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Mayo Hall

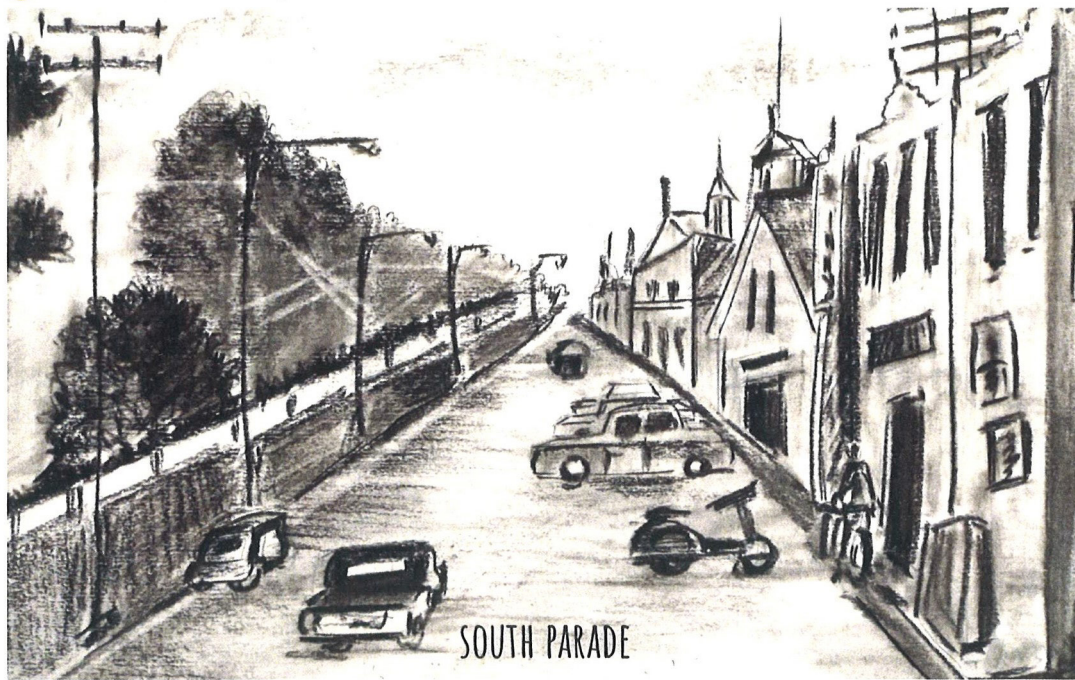
SOUTH PARADE'S STORIES

Vivek Mahaveer & Esha Raikar

Bengaluru, Karnataka's capital city, sits in India's Deccan Plateau. Once known as the City of Lakes and Garden City, it evolved to become India's Silicon Valley. But the city's nucleus started off as a settlement around a mud fort, built in 1537 by a local chieftain, Kempe Gowda I.

Bengaluru was the headquarters of the British administration from 1831 to 1881. In 1949, the *Pete* and Cantonment areas were merged, and Bengaluru switched from a textile production hub to a real estate market with the highest land rate in India! High-rise buildings came into the picture and with that came more small-scale industries on the city's outskirts.

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South Parade Road

South Parade Road

Did you know that Mahatma Gandhi Road was once known as South Parade during pre-independent Bengaluru? During colonial times, the road used to be called South Parade Road because it was situated to the south of the British military parade grounds. On 26 February 1948, it was renamed as Mahatma Gandhi (MG) Road.

Today, MG Road is part of Bengaluru's Central Business District. The road runs from Trinity Circle at one end to Anil Kumble Circle at the other. MG Road is one of the busiest and most popular roads in the city, lined with shopping malls, pubs, restaurants, art galleries, showrooms and banks. Take a closer look and one can spot remnants of a bygone era hidden amongst the colonial buildings, plaques and statues.

Not known to many today, MG Road abounds with architectural treasures and places rich in heritage and history. For example, the Holy Trinity Church, one of the oldest in the area, built in 1852 for the British Regiment, has several tablets dedicated to officers who died in various battles in South East Asia. The Mayo Hall is another colonial building along MG Road and is dedicated to Lord Mayo, Viceroy of India.

