communities
14. Tailoring Equipment
15. Dabar Vad (musical instruments)
16. Kalupur Fruit Market
17. Ratan Pol
18. Pankore Naka (hardware)
19. Dhalgarwad
20. Vegetable Market
21. Dana peeth
22. Vegetable Market

23. Kansara Pol
24. Mandvi ni Pol
25. Chandla Ol
26. Chopda Bazaar
27. Electrical Bazaar
28. Cycle Bazaar
29. Chhippa Pol
30. Chhippa Wad
31. Saraiya Pol
32. Zaveri wad/Pol
33. Kagdi Wad

Mobile Shops (1-3)

Mobile Shops Market (120-300)

Clustering of Mobile Repair Businesses in the Walled city along with Specialized Products Markets listed by UNESCO Heritage city Ahmedabad; Source: Map Based on UNESCO Heritage city Ahmedabad listing 2017
https://whc.unesco.org/en/list/1551/documents/

A new start-up by Gujarat Technical University Innovation hub in the premises of L. D. Engineering college campus, testifies to the fact that customers want someone answerable and that cannot be an email address or a complaint number. During the interview, the director of the start-up says that online- repair is still at a nascent stage in India. He says in more developed economies, customers favour time over just money. It is when the market reaches that kind of maturity, online repairs will become big in India. He says in the Indian context and most definitely in Ahmedabad, customers value the experience of buying or even getting a service. So people will surely prefer to go to the repair store to interact with the repairer. The young-engineer-director-repairer zips around the city on an electric-bike collecting phones that need to be repaired. He takes pride in the fact

that their turn-around time is only one day. That is very efficient especially because the phones are being collected and dropped back to their owners.

Conclusion
What is also evident from the study regarding the question of location, is it is still important, as customers want to go physically to the shops for repair. The mobile repair businesses are located in proximity to public transport, regional transport or railway stations but even in such locations, they find floor-spaces that are not directly in the path of customers and therefore less costly. The study highlights that spatial proximity to customers remains important, to such an extent that new hubs and clusters have been formed in the extensions of the city.

Himadri Das is an urbanist and educator based in Ahmedabad and Bangalore. His interest is in propagating awareness of sustainability be it through consultancy, advocacy or activism. Himadri is a trustee at Repair café Bengaluru. He is part of a team of volunteers who help spread the message of repairing and re-using domestic items by organizing pop-up workshops in communities. Himadri graduated from the Master in Human Settlements (MaHS) from Katholieke Universiteit Leuven, Leuven, Belgium in 2012. He is currently pursuing his Phd at Faculty of Planning at CEPT University. His research focuses on micro-entrepreneurs in electronics repair clusters in Indian cities. In his professional life he consults as an urban design expert. He was the recipient of a 'special recognition' in the Volvo Sustainability Awards 2013 for his project "Towards a walkable and Sustainable Bengaluru: A safe Access project for Indira-Nagar Metro Station". He is a co-author of the Safe Access Manual: Safe Access to Mass Transit Stations in Indian Cities in 2014. Himadri has been actively involved in teaching architecture and urban design for more than 12 years.

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Dakhni X Rap

A study of the advent of the emerging artform as a subculture
Mayank Singh

Ojas Shetty is a Senior Program Associate - Transport with the New Sustainable Mobility practice at WRI Ross Center for Sustainable Cities
Image credit: Instagram, Soundcloud accounts

This article explores the advent of rap and hip hop as an artform across the country and its intersection with Dakhni in the context of Bangalore. Hiphop and rap as genres, throughout their 20th century history have often been tools of representation and resistance. How does Dakhni find itself as its ally against the spatial and socio-cultural backdrop of an urban centre like Bangalore? We talk to 3 Bangalore rappers and an artist manager in this domain and find out.

Ojas Shetty

"What is Hip-Hop if not a cultural response to adversity?"

Ojas is an urban practitioner, multimedia producer, cultural propagandist, currently working at WRI India as a Senior Programme Associate. Ojas writes about cities, mobility, public spaces, data and hip-hop.

Mayank (M): How did your journey with Indian hip hop start?
Ojas (O): When I was 26-27, I was living a decent life, and to find more joy out of life, I started venturing out. In 2014, while I was with Hyderabad Urban Lab

(HUL), 'Mere Gully' had come out by producer Sez on the Beat featuring rappers Naezy and Divine. But more than just the artists on this track, this was also a collaboration of Kurla and Andheri with its class variations. And it was picked up everywhere - they got radio plays, interview invites, even on relatively newer platforms like Instagram and YouTube (thanks to the latter's latest monetisation policy) - and spread like wildfire in the independent music space. In 2016, I moved to Mumbai and started to attend and even arrange 'cyphers'*. Artists would get together in places like a park in Dharavi, a ground in Worli or Shivajinagar. I being, an avid hip-hop listener myself, started exploring the stories behind these artists.

A 'cypher' is a practice where rappers meet at a place, ideally in a circle and exchange verses for entertainment and competition.
M: What differences did you find in the socio-cultural background of the rap you were listening to, which was mostly Western I presume, as compared to these artists you were hanging out with?
O: In the west, especially in the United States, Rap was largely a vocabulary of a disadvantaged community. It emerged out of spatially segregated neighbourhoods in New York and ghettos in Atlanta and Los Angeles. Hip-hop in India has had its own trajectory. For example, north India had desi hip-hop emerging out of NRI artists like Apache Indian. In cities like Mumbai, you would see instances of rappers like Sean Paul being played in apartments and arousing curiosity in the adjacent bastis. Ace, a pioneer from the Dharavi rap scene, would burn and distribute CDs from home, making rap music accessible to all classes. By 2013, in Mumbai, there emerged a clear distinction between basti rappers and apartment rappers. Similarly, in Delhi, East Delhi

and South Delhi were developing their own styles. With easy access to smartphones and iPads, music production also became easy. That being said Rap everywhere does accentuate the element of protest in an artform, although that's not always exclusive to it. I mean what is hip-hop if not a cultural response to adversity.

That being, rap also presents itself as an identity politics artform - there is Valmiki Rap, Jat Rap, even Right Wing rap.

M: How did you get introduced to Dakhni rap?
O: My work with HUL in 2016 involved talking to a lot of bus unions and auto-rickshaw drivers, which is where I picked up a bit of Dakhni. I also got a chance to speak to filmmaker Gautam Pemmaraju and ended up learning more about the history of Dakhni. While living in Hyderabad, I realised the Urdu I have picked up has

Rap was largely a vocabulary of a disadvantaged community.

a more Dakhni touch to it. In 2018-19 as I had to frequent Bangalore for my work with WRI, I made it a point to catch cyphers or attend studio recording sessions. Pasha Bhai, who would later drop his single 'Eid Ka Chand' in 2020, was still writing and recording in English and Hindi. On top of this, avenues like MTV Hustle would only accept entries in these two languages. In 2021, I helped write a proposal for these Bangalore-based artists for IFA and then once we bagged the grant, we not only realised that there is value in Dakhni as a language for hip hop, we also discovered that there is a whole realm of grant-writing as a medium to release music rather than primarily relying on self-funded production of this kind of work.

M: Is there a spatial or cultural similarity between the origins of hip-hop culture of Mumbai and Bangalore?
O: There isn't. In the west, hip-hop as an artform has its origins in the Bronx in New York City. In Mumbai, hip-hop had its origins in Nalasopara and Mira Road - where dance groups helped keep children off drugs. You must have seen some of these dance groups on the TV show Boogie Woogie on Sony back in the day.

Bangalore has had its own history of western music - Metal, Jazz and Electronica. It took a little longer for rap to be taken seriously in Bangalore because of proximity of better venues and conservative neighbourhoods. You must have heard the news of RWAs shutting down some

Mohammad Affan Pasha, also known as Pasha Bhai, has gained recognition for his contributions to the hip-hop scene in Bangalore, India. Image credit: Rolling Stone India, bangaloreinternationalcentre.org

100+ venues around the city.

The group 'Wananadaf' was an early initiative that turned informal spaces like Cubbon Park into accessible performance venues from people from all backgrounds, as bigger venues would have a cover charge for listeners. Dakhni rap happens at Neelasandra and Shivajinagar. There are discrete scenes in RR Nagar, Hennur, Koramangala. There are Rappers like Smokey and Brodha V who come from relatively advantaged backgrounds and have had access to housing and culture. There is a recent realisation amongst NRI rappers, like Hanumankind, that South Asia is a big emerging market for them.

M: Was there an apprehension about putting out an album in Dakhni?
O: There was. Urdu and Dakhni have their own class connotations where Urdu is considered more respectable and has a wider audience; Dakhni is considered humorous. One is often chided by elders for speaking in Dakhni - labelling it as 'broken Urdu'. But we felt writing in English and Hindi/Urdu would have been an inauthentic

representation of their everyday life.

M: How have the venues received this as an artform?
O: There are clear divisions: programmers come from a different class background, and the elite determine taste more than anyone else. You have to wait for a chance and are expected to feel grateful for opportunities that you may get at a popular venue like Fandom or Social. We then would reposition ourselves to consider venues like BIC/MAP/Goethe Institut. Rap audiences are different in the sense that they are largely male and high energy. Although once we did end up doing a show for an NGO-run school.

M: How has this artform helped revive Dakhni as a language?
O: We have to realise that Dakhni stopped being a literary language due to the rise of the Urdu dominion and its recognition from the Government. A lot of artistic work would exist in Dakhni - although as a spoken word tradition it still continued since the last 200-250 years. Dakhni in Bangalore would have more Kannada and even Marathi (due to Shivaji coming to Bangalore in the 16th century), than

Dakhni in Hyderabad which would have more Telugu in it. These guys are reviving the dead literary tradition in a way, even though it's not the same Dakhni, especially with the usage of everyday slang.

During floods, our sewers end up overflowing, electricity gets cut off first, houses get flooded with this water, we are not able to sleep, cook, eat or drink.

Pasha Bhai is a well-known rapper from Bengaluru, popular for his unique style of blending "Dakhni", a South Indian Urdu dialect, into his rap music. His tracks often reflect the struggles of the urban poor, daily life in Bengaluru's Muslim neighbourhoods and social issues.

M: Can you describe your journey and background?
Pasha Bhai (P): I belong to Neelsandra, which is a small ghetto with small lanes, filthy streets. It's a highly dense locality. I feel we are treated differently by the administration but it's people like us who run the city at the core of it - we may not be signing documents but we go and get our hands dirty and put our head in the infrastructure of the city - be it economically or physically, tangible contributions to the city come from these communities. Growing up here I'd question

why do we only have to end up taking these certain jobs and end up studying at these particular institutes? Why can't this cycle change?
During floods, our sewers end up overflowing, electricity gets cut off first, houses get flooded with this water, we are not able to sleep, cook, eat or drink. We somehow spend the night and start cleaning up the next morning. Some people would get together and arrange for food and would go around distributing milk, bread, medicines. So this solidarity literally has helped us survive. You don't leave your people behind, no matter what the situation is.

M: How did you start rapping?
P: Growing up, being exceptional in studies, I was told I was a special kid. Eventually I started questioning this notion as I started getting practical in life, especially after I lost my father. I was directionless, out on the streets making money by printing documents for people, doing all kinds of work. And this money which we'd have to hide from family would somehow allow us to bunk classes and hang around with friends. After 12th, I was introduced to rap by a friend and became a proper hip-hop head, listening on repeat albums like J. Cole's '4 Your Eyez Only' and Kendrick Lamar's 'Damn'. Being a rapper was something that only existed

Mohammad Affan Pasha aka Pasha Bhai

at the back of my head, since these artists were doing their work in English and my friends who introduced me to this work were writing in Hindi. I started learning and picking up other people's styles and started writing everyday in Hindi/English.

M: When did you start writing in Dakhni?
P: When I came across Indian artists like Naezy, Divine, Emiway and esrtwhile Seedhe Maut, I noticed that they are authentic to their language. That's when I realised that my mother tongue Dakhni has had its own literary legacy from the past several centuries. And that's what led me to the release of my debut single 'Eid ka Chand' and a lot of people appreciated me for representing Dakhni. I had started writing in Hindi, because a lot of my inspirations amongst mainstream artists were writing in Hindi. I later started rapping in English after being exposed to global hip hop and watching rap battles. To be honest, I never thought I'd end up rapping in Dakhni, but later rapping in my mother tongue felt like home to me.

M: When you look at the rap culture of another city, let's say Hyderabad, do you see any similarity?
P: I can relate a lot with Divine, Emiway and Naezy. Listening to Naezy hits you differently if you are a Muslim kid. There's a lot of resilience and pride in Emiway's writing. So when I'm looking for depth, I relate to Bombay rap a lot, although for easy listening I listen to Delhi rap. A lot of cultural aspects reflect in the rap of that geography.

M: What about the nature of rap coming from smaller cities?
P: I have seen a lot of rappers come to Bangalore from Kolar, Hassan, Mysore, Chintamani and then go back because of lack of opportunities here. To be honest, there's no proper formalised industry here. Whatever it is, it's just us and we do have a range of rappers based on reach, popularity and accessibility. And the rappers from small towns come and learn how to make do and manoeuvre through the available opportunities here.

M: My last question would be - in terms of informal spaces in Bangalore for rap battles and cyphers, and even regular performance venues like Fandom, how accepting have they been?
P: Talking about informal spaces, Wanandaf

did bring about a certain organisation in the rap community in the city in terms of cyphers. Even before that, MC Suhas would organise cyphers and jams around Jayanagar. And we would see rappers like Ali from Kashmir amongst others. In comparison to other cities, Delhi and Mumbai may have been better in terms of rap's presence but I still find the scene here a little less confusing than, say, Chennai.

The formal venues have not been very accepting to be honest, all they want is to make money and become another Delhi or Mumbai. They would rather fly down MC Altaf from Mumbai or Seedhe Maut from Delhi rather supporting artists here. They have no vision. If I had my own venue I would call rappers every week for a showcase and get my regular audience. That would cut half the cost of flying these artists from other cities.

Dope Duo (Saad and Umar)

"The Bangalore we see is different from the Bangalore that other people see."

M: Hi, could you both give me a little educational background of yours?
Saad (S): I'm in second year, studying BBA in St. Joseph's (evening) college.
Umar (U): I graduated from St. Joseph's (evening) college. Currently I am working as a brand alliances manager for a firm for 6 months.

M: How old are both of you, if I may ask?
U: I'm 21 and he (Saad) is 19.

M: Where did you grow up and where do you currently live?
U: We spent the first 10-15 years of our lives in Shivajinagar and then had to move to Neelasandra due to some family issues, which is where we currently live.

M: And how has it been living in Neelasandra?
S: We might have been born in Shivajinagar but this place (Neelasandra) is us living hip-

hop. This Muslim ghetto is (the embodiment of) hip-hop for me. At every street corner here, you'll find a so-called thug with a blade in his mouth. I mean he has a life to live, a wife and kids to protect. I hope you understand. And we were not born with a silver spoon in our mouth. The Bangalore we see is different from the Bangalore that other people see.

M: How and when did you both get into rap?
S: Rap was not a conscious decision to get into. It came automatically into our lives. I guess it was God's plan, it was all written. I started listening to rap around 2018-2019 before big names like Divine got famous, even before Pashabhai started rapping in Dakhni. People here were writing in Urdu and English and going through an identity crisis. When I'd listen to international artists like Kendrick (Lamar) and Eminem, you'd realise that their stories are similar to the lives we are living here.

U: We have been writing for a couple of years now. Very rarely you will come across a duo of actual siblings in hip-hop working together. We have been witness to each other's personal and professional struggles. Thankfully till now people who have heard our music have shown us love. And we are still learning from each other and from hip-hop as an artform. And we have been lucky enough to be able to collaborate with Pashabhai who is a known figure of the Dakhni hip-hop scene. And so now, that serves to us as a milestone and there's no turning back now, we have nothing to lose. And we are doing this on top of my day job and Saad's education. We want to set the right example for kids.

M: So I'm assuming the language you speak at home is Dakhni; how did you end up writing in Dakhni?
S: We started writing in Urdu and English - the latter primarily because we'd memorise Eminem's verses and write our own on the same beats. Eventually we realised if we have to represent our culture, we do need to start writing in Dakhni. There is a line in my upcoming song: 'Eminem bhi yaha paida hota toh rap karta Dakhni mein' (Had Eminem been born here, even he' d have rapped in Dakhni'). We have seen how Dakhni is looked down upon as a language. We are not asking for a special treatment to Dakhni, we just want to be accepted just like any other rapper.

M: Any particular spatial anchor that helps you to create art?
U: It used to be the water tank on the terrace of my house in Neelasandra, where I would sit in the night and see the moon shine brighter than the stars around it. The moon would inspire me to shine brighter than those around me especially since I was going through some personal turmoil.

M: Are there rappers coming from small towns or are they only present in cities like Bangalore and Hyderabad?
U: I think people consume hip-hop from all across the country, from all cities big and small. And what matters is whether someone sitting in a small town far away can relate to what another artist is trying to say. There are a thousand ways to express and tell a story. And there are so many perspectives. You never know who might find your story relatable and inspiring. We might not have the same life but we may be able to bring our own perspective to someone else's work. Currently there is a rapper in every street.
S: There is no point comparing towns I feel - our Bangalore ghettos are extremely small in front of the western (neighbour-)hoods, which might look lavish in front of ours in terms of lifestyle. So if you look at it, we are small town boys for them. So if we are able to connect with them, definitely artists coming from smaller towns (than Bangalore) would surely connect with us. That being said, Bangalore definitely has more visibility and a community for artists to learn and grow than say Belagavi.

M: How often does communal background find its way into rap lyrics?
S: Hip-hop historically originated from the Black African-American Community, so yes in the west, communal differences in writing may be seen between the works of Kendrick (Lamar, a Black artist) vs say Eminem (a White artist). In India, it's a mix of this socio-economic background plus what you have grown up listening to. There is a whole subgenre called flex-rap, where yes you do write about money and cars and women, and we frankly don't relate to it. But they won't be writing about the struggles we have faced. But for us there is an added challenge - the struggle is not just against the world, it's also to find acceptance (of pursuing this artform) within our own community.

Listen to 'Bengalore ki Daastan' by Pasha Bhai and Demixx Beats on YouTube by scanning the link below:

Dope Duo are an emerging rap Duo from Bangalore, consisting of brothers Umar and Saad. Listen to 'Emergency Case' by Dope Duo featuring Pasha Bhai

Mayank is an architect with a Master's Specialisation in Structural Engineering with over 9 years of professional experience. As an educator, his main subjects are building construction, with an emphasis on computational design and its applications in large-span and high-rise structures along with building acoustics. As a part-time musician, composer and producer, he releases and performs music under the moniker 'Bluedoor'. Mayank is drawn to finding parallels with music and architecture for students to develop a cohesive understanding and commonalities of both the disciplines.
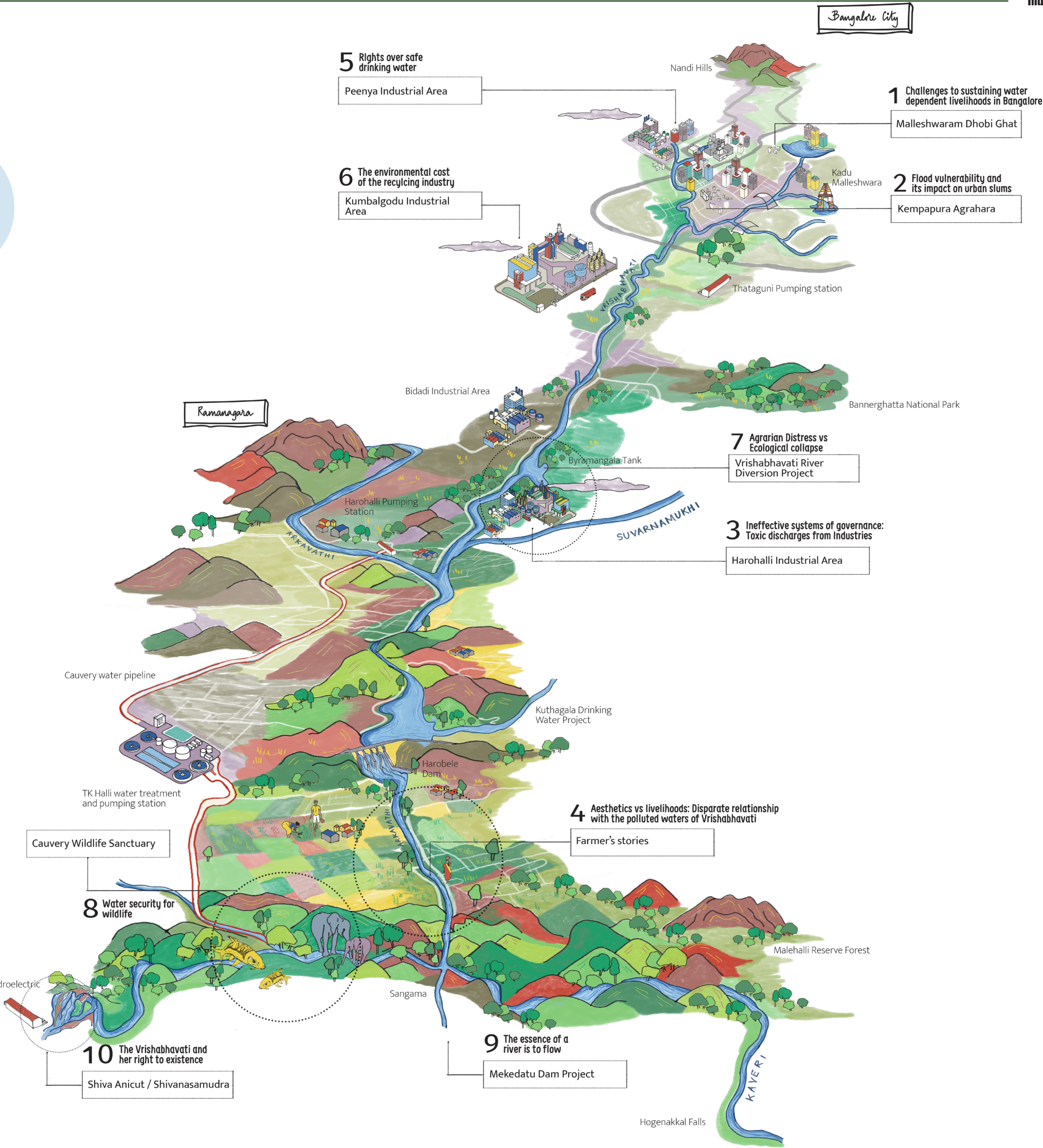
Whose river is it anyway?

