



Venkatappa Art Gallery Forum

PRESS-NOTE

DATED – Wednesday, 28th November 2018

**Sub: Appeal of the Artist Community to the Government of Karnataka
Regarding proposed demolition and reconstruction of Venkatappa Art Gallery (VAG)**

Copy to various Departments:

Department of Kannada & Culture,

Department of Archaeology-Museums & Heritage,

Department of Tourism

Yet again, the visual artists of Karnataka are taken by surprise, due to the announcement made by Minister of Tourism, Sri. Sa Ra Mahesh regarding demolition and reconstruction of Venkatappa Art Gallery (VAG). Such an announcement, without an evaluation by technical experts and without any discussion with representatives of the artist community, shows scant respect to democratic traditions and processes. A few from the artist community met at VAG, to discuss and understand the reason behind this hasty decision and what action should be taken keeping in mind the future of VAG.

Venkatappa Art Gallery is the one and only Art Gallery funded and managed by the Government. Artists have time and again worked with various Governments for the growth and flourish of VAG. The furor raised a few years back, due to the decision of the handing over of VAG in adoption to a private enterprise is not very far from memory. The artist community has been quite clear in their protests and appeals to the Government to respect and safeguard the space meant for artists of Karnataka for their artistic pursuits. Artists have repeatedly requested for proper maintenance and upkeep of VAG. It is high time that the Governments give a proper listening ear to the needs of artists and initiate a dialogue with the artist community to realize a vision for Venkatappa Art Gallery (VAG).

Immediate and Important points that Arise

- VAG comes under Department of Archaeology, Museums and Heritage, Government of Karnataka, under the Minister of Kannada and Culture, the mother department. **Why is the Tourism Minister, once again, taking decisions and making announcements about VAG?** Why is the Minister of Kannada and Culture, the mother department and the Department of Archaeology, Museums and Heritage, Government of Karnataka silent about this?
- A proper democratic process would involve consulting technical experts before taking or announcing any decisions. **Why were the structural engineers not consulted before coming to a conclusion?** On what basis was a Minister on his first visit concluding that VAG building is sinking because of the moat around it? This shows an ulterior motive, a clear intent to demolish prior to inspection and consultation.

- The Minister for Kannada and Culture and the Department of Archaeology, Museums and Heritage, Government of Karnataka, must look into this recent announcement from a department that is not in charge of this Museum. As to the claim that VAG building having developed cracks and is weakened beyond repair is not for the Tourism department to point out. **This very Tourism department was willing to let a private enterprise take up VAG for adoption for an indefinite period! Surely then, the building must be stronger than is being projected now!**
- VAG was built with certain definite purposes. It was built as a museum for housing K. Venkatappa's works. It was also built as a gallery space for contemporary artists of Karnataka, to exhibit their works and for their artistic practices. Therefore, whatever moves and decisions concerning VAG, it is imperative that it should be in discussion with the artist community of Karnataka. **Why was the artist community of Karnataka not called for a discussion before such an important announcement concerning their art space was given to the press?** This speaks of a total apathy towards the artist community of Karnataka!!
- Artists who use and visit the galleries regularly, have found no major cracks, only some rain seepage here and there, certainly no major problems that cannot be solved with the consultation of experts, the will of the Government, evaluation of structural engineers, annual maintenance and necessary steps to stop any water seepage from the moat to safeguard the building's foundation. **Demolition is an extreme option that points to other intentions.**
- VAG was in fact planned to have 5 floors in the course of time out of which only ground plus two floors have been built. (<http://www.karnatakaarchaeology.gov.in/sri-k-venkatappa-art-gallery-bangalore/>) **The building, which was planned for five floors, surely will be provided with a foundation for five floors.** If now with two floors itself the building is unsafe, then the execution of the building by the State PWD remains questionable?
- The statement of Tourism Minister fails the very purpose of VAG. How is it that the Tourism Minister is planning to house the historic artifacts stored in 50 lockers of Government Museum in one floor of the proposed gallery after demolition-reconstruction of VAG? **Let the Government not forget that VAG is a Museum of Modern and Contemporary art and not meant to be an extension of the Government Museum or its relics.**

Can the visual artists please have some respite from this cry and fight for their own dedicated and democratic space?