FlippAR Go

FlippAR Go is an Augmented Reality (AR) start-up based in the beautiful city of Bengaluru. Fuelled by NUMA Accelerate and (*kaapi* - colloquial for coffee), it specialises in computer vision, 3D, video, app and content development. Augmented Reality is a

technology that superimposes a computer-generated image on a user's view of the real world, thus providing a composite view, to get people, especially the younger generation to unlock the stories of these places by simply pointing their phones at a building to watch its story come to life on their screen.

Experiencing heritage through tech

Ask most people about MG Road and they would say it is a great place for shopping, food and having a good time. Very few know of its former name, South Parade Road, and the history surrounding it. As founder of FlippAR Go, I wanted to change that and what better tool to use in today's day and age than technology, to tell such stories?

It all started with the story of the Plaza Theatre that was once located on MG Road. I recall fond memories of watching movies at the Plaza theatre with my friends in the 1990s. But very recently, I got to know that the theatre has some intriguing stories of its own! Built in the 1930s, Plaza used to have a ballroom, modelled after Piccadilly Circus in London. Unfortunately, by the time I stumbled upon this piece of history, I could not experience Plaza theatre in this new light as it had since been demolished. Today, the MG Road metro station stands in its place. Diving deeper, my team and I discovered that MG Road was in fact a treasure trove of heritage buildings, and every other wall had some story to tell. I saw AR as the perfect tool to tell these stories, allowing people to get to know their city and its evolution better.

Methodology

i) Identification of heritage buildings

FlippAR GO worked with Aliyeh Rizvi, a cultural documentarian with a deep understanding of the history of Bengaluru. Aliyeh helped curate the buildings and stories that needed to be covered on South Parade. The heritage spots we selected were:

- South Parade Road
- St. Mark's Cathedral
- The Bengaluru Tract & Book Society
- Oriental Building (LIC)
- Higginbothams
- Cauvery Arts & Craft Emporium
- Mayo Hall
- Galaxy Theatre
- East Parade Church.

ii) Content development

The team collated information from multiple sources. Some photographs were contributed by Kiran Natarajan, a Bengaluru-based IT professional who collects Bengaluru ephemera and memorabilia and writes on related historical topics. A priest at St. Mark's Cathedral contributed a coffee table book containing information about the church. The content for each building, which might be in the form of text, videos, audio, images and 3D projections is collated into short videos with English voice-overs.

iii) Setting up the buildings on the AR platform

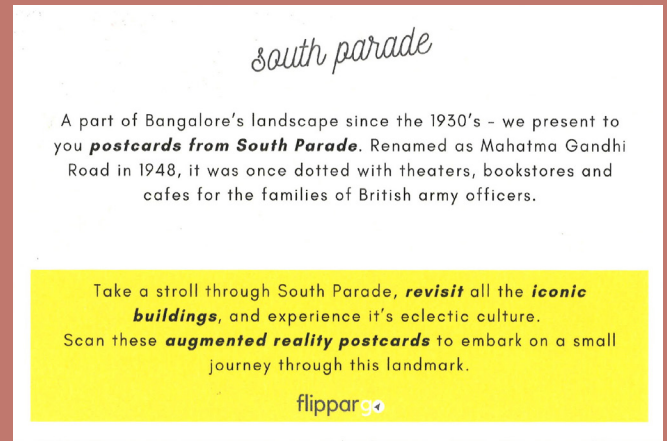
The buildings are AR enabled so that on scanning the buildings with the FlippAR GO app, the stories come alive on your screen.

iv) Creating AR postcards

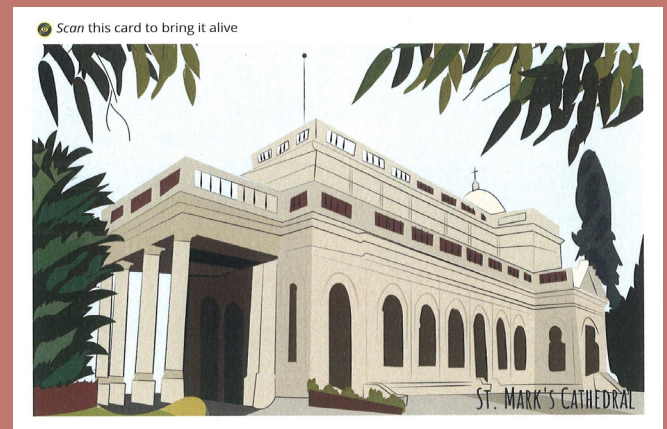
For the buildings of South Parade, Esha Raikar, illustrator and user-experience designer at FlippAR GO illustrated a set of AR postcards of heritage sites on the former South Parade. She researched the buildings, visited them, referred to photos from archives, and illustrated them in her style using Adobe Illustrator. AR made it possible for any artwork to come to life, in an experience that is educational, fun and interactive.

