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'Heritage can co-exist with change'

City Express speaks to architect V Vishwanath about the preservation of landmark edifices

Express News Service

Bengaluru: V Vishwanath, principal architect with Vishwanath Associates, is responsible for many Bengaluru landmarks, including the campus and auditorium of Sophia High School, the regional campus of Visvesvaraya Technological University in Nagarbhavi and the auditorium in St John's National Academy of Health Sciences. His company has also contributed to station designs for the phase II blueprint of the Bangalore Metro. But he is equally sensitive to the city's past.

Says Vishwanath, "Modernism in the context of urban landscape must also include the heritage of the city and the outlook of the citizens. In the light of Balabrooie Guesthouse controversy, all I can say is that if Bengaluru had an active Urban Arts Commission, many structures like the Plaza Theatre could have been saved. Plaza was a beautiful example of a multi-utility building with a rare combination of a dance floor and a theatre. Unfortunately, we also lost a landmark structure like the Sandur Manganese and Iron Ore Building on Cunningham Road to a new gigantic hotel that is overpowering the neighborhood and intruding into the privacy of the residents."

He continues, "The loss of Sangam Theatre that was built by famous architect K N Srinivasan in the early 1960s...was the loss of an important landmark. Some of the important buildings which need to be preserved today include the Kumara Krupa Guest House, KCN Mansion in Kumara Park, the Bishop Cotton Boys administrative office, BRV Theatre on Cubbon Road, Mayo Hall, Higginbothams, Cottage Industry Emponium on Cunningham Road, Air India building on JC Road, Bible Society of India, etc."

Vishwanath thinks that citizens must campaign for the Urban Arts Commission to create a vibrant city in



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—Vishwanath,
Architect



which traditional and modern architecture can co-exist. He says, "Public spaces in the city are shrinking due to gross violations and scant respect shown for laws laid down by the city planners. There are not enough parking spaces and there is a lack of vision and competence as far as infrastructure projects go. The city to a large extent had a plan that accommodated roads, parks, parking spaces etc., but the implementation agencies have failed in their jobs which have resulted in the chaos that presently exists in the city."

The architect wants the city to rethink the design and structure of various sewage treatment plants at various points of the city. He adds, "Strict implementation of car parking norms, guidelines to bring about facade control and last but not the least, waste management will help the city to get organised to some extent. We must bring into practice modern technology to segregate and dispose of waste in all localities." He dreams of a city that is modern and also respects history.