Isolated by elitism: Pitfalls of recent heritage conservation attempts in Chennai

On 4 April 2003, the then Tamil Nadu Chief Minister J Jayalalithaa informed the State Assembly that the "run-down" buildings on the 30-acre, 88-year old Queen Mary's College (QMC) on Marina beach in Chennai would be razed to make way for a brand new secretariat complex[1]. Earlier on in January the state government had inked a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) with the Malaysian Government's Construction Industry Development Board for several development projects in the state, including the proposal for an administrative city (including the secretariat) on the southern outskirts of Chennai. But when the initial feasibility study indicated a time span of fifteen years to realise this proposal, the Chief Minister settled in for an interim alternative to relocate the Secretariat Complex at the site of the Queen Mary's College.

This was not the first time that the state government had sought to relocate the Secretariat. Since the 1980s, it has expressed itself to be inadequately housed in the Fort St. George Complex, also located on Marina Beach, and has time and again looked for alternative sites and accommodation but nothing had come to fruition[2]. This time there seemed to be some urgency to the proposal coming at a juncture when Chennai was making all-out efforts to place itself on the network of global cities, with corresponding architecture projects endorsing its commitment to globalisation and high-technology development. The new Secretariat complex complete with 'state-of-the-art facilities' was meant to be an exemplar, reinforcing the transnational aspirations of the government. But such intentions proved to be far

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[1] 'Shifting Secretariat a farsighted move: Jayalalithaa' 2003, *The Hindu*[online], 05 April, n.p. [Accessed online on 22 March 2005].
[2] The Fort St. George Complex is under the direct purview of the Archaeological Survey of India (ASI) and is strictly regulated in terms of renovations and constructions that could be undertaken within the complex (no construction is allowed within 200m of the Fort). A 10-storey annexe building was built in 1975 but is in a dilapidated condition today with poor maintenance and insufficient offer of facilities.

from ground reality as the proposal provoked protests from a wide range of interest groups beyond anyone's imagination.

Within hours, an impromptu 'Save QMC' movement was launched and support snowballed quickly from various quarters including teacher's associations, women's groups, human rights, environment and heritage activists. All concerns ranging from women's education to environment and heritage protection came to a heady mix in this crisis where nine different public interest litigation (PILs) petitions were filed from different quarters including the Tamil Nadu Government Collegiate Teachers' Association and the Students Federation of India, the Citizen, Consumer and Civil Action Group (CAG), and the Indian National Trust for Art and Cultural Heritage (INTACH). They all expressed inter-related concerns as the former argued that the location prioritised and privileged women's education, the CAG petition claimed violation of a host of existing development laws, including the provisions of the Coastal Regulation Zone (CRZ)[3], the Town and Country Planning Act and the Constitution, while INTACH argued that the QMC complex was part of the 12 buildings on the Marina Beach stretch identified as a heritage precinct.

The controversy raged through the month of April expanding into the political circuit with various parties getting involved and attempting to arbitrage the crisis to their own advantage. The issue was finally sealed on 22 April 2003 when the Union Ministry of Environment and Forests imposed a blanket ban on demolition or reconstruction of archaeological or historical importance, heritage buildings and public use buildings on coastal stretches. While it was obvious that the intervention was mainly an act of one-upmanship between rival political parties (the ruling ADMK at the state level and the opposing DMK which happened to be a member of

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[3] With four categories of classification from CRZ-I to CRZ-IV to control the development of land within 500 metres of High Tide Line of the landward side, and many allowances for exceptions, the CRZ is ambiguously worded and has been least effective in controlling development, let alone fighting legal cases with. Yet it is constantly invoked in many Public Interest Litigations (PILs) to argue against proposed new developments such as the one at Marina Beach.

the coalition government at the Centre and whose MP TR Balu held the MEF portfolio), it did little to dampen the jubilant and celebratory spirit of the different activist groups in the city that had been involved in the crisis.