How do these AR postcards work?

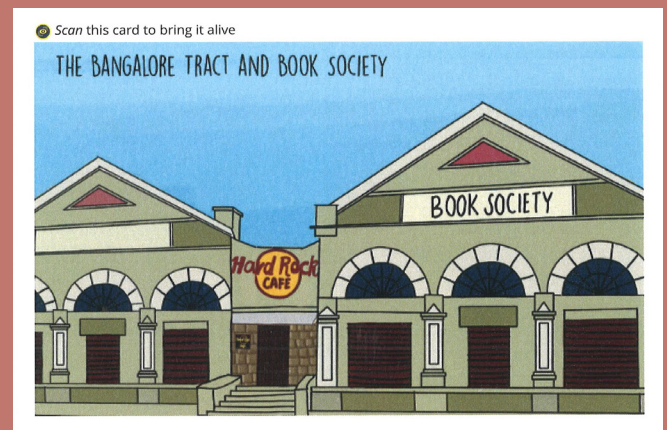
Scan the postcard using the FlippAR Go app that can be downloaded for free on Google Play Store and the App Store, and watch it come alive with the stories of that place. This way you can access these stories from anywhere around the world. Currently these postcards are being sold at bookstores, hostels, hotels and a few embassies.



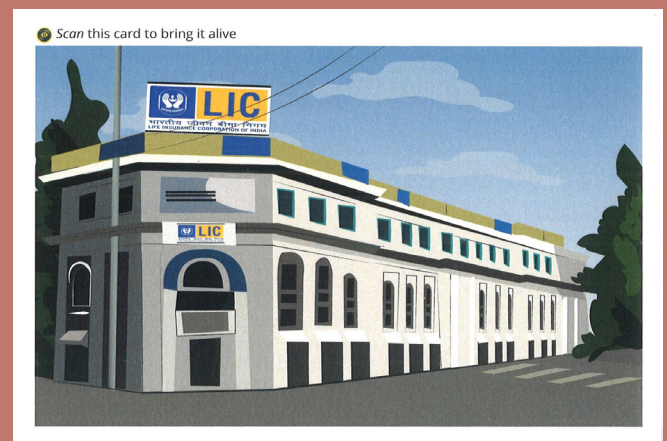
The cover card for the South Parade FlipArr card set



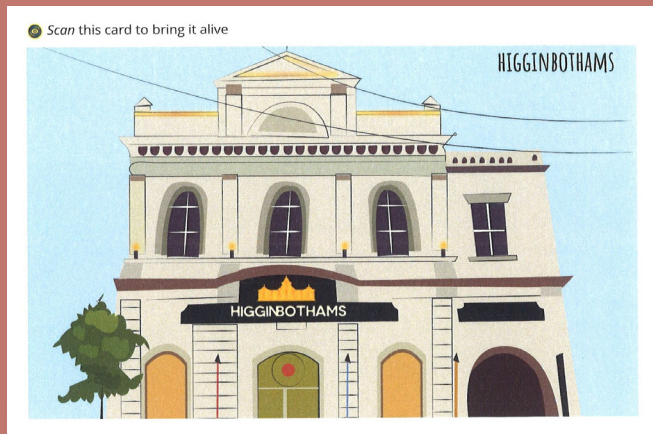
St. Mark's Cathedral



The Bengaluru Tract & Book Society



Oriental Building (LIC6)



