

Walking through the Culture of Basavanagudi, Bengaluru - Bridging the Tradition and Urbanism through Heritage Trails.

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Abstract: Bengaluru, often celebrated as India's technology capital, is also a city rich in cultural and architectural heritage. As the metropolis undergoes rapid urbanization, its historic neighborhoods offer opportunities to strike a balance between modern growth and cultural preservation. Among these, Basavanagudi stands out as a district where deep-rooted traditions and urban dynamism coexist in a uniquely vibrant urban fabric. This paper examines how heritage walks can serve as an inclusive strategy to reconnect communities with their cultural heritage, while promoting sustainable tourism and public engagement. Focusing on Basavanagudi, home to revered landmarks such as the Bull Temple and Dodda Ganapathi Temple, bustling traditional markets like Gandhi Bazaar, and the renowned VV Puram Food Street, the study investigates how curated pedestrian experiences can bridge historical narratives with contemporary urban life. Drawing on spatial mapping, ethnographic observations, and stakeholder interviews, the research identifies key elements of the neighborhood's intangible and tangible heritage and examines the potential of walkable cultural trails to enhance public space and promote economic inclusivity. Particular attention is given to how local traditions—spiritual, culinary, and communal—can be celebrated through interpretive design and community participation, ensuring the designed trails remain authentic and locally grounded. The paper concludes that such heritage-led regeneration offers a replicable model for growing cities, demonstrating how cultural continuity and urban inclusivity can be fostered through innovative placemaking and collaborative design approaches.

Keywords: Basavanagudi Culture, Cultural Trails, Inclusive Urbanism, Tangible and Intangible Heritage

1. Introduction

Bengaluru, the capital of Karnataka, India, is globally recognized as the “Silicon Valley of India” due to its thriving information technology and innovation-driven sectors (Census of India, 2011; McKinsey Global Institute, 2010). Yet beneath this façade of modernity, Bengaluru conceals a complex and layered urban history that spans the pre-colonial, colonial, and post-independence periods (Prakash, 2020). Founded by Kempegowda I in the 16th century, the city originated as a fortified settlement, subsequently shaped by the Vijayanagara Empire, the Wodeyars of Mysore, and the British colonial powers. Bengaluru's current urban fabric is shaped by this duality: gleaming tech parks and congested roadways stand juxtaposed with traditional markets, religious precincts, and heritage homes. This rapid, market-driven expansion has frequently marginalized cultural and historic precincts, with significant consequences for both tangible and intangible heritage assets (Benjamin, 2008; Jain, 2017). Urban development has prioritized economic imperatives and infrastructure growth, overlooking traditional neighborhoods and practices. Intangible heritage, such as festivals, vernacular food culture, and oral traditions, faces similar neglect due to gentrification and changing demographics (Jain, 2017).

2. Literature Review

Studying Heritage and Urbanism, the research emphasizes that urban heritage is not limited to just monuments (Bandarin & van Oers, 2012). Cities such as Ahmedabad and Jaipur have demonstrated that cultural walks can act as catalysts for economic revitalization, tourism, and local pride. The concept of “living heritage” emphasizes the importance of integrating intangible practices, such as rituals, food, and oral histories, alongside built forms (Ripp & Rodwell, 2015). Placemaking and Community Engagement is a participatory design process that foregrounds community needs and experiences in the (re)shaping of public spaces. Rather than imposing external narratives, effective placemaking emerges from the co-creation of space by diverse local actors, encouraging ‘ownership’ and sustainable stewardship (Project for Public Spaces, 2016).

3. Basavanagudi: A Living Archive

Basavanagudi, meaning "Bull Temple" in Kannada (Basava = Bull, Gudi = temple), is centred on the 16th-century Bull Temple, home to a significant monolithic Nandi statue. The neighbourhood's urban fabric is defined by its religious institutions, bustling markets like Gandhi Bazaar, local parks (such as Bugle Rock and Krishna Rao Park), and culinary hubs, including VV Puram Food Street. The area also features centuries-old homes, public tanks, educational institutions, grounds, lakes, and some parts retain their old charm amidst the rise of Apartments. Basavanagudi has historically been a centre for Kannada culture, festivals, and literary circles, reflecting a profound sense of rootedness.



