

Rituals and the participation of urban form: Informal and formal image making processes

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Abstract

Connerton (1989) emphasises that rituals may be viewed as collective symbolic texts, where ritual actions exemplify cultural values expressed in elaborate statements we call as myths. By studying the yearly *Karaga jatre (ritual)* in Bangalore, India ethnographically and spatially, the paper describes the ritual's relevance to urban form, its role in sustaining collective memory and attachment, while conveying the process of urban image making. The author through this paper hypothesis that the role urban form plays in the act of rituals contributes to an urban imagery that is embedded in various formal and informal socio-spatial processes and practises.

The Karaga ritual, as a visual and spatial narrative, acts as a powerful mnemonic for the city, where a rekindling of an affliction between its people, its urban form, and memory occurs. Over a period of eleven days annually, public and semi-public spaces within the historic core transforms to accommodate over twenty thousand people creating a powerful imagery that employs urban form and myths as central narratives. The presence of formal (the tactic of the ritual) and informal (people and urban form) narratives merges to create a palimpsest of storytelling within the organic form of the historic core in the city of Bangalore.

By expanding on the urban performance of the ritual and linking it to an urban imaginary of the megacity of Bangalore, this paper explores the transformation and making of urban public space, and the various tactics involved in creating this temporary urban spectacle.

Image making, urban form and memory

The real world and the storied world are not mutually exclusive; they intertwine, and are constitutive of each other (Jacobs, 1996). In history, fiction, lived experience, myth, or anecdote, stories tell of origins, explain causes, mark the boundaries of what is knowable, and aim to explore the territories beyond. As we remember, interpret, plan and dream through stories, they give form (real and imaginary) to the transience of experience (Potteiger & Purinton, 1998: 3). The synthesis of the real and the storied world leads to interesting observations and findings that shape collective memory and place-making, creating an ensemble of spatial narratives and imageries. Stories, myths, and rituals that people create and use becomes 'real' when encoded into urban space (Potteiger & Purinton, 1998) binding people to place. Everyday spaces of use, merges with a landscape of memory and history through narratives, place, and spatial movements (rituals), creating an urban imagery that is simultaneously formal (process) and informal (place).

The yearly ritual of the *Karaga jatre*¹ in the historic centre (*pettah*) of Bangalore contributes to a heterogeneous image of a city of nine million considered to be the 'Silicon Valley' of India. During this period, the image of a globalised city, compounded by high-tech industries and innovative clusters, merges with that of an idyllic village-like imagery, where age-old myths, histories and rituals, shapes culture, places, and people. The Karaga held in the pettah during the months of March or April for a period of ten to eleven days, is a ritual celebration dedicated to Draupadi the polyandrous wife of the five Pandava brothers from the Mahabharata². A ritual attributed to the community of the Thigalas, a social group, who were once a community of gardeners, were/are from the district of Arcot in the neighbouring state of Tamil Nadu in Southern India. Over a period of eleven days annually, public and semi-public spaces within the historic core transforms to accommodate over twenty thousand people creating a powerful imagery that employs urban form and myths as central narratives.

By studying the annual Karaga ritual in Bangalore as a dynamic, social, and temporal representation of the built form of the old city, the paper describes the meaning attributed to the urban form, its role in sustaining collective memory and attachment, while conveying the process of urban image making within a historic metropolis. By using qualitative mapping, go-along methods, participant observations, photography, and document analysis, the accommodation of various imaginaries and narratives within the pettah during the Karaga is studied. By embedding the morphology of the Karaga within the growth of the city, the visual and spatial ritual is analysed as a narrative experience that acts as a powerful mnemonic for the city, recollecting past urban forms, people, and their socio-spatial histories.

Expanding on the making and transformation of urban public space, and the various tactics involved in creating this temporary urban spectacle, the paper expands on the rekindling of an affiliation between body, memory, rituals and space. The ritual merges various narrative experiences to create a palimpsest of storytelling within the organic form of the pettah in the city of Bangalore. This blending together, the author postulates is a form of formal (the tactic of the ritual process) and informal (people) imageries where the urban form is a central actor in the ritualistic process.



Fig 1: (Left) The male priest dressed in a turmeric-colored sari carrying the Karaga, which is the symbol of the goddess's power. The huge floral arrangement balanced on the priest's head protects the Karaga, as he moves through the streets without touching the Karaga by hand. (Right) The celebration surrounding the procession as it moves through the pettah in the middle of the night. Source: Author & Aliyeh Rizvi.