Documenting memories of an urban river

Kadambari Komandur, Namrata Narendra, Megha Kashyap

The Vrishabhavathi river runs through the south-western parts of Bengaluru and Ramanagara district for about 69 km. With a catchment area of 170 sq-km, Vrishabhavathi carries the toxic wastewater of one-third of Bengaluru. Flanked by large industrial areas in Peenya, Yeshwanthpur, Kumbalgodu, Bidadi and Harohalli, it meanders past dense residential neighbourhoods, prestigious institutions, shopping malls, temples and farmlands before emptying itself into the Arkavathy river. As it passes close to national parks, this polluted wastewater becomes wildlife's drinking water source. The Vrishabhavathi then feeds into the Arkavathy near Kanakapura town.

This river has been designated as 'critically polluted' by the pollution control board. Polluted natural systems like these are usually very difficult to conserve. The Vrishabhavathi and its catchment have over time been overwritten and polluted. With the provision of piped water supply from the Kaveri, the idea of the river as a holistic system, has all but receded from public memory. The situation is made more complex by the diversity of people impacted, many of whom go by unseen. For instance, the larger impact of upstream apathy is felt by farmers downstream. Here, water stresses and the contamination of agricultural lands result in livelihood disruption and health concerns. Furthermore, the loss of natural resources has sidelined scores of resource dependent urban communities like potters and dhobis. Added to this is the stress that this degradation is causing to resident biodiversity, in the lower reaches of the river.

Bangalore City

5 Rights over safe drinking water
Peenya Industrial Area

6 The environmental cost of the recycling industry
Kumbalgodu Industrial Area

1 Challenges to sustaining water dependent livelihoods in Bangalore
Malleshwaram Dhobi Ghat

2 Flood vulnerability and its impact on urban slums
Kempapura Agrahara

Nandi Hills

Kadu Malleshwara

Thataguni Pumping station

Bidadi Industrial Area

Bannerghatta National Park

Ramanagara

Byramangala Tank

Harohalli Pumping Station

7 Agrarian Distress vs Ecological collapse
Vrishabhavati River Diversion Project

3 Ineffective systems of governance: Toxic discharges from Industries
Harohalli Industrial Area

SUVARNAMUKHI

ARKAVATHI

Cauvery water pipeline

Kuthagala Drinking Water Project

Harobele Dam

TK Halli water treatment and pumping station

4 Aesthetics vs livelihoods: Disparate relationship with the polluted waters of Vrishabhavati
Farmer's stories

Cauvery Wildlife Sanctuary

8 Water security for wildlife

Malehalli Reserve Forest

Shimsha Hydroelectric Station

Sangama

10 The Vrishabhavati and her right to existence
Shiva Anicut / Shivanasamudra

9 The essence of a river is to flow
Mekedatu Dam Project

KAVERI

Hogenakkal Falls

Livelihoods, water and its governance
A case of Dhobi Ghat

The ghat as it exists today, is an impressive local industry, with over 400 dhobis washing clothes or running small dry clean businesses. In this ghat, water is a critical resource, managed through fairly effective communal systems. With a local union structure that takes decisions on matters of community resources and governance, the ghat is a case study in the success of the urban commons.
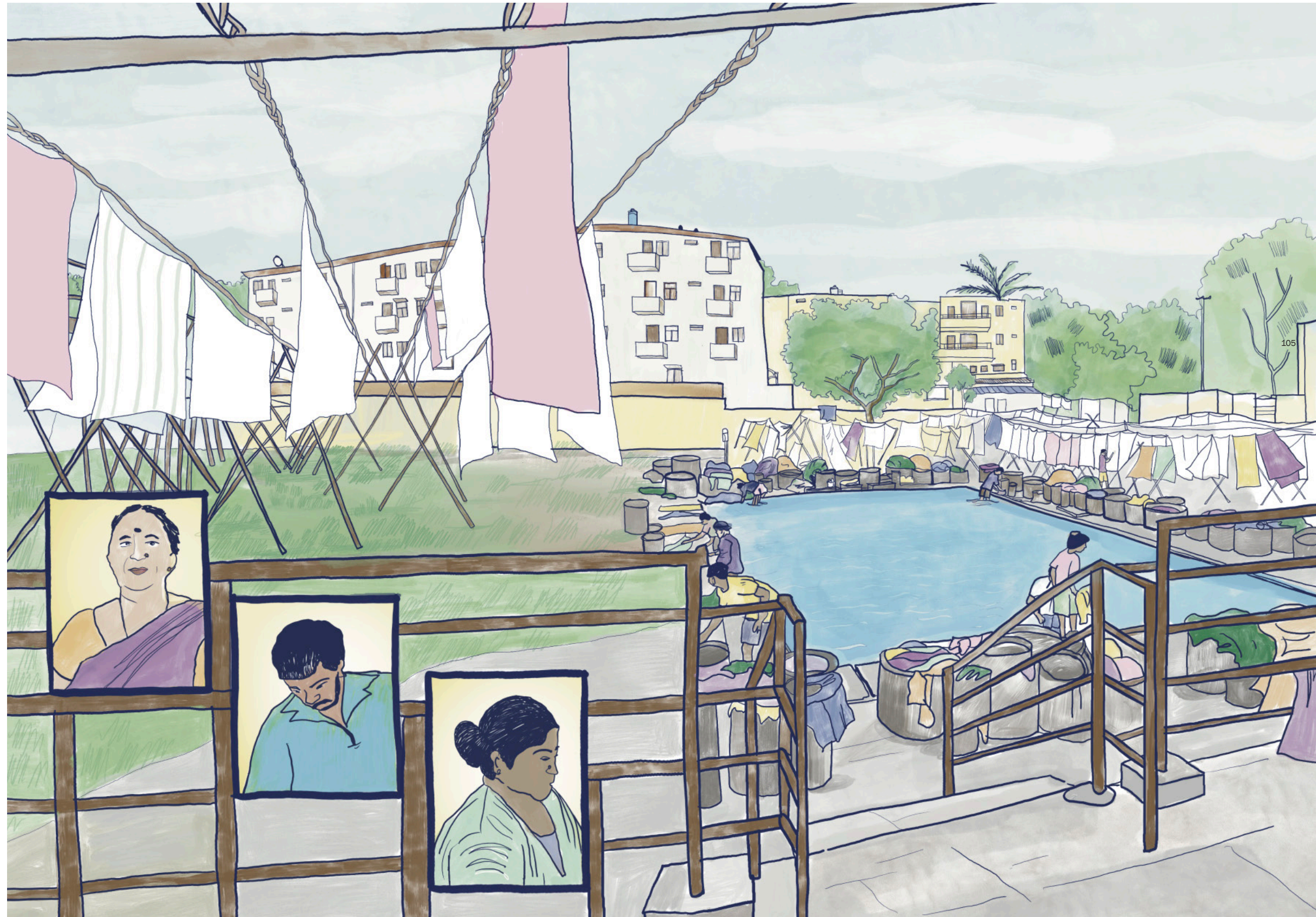
These disparate groups are rarely represented together, making it extremely difficult to understand the complexity of the river. To begin a conversation for conservation, it is imperative for people to understand their individual roles. For the polluters, this means understanding the implication of their activities, which will only come with a comprehension of ground realities. For the marginalised communities, it would mean understanding the causes, as well as their rights and capacities. Saving the Vrishabhavathi is therefore a momentous task, requiring one to see multiple natural, social, cultural and political forces. Few people are able to see these connections, largely because there is no cohesive, people-centric narrative.

Through this storytelling initiative, we hope to uncover stories about the river and its significance that are orally preserved by diverse communities all across Bengaluru and in the downstream areas.

The Malleswaram Dhobi ghat, speculated to be over 85 years old, is situated at the origin of the Vrishabhavathi catchment. It grew organically along the banks of Sankey Tank to serve the needs of nearby residential areas.
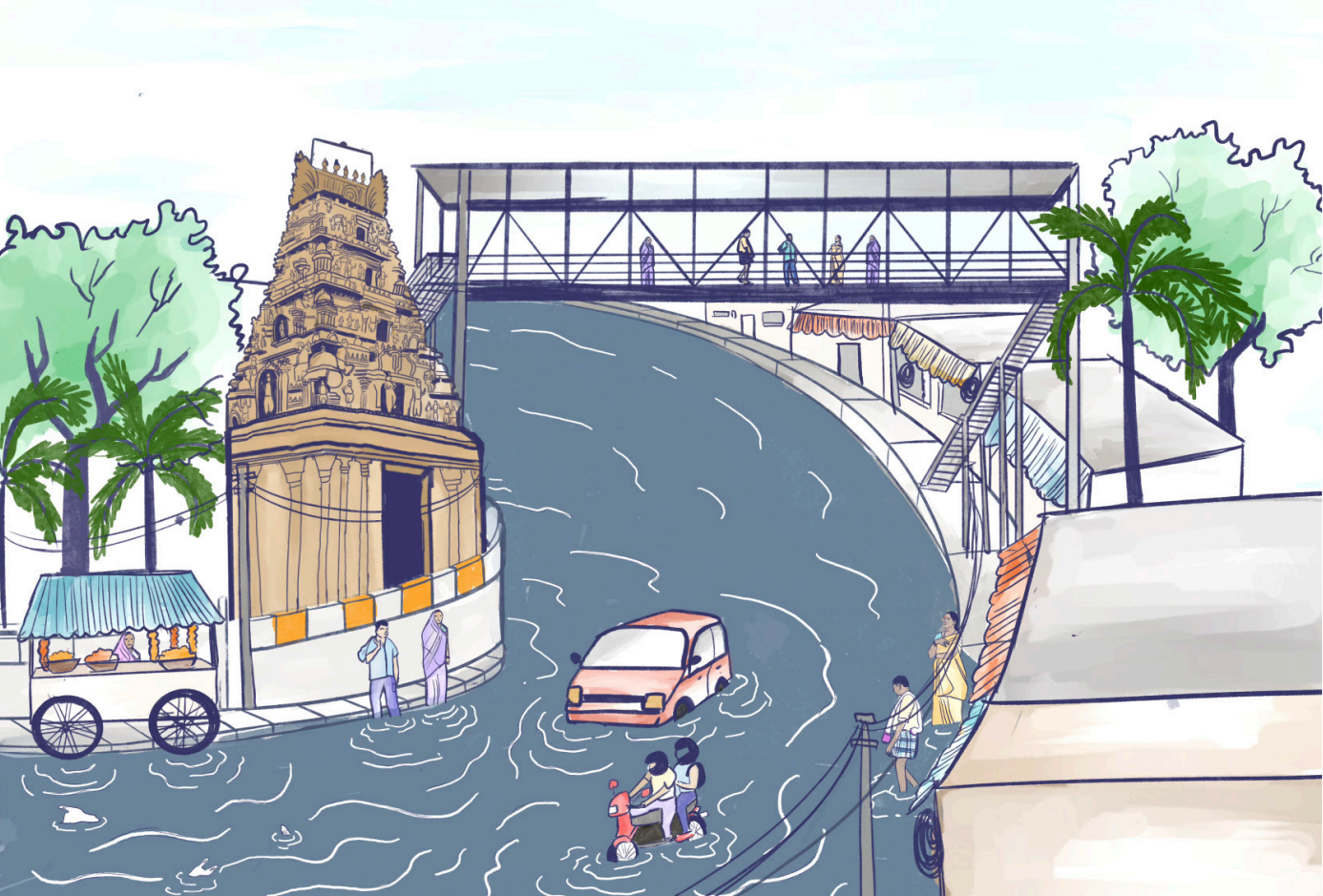
The ghat has a strong relationship with water, both individually and collectively and both ground and rainwater. Politicisation and gentrification over the years has had a massive impact on access to water for the workers in the Dhobi Ghat.This is a story of local resilience, aspiration and industry. In saying so, it is also a reflection on the efficacy of top down resource management visions, especially when contrasted with more bottom up governance systems.

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Consistent conversation with the shop owners and vendors are beginning to reveal a disjunction in planning and citizen benefit, with development tending to envision a better future rather than a liveable present.

Pollution for profit?
A case of the market at Gali Anjaneya Temple Economics of degrading water quality : A case of agricultural practices and childrens' perspectives in Harohalli, Byramangala and Annedoddi villages

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Sweeping the water back
A case of the market at Gali Anjaneya Temple

"I have to close the shop and sweep the water back onto the streets. Since I sell food, none of the merchandise is recoverable, resulting in significant losses. This happens every year, and there's no way to prevent it. The land owner had to reconstruct the shop at a higher level to avoid water entry, but with the increasing waste disposal, more water flows onto the streets each year", said Mrs. Nagamma, an owner of a tea stall near the temple.

With every passing year, the rains are becoming more unpredictable, both in their quantity and their frequency. This has severely impacted the area around the Gali Anjaneya temple which is located right by the river. New construction in the form of highway pillars, metro pillars, white topped roads are adding debris and waste every single day leading to a rise in water level even during a small shower.
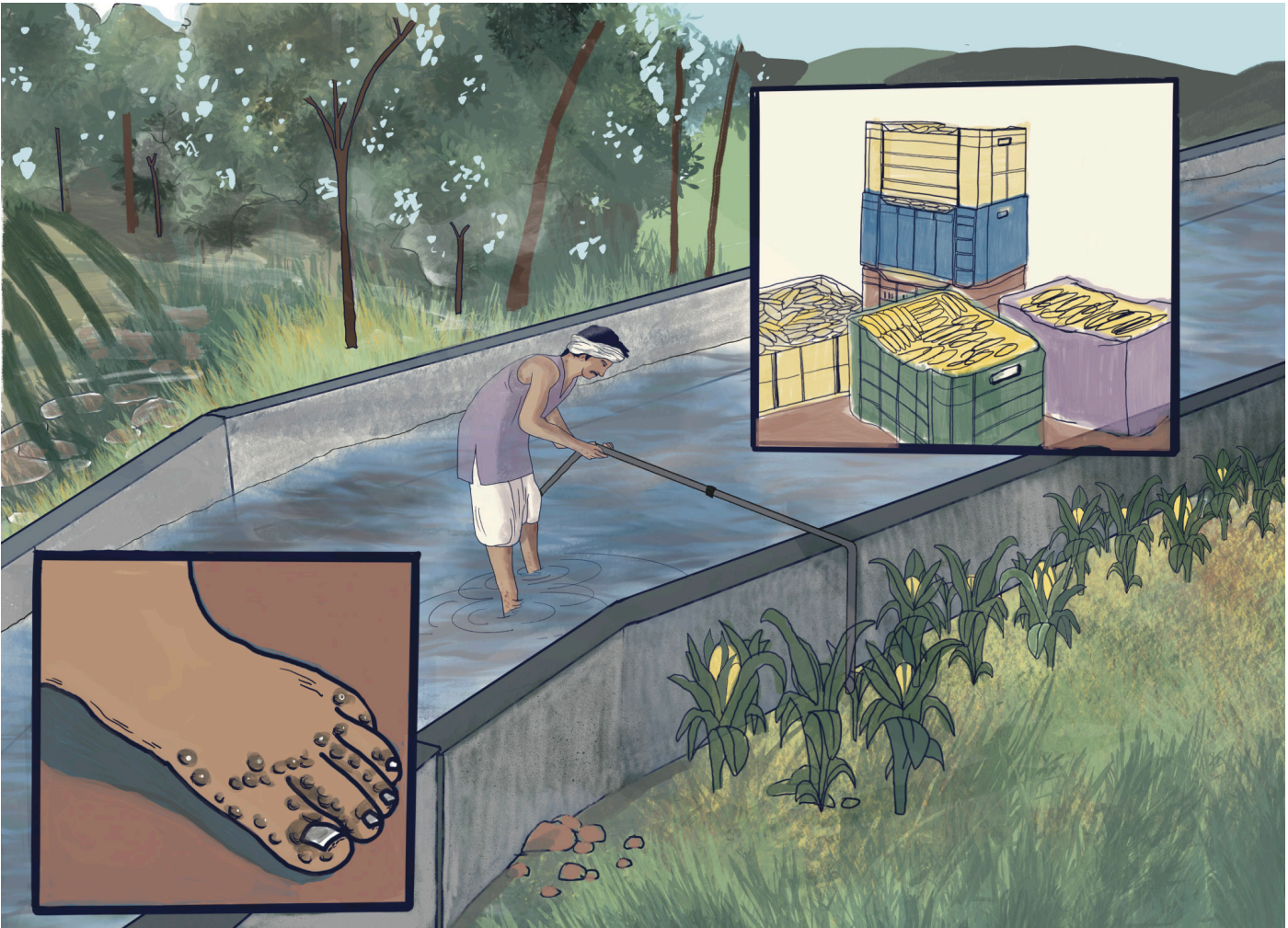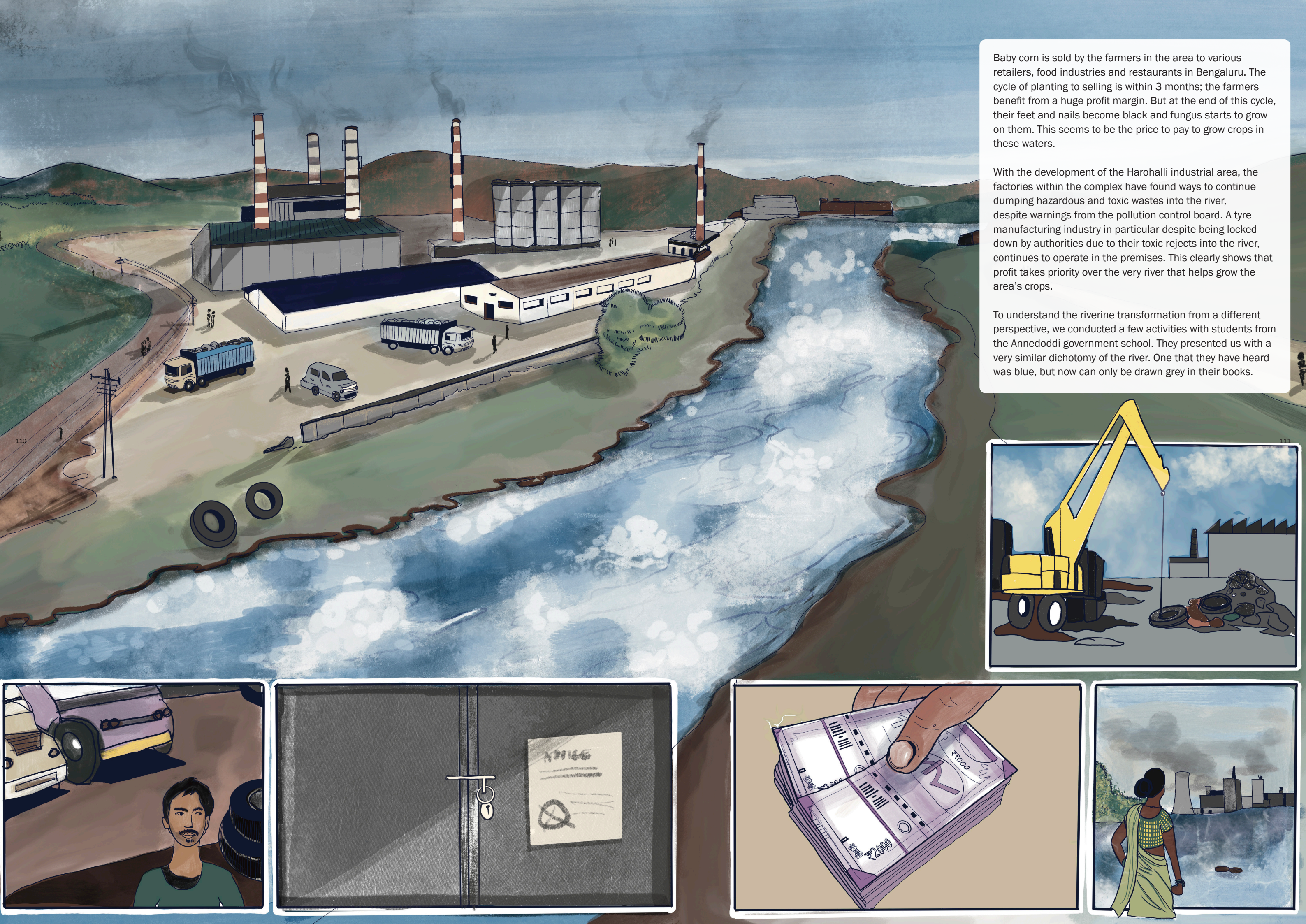
Adding to the challenge of ensuring there is enough funds to fix the damage incurred by the floods, the shopkeepers and vendors also have to be careful of the water entering their shops. What was earlier just sewage, is now also mixed with industrial effluents which cause more harm since the shops sell food amongst other things.

