

NATIONAL

Bengaluru is not inclusive: Rohini Nilekani



Sharath S. Srivatsa & K.V. Aditya Bharadwaj

BENGALURU, FEBRUARY 12, 2017 19:45 IST

UPDATED: FEBRUARY 12, 2017 19:52 IST

Says issues affecting people of all classes can bring together elite and poor in “the most rapidly changing city.”

Larger city issues like water, mobility and air quality that affect people of all classes could be the melting point of the perceived class-and-language divide that the city with a population of over 1.1 crore population is now faced with, felt Bengaluru’s social activists.

“The city is not inclusive. The elite and the poor have different ideas and their interests often compete with each other, leaving fewer means for them to protest together. That is why we see disparate protests. However, there are some issues like water and mobility that bring all of us together,” writer and philanthropist Rohini Nilekani said during the conversation on **Bangalore vs Bengaluru: The Tale of Two Indian Cities**, at The Huddle, here on Sunday.

She, however, pointed at the protest against eviction of disadvantaged people from areas in Ejjipura, near Koramangala a few years ago when the middle class also played an active role.

‘Association with Infosys’

“Bengaluru has been the most rapidly changing city in India. Being associated with Infosys has brought both bouquets and brickbats for this change,” said Ms. Nilekani, whose husband Nandan Nilekani is among the founders of Infosys, which has been an important part of the city’s IT growth.

Architect Naresh Narasimhan, who coordinated the Steel Flyover Beda (No Steel Flyover) campaign, said that the city was divided culturally, but comes together depending on the issue.

“The Steel Flyover Beda campaign was inclusive, which is why it is a successful campaign. People across the spectrum felt against misgovernance,” he said.

Inhabitation and exploitation

Over the last five to seven years, there has been two images of the city – one as a site of inhabitation where people are concerned about the quality of ecology while the other is a site of exploitation mainly by the migrating political class that exploits the city for economic purposes, he has said, explaining the divide within the city.

Acknowledging that the public campaigns are not inclusive, Vinay Srinivasa of Alternative Law Forum, said the city was so structurally divided that not many have friendships across the classes. “Middle class in Cantonment area can speak to middle class in the Old City, but they fail to have communication with other classes in their part of the city,” he said, adding that none of the important debates pertaining to issues affecting the city at large were being held in Kannada, which created a barrier for masses to take part.

“When the garment workers protest erupted, the social media users expressed their angst at the roads being blocked. However, they were not interested in understanding the low-wage structure of the garment workers or the sexual harassment at workplace. They did not understand that these workers were fighting for the provident fund rights,” he said.

Migrants mute spectators

Responding to the issue on insider-outsider debate, conflict with Africans and language barrier raised by Resident Editor, *The Hindu*, Bengaluru, T.M. Veeraraghav, who moderated the session, film-maker Pawan Kumar said migrants normally observed the city’s happening instead of taking part in civic movement.

Sharing his experience of living in Mumbai for a few years, he said: “When in Mumbai, while I was aware of the many issues that the residents were fighting for, I did not participate. However, something happening in Bengaluru becomes a priority,” he said. Mr. Kumar, who directed the hit Kannada flick ‘U Turn’ and played an active role in Steel Flyover Beda campaign, felt that citizens should be convinced that any city issue was a personal problem and not a social issue.

Do the multiple campaigns translate into electoral politics? Ms. Nilekani said there were many lessons learnt during the 2014 campaign for Bengaluru South Lok Sabha constituency on how cut off they were from pockets of the city and their problems. She argued that electoral politics was not the only arena to shape the city and the politicians could not resist public pressure. Mr. Narasimhan also added that the growth of a mass movement couldn’t be plotted and needed to be organic.

Civic activists galore

“Bengaluru probably has the biggest concentration of civic activists in any city in the country,” Ms. Nilekani said to which Mr. Narasimhan pointed out that over the last 20 years there had been an explosion of resident welfare associations, whose number has gone up from a mere five in 1999 to over 1,700 today, “Now there are associations of RWAs coming together to form larger pressure groups fighting pan city issues. I feel the pulse of the city is quickening,” he said.

Printable version | Nov 17, 2017 3:04:51 AM | <http://www.thehindu.com/news/national/Bengaluru-is-not-inclusive-Rohini-Nilekani/article17292294.ece>

© The Hindu