Requests and Demands of the Artist Community:

- The Minister for Kannada and Culture - the mother department and the Department of Archaeology, Museums and Heritage, Government of Karnataka, should safeguard the interest of the artist community of Karnataka. They should handle the various challenges and workings of VAG, facilitate and make possible a democratic, vibrant space for the artists of Karnataka.

- Since VAG comes under Department of Archaeology, Museums and Heritage, Government of Karnataka, the budget allocation for VAG is combined with that of the Government Museum. The exact funds given and used specifically for VAG is not known since it has no separate budget. It is crucial to have a separate allocation of funds to VAG.
- VAG does not even have staff of its own. An overall body of staff coming from an arts background is absolutely necessary-Curator or Exhibition officer, Conservationists, Installation experts. An immediate requirement would be to have a separate curator for VAG who will look into the smooth functioning of VAG and its activities.
- Since its inception, the gallery and its entire environs have been a meeting ground and a space for various State and All India art events. It has been a centrally located, economically viable and democratic space for decades. The need to upgrade the gallery is an on-going process and the artists welcome any step or action towards it. The correct way of arriving at any solutions should be to hold discussions and meetings between the art community and the various departments managing the VAG.
- VAG undoubtedly needs immediate attention. The entire building is at the moment in state of neglect and needs repair and painting-inside and outside. The first floor rentable gallery walls need to be stripped and replaced entirely with seamless plasterboards as is done in the K.K.Hebbar room on the 2nd floor. VAG Forum has made a list of many more requirements for the gallery improvement like temporary partition walls, proper lighting, proper signage and display boards, working of lifts, AC's, fans and many more such points. We would be pleased to share the same with the Departments concerned.
- The priceless collection of Sri K. Venkatappa's works displayed in the ground floor gallery are neglected and in bad shape. The works need conservation and proper signage.
- Artists have questioned many times about the whereabouts of 'Art works of Karnataka artists' which is a Government acquired collection. These were displayed earlier in VAG. Where are those works and why are they not on display? Should the artists conclude that those works are not being displayed because of lack of space? We request the Government to provide the space necessary for the art works of Karnataka artists and bring it back for public display.
- It is unfortunate that at present many rooms in VAG both on the first floor and the ground floor are being used as office rooms and storage. Artists need more galleries – large and small, in VAG, to host simultaneous shows. Currently, the only gallery space provided to artists for exhibitions can accommodate only very large shows and that too only one show at a time. It is absolutely essential to have gallery space for artists for their activities and display of works.
- Artist community welcomes and suggests the Government to add more floors to the existing gallery building as originally planned. At present, one large hall houses the works of Sri K. Venkatappa, one large hall houses the work of Sri K.K. Hebbar and one large hall is for the

display of works by contemporary artists. It is crucial to have two more floors and empty the present offices occupied by the Government. This gives the space for the locked works of Karnataka contemporary artists to be brought for public viewing, a restoration area for conservation of art works going to be housed here, a storage space for artworks which are not on display, visiting children's art activity area etc, making VAG a vibrant space exclusively for the artists of Karnataka.

- At present VAG is the only gallery funded and managed by the Government. It has been a repeated request from the artist community of Karnataka to have more State run galleries all over Karnataka to support art activities state-wide. The proposition of Rs. 20 crores for the construction of VAG can be thus utilized appropriately:
 1. Repair and upkeep of existing VAG
 2. Adding two floors to the existing VAG
 3. New gallery in another district of Karnataka. Davangere is the ideal place to have one.

We once again urge the Government to engage with the artist community to visualize a future plan for VAG that is inclusive, transparent and democratic.

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For further information and insights on #savevag movement please visit

<http://vagforum.in>