The city, the historic pettah, myths, and growth

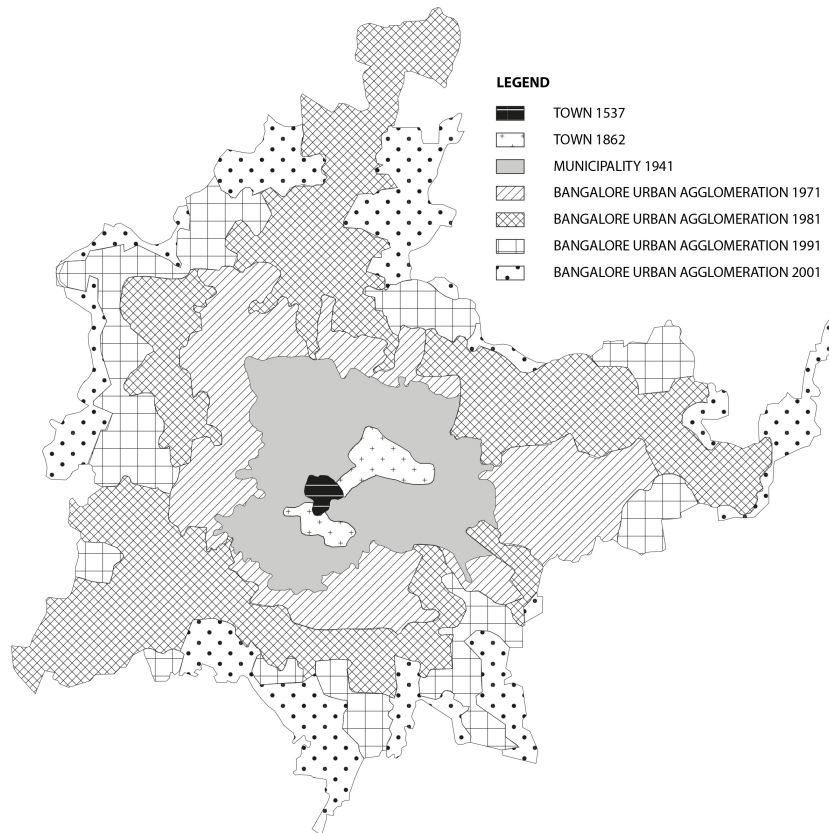
Bangalore, like many urban centres around the world is living under the umbrella of economic and cultural metamorphosis, which has also become analogous with modern India. Under the influence of constant and expeditious transformations the city has been forced (or rather chosen to) both re-image and re-imagine itself, which can be seen and experienced through the urban form of the city. The climate of economic growth of the twentieth century has reterritorialised the city, its form, its symbols and monuments, merging a global city with a provincial village.

Time Period	Political Regime	Economic Climate	Urban Model
Pre 1537	Various Kingdoms	Trade, agriculture	Organic developments
1537-1790	Kingdom	Regional trading, shop keeping, regional agricultural production	Organic developments
1790-1937	Colonialism	International market distribution, exploitation, segregation	Colonial
1947-1991	Post-Colonial Democracy	State lead import, substitution industrialization	Start of modernist planning
1991-present	Post-Colonial Democracy	Liberalisation of markets	Global city

Table 1: Various planning paradigms in the city of Bangalore and the division of the four zones. From Krishnamurthy (2012).

Akin to many cities within the Indian sub continent, Bangalore’s history of urbanisation can be characterised into four main economic, political and architectural paradigms as shown in Table 1 (Krishnamurthy, 2012). As with the founding of cities around the world, many myths surround the naming of the city of Bangalore and its inception. Stories are told and retold that trace the oral history of the city in the form of local myths, children’s stories and plays³. The founding of the historic city or the Pettah, where the paper concentrates is embroiled in the story of Kempe Gowda, a local military chieftain who in the sixteenth century decided to create an urban centre called ‘Bendakaluru’ or ‘Bengaluru’.

The size of the settlement and fort, was determined according to Hassan (1970), ‘one fine morning in 1537, four pairs of milk white bullocks stood harnessed to four decorated ploughs, and at the royal command off they went, driven by young men, furrowing the ground in the four



directions up to the limits marked’.⁴ The routes traversed by those four ploughs became the nucleus of the new town’s four main streets. The urban settlement consisted of a mud fort surrounded by organically developed residential and business quarters until the turn of the seventeenth century.

Figure 2 (above): Diagrammatic representation of the growth of an organic city from the sixteenth century, to a city of more than nine million in the twenty-first century. Source: Krishnamurthy (2012).