It seemed like a truly momentous occasion as interest groups representing different layers of cultural objectives had come together and collectively stalled an insensitive development move made by an autocratic state. The QMC catered to the educational needs of women and children from socio-economically under privileged groups, and is historically an edifice of women's emancipation[4]. For the heritage enthusiasts, the complex of 26 buildings is home to historic structures from the colonial era, seen as a crucial component of the celebrated "Madras skyline" worthy of preservation, and for environmental activists, the concern revolved around protecting the fragile, coastal environment threatened by a large footprint legislative complex. It was thus heartening to note that the response to the crisis revealed a tacit coming together of multiple sectoral groups ranging from the elites to the disadvantaged, each drawing on the resources of the other, and the general debate itself being able to comfortably accommodate their various different conceptual frameworks.

Such enthusiasm was unfortunately short-lived; with dust settling on the crisis the explicit show of support between the different actors failed to evolve into a long-standing and institutionalised 'politics of partnership' which could have been successfully developed to impress upon the state alternative sustainable development visions for the city. Instead, the students went back to their classrooms, opposing political parties disappeared from the 'crime scene', and the heritage and environment activists fell back to the comforts of their 'armchair activism' writing and whining mostly through the medium of English-speaking press about the lack of heritage consciousness in the city. This paper focuses its attention on this particular

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[4] Krishnakumar, A. 2003, 'The end of a women's college?', *Frontline* [online], **20(8),** n.p. [Accessed on 18 March 2005].

aspect of heritage activists. Given the elite nature of such participants, a display of superiority and isolationist tendencies doesn't come as a surprise. But the need for heritage to break the imposed class boundaries and go beyond the concerns of one particular class is paramount if heritage is to take on a comprehensive role and be an invaluable part of an alternative development blueprint for the city. It also means, on the part of the elite and middle class activists, acknowledging and incorporating the diverse range of class interests which will invariably clash and collide over competing ideologies and visions of use. It begins first by elaborating the historical circumstances under which heritage activism developed as an elite interest and remained confined to the same for most part of the postcolonial development era.

Heritage: a postcolonial impossibility

Dickenson (1994) explains that Third World urban concerns are heavily problem-oriented towards the present and the future, under the pressures of which the past is neglected with no time or place for the preservation of historic values. He believes that such protection hardly go beyond the recondite interests of urban historians, and even though a strong case for the significance of the past for the national identity can be made, he queries the value of the past in the "country of the future". Such an understanding was so firmly entrenched in planning approaches of most Third World cities that when the UNESCO Charter of 1975 argued for the conservation of the historic quarters or cities, counter arguments were effectively produced to the contrary: 'conservation takes a disproportionate amount of time, money and administrative and political negotiation….[and] very clear justification is necessary particularly in developing countries, where available resources are usually scarce' (Shankland 1975, p. 24 cited in Dickenson 1994, p. 23).

In addition to this classic development versus conservation debate, there is yet another good reason as to why heritage preservation, particularly in the urban

condition, failed to capture the state's attention in the years of post-independence governance. This had a lot to do with the equivocal nature of the postcolonial 'historic constructions' that ensued. Mitchell (2002) outlines the situation of such new nation-states who in order to prove that they were modern also needed to prove that they were ancient, and that 'deciding on a common past was critical to the process of making a particular mixture of people into a coherent nation' (p. 212). As a result of this process, any genuine invocation of heritage proved to be awkward and compromised. Moreover, for nations with colonial history and an explicit anti-colonial stance of nationalist historiography such a move instantly negates any attempt in this direction: how was one going to frame the colonial structures of the urban landscape that were clearly part of a past yet denied as 'tradition'?

