

THE SACRALITY OF EMBODIED SENSE SCAPE

An Archetypal Dimension of Memory Place-making in Bengaluru

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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.

“ Karaga jat্রে 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 Vahnikula 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.

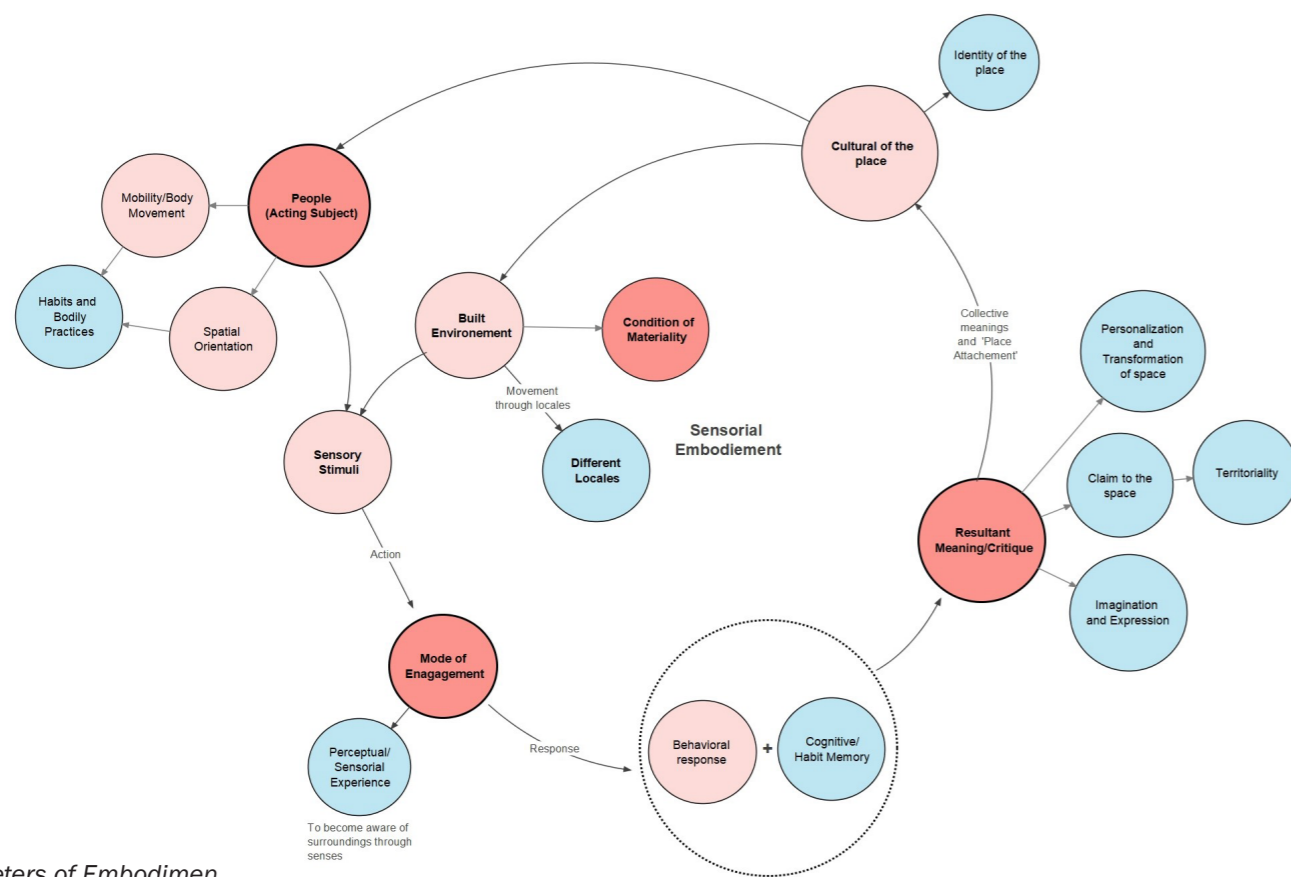
The uniqueness and the distinctive meaning of the Pete area is brought about by the unique community network of the Thiggalas and their place association, Chikpete, as a realm where the Karaga Jatre plays out as a civic ritual and lastly the intrinsic meaning and impact of such event on the city and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