Baby corn is sold by the farmers in the area to various retailers, food industries and restaurants in Bengaluru. The cycle of planting to selling is within 3 months; the farmers benefit from a huge profit margin. But at the end of this cycle, their feet and nails become black and fungus starts to grow on them. This seems to be the price to pay to grow crops in these waters.

With the development of the Harohalli industrial area, the factories within the complex have found ways to continue dumping hazardous and toxic wastes into the river, despite warnings from the pollution control board. A tyre manufacturing industry in particular despite being locked down by authorities due to their toxic rejects into the river, continues to operate in the premises. This clearly shows that profit takes priority over the very river that helps grow the area's crops.

To understand the riverine transformation from a different perspective, we conducted a few activities with students from the Annedoddi government school. They presented us with a very similar dichotomy of the river. One that they have heard was blue, but now can only be drawn grey in their books.
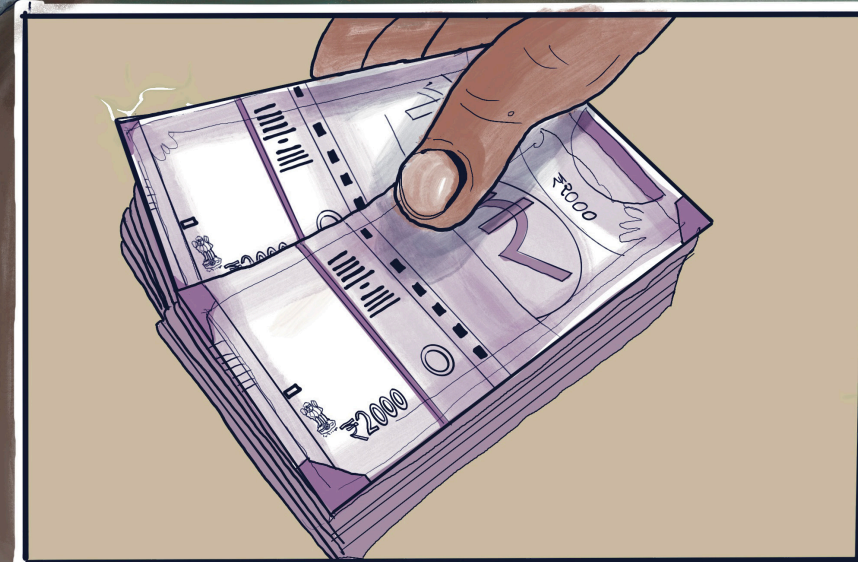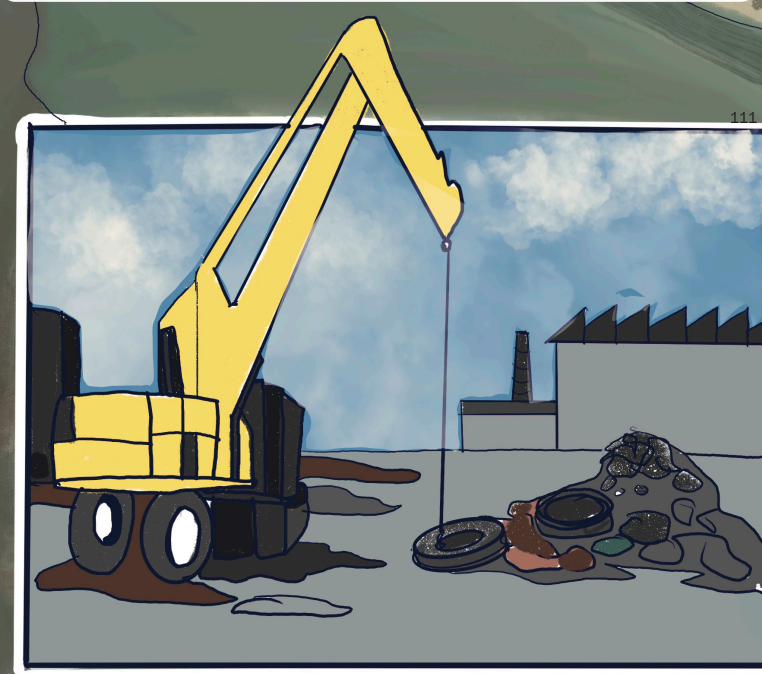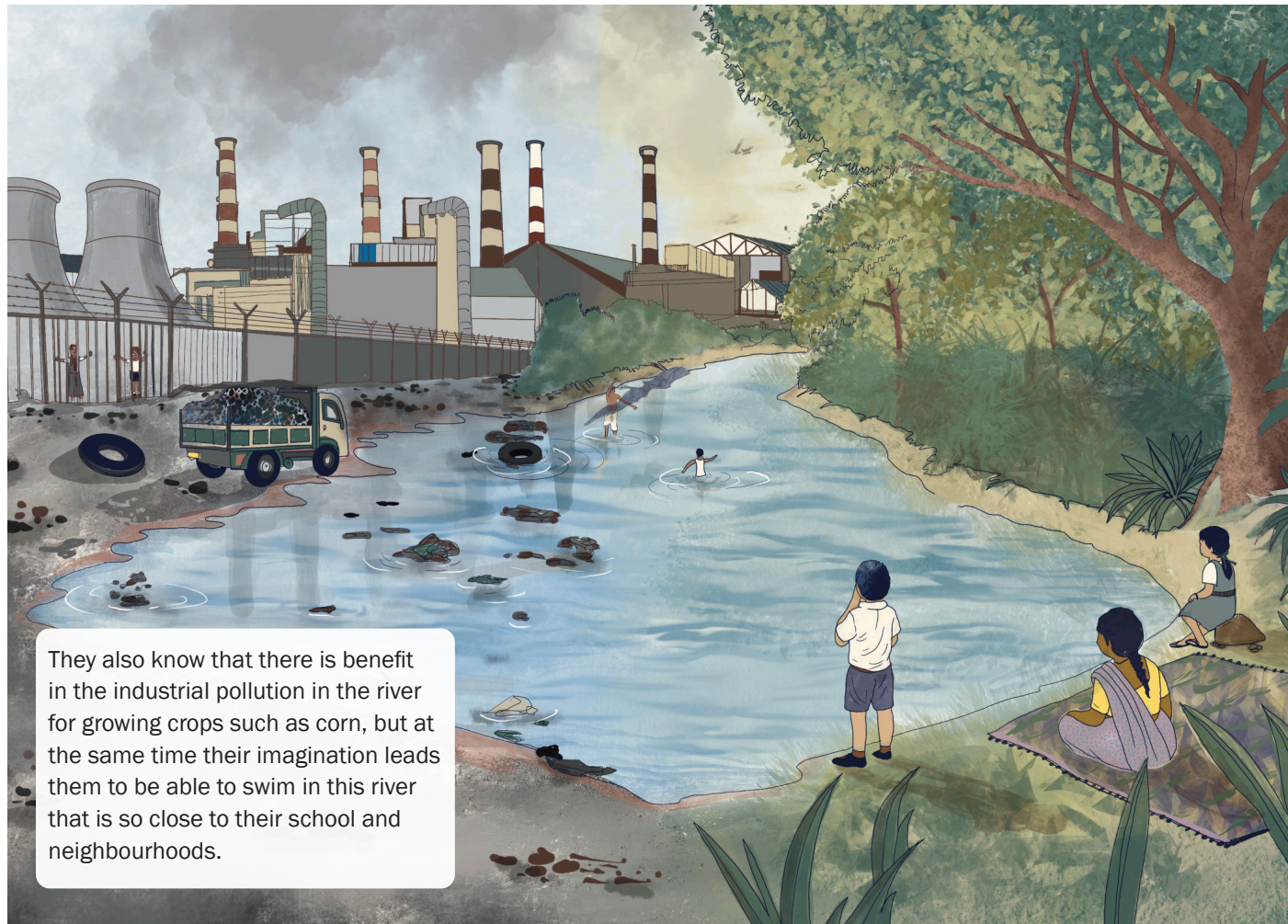
They also know that there is benefit in the industrial pollution in the river for growing crops such as corn, but at the same time their imagination leads them to be able to swim in this river that is so close to their school and neighbourhoods.
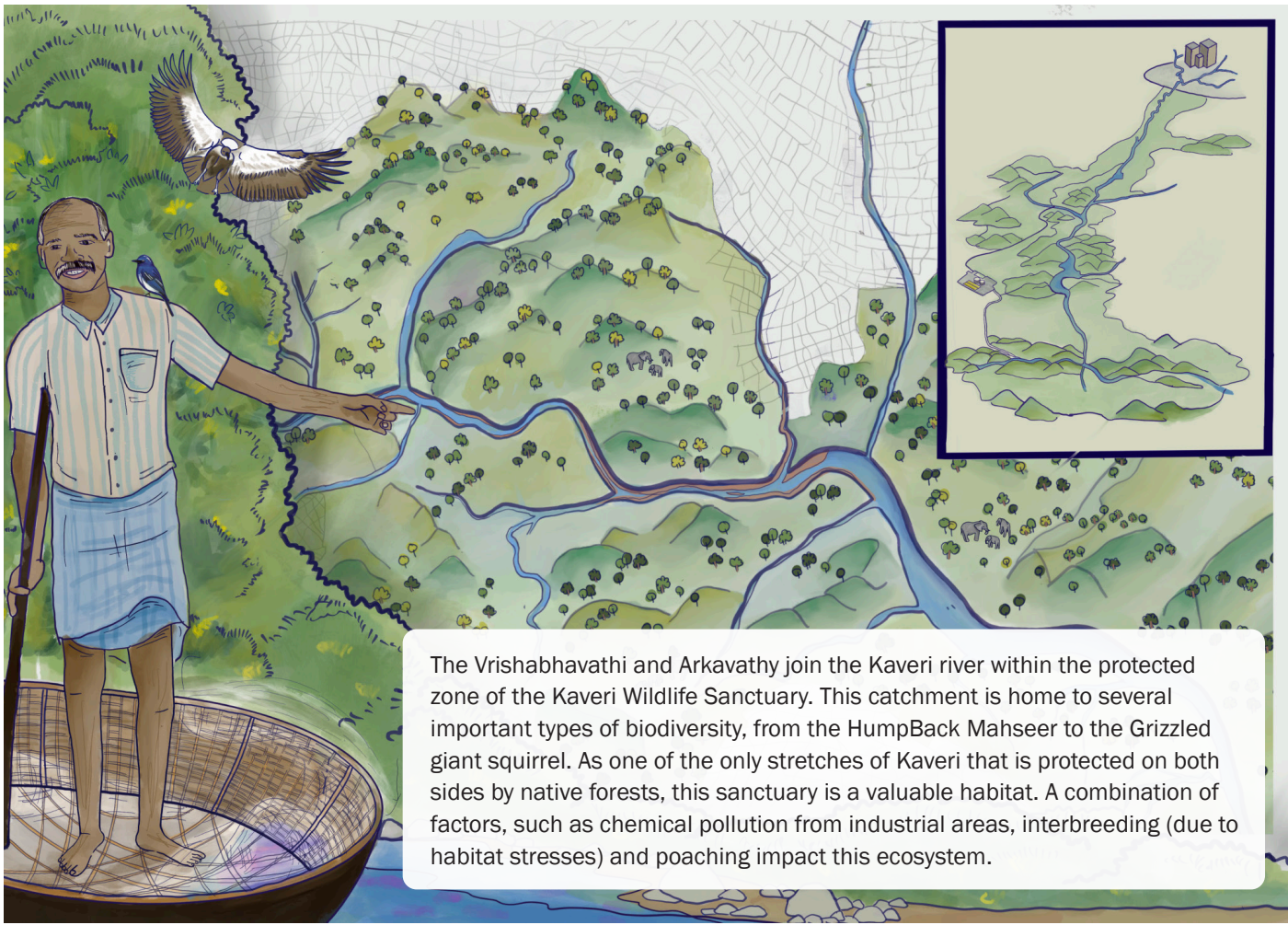
The Vrishabhavathi and Arkavathy join the Kaveri river within the protected zone of the Kaveri Wildlife Sanctuary. This catchment is home to several important types of biodiversity, from the HumpBack Mahseer to the Grizzled giant squirrel. As one of the only stretches of Kaveri that is protected on both sides by native forests, this sanctuary is a valuable habitat. A combination of factors, such as chemical pollution from industrial areas, interbreeding (due to habitat stresses) and poaching impact this ecosystem.
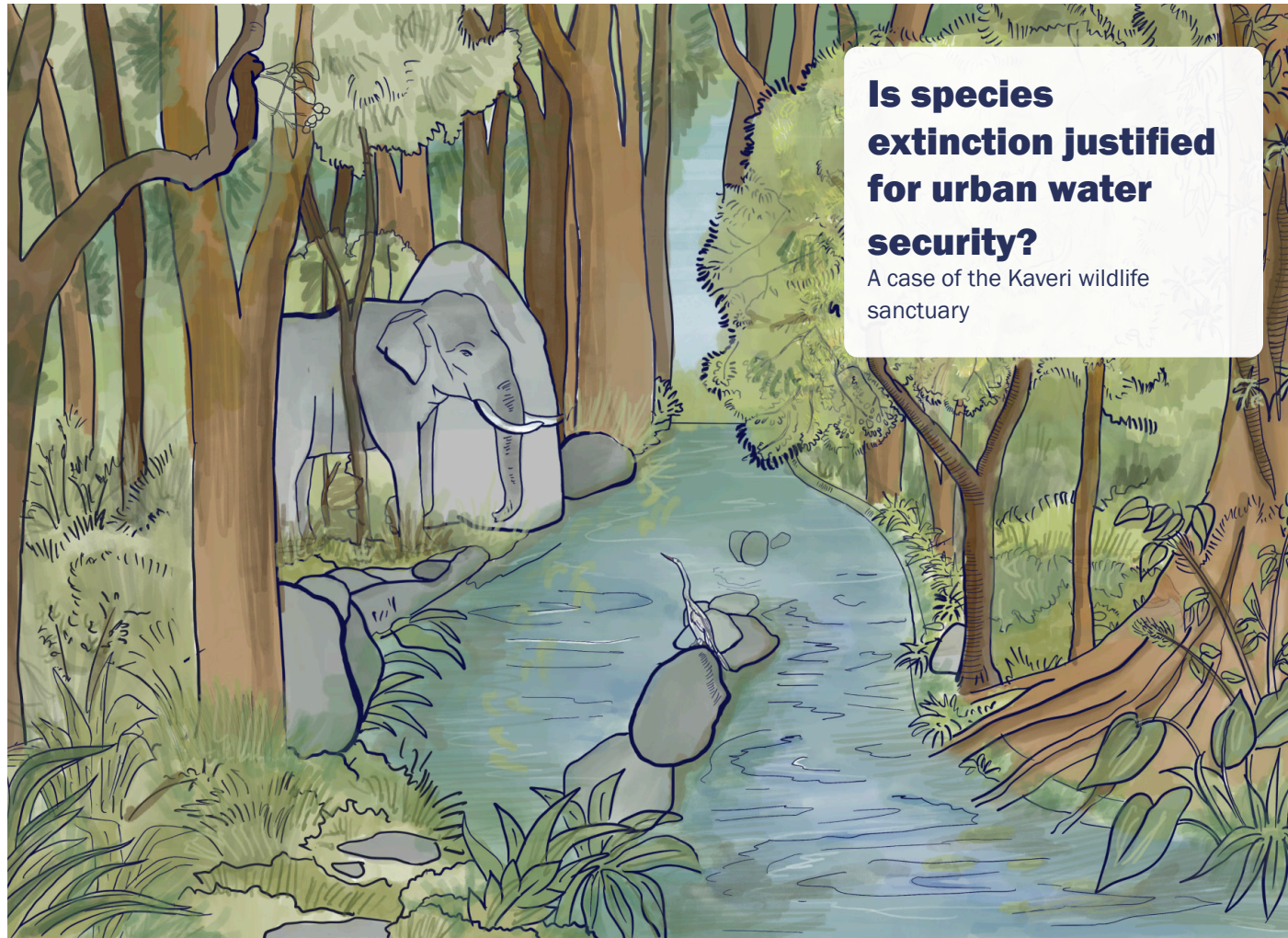
Is species extinction justified for urban water security?

A case of the Kaveri wildlife sanctuary
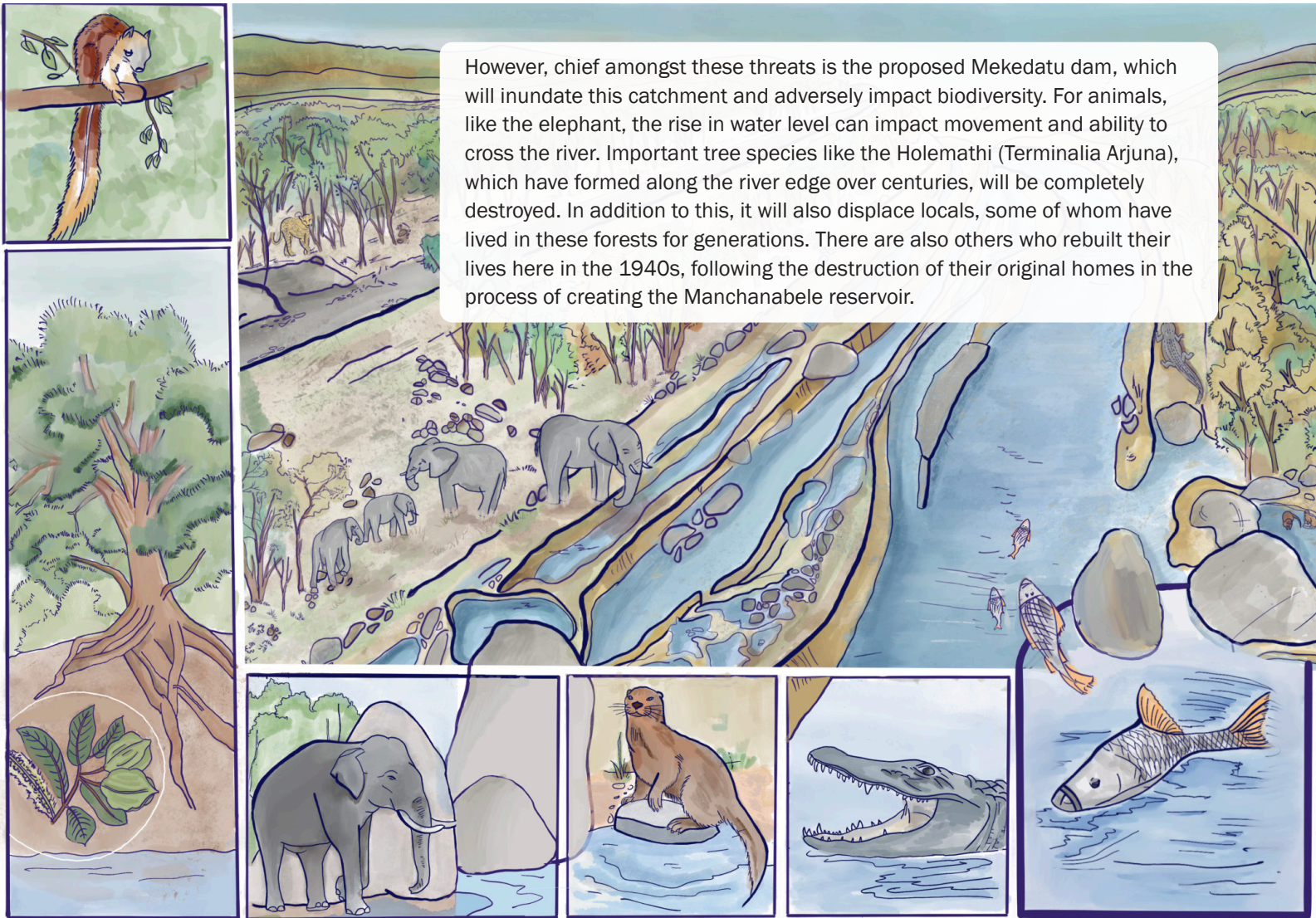
However, chief amongst these threats is the proposed Mekedatu dam, which will inundate this catchment and adversely impact biodiversity. For animals, like the elephant, the rise in water level can impact movement and ability to cross the river. Important tree species like the Holemathi (Terminalia Arjuna), which have formed along the river edge over centuries, will be completely destroyed. In addition to this, it will also displace locals, some of whom have lived in these forests for generations. There are also others who rebuilt their lives here in the 1940s, following the destruction of their original homes in the process of creating the Manchanabele reservoir.

For some species, like the endangered Mahseer, the dam may even trigger species extinction, as this particular type of Humpback Mahseer is found in only two areas of the Kaveri.

Through interactions with the residents of this area, it is crucial to understand the value of this habitat, the stresses faced by the different types of biodiversity and people. Another pressing question to be asked is whether the destruction of all of these entities is necessary and validated simply to serve the needs of urban residents in Bengaluru city.