The organic city was subject to British rule (late nineteenth to mid twentieth century) followed by liberalization of the markets (late twentieth century) and is currently under the umbrella of an IT boom (last twenty five years). Within the Indian subcontinent, Bangalore is an example where the changes that the city has faced in terms of urban transformation can be traced with relative ease mainly due to the presence of the past in various distinct and distinguishable layers.



Figure 3: (left) The division of the organic city and the colonial city through park landscapes in the nineteenth and twentieth century; (centre and right) the form of the organic city today with a mix of architectural style from the twentieth century. Source: Author.

These urban models have left various 'permanent markers' in the city fabric that are monuments, histories, myths and rituals (see Krishnamurthy, 2012). These sites or markers from regimes of yesteryears play dichotomous roles as sites of memory and sites of urban transition, and are what Maurice Halbwachs (1992) has called 'frameworks' of collective memory. Halbwachs expands frameworks, as 'no memory is possible outside frameworks used by people living in society to determine and retrieve their recollections'. The paper identifies that the ritual of the Karaga, its myths, its movements, and monuments reignites the organic city (or the Pettah) while connecting the various urban models that the city experienced for the last five hundred years. And a stage on which the city can exhibit its amalgamated social and spatial identity.

Rituals, celebrations, and space

'A complete festival morphology will correspond to the complete festival cycle and several of its parts will form the configuration of each of the actual festive events' (Falassi, 1987: 6). As festivals are composed of smaller events held in a sequence that create the narrative of the celebrations, the cycle of a festival or ritual serves to express myths, histories of people and places, or can even be the recapitulation of an event. Connerton (1989: 44) identifies that 'rites are not merely expressive... but rites are expressive acts only by virtue of their conspicuous regularity. They are formalised acts, and tend to be stylised, stereotyped and repetitive'. Connerton further expands that rituals are symbolic representation of people and histories, quasi-textual representations that imply continuity, and are historical positions that illustrate context. Rituals and myths may be viewed as collective symbolic texts where one may go on to suggest that ritual actions should be interpreted as exemplifying the kind of cultural values that often also expressed in elaborate statements that we call myths showcased through various medium (in this case urban space).

Rituals, as cyclically recurrent social occasions take place in various ways; celebrations on specific days/ periods of the year, story telling, selective remembrance or the recapitulation of an event and certain forms of set behaviours that enacts the myth of the given place. They also serve to revive and express the memory of a myth associated with an event, person or place and could be said to be a formal recreation of collective memory or celebration of collective memory beyond a functional level (Kanekar, 1992). Almost all rituals of any length and complexity represent a passage from one position, constellation, or domain of structure to another. They may be said to possess 'temporal structure' and to be dominated by the notion of time (Turner, 1974). The process of recapitulation, adds the dimension of the passage of time, showcasing the idea of the past, and present, making the ritual the notion and the acts that links across time. Going by the definition that rituals are repetitive implies continuity with the past through action or narration. This sense of continuity, if held on to, helps with a group's image, collective memory, and identity (Connerton, 1989; Koster, 2003).

Though the practice of rituals has been the focus of study of anthropologists, ethnographers and sociologists for some time now (Lévi-Strauss 1963; Bourdieu 1977; Durkheim 1995), the influence and role of urban form on rituals is relatively young (Rossi, 1984; Connerton, 1989; Kanekar, 1989; Potteiger & Purinton, 199; Srinivas, 2004). Through the work of Rossi (1984) for example, the relationship between rituals and memory are linked through modes of actualization and of interpretation of time, culture and circumstances. Rituals merge the present and past traditions (the concept of time) within an urban context, Kevin Lynch expresses this succinctly when he says (1972: 143), 'look for social image of time which enlarges, celebrates, and vivifies the present, while increasing its significant connections with the past and especially with the future'.

The commemorative value of that space, monument, or urban environment is built upon and revived through the enactment of these rituals and festivals, and is an expression of cultural and social continuity. Aldo Rossi (1984: 131) constructs an interesting relationship between monuments and ritual, both being the 'permanent conserving element of myth' and thus being linked to the idea of retrieving the past through what he calls as 'permanences'. The essence of continuity and security that participants associate with rituals can be attributed to both the dynamicity and temporality dimensions, and the permanence of form, and monuments. By identifying rituals associated with urban space, cultural manifestations, place identities, attachments, and traditions can be observed and analysed. The paper identifies that while rituals are a combination of dynamicity, permanence and temporality, the role that urban space plays in this triad is central. The paper positions the role of urban space as a transformative element that accommodates culture, myths, and time during the act of the rituals and celebrations needs investigation and further analysis.

