

Images: International Institute for the Inclusive Museum



The Maha Stupa largely devoid of sculptures that have been removed to museums across the world is now surrounded by encroachments and recent constructions in contravention to the ASI mandate to protect land around the monument within a hundred-meter diameter. Several houses have been constructed on top of significant archaeological remains and monastic complexes. Thanks to the HRIDAY Scheme, the Maha Stupa, the adjacent colonial Bungalow and the ASI Museum are now brought together as the Amaravathi Archaeological Heritage Park under the supervision of the Amaravathi Heritage Centre and Museum and ASI. Solid granite walk ways, protective railings, dustbins and street lighting have been installed by the APTDC.

HERITAGE MATTERS

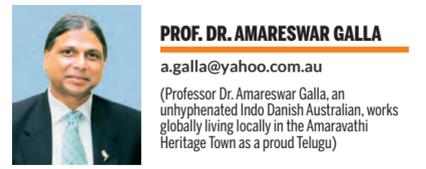


Until recently the Mud Fortification or Citadel dating back to the Satavahana times, if not earlier, was relatively intact. It was about 400 meters in length on three sides and approximately 330 meters on the river side. Many parts are extensively encroached and ruthlessly dug up for treasures. Only parts of the Southwest remain. ASI signs and fences have been vandalized. The promised buffer or barrier fencing and roads and landscape management through the HRIDAY Scheme would help considerably to protect the remaining citadel, perhaps as a standing testimonial to the Satavahana history.



On the occasion of the Kalachakra Ceremony, His Holiness the Dalai Lama planted a Bodhi tree sapling from Bodhi Gaya attributed to the original Bodhi Tree. Soon after the Kalachakra the sapling was abandoned, and the area used as a car park and public amenity. One of the first interventions of the Amaravathi Heritage Centre and Museum was to revitalize the sapling that is now a tree, commission ashtanga symbolism through eight granite stones sourced through carvers from Duggi, a granite Dharma Chakra, five Gazeboes symbolic of the five disciples when Buddha turned the wheel of Dharma and a bamboo plantation representing Venu Vanam. It is the first project of museum intervention to promote the basic notion of respect for heritage values and places to both locals and visitors.

DANGERS OF TELLING SINGLE STORIES



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In her TED talk from July 2009 “The Danger of a Single Story” Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie eloquently argues that single stories diminish the dignity of people and places. Her talk has many lessons for tourism, culture and heritage industry personnel and scholars. I have advocated throughout my professional career of more than three decades that single story presentations and interpretations are the biggest cause of deteriorating conservation and demise of layers of significance in heritage places, ultimately destroying them. Monoculturalism and single interpretations diminish the rich complexity of heritage layers of significance in historical cultural landscapes such as Amaravathi Heritage Town.

Monocultural visitor gaze triumphs. Outsiders impose. The mediator manipulates. The goose that could lay golden eggs is gradually smothered. Parachute contractors and consultants move on to the next honeypot. Negligence and visitor destruction are relegated to oblivion. More than anything, Amaravathi struggles under the weight of its own glorious tradition and creativity. Amaravathi School of Art is well known. Its sculptures from the Satavahana and Ikshvaku periods are well studied and analysed.

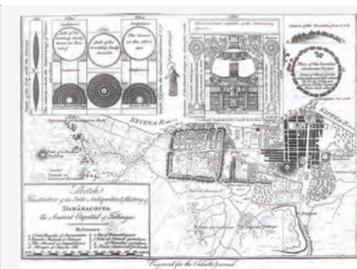
What is missing is the understanding of the context for such creativity. Object centredness, a legacy of colonial extractive heritage resource agency, has resulted in serious neglect of the historical cultural landscapes. It is a common malady of former colonial territories. Decoloni-



The present Zamindar's Bungalow on the main Temple street is nearly a hundred years old. It is located in front of the Zamindar's Kota area and further on is the Nandana Vanam. These are historical places that are more than 200 hundred years old. But history and heritage are poorly understood and there is considerable damage to the heritage values of the place. However, the Bungalow and its contents are well maintained by the zamindar's family, especially S.R.Y. Sucharitha Prasad and her son S.R.Y. Prasant Prasad. It is a private property and thankfully that has helped its safeguarding. But encroachments all round including the police booth prevent the full appreciation of the place and its historical location and values.



