



A CASE FOR PRESERVING OUR IDENTITY

- YKC Wadiyar





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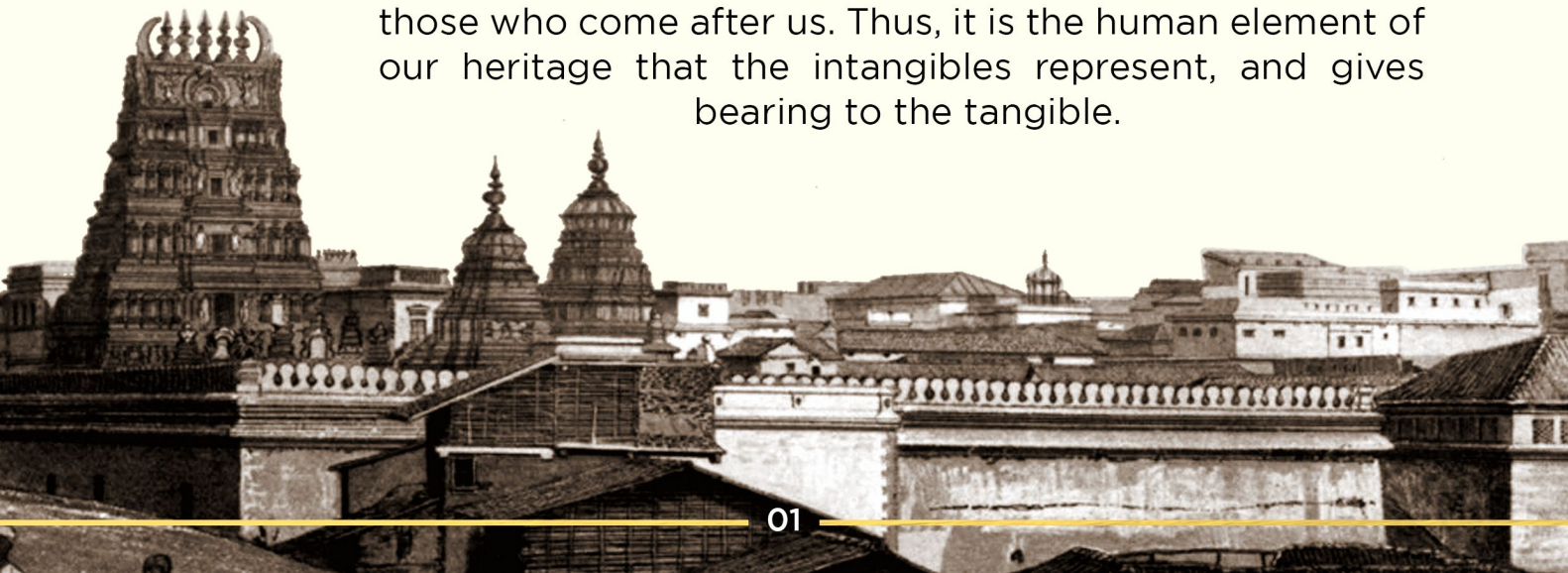
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The Heritage of a particular society refers to unique tangible and intangible cultural features including language, art, traditions and buildings of the past that continue to have a positive bearing in the present and that which ought to be preserved and bequeathed to the future generation.

Tangible heritage refers to archaeological, architectural and other objects that can be touched, felt and looked at and that which are significant to the society. We can also hear intangible cultural heritage through our age-old music, through the way the news-paper boy yells out, street by street, of the fact that he is indeed the purveyor of the 'Paper', we can smell it in our mother's cooking, a recipe which was passed on from time immemorial, and lastly, we can feel it within ourselves as a legacy inherited from our ancestors, governing the way we look, the texture of our skin, the colour of our hair, eyes etc.

The intangible heritage is inherent within the tangible and is the governing factor in adding the identity and characteristic to the tangible heritage. For example, our traditions are governed by our texts which contain the perceptions, aspirations, and ideals of our ancestors that have been poured into them. Therefore, when conducting these traditions we are essentially furthering the joint aspirations of all our ancestors and informing them with our narrative.