Do we really need the massive Mekedatu dam, or can other solutions be imagined? What stands in the way of taking these less invasive paths?
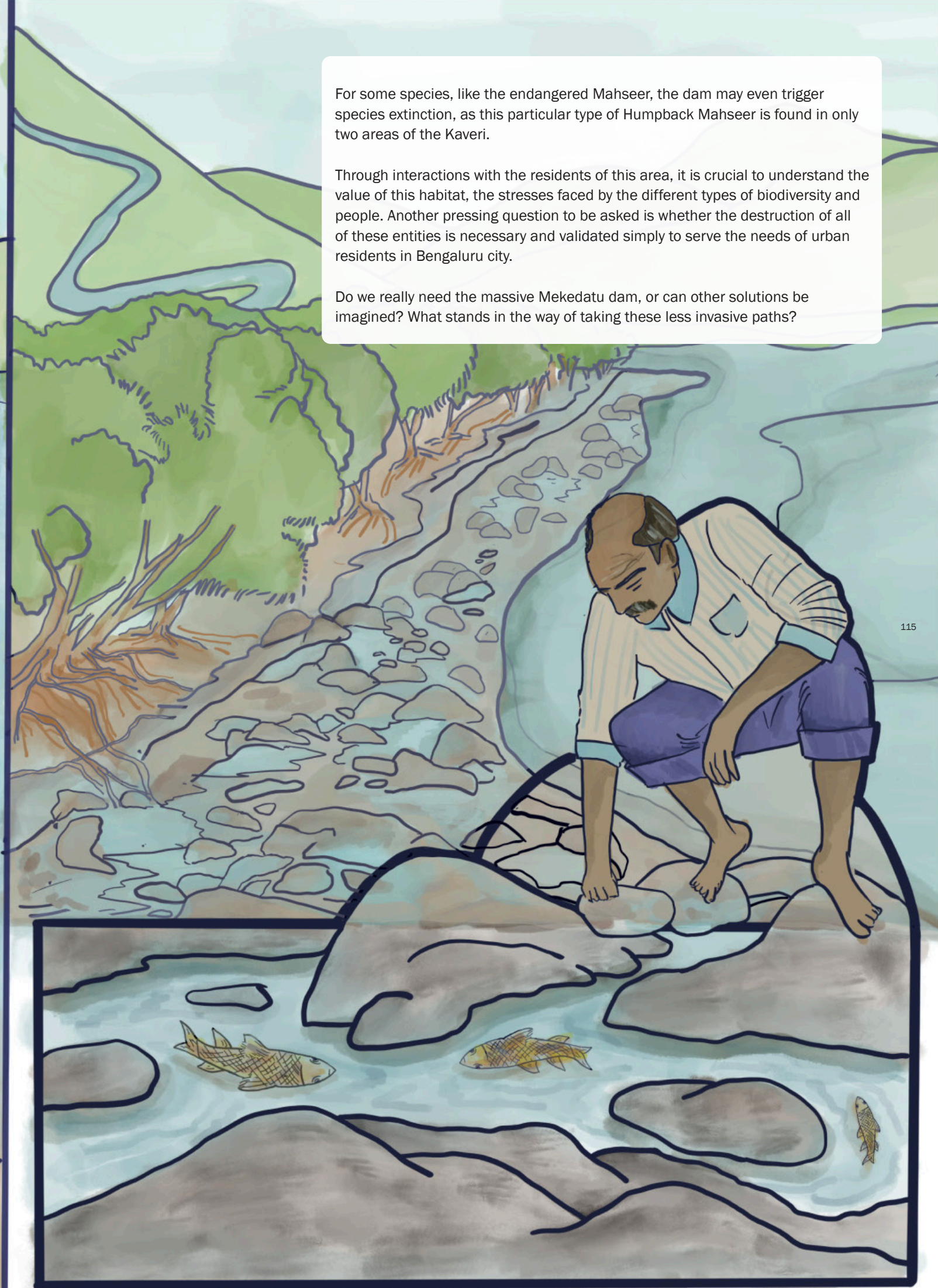
Our journey of discovery and creation

During the peak of the first COVID wave, in July 2020, we came across an article in the Times of India, with a picture of a comparatively clean Vrishabhavathi river. This was a period where the industries in Peenya were not functioning and therefore, not discharging effluents.

Our journey with the project began at this point, as a personal journey of understanding what we (as young architects, and citizen scientists) could do to raise awareness about the river. A combination of initial unsuccessful grant applications and personal career journeys have made progress slow. The project is now four years in the making. Over these years, we were fortunate to gain perspectives from others working in this space. We ourselves also grew as individuals and professionals, enabling us to tackle fairly complex issues with more empathy, than we would have four years ago. The project, which began with grand notions of building a cohesive digital repository of the river, was simplified to understanding how the river is used on ground, and who it impacts. As we are illustrators, the idea of creating a graphic novel took root.

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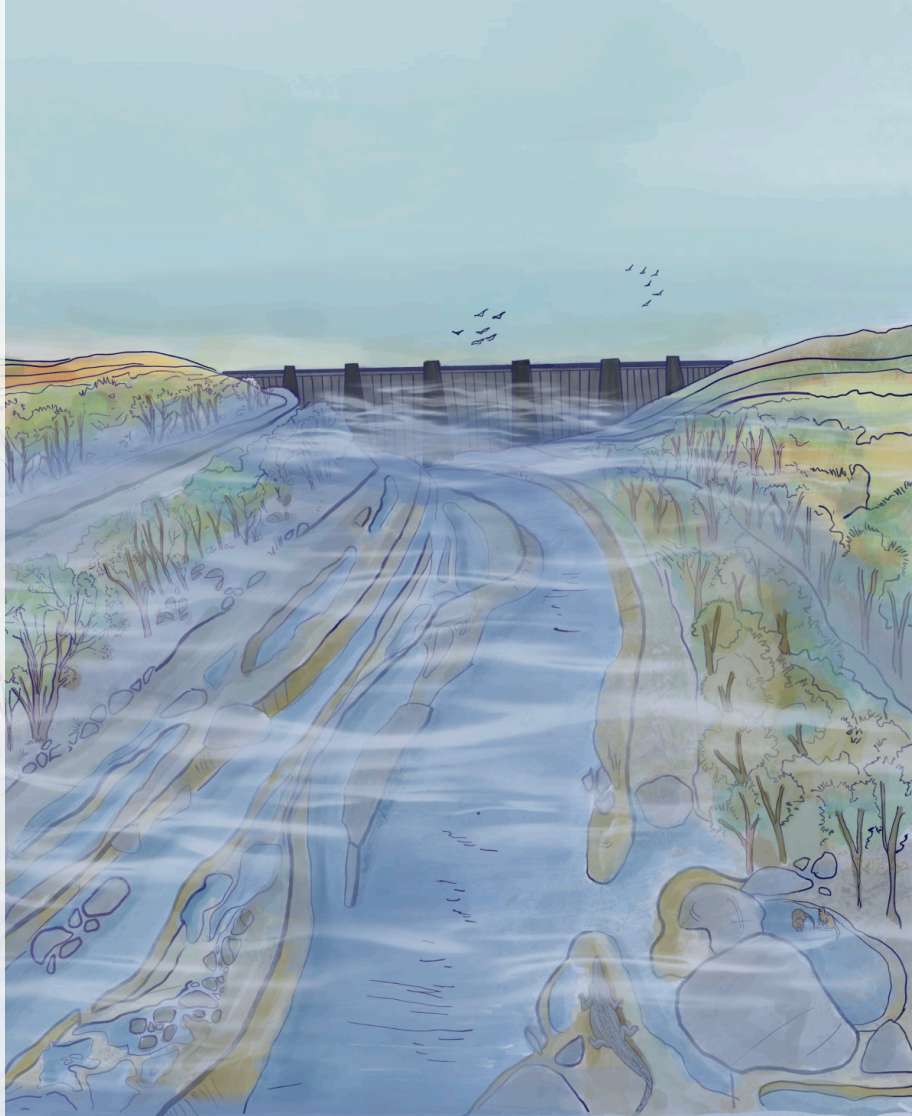
So each of our stories involved engagement with people using or associated with the river (Dhobi Ghat, school children in Anedoddi and the shopkeepers in Nayandahalli). In the case of the Dhobi Ghat and Nayandahalli for instance, we made visits to the Ghat to observe and document stories from different individuals. In Byramangala, we interviewed farmers, and later conducted a small drawing workshop with school children, to understand how they perceive the river.

Though enriching, these field visits and engagements had their own share of challenges. In the dhobi ghat for instance,

after creating the initial set of storyboards, we went back to the community to get their perspectives on the story, at their fortnightly union meeting. We presented the draft for the first time to the (male) leaders of the union, as well as to the women we had initially interviewed. Expecting interest and collaboration, we were instead met with confusion and distrust over the representation. While we have speculations on why we caused this reaction (our strong use of a female narrator, the nuances of local politics and the broader political narrative that we discuss), we have not been able to go back and work out this confusion.

However, the teachers at Byramangala showed interest in the drawings of stories from the dhobi ghat. They understood what we were trying to do, and were agreeable to involving their children in the process. While working with the children at Byramangala, we initially wanted to co-create some of the illustrations with the children, however limitations of time and resources made this difficult. The drawing workshop we conducted was brief, but enjoyable, with the awareness that greater engagement could lead to more sustained impact. We are yet to show the children the illustrations we have made for this book, but are hopeful that it resonates with them. In the case of the Kaveri story, we were presented with the challenge of

carefully representing a sensitive narrative of the state backed Mekedatu dam, against the potential for its mis-use. Throughout the project what is strikingly clear is that each of us engage with the river in different ways, whether it be through ignorance and apathy, or through everyday struggles to contain its flow or through finding ways to profit from it.

Overall, the project, its steps and mis-steps have been a journey of learning, on the field and otherwise. We aim to finish the graphic novel by the end of this year, and publish soon after.

Fable of an urban
ನದಿ (river)

She lays wasted between retaining walls of concrete
diverted one too many times to retain her origins,
left to dry in the interstices of collective memory
owners of which dress her daily,
one new accessory of human consumption

// crack

she who broke free from ಅಗಸ್ತ್ಯ ಮುನಿ's kamandala
ಕಾವೇರಿ is now trapped by human ಅಭ್ಯಾಸ, ಸ್ವಭಾವ
how does one discard disregard,
when she can't anymore disregard discard?
how do you curtail the currents of consumerism?

// crack

she escapes the water cured walls
with help from the clairvoyant skies
ವಿಷಭಾವತಿ, a river no more
she's transfigured into annals of human greed
flowing recklessly into homes that buried her

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Kadambari Komandur is an information designer with an interest in landscapes and ecology. She is a UX designer by day and a researcher, data visualizer and explorer otherwise. She is currently engaged in projects examining the relationships between communities and urban landscapes. With a belief in using design as a tool for critical thinking and social justice, she imbibes this thought process in her work.

Namrata Narendra is an urban artist-researcher based between India and the Netherlands with an interest in the built environment and infrastructure provisioning with a focus on climate and environment. This project

amongst others is her attempt to understand Bengaluru's water journey, especially the conditions of urban rivers, social and spatial injustice and challenges caused by fragmented urbanisation.

Megha Kashyap is a designer from Bengaluru, with an expertise in research, illustration and UX design. After graduating from Srishti Institute of Design, Megha spent a year working in urban sustainability with various organisations such as NCF and IIHS. Her work explores the connections between people, nature, and cities, bringing attention to critical environmental and social issues.

art at the protest site- became an important instrument of communication and narrative

RURAL ROOTS, URBAN EDGES
Performing Panjabiyat at the Delhi Borders
Arpita Dayal

These pictures offer a glimpse into the transformed energy of the Singhu Border, bordering Delhi and the Haryana state, which was one of the protest sites where farmers camped during the Farmers Protest. The protest that lasted for over a year between 2020 and 2021, against the three farm laws passed by the Parliament of India, became one of the most popular protests in recent history.

When the protesting farmers, on thousands of tractor trolleys were walled out of the national capital at the borders, through massive barricading and heavy armoury, they chose to camp on the highways itself, to mark this denial of access.

The protest became particularly characteristic of its unique spatiality, distinct from that of usual protest spaces. Not only did they engage in sustainable building activities using available resources and materials, but they also developed a strong narrative of seva at the protest sites, synonymous with the practices of Sikhism. In the absence of any support from the state, or any pre-existing manuals, the farmers promoted their narrative of a peaceful protest embroiled in strong social and cultural facets of the Punjabi culture. Their sustenance as a result, reflected in the robust spatialities that they assumed through the temporary makeshift structures of Langars – serving food throughout the day to anyone who came, Saths – discussion spaces similar to their villages and through practices of seva – as an integral part of Sikhi.

Clockwise order

barricades – the multiple layers of barricades along the Delhi-Haryana highway diverting traffic along the interior of the villages and cordoning off the protest area. Barricading was among the many armaments used by the state to ensure the protestors denial of access.
new scale to the vehicular road opportunities for neighboring villages – the existing settlements near the protest sites started small businesses selling everyday items, indicating a co-existence of sorts
sangath – a massive stage was set up to disseminate information to all protestors across the site, and also as a platform to voice opinions of supporters and leaders

The unique spatiality can be seen as a question to the formidable dominant narrative of the authority. It exemplifies how peaceful narratives of community solidarities and cultural representations emerge out of the cracks of the system, despite all odds. The cruciality of such an existence point to the lasting impacts that these have on memory and associations of those involved, despite being temporary in time and space.

sanjhi sath – similar to their Punjab village settlement ideologies, the protestors set up Sanjhi sath at the Singhu Border protest site, as a place for discussion, study and getting together.

tent city – tents remain a constant element of a protest, as the tent city here was set up using prefabricated tents along an empty plot near the highway

inside a tent – the small makeshift tents were fully equipped with necessities, as basic comfort would ensure long haul. These spaces were also evidence of the resourcefulness of the protestors in the use of material and space

langar- where no one leaves hungry – the practice of seva through multiple langars feeding hundreds of visitors everyday, was an unexpected occurrence at the protest site

sevadaars at langar – selfless servers at the langar serving food as way of protest

inside the kitchen of langar – the makeshift yet efficient kitchens that were set up along the highway turning out massive quantities of dal, sabzi and kheer every day.

Clockwise

medical facilities – Despite the ongoing Covid 19 scare, large scale medical facilties were set up in service

inside the shelter – the Khalsa Aid organized formal tents with mattresses for protestors

beauty and the brutal – an array of potted plants, banners of peaceful messages and other aesthetic elements were added to facades as an extension of the peaceful narrative of their long haul

seva - free milk tankers – another form of sewa were the milk, almond, blankets, slippers langar, services that were free of charge and sponsored by supporters as a way of showing solidarity

Arpita Dayal is an Assistant Professor at the Department of Architecture, School of Planning and Architecture (SPA), New Delhi. She is a double gold medalist and holds a Master's degree in Urban Design from SPA, and is currently pursuing doctoral studies from the department. With a teaching experience of more than 16 years, she has coordinated research and design based courses at the school, and her focus has been on innovative pedagogical advances for effective learning and teaching. She has also published papers in prestigious international and national journals including the International Journal of Urban Design and Tekton, and presented her work at the University of Warwick, UK, the IJAS Conference, Rome, Panjab University and at JNU. She has been a working professional in Delhi and Mumbai, and has been involved in many research projects in the city related to redevelopment, urban spaces and sustainable form. Some of her prominent projects include a joint research project with the National Institute of Urban Affairs and Oxford Brookes University on Sustainable Urban Form for Indian Cities, and various architectural projects with the Delhi Urban Art Commission and ABLA, New Delhi. Her areas of interest include liminality, urban spaces, spatial resistance and protests.

kings, dynasties, periods and wars

FROM GRANITE TO GIGABYTES
Saving Bangalore's History

Written by
Dyuvan D Machaaranda
Narrated by
Udaya Kumar P L

I usually ask students I meet one question: What do you know about Bangalore's history? I am very often left getting crickets. I sometimes get name drops; 'Kempe Gowda, Founder of Bengaluru' or 'the Wodeyars, rulers of Mysore State'. Asking an older demographic the same question yields perhaps diverse but similarly underwhelming answers.

Does this mean that the country's Technology capital, the epicentre of innovation and modernity, has a sparse and short history? Do the places, temples, deities, lakes, inscriptions, hero stones and buildings dotting the city have no ancient tales to tell?

These questions don't even occur to most residents of the city. This is, for one, because of the way history is constructed and perceived in common parlance. School history books are the sole means of interaction most people have with the past, and they fall considerably short of inspiring curiosity in the reader. Lists of kings, dynasties, periods and wars crowd their pages; most people find little of interest within these unending lines. As soon as one progresses past these books and grades to whatever domain they make a living in, an impression of indifference or apprehension is all that remains about the field of history.

I have noted this from my career in the field of science and technology. Those who work with the sciences often have an active distaste for the Humanities and vice versa. I may have remained an ignorant member of this very dichotomy if not for a chance discovery I made through an acquaintance.

I had lived in Rajajinagar my whole life. My impression of the area's history had been that it was a post-independence development named after C. Rajagopalachari. Then, in 2017, I learnt that a rather unkept locality in Rajajinagar, an erstwhile village by the name Kethamaaranahalli, had a 700-year history! An inscription had been found here dated to the 14th century, which mentioned the village by the same name it's still knownby. This extraordinary find was pivotal in the journey towards what has now become my life's most important project.

Deeply intrigued, I set out to find the inscription. In my decades-long residence in Rajajinagar, I had neither seen nor heard of such an inscription existing in the area. In my search, I came across the Epigraphia Carnatica, a repertoire of information about inscriptions of Karnataka collated over a century ago. Though I still wasn't able to find the Kethamaaranahalli inscription (it has been lost to time), this text opened up a whole new world of local history for me. According to it, there were over 175 historical inscriptions just in and around Bangalore. The oldest of these are dated to the 8th century, and there is a continuous string of these artefacts stretching to as recently as the 19th century. Bangalore's history, I learnt, was far from being either sparse or short.

I began to go looking for other inscriptions mentioned in the Epigraphia Carnatica around my residence and place of work. I also began talking to my circles about the finds I had been making. Before long we had a group of people deeply interested in uncovering and spreading the word about Bangalore's long and virtually forgotten history. The online community 'Inscription Stones of Bangalore' embarked on regular expeditions to find and secure inscriptions, inform the locals of the significance of the artefacts and publicise the history uncovered from them on various platforms.

As we conducted more of these activities, we soon realised that simply finding these inscriptions was insufficient. Due to urbanisation, pollution and ignorance, these stones were all under different levels of threat. Some were left exposed to the elements and weathering away, some were being used to line stormwater drains; some others were soon to be obliterated to make way for construction. We had only just begun to uncover and popularise the previously unheard histories of Bangalore, and these threats were on the verge of destroying permanently many more such stories we were yet to rediscover.

We envisioned an ambitious project: making high-quality 3D digital copies of these inscriptions, copies that could be used as a substitute for the physical artefact for any imaginable purpose. Even if an inscription were destroyed due to uncontrollable factors, its digital twin would ensure no information about it would be lost.

As visionary as this idea was, it was going to be a very expensive one. It required specialized cutting-edge technology that was not easily available. It also required a well-trained team of experts to run successfully. Our makeshift group of volunteers, however passionate and committed, would not be able to pull it off. We thus approached organisations we thought would be willing to help. We tried making the proposition to the government archaeological department. They were supportive in providing administrative and logistical support to the project, but in classic bureaucratic fashion, cited budget constraints as reasons not to help financially.

We also tried tying up with universities and academicians in the field of history. The responses we got from these circles were in the tone of reluctance and dismissal. Academically trained historians saw no need for such an effort. This history had already been recorded and written perfectly according to them. There was no need to revisit and preserve its sources as one would find nothing new of use in them. They further couldn't digest the idea of using the latest technology in the field of history. What place did high-tech machines have in a realm that did not use science and numbers? The Mythic Society, a pioneering heritage organisation working to preserve and propagate historical knowledge, finally

stepped forward to fund the project. Thus, in January 2021, began the Bengaluru Inscriptions 3D Digital Conservation Project. My weekend hobby had evolved into a full-time dream project. Our initial twofold mission was firstly to educate those who live in the vicinity of inscriptions about their history andsignificance, and secondly to create an exhaustive database of high-quality digital copies of all historical inscriptions around the city. With this vision, we set out on our quest to digitally preserve the estimated 1500 inscriptions for 'as long as the sun and moon persist'.
As our project has progressed in the last few years, and as we have delved deeper into epigraphical research, we have made some startling discoveries. On revisiting inscriptions previously recorded over a century ago, we have found that the readings of these texts, which scholars widely accept, all have discrepancies ranging between degrees of 25 to 75 per cent compared to our readings from high-quality scans. The implications of this finding are staggering. These century-old readings, used extensively by scholars, are the foundation of most of history that has been reconstructed with academic consensus in the past century. If these readings themselves are considerably erroneous, where does this leave the vast historical narrative that has been constructed based on them? Is the 'perfect' history career historians swear by with confidence even remotely perfect?

I started on this path over half a decade ago with a unique vantage. Armed with the inquisitiveness and critical thinking one acquires from training in the sciences, I entered a field that treasures and closely guards the norm. Our work similarly approached the domain of history with fresh, innovative and highly technical means. Of what utility are our efforts? What contribution are we making to our society and country through our project?

