

HERITAGE MATTERS



Amareswar Galla
director@inclusivemuseum.org

(Professor Dr. Amareswar Galla, an unhyphenated Indo Danish Australian, is an expert with UNESCO and UNWTO. He chose to return and live in the ancient Amaravathi Heritage Town)



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WHAT PRICE HERITAGE?

What value heritage?



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- 1 Manduwa Houses with pantiles, quintessential Andhra abodes, are being torn down in tens of thousands due to lack of appreciation of their heritage value. Such houses in China, Vietnam and Nepal have become popular in bed and breakfast tourism
- 2 Pit looms of Andhra once produced the finest cottons in the region of Maisolia, lower River Krishna Valley, mentioned by Greco Roman writers some two thousand years ago. The last of the pit looms, our invaluable heritage - both tangible and intangible - are stopping to rattle in Bhattiprolu, Repalle, Machera and many other places, for lack of livelihood to the weavers. Muslin originated in Andhra but the last of the expert weavers are struggling in Bobbili
- 3 Youth performances have proven to open up museums as civic spaces attracting the next generation to enjoy and celebrate both classical and contemporary Tollywood dancing
- 4 For too long scholars and museologists only focused, understandably, on the iconic sculptures of the Amaravathi School of Art. Now thanks to the HRIDAY and PRASAD Schemes of the Government of India, APTDC can bring out the significance of the Maha Stupa as an integral part of the Amaravathi Heritage Town and its heritage landscape values



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The questions are universal. But they shook the ground under complacent Australian institutions managing heritage resources in the 1980s. Professionalisation through relevant skills, competencies and attitudes in safeguarding valuable heritage assets began. Academics were challenged to think interdisciplinary. Applied heritage management emerged as a new academic endeavour. Heritage experiences inform responsible tourism. It is the progression from a deficit model of heritage dependent only on government subsidies to an affirmative, inclusive and relevant paradigm where the public are prepared to pay because they value their heritage. Joint ventures, CSR and PPPs have become common place across Australia.

Heritage tourism has emerged internationally as an industry. Tourism continues to demonstrate fastest growth in the world for almost two decades. It is a very competitive market. It aims to capture the recreational spectrum of the burgeoning middle classes across the world. Could heritage institutions in Andhra become the producers of experiences that could anchor tourism growth? Heritage driven tourism is a lifeline for stagnating institutions and curiosity cabinets. But cost benefit analysis, outcomes driven core business, cooperative marketing and user driven public programming need to become part of the game.

Signature branding based on unique heritage assets is used in several countries to optimise GDP outcomes. Infrastructure and capacity to develop as an industry determine who gets more of the cake. Despite security concerns after September 2001, tourism continues to be a vibrant industry in the USA. Strategic policy making, deep research, statistics, ethical engagement and above all, reliance on domestic tourism are the basis for the resilience. In techno savvy Andhra, digital heritage engagement is still a far cry. How can we be relevant to young people, biggest market in Andhra, and aspire to promote intergenerational transmission of heritage values?

It is heartening to hear AP Secretary of Tourism and Culture, Mr. Mukhesh Kumar Meena, state that domestic tourism is on the increase. The bedrock of all tourism growth in larger countries is domestic tourism. In a culturally and logistically diverse country like India, tourism provides unlimited opportunities for the diversification of experiences as products attracting investment from both the public and private sectors. It enables growth of international visitation. Appropriate policy and good governance ensure stability. In this context, heritage conservation and wise use of assets for generating experiences is fundamental.

The establishment of the AP Board of Tourism, Culture and Heritage is momentous for the new state. It provides for interdepartmental coordination. It centres cultural and heritage tourism. New pathways to progress are already enabling government to invest. The Hon CM Shri Nara Chandra Babu Naidu Garu is himself the Chair. Policy processes, strategic planning and qualitative and quantitative indicators essential for growth are awaited.

The Hon CM emphasises core tenets of success based on value, experience, user sense and sustainability. These are critical for the goal to develop tourism as the second GDP earner in the state. Everything is possible as the manifesto of AP Tourism Authority optimistically states. The Culture and Creativity Commission under the Board is adding considerable value. It has become the lynchpin for providing much-needed content in the growing tourism sector. But what of the dormant heritage sector?

Heritage management needs to confront long-awaited transformations. Legislation is almost sixty years old. It is deeply embedded in colonial legacies. Archae-

ology and Museums are invaluable for the new state. But poor security, inadequate staffing and most importantly, lack of capacity to engage in the 21st Century are challenges. Andhra once boasted of preeminent archaeologists in the country. Doyens were the late Bendapudi Subba Rao, Rayaprolu Subramanyam, I.K. Sharma and V. Krishna Sastry, just to name a few. Will we ever see another eminent palaeographer like the late Parabrahma Sastry? More than seventy inscriptions totally neglected on the uphill path to the Stupa in Salihundam are deteriorating under the footsteps of visitors and the passing wind and rain. We could list hundreds, if not thousands of such instances in AP. Whose heritage? Whose responsibility? Where are the archaeologists and museologists? Do people care?

AP Department of Archaeology and Archaeological Survey of India are both popular punching bags. Critics, cynics and populists are plenty. Any constructive discussions and debates on how we should move forward? Surprisingly rare. Populist rhetoric pervades. Does it mean we allow our valuable heritage to languish? Money is not the issue. Ability to collectively bring about change is the critical need of the hour. Change for the better ensuring sustainable heritage management. Development to add value to our identity and self esteem and to the potential of tourism growth by developing quality experiences.

Experiences could be developed ad hoc and randomly by importing expertise. Some are of the highest quality and others of dubious nature. Parachute consultants are plenty. They come like flies to the honey jar wherever there is money. But competent ones are far and few in between. They are difficult to attract unless hurdles are removed. My argument is that both Public Private Partnerships and expert consultants are critical. The former need to add a third P - People at the heart. The latter need to be matched with inhouse expertise. Ability of personnel to engage with consultants is essential for ensuring appropriate interventions, projects and sustainability.

I come back to the questions of value and price posed in the title of my column. The then Department of Finance shocked the culture and heritage sector in Australia. The missile was a draft policy paper entitled 'What Value Heritage'. We had several healthy debates and discussions and drafted a policy paper 'What Value Heritage'. Australia led the world through this encounter and has not stopped.

The tensions are between centrifugal and centripetal forces of finance and heritage. The former is driven by carelessness and tinged with a dose of economic nationalism. The latter by constantly improving our policy and practices ensuring the safeguarding of our heritage in all its manifestation, tangible and intangible, natural and cultural, movable and immovable. If heritage is not valued and protected, then we become victims of economic fundamentalism.

As we move forward in Andhra, two things are critical. Conservation is non-negotiable. So is GDP driven development. The resolution to ensure productivity between the two non-negotiables is sustainable heritage development. A paradigm shift is needed. Leadership of the Board of Tourism, Culture and Heritage is invaluable. For it can bring about meaningful and productive transformations. In policy for strategic directions. Cooperation and coordination so that there are economies of scale, efficiency and effectiveness in all the sectors under its ambit. Policy Pragmatism. Capacitybuilding. Competent personnel. Content development is quintessential for image projection and signature product development. I am optimistic that Andhra can set the national benchmarks in the long run.

Next week: Heritage Matters will look at lessons for Andhra from Vietnam, one of the few countries that is harnessing heritage tourism as one of the top GDP indicators