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Tradition and modernity subtly synchronised in Pune

Neha Madaan, TNN Feb 22, 2012, 03.23AM IST



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PUNE: Though part of this city has become a veritable concrete jungle, its heritage cannot be shrugged off. Pune's cultural heritage is in its past architecture mingled with history.

The 8th century Pataleshwar caves of the Rashtrakuta period, the forts surrounding the city, the colonial bungalows, a legacy of the British Raj, Aga Khan palace, Shaniwarwada, Lal Mahal and Peshwai wadas are all snuggled safely in a city that is becoming a concrete jungle.

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Little wonder then that Pune pushed out Mumbai to occupy the second best rank in the Times Of India-IMRB Quality of Life survey, with an enviable rating of 3.4 in cultural heritage. Ahmedabad and Hyderabad boast of a similar score, with Delhi scoring 3.6 and reigning supreme.

Urban conservationist Kiran Kalamdani feels that Pune is smaller in size when compared to most other cities and people here have the time to spend. He added that people places such as the Fergusson College Road or Main Street or Tulshibaug (which do not have a very distinctive or impressive architecture) have a familiarity and an unassuming scale that quickly accept the newcomer and put him at ease.

"This is something that does not happen to you in Mumbai, Kolkata or Delhi. The various home-based institutions that we see in Pune's lanes, wadas, even bungalows and now, apartments, are a part of the everyday culture that might range from bhajani mandals to discussion groups, reading clubs or even film clubs," he said.

A complex interweaving of the landmarks, home based institutions, as well as those with great pedigrees like--the Bhandarkar Oriental Research Institute, Bharat Itihas Samshodhak Mandal, the Pune Nagar Vachan Mandir or even the Shasakiya Granthalay at Vishrambagwada--are cornerstones around which Pune's public realm revolves to make it a place where one never gets bored and offers something to do or listen to, said Kalamdani.

Supriya Goturkar Mahabaleshwarkar, co-ordinator, Indian National Trust For Art and Cultural Heritage (INTACH), Pune, said, "The city is rightly called the Oxford of the East, with umpteen intellectual institutions established here during the British era and post independence, even while new ones keep adding every year.

"Punekars have a penchant for intellectual debate, supported by numerous heritage libraries specializing in various subjects, lecture series like Vasant vyakhnamala (spring lectures), open forums and kattas on different themes, where people gather for the pure joy of sharing knowledge," she said.

Mahabaleshwarkar said that old theatres like Balgandharva rangamandir and Bharatnatya Mandir have stimulated theatre, mainstream and parallel, with a strong youth representation even today through inter-collegiate competitions like Purushottam and Firodia Karandak.

"Various cultures have blended perfectly here-be it the cosmopolitan culture in Camp or the traditional Maharashtrian culture in its Peths. They have prospered here and kept their identity alive while blending with the rest.

Also, an inimitable aspect of Pune is the abundance of its cultural spaces for showcasing and appreciating talent in music, ranging from music festivals such as Sawai Gandharva, to the recent ones like Baajaa Gaajaa," she said. Also, among the upcoming malls with fancy buys from all over the world, Pune's very own craftsmen, the tambats (coppersmiths) and the buruds (bamboo craftsmen), have managed to keep their craft alive. Pune is probably one the few places with live age-old traditions of Ganeshotsav celebrations, Alandi-Pandharpur wari, and many more cultural festivities that retain their intrinsic values and messages.

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