

Is Agriculture Back?

Andhra Pradesh Capital Development Story

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Some people may be waiting with bated breath for Amravati, Andhra Pradesh's new capital but several locals are finding newer ways to earn their livelihood in this transitional period. Our fifth photo essay from the ground of the new Andhra capital.

In all the capital villages there is a gradual tempering of expectations about the government capital building efforts. Residents are keenly awaiting the next move of the government even as life in the villages has changed forever. Private building activity is taking place at a rapid pace and unlike a few years ago signs of wealth being flaunted is visible everywhere. The number of new houses and shops under construction along with brand new infrastructure equipment clogging the roads in the villages easily catches the attention of a visitor.

Return of Agriculture

In the more fertile areas (*Jerebu* lands) it is common to come across fields where the owners have restarted cultivation of various vegetables. Most of this cultivation is by people owning small pieces of land. Land owners who have surrendered their land under the Land Pooling Scheme (LPS) claim that they have requested that they be allowed to cultivate their fields and government officials have agreed to such requests on the condition that they have to be prepared to make way at short notice for capital construction, even if it means losing the crop midway.



However, [newspaper reports note](#) that the Capital Region Development Authority (CRDA) is keen to discourage such cultivation.

Infrastructure Building

All the villages are witnessing continuous building activity of one kind or another. Apart from houses by individual households, a lot of government building activity is centred around expanding existing roads, building minor crossings on small culverts and laying drains. This activity, which is order of the day, was rarely seen in the past few years. However, the pace of such activity is far less hectic than it was in the run up to the foundation ceremony in October.



A visitor frequently comes across brand new infrastructure equipment at work all the time. The number of new tractors visible in the villages, mostly deployed in various infrastructure related work, is unprecedented. The picture below is one such case where a brand new (unnumbered) crane is used deployed to lay new electric poles in one of the capital villages.



Marked changes in Topography

There is a clear change in the topography of the region, compared to a year ago. A new development in the capital area is the gradual increase in clearing agricultural land albeit, in certain pockets. The leisurely pace of such activity has dampened expectations and disappointed land owners who agreed to give their land under LPS. Most of the residents are unhappy since they have no clue about when the construction activity will start in earnest or the end use of land that is gradually being cleared.



A field that has already been cleared (picture below) by a farmer. In certain cases, farmers who have turned over their land under LPS have cleared their lands to wring out some extra money that can be earned by selling palm trees.



Interestingly, the fields cleared for the foundation ceremony have not witnessed activity of any kind, construction or otherwise. Picture below near the helipad built for the foundation ceremony is a popular grazing area.



Moving Away from Public Gaze?

The last signs of the foundation ceremony are being dismantled. The makeshift structures that housed “Amaravati Pavilion” which showcased the history of the region and the future three-dimensional map of the capital during and after the foundation ceremony are being dismantled. However, the foundation ceremony site continues to draw a trickle of visitors, especially those passing through Vijayawada and those “not wanting to miss history in the making.”



Centrality of Consumption

A pronounced feature of the capital villages and the small town of Mangalari, adjoining the capital villages is the increased sign of affluence and increase in the number of people exhibiting their new found wealth. This has resulted in the rise of a completely new consumption economy catering to the new wealthy segments. Mangalagiri Town (estimated population as per 2011 Census: 73,613) now boasts of a BMW car dealership and many two wheeler dealerships, most of which were established in the past year. The BMW showroom is the first such showroom in the five coastal districts of Andhra Pradesh (comprising the districts of Krishna, Guntur, East Godavari, West Godavari and Prakasam). Till the establishment of the showroom, buyers had to purchase these luxury vehicles in Hyderabad or Visakhapatnam.



Similarly, the number of people buying new motorcycles has increased substantially since land price skyrocketed. The favourite among the villages, based on the number of vehicles visible on the roads compared to the past, seems to be the Royal Enfield or "Bullet" Motorcycle. In many villages, street side makeshift kiosks advertise sale of new vehicles and special offers to exchange old vehicles.

Most major banks now have a presence in the capital villages. This rush among the banks is visible even among the smaller public sector banks which barely have a presence in Andhra Pradesh. The picture below of a new building that will house a branch of Bank of Maharashtra.



Banks are not alone in this rush to establish a presence in the capital villages. Even general insurance subsidiaries are establishing their offices in the region. New India Assurance Company recently established an office in Thullur village.

Apparently, not all consumption segments do well. Certain segments seem to have gained more preference than others. Old cinema halls are giving way to other activities due to the lack of patrons. In the picture below, a cinema hall that has fallen into bad times finds it more profitable to host a liquor shop. The liquor outlet is located in the part that in the past hosted the theatre's canteen.

Liquor sells better than movies.

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Ironically, the commercial establishments coming up on both sides of the existing roads in place of existing houses or vacant sites means that there is less scope for the dream of wide roads in the modern capital becoming a reality in the villages, at least not unless there is a demolition drive in the near future.