



One of the most important cultural spaces conserved is the Venu Vanam with the Mahabodhi tree sapling planted by His Holiness The Dalai Lama. Postgraduate and doctoral students and faculty from the Pune Deccan College commended the work

What museums India 21st Century?



The largest ginning mill heritage building is under threat once again due to inadequate State legislation and heritage awareness



The centuries old Gali Gopuram of Amaralingeswara Suamy temple was pulled down in 2015 as there was no adequate heritage protection in the State. AHCM coordinated subsequent conservation and protection of temple architecture



Museum educational programme for students includes their rights, presented by police. Such awareness raising minimised child marriages, domestic violence and girl abuse

The International Council of Museums (ICOM) is going through a global process of rethinking its backbone - the definition of a museum. Parameters are plenty. It should have clarity about the purpose of the museum, enunciating the value base from which museums meet their cultural, social, economic, environmental, sustainable, political and ethical challenges and responsibilities in the 21st century. It should retain, despite variations in terminology, the unique functions of collecting, preserving, documenting, researching, exhibiting and communicating collections and heritage values.

The ICOM calls for the imperative of climate change and the urgency to scope sustainable solutions must be addressed. It should acknowledge and respect contextual world views. The legacies and societal inequalities and asymmetries of power and wealth across the globe need to be addressed. The expert role of museums as a collaboration with stakeholder communities should be addressed. Museums should be civic spaces for learning and exchange. Accountability and transparency need to inform the acquisition and use of their material, financial, social and intellectual resources.

It is timely that India is hosting three summits on museums in the next six weeks. In the coming week, the state-of-the-art Bihar Museum in Patna is bringing together about 25 museum directors for a roundtable on museums as repositories of knowledge providing multiple narratives on humanity, living cultures, memories and interactive experiences as incubators of "new" knowledge.

The outcomes would inform the Museum Biennale in Patna, a global first, from March 2020. Two weeks later the well-established and deeply resourceful Center for Art and Archaeology at the American Institute for Indian Studies is hosting a major national museum summit entitled Reimagining Museums for the 21st century.

It will cover the range and breadth of museological topics. During the following week at the end of July, Indira Gandhi Rashtriya Manav Sangrahalaya, Bhopal, is hosting a National Seminar on Ethnographic Museums in India: Contributions, Representations

and Future Possibilities. It is essentially and critically a major exercise in rethinking museum anthropology.

The definitional exercise of ICOM and all the three Indian summits are about relevance in a postcolonial world of rapid change and fluidity needing new modalities of ethical engagement.

They are about plurality of knowledge generation. They are calling for contextual museology and sustainable heritage development grounded in the present century. The Museum Biennale by the Bihar Museum and rethinking the very basis of ethnographic museums are demanding entrepreneurial and innovative approaches. American Institute is addressing the core of capacity building.

All three deal with contemporary concerns of identity, climate action and sustainability. In the frame of ICOM, the key question is - What Museums India?

As a former Vice-President of ICOM, Paris, and President of ICOM Asia Pacific Executive Board and now living in Amaravathi Heritage Town, my challenges are with village India. How does one curate the essence of a historical cultural landscape? What are the methods to bring in the voices of the primary stakeholders that have never been included? Are there ways of engaging multivocality and dialogical methods in making exhibits? To what extent could the participation of women and girls (UN SDG 5) be enabled and embedded? Could we re-think the museum as a cultural hub in responsible heritage tourism?

The Amaravathi Heritage Town covering an area of 300 acres of archaeological deposits and monuments, such as the largest Buddhist Stupa in India, is governed as the twin village panchayats of Amaravathi and Dharanikota. There are about 23 villages



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in its hinterland and the aggregate population is about 60,000 with nearly half living in the Heritage Town and on layers of archaeological and historical deposits.

The town was once the cultural hub of Lower River Krishna Valley. HRIDAY, PRASAD and Buddhist Tourism Schemes gave a window of opportunity to rehabilitate the place in heritage tourism.

Amaravathi Archaeological Heritage Park is the core covering the Maha Stupa, British Bungalow, ASI Museum and the Ramalingeswara Swamy temple established by Zamindar Raja Vasireddy Venkatadri Naidu.

Amaravathi Heritage Centre and Museum (AHCM) is the professional agency for the gradual transformation of the town. We inherited it in 2016 as a much-neglected building with part of the roof missing and with rainwater, dust, insects and especially termite infestation everywhere.

In 2019, Amaravathi Heritage Centre is the coordinating centre for the 300 acres of the Amaravathi Heritage Town, a historical cultural landscape with layers of significance from the Megalithic or Pandukal times about 2900 BC until the current revitalisation of highly endangered intangible heritage across 20 cultural spaces.

The collections in the AHCM range from Buddhist sculptures to contemporary art works and heritage objects from the homes of women and the Zamindar's bungalow in the town. The curatorship of exhibit development considers that the past is always perceived through the present and that all interpretation must be evidence based.

The AHCM is an interpretive centre considering the whole of the Heritage Town as an ecomuseum, a living entity. It is also conducting a Memory Mapping exercise with a focus on the Lower River Krishna Valley. There are about 20 cultural spaces in the town

Buddhist monks discuss climate action and environmental conservation on World Environment Day



Maa Vooru Maa Kodallu exhibit development is through the first voice and intangible heritage of women, especially daughters-in-law

NEXT WEEK

Heritage Matters will take you to the vibrant world of Istanbul, Turkey