In my three-decade career in software and engineering, I dealt extensively with people and organisations from around the world. What became clear to me in this process was how important it was to have a strong identity and sense of belonging in life. Having strong connections to one's roots and pride in one's heritage is paramount in today's fast-globalising world. In the absence of a confident cultural identity, it is next to impossible for a society to grow and progress.
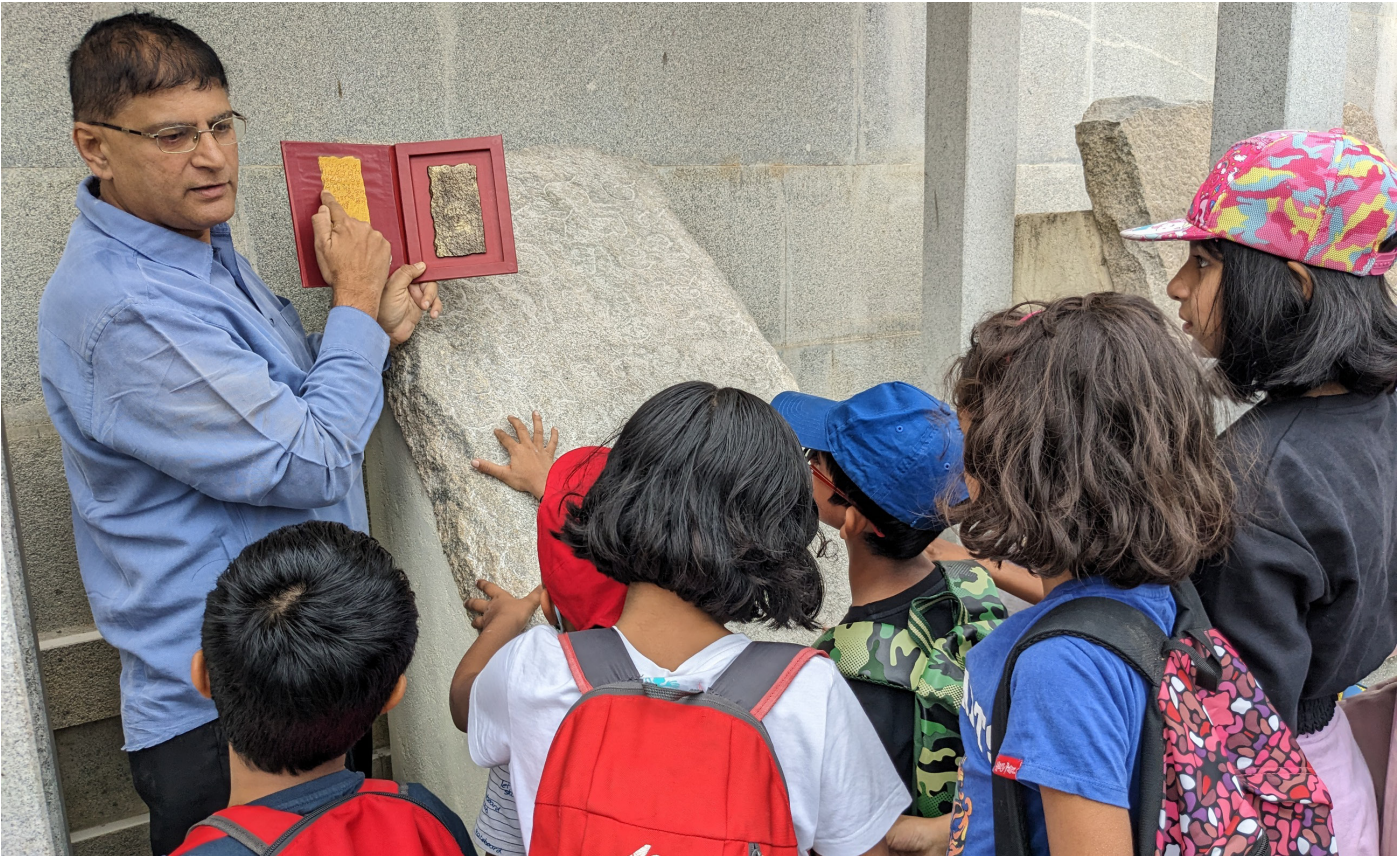
There is almost no field in which the city of Bangalore hasn't made a significant contribution, be it technological, commercial or artistic. Why, then, is there such little celebration of the city's achievements among its people? Why does the city continue to look misdeveloped and unappealing at a glance despite its many successes? This, in my experience, is because the average Bangalorean playing a part in the city's achievements feels little affinity to it. He/she does not know that he/she is part of a city that has a glorious 2000-year-old history, without which it wouldn't stand the way it does today. If only he/she knew that Bangalorians were part of a grand old story that continues to be scripted as the city advances with great potential into the future, would he/she feel an emotional attachment to Bangalore. He/

she, with such an attachment, would likely be more invested in being part of its growth story, perhaps by solving pressing civic issues, contributing to the welfare of the city, etc.

The ultimate goal of our project, in essence, is to inspire such a sense of belonging and attachment to the city among all its citizens. We want to make true local history easily accessible to all Bangaloreans. We want to inspire pride within each resident of Bangalore for its 1300 years of progress. We want to make each citizen a stakeholder in the advancement of the city by establishing deep roots of belonging. To this end, Mythic Society's Bengaluru Inscriptions 3D Digital Conservation Project will work as far as it can play a meaningful and productive role.

Udaya Kumar P. L. is a Bangalore-based heritage conservationist, independent researcher, and the Honorary Director of the Bengaluru Inscriptions 3D Digital Conservation Project at the Mythic Society. He leads one of India's most ambitious citizen-driven digital humanities initiatives, combining field epigraphy, 3D documentation, and public engagement to document and preserve over 1,500 stone inscriptions from the Bengaluru region, dating from 200 to 1750 CE. Originally trained as an engineer, Udaya holds a Master's degree in Engineering Mechanics from IIT Madras and spent over three decades in leadership roles with Tata, General Electric, and Schneider Electric. He brings his interdisciplinary expertise to the field of heritage preservation, applying data science, geospatial analysis, and open-access technologies to reimagine epigraphy for the digital age. In recognition of his contributions to cultural heritage, he was awarded the Namma Bengaluru Citizen Individual of the Year in 2019.

Dyuvan D Machaaranda is passionate about the social sciences, with a special interest in history, aesthetics, and how societies evolve. He enjoys exploring reality through research, writing, and creative projects. Curious by nature and trying to have an interdisciplinary outlook, he's drawn to the connections between antiquity, culture, society, and everyday life. He is currently working in the field of historical research and conservation.

CHASING THE RIGHT QUESTIONS

RESEARCHING TECHNOLOGY INDUCED SUBCULTURES

Ajinkya Kanitkar
for sub:version II Editorial Team
In conversation with
Dr. Balaji Parthasarathy

Balaji Parthasarathy is a Professor at the International Institute of Information Technology Bangalore (IIITB) and co-founder of IIITB's Center for Information Technology and Public Policy. His research interests lie at the intersection of economic geography and economic sociology, focusing on the interplay between technological change, innovation, economic globalization, and social transformation.

As a part of the second issue of sub:version, Ajinkya Kanitkar, Assistant Professor at RVCA and editorial team member, sub:version II interviewed Balaji Parthasarathy on September 10, 2024. The Editorial Team of sub:version thanks Balaji for accepting the invitation and for an equally captivating dialogue on 'chasing the right questions' that every professional working at an intersection of built environment and technology needs to ask.

Ajinkya Kanitkar: Let's start with your experience and journey in the profession as an urban practitioner, and from there, we can take it forward.

Balaji Parthasarathy: To be honest, I'm not an urban practitioner in the strictest sense. My formal degrees—my master's and PhD—are in city and regional planning. I initially started as an architect. I graduated from IIT Kharagpur after receiving what I consider was excellent training, but I became intrigued by larger urban issues and went on to pursue a master's in urban design at the University of Southern California. It changed my perspective on cities. I began to see them in terms of social conversations, political contestation, and how the built environment matters beyond just physical design; there's a political economy to urban form that was largely missing in my architecture training. This is not to say that architecture isn't important— it absolutely is—but the questions surrounding urban issues can't be fully addressed within the analytical framework of architecture alone.

I became interested in these questions and decided to pursue a PhD in urban design at the University of California, Berkeley. I took a few courses and started exploring the role of technology in shaping urban form and social relationships. It became evident that we can't think of urban areas in isolation; they have significant connections to their rural hinterlands. For example, you can't consider Bangalore without looking at Hosur, which is just across the border in Tamil Nadu. I began to see how technology influences these processes. Early approaches to technology were overly simplistic. People claimed that with technology, work-from-home arrangements would make cities obsolete, but those predictions seem quite laughable now. In the 1960s and 70s, futurists like Alvin Toffler suggested that cities would become relics of the past. However, this has not been the case. There are tensions between what technology enables and the social reasons why cities continue to exist, even as they are shaped by global forces.

During my time at Berkeley, I was right next to Silicon Valley. The planning program at Berkeley focused not just on physical planning but also on the broader sets of forces shaping that physical form. Decisions made at a macro level, such as those on Wall Street, can affect local realities in profound ways. Being able to examine these social-spatial relationships at multiple scales is crucial, rather than concentrating solely on one aspect for ease of analysis.

Ajinkya Kanitkar: Could you elaborate a little bit on the facets of the scales and the proxies for socio-spatial relationship that intrigued you to delve deeper into your research area?

Balaji Parthasarathy: What I mean is that you may want to look at a particular aspect of the city, perhaps a neighborhood, or say rag pickers. The question is, what is the nature of the labor market that pushes them to undertake rag picking? What is the nature of the market for waste? Who generates this waste? How is it wasted? What is our social attitude towards waste? e.g. one of the greatest urban design thinkers, Kevin Lynch, wrote a great book on waste. Why is it that certain cities are so clean? Why is it that human beings are subject to the social indignities of handling waste that you and I discard? This happens, and it doesn't necessarily have to do with whether a country is rich or poor. You go to a country like Sri Lanka; it's much cleaner than our cities—embarrassingly cleaner, actually. So it doesn't have to be just a question of wealth. The answers are not always straightforward.

The issue is not if research will necessarily have all the answers, but it's crucial to generate the right kind of questions. I think many of the questions that physical planners are asking are not deep enough—that's the point. They are trained to come up with solutions when they have the right questions; there's no doubt about their capability. But it's about asking, "Are we chasing the wrong question? Is it a mirage that we're pursuing?" How do you frame these questions? That's been my journey. For me, these questions take on particular salience not just in India but in less affluent contexts. Many of these questions have been studied and analyzed more deeply in wealthier contexts, such as Europe, North America, and to some extent, Japan. But in situations like ours, I think we have to do a lot more work to understand the nature of our problems. There are two or three issues here.

Ajinkya Kanitkar: Is that the premise of your essay on India's Silicon Valley? We can see how Bangalore as a city has evolved and thus contributed to the overall development at a larger scale as well over the years, thanks to anchoring important software and technology companies. This kind of economic growth attracts a certain demographic, and the needs and demands of the society evolves with it often undergoing changes. How did you venture into the area of technology and its impacts on the underprivileged or on specific classes of society?

Balaji Parthasarathy: Exactly. But I do have to make the connection that starts with my doctoral dissertation. In Bangalore, you see a manifestation of IT in many forms. If you go to cities like Chennai, Hyderabad, or Pune, you see similar trends. The thing is, for an industry that exports roughly $250 billion, employing about 5 million people is just a drop in the ocean in a country with a large population. These workers are in jobs that connect them with the world economy. They get paid by world standards, although not as much as someone in the U.S. or Europe, because that would lead to the loss of their competitive advantage. But they still earn more than their neighbors with similar skills who work for other sectors.

As a consequence, there is this growing concentration of wealth being funneled into the hands of a relatively small section of the population. What happens then is that there is a demand for certain kinds of housing. Given the limited infrastructure services, bidding up of land rent leading to exorbitant housing prices and rentals, placing demands on basic infrastructure. You also start to see a retreat of the affluent into gated communities, where they express a desire for security. It's not as severe as in countries like South Africa, with high levels of crime, but there's still a significant desire to create boundaries.

In older public sector townships, in Bangalore, you can drive through places like BEL or HAL without anyone stopping you to check your ID. However, in these new gated communities, you see a rise in particular kinds of consumption spaces that mimic global norms. For instance, you go to a shopping

QUESTION?
Are we chasing the wrong

mall, like UB City. These are considered public spaces, but if you dress a certain way, you might be questioned or turned away.

So, this sorting within the city occurs due to these connections to global markets. Now, regarding the supply side, another aspect of information technology is particularly relevant. Information technology is often referred to in economic literature as a general-purpose technology, meaning its value comes not just from its production but also from its consumption across various domains of economic activity. Think of MRIs in healthcare, or Zoom calls in academia, or ATMs in banking. The economy benefits from information technology not only by producing it but also by consuming it effectively. A useful analogy is that if you only produce it but rely on imports for consumption, it's akin to sending cotton to textile mills abroad and buying back finished garments.

While we've been producing software for years, around 80% of what is produced is sold abroad. Our domestic consumption remains low compared to international standards. The transformative potential of technology is yet to be fully unleashed in our context.

I started getting interested in questions such as how to create solutions for underprivileged populations. We have great technology and brilliant minds in companies like Microsoft and Google, but they often lack the answers. Once you pose the right questions to them, they can figure things out quickly. This is a large portion of what technological development means—understanding the needs of sections of the population that have largely been ignored.

My current work focuses on a perverse application of technology. For example, many of us have used platforms such as Uber. These platforms connect service providers with customers, but we've been documenting the conditions under which delivery workers operate.

While technology allows customers to

order services at the touch of a button, the terms and conditions under which these workers operate are harsh. The NITI Aayog reported that we already have about seven million workers in the gig economy, while we still only have about 5 million in the software industry.

These gig workers face significant issues, such as lack of minimum wage and insurance, and many work extremely long hours. This calls into question industry leaders who advocate working long hours; many gig workers already do.

When an IT company lays off employees, remember they belong to an elite segment of the workforce and don't necessarily face precarity. But for gig workers, the situation is dire. If they are complained against once or twice in a day, they can be blocked from working on a platform.

This raises significant questions about employment in the country. Translating this into an urban question, we see an increasing presence of delivery workers migrating from various parts of the country to major cities. This leads to specific demands on housing and infrastructure. For instance, many gig workers don't have access to basic facilities, such as bathrooms, while they work long hours delivering services.
How do we accommodate these fundamental human needs of this new segment of the workforce? We cannot wish them away because we want their services. These are the kinds of problems I find interesting, not only because they are wicked but because they are essential.

Value lies not only in production, but in broad-based consumption.

Ajinkya Kanitkar: Especially when lucrative offers like 'get it delivered in 25 mins (for example)' systematically attract the consumers on these platforms and we do consume it that way sometimes, probably without giving a second thought to how the delivery partners are affected by it.

Balaji Parthasarathy: So, we are complicit in this accomplishment. We have to think about how to incorporate these workers into our urban environments. What does it mean for urban form in these situations where these workers must survive? Their survival depends on us. These are the kinds of questions that I'm really concerned about. Although I am a lapsed architect and urban designer, I think about these questions because of my training. I also consider them at the level of urban form, although I don't necessarily articulate it at that level; However, all these questions have significant implications for how our urban areas are structured.

To give you a sense of this on a global scale, in India today, none of these platforms are making a profit—not one. Why are they surviving? Because global venture capital companies are pouring money into them. Without this influx of capital from abroad, many of these companies would shut down. As it stands, they continue to operate, for the most part, as loss-making entities. In an economy where there is significant underemployment and unemployment, these companies cater to sections of society in large cities that have the disposable income to use those services but also turn a blind eye to how workers are treated.

In our field observations, we've found that entry into large apartment complexes is often challenging. When we interview workers, they mention that getting into these big complexes is hard. You have to call from outside to let them know you've arrived. Once you get in, if it's a tall building, you might find yourself in the residents' lift, which can be problematic; often making them use a separate service lift. Some workers have even faced physical abuse.

A worker who can't read Kannada or English will face issues in such instances. Even in situations where power goes out, for instance, if you're delivering groceries, you may have to climb five or six floors to deliver them because of the delivery time constraint. We see these social norms influencing how workers negotiate the built environment on a daily basis. There are other pressing issues as well. e.g., this year, we've had an unusually warm summer, making it terribly hard for delivery workers. Despite this, they are still expected to deliver. This is compounded by the fact that driving habits are often reckless, and the situation can become even worse during heavy monsoon rains.

It's useful to recognize that the virtual diffusion of technology does not imply that a similar social diffusion takes place. Someone delivering for Zomato may have access to the same models of smartphones, but the way they use that technology varies greatly. The underlying information asymmetries and social inequities are different, and we have to acknowledge that. There's a lot of talk about the article you referred to, but the notion of India as a Silicon Valley completely ignores the specific social conditions underlying technological production. Silicon Valley is not just about producing technology; it's also about the people involved, and ignoring the social relationships creates an empty slogan that is misleading.

In fact, Bangalore and Silicon Valley are not the same. The comparison is problematic, and at a social level, it just doesn't hold up. If we're not asking the right questions and indulge in slogans about promoting technology, we won't go far. We must ask questions about who gets left out and why. How can we include those who are excluded, often in very disadvantageous ways? For instance, many women and people with disabilities are overlooked; not just in India; but in many parts of the world.

It's not about pointing fingers; it's about taking a more analytical perspective. How can we do things better? Can we ask sharper, more

focused questions to help specific segments of the population rather than perpetuating clichés? Research is essential for helping people ask different questions and figure out solutions that work in their specific contexts, rather than applying a one-size-fits-all approach. This is also key to technology. When we exclude certain groups, we assume technology can only take one form. If it doesn't fit someone's needs, they won't accept it.

Ajinkya Kanitkar: Often academic research that leads to publication, as knowledge-sharing platforms, often demands certain key phrases that are currently trending. Given your field of research—which simultaneously examines technology, as well as the geographic and socioeconomic components of urban scenarios—what key aspects do you think researchers, including architects, should keep in mind?

Balaji Parthasarathy: I wouldn't want to be prescriptive. What's important is to find a fascinating or interesting topic. There's a wonderful phrase that says you have to "scratch an itch," meaning you need to identify something that truly engages you. For instance, five years ago, if you had asked me about this gig economy, I wouldn't have imagined being involved in this research. At that time, I would wonder about what these workers were doing. Gradually, I started reading more in the newspapers, which led me to realize this is a broader question about technology and inclusion. So, I delved deeper into it.

I think it is relevant whatever your professional occupation is. The goal is not to always find answers but to raise good questions—questions that prompt us to understand things in ways we hadn't considered before, to challenge accepted wisdom. You'll find that, while there are things you do well in your field, there are also areas where you might need assistance. This is where interdisciplinary collaboration becomes essential. The world isn't neatly siloed, and problems often require insights from multiple disciplines.

I know many architects who deal with a significant amount of technology in building information management and systems. They are navigating many issues—not just discussing rhythm and proportion learned in their first year. Whichever field you're in, you need to define the boundaries of that field, position yourself at those boundaries, and reach out to adjacent fields. Many interesting problems lie in these gray areas, and it's vital to explore them. My training still helps me think critically about certain issues even if I don't practice architecture anymore. Now, I identify more as a geographer, and that influences the questions I ask, consciously or unconsciously, helping me understand spatial issues.

Ajinkya Kanitkar: I also want to ask you about ICT. You mentioned that the value of technology only matters if someone can consume or use it. So, is there a concept of digital democracy, especially regarding policymaking? In your research, do you see a voice for all stakeholders, or at least for the larger population?

Balaji Parthasarathy: No, I don't think that's the case at all. There are entrenched entities with significant voices, particularly in digital platforms. We've been involved in some advocacy work, providing input to the Karnataka government on a bill for gig workers, but we also see pushback from the other side. Platforms have their own rights and voices, and while I'm not dismissing that, it's crucial to recognize their technological power and resources. The individuals running these powerful platforms often come from prestigious institutions, making them articulate and well-connected. Given that technology is largely controlled by such entities, it's misguided to assume there's equity in its deployment. However, there are possibilities for two pathways here. First, governments play a critical role in regulating these entities. We've worked with various state governments, like Rajasthan and Karnataka, to shape how this technology is deployed. It's not a binary situation; taking away the technology would mean a loss of livelihood for many. The challenge

is to mediate in a way that ensures opportunities are not denied, but that workers are not treated as slave labor either. This is where academic activism can play a role. We need to back our arguments with evidence and research, rather than resorting to protests without substantial backing.

This also ties back to your earlier point about the kind of research that's needed. It must be evidence-based and actively engage with the complexities of our society. Too often, research conducted in one corner of the country is generalized across the nation, ignoring its heterogeneity. So, I'd say one solution is government regulation. The other is for researchers to empower individuals with technology, helping them transform it into a tool for agency, allowing them to take control of their situations. That gives them a voice.

Ajinkya Kanitkar: It really has been an engaging conversation so far. Although ICT has been attributed as a key driver for the development in India lately, and urbanization is predicted to be 70% in near future, I would like to know your idea of 'utopia' for urban centers of the nation if the aforementioned lacunae in the use of technology are overcome.

Balaji Parthasarathy: Frankly, I don't even want to talk about technology here. Also, it doesn't matter how rural we are; the urban-rural distinction is administrative. It's not an analytically reasonable concept anymore. The things that matter to us are ones where technology may or may not play a role. For instance, we want to see

a population with a much better life expectancy, that doesn't suffer from certain diseases. We don't want to see 40% of our kids not going to school. We want a reasonably educated population. We often see children playing at construction sites when they should be in school. We need to consider the environment, the air we breathe and the water we drink. These are critical issues. Technology can play a role in all of these, but it is a means to an end, and it requires social or organizational components.

What we've done in terms of ICT integration so far is to lower transaction costs for many of these processes. But whether the transactions themselves are fundamentally fair or unfair is another question. It's like saying you're selling me something and it's outrageously overpriced; but if I'm desperate to buy medicines, I still pay that amount through a payment app. It significantly lowers the transaction cost of transferring money, but the inequity of the transaction remains the same. Let me give you an example from architecture: people talk about Vastu and other traditional concepts which are deeply rooted in an environmental understanding. But applying it blindly, without thinking critically about how it applies in today's urban environments, is sloppy and lazy. You can't apply rules from a bygone era without considering current conditions. It's important not to fall back on formulas without questioning their relevance. But there is a market for the manifestation of traditional forms with little heed to their conceptual basis.