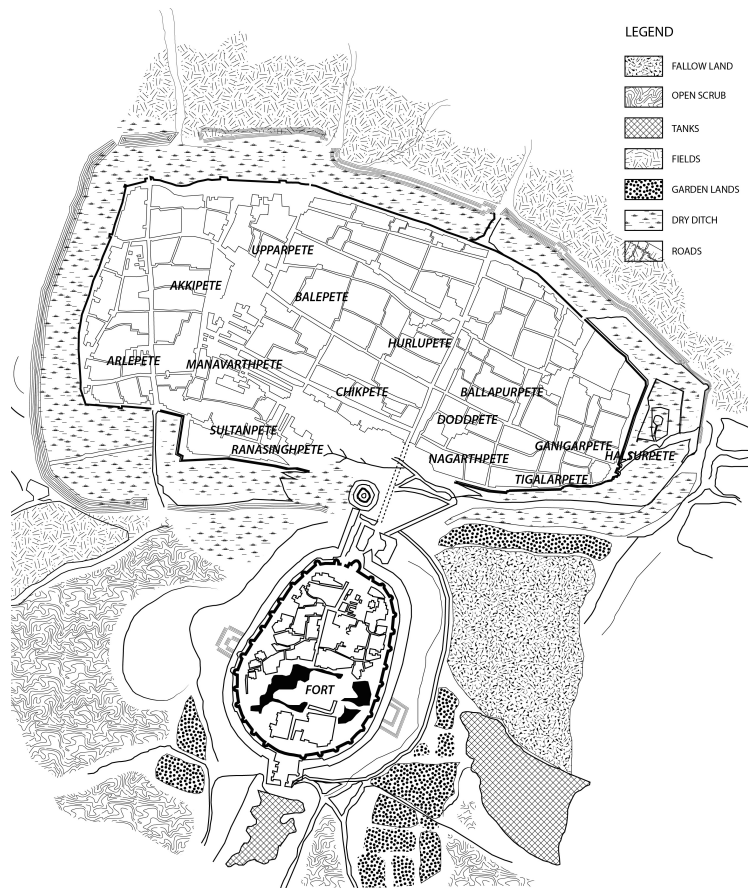
Pettah, religious institutions, and people

Religious institutions within the South Asian context play the role of the community's focal point as centres of religion, and institutions around which the public sphere was/ is shaped and communities were formed (Warner, 2000; Srinivas, 2001; Kaur, 2003). Though the relevance of these institutions are changing fast in a landscape of modernisation,

innovation, and technology, within certain areas in the city of Bangalore, more so in the older parts of the city (the Pettah area, for example) some institutions continue to hold on to strong traditions, attachments to form, rituals, festivals and associated practises.

Between the sixteenth and nineteenth century, the Pettah developed organically into the historic centre of the city. From a small urban settlement the area slowly developed into a city of commerce and trade (agricultural products followed by textile production), drawing traders and craftsmen, 'weaving castes (such as the Devangas and the Pattegaras) and independent trading castes dependent on textiles (the Komatigas, the Nagarits, and the Banajigas).

There were also horticulturists (the Tigalas), specialized dyers (the Niligas), oil producers (the Ganigas), and tanners (the Madigas)' (Srinivas, 2001). Characteristic of the organic city is the naming nomenclature of neighbourhoods based on economic activity (profession of residents), housing typologies linked to professions and craftsmen (see Rajagopal, 2008), and distribution of various social groups through religious affiliations (Hindu, Christian, Muslim). Historically identified by narrow winding streets housing distinct communities and business, these socio-spatial characteristics continue to define the character of the zone today. The common urban space wherein these various intuitions act upon and occupy, lends a unique characteristic to the pettah, which during the time of the Karaga are exaggerated and celebrated.



The Karaga, a festival of the Thigala community (Vanhikula Kshathriyas) as mentioned in the introduction, trace their arrival to the city before sixteenth century, were traditionally gardeners or horticulturalists by trade, who settled around the Pettah area (Srinivas, 2001; Rao, 1985). A community whose central deity is the Goddess of Draupadi, associated with energy or '*Shakti*', manifests itself through a priest within the community. The priest and Draupadi *shakti* become a conjoint unit and are both referred to as the 'Karaga' (Srinivas, 2001: xix), becoming central actors in the ritual. The ritual and the performance is embodied through stories associated with the tale of Mahabharata, mythic hero's called as the Virakumaras, or the 'hero-sons,' and stories of duels and hero's. The image of the pettah transforms during the months of March and April to accommodate an urban imagery that is mythic, and traditional, while reviving collective attachment, identity and memories.