Even within the framework of our ancestors characteristics, we have a means to create our own unique persona that draws from them, and the environment around us, which we will pass on to those who come after us. Thus, it is the human element of our heritage that the intangibles represent, and gives bearing to the tangible.





The State of Karnataka has been bestowed with tremendous heritage created and gifted by the many kingdoms that have administered the state at various times in its history. The city of Mysore, which was the capital city of The Kingdom of Mysore, is perhaps the best representation of the culture, identity, and uniqueness of Karnataka.

The identity of our city is most apparent in our built heritage, from our temples, which are over a thousand years old, to the unique blend of architectural styles that emerged later on, found in The Palace itself, in our many administrative buildings, and educational institutions that can be uniquely identified as **'Mysore style of architecture.'**



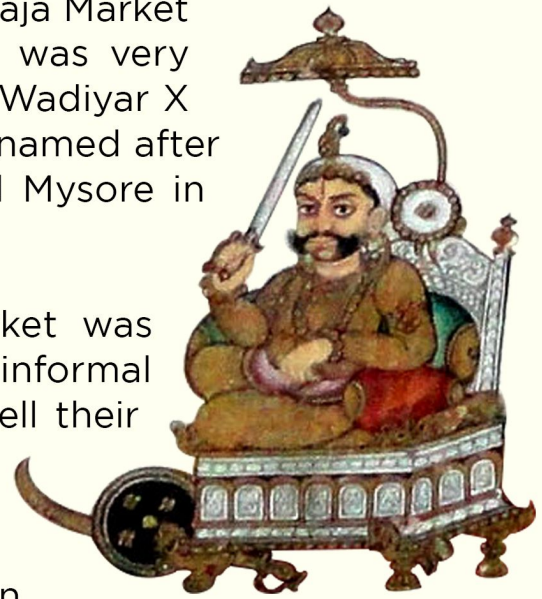
Mysore City Corporation Building

Of pertinence, to our musings presently, are two important buildings - The Devaraja Market, and the Lansdowne Bazaar, both of which have been earmarked for demolition by the Mysuru City Corporation (MCC). Both buildings are undoubtedly unique in their architectural heritage, and this has been discussed in detail elsewhere. I would like to engage the reader with the intangible elements associated with these two buildings, both of which are defining elements to the Mysorean identity.



The history as to when The Devaraja Market was created is unclear, but the Market was very much active at the time H.H. Chamaraja Wadiyar X built the Clock Tower (Chikka Gadiyara) named after then Viceroy, Lord Dufferin, who visited Mysore in 1886 C.E.

It is possible that a formal market was established in the place where an informal 'Santhe' of local traders assembled to sell their wares. However, it is extremely likely that the market was built by H.H. Chamaraja Wadiyar X, and this was perhaps named after his fourth son, Devaraja Wadiyar, who died very young in about 1892 CE.



Maharaja
Dodda Devaraja Wadiyar

It is also likely that it might have been so named to commemorate the contributions of Maharaja Dodda Devaraja Wadiyar (r. 1659-1673 CE), who constructed the Nandi (Great Bull) atop Chamundi Hill, and 1000 steps stairway to the top of the Chamundi Hills. It is very clear that the Market has always been the center of the city's trade and its proximity to the Palace has lent itself to being an integral part of the identity of Mysore.



The Grand Bazaar, Istanbul

Markets around the world have assumed tremendous importance to the city they are established in. The Grand Bazaar in Istanbul, Turkey, is one of the world's most visited tourist sites in addition to running as the center for trade, as it has for over 500 years.

London has several important landmark markets that contribute to the identity of various neighborhoods within London, such as the Borough Market, known for its eatables, organic fruits and vegetables, everything and anything to do with cooking, or the famous Portobello Market, which deals mostly with antiques, and assumes a festive fervor every weekend. Even Mumbai, with its infamous 'Chor' Bazaar, one of the largest flea markets, is quintessentially part of the city's identity. Devaraja Market is no less integral to Mysore.



