

Let Pune's Magarpatta show the way

Vinayak Chatterjee | BS | February 20, 2008 | 08:53 IST

The Magarpatta Township Project in Pune is a case study today in 'inclusive' development. About 120 farmers came together to be masters of their own economic destiny. They pooled around 400 acres of their ancestral land on the fringes of Pune city and proposed the rather revolutionary idea that they would together develop 'Magarpatta City', an innovative mixed-use township.

The Pune Municipal Corporation, first shocked out of its wits, ultimately bowed to the power of the idea and the passion of its proponents.

In an epochal meeting in 1993, all the landowners contributed their land into a development company and accepted the principle of proportionate shareholding.

The rest, they say, is history.

With glistening office blocks ringed around a central parkland, the radiating concentric circles have housing environs and residential communes with a 'walk-to-work' philosophy. Enhancing the quality of life are world-class sporting facilities, gyms, and shopping and entertainment arcades. Few would guess, looking at the state-of-the-art development, that a farming community achieved all this on their own.

It is important to understand how this phenomenon occurred and what the constellation of circumstances were that came together. More importantly, it is worth examining whether these circumstances are replicable in the rest of the country wherever age-old agricultural land is threatened with non-agricultural developmental uses.

Let us try and understand these forces and circumstances a little better:

- The entrepreneurial vision and energy came from Satish Magar. He is not an ordinary farmer. His grandfather was in politics, his uncle was a Member of Parliament and his maternal grandfather was the first Mayor of Pune. Educated in a top-end 'westernised' Pune school, he got his degree from the Agricultural College in Pune.
- The 'vision' of an integrated urban development was not pure inspiration. Magar's politician uncle had conceived of the Pimpri-Chinchwad Municipal Corporation -- one of the earliest planned urban developments. The same uncle was also involved with other modern urban development projects in the region. These exposures from an early age shaped his vision and thinking.
- Satish's father (himself a graduate of the Pune Engineering College) ran his own civil construction company and the family owned a fairly large dairy. Satish himself got into entrepreneurial ventures in consumer products and real-estate development before zeroing in on the township opportunity.
- The family itself owned about 40 per cent of the land area that was ultimately pooled together, and their social standing and relatively higher exposure and economic clout could get the other land-owners to take the proposition seriously.
- There was a clear threat that the Pune Municipal Corporation would notify and acquire the Magarpatta lands as the 1982 draft development plan showed them to be in the future urbanisable zone of Pune.
- This huge amount of commercial-residential real estate coming into the market required an adequate demand base. Luckily, by the time the project was getting readied, the IT-BPO boom had already hit Pune.

- Fairly heavy-duty networking amongst the influential had to be done. The Magarpatta promoters were able to get their 'concept' vetted, endorsed and supported by the likes of Deepak Parekh, Sharad Pawar, B G Deshmukh (retired cabinet secretary) as well as a list of senior Maharashtra bureaucrats and politicians.
- The landowners who had pooled in were not only promised a high capital return on the value of land they had thrown in, but were also given new-age entrepreneurial options arising from the plethora of on-site opportunities. So, farmer families became excavation contractors, concrete-block makers, restauranteers, taxi and truck operators, grill and cabinet makers. Many became civil contractors too, taking on pockets of in-situ development.
- So, can the Magarpatta experience be replicated as a model of 'farmer-led' inclusive development across the length and breadth of the country? Yes and No. Yes:
- If there is existing cohesion and social harmony in the area, as was the case here.
- If local communities throw up well-educated, visionary and well-connected entrepreneurs like Satish Magar who, by virtue of their land-holdings and social status, are readily accepted and trusted as opinion leaders as well as business anchors.
- If the agglomerated land is within the fringes of large well-connected commercial towns and cities that anyway have a real-estate boom waiting to happen from sunrise sectors and require little 'destination-marketing' per se.
- If, across the development process, the natural leader (*a la* Satish Magar) is perceived to be fair, and is seen to be distributing the gains to all the pool members in a transparent manner.
- If the Magarpatta model is replicated by other rural communities who may not have their own Satish Magar but invite entrepreneurs like him who enjoy the trust of the community to take similar 'sharing' models forward. (Already, the model is being tried out in two similar patches outside Pune where the Magarpatta Company has been invited by the local community to play the prime 'developer' role.)

Obviously No, if the above conditions do not hold. Also no:

- In areas where land holdings are so fragmented that collecting 500 acres could well involve thousands of family members.
- Where the issue gets highly politicised, *a la* Nandigram.

In most cases where land is required for large format infrastructure projects, there will still be no substitute for pro-active external interventions in resettlement and rehabilitation efforts. This is because it does seem unlikely that most parts of rural India can throw up the enriching and heady cocktail of circumstances that can make a Magarpatta happen. But let us celebrate the fact that in one city in India, it did.

Cheers!

ALSO SEE:

- [The amazing story of Magarpatta](#)
- [The Rs 4000-crore township that farmers built](#)

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