



A Typical Study of Bengaluru: Myth, Culture, and Tourism

*¹Dr. Ashwathamma K

¹HOD & Associate Professor, Department of Kannada, Al-Ameen Arts, Science and Commerce College, Bengaluru, Karnataka, India.

Abstract

This paper examines Bengaluru not merely as a modern metropolis but as a cultural text shaped by mythology, folklore, and religious heritage. By critically engaging with sites such as Basavanagudi, Gavi Gangadhareshwara, and Someshwara Temple, the study highlights how myths and legends are embedded in the city's identity and subsequently transformed under the pressures of urbanization and globalization. The paper argues that Bengaluru's tourist culture is sustained by the reinterpretation of mythological narratives into socio-economic practices that attract both local and global audiences. In doing so, the paper situates Bengaluru as a hybrid space where tradition and modernity coexist in a dynamic cultural economy.

Keywords: Mythology and Folklore, Cultural Tourism, Cultural Economy, Urbanization Globalization etc.

Introduction

Bengaluru, widely recognized today as the "Silicon Valley of India," embodies a paradoxical identity. While it is globally acknowledged as a technological hub, it simultaneously preserves centuries-old traditions rooted in folklore and mythology. The city's religious and cultural sites function as living archives of collective memory continuously reinterpreted to meet the demands of tourism and globalization. Kempegowda, the city's founder, represents this synthesis: his vision of urban development was intertwined with mythological and spiritual symbolism, thereby granting legitimacy to the nascent settlement.

Tourism studies (Macintosh, 2007; Goeldner, 2011) [5] have generally emphasized the economic dimensions of travel, yet in Bengaluru, cultural tourism extends beyond leisure. Visiting temples, participating in festivals, and engaging with myths serve not only devotional purposes but also function as forms of cultural negotiation between the sacred and the commercial. This study seeks to interrogate the historical, mythological, and socio-economic trajectories of Bengaluru's cultural landmarks, demonstrating how they embody both continuity and transformation.

Literature Review

Scholarly engagement with Bengaluru has often focused on its technological growth and urban expansion (Nair, 2005; Heitzman, 2004). However, fewer studies have examined its mythological and folkloric dimensions. Works by Dr. B.A. Vivek Rai (2000) [1] and Dr. Veeranna (2012) [2] have foregrounded folklore as a vital cultural resource in Karnataka's urban imagination. Dr. Ashwathamma (2010) [3] has specifically highlighted the interplay between Bengaluru's urban and rural spaces, underscoring the persistence of folk

traditions amidst urbanization.

In the field of tourism studies, Macintosh (2007) [5] and Goeldner (2011) argue that cultural tourism relies on the interplay of myth, ritual, and material culture to create attractions that appeal to both domestic and international audiences. This framework is particularly relevant in Bengaluru, where sites such as Basavanagudi and Gavi Gangadhareshwara are simultaneously devotional spaces and tourist destinations.

Thus, this study builds upon folkloric, urban, and tourism studies literature to situate Bengaluru's cultural landmarks as hybrid spaces of identity negotiation.

Methodology

The study employs a qualitative cultural analysis based on textual, historical, and folkloric sources. Primary data includes local legends, inscriptions, and temple histories, while secondary sources include scholarly works on folklore, urban history, and tourism. The analysis follows an interpretive approach, examining how myths and religious traditions are reinterpreted in the context of modern urbanization and tourism. By focusing on selected sites—Basavanagudi, Gavi Gangadhareshwara, and Someshwara Temple—the paper identifies recurring patterns in the transformation of cultural memory.

Historical and Mythological Roots of Bengaluru

The etymology of "Bengaluru" itself reflects the interplay of myth and history. Popular belief traces the name to "Bendakaluru," associated with stories of boiled beans offered to a hungry king, while other accounts emphasize the presence of sprawling banyan trees. Regardless of historical

accuracy, such legends establish Bengaluru as a place of hospitality and natural abundance.

Kempegowda I, the city's founder (1513–1569), stands as both a historical figure and a mythologized cultural hero. His establishment of lakes, temples, and forts symbolized not only administrative foresight but also a sacred vision of urban space. Many of Bengaluru's prominent temples, including Gavi Gangadhareshwara, are attributed to his patronage, situating the city within a sacred geography.

Basavanagudi: From Agrarian Ritual to Urban Festival

Basavanagudi exemplifies the transformation of folklore into an urban cultural economy. Once known as Sunkenahalli, the area was primarily agrarian, with groundnut cultivation as a staple activity. According to legend, Basava—the sacred bull—protected farmers from pestilence. The Kadlekai Parishe (Groundnut Festival) emerged from this belief, ritualizing agrarian anxieties into a form of religious devotion. Over time, the festival has become a site of urban spectacle, attracting thousands of devotees and tourists annually. What was once a localized agrarian ritual is now embedded within Bengaluru's tourist economy. Vendors, traders, and hotels capitalize on the influx of visitors, transforming devotion into commerce. From an analytical perspective, Basavanagudi represents how myth and ritual evolve into hybrid spaces where spirituality and economic exchange intersect.

Gavi Gangadhareshwara: Myth, Architecture, and Cosmic Spectacle

The Gavi Gangadhareshwara temple in Gavipura epitomizes the convergence of myth, natural landscape, and architectural ingenuity. Believed to date back to the Chola period but later patronized by Kempegowda, the cave temple is associated with the worship of Shiva and Durga. Its uniqueness lies in the solar phenomenon observed annually during Makar Sankranti, when the setting sun's rays pass through the temple's entrance and illuminate the Shiva lingam.