Devaraja Market, 1890s

The market itself is built along Sayyaji Road which was earlier called the New Market Road. This was built over the failed Purnaiah Canal, which the then Diwan Purnaiah had built to bring Cauvery Water to Mysore.



Many goods, associated specifically with Mysore, such as the famous Mysore Mallige, Irangere Brinjal, Nanjangud Bananas, Mysore Pak, Mysore Peta etc. are found within the confines of the market. The traders who spend most of their waking hours within the market, have been associated with it for several generations and call the market their second home. They, more than anyone else, are the true custodians of the market.



On my visit to the Market on 12.2.2018, I was taken around by the tenants association and heard many a grievance against the powers that be, sorrowful stories of how simple shop keepers have had to endure constant threats of demolition, and fear of losing their ancestral means of supporting themselves.



There was a unanimous chorus of everyone wanting to save the market and a strong stand against the resolution to demolish the Market. One must only go to the Market to understand the plight of the traders there. Even the Mysoreans who visit the market every day to buy wares, groceries, and other goods, have tremendous attachment to the market and echo the same opinion. The Market carries the sentiment of Mysore, and is a window into the unique character of Mysore.



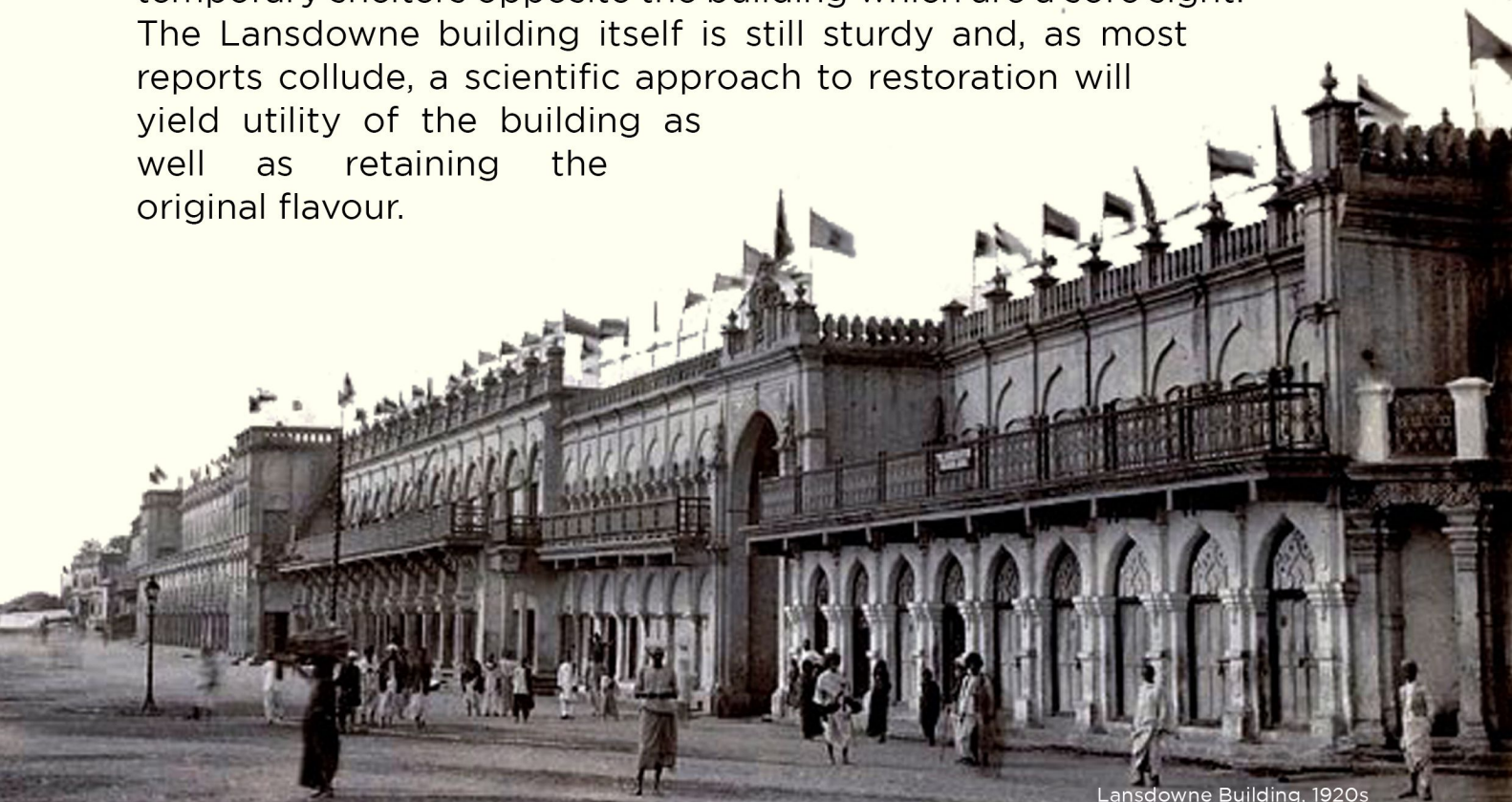
The Lansdowne Bazaar which is another example of tangible and intangible cultural heritage of the city is battling the same issue. The building was completed in 1892 C.E., and named after the Marquess of Lansdowne, in honour of his visit to Mysore in his capacity as the Viceroy of India.