But it hasn't been that easy to rid the urban landscape of the trappings of the colonial past, the refiguring of which with respect to the positioning of representations of the postcolonial nation-state has proved to be a double-side problematic (Alley 1997). In instances where the colonial material infrastructure posed a structural obstacle and restricted the ways in which landscapes could be modified and redefined in postcolonial India, the nationalist state projected the new nationalism to the people by repopulating adjacent public spaces with newer accounts of political history. For instance, in Chennai, while many of the government departments and institutions moved into the stretch of colonial buildings along the Marina, the public space across the road was used by the regional government for 'constructing' a Tamil identity. In 1968, on the occasion of the Second International Tamil Conference, the government erected statues of ten writers and scholars who contributed to Tamil language and literature (Pandian 2005). Thus, the national (or in this instance, the regional) self and the colonial other stood side-by-side in juxtaposition, with the latter languishing mostly in neglect, and the former attempting to successfully reproduce postcolonial spaces of power and symbolic authority in a manner similar to that of the colonialists.

Enlightened by history – elite pursuit of heritage

It is against this background that elite involvement in pursuing issues of heritage and preservation needs to be understood and explored. While colonialism left heritage concerns in the postcolonial context unresolved, and in many cases the colonial past was seen at best as a prelude to the present and at worst a harbinger of contemporary woes (Dickenson 1994), the indigenous elites and English-speaking middle classes viewed the urban domain as loaded with colonial meaning carried immense value in terms of housing the promises of modernity (Khilnani 1997). They had gained a lot materially from colonialism and therefore sought to encompass the materiality of colonial buildings and streetscape within the definitions of national heritage and hoping to assist in repositioning "the city" as part of a continuous history which reconnects pre- and post-colonial national narratives with the colonial experience (Coté 2002).

Alley (1997) explains that heritage activists and professional elites view heritage not merely from a perspective of political history but more importantly in terms of recognising the need to preserved symbolic structures, its aesthetic values and architectural principles, a position which stipulates that all architectural heritage are equally important and thus need to be retained and preserved. Non-governmental bodies like INTACH engaged in recovering an architectural past emphasised the need for a national narrative of architectural development without any bias or discontinuity. For the new middle classes who had acquired affluence as a result of successful national economic development, participation in heritage preservation issues was a public status marker as they sought an alternative to what appeared to be an increasingly aimless regime-driven development (Coté 2002). In addition, for these social groups, heritage preservation was a system of political protest wherein by expressing interest in a disappearing urban past they were simultaneously

expressing concern over the burgeoning pace of urban development and population growth (Jones and Varley 1994).

In this position, heritage supporters, professionals and activists adopted a position contrary to the state's gestures of a similar nature. In Chennai, when the Chief Minister announced that the new Secretariat would be an exquisite mix of the façade of the Vidhan Soudha in Bangalore and the modern interiors of the Vigyan Bhavan in New Delhi, heritage professionals were quick to react with criticism. Condemning it not only as a personalised, obsessive fantasy of the powerful, they also slammed it for its inauthenticity. If the state intended that the mixture of 'modern' interior and 'traditional' exterior would be the new global, transnationalised imagery of the cityscape, professionals criticised the incongruity of such a proposition. They emphasised the inappropriateness of a 'neo-classical' building amidst a series of Indo-Saracenic buildings dotting the Marina, criticising the pastiche that was offered as 'traditional architecture', one where the skin of the past was used to allow the present in its pursuit of the future[5]. Sorkin (2000) warns against such superficial concessions when he cautions that space-making could get caught in a matrix of simulation, and '[a]s culture is increasingly globalized and the architectural forms of authenticity become even more easy to manipulate and reproduce, we risk a condition of general architectural mendacity' (p. 61). The validity of such arguments notwithstanding, the efforts of elites and middle classes in stimulating historic preservation measures hasn't been free of criticisms and scepticisms, primarily revolving around their selection bias, of what constitutes heritage and what is worthy of being preserved.

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[5] Ahmed, F. 2003, 'Teachers, architects flay plan to demolish QMC building', *The Hindu* [online], 26 March. See also Srivathsan, A 2003, 'Art for the power hungry', *The Hindu* [online], 27 April [Accessed on 24 November 2006].
'Shifting Secretariat a farsighted move: Jayalalithaa' 2003, *The Hindu*[online], 05 April, n.p. [Accessed online on 22 March 2005].

