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# saving

'it's not about preserving a monument, it's about preserving a sense of place and identity'

# history



Now, the Cash Pharmacy is gone! Lovers of old Bangalore and passionate guardians of heritage express dismay at the latest addition to the list of Bangalore's heritage casualties. Pragmatists feel that it was inevitable. After all, private owners of heritage properties must rightfully be allowed to benefit from their assets. Moreover, it was dilapidated anyway. Both points of view are valid. We need to preserve our history and respect the rights of private property owners.

Few global cities have grown as rapidly as Bangalore. And fewer still have grown with such a lack of aesthetic sensitivity. There is much more to shaping our cities than economic activity and infrastructure. We need to go beyond the functional view of any city and ask more meaningful questions about the true identity of, in this case, Bangalore. How do we go beyond the current transactional nature that gets reflected in our built environment? What about our unique social and cultural ethos, which seems to be getting submerged in a sea of structural glazing? Why is it that we are not preserving our heritage assets?

Part of the problem is that with increasing migration, most residents today are not even aware of the city's history or historical assets. Neither is the younger generation. So it is not just about preserving the occasional monument or building. It is

about preserving a sense of place and identity.

Unlike other cities, our heritage and traditions are neither splendidly displayed, nor are they promoted by our governments. In fact, most public heritage buildings and landscapes are surrounded by high walls screening them from public sight. I'm familiar with our heritage more through books like *City Beautiful* by T.P. Issar and websites of Ronnie Johnson, Aarambh and Bangalore Walks. I haven't visited Tippu's Fort since my school days. This is because an encounter with Bangalore's history is more an effort than a beautifully built-in part of the natural fabric of the city. If we are to meaningfully integrate old Bangalore with new, two critical aspects need to be in place: an enabling heritage framework, and an appropriate institutional design. We need a three-tier approach to heritage interventions: policy, planning, projects.

The state defines the policies, rules and regulations related to all heritage assets in the state, both public and private. It also defines innovative heritage tax benefits and incentives and the use of special instruments such as Transfer

of Development Rights (TDR).

Based on these policies, comprehensive heritage planning can identify heritage assets and integrate them with the master plan process. Heritage Protection Zones could restrict development in areas around historic monuments. Public heritage projects can be identified for conservation and promotion, and private owners can be compensated based on the heritage policy.

If the Cash Pharmacy building was included in the list of heritage assets, then imagine a scenario where the owner is compensated with TDRs for the area that can be built on his property and which he can later sell. As per TDR rules, the owner can also agree to set aside a portion of the funds from the sale of the TDR for the renovation and maintenance of the building.

But who leads the way? Who creates the standards? Who approves plans and manages the finances? Can there be a shared vision and commitment? Unless these answers are empowered through institutions, heritage interventions will be slow, laborious and anecdotal. While I marvel at the pillars of Pompeii or the buildings of Barcelona, I would like to celebrate heritage closer to home, Kempegowda's vision and Tippu Sultan's courage. It requires a collective belief that we have stories worth telling. Until such time, we will lament the loss of bits of our memory. ■

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