Fig.1 Karanji Anjaneya Temple Circle

Table 1: Major Heritage links of Basavanagudi

Site	Significance	Key Traditions
Bull Temple (Dodda Basavanagudi)	Spiritual anchor, Kadalekai Parishe (Groundnut Fair during the month of November)	Processions, community rituals, and gatherings,
Dodda Ganapathi Temple	Iconic decoration of the Butter Ganapathi idol	Seasonal celebrations during Ganesh Chaturthi and very popular for the beginnings of Sandalwood movies
Gandhi Bazaar	Retail includes hawkers and high-end shopping showrooms, floricultural market, traditional eateries like Vidyarthi Bhavan.	Flower market, Local commerce
VV Puram Food Street	Culinary diversity, Exclusive dishes	Avarekai Mela, Street food
Karanji Anjaneya Temple	Hanuman worship, Ramayana carvings	Morning and evening rituals, Cultural programs during various festivals
Bugle Rock Park	Geological, recreational, cultural gatherings, Historical importance of rock formations	Walks, open-air events, recreational spaces

A unique spatial and social ecology has evolved in Basavanagudi, where temples, markets, and parks are interconnected settings for daily rituals, festivals, storytelling, and neighbourhood commerce.



Fig.2 Bull Temple and Dodda Ganapathi Temple

Basavanagudi presents an optimal testbed for heritage trail design due to its unique density of both tangible (temples, heritage homes, markets) and intangible heritage (rituals, festivals, community storytelling). It's celebrated as Kadlekai Parishe (Groundnut Fair) - an annual gathering that is centuries old, underscoring how cultural rituals structure spatial memory and social cohesion. Yet Basavanagudi, too, faces infrastructure bottlenecks, vehicular encroachment, and inadequate policy protection.

4. Methodology

This study employed a mixed-methods approach, incorporating field observations, oral history interviews, and participatory mapping workshops that involved residents, market vendors, and students. Key data points were categorized along the following urban heritage dimensions:

Table 2: Major Data Observations

Dimension	Observation	Design Implication
Cultural Density	High overlap of food, worship, commerce	Multiple, layered trail options
Community Ownership	Strong emotional ties to sites and rituals	Leverage participatory planning
Access Challenges	Poor walkability; traffic & encroachments	Integrate pedestrian infrastructure
Underrepresented Voices	Marginalized women, secular youth, performers	Employ inclusive storytelling tools
Temporal Rhythms	Ritual cycles shape place-use	Trails adapt to seasonal changes



Fig.3 Gandhi Bazar Main Road

4.1 Critical Analysis: Challenges and Design Opportunities

The spatial arrangement of the areas in Basavanagudi consists of older settlements that were not planned and have evolved over time. These spaces lack hierarchy and planning, unlike planned layouts. Hence, analysing the spaces and understanding the challenges faced, as well as the scope for designing, is very important.

4.1.1 Cultural Clustering & Tangible-Intangible Overlaps

Basavanagudi's most notable asset is the interweaving of temples, markets, food streets, and parks. However, this very overlap poses design challenges: heritage zones are fragmented, and infrastructural support (such as signage, sanitation, and rest areas) is inadequate. Trail networks must thus offer both modular routes (thematic “mini-trails” around food, worship, or parks) and holistic narratives.

This research employs a qualitative multi-method approach with respect to -

- Spatial Mapping: Site visits were conducted to record pathways, accessibility, and existing pedestrian infrastructure connecting heritage landmarks.
- Ethnographic Observations: Public behaviour, rituals, and market dynamics were observed at key times (e.g., festival and market days, evenings at Food Street).
- Stakeholder Interviews: Informal interviews were conducted with temple authorities, market vendors, local residents, and municipal planners to understand perceptions, aspirations, and constraints.
- Document Review: Local histories, planning documents, and tourism materials were analyzed to contextualize past interventions and urban development patterns.

4.1.2 Memory and Identity

Oral histories reveal that heritage trails are not just spatial but profoundly emotional; they activate personal rituals and collective memory (Jain, 2017; Tilden, 1957). For meaningful placemaking, design must foreground these neglected constituencies, aligning with Project for Public Spaces' call for equitable, bottom-up engagement.