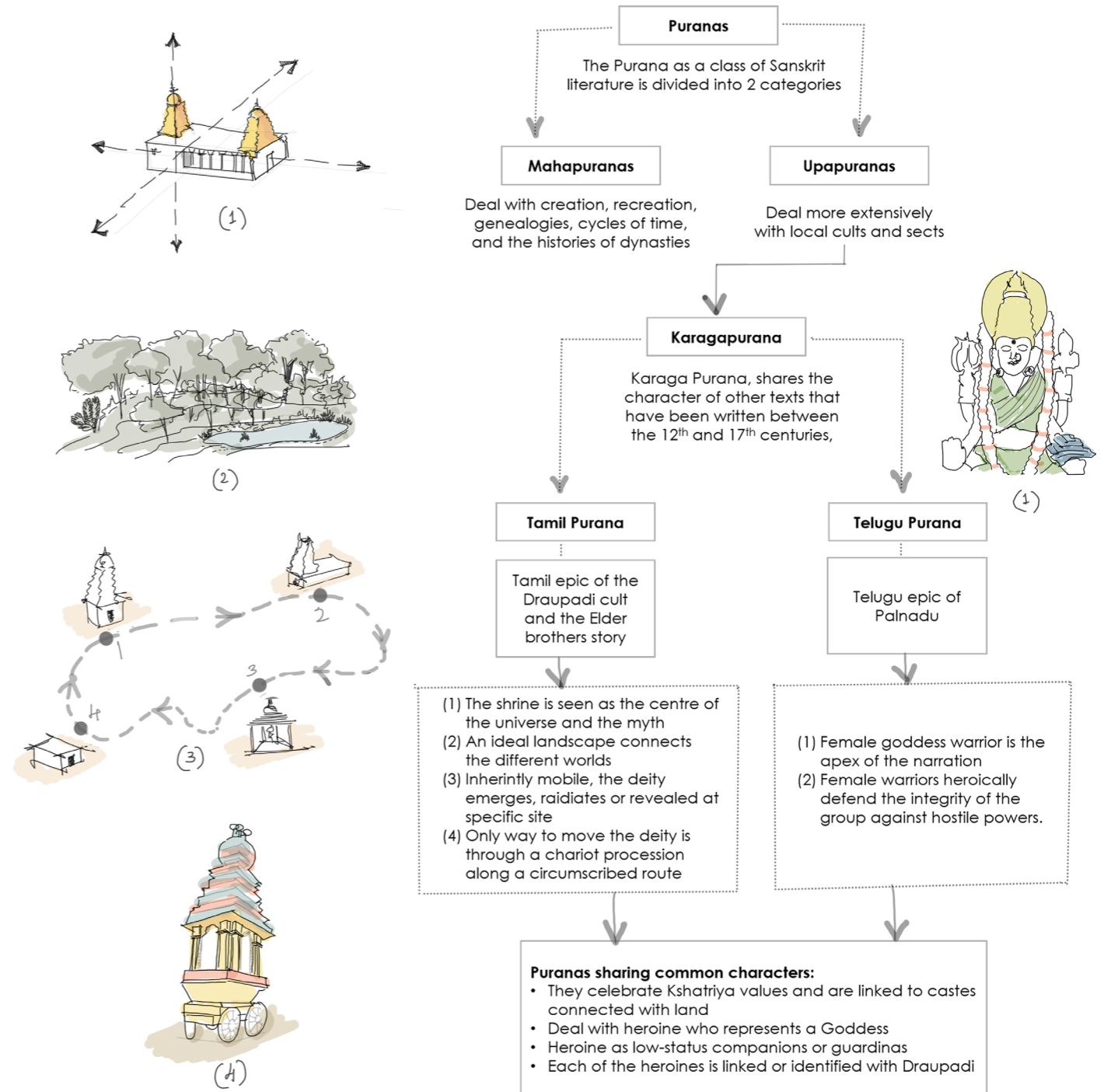
Bengaluru’s existing master plan focuses on 13 features, which elaborates on the preservation of architectural and heritage monuments in Bangalore and promotes ‘Heritage Tourism’ to showcase the region’s history and culture. The proposal for the 2031 Bengaluru master plan should not only look at urban 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 perceptions, 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



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.

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