

HERITAGE MATTERS

BRINGING CINDERELLA TO THE BALL

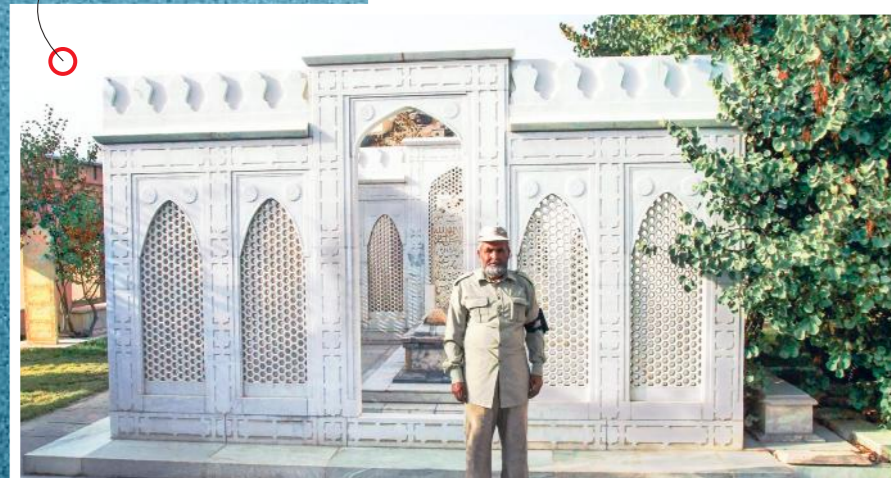


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(Professor Dr. Amarewar Galla, an unhyphenated Indo Danish Australian, is the Keynote speaker at the National Conference of the India International Council of Monuments and Sites in Ahmedabad, 16-17 June 2018)

Bagh-e Babur or Babur's Garden. The marble screen built around tomb complex by Mughal Emperor Shah Jahan in 1638 is inscribed with the following: "Only this mosque of beauty, this temple of nobility, constructed for the prayer of saints and the epiphany of cherubs, was fit to stand in so venerable a sanctuary as this highway of archangels, this theatre of heaven, the light garden of the god-forgiven angel king whose rest is in the garden of heaven, Zahiruddin Muhammad Babur the Conqueror." (Aga Khan Historic Cities Programme, "Babur's Garden Rehabilitation Framework.")



The standard of conservation of heritage sites in India remained static for a long time since the formation of the Archaeological Survey of India (ASI) in 1861 by Alexander Cunningham. The Maha Stupa in the Amaravathi Heritage Town and its outstanding sculptural wealth was being stripped off without systematic excavations throughout the 19th Century under the British Raj. However, the formation and the evolution of the new agency started yielding official status and professional orientation for archaeology. Since Independence, the Survey has expanded considerably undertaking the massive responsibility for looking after the rich and diverse heritage of India. However, inadequate funding and the dearth of competent technical personnel has been hindering the delivery of the mandate of the Survey.

In its search to aspire for excellence, the Survey after due process of consultation and engagement adopted a National Policy of Conservation in February 2014. The mission starts off with "The National Policy for the Conservation of the Ancient Monuments, Archaeological Sites and Remains continues on the one hand, to further the already laid out objectives of safeguarding monuments and sites of national importance and, on the other, envisions bringing in renewed impetus for contemporizing and indigenizing the conservation approach." The constituent states and territories of the Indian Union need to start policy development of their respective departments and complement the national policy. A country of the size of India demands cooperation and coordination as well as collaborative policy frameworks to safeguard its valuable heritage.

Policy frameworks are critical to maximise on the Public Private People Partnerships by the Survey. Most of the criticism from the media and the professional bodies about the ASI's PPPPs has been due to the absence of public debate and discussion as well as a policy vacuum at the regional and state levels. Coming back from Australia after several decades of professional heritage work and having worked in several countries, I was surprised by the angst. The same could be said about the lack of protection of recently built environment with significant heritage value. There is very little, if any, mobilisation for heritage conservation at the local government levels. For example, in the Amaravathi Heritage Town, one of the oldest ginning mills in Andhra Pradesh is left to fall part as it does not fall into the official category of an antiquity! But first legislations need to be brought into



Local youth have been involved for more than a decade in mapping local craft and other intangible assets. They are also trained as heritage interpreters for visitors, both domestic and international as well as school groups. Apni Basti Mela is one of the many cultural activities where local cultural products are marketed. Job creation for young people has been a focus here in programming and event development, an essential ingredient for heritage tourism.