One of the oldest Ginning Mill remnants in Andhra are in Amaravathi next to the Maha Stupa. Guntur district is famous for the black cotton soils of the Deccan and cotton growing. It was also famous for weaving. Dhanyakataka was the heart of the lower River Krishna Valley and its historical evolution through intensification of agriculture and growth of commerce in the Indo Roman trade. More than two thousand years ago, it was attributed by the Greco Romans as the source of finest cottons in the then known world. No wonder one of the very early ginning mills under the British was established here. Its history is tied up with exploitative colonial taxation and impoverishment of weavers. It is also connected with the subsequent Swadeshi movement under Mahatma Gandhi. Appropriate protective measures are needed to safeguard such historical heritage that is neglected or destroyed.



Map of Amaravathi town prepared for the first time based on cartographical principles in 1817 by Colin Mackenzie and printed in 1822. Once again, for first time two hundred years later students from the School of Planning and Architecture, Vijayawada, documented the place with scaled drawings of the several elements in the above map.

Amaravathi grid planned town layout to the extreme right is from 1790s, a tribute to the Zamindar Raja Vasi Reddy Venkatadri Naidu. Amaralingeswara Temple is immediately above the grid on the river Krishna.

The Maha Stupa mound is immediately below the town. The squarish mud ramparts of Dhanyakataka are in the middle.

Balusulamma Thalli Gudi is immediately below. Megalithic or Rakshasi Gallu circles are to the extreme left.



The main temple of Amaralingeswara Swamy evidences more than a thousand years of history. It was restored in time for the Pushkaralu in 2016 under the PRASAD Scheme of the Central Government by the APTDC and Endowments together under the supervision of the Amaravathi Heritage Centre and Museum. It is the first systematic restoration of a temple in AP and with quality elements ensured across the temple precincts it sets new standards for the maintenance of temples in the state.

Good conservation is good business even in places of worship - the temple's income has trebled after the interventions. According to the MRO the temple brings more than 90% of visitors to Amaravathi contributing to local economy and job creation.

sation of such legacies and postcolonial understandings are slow to emerge in several Indian states. Hopefully the new state of Andhra and the new Board of Tourism, Culture and Heritage can make a difference and perhaps even lead the way. Only time will tell.

Amaravathi Heritage Centre and Museum is focusing on contextual heritage. The intensification of agriculture around 2400 BP with the introduction of iron ploughshare radically transformed the landscapes into fertile tracts resulting in the birth of the first historical urban centre in Andhra, Dhanyakataka or emporium of grain. It is this wealth that enabled traders to flourish here with networks connecting to the rest of India and beyond in the Mediterranean. Patronage for Buddhism and other faiths and creative genius was sustained for almost four centuries. Amaravathi Heritage Centre and Museum has taken a systematic approach to map the 300 acres of Amaravathi Heritage Town. It aspires to interpret a range of thematic episodes as part of the narratives for educational and experiential tourism. Recent focus in Amaravathi has largely been on recreational tourism. But the use of heritage resources that are non-renewable requires first systematic mapping, studying and conserving heritage resources before using them. It takes time and competent personnel with appropriate skills and knowledge. A good example is the thousand-year-old temple, a place of prominence in the Pancharama pilgrimage. A scientific study of the structures and impacts of time and poor human interventions in recent

past were first studied. Its history was analysed to unravel periods of growth and development of the temple from the Reddy kings to the recent renovations by the local Zamindar. Visitor needs were analysed. Circulation and comfort of pilgrims was considered. The adjacent Ghats and water usage were discussed. Encroachments removed systematically revealed hither to unknown elements of the temple. It was a total approach based on comparative experience from other similar projects internationally.

Buddhist tourism could make a difference to Amaravathi Heritage Town and lower River Krishna Valley. It needs to be informed by understanding derived from landscape archaeology and interpreting historical cultural landscapes. Mother Goddess tourism could also make a difference. The conservation and development of Balusulamma Thalli Gudi in Dhananikota, a first in the state, of a grama devata by the Amaravathi Heritage Centre and Museum, shows the way to add to grassroots pilgrimage and recreational spiritualism. We have 1.4 lakh mother goddesses waiting to be conserved and uses in such a pursuit.

What is significant is that the local community groups provide most of the resources in such ventures. In short heritage tourism needs to be creative with integrity to make a difference in the market place and the social space of Andhra people who are still euphoric about the opportunities provided by a new state. Smart heritage tourism that ensures conservation of resources it uses could play an important role.

NEXT WEEK

Heritage Matters will focus on festivals as civic spaces for social, economic, environmental and cultural development