Ajinkya Kanitkar: You made two wonderful points: first, there are professionals who understand the market, not necessarily the subject; and second, the challenges at grass-root levels. The saying goes, "there's a sucker born every minute." You can find a market for anything, even dubious therapies during the pandemic. How does research, not just in academia but practice contribute to overcome these challenges?

Balaji Parthasarathy: Yes, and at the grassroots level, the disparities in education and finance limit the abilities of the end users. If you consider the government and the policy perspective, urban practitioners or architects face setbacks from what they want versus what the actual development of the built environment can achieve. There are always going to be challenges. This is where research matters. We need to see how we can accommodate various perspectives. For instance, we did a study on innovation in low-income communities in Bihar, where residents didn't trust doctors and instead relied on quacks. A program funded by the Gates Foundation incorporated these quacks into the healthcare system. They were trained to perform basic tests like height and weight measurements. Once they reached a certain threshold, they were given a camera to connect with doctors at district or state headquarters. These quacks served as a trusted social interface for the community. This approach led to significant improvements in basic healthcare indicators.

It's about recognizing that when you have technology, you should also consider how it can empower users. Understanding the demand is critical; we need to incorporate that into how technology is deployed. Our expectations of these technologies are shifting, which contributes to the complexity of these problems and to study something that is not static is challenging. The right inquiry can help overcome these challenges with the help of technology.

Balaji Parthasarathy joined IIITB in July 2000 as an Assistant Professor, and became a Professor in February 2013. He served as the Institute's first Dean (Faculty) from January 2014 until February 2017. In 2012, he also co-founded IIITB's Center for Information Technology and Public Policy. His intellectual interests are rooted in economic geography and economic sociology, and explore the relationships between technological change and innovation, economic globalization, and social transformation. Within this broad focus, his work follows two threads. One thread examines the impacts of public policies and firm strategies on the social and spatial organization of production in the ICT (information and communications technology) industry. Another thread deals with ICTs for Development or ICTD. Here, his interests lie in understanding how ICTs are deployed in various domains of activity to transform social relationships, especially in underprivileged contexts.

Ajinkya Kanitkar is an architect, urban planner and academic engaged in research on climate change and community, infrastructure and creative-cultural economy.

EVERYDAY SUBCULTURES

Suhas H, Sagar, Vivek M R and Chinmay Jake

This photo essay explores the quiet but vibrant subcultures that shape everyday life across Karnataka - from market chaos to solitary stillness, from ancient stones to steaming kitchens. Each image captures a fleeting moment that speaks volumes about where we come from, how we live, and who we are.

In the bustling lanes of KR Market and Mysuru's Devaraja Market, colors, faces, and livelihoods collide - each vendor, each buyer, part of a silent choreography of survival. Further away, in the sun-washed heritage of Hampi or the rural rhythms of Panja, time moves differently - marked by pauses, postures, and quiet dignity.

Back in Bengaluru, glimpses of metro laborers, bus commuters, and street-side negotiations reveal the layered pulse of a city constantly in motion. The kitchens of Bidadi and Chikkegowdanapalya remind us that sustenance is sacred labor, while moments of introspection - like an old man gazing from a train - whisper of journeys both personal and collective.

These images document lives not often in the spotlight but deeply rooted in culture, resilience, and change. Together, they form a tapestry of subcultures - geographies of labor, craft, and emotion - woven into the everyday fabric of the region.


Three Women, One Wall of Time
A quiet pause carved into stone—where stories sit, and silence speaks louder than words.
Location: Hampi

A floral mosaic of color and motion—where tradition bursts into commerce and culture collides in scent and sound.
Location: kr Market

Faces of the Market
Between the bags and bustle he moves, a rhythm the old city quietly proves.
Location:Devaraj Urs Market, Mysore
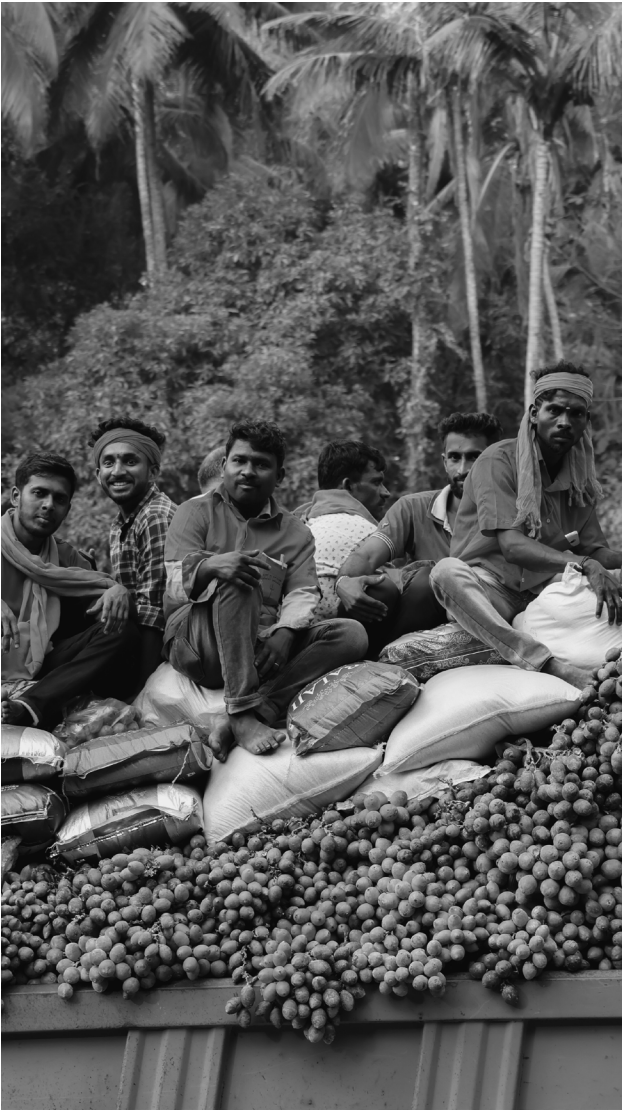
Riders of the Harvest
Between the weight of produce and palms, rest the faces of toil—men who move the earth's fruit with quiet resolve.
Location: Panja (Mangalore)

Bidadi's Dawn
Not just steam, but stories rise in quiet kitchens where effort lies. A man, a rhythm, a morning rite etched in warmth and filtered light.
Location: Bidadi

Chinmay Jake is a passionate photographer who finds beauty in the overlooked and emotion in the everyday. His work captures fleeting moments—of people, places, and moods, with a quiet sensitivity that draws viewers in. With a love for travel, culture, and stories that unfold naturally, he turns ordinary scenes into timeless frames. Chinmay believes photography isn't just about seeing, but about feeling what others might miss. While pursuing his studies, he continues to explore the world through his lens, one frame at a time, observing, learning, and growing, both as an artist and as a deeply curious human being.

(left)
Kola" a culture in the coastal region
It bridges human and divine worlds, with the performer believed to be temporarily possessed by the spirit, giving people access to divine justice, blessings and guidance

Sagar is an architectural photographer and filmmaker with a background in architecture. Starting his journey with astrophotography at 21, he quickly found his passion in capturing built environments and cultural stories through powerful visuals. He is the founder of Studio NAKRITI, specializing in architectural shoots, cinematic walkthroughs, and heritage storytelling. With expertise in visual direction, editing, and branding, Sagar blends design sensibility with storytelling finesse. He runs his own creative studio, aiming to create timeless, impactful narratives through film and photography.

(Left page) Wrinkled Face, Unwrinkled Hope
Old man looking out of a train window
This photo shows an elderly man resting his arms on a train window, looking out quietly. His face shows he has lived a long and maybe hard life, but his eyes still have hope. Even though he may be old and tired, he seems to be thinking about the journey ahead. This picture reminds us that no matter our age, we can still have dreams and hope for something better.
Location:Kengeri Railwaystation,Bengaluru.

(top) Stillness Wrapped in Vibrant Tales.
Man in a fabric stall
This photo shows a man sitting quietly behind piles of colorful cloth in a small fabric stall. Even though everything around him is full of color and design, he sits still and calm. The fabrics may look simple, but they hold the hard work and traditions of many people. The photo reminds us how quiet people like him help keep our culture and crafts alive without making any noise about it.
Location:6th Indian craft collective exhibition,Jayamahal Palace Hotel Bengaluru.

(bottom) Flames Feed Families, Not Just Plates.
Man cooking in a hot kitchen
In this picture, a man is working in a busy kitchen, surrounded by steam and heat. He looks focused, and we can feel the hard work he puts into every dish. He isn't just making food — he's working to support his family and help others. This photo shows us the effort and care that goes into something as simple as a meal, and how much it means for those who do it every day.
Location: Hotel Sri Krishna Dwaraka,Chikkegowdanapalya,Bengaluru.

Suhas H is an Architect with a deep passion for photography. While exploring design and spatial experiences through architecture, he also finds meaning in capturing everyday moments that often go unnoticed. His photographs reflect a sense of stillness, effort, and emotion - small stories that speak volumes. Suhas believes that both architecture and photography are powerful tools to document and preserve culture. Through his lens, he aims to highlight the beauty in ordinary scenes and give a voice to silent narratives around us. For him, every frame is a story waiting to be seen.

Building the future – one beam, one hand, one hope at a time.
This photo captures the silent strength behind urban development , the workers building Bengaluru's metro. It shows the hard work, teamwork, and dedication of those who shape the city's future from the ground up. These workers may remain unnamed, but their efforts lay the foundation for millions of daily journeys. It's a powerful reminder of how cities rise through the hands of everyday heroes.

Location: Bengaluru Metro Route Construction Site

Everyday journeys – where city life begins with a conversation.
This photo captures a simple but powerful moment from the streets of Bengaluru. It reflects the everyday life of people, a quick negotiation, a ride to somewhere, a pause in the city's constant movement. It shows the connection between strangers in urban life, highlighting how small interactions shape our daily stories.
Location: Malleshwaram, Bengaluru

Moments in motion – a pause between the city's rhythm. This photo captures a quiet moment in the busy life of Bengaluru. It shows the everyday routine of city commuters, reflecting the rhythm of urban life. The lighting, expressions, and backdrop highlight the contrast between movement and stillness, giving a powerful yet simple glimpse into the life of a working city.
Location: Shantinagar Bus Station, Bengaluru

Where tradition meets color – Indian heritage crafted by hand.
This photo shows the beauty of Indian handmade art. It highlights the talent of local artists and the importance of keeping our traditional crafts alive. The bright colors and designs reflect India's rich culture and heritage in a simple, meaningful way.
Location: 6th Indian craft collective exhibition, Jayamahal Palace Hotel Bengaluru.

Vivek is an architect with a creative soul and a sharp eye for design. Blending structure with storytelling, he not only shapes spaces but also captures moments through his lens. With a deep passion for photography, Vivek finds beauty in everyday life and transforms it into visual art. Whether sketching blueprints or clicking candid frames, he thrives on turning imagination into impact. His work reflects a balance of form, function, and feeling be it in buildings or behind the camera. Driven, detail-oriented, and always inspired by nature and people, Vivek continues to explore the world through both architecture and photography.

GENDER

Kumartuli, 2025
Photo Credits: Ujjayant Bhattacharyya

DOES SPACE HAVE GENDER ?

Kaushik   Conversations on identity conditions like gender often open in the context of law and policy. The law is a good place to begin because it is a system constructed to define societal operation. In other fields of knowledge as well, we encounter gender in the "laws" that govern the field - contextualising questions of identity here opens up the possibility of critiquing its foundational systems (Butler, 1990). By situating the self and asking "What is gender? Who constructs it, and for whom?" we are forced to navigate its intersecting influences and impact on our lived reality.

In 2021, in the spirit of this vague open question (and as a consequence of existential spiralling) I asked the people around me, Does Architectural Space have Gender?

The following notes are laid out from various responses and more emergent questions - from architecture students, professors, field researchers and practitioners of cis and trans gender positions. It is presented in a manner that strips back layers of the space: from the symbols that adorn it, to its form, its function, its depiction, imagination and making, to understand
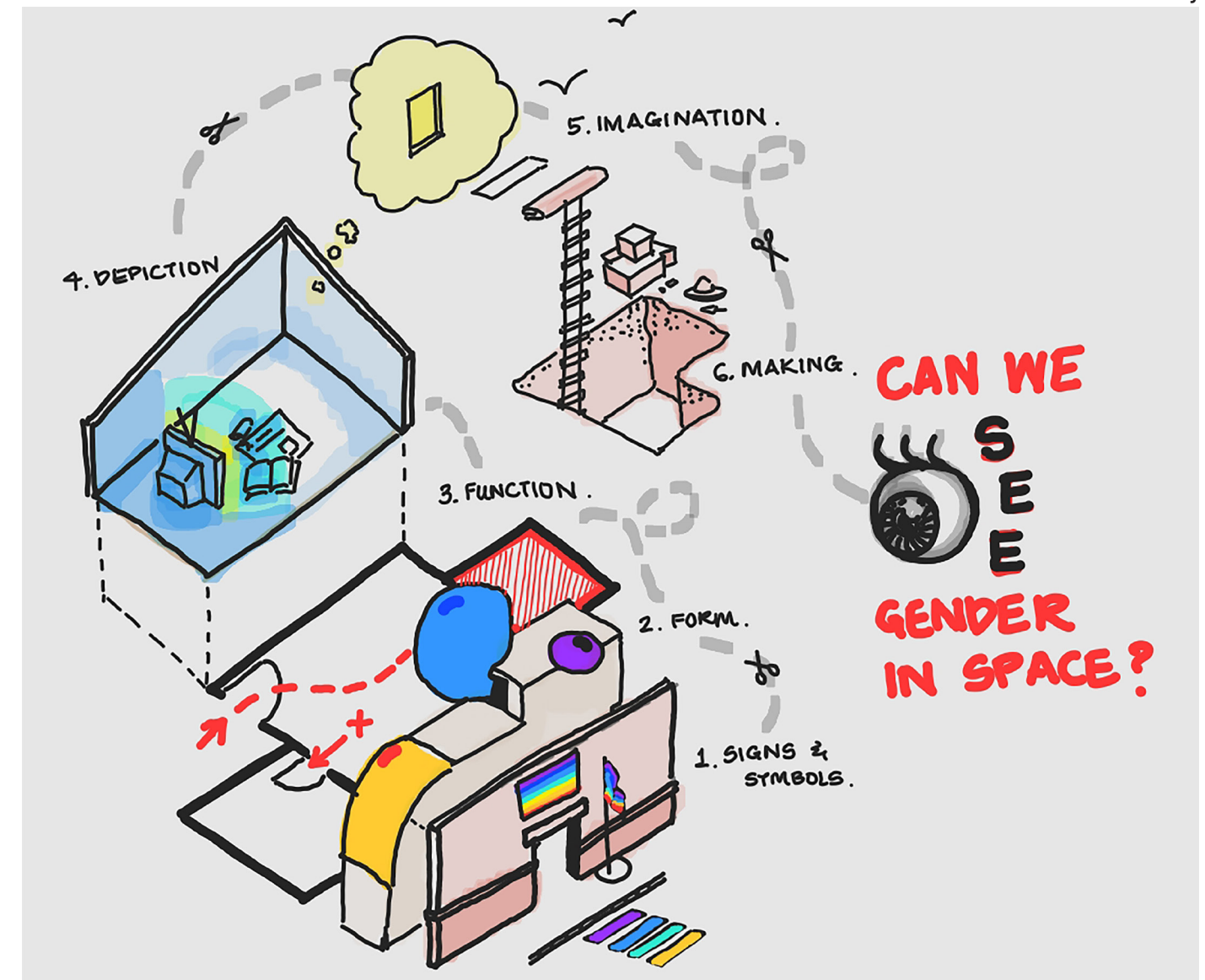
Peeling back layers of the architectural space.

Gender informs the self, the system and the space.

Signs and Symbols

We begin, as many-a-conversation on inclusion does, with an image of a rainbow-coloured street crossing. Painted on the dark tarmac of city centres under pedestrian footfall, these gestures are more permanent forms of the queer pride flag, a feature of pride parades and one of the most legible and adamant civic gestures towards a gender-inclusive public today. They signify an acceptance and celebration of the queer subject, aiming to foster a public that is accustomed to diversity without erasing or demanding conformity.

Signs and symbols are important in a space. A sign serves to represent various presences and claims to space, as well as an ongoing contestation for the right to occupy. It is a visible marker of an idea that is adopted by coalescing groups into a symbol, which then becomes a marker of identity. For a lot of young queer people, the presence of the rainbow flag can be extremely affirming. It becomes a medium to educate, and material to organise with.

As philosopher Alfred Korzybski states however, "The map is not the territory" - An understanding of the world that is shaped by abstractions can never fully capture the complex "territories" of reality. Such is also the case with these gestures. While they increase visibility, they do not directly correlate to the absolute realities of safety in these cities, as queer individuals still face systemic and physical violence, from the denial of housing, employment and adequate healthcare, to police brutality and incarcerations (Krishnan, 1998). Against such lived realities, it is possible with purely an examination of symbols to forget the violence of the systems into which such gestures ask that we be included. Is it possible to consider then, the gendering of architectural spaces that extends beyond such markers?

Form

Building on Gestalt theorist Wolgang Kohler's sound symbolism theories, two shapes were presented - one with straight sharp lines, another with curvilinear form. Is one markedly female and the other male? Architectural descriptions of form are also riddled with these connotations, from Vitruvian principles of firmness or structure associated with masculinity and beauty or ornament with femininity, to descriptions of tower forms to phallic symbolism and caves to wombs.
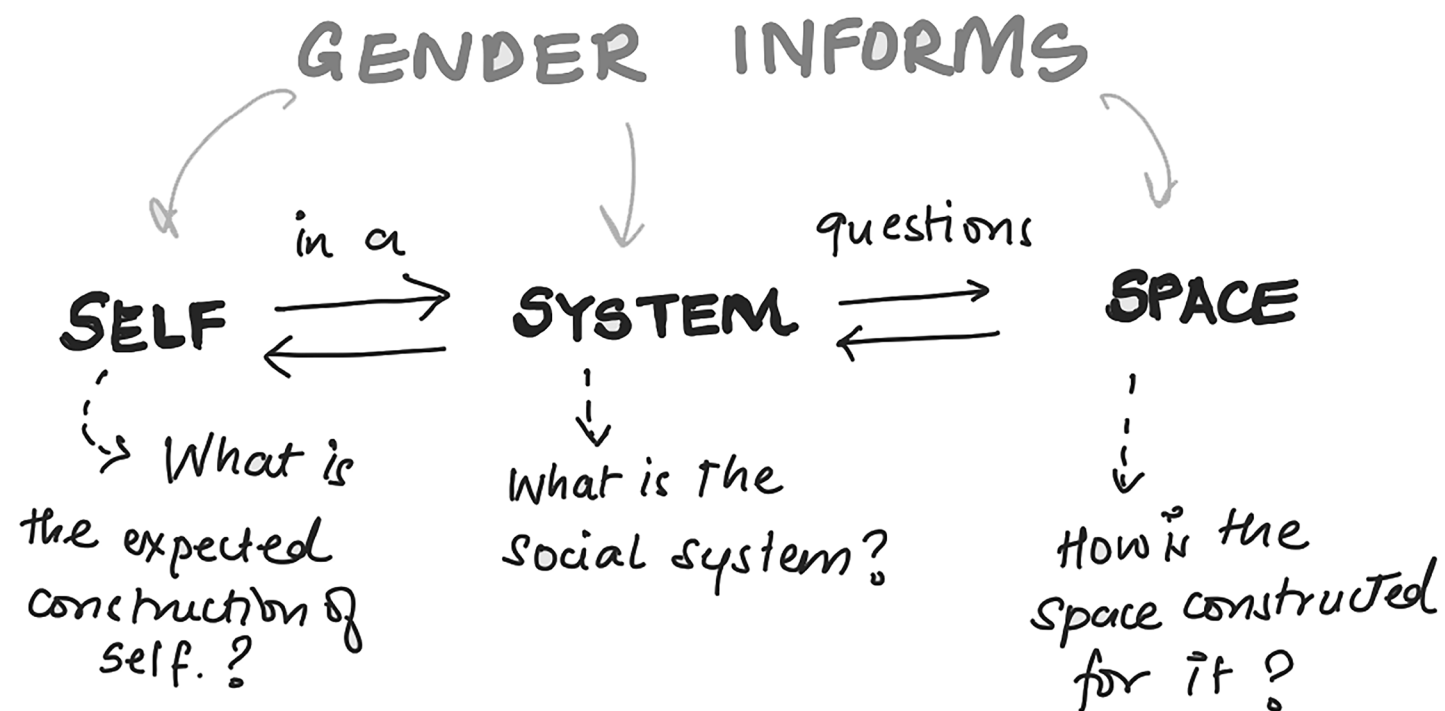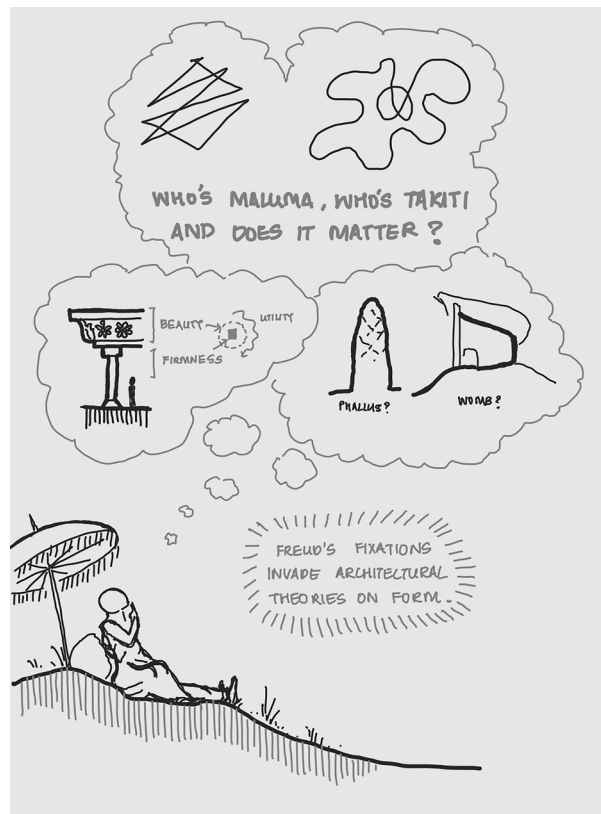
Gender categorisation applied to form in architecture veers dangerously towards stereotyping.