Figure 4: Bangalore in the eighteenth century marking the areas of the Kempegowda Fort and the Old City or the Pettah. Also highlighted are the names of each quarter reflecting the types of business historically practised within particular zones. Source: Based on Survey of India Map 1791.

Morphology of the Karaga ritual, its movements, and imageries

Place identity and urban imagery are linked to local vocabularies of people, and culture creating landscapes of memory, history, and narration. In the case of the Pettah and the Karaga ritual, a complex web of relationships, story themes, sacrifices, and people, conjoin to make the imagery of the urban form and the ritual. Van Gennep (1982: 202) for example, divides rituals into three stages-the 'preliminal', 'liminal', and 'postliminal', where 'it is in liminality that one enters a ritual time and space that are betwixt and between those ordered by the categories of the past and future mundane social existence'. The 'preliminal' stage, which demarcates sacred space-time from mundane space-time of the Karaga begins before the start of the actual ritual with the training of the priest who carries the Karaga on the final day, and the various 'hero-sons' or Virakumaras who accompany the priest. Based on belief systems of the Hindu religion, stories from the Mahabharata, and myths associated with celibacy, and physical strengths, the members of the procession train for lengthy periods before the main event.⁵

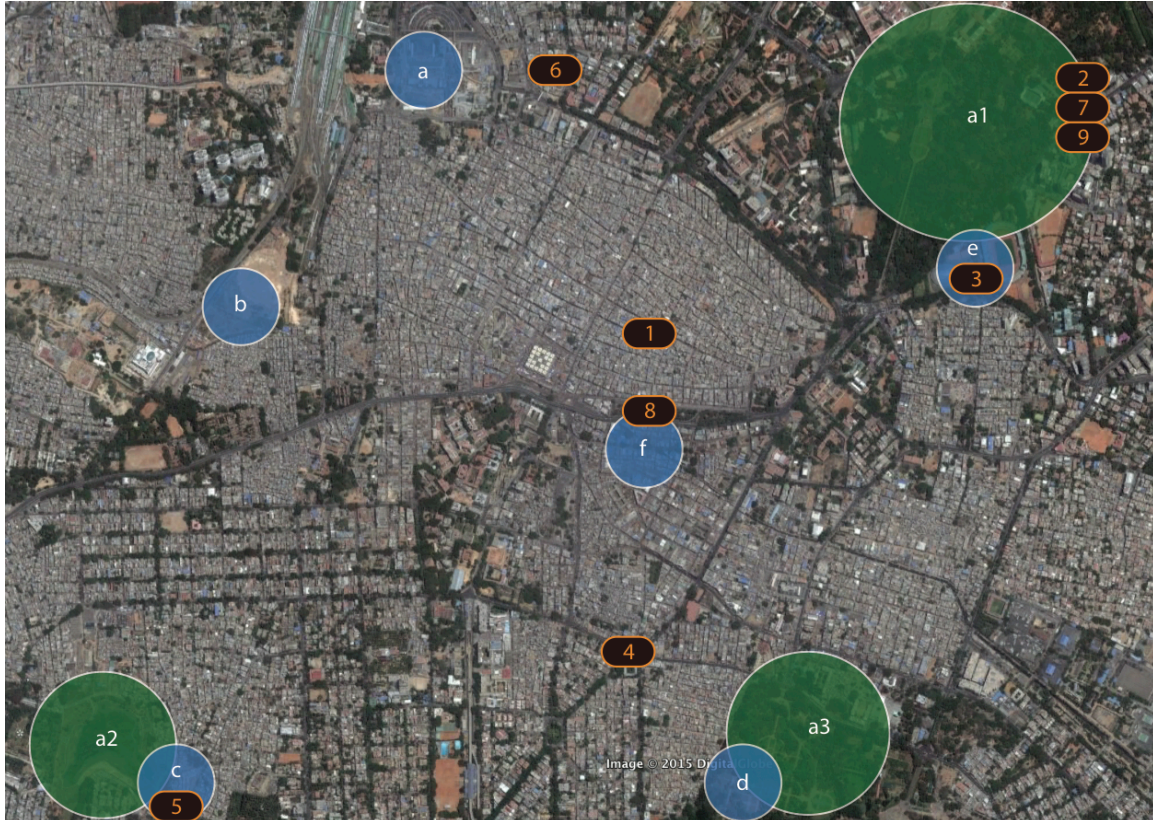
The 'preliminal' period can range from a few months to a year before the actual ritual of the Karaga takes place. Followed by the 'liminal' period that begins in the month of April or May with the raising of the ceremonial flag at the Dharmaraja Temple. The flag rising is succeeded by ten days of complex rituals that are central to the ritual process and forms the heart of the celebration. It is during this period that the form of the pettah and its environs merges with spiritual and religious narratives, reviving lost borders, institutions, extinct tanks (water-bodies), and history. The 'postlimial' period can be identified through the desacralization of the religious zones, lowering of the ceremonial flag, and the temporary erasure of urban memory and myths associated with the Karaga and the pettah.