This spectacle has transformed the temple into a major tourist attraction, drawing both devotees and international visitors. The temple thus demonstrates how cosmic phenomena are ritualized and commodified within a cultural tourism framework. The blending of natural astronomy with devotional symbolism exemplifies how religious spaces are repurposed as cultural capital in the globalized city.

Someshwara Temple (Halasuru): Legend and Living Heritage

The Someshwara temple at Halasuru represents Bengaluru's enduring link between myth and civic identity. Associated with the sage Mandavya, who suffered wrongful punishment yet attained spiritual greatness, the temple embodies the cultural theme of suffering and redemption. Architecturally, the temple is significant for its Vijayanagara-style gopuras, intricate carvings, and the famous Darpana Mantapa, which attracts tourists and filmmakers alike.

The temple's annual chariot festival (Halasuru Theru) continues to draw massive crowds, reflecting the fusion of Tamil and Kannada traditions. Beyond its religious role, the temple illustrates how heritage sites function as spaces of cultural negotiation, where devotional practice, film culture, and tourism converge. Its survival and renovation amid rapid urban development signal the persistence of mythological memory in shaping urban identity.

Myth, Folklore, and the Making of Bengaluru's Identity

The legends associated with Bengaluru's temples reveal how

myths serve as cultural memory. Alexander's Law on mythology—that myths become integrated into religion and adapt to modern realities—applies directly to Bengaluru's case. The city's identity is shaped not only by its technological advancement but also by its mythological landscape. Pilgrimage, devotion, and local festivals continue to coexist with global conferences and IT parks, making Bengaluru a “city of multiple temporalities.”

Folklore in Bengaluru operates as both continuity and adaptation. Rituals such as the Groundnut Festival or Sankranti solar spectacle demonstrate how mythological narratives are constantly reinterpreted in light of changing social and economic conditions. This adaptability explains their survival and continued significance in the city's cultural imagination.

Tourism, Globalization, and Cultural Economy

Bengaluru's transformation into a global city has amplified the visibility of its cultural landmarks. Tourists are drawn not only to technological parks and modern infrastructure but also to sites of religious and mythological significance. The tourism industry packages these sites as part of “Heritage Bengaluru,” thereby commodifying spiritual traditions.

This commercialization raises critical questions. On one hand, tourism sustains cultural preservation by funding renovations and generating employment. On the other hand, it risks diluting the spiritual essence of rituals, reducing them to spectacles for consumption. The Groundnut Festival, once a farmers' thanksgiving ritual, is now a commercial fairground. Similarly, Gavi Gangadhareshwara's solar spectacle is mediated through media coverage and tourist infrastructure.

Thus, Bengaluru exemplifies the paradox of cultural tourism: while it ensures continuity, it simultaneously transforms devotion into performance, sacredness into market value.

Discussion

The analysis of Basavanagudi, Gavi Gangadhareshwara, and Someshwara Temple highlights a recurring theme: the transformation of myth into cultural capital. Bengaluru's urban identity is not merely a product of modern development but an ongoing negotiation between folklore, religion, and globalization. Myths serve as symbolic anchors that provide cultural legitimacy to the city, while tourism reinterprets these anchors as economic opportunities.

This dynamic reflects broader debates in cultural studies regarding the commodification of tradition (Hobsbawm & Ranger, 1983). In Bengaluru, traditions are neither static nor purely historical; they are actively reimagined in ways that allow them to coexist with the city's global aspirations. The city thus stands as a unique case of cultural hybridity, where folklore and high-tech modernity intersect.

Furthermore, these case studies reveal the dual nature of cultural continuity. On one hand, festivals and temple practices preserve collective memory, connecting communities to their agrarian past and mythological imagination. On the other hand, the same practices are recontextualized as economic ventures, reinforcing Bengaluru's place in global tourism circuits. This process results in a cultural hybridity where local traditions are continuously reshaped by global flows of capital and people.

By situating Bengaluru within this framework, the paper underscores the importance of reading urban culture through both its mythological foundations and its modern reinventions. Such an approach enriches our understanding of how cities maintain cultural depth while pursuing global

relevance.

Conclusion

Bengaluru's identity cannot be understood solely through the lens of technology or rapid urban growth. The city is equally defined by its cultural landmarks, religious traditions, and mythological narratives that continue to inform its symbolic landscape. Sites such as Basavanagudi, Gavi Gangadhareshwara, and Someshwara Temple illustrate the ways in which folklore and devotion are continually reinterpreted in the context of globalization and tourism. These sites are more than relics of the past—they are living cultural spaces that sustain collective memory while simultaneously adapting to modern demands.

The study demonstrates that Bengaluru's cultural economy is characterized by hybridity. Agrarian rituals evolve into urban festivals, cosmic phenomena become tourist spectacles, and ancient temples serve as both devotional centers and heritage attractions. This transformation reflects not only the resilience of folklore but also its capacity to generate new meanings in changing socio-economic contexts.

At the same time, the commodification of culture raises critical questions about authenticity, spirituality, and commercialization. While tourism fosters preservation and visibility, it also risks reducing sacred practices to consumable performances. Bengaluru thus embodies a paradox: it is a city where devotion and commerce intersect, where sacred traditions are simultaneously preserved and transformed.

Ultimately, Bengaluru's cultural narrative underscores the dynamic relationship between myth and modernity. The city thrives as a space of multiple temporalities, where folklore, technology, religion, and globalization coexist. This interplay ensures that Bengaluru remains not just a technological hub but also a vital cultural capital—anchored in its past, yet continuously reinventing itself for the future.

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