

Expert: Policy to safeguard intangible heritage needed

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Kochi: During the Roman period, muslin was one of the most prized exports of ancient Mysolia in Krishna valley region of Andhra Pradesh. When Amareswar Galla was growing up in Amaravathi, with a tangible heritage of nearly two millennia, it still had many places that produced muslin.

“It’s all gone now. Died out. Isn’t it a shame that after 2,000 years, such an amazing world-class heritage in the birthplace of muslin is not safeguarded,” asks Galla, an internationally-renowned academic and an authority on heritage conservation.

Currently the founding director of the International Centre for Inclusive Cultural Leadership (ICICL), Anant National University, Ahmedabad, Galla has worked across continents to bring focus on the need to safeguard intangible heritage through community involvement and inclusive approaches.

Because no effort has been made to create institutions for safeguarding intangible heritage, many of them are being lost at a speed that is scary, said Galla, who founded the inclusive museum movement two decades ago.

“Those that are conserved or safeguarded now are mainly centered around institutes that deal with upper castes. Take Kuchippudi or Bharatanatyam for example, they are upper caste practices,” said Galla, highlighting the case of Theyyam which is yet to be recognized as intangible heritage.

He considers Sree Sankaracharya University of Kalady as the only institution in India which is working towards and has attained a level of success in safeguarding such iconic intangible traditions. “If you look at the three intangible heritages recognized by Unesco, Vedic chanting, Koodiyattam and Mudi yettu, they are all in Kerala; there is nothing in Tamil Nadu, Karnataka or Andhra,” said Galla, who had been working closely with the university. “These efforts can have a multiplier effect for people in Kerala and south India to safeguard intangible heritage,” says Galla.

A small country like Vietnam, when compared to India and China, is doing a better job at safeguarding its living heritage, Galla said, because they have developed a national policy. “Vietnam has national legislation that protects intangible heritage and national and provincial approaches for capacity building,” he said.

“We have been talking about it, but India still does not have a policy. Even Kerala does not have one,” says Galla, who feels it is a state which has all the features required to develop such a policy. “People in Kerala are also far more conscious of their heritage,” he said hoping that events like heritage festival hosted in Kochi recently would lead to a change.

“If you want Kerala tourism to be sustainable then you really need state-wide contemporary heritage legislation that deals with both tangible and intangible heritage wealth,” he said.