Reviving an extinct landscape of tanks and gardens

The now extinct tanks (water bodies or small lakes) that surrounded pettah were connected to historic economic, social, recreational, and religious activities. To satisfy the needs of the burgeoning city from the 50's and 60's, various water bodies were reclaimed and converted for private and public use. Among, those lost are the water bodies of the Dharmambudi Tank that gave way to the bus depot, Sunnakal Tank into which the pettah area was drained, was sewage and market garden before turning into a residential area (Singh, 1964). The Sampangi Tank on the east of the Pettah was converted into a large sports facility. The physical loss of various water-bodies, which were a part of a larger, interlinked systems of lakes and tanks that existed in the city (Morrison, 1993, Mathur & Cunha, 2006) is revived during this period of ten to eleven days.

In each of the locations marked on the map (Figure 5), the gardens surrounding these now extinct lakes were tended to, and sometimes belonged to the community of Thiglas. In today's landscape, while the gardens and the water systems no longer exist, an ephemeral connection is made to the landscape of past activities and forms through the rituals that are part of the festival. The festival commences at the Dharmaraja Temple, on day one, moving to a now extinct tank Upnirinakunte in Cubbon Park (No. 2 in Figure 5) the next day. The Upnirinakunte is a sealed well that is visited multiple times during the ten days (second, seventh and ninth days). The festival is continued in other extinct tanks

namely Sampangi, Kempambudi, and Dharmambudi Tanks, where the rituals take place in nearby temple wells due to the absence of a water-body.



Legend

Karaga festival locations

1. Dharmaraja Temple
- 2./ 7./ 9. Upnirnakunte near Cubbon Park
3. Ganesha Temple opposite the Kanteerava Stadium
4. Munishwara Temple near Lalbagh
5. Jalakanteshwara Temple near Kempambudi Tank
6. Annamma Temple
8. Mariswamappa Monastery

Tanks/Lakes

- a. Dharmambudi Tank (Extinct)
- b. Lake converted to Binny Mills in 19th century
- c. Kempambudi Tank
- d. Lalbagh Tank
- e. Sampangi Tank (Extinct)
- f. Siddikatte Lake (Extinct)

Gardens

- a1. Cubbon Park
- a2. Bugle Rock
- a3. Lalbagh

Figure 5: Extinct and existing water bodies, various gardens that surround the pettah overlaid on today's urban fabric. Based on Google Earth Maps, 2015.

The commemorative value of the lakes (alive and extinct) around the pettah are linked to the progression of the festival through storytelling, and physically moving from one (extinct) water-body to another while performing rituals at each of the locations. In most cases, the

movement of people and function revives a past use and retains the collective memory of the people/ community and imaginary of the extinct or alive lake. Through the process of movement across the pettah and its environs, the urban form of the organic city is used as a stage to disconnect existing functions and forms, and rekindling a commemorative role for lost water bodies, stories and functions is initiated.

Metaphoric borders, secularism, and city axis's

Through the period of the celebration, the pettah, and its structures are analogous with a pilgrimage ground experienced through people, decorations, and the general air of festivity and worship. The final day of the festival (tenth day) draws the most crowds to witness the movement of the priest carrying the Karaga (the scared pot) across the pettah through the night stopping at various historic markers. The movement of the Karaga through the Pettah connects visitors and participants alike with the urbanisation extent of the historic Pettah through its original thoroughfares, gates of the fortification, and religious institutions. Slicing through various historical and religious periods, the Karaga marks a commemorative mnemonic to the past. The spectacle of performance on the final day transforms the city's prosaic built environment to a degree that it is unrecognisable for a night by recovering fragments of historic forms and functions.