4.1.3 Mobility and Infrastructure Gaps

Fieldwork confirmed the high potential for pedestrian-friendly, walkable trail experiences, but also highlighted weak infrastructure due to traffic congestion, vehicular encroachment onto sidewalks, and fragmented wayfinding (INTACH, 2014). Any successful heritage trail must therefore incorporate mobility planning with improved signage, resting “pockets,” accessible paths, and safe pedestrian zones.



Fig.4 Gandhi Bazar Fruit Market

4.1.4 Temporal and Sensory Heritage

Events like Kadlekai Parishe or street-food festivals transform Basavanagudi's spatial identity, suggesting that trails cannot be static; they must flexibly accommodate shifting rhythms, enabling seasonally curated experiences.



Table 3: Critical Analysis Summary

Theme	Findings	Implications for Trail Design
Cultural Clustering	Temples, markets, food, and parks are densely clustered	Modular, thematic trails needed
Memory & Identity	Deep ritual-emotional connection	Oral histories, folk memory as anchor
Inclusivity	Informal practices are often omitted	Emphasize marginalized voices
Mobility Gaps	Poor walkability infrastructure	Enhance paths, signage, and rest zones
Temporal Heritage	Time-bound events restructure space	Dynamic, seasonally adaptive trails

4.2 Heritage Trail Stops

Based on mapping and community input, a model heritage circuit is proposed below. Each stop combines interpretative tools that are digital and analogue for immersive engagement

Table 4: Heritage Trial Stops

Stop	Name & Theme	Interpretation Element
1	Karanji Anjaneya	Stone mural, soundscape installation
2	Bull Temple	AR overlay, QR-linked oral story

3	Dodda Ganapathi	Signage on rituals and iconography
4	Bugle Rock Park	Audio-narrated map, resting area
5	Gandhi Bazaar	Vendor stories, floral mosaics
6	VV Puram Food St.	Food flags, interactive map, app integration
7	National College	Plaques, mural wall curated by local students

Each node targets varying user groups like residents, students, pilgrims, and tourists, and invites participatory interpretation (Champion, 2015).

4.3 Technological Innovations

The inclusion of QR Code signage across all stops, linking to archival images, oral history videos, and AR mythological overlays. Community Trail Apps can include gamified challenges (“Find this idol”, “Taste this dish”), user uploaded stories, and real-time event notifications. Augmented Reality (AR) can be introduced for immersive historical reconstructions and folklore animations (Champion, 2015). Accessible Mapping to improve interactiveness, mobile-friendly trail maps cater to diverse ability groups.

5. Proposals and Discussions

Critically, the success of such heritage trails hinges on parameters that require collaboration with various stakeholders, institutions, and private/public authorities. Interdisciplinary Governance and close collaboration among municipal planners, heritage NGOs (e.g., INTACH), technologists, and local associations.

Equity and Inclusion are needed for proactive strategies to integrate gendered, secular, and informal sector narratives into trail content. Adaptive Placemaking for trails can be made to evolve with community input and urban pressures. (Landry, 2000; PPS, 2009)

Economic Opportunity is boosted by harnessing these corridors for cultural tourism, artisanal economies, and youth engagement.