Higginbothams

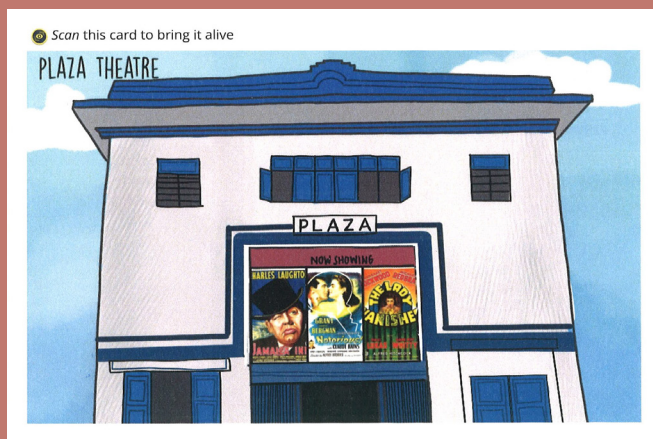
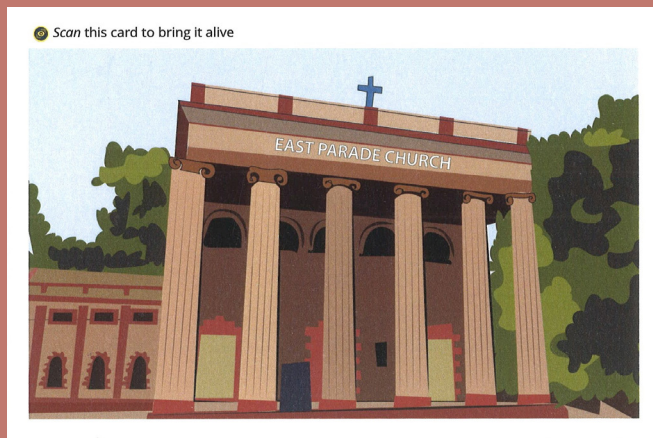
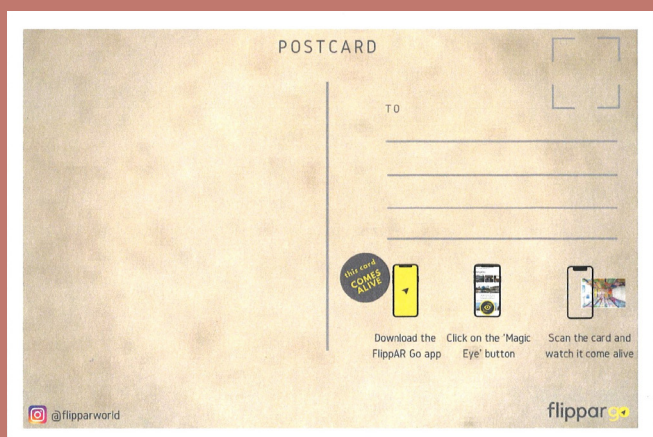


Figure 8. Plaza Theatre



East Parade Church



The back of the FlippAR card

How can you unlock MG Road's stories?

1. Download the FlippAR GO app for free on Google Play Store or App Store.
2. Look for the MG Road trail on the app, which lists all the curated buildings covered on MG Road and the shortest route to reach there. If the user is already at MG Road, the trail would show up on the top.
3. When in front of the building, scan the building to bring alive its stories.

Challenges to the FlippAR GO project

1. Varying light conditions have to be taken into consideration. The scanning of the buildings would be inconsistent at times.
2. Creating awareness about the South Parade Road project was a challenge. The creation of AR enabled postcards helped achieve the same.
3. Content generation and information verification were one of the most important steps. All the information had to be verified by an expert.

Impact of the South Parade Project

1. The project was very well received by citizens and government departments.
2. Both tourists and locals continue to unlock stories on a regular basis, using the FlippAR GO app.
3. The AR postcards have travelled across 30 countries and over 400 cities in India.
4. This project has helped a lot of youngsters experience and learn about South Parade.
5. With the positive feedback that followed the execution of this project, the FlippAR team went on to create stories for over 200 other places of interest.

Vivek Mahaveer is a Bengaluru-based tech entrepreneur who works with cities on Augmented Reality-based projects. He is the founder at FlippAR. Email: flipparworld@gmail.com

Esha Raikar is an illustrator, experience designer and a visual designer. She is currently pursuing her Masters in Design. Email: esha8r@gmail.com