All that glitters….: limitations of elite interest in heritage 1

Surrounding the appropriateness of heritage conservation in the Third World is the looming suspicion that this is yet another of those First World indulgences and fetishisms that have been imposed onto the Third World as a dominant capitalist paradigm by its highly westernised elite (AlSayyad 2001). At a more specific level are several concerns – first and foremost is the issue of whether heritage is merely a tool for promoting elite self-interest defined narrowly by their sense of aesthetics. Often there is an overriding emphasis on the aesthetic and visual aspects of heritage which is not sufficient to address larger environmental and development pressures[6]. As Bhattacherjee (2004) quipped, nothing that is without shine can become heritage, and the 'choices of the most lowly stakeholders – whose houses were built of wood or thatch rather than stone – are muted or silent, and those whose lives were blighted by massacre, torture and discrimination are also less remembered' (Harrison 2005, pp. 7-8). A good illustration of this can be seen in the response of heritage activists to yet another crisis over the transformation of Marina Beach in Chennai.

A few months before the eruption of the April 2003 QMC crisis, as a part of the state government's MoU with the Malaysian Government, a proposal for a 1.5 km stretch of the beach was presented outlining the development of multi-storeyed complexes of international standards providing office administration for multinationals and embassies. The plan required modifications to the existing Development Controls Regulations (DCR) which protected the existing 'skyline' of Marina and prohibited 'tall' structures, and also openly acknowledged that the fishermen settlements or *kuppams* dotting this stretch of the beach would have to be relocated elsewhere. Environmental activists were quick to jump into the fray in support of the fisherfolk arguing that in a context where the livelihood of 'artisanal

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[6] INTACH does repudiate such criticisms insisting that heritage initiatives in India recognizes larger issues and adopts a comprehensive framework in its approach. See for instance the collection of articles published in *Seminar* on Conservation (October 2004, issue 542).

fishermen' were already threatened by larger 'developmentalist' interventions such as mechanisation and industrialisation of fishing activities, combined with the general effects of pollution and climate change, the proposed redevelopment of the Marina and the relocation of the fishing communities would worsen their already depleted livelihood opportunities[7].

Interestingly enough, heritage activists participating in this debate expressed concern over the proposed changes to the DCR and the impact that multi-storeyed buildings could have on the unique heritage character of this historically significant stretch but not more. Preoccupied with protecting the monuments of stone, not for once did they acknowledge the heritage value of the fishermen huts dotting the Marina and whose presence as a community along the seashore predates the colonial structures. In fact, despite their historic association with this seashore, the hutment clusters have been time and again portrayed as 'slums' defacing the beach, making it less attractive for the visitors and tourists[8]. It is obvious that the heritage vision of the elites runs the risk of pursuing a kind of monumentalism that emphasises a few significant structures but tends to ignore broader concepts of cultural townscape. If conservation projects are to adequately register the "urban memory" of heritage sites, they must first involve the construction of a social history beyond a history of dominant colonial and indigenous power structures, not simply putting "the native in the picture", but more generally recognising a broader everyday urban culture, one where conservation projects will be embedded in a yet-to-be-written people's history (Coté 2002). Yet even when there is a gesture to recognise the vernacular traditions, it is undertaken only with intentions of promoting its active consumption to the abetment of which tradition is disassembled and rearranged in order to recreate a marketable semblance of "authenticity". Thus, in this regard, the so-called heritage site of "Dakshinachitra" in Chennai can only be described as an "interpretative"

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[7] Prominent amongst the supporters was Medha Patkar of the National Alliance of Peoples Movements, an environmental activist of repute who has for many years rallied against the Narmada Valley Dam project in India.
[8] See for instance Vydhianathan, S. 1996, 'Squalor on the shore', *The Hindu*, 16 September, M1.

heritage centre refit with new "symbolic economies" (Robinson 2001) in what Gregory's (2001) would term as 'a space of constructed visibility' within which "tradition" is seen in particular, partial, and highly powerful ways, some illuminated, recuperated and privileged, and others dimmed, marginalised or erased[9].