5.1 Heritage Trail Map & Sequence proposed

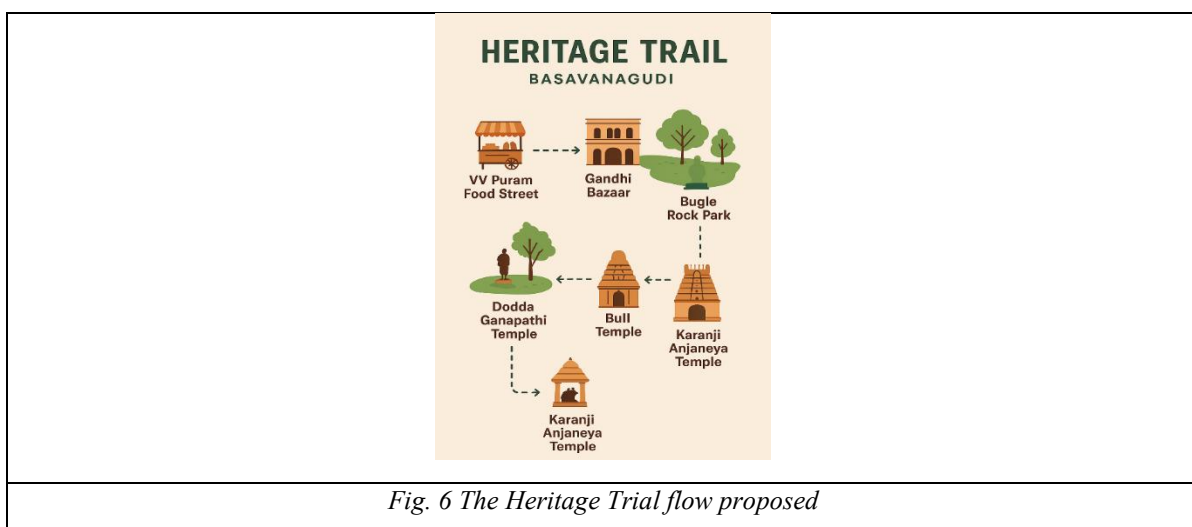


Fig. 6 The Heritage Trial flow proposed

5.2 Placemaking Areas and Design Approaches

The identified areas are diverse yet historically intertwined with one another. The public sector's visits to each place and the amount of time spent vary; thus, the placemaking and design approaches need to be viewed differently at every stop.

Table 5: Place Making and Design Approaches

Location	Current Challenges	Placemaking Intervention	Design Approach
VV Puram Food Street	Crowded, chaotic pedestrian flow	Widened pavements, night lighting, and food kiosks	Modular seating, night art lights
Gandhi Bazaar	Encroachment, vehicle traffic	Traffic calming, street furniture, and flower walls	Community mural, wayfinding boards
Bugle Rock Park	Idle edges, unclear entry	Defined entry, heritage signage, performance space	Storytelling installations
Bull Temple Precinct	Pilgrim flow conflicts, litter	Ritual route mapping, shaded sitting, interpretive displays	Eco-paving, traditional motifs
Karanji Anjaneya Temple	Low visibility, poor connectivity	Better signage, trail extension, storytelling nodes	Sculpture trail
All routes	Inconsistent signage, safety	Consistent maps, QR codes, and marked crosswalks	Tactile paving, interactive tech

6. Results

The design approach enhances connectivity through the mapped heritage trail, providing a coherent and walkable link between major cultural nodes, thereby improving visitor navigation and experience. Collaboration with local stakeholders increased their sense of ownership and awareness towards preservation. Trail-based footfall supports small vendors, eateries, and craftspeople, sustaining traditional economies. Interpretive signage, art, and programming along the trail enhance the visibility of intangible cultural practices.

Table 6: Analysis and Inference for Design Approach

Parameter	Before Trail	After Trail Implementation
Visitor Experience	Disconnected, rushed	Thematic, immersive
Local Business Revenue	Sporadic	Increased, diversified
Pedestrian Safety	Low	Improved
Cultural Awareness	Limited to devotees	Broader, inclusive
Environmental Footprint	Car-centric visits	Walkable, reduced congestion

Heritage trails in Basavanagudi offer a replicable urban intervention, simultaneously fostering cultural continuity, sustainable tourism, and economic inclusivity. By connecting iconic landmarks, everyday markets, and community spaces through user-centered placemaking, these trails bridge the past and present, nurturing



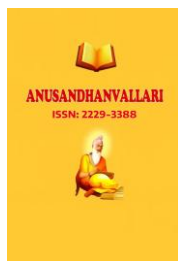
civic pride. Success hinges on collaborative design, community engagement, and sensitive adaptation of spatial infrastructure.

5. Conclusions

This research highlights the critical need to reimagine and reclaim Bengaluru's historic neighbourhoods, such as Basavanagudi, not as a museum of relics, but as vibrant, dynamic commons that blend memory, ritual, and innovation. Participatory, digitally augmented heritage trails can make cities more socially inclusive, culturally literate, and economically resilient, even as they confront the relentless pulse of modernization.

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Authors' background

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