The locus of the final performance remains at the Dharmaraja Temple with the priest carrying the Karaga leaving the temple surrounded by members of Virakumaras acting as protectors in the middle of the night. The cardinal directions dictate the path along which the Karaga moves from the Dharmaraja Temple towards the various other points along with the procession stops. The movement of the Karaga along the lanes of Chickpet Road and the Avenue Road (see Figure 6) corresponds to also the myths associated with the historic creation of the pettah area. The two roads have remained the central axis of movement of people and goods for centuries, and are the busiest streets of the pettah. Moving along Nagarhabet Road, the procession proceeds towards Kote Anjaneya Temple in the fort area (southerly direction). Today, engulfed by the informal markets what remains of the fort is only small fragment of the walls and one of the city gates (Delhi Gate). The temple Kote Anjaneya is identified as guarding the gates of the

settlement, and is housed at the entrance to the settlement. The procession moves north and turns westward towards the Hazrat Tawakkul Mastan Shrine (a Sufi shrine) that is a marker from the eighteenth century for the growing Muslim population during the time of Haider Ali and Tippu Sultan. The visit to the Annamma temple following the Sufi shrine can be analysed as an allegory for the temple's adjacency to the now extinct water body of the Dharmambudi tank. The procession reconvenes the connections between the role that water, religions, and history played in the development of the pettah. With the last stop at the gate towards the north (marked no. 5 in Figure 6), the procession makes its way back to the Dharmaraja Temple.

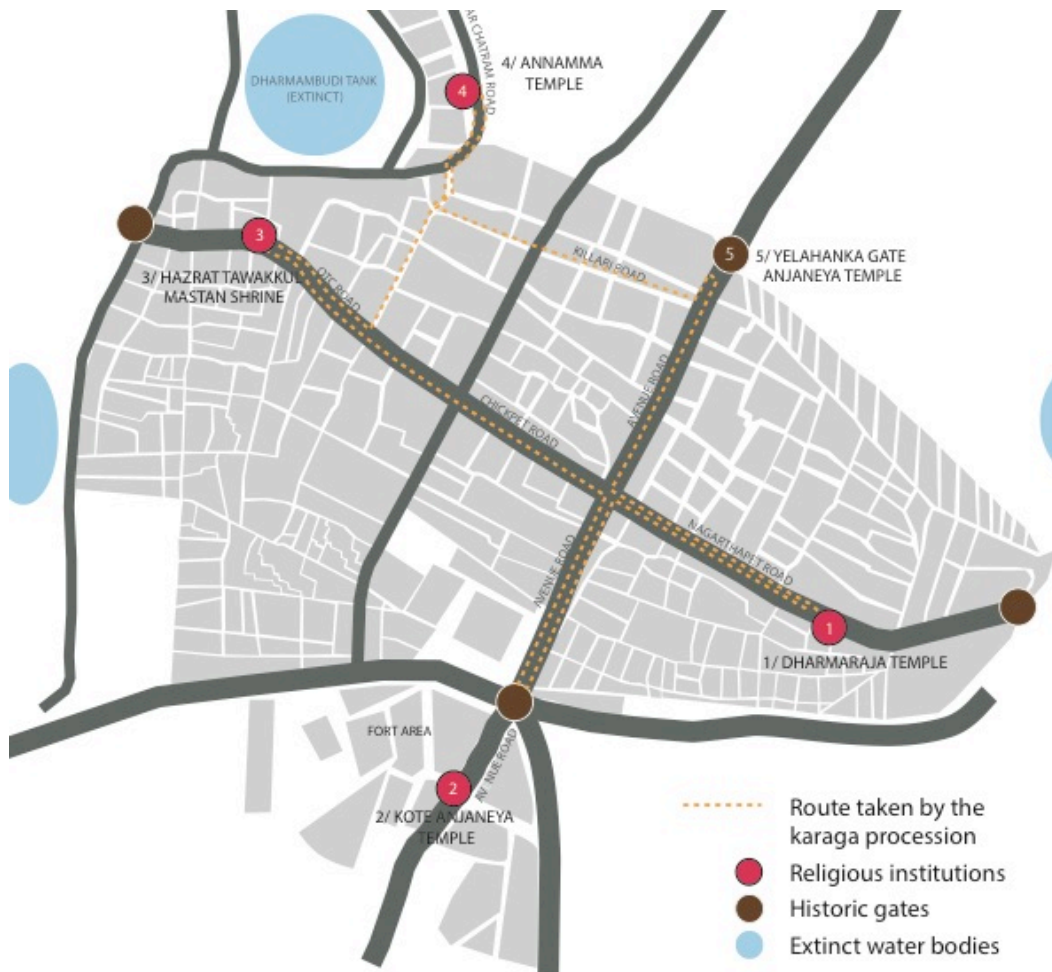


Figure 6: The movement of the Karaga procession on its final day through the fabric of the organic city showing the sites of importance, temples, extinct water bodies and historic gates. Source: Author.