We paused to challenge the universality of such inferences. Thought experiments like this have proven time and again to be irreplicable across cultural and linguistic contexts. In architecture too, we rarely perceive or conceptualise spaces in this "masc", "femme" separated manner.

This critique is further enriched by Yael Reisner's thoughts in Towards Abundance. Reisner, who has a background in both biology and architecture, states that while differences may be seen in the male-female anatomy, form-making is driven by thought, and creative impulse does not present any inherent gender distinctions (Marx, 2023). He argues that these associations have formed from a result of societal conditioning and are not based in evolutionary biology. Judith Butler furthers this by arguing that one must not take nomenclature even with biology as pre-ordained,

as the act of demarcation in biology is a matter of human consideration, governed by societal frameworks of the time (Butler, 1990). We select what to notice as points of distinction, and we decide what to name each side of this distinction.
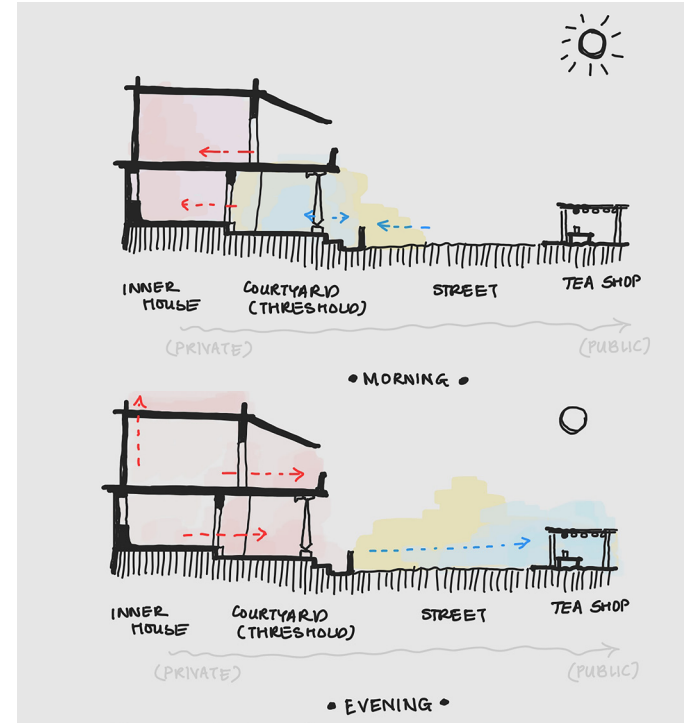
Anna Heringer's earthen caverns of METI handmade school serve as a good representation of care and nurturance in built form. When we divorce the association of descriptors such as "care" and "nurturance" to Herringer's womanhood, we are met with another example - Aldo Van Eyck's city for children, which stood testament to the same qualities across form, materiality and gender of the architect. Such objectives driven through the built form are therefore not inherently associated with gender, rather a reflection of what society expects each gender to embody.
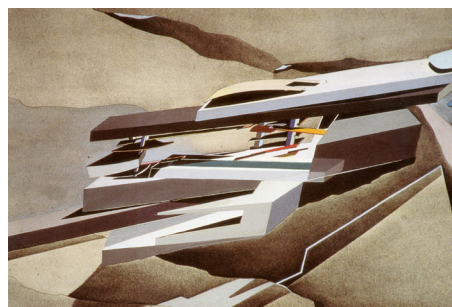
We have seen soft, fluid architecture in the Guggenheim Museum in Bilbao by Frank Gehry, as well as at Amanda Levete's project in Lisbon. Conversely, we've seen hard, angular architecture from Zaha Hadid in her proposal for the Peak project in Hong Kong. These styles are reflections of diverse creative impulses, not expressions of gender.

Pride Parade in Bangalore; Stonewall Inn, New York City; Rainbow pedestrian crossing in Nashville.

(bottom) Anna Heringer's METI Handmade School in Bangladesh.

Aldo Van Eyck's Orphanage and Playground in Amsterdam.

Movement of men and women in a Bora household across the day.
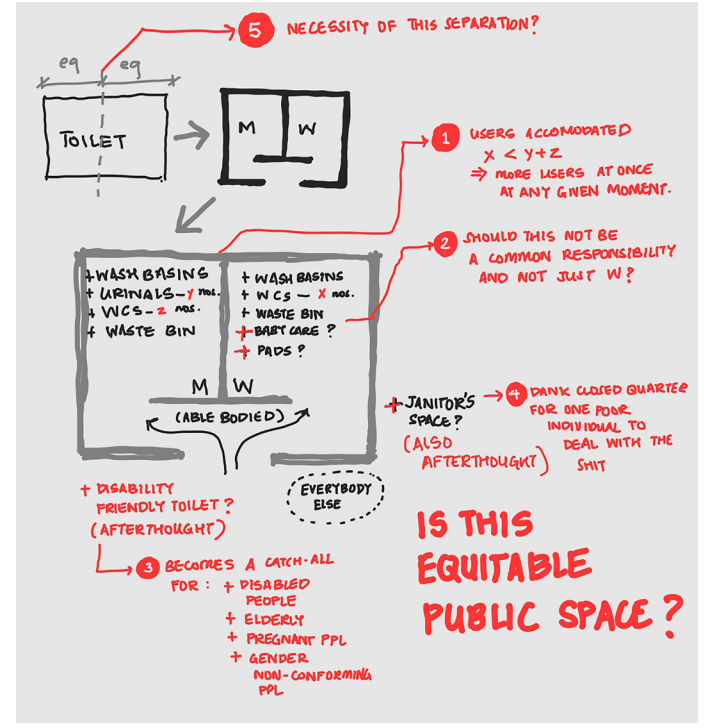
Washroom battles – questions raised during the discussion of public washrooms. Examples from metro stations, malls and college were discussed.

Function

Buildings are more than edifices- they are social maps, charting relationships and expectations, embedded into the functions that they are designed for. In the built form, it is easy to identify how these functions are demarcated, by understanding its means of access and separation. When we examine public and private spaces in the evolution of settlements, we find many instances of separation across the gender binary: with public spaces considered as the realm for men, and private and domestic spaces the realm of women. Although this pattern in its more explicit ways is slowly diminishing, it continues to haunt public and domestic spaces implicitly in the ways that they are occupied and designed. Today, be it for work, leisure or transition, women and individuals of other marginalised genders face challenges in occupying public space due to a constant threat of scrutiny, harassment and objectification.

Cis-women and trans people from all walks of life reflected deeply on how this effect is embedded into our collective consciousness. While cis-men in our discussions could often corroborate based on observations and stories heard from their peers, it was not an embodied experience that they could resonate with. A suggestion was made to bridge this, inviting the cis-men in the room

"to walk a day in women's clothes" to truly understand male gaze. This was met with some laughter, resistance and guarded curiosity.

Contests for visibility in public space reflect deeply embedded societal norms where, although space in a hetero-patriarchal framework may be built around the masculine "ideal", femininity (in men and women) emerges as a carefully controlled subject of scrutiny. A definition of the masculine "ideal" built on the othering of deviation, leaves cis-men the opportunity to be a flaneur or an unobserved wanderer, while others navigate public space with caution or limited access. This perception of femininity and non-conformity as failures to attain the masculine ideal spares no one - while men navigate their own deviations from masculinity and therefore the fragility of their means of access and control, it subtly shapes public perceptions of others, and influences how individuals navigate through architectural spaces under gendered scrutiny.

Public-private separations operate not only at the city level, but also within the home. In examples of domestic spaces from vernacular architecture in coastal Maharashtra, we observed that the gendering of spaces is woven into the very language used to label different areas of the

house. Even the spatial layout reflects these assignments, with private and "servant" spaces associated with femininity and public-facing and "served" spaces seen as masculine. This cultural layering influences movement within the home, demarcating which genders "belong" in which spaces. Spatial organisation also illuminated how such gender divisions manifest in the neighbourhood. An example was provided from Bora neighbourhoods, where men occupy the front of the home during the day but transition to public spaces such as tea stalls in the evening, allowing women greater access to the more public areas of the home. This temporal shift in spatial use illustrates how access to space can change based on times of day, adapting to the rhythms of daily life while still reinforcing gendered boundaries.

In many stories, thresholds emerged as important sites for questioning, hesitation or conflict for trans people, and those who broke social norms constructed around their given gender. One such story was that of a transwoman who recalled her teenage years sitting at the doorway between the kitchen and the living room, where she could listen to and participate in conversations with other women in her home, while she was expected to present as a man and occupy the "front room".

Feminist theorists Janet Wolff and Elizabeth Wilson (Wilson, 1992) introduced the concept of the flaneuse as women who subverted gender expectations by crossing this threshold into public life. From sex workers who stood then as some of the first public women, to trans sex workers today, these "flaneuses" reclaim the right to observe public life on their own terms, despite scrutiny. They pave the way for artists and activists who, with this ability, can challenge and redefine gender frameworks that define who can experience freedom and anonymity.

Toilets are an important public utility for those spending extended hours outside the home. More importantly for our discussion, it is a historically persistent site for binary separation - across class, caste, race and gender. Theorists like Joel Sanders demonstrate how spaces like toilets reinforce the hetero-normativity of gender through clever (and now taken-for-granted) organisation of gazes, props, boundaries and finishes (Sanders, 1997). In many cases, the acute shortage of clean accessible toilets for women, trans people and disabled persons has forced many to reluctantly use unclean restrooms, defecate in the open or delay use until they are able to return home, heightening risks of contracting urinary tract infections.

Discussions on the transformation of public restrooms to be equitable brought forth existing and potential directions: increasing the size of women's washrooms to include more stalls, relocation of baby care rooms to central locations between men's and women's rooms and ensuring free and safe access to menstrual care products and disposal systems. A notable case study raised during this conversation was Stalled!, an open-source initiative by Joel Sanders, Susan Stryker and other contributors that provides prototypes for all-gender restroom designs (Stryker & Sanders, 2016).

Space emerges as an important tool in gendered coding. Here we acknowledge how design of spaces may result from a notion of expected function, and later actively work to shape our movement. To quote Simone de Beauvoir, "One is not born, but rather becomes a woman" (de Beauvoir, 1949). We are not born into a set of behaviour patterns, but are coded from very early ages to perform in expected ways. Participants reflected on the disciplining practices and design of their schools - if not entirely separated by gender, still reinforce gender norms through bifurcated assembly lines, uniform and grooming codes, or limits on interaction.

Spaces built to unrevised design codes reinforce this through the design of toilets, locker rooms, hostels - All of which routinely erase homosexuality and exclude trans, non-binary and intersex identities, turning them into aspects of concealment and shame.

We see profound shifts in the design of high-function spaces on the entry of gender diverse architects. Domestic spaces like kitchens become a perfect example of this. Early cis-women who, upon entering the architecture profession in the late industrial era, introduced designs that significantly improved daily household efficiency. We reflected on the evolution of design aids like the kitchen triangle—a layout concept developed by Lillian M Gilbreth in the late 1940s to optimise kitchen efficiency by organising movement between the stove, sink, and refrigerator. This concept was revolutionary for its time, as it addressed the practical needs of kitchen users. These architects understood the demands of domestic labour, designing homes that prioritised comfort, usability, and reduced workloads. Such changes were not a result of a natural "feminine" perspective but rather the outcome of considering lived experience, which allowed these architects
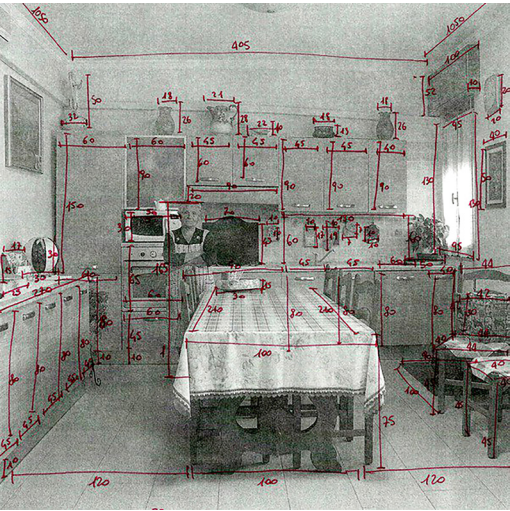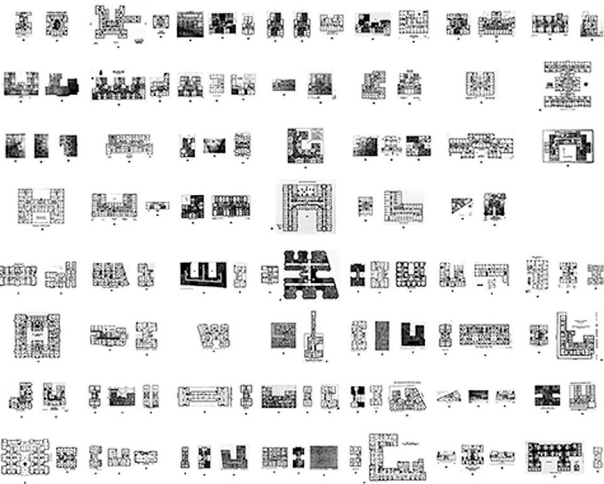
to design with empathy for others who shared similar burdens (Canales, 2023).

Socialist architects such as Marie Howland and Alice Austin took these imaginations a step further with concepts for cities without private kitchens, opting instead for communal kitchens (Hayden, 1978). As the world progresses well into the 21st century, we see houses shrinking in response to the growing demand for urban space. Kitchenless cities become relevant again, and we see examples of this reality in dense populous cities like Mumbai, Tokyo and New York.

It is noteworthy that this binary construct of power and powerlessness has not been static across history. In classical Greek society, for example, the "ideal" citizen was an older man with voting rights and social authority, while younger men, women, and others were deemed "less than" and excluded from these privileges. This structure built on the intersection of age and (our current understanding of) gender influenced who could inhabit specific areas and the behaviours expected within them.

Gender as an influence on space is also not isolated but layered with other social

factors like age and status. In modern Indian society, similar dynamics are seen, where the intersections of caste, class, and age collectively dictate access and authority within spaces. In such settings, power and privilege are also dynamic, changing over a person's life. Cis-women, for instance, experience shifts in autonomy and authority as they transition through different stages of reproductive years. A young, unmarried woman might have limited freedom in public spaces (menarche), but as she ages beyond menopause her familial authority grows, as seen in the popular "patriarchal mother-in-law" trope of tv serials broadcasted in the country. This shift reflects how the responsibility of carrying patriarchy intertwines age with authority, impacting both men and women of a household (Menon, 2014).

Working-class men in India have been seen to subvert gender expectations of western hetero-masculine normativity — holding hands publicly or painting or grooming individual finger nails (Menon, 2014). These subtleties reveal the fluid non-universal nature of gender hierarchy that requires a multi-layered study of the context and time that the system emerges from.

Lara Agosti's measured photograph of her grandmother's kitchen depicts the importance of scale in the kitchen. The dimensions and proportions reveal for whom it is exactly the right size.

Anna Puigjaner's documentation of apartment floorplans in New York City, part of her project Kitchenless City.

Policemen in Maharashtra holding hands; Kokilaben from the popular television soap Saath Nibhaana Sathiya representing one of many shows that bring forth the mother-in-law trope of being responsible for enforcing patriarchy in the household.

Still from Alai Payuthey. The newlywed couple in their home, where spaces are not rigidly divided by walls but rather suggested through the presence of props and activities that both homeowners partake in.

Still from Killa

Depiction of Space: Film and Media

Film offers layered perspectives on gendered spaces and social structures in India. While we see examples like The Great Indian Kitchen and Paava Kathaigal which demonstrate space as a tool for oppression, we also see space used to imagine the act of release. Alai Payuthey, a film in which a newlywed couple move into a house under construction to make a home together against the will of their families. This courtyard house, apart from its external walls, was loosely divided on the inside with curtains, sarees and other fabrics draped on clotheslines. This single temporary, free-flowing space prompted us to ask ourselves, is this an imagination of a home, free from the division of labour across gender?

Expanding on the idea of liberated spaces Wild Publics as Jack Halberstam describes, are liberated spaces beyond societal constraints, allowing freedom from surveillance

(Halberstam, 2020). This theme of finding oneself within unstructured environments is depicted in the Marathi film Killa, which follows a group of children exploring an old fort and its surrounding natural areas. The children's interactions with these abandoned structures and the wild landscape serve as a metaphor for self-discovery, as they navigate both the ruins and their personal challenges. These open, unbounded spaces contrast with the structured, restrictive environments of traditional homes or schools, allowing the children to freely explore, imagine, and connect with their identities.

Another example from Bangalore is Chandri's comic, which portrays a trans woman's experience of finding peace and perspective on her terrace, away from the demands of daily life. This "wild" rooftop space offers her a personal sanctuary, allowing her to reconnect with herself and reflect on a reality beyond societal pressures.

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Snapshots from Times Will Pass, Chandri's comic, released by Aravani Art Project.

Examples of Liminal Spaces, machine centered environments.

*Andy Warhol's The Factory; King Ludwig II's Linderhof Palace in Bavaria*

Liminal Space: Neutral Ground?

Humorously, this discussion began with a (mis?) interpretation of the question - "does outer space have gender?". We spent a little time on structures built in infinite space and then examined liminal spaces, focusing on environments that operate outside social constructs. Certain machine-centred environments, such as airport terminals, create a neutral setting that paradoxically excludes all individuals by design, unintentionally making them truly neutral in their status as "no-man's-land".

Shows like Stranger Things depict 'mall rats'—young people reclaiming these liminal spaces as places for loitering, socialising, and adventure. This illustrates how space can result from people repurposing spaces for self-expression and community, beyond the commercial intentions of their design.

We see reclamation as a recurring practice in queer spaces. Documentaries like Paris is Burning and shows like Pose depict spaces in the late 1980s reclaimed by New York's QPOC community, reclaiming structures like warehouses, malls and port sides for finding love and community. The "ballroom" was one such secret performative space built into abandoned basements and warehouses. These served as stages for drag contests and dance-offs, movements for self-expression and gender parody (Livingston, 1990).

Other-worldly environments can also be intentionally created
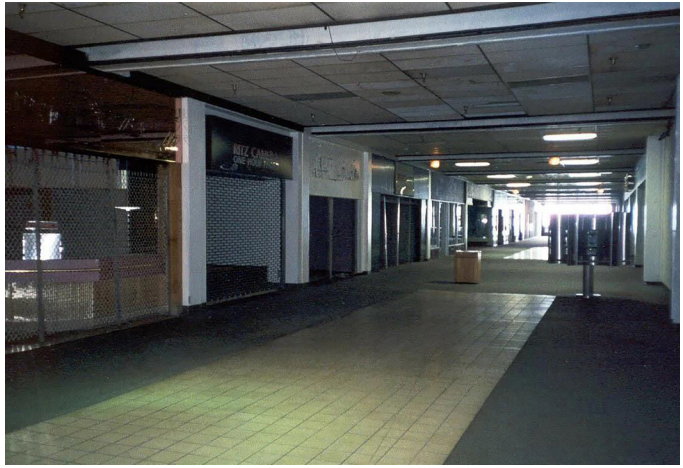
to subvert expectations on what a space must normally present as, like Andy Warhol's Factory, or the archetype of nightclubs, clearly marking removal through their design. History records palaces like that of Ludwig II, designed to remove its inhabitants from public scrutiny and protect them with a physical barrier. A particularly evocative account from Bangalore is Begum Mahal, a mansion once owned by Begum Akhtar, who opened her home to the trans community in solidarity with her Kothi child. On Friday nights, this mansion became a sanctuary for the trans community and other "little people" of the area, where they would gather to drink, smoke, and dance to item songs. The mansion provided a liberating space shielded from societal judgement, allowing free expression. The mansion was mysteriously burned down in the early 2000s, and the loss of such an inclusive, safe space continues to be lamented by the community (Harish, Mohan, Raj, & Mangai, 2019).

In contrast, on the opposite side of the street was a shanty belonging to another trans woman who also offered shelter but was often ridiculed for her "shabby appearance" and dismissed. This woman, however, responded defiantly to her mockers by tossing water pots at those who jeered at her. This juxtaposition of Begum Mahal and the modest shanty underscores a key point raised in Wild Publics. Halberstam suggests that "removals to the beyond tend to operate within their own relations to power; the ability to enclose any space from a private home to a sovereign palace is one already based on ownership and stature." This dynamic

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Begum Mahal was both a woman and her house.