More importantly, in reference to the preference for the built form of the urban landscape, Jones and Varley (1994) note that it is integral to the symbolisation of the elite culture, a particular configuration of power relations. The most flamboyant architecture that is chosen for preservation is often the one that demonstrates the most the symbol of power and planning in the city with renovation programmes implying the conservation of an idea or idealised image of the past as well as the architectural artefact that is then used to recreate an ideal image in order to symbolically "recapture" the city. By employing discourses revolving on pride and dignity in the built environment, the middle and upper classes developed heritage preservation as 'a tensile apparatus of power, knowledge and geography (Gregory 2001, p. 115). Elite invocation of identities and symbols thus aid and enhance the proliferation of existing social inequalities and class polarities.

Don't cast pearls….: limitations of elite interest in heritage 2

The marketing of heritage symbols and the conferring of historic status involves a system of selectivity which promotes certain value systems over others and can result in the "disinheritance" of non-participatory, marginalised groups (Robinson 2001). This is mainly constructed by exuding a sense of respectability, wherein heritage debates are used successfully to pit the cultured, respected self of the middle and

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[9] See Hancock's (2002) critique of this project. She sees it as one tied to consumerism and elite perceptions of regional and national heritage, an aspect also noted by the UN-Habitat (2004) study when it mentions that the language used at Dakshinachitra is predominantly English, and 'the programme of the crafts complex as a whole is directed toward a cosmopolitan rather than a local audience' (p. 42).

upper classes against the uncivilised and dangerous 'others' of the lower classes. Spaces that could be potentially contested are appropriated through a discourse and a variety of practices that range from a class-conscious passion for the arts to performative stagings of heritage (Guano 2003).

Addressing this tendency of middle and upper class heritage activists invoking a superior understanding of history and heritage is important in the context of Chennai as heritage activists attend their concerns to historic quarters like George Town in the northern part of the city spatially claimed for their heritage value yet at the same time are 'home' to the poorer sections of the society. This claim needs to be located within a larger turn of events affecting the development pattern of the city as a result of which a socio-physical fault line is emerging simultaneously dividing and connecting two different realms of the city, the geographic north and south. Both in different ways are being subject to an overwhelming bourgeois imaginary, a distinction that has been, oddly enough, cemented strongly since the anachronistic debate surrounding the historical authenticity of the city's name, when in 1996, Madras was officially renamed as Chennai. In a dyadic simultaneous existence, Chennai and Madras exemplify the tale of two cities, where the newly developing, globalising 'South' Chennai exhibits an elegant and ordered bourgeois landscape, replete with flyovers and expressways, high-rise buildings, and cleaned-up public spaces, while an economically stagnant, 'North' Madras portrays filth and decay, and is condemned as a 'slum' with poor infrastructure. Given this contrast, heritage activists are focussing on the colonial fabric of 'North' Madras whereby the now languishing historic district could be reinvigorated as 'vintage' Madras through their efforts.

Laudable as such efforts can be there is equally room for concern in this potential resurrection. Even if one acknowledges that heritage conservation has come a long way from its earlier promotion of a much criticised manicured reconstruction of the past, (Baig 2004), making genuine attempts to step away from

'museumisation' strategies, current practices still leave plenty of questions unanswered. Much caution needs to be exercised if heritage activists are to undertake efforts at restoring old historic quarters like George Town, celebrated by heritage connoisseurs as 'the first "planned" native settlement of British Madras' complete with buildings reminiscent of a colonial architecture (Kalpana and Schiffer 2003). Today, almost universally in every developing city, historic quarters are receptacles of the poorer and less privileged sections of the society, who under economic and social pressures have transformed the urban fabric of these areas, with such changes rarely meeting the standards of approval of heritage activists and promoters.

