

How caste-minded Brahmins got conned by a realtor building 'Brahmin-only' colony in Hyderabad

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A realtor was arrested last week in Hyderabad for cheating more than a 1,000 people of around Rs 25 crore, including several NRIs and top government officials. The story would not have raised as many eyebrows if not for one significant detail – the realtor Y Prabhakara Sharma had promised his clients an “exclusive Brahmin housing colony”. It was to be named “Veda Gayatri Agraharam” and built in Chegur village of Kothur Mandal at the outskirts of Hyderabad.

That the list had several NRIs and top government officials only reinforces the fact that some people can leave the country, could reach the pinnacle of power, but you cannot take the caste out of them. What’s more – Prabhakara’s campaign was a perfect mix of a medieval mindset and modern technology.

Prabhakara, who is a native of Guntur, ran an aggressive advertising campaign on TV and newspapers in united Andhra Pradesh and later Telangana, from [as early as 2007](#).

Pictures on Facebook page of proposed Agraharam

He did this to earn the trust of potential buyers, to whom he promised that the area would be exclusively for Brahmins and would be a “hi-tech agraharam”. Almost all local newspapers and TV channels had been carrying advertisements for years. On TV, he mostly advertised on devotional channels like Bhakti TV and during astrology programmes on various channels. Prabhakara even had a [Facebook page](#), two YouTube accounts where he promoted his advertisements and a furnished [website](#). “He hired vehicles and provided transportation from his office in New Nagole, LB Nagar to ‘Veda Gayatri Agraharam’ at Chegur village for

sightseeing. He arranged lunch and conducted 'homam' at the site," a report in the [Deccan Chronicle](#) quotes the investigating officer as saying. Prabhakar's main facilities included a Vedagayatri Goshala (Cow shelter) with Ongole cows, Veda Pathashala (Vedic school), Veda Gayatri IAS Academy, Kalyana Mandapam (Marriage hall) for performing Brahmin marriages. Smoking, consumption of alcohol and meat were to be strictly forbidden in the colony and pets too were to be banned as they hunt for flesh around the colonies. Only cows were permitted.

Prabhakar took 20 per cent of the plot cost as advance and the remaining amount through EMIs, collecting lakhs from each customer, until the victims realized that no colony would come up, and complained to the police.

What is unfortunate is that the casteist mindset of some has not changed in the past 2000 years. Brahmin's colony or 'Agraharams' have been around since 3rd century AD. They were called Chaturvedimangalams back then. Ghatoka and Boya were also common names.

According to the traditional Hindu practice, the town would be planned with an Agraharam, which consisted of two rows of houses running north-south on either side of a road with a Shiva temple on one end and a Vishnu temple on the other.

Pictures on Facebook page of proposed Agraharam

Today, many of these Brahmin families have packed up and left and there are a very few of the colonies still standing. But in their space, new age complexes are being built to keep the other castes away.

A similar Brahmin township had cropped up around a 100 km from Bengaluru in 2013. At the time, a Supreme Court lawyer had written to the union and state governments asking them to intervene as it encouraged casteism. While officials from the Brahmin community funded trust claimed that the project was not for profit, the advocate claimed otherwise. "When a government knowingly backs a project which it knows will end up discriminating against members of many castes, now that discrimination

will fall foul of Article 15 of our Constitution," an [NDTV](#) report quoted him as saying.

However, the legality of Agraharams is still under debate.

Prabhakara's main target audience was NRIs and government officials, who were willing to shell out a lot of money for a plot in the Agraharam. The victims of the incident, [voiced their views](#) on a regional news channel, where they spoke about how they saw the advertisement on 'Bhakti TV' and decided to buy a plot to find people in a "nice environment with the same interests and thought process."

It may seem that caste discrimination has died down, but a 2014 [survey](#) revealed that at least 27 per cent of the country agreed that they practiced untouchability in some form. The practice was most prevalent among Brahmin respondents with 52 per cent while 24 per cent of non-Brahmin forward caste respondents also admitted to it.

[Various laws](#) forbid discrimination by caste while at the same time contradict it as well, as official schemes push positive discrimination, by reserving quotas according to caste. Politicians in India have also excelled at 'caste politics,' doling out benefits and promises based on caste.

"Caste identity is sticky baggage, difficult to dislodge in social settings," [The Indian Express](#), quotes the lead researcher of the 2007 study as saying.