Begum Mahal, its erstwhile location to the south of Ulsoor Lake, Bengaluru.

shows that while architecture can create sanctuary-like spaces for marginalised individuals, the ability to maintain and protect these spaces often depends on social standing and ownership.

Making of Space: Profession and Practice

The gender dynamics within architectural education and professional practice reveal a stark contrast between aspiration and reality. While women constitute a substantial portion of architecture students, their representation diminishes sharply in professional settings. Systemic barriers, including wage gaps and limited career advancement, hinder their participation and progress. This disparity often leads to isolation, as echoed by practitioners describing exclusive, "boys' club" atmospheres in professional gatherings, discouraging women from pursuing architecture as a long-term career.

This exclusion is not new; its roots lie in historical movements that shaped the perception of architectural greatness. For instance, the New York Five contributed greatly to the commodification of architecture in the US by aligning themselves with influential allies in advertising, positioning architecture as a product of cultural prestige rather than practical self-building. This shift contributed to the elitist perception of architecture, sidelining common and marginalized voices in the expression of architecture. This perception continues in educational curricula, where well-advertised, out-of-the-box ideas are valued over intuitive skill.

In theory, figures like Denise Scott Brown, despite significant contributions, are overshadowed by male counterparts like Robert Venturi, Le Corbusier or Louis Kahn. While we noted the absence of emphasis on these figured, the call made was not for just token inclusions of marginalized voices in architectural history, but meaningful engagement with their

ideas to enrich the field.

In practice, biases persist in studios and on construction sites. Cis-women and marginalized people often face scepticism about their expertise, prompting them to "code-switch" or adapt their behaviour to fit traditional expectations of authority. Hierarchies on construction sites reinforce these biases, with "skilled" labour dominated by men and support roles relegated to women. This unequal division of labour limits access to higher-paying, respected roles for others and raises questions about what we define as "skill" in construction.

Trans and gender-nonconforming individuals face compounded invisibility due to the lack of representation and mentorship within the profession. Addressing these gaps requires cultivating safe, inclusive and equitable environments that actively challenge biases through increased visibility, awareness and respect for gender variance.

Collaborative practices offer a vision for a more inclusive and socially responsive

architecture that empower gender diverse groups. Yasmeen Lari's work in disaster-affected regions of Pakistan exemplifies this shift. By partnering with rural women to build 80,000 chulahs (clay stoves), she demonstrates how collective action, built on embodied building practices learned over generations can redefine architecture.

Formal collectives like Matha Chaj empower women by transforming traditional techniques into recognised skill in construction. Drawing from the guild's textile skills Matha Chhaj moves traditional weaving practices into the realm of thatch-roof construction, empowering women as both creators and collaborators in architecture. The Aravani Art Project, a collective of trans women creating murals in Bangalore, brings visibility to marginalized communities by enriching urban spaces with their distinct treatment of colour.

These examples signal a move away from the era of the "heroic starchitect" toward architecture as a collaborative and inclusive practice that shifts power, from the thinker towards the maker. This redefinition

The New York Five, at a time when architecture positions itself as an object of cultural prestige, a commodity rather than an act of self-building.

Mud-flooring artfully executed in a village in Madhya Pradesh. Barring the responsibility of incorporating foraged materials such as wood and twine, Women here not only execute finishes but also erect the super-structure through hand-made adobe blocks and roof tiles - in all of 27 days. Architecture holds potential in recognising these skills, and gender minorities as carriers of these skills through lived experience accumulated over generations.

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Website for Matha Chhaj, a women's collective operating out of Kutch as a guild that specialises in construction of thatch roofs; Aravani Art Project, a trans-women's collective in Bangalore that specialises in creating large murals and publication graphics, lending distinctive character to public spaces in the city.

positions architecture not as a noun but as a verb—a process rooted in coalition-building and collective action.

In this view, architecture becomes an activity that has the power to coalesce and foster new identities.

Gender: A wind in your sails

The essay so far has explored how and where gender can be read in architectural space. The pertinent question that remains is is: What does one do with this?

Architecture, by its very nature, is concerned with the shape and materiality of the physical interface—our constructed reality. But it is more than a neutral backdrop; it is a technology of gender (de Lauretis, 1987), a site where societal norms are embedded and reinforced. Recognizing this is not just an academic exercise but a critical means to challenge architecture's complicity in maintaining power structures. While critical frameworks—such as deconstruction, postcolonialism, feminism, queer and trans activism—have entered academia, their absorption into architecture has often been limited to stylistic exercises rather than critical practice. Architecture could radically expand by questioning the foundational principles on which the discipline rests. Instead of merely observing how architectural discourses inscribe masculine, feminine, and other gender identities, the field might explore gender as a fluid spectrum of qualities, using it to redefine the boundaries of architectural history and the discipline's future directions.

A critical lens like gender to architectural theory is what a scalpel is to a surgeon - it allows us to slice open the body of knowledge and locate how architecture has historically been a tool for maintaining norms. It helps us question and disrupt the inherent biases coded into spatial organization, material choices, skill, and access to space. It opens the door to rethinking how we design, build and occupy our environments in ways that do not simply replicate existing hierarchies (Castello, 2023).

As demonstrated in the essay, observing gender in space is not just a battle to be fought by trans and gender non-conforming people. Binary separation is an archaic social system that traps everyone across the gender spectrum. By turning the question to the system, and looking to the lived experiences of marginalized communities, we are offered profound wisdom on how space can be adapted, reclaimed, and reimagined. Acknowledging this lived knowledge is not only an act of inclusion but a step toward collective liberation.

Trans culture, for instance, offers a valuable perspective on rethinking value and identity. The worth of an entity is not in how closely it aligns with a fixed model, like masculine or feminine ideals. Instead, value arises from its capacity to embody its unique existence, pushing at the boundaries of societal norms. This "bordering" position, whether of a trans body or an architectural object, can reveal hidden forces that shape conventional systems, enriching the cultural landscape through expressions that exist within society's in-between spaces. This approach encourages a concept of "trans architectures"— structures that may not appear in mainstream histories but exist as transitional forms, often dismissed as incomplete or impure. If gender or architecture is not seen as a static, preordained construct but as something fluid—something with the potential for change—then this understanding holds possibilities for everyone, not just those at the margins.

Gender, along with queer and trans studies, is generating a profound cultural shift and offers an evolving set of theoretical and practical tools that architecture can harness. By adopting these tools, architectural theory can extend its field of meanings, embracing desires and identifications in relation to space. To question how we might design spaces that hold plurality, fluidity, and agency—where identity is not confined but continuously negotiated—is an act of radical imagination. And perhaps, in that, we begin to shift architecture from being a mechanism of exclusion to one of possibility.

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Kaushik is a gender non-binary architect and illustrator exploring the intersections of place, culture and identity. With an interest in sustainable and participatory design, their work engages with questions of geography, materiality, and the socio-political dimensions of the built environment. Their research and practice investigate how architecture encodes systems of power, informed by interdisciplinary perspectives drawn from anthropology, human geography, and visual storytelling. Through their work, they aim to challenge normative frameworks in spatial design and advocate for more inclusive, responsive environments.

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Notes and snippets from various formal and informal discussions with Rumi Harish, Sunil Mohan, Shobhana, Dhruv, Dia, Pranesh, Rey, Namrata, Prof. Anupriya Saxena, Prof. Madhuri Rao, Prof. Salila Vanka, Prof. Meera Vasudev, Prof. Archita Banerjee, Prof. Smruti B, Prof. Bakul Jani, Prof. Megha Naniah, Prof. Deepa Suriyaprakash, Ar. Gurumurthy, Prof. Ajinkya Kanitkar, Prof. Anuradha Dinesha, Prof. Bikramjit C, Ar. Tanvi Choudhary, Ar. Bhavana Priya B, Sandeep Virmani, Sushma Iyengar, Shruthi, Chinmay Pathak and many more.
Due credit to organisations such as ALF, Sangama and Aravani Art Project for providing accounts of lived realities of transgender persons and other sexual minorities in India.

HAIKU

SURASHREE JOSHI

kintsugi
if only I could
afford the gold

(tsuri-doro, Issue 17)

in between the saree pleats my mommy issues

(Failed Haiku, Volume 8, Issue 94)

sins we pass around sleepless nights

(Failed Haiku, Volume 8, Issue 92)

petrichor
and the glue sniffers
judge me

(FreshOut Magazine)

white coats
an intervention
of poppies

Haiku is a minimalist form of poetry from Japan. It has thousands of years of history. It is woven into the very fabric of Japanese life and culture. Nature is deeply embedded into it. People writing haiku today still read and follow the great masters like Basho and Shiki. It is a bit difficult to put into words what actually the process of writing haiku is. It can be different for different people. So you can say that it is deeply personal yet remains universal at some level. Haiku emphasises a lot on concrete imagery. One of the best ways to describe it would be "Write a haiku and see if a child can draw it!"

Haiku in English has come a long way and has become more complex and encompassing. Haiku poets try to capture the essence of human nature, complex imagery and an array of emotions along with nature. Haiku in English has moved away from the traditional 5-7-5 structure. A lot of brilliant experiments are taking place in terms of form and content. What amazes me personally is the thought of expressing an image, either concrete or abstract, in the least possible words and juxtaposing it with something that makes sense only in my head probably!

These haiku are based on my interpretation of what a subculture might mean. These poems are a mix of tercets (3-lines) and monoku (1-line).

Surashree Joshi is an English teacher by profession. She is an avid reader and a published haiku poet. She is currently dabbling in erasures and digital arts. (Instagram @surashree_ulhas_joshi)

Illustration Credit: **Vijayalakshmi** (Instagram @artsy_hudugi) Vijayalakshmi is a designer whose practice spans art, craft, typography, and spatial design. Her work is characterized by abstract explorations of nature forms, inviting personal interpretation and engagement from the viewer.

Firodiya Centre for Inspiration / Studio A dvaita.
Source: Rasika Badave
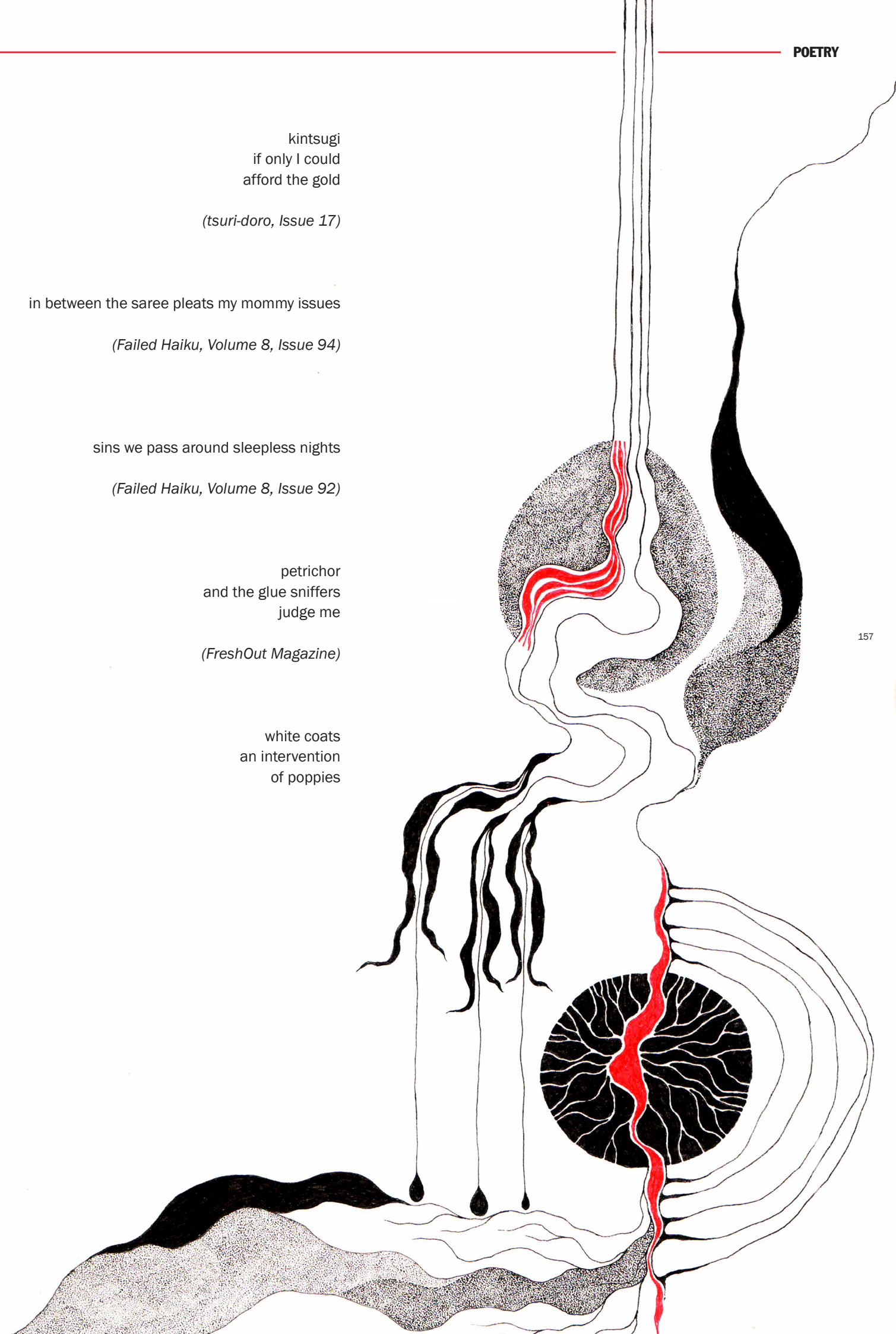
Glimpses from the Delhi Pride March 2024.
Source: Indian Express

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DECODING INCLUSIVITY THROUGH THE LENS OF THE CITY

Srivatsa Koduri

Architecture is a vast universe of ideas and explorations, much more than simply constructing structures and making endless drawings. History speaks of Viswakarma – the God of Architecture and his vast craftsmanship of Dwaraka and Sri Lanka whose grandeur and attention to detail can still be seen today. This means that architecture is more than simply construction structures, it's also about developing areas that foster fairness, diversity and the social well-being of the society. As a result, architects have a big social duty to the commodities they work in. This responsibility goes beyond just creating visually splendid facilities and includes designing built environments and urban interventions that are secure, eco-friendly, and inclusive. Architects can design environments that enhance and promote social interaction and participation in change and advance a better community for everyone.

Inclusivity refers to creating an environment, culture, or society that actively values and respects the diversity of individuals and ensures their equal participation, representation, and access to opportunities. It goes beyond tolerance and aims to embrace and celebrate all people's unique characteristics, perspectives, and identities, regardless of their background, race, ethnicity, gender, sexual orientation, abilities, or any other factor.

In the context of queer culture in India, inclusivity is crucial to promoting equality and ensuring the well-being of LGBTQ+ individuals. It involves acknowledging and embracing the diverse identities within the queer community and providing them with a safe and supportive environment to express themselves freely.

The 'Trans Lives Matter' mural at Lodhi Art District.
Source: The Hindu Bureau

To foster inclusivity, it is essential to challenge stereotypes, prejudices, and discriminatory practices that marginalize queer individuals. This can be done through various means, including education, awareness campaigns, policy reforms, and legal protections. Promoting inclusivity also involves actively engaging with and listening to the voices and experiences of queer individuals, amplifying their stories, and addressing their unique needs and concerns.
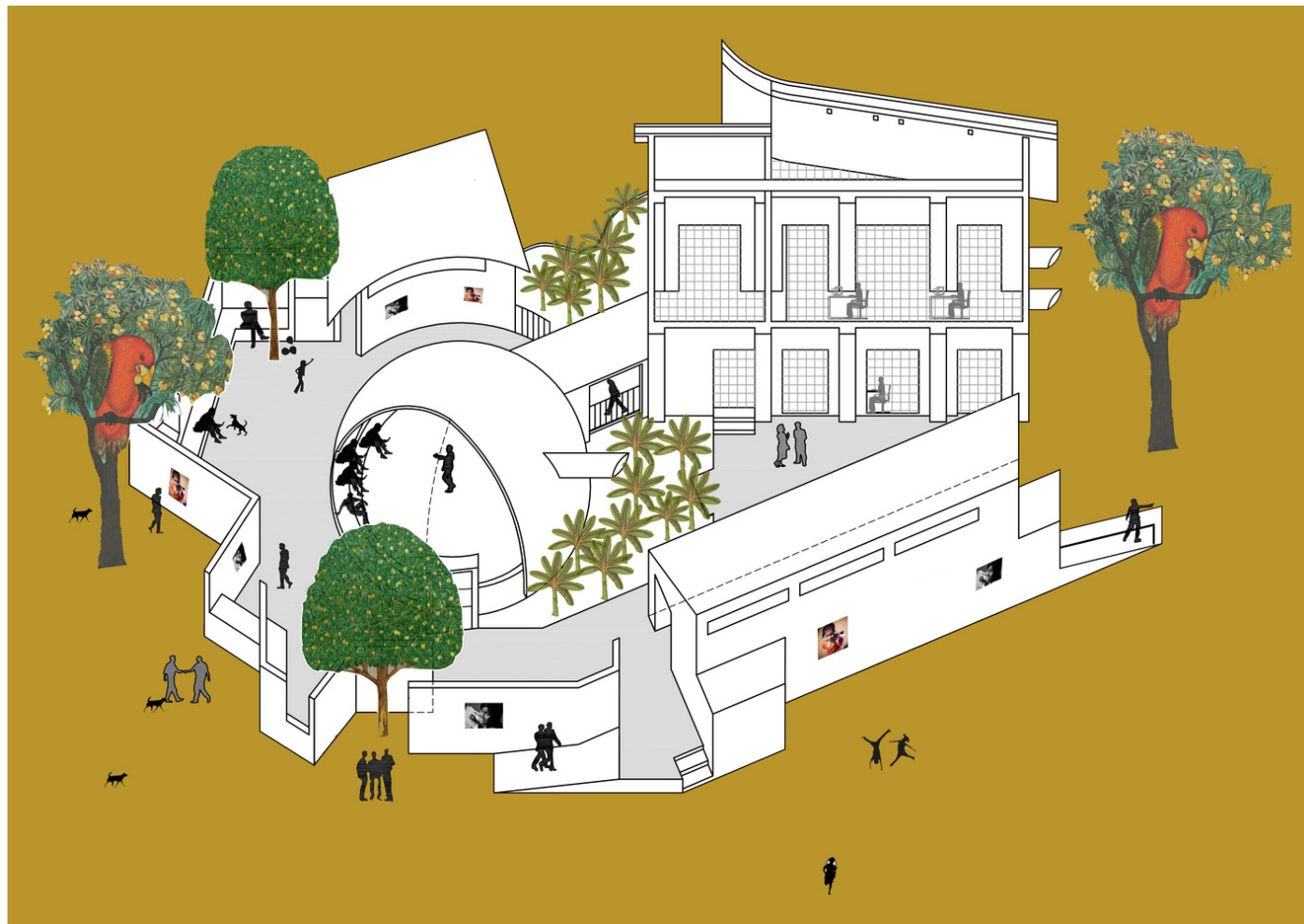
As designers, what can one do to tackle this notion of isolation and the necessity of belongingness in an urban fabric which is sturdy and rigid? Do we start questioning the gender and sexuality of the city's architecture? With masculine and feminine elements of architecture often referred to as handsome and beautiful, what if one has to tackle the queerness of a space?

Being queer in a conservative city like Hyderabad comes with a lot of challenges.

There are numerous cases of basic human rights and discrimination against the queer community. Yet, Hyderabad demographics state that it houses an ample amount of queer people. It also has a lot of NGOs, Social Welfare Groups and Legal Institutions which work in favour of the queer community. This gives a great potential to exercise the idea of inclusiveness in a city which has quite a lot to offer – from underground drag shows to freedom of expression in the streets of Charminar. When we think about queer spaces or let's say spaces in general, we may first be drawn to the architectural metaphors long intertwined with non-heterosexual identity: the closet and the washroom.

The very idea of the closet is rife with contrasts, invoking both interior and exterior, storage and room, pride and repression, homo- and heterosexuality. The pride revolution itself started with a sole goal of claiming the basic human right to have designated toilets for transgenders.

Firodiya Centre for Inspiration / Studio A dvaita. Source: Rasika Badave

How India continues to deny its queer citizens access to toilets. Source: Illustration by Jose

Let's say, in metro stations where does a transgender person go for a security check? Or even to just use a restroom? And can queer people openly use public transport in the city which is a major stakeholder to the ergonomics of the city?

Thinking beyond the closet and the washroom, nightclubs, bars and dance floors have also been key environments through which queer folks have found safety, community and belonging.

Rather than merely actions or occupancy, queerness might also be regarded as a way to think beyond the very binaries inherent in building. Much of this exploration has — and continues to be — investigated within the context of exhibitions and galleries.

From closets to washrooms, nightclubs to exhibitions, parks to homes, these spaces are laboratories for political futures, central to understanding new ways of thinking, living, loving, meeting and belonging.

A graduate of R.V. College of Architecture in Bangalore, **Srivatsa Koduri** is a passionate architect driven by a desire to use design to tell stories. With a keen eye for detail and a deep appreciation for the art of architecture, he delves into the intricacies of buildings, uncovering their hidden narratives. Fascinated by the symbolism and metaphors embedded within architectural forms, Srivatsa explores their historical significance and cultural impact, particularly from a metaphysical perspective. His architectural perceptions are significantly influenced by a diverse range of interests, including literature, various art forms, and a love for travel. Srivatsa is currently pursuing a Master's degree in Interior Design at Middlesex University, London. He enjoys exploring his creative side through singing, doodling, and journaling.

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