As heritage activists step into such districts with proposals for revitalisation projects, they need to do so with the mindset that the opportunity here is not merely for the preservation of a few buildings of architectural merit but of an entire social, cultural and economic landscape and all the activities traditionally and regularly associated with it. The challenge that confronts the effort of heritage conservationists is their ability to reconcile and establish a productive symbiosis between the historic architecture that they seek to preserve and the everyday practices of the social classes that inhabit them, the ecology of the living, particularly when the latter is seen as the cause of ruin or neglect of the former. This pressing contentious issue of heritage or historic apathy is well illustrated by Kaviraj (1997) when he observes that while the poor 'find it difficult to participate in these highly emotive struggles over the past', the middle classes 'would not have shared the poor classes' indifference or inability to appreciate the idea of the civic' (p. 109).

The fact is that the structures in George Town have been continuously updated through the post-independence decades through extensions, renovations and demolitions to meet the changing functional needs of its inhabitants using and producing an aesthetic vocabulary completely different from the ones prescribed by the heritage preservationists. But as Holston (1991) has emphasised, working-class taste cannot be reduced to the rack of functional necessity where it has no aesthetic

distinction, but indeed is driven by a visual calculus of appearances, albeit one that is constructed differently from that of the 'distinctive' tastes of the elites and middle classes. But what heritage activists tend to do is disparage such aesthetics as kitsch, vulgar, and demeaning to the significance of the historic fabric, failing to acknowledge the fact that aesthetics is conceived of and experienced differently according to how it is placed within the various kinds of interpretations that people bring to it. Instead of capturing the multiplicity of meanings implicitly present in such spaces, preservation becomes a means of imposing just one meaning congruent with an ideologically defined image of the past, implying the destruction of present ways of life.

Informality in heritage: reconciling elite-mass conflicts

Ignoring the fact that places are born of practice as well as discourse, preservationists exhibit a tendency to join the general bourgeois brigade condemning the presence of informal traders and street hawkers as encroachments and calling for their removal from the public spaces. Historic preservation in this context becomes a special supplement of value that pathologises such quotidian stewardships and is presented as an antidote to the popular practices dominating these spaces. Commenting on the various informal bazaars lining the Victorian arcades in the Fort Area of Bombay Mehrotra (2000) mentions that if the chaotic marketplace of shops, stalls and hawkers are considered as a symbolic metaphor for the physical deterioration of the Indian city, for the elites and conservationists the Victorian core has acquired an even greater meaning as a crucial symbol of the city's fast-deteriorating historic image.

Consequently hawking is deemed illegal by city authorities who constantly attempt to relocate the bazaars. Such decrees fail to acknowledge that many worlds can inhabit the same space, relating to it and using it in different ways, for doing so

would imply that we must accommodate and overlap varying uses, perceptions, and physical forms. A rehabilitated urban fabric instead subtracts the informal trading spaces out of the equation removing their livelihood opportunities, and turning these spaces over to institutions and groups who are considered worthy of the structures and their history. The Fort Area in Bombay which is the largest conservation area with a third of conservation-worthy buildings in the city has become the hub of financial institutions and multinational banks who prefer to be located in a historic environment, often providing financial banking for the restoration processes. Overlooked in this process is the fact that they only do so because such a move instantly gives them an identity and a connotation of having been around for a while (Mehrotra 2000), allowing in the process global actors to take on a local-friendly look (AlSayyad 2001).

For heritage conservation to have a meaningful social relevance, it is crucial that preservationists clarify and resolve their position vis-à-vis informal traders and street hawkers, particularly in terms of the effect of this economic group (both perceived and real) on the authenticity and sustainability of the built environment (in most cases, historic structures share spaces cheek-by-jowl with the informal traders and dwellers posing a challenge to preservationists). In recent years, with increasing embourgeoisement of the urban debate in Indian cities, the question of 'illegality' of informal spaces (including squatter settlements and traders) has become a prime preoccupation requiring immediate redress. Chandoke (1993) traces the source of this problem to the state sponsored development projects and policies where the poor are accommodated in the spaces of production but not in terms of spaces of reproduction, thereby forcing them into 'illegal' land occupation. But more lately, the cognitive mapping of the middle classes tends to void out the informal spaces, resignifying them as dangerous areas instead (Guano 2003). Reflecting on the growing visual economy of commodity aesthetics in neo-liberal India, Rajagopal (2001) focuses on how the hawkers peddling on the streets have come to symbolise the disorder of an illicit enterprise and metropolitan space gone out of control.