Ratish Nanda is the heritage interpreter par excellence. On the several occasions I walked around the Humayun's Tomb and Nizamuddin Basti with him. I found that he calls a spade and spade. His honest and in-depth discussion on the issues emerging from the challenges between conservation and development are valuable lessons. He is a good story teller who makes conservation and community cultural most interesting.

the 21st Century along with appropriate policies and strategies. The challenge ahead is for all competent authorities and stakeholders to work together systematically to bring about transformations. In some archaic cases we might have to leapfrog from the 19th into the 21st Century.

In this context, it is heartening to see professional bodies that have remained moribund for a long time being renewed and reinvigorated by an outstanding younger generation. India International Council for Monuments and Sites (ICOMOS) is launched by a new generation of conservation architects and scientists. They are so respected by the international community that the global General Assembly of ICOMOS was held in India for the first time in December 2017, an outstanding achievement in itself and a definite statement of the changes afoot.

The theme aptly was Heritage and Democracy, a clarion call for civil society engagement in safeguarding our heritage. Similarly, India International Council of Museums attracted the Conference of the International Committee for Museum Management in February 2018 in Kolkata. The theme once again is timely focusing on cultural economics, entrepreneurial engagement and community benefits. I have often argued that good conservation and heritage interpretation is good business.

What is timely in India is the beginning and ongoing success of a PPPP project, a first of its kind in the country, which has become a national and international demonstration project. It is the conservation of Humayun's Tomb and the Nizamuddin Basti neighbourhood development. Bringing people and their heritage together is the essential spirit of the project. It enables local employment through understanding the existing skills and upskilling them in the service of conservation. In the words of Nobel Laureate Professor Amartya Sen, it is about capacities and capabilities. In French parlance it is an ecomuseum approach where the whole area of some 200 acres is a designated historical cultural landscape. The Basti development is an excellent model for heritage, health and wellbeing in the community cultural development frame.

The PPPP is facilitated through MoUs and a series of agreements between the Aga Khan Trust for Culture (AKTC) and the ASI, the South Delhi Municipal Corporation and Central Public Works Department. Tata Trusts is a significant partner in the diversification of the resource base. Understandably it took time in developing a shared understanding of the challeng-

Ratish Nanda, CEO of the Aga Khan Trust for Culture, India. I first learnt about his integrated local area planning work in Kabul, Afghanistan, where he worked on the contextual and holistic conservation of Bagh-e Babur.



Aga Khan Trust for Culture, India, are bringing their expertise and holistic heritage conservation approaches to South India. Eid Namaaz being offered at the Idgah in Qutb Shahi Heritage Park, Hyderabad.



es ahead and then developing systematic interventions and holistic sustainable heritage development. The CEO of the AKTC India, Ratish Nanda, an experienced and outstanding conservation architect who is the linchpin for the partners and projects, emphasises that an interdisciplinary approach has been critical. Former ADG of Culture at UNESCO says that the underlying sustainability factor is "the decision-making process to arrive at the most appropriate conservation plan"

Add to this Ratish's vision to ensure that the conservation of the monument and its hinterland along with community cultural development provides the integrated pathway for sustainability. In many ways the Nizamuddin Basti project is an exemplar of the UN SDG 11, "better urban planning and management are needed to make the world's urban spaces more inclusive, safe, resilient and sustainable." The rehabilitation of the 67 acres Sundar Nursery in the Buffer Zone of the Humayun's Tomb World Heritage site has now become the core of the Delhi Urban park. In one of the most polluted cities in Asia, the Park provides for healthy lungs.

The revitalization of crafts skills and their use, holding various festivals and historically located musical performances bring in the spirit of the 2003 UNESCO Intangible Heritage Convention into play. Almost 50 reviews of progress made by the project through local craft people, honouring them as carriers and transmitters of intangible heritage, and the meticulous research informing all decision making and interventions is worth emulating. This respectful approach buys in the community groups promoting shared responsibility in looking after the monuments, gardens and neighbourhoods. Deep research, shared understanding of all concerned for the safeguarding of heritage, valuing culture in measurable ways, policy driven long term commitments are some of the take away lessons for us in Andhra as we gradually develop new institutions for looking after and promoting the heritage of Telugu people. It will be bringing Cinderella to the ball indeed. Will there be only one Prince Charming, PPPPs need a host of them. We can only aspire for the best.



Humayun's Tomb has been well researched and restored with skills and methods setting new international standards. Local craftspeople were used in not only the conservation efforts but also for evaluations to ensure that there is an appreciative integration between intangible heritage and its role in conservation. In 1994, I was the youngest participant in the Nara, Japan, Expert Meeting on Authenticity in the 1972 World Heritage Convention. The meeting came up with the Nara Recommendation on Authenticity on the use of intangible heritage in conservation. Humayun's Tomb is one of the best practice examples of the Nara Recommendation

NEXT WEEK

Heritage Matters will take you into the heart of rehabilitating historical parts of Kabul and especially the National Museum of Afghanistan following wanton destruction by the Taliban and now ISIS.