



Reclaiming the main street of Amaravathi led by the daughters-in-law and sponsored by the Arya Vysya community. Local Zamindar's family provides inspiration and support



Underground drainage and four STPs were promised and budgeted during the 2016 Pushkaralu and again last year, but never delivered. Four major drains empty the sewage into the river Krishna where people take scared dip and conduct pinda dana ceremonies

The newly elected government in Andhra Pradesh has the quintessential policy with the potential to illustrate what is called culture in sustainable development. Its Navaratnalu promise embeds everything that culture can provide as the glue for bringing people and their livelihoods together. Rapid growth in the past decade has diminished, if not decimated, the substructure of Andhra society that is built on values and legacies characterising the essence of Andhra people. To redress this situation through the Navaratnalu pathways, a fundamental paradigm shift is needed in addressing both development and culture in all its manifestations at the foundational local government level.

Let us look at the example locating culture in agrarian development. Cancers of all kinds are plaguing people. Most are a result of pesticides and fertilisers in order to increase productivity. This focus on the market and short-term benefits are negated with consequent health hazards. Farmlands are becoming highly toxic. Some of them will take four decades to rehabilitate. Traditional knowledge of all aspects of farming, what is called intangible heritage, is being forgotten and within a generation no one will remember it. Comparative economics of agriculture and health reveals the benefits of traditional knowledge in sustainable development.

Over a third of adult Andhra people struggle with diabetes. It is an epidemic with serious consequences. Poor diet with recently introduced processed food and overindulgence in unhygienic street food and biryani sub-culture are contributors. Recent wealth meant sitting down as couch potatoes with nonstop TV or smart phone addiction. No exercise. No fresh air. Traditional culture, health and wellbeing are forgotten. Lack of planning resulted in the destruction of civic spaces such as Rachchabandalu and performance areas for community festivals.

In the lead up to Pushkaralu we planned with PRASAD scheme of the Central government 1.5 kilometres of Ghats in Amaravathi. Panchayats of Amaravathi and Dharanikota were concerned about the lack of spaces for exercise and walks. A meeting of local Kodallu identified diabetes, obesity and depression among women. The Ghats development was to establish a seamless space for sacred and public use after the Pushkaralu. Ideal for walking and exercise. High mast lights for security; seamless physical access for elderly and physically challenged; gazebos for rest and shade; water bubblers; and exercise infrastructure were planned and budgeted all along the Ghats. Implementation is still awaited.

In addition to greasy food, the street dirt that settles on various delicacies is a source of serious diseases. Detailed observation reveals that dogs, cattle, monkeys, goats, pigs and humans often defecate in public places, especially the main street and Ghats of Amaravathi. The dried faeces become part of the street dust often settling on street food. Every special event in Amaravathi generates more such dirt and the health facilities are over stretched. Health standards are connected to understanding of new cuisines, impacts of tourism and pilgrimages. Panchayats cry foul as the main temple and tourism visitation sites cause the deterioration of public health situation but neither share their increased income with panchayats.

Women and girls constitute 52 percent of the population in Andhra Pradesh. Their cultural sensibilities should inform all projects and development, if they aspire to be inclusive. Andhra needs to get in step with progress and UN SDG 5. We started in Amaravathi Heritage Town a pilot program called Maa Vooru Maa Kodallu to redress this gender imbalance. Child marriages are a thing of the past. Widows get their pensions. They are able to participate in public life. Women have been at the forefront promoting inclusive education for children with 21 forms of

WAKE UP ANDHRA PEOPLE YOUR CULTURE IS DYING



Amaravathi Kodallu want safe places to celebrate their culture without the eve-teasing and public nuisance from taxi and auto drivers who come from outside and show no respect to the local women

disabilities. Women also started advocacy to make tourism and its infrastructure respectful of women. A dedicated women's police station, a cultural concern, is desperately needed.

Bifurcation of heritage collections has not happened in the past five years. It means a substantial part of Andhra heritage is locked in Hyderabad. Andhra is also an open treasure trove for looting of archaeological sites, built environment and places of worship. Recent example is the neglect and then the looting of valuable sculptures from Chandavaram that ended up in international art market. Tamil Nadu has been focussing on minimising looting of its temple idols. Could we learn from and collaborate with our neighbours? Archaeological sites are mercilessly destroyed in Andhra with encroachments across the State on significant heritage places. In 2018, about 500 truckloads of valuable dirt was mined from the Satavahana fortification in Dharanikota. It was from the ASI protected area. Ironically, Andhra people celebrated only the year before the blockbuster film Gautamiputra Satakarni. But his fortification is badly encroached upon and being destroyed by the day. Could we finally review the archaic Heritage bill from 1961 with colonial legacies and have a new legislation that protects and develops Andhra's tangible and intangible heritage, especially in the context of responsible tourism.

Tourism marketing and civil works without planning, without the latest wisdom of culture in development, the world fastest growing industry will remain the greatest destroyer of Andhra culture. Decentralising tourism to the 13 districts or even the mandal level is critical to safeguard the culture of Andhra through appropriate understanding and use contributing to local GDP. I still remember 20 years ago how we in Australia invested in back packer tourism and cultural promotion to spread the tourism dollars across the vast country creating the backbone to phenomenal success, making tourism one of the top three income generators and employers in the country. UNWTO and UNESCO have consistently advocated that culture needs to be the soul of tourism, without it there are no experiences or respect, only Disneyland and McDonalds phenomenon. To avoid this caricaturing and loss of opportunities Andhra needs a new tourism policy that revitalises and reinforces culture and heritage values of, signature value and generated bottom up without relying on parachute and cut and paste consultants who plagiarise from the West.

Digitally par excellence Andhra people wake up to the fact that the State's arts, culture and heritage are not even mapped, digitised and understood but are being marketed. The furnaces of glass beads of Papanaidupet in Kadapa district have shut down after 2,600 years. About 5,000 pit looms are abandoned in Bhattiprolu. Hand-made Kondapalli toys are drowned with machine made Chinese toys. Kalamkari designs are digitised and exploited by outsiders without respect for any copyright or value to the producers. Lambadi intangible heritage and dances are performed by others making a mockery of the first people. One could go on. The State indeed needs a policy-based approach to protecting its arts and crafts and livelihood for people in the villages. What about art treasures. World famous artist Damerla Rama Rao's art treasures are rotting, and silverfish infested in Rajahmundry, typical of neglect of Andhra's artists.

More of the same will not do. Culture in all its avatars needs to be part of integrated local area planning in Andhra. It is a question of building capacities and capabilities and working on war footing before it is too late. Innovative and relevant policies and strategies at the local or mandal level rather than only in the big cities augurs well for the dying culture of Andhra people. Hence embedded approaches with the Navaratnalu pathways promise the future for safeguarding the culture of Andhra people.

HERITAGE MATTERS

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Professor Dr. Amareswar Galla, an unhyphenated Indo Danish Australian, UNESCO & UN World Tourism Organisation Senior Expert returned to live in Amaravathi/Dharanikota after working overseas for 43 years



Credit: International Institute for the Inclusive Museum and Nonika Kakumanu



Coordination with irrigation on water frontage; panchayats for cleanliness and maintenance; police for security; and civic engagement have been challenges in Amaravathi



Chenchu, Yanadi and Yerukula, the three local aboriginal communities are the poorest and most marginalised in Amaravathi. Government must profile their culture and heritage with dignity to counter discrimination and racism

NEXT WEEK

Heritage Matters will take you to Istanbul, Turkey