



Mumbai's vanishing milestones

200 year-old milestones that once measured distances from Fort's St Thomas Cathedral are slowly succumbing to widespread construction and resident apathy

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AS expatriates and curious Mumbaikars rediscovered the history of the city during a Heritage Walk organised by the Indian Merchants Chamber last week, they realised that one aspect of Mumbai's architectural heritage has remained largely ignored — the milestone.

Three years ago, Tardeo-based chartered accountant Dinshaw Karanjia (32) began researching about Mumbai's milestones, built almost 200 years ago, for a short story he was writing, and found to his dismay that many were either no longer to be found, or damaged due to the ignorance of Mumbaikars.

Built in the 1800s, the milestones were constructed to mark distances in the city, measured from the St Thomas Cathedral (built in 1718) in Fort, then called St Thomas Church, and stretched across Kalbadevi, Mazgaon, Grant Road and Sion. The 0-mile milestone was located opposite Asiatic Library at Horniman



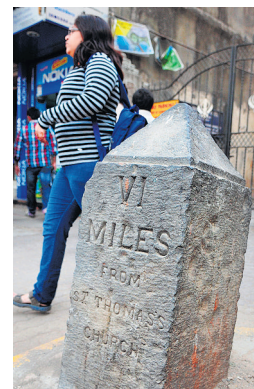
DR SS RAO ROAD near Mahatma Gandhi Hospital. PICS/NIMESH DAVE



BHAU DAJI LAD MUSEUM, Byculla



<DADAR, near Antony D'silva School



<DADAR, opposite Chitra Cinema

Circle, and the 1-mile milestone was stationed in Kalbadevi.

Abha Narain Lambah, conservation architect, says, "There are 15 milestones listed as Grade-I heritage structures, so the law requires that they be protected and preserved."

Karanjia found quite the opposite. "Some of them are engulfed in layers of cement, while others are damaged. One is being used to rest a fruit-vendor's wares, and another has been uprooted and misplaced while tiling pavements," he says.

Salim Ahmadullah who has researched and documented

Mumbai's old milestones says these 'architectural gems' from another era tell us about the city's past.

"Twenty years ago, I had a discussion with the then BMC Commissioner regarding preserving these milestones. He suggested that they should be uprooted and placed in a museum. At that time, I thought it was a bad idea, but today, I regret we didn't do it back then," he said.

A few however, have been saved. Two milestones that were originally located at Crawford Market now stand at Byculla's Dr Bhau Daji Lad museum.

Conservation architect Kruti Garg suggested building a wall around existing milestones. "There should be a boundary around the milestones, with information indicating their date of construction so that onlookers understand their importance," she suggests.

Mumbai Heritage Committee, chairman Dinesh Afzalpurkar, says, "We can't blame the Heritage committee for the condition of the structures. It is just an advisory body. The responsibility to protect the structures lies with the citizens; the government can only help them."

In the meantime, the milestone at Chinchpokli is under threat due to the construction of the monorail, however MMRDA Joint Project Director and spokesperson Dilip Kawathkar says they would "take full care to protect all heritage structures".

When contacted, a senior BMC official didn't seem aware that milestones were Grade-I heritage structures. "I am not aware of this. If you can give me their number (each heritage structure has a number) I can check their status," he says.

STUDENT DOCUMENTARY SUGGESTS RIGHT TO DIE

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ARUNA Shanbaug lies in ward number 4 of Mumbai's KEM Hospital unaware that a euthanasia plea (mercy killing) for her is pending before the Supreme Court. In 1973, Shanbaug was sodomized by a hospital staffer leaving her in a vegetative state.

The Ahmed siblings, Mehfooz, Khurshid and Ruksana had submitted a collective euthanasia plea. Residents of Mankhurd, Khurshid and Ruksana have already lost their battle against multiple dystrophy while Ahmed is still struggling. Mehfooz is dependent on his brother Khalid for assistance, including using the bathroom.

Jogeshwari resident Baby Chaudhary had once believed death was the only answer to her husband Shyamsunder's suffering. The father of two was paralysed in the Vile Parle taxi blasts that had occurred during Mumbai's 26/11 terror attacks.

Though Aruna, Mehfooz and Shyamsunder have yet to meet one another, they collectively tell the story



Hrithik Roshan's character in Guzaarish files an appeal in the court for euthanasia

of seeking death in life in Silent Cries, a documentary that explores how euthanasia could be a solution for many.

After spending 45 days in the life of Aruna, Mehfooz and Shyamsunder, a bunch of third year Bachelor of Mass Media students of KC College are asking what it means to have 'dignity in death'.

"If there is something called dignity in life, there should be dignity in death.

That's where euthanasia comes in. Though we had decided not to take a stand, while shooting the documentary we realised life is far too precious," says Priyanka Kothari.

The documentary by Khuushbu Gianani, Kinjal Tailor, Bhumi Shah, Maansi Aurora and Kothari won the class documentary competition judged by former sociology professor Nandini Sardesai, and actor Sanjay Suri.

"Every case should be looked into individually before permission to die is granted," believes Kothari.

Bollywood posters over phool decor

Couple customises filmy posters featuring themselves for their wedding in a bid celebrate their love for Hindi films and music

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HERE'S an indication of Bollywood going global. A couple decided to make Bollywood the theme in their cross-cultural wedding.

Thirty-some-things Saikirthi Daswani from Hong Kong and Mathias Fridholm from Sweden decorated the venue of their February 6 Goa wedding with Bollywood posters made in Mumbai.

"We decided to include some of our friends and relatives in the posters. Everyone loved them. Many said it was something they'd never forget," says Daswani.

The biggest poster, she says, was "three posters incorporated in one" and based on the Akshay Khan-Katrina Kaif starrer Namaste London. The 16 feet long and seven feet tall poster was customised.

"We incorporated three elements in this one big poster titled, Namaste Goa. There was Namaste Sweden, since the groom is from there, and Namaste Hong Kong, since the bride is from Hong



Kong," says Hinesh Jethwani, founder of Indian Hippy, a foundation for Bollywood film poster and billboard artists, who customised the posters for the wedding decor.

"The groom's parents have taken the poster back home to frame and hang up at their home there," says Daswani.

Not only were the posters a hit at the wedding, the guests who arrived from Finland, Canada, Poland, Belgium, and France danced to Bollywood numbers too.

"We had Chinese guests perfecting jhatkas on Bollywood tracks," laughs Daswani. "My husband, Mathias has always been interested in movies, and around the time we met, Kabhi Alvida Naa Kehna was released. We watched it in a theatre in Hong Kong, and Mathias has been a Bollywood fan ever since. He loves the music and colourful dancing," she says.

The groom also asked the wedding coordinator to arrange for a Shah Rukh Khan look-alike to perform at the sangeet. The artist arrived and danced to Bollywood numbers from Shah Rukh's movies, including Om Shanti Om.