The imagined geography and history of heritage conservationists is cleverly applied to settle the fundamental contest for spaces. The pragmatism of the street traders whose hawking activities are framed in terms of economic survival is illegalised through conservation strategies that propose disciplining the 'errant' human bodies to a common economy of order and suggest that hawking activities be legalised and formalised through licensing and regulating their spaces of operation (Rajagopal 2001). This is the general strategy that is being adopted across major Indian cities and has even been scripted as a national policy on urban street vendors (2006). But the creation of such "spaces of prescriptions" regularising, standardising and making predictable the cityscape rather than the spaces of negotiation that is fluid, individual and improvisational (Gregory 2001) is superficial as a solution and doesn't address the structural characteristic of a Third World economy. Gladstone (2005) explains that in India where over 90 percent of the businesses are informal and account for more than 60 percent of the economy's value added, a nexus of dependency runs as a continuum from the purely informal to formal production. He also clarifies the issue of informality and illegality stating that because economies are informal they cannot achieve the economies of scale necessary for legalisation and because they remain illegal they continue to be informal. Any attempt to formalise the informal would only adversely affect this nexus of dependency. But the tendency of heritage activists to discipline and marginalise the community of informal traders and street dwellers reveal the inherent tendency of culture to bend and blend itself to the fixed nature of capital as against the 'informal' flows of cash economy.

Conclusions

Both the World Bank (Serageldin and Shluger 2000) and the UNESCO's *Our Cultural Diversity report* (1995) insist that heritage preservation and poverty reduction are closely intertwined as the former can establish a sense of solidarity and

empowerment amongst the disenfranchised. While this paper does not challenge this position, it explores the issues of incorporating the protection of built heritage into the general realm of development as a complex iterative process involving multiple actors and partnerships between them. It argues that one cannot get too complacent or seek comfort in the fact that multiplicity of actors automatically ensures an equally distributive partnership. It instead focuses on class lines that divide the different interest groups drawn apart by differing ideologies of heritage and history. The emphasis here is on the dominance of an elite discourse which fails to successfully encompass all social groups, using heritage issues instead to mark the setting of a new order of power and precedence, and fixing the spatial evolution of the city through a one-dimensional accounting of history.

Much as there is an emerging concern to link the quality of life, particularly in historic areas, with its built heritage, the issue that this paper raises is whether this notion is defined by a bourgeois normative framework ignoring alternative possibilities. Even though there is a realisation that conservation efforts should not affect the daily living of people who are prominent stakeholders and that they have to form part of the larger economic and social planning for the area, the inability of heritage activists to adopt a reconciliatory position towards the presence of informal traders and street hawkers, and the everyday practices of the poor in general (including their sense of aesthetics) exposes their position to be straitjacketed by very conventional norms of legality and legitimacy, and history and geography. One then wonders whether full justice can be done to the word stakeholder as it is limited to the networking dynamics of 'legal' residents and businesses to the exclusion of marginal groups. While conservationists acknowledge the need for stakeholder participation and the involvement of local community, in reality the complex matrix of a diverse range of actors and the contradictions, paradoxes and biases they bring to the issue problematises heritage to such an extent that the elites instinctively shift to a defensive gear, defining and propagating heritage from a dominant, normative perspective. Through examples of recent heritage initiatives and examples in

Chennai, this paper draws attention to the still unresolved nature of elite-mass linkages underlining these efforts, working at best as a patronage but never lasting as a partnership.

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