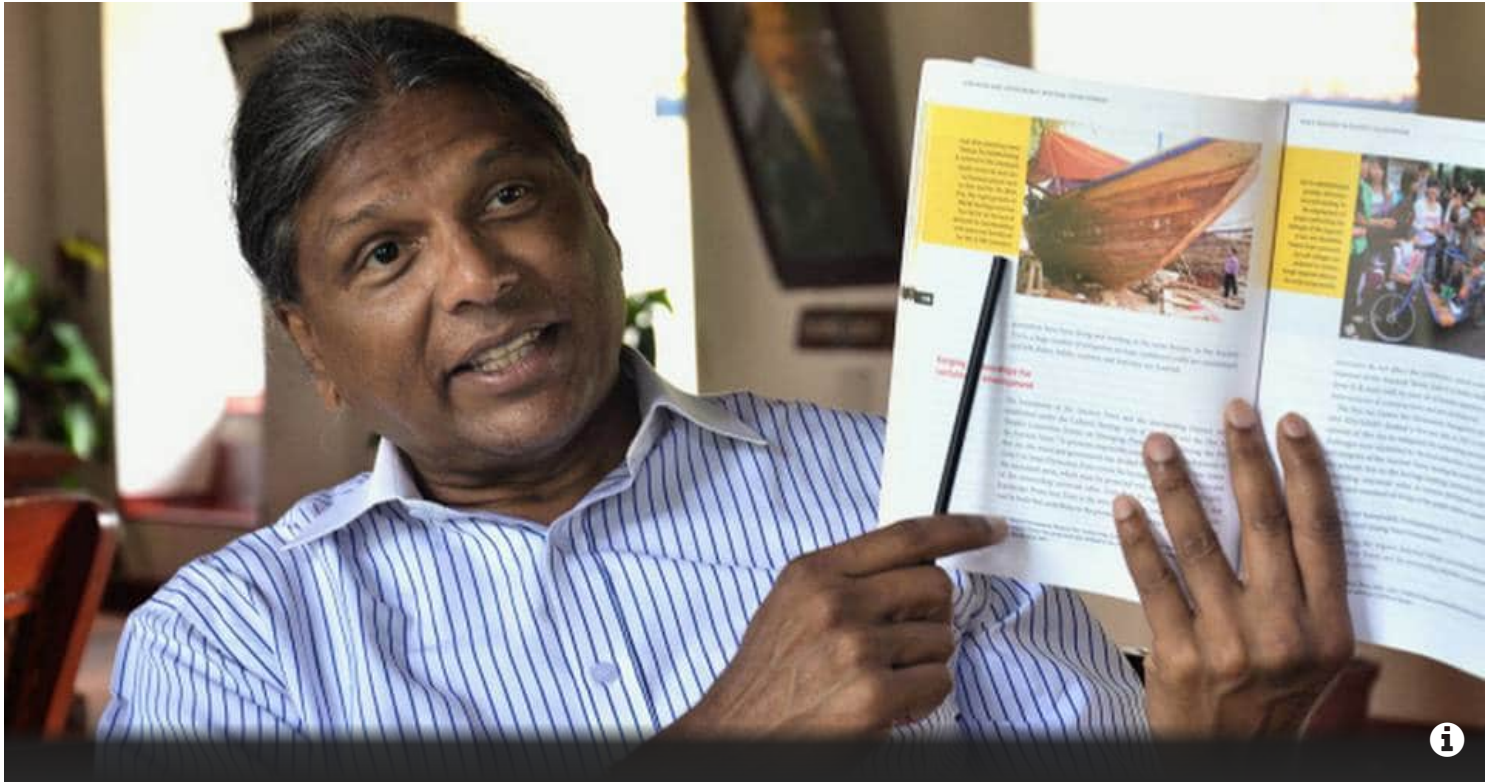


KERALA

## 'Heritage conservation involves experiential life of people'



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Amwareswar Galla woke up with the birds, as is wont to him, and took a two-hour walk along the history-strewn streets of Fort Kochi, which he had last visited as a student basketballer in 1973.

He sat down for a chat with the fishers as they operated the 'Chinese nets' without realising that he is way too familiar with similar fishing contraptions dotting Vietnamese river banks.

"I asked them about the rubbish washed ashore. They pleaded helplessness and said it was all generated upstream at the port. Sounds true, as there was lot of styrofoam in it," says Dr. Galla, internationally-renowned academic and executive director of the International Institute for the Inclusive Museum where 'culture democracy' is practised by the stakeholders in conserving 'intangible heritage' of humanity.

A while later, he found himself striking up a conversation with the owner of a homestay who was washing his car by the wayside. Two local lads from a bunch of youngsters playing football

at the ground told him, 'it is part of life', when queried about heaps of garbage in a corner.

Fort Kochi reminds Dr. Galla of the Vietnamese port city of Hoi An with intangible cultural assets like distinctive occupational practices, architecture and cuisine of outstanding universal value, which he and his team helped map and conserve. As it eventually got inscribed on the list of World Heritage sites, Hoi An now hosts some 2.3 million visitors (Dr Galla is loath to the exclusivity of the word, 'tourists') annually and remains a protected zone, with the local people actively taking part in the process of conservation and benefiting from it. The revenue generated there is ploughed back into the process of conservation.

"It is this sort of ownership by the local populace that has made the Kochi Muziris Biennale unique," he says, as former Mayor K.J. Sohan and Biennale director Bose Krishnamachari listen in.

Heritage conservation doesn't really translate into creating 'sanitised' environs with meta-narratives with Disney-land like amusement facilities to boot. It largely involves the experiential part of life by a people and must, therefore, be led by them to be a success, says Dr. Galla, who was shocked to see the damning tourism initiatives on the Buddha trail in India. On Wednesday, he'll give a talk on 'Curating Cultural Value' at an event organised by the Biennale at Fort Kochi's David Hall.