

VIJAYAWADA

Ancient Kabristaan in Amaravathi to get a facelift



P. Sujatha Varma

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Giving people dignity in death is part of culture: Prof. Galla

When Raja Vasireddy Venkatadri Naidu established Amaravathi adjacent to the ancient town of Dharanikota /Dhanyakataka, he introduced systematic planning with a grid layout. It had parallel streets with the main boulevard opening from the Amaralingeswara Swamy temple towards the south, leading to the present day Lam and Guntur.

Streets were designated based on caste affiliations and areas were also provided to the 3,000 Muslims he brought to Amaravathi and Dharanikota.

Among public spaces, an area was designated as cemetery or *kabristaan* for the Muslims, on the edge of the then town and now right in the centre of Amaravathi. There are visible signs of encroachments but a substantial part of it is protected. Burials continue to take place but the

place stands neglected. Even after 220 years, this stretch is good enough to be developed as part of the Heritage Walk.

Bringing in participatory democracy in the systematic planning and rehabilitation of the Amaravathi Heritage Town under the Centrally-sponsored HRIDAY and PRASAD schemes, *rachchabandas* (open meetings) are being conducted to integrate community ownership of the infrastructure development in this ancient town.

Currently, the town has some 4,000 Muslims belonging to the Sunni sect and several mosques cater to their spiritual needs.

For over 200 years, the *kabristaan* is the place where they pay their last respects and bury the departed ones. After consulting the local Muslim clergy, Galla Amareswar, curator of the Amaravathi Heritage Town, convened a *rachchabanda* at the entrance to the burial ground to take people of the community into confidence. Kareem Momin, assistant executive engineer, has been engaged to work on the project to demonstrate commitment and respect.

A consensus has emerged on paving a pathway from the main road to the *kabristaan*. An entrance gate with an arch will be constructed. Inside, the old stone platform of three square meters around an ancient neem/margosa tree will be restored. Prayers will be offered on an adjacent platform and the deceased will be taken to the designated plot for the final rites and burial along pathways which are to be paved with rough granite.

Sixty-odd people from the community, who participated in the *rachchabanda*, assured Prof. Galla that they would ensure proper upkeep of the place.

Zilla Parishad member Shaik John Saida said the meeting demonstrated respect for their heritage and public spaces while Imam Shaik Md. Ali affirmed that they would look after it as a living heritage space.

Shaik Jaan Ahmed (Mouzan) and Shaik Ataar Pedda Jaan, a senior citizen of the masjid, said the Social Forestry wing could give them appropriate plants to beautify the place. Moulana Shaik Anwar Saheb expressed gratitude to the government saying this would ensure dignity in death for their loved ones.