Upon his visit to Mysore, the Viceroy had remarked that **“there is probably no State in India where ruler and ruled are on more satisfactory terms, or in which the great principle, upon which His Highness has insisted, that government should be for the happiness of the governed, receives a greater measure of practical recognition.”**



Maharaja Chamaraja Wadiyar X
with Marquess of Lansdowne

The Lansdowne Bazaar is testament to the Glory of Mysore and upon my visit to the building, right after my tour of Devaraja Market, it is apparent that this is one of the more exquisite buildings that we have in our State. The condition in which the MCC has kept the building in is indeed pathetic. Not only have they not completed the restoration works, they have forced the tenants to shift to temporary shelters opposite the building which are a sore sight. The Lansdowne building itself is still sturdy and, as most reports collude, a scientific approach to restoration will yield utility of the building as well as retaining the original flavour.



Lansdowne Building, 1920s



When both buildings have such an intrinsic place in the hearts of the citizens of Mysore, and possess a history comparable to Bazaars and Markets world over, and have the collective goodwill of its true Custodians to preserve them as is, it is disturbing that the powers that be continue to resist the many experts, conservationists, and heritage groups who are all of the same opinion that these heritage structures can be restored.

There is much controversy in the fight to restore these buildings. As early as 2005, the Mysore Grahakara Parishat (MGP) released a document stating that “the entire building is in a dilapidated state, primarily owing to inadequate engineering maintenance and lack of regular engineering inspection” and also stated that the building is Public Property and any demolition would amount to “Public Loss”. Several reports have been published since, all of which don’t recommend demolition, rather they prescribe “appropriate strengthening measures” (Report on Lansdowne submitted to Deputy Commissioner on 4th September, 2012) and the most recent report by Dr. Arun Menon, IIT Madras of 2016 which states that

“with a scientific approach to assessment and structural conservation, the existing infrastructure of the Devaraja Market and Lansdowne building can definitely be rehabilitated, and put back to its original function.”





It is therefore very disturbing that despite over 13 years of expert opinions, All stating that the buildings can be restored, the powers that be have done nothing in lieu of restoring the these buildings. The impact of proposed demolition of these two buildings would be tremendous - over 10,000 lives will be affected and their means of supporting themselves, which they have had from the time of their forefathers, will be wrenched away by the very powers they elected to safeguard them.



The resolution of MCC, to recommend demolition is an immense cause for concern. The very body that should be protecting our civic integrity is determined to see it destroyed. It is time the MCC works together with the interests of the Citizens of Mysore, to see that these two buildings are restored and entrusted to their true custodians.