The symmetry of movement of the procession between the organic city, the fort, its borders and gates, and various religions it houses, informs the imagery of the ritual that merges the formal (the tactic of the ritual process) and informal (people and urban form). The movement and agglomeration of over fifty thousand people within the pettah marks the performance as a powerful mnemonic for the city, its form and urban imagery. In the process of this performance a rekindling of an affliction between body, memory and architecture is initiated through the process of the ritual, where lost spaces are reignited, and myths recalled.

Formal and informal image making processes

There is a tendency to think of narrative primarily as a temporal art, and landscape as something visual, spatial, an unchanging background and therefore non-narrative (Potteiger & Purinton, 1998). Ricoeur (1991), points out that, narratives combine two dimensions, one a temporal sequence of events and the other a non-chronological configurations that organises narratives into spatial patterns. The associations and themes that intertwine within the Karaga performance with the city form, creates a powerful urban spectacle associated with historic patterns, people, and myths. Following what Bakhtin (1938: 84) expands as when 'space becomes charged and responsive to the movements of time, plot and history'.

Interpreting the Karaga as a palimpsest of urbanity and history, the ritual performance 'reactivates a (pre-) modern knowing of space within the specific conditions of modernity' (Jacobs 1996: 127), through place attachments, memory and identity. Narratives experiences connect processes (rituals), physical associations (religious institutions, squares and the street) with memory landscapes that are cross sections of history and myths. Making the pettah, a repository of history and memory through its urban space, architecture and institutions that have held onto traditions and commemorations for the last five centuries.



Figure 7: (1) The ritual flag hoisted at the temple of Dharmaraja Temple. (2) The locus of the karaga performance, Dharmaraja Temple (3) The Virakumaras performing at the procession. (4) The priest carrying the Karaga (from that point onwards called the Karaga) leaving the temple surrounded by members of Virakumaras. (5/ 6/ 7) The Karaga procession as it moves through the pettah surrounded by festivities and thousands of people. (8) Dawn breaks over the city on the final day of the ritual. Source: Author & Aliyeh Rizvi.

The revival of fragments of the historic city, its older axes and neighbourhoods, creates a unique narrative that provides access to spatial stories, acquisitions of power, and site histories. The act of the celebration that is recurring, collective, publicly exhibited, using the public environment to be enacted upon, reinforces the collective consciousness of the place and the people. Making the Karaga ritual an important aspect of the collective memory, the built form, and urban imaginaries of a global city.

The intertwining of the real and storied world, in the case of the Kargara, is a spectacle that transforms the urban landscape from a space of everyday use to a dynamic stage, where an alternate imagery of the city plays out.

Endnotes

¹ The Karaga jatre or the Karaga ritual refers to the annual ritual associated with the community of the Thiagal's in honor of Adishakti (the mother goddess who is Draupadi in this case). Through the ritual process, the priest and Draupadi shakti embodied through a water pot becomes one unit and is cumulatively referred to as the 'Karaga'. As the ritual is linked to the community of Thiagal's, the celebration is geographically dispersed across the region. This paper discusses the Karaga festival in the historic center of Bangalore.

² The tale of Mahabharata is one of the two major Sanskrit epics from ancient India. A tale of dynastic struggles for the throne of Hastinapura between the warring clans of the Kaurava's and the Pandava's.

³ The story goes that once a Hoysala king was travelling through the region after an unsuccessful hunt, hungry, lost and tired he came upon a house with an old lady. The old lady offered to him, the only item of food that she possessed- boiled beans; which in the regional language Kannada translates to 'benda kalu'. The king is said to have been extremely grateful to this old woman and there after named the region 'Bendakaluru' which in course of time became Bengaluru. Another talks of Benacha kalluru (Benachu is quartz stone found in plenty in the region), the stone lending its name to the city and region becoming Bengaluru. While other myths trace the presence of Benga trees found in 'Bengeuru' which lent its name to the place, Bengaluru!

⁴ The lore goes on to say that four gates were built in the four cardinal directions in the city of Bangalore. These towers still exist in the landscape of the city and are located in the middle of parks and are popular tourist destinations. The current locations are: North West: Near Mekhri Circle; North East: Near Ulsoor Lake; South East: Lalbagh Park; South West: Near Kempambudhi Lake.

⁵ As the community of the Thiagal's are geographically distributed across the region, the festival of the Karaga occurs in multiple places. Each of the processions though follow a similar pattern, the training period for the participants of the festival vary.

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