

CONNECTING THE DOTS...



Shore Temple, Mamallapuram, UNESCO World Heritage Site

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A Publication Series

on

Connecting the Dots 1.0: 2021

Connecting the Dots 2.0: 2023

By

ICOMOS INDIA

National Scientific Committee on Cultural Tourism

Editor

Ar. Madhu Vottery

Advisors

Dr Sanjib Kumar Borkakoti and Ar. Shreeamey Phadnis

PROLOGUE

By
Dr Rima Hooja
Ar Shalini Dasgupta and
Dr Fergus MacLaren

**Message by Rima Hooja**

The visual delights of both the built and the intangible human inheritance of the larger world around us is often what strikes the average visitor or tourist to any place. In the main, the reactions of tourists as well as those connected with cultural tourism, range from awe and wonder at the sites viewed, to irritation over minor travel hiccups and uncoordinated access to local tourist information, or to transport flaws and issues over meal options etc.

Other issues include poor signage, and out-right harassment that affect the creation of good visitor memories. Added to that, are the issues of adequate service facilities for visitors, site management plans, protection of tourist sites and tourists, over-tourism issues, and the knowledge that the balance between sustainable/responsible tourism versus over-exploitation of tourism sites and resources is something all professionals in this field of Cultural Tourism need to constantly work with.

The past few years, starting with the 'Covid Years' has seen an incredible degree of transformation and change in our perception of the style & modes of tourism, our human footprints on climate change, and our long-term impact on the Earth, as we strive to achieve United Nations Sustainable Development Goals and similar future landmarks.

India is a remarkable land with a civilisation that is several thousand years old. There are numerous types of heritage found across every part of our country. The rich culture of India, with so many ethnic groups having their own distinctive cultural wealth, foods, festivals, celebrations, etc., make our country a paradise for cultural tourism. India attracts millions of tourists from all over the world, in addition to domestic tourists. Such a large footfall needs to be managed in a sustainable manner, in keeping with the Cultural Tourism Charter of ICOMOS.

ICOMOS India therefore ensured the holding of a series of webinars to highlight these issues during 2021 and 2023.

These were successful and helped many of us as professionals, in collectively analysing and better understanding aspects of Cultural Tourism.

The webinars had several heritage experts proffering their invaluable views and insights about several important places and numerous heritage aspects from different parts of the country. Both TANGIBLE and INTANGIBLE aspects were discussed. The colourful presentations - including of festivals and aspects of living heritage, made the talks extremely interesting. It was therefore decided to convey at least a part of that experience via written /print medium for the wider audience to share in.

As President ICOMOS India, I am grateful to Ar. Madhu Vottery with Dr Sanjib Kumar Borkakaoti and Ar Shreeamey Phadnis, to have taken up the onerous task of collecting, collating, editing, and formatting the webinar papers into a monograph. It is hoped that more publications on Cultural Tourism and related aspects will continue to come from the ICOMOS India NSC on Cultural Tourism, and all those who have participated in the webinars and subsequent brainstorming, further paper-writing, and further analyses on the subject.

My very best wishes for the future activities of this ICOMOS India Cultural Tourism NSC and for everyone concerned with Cultural Tourism and its wider issues.

Rima Hooja, PhD

President, ICOMOS India

**Message by Ar Shalini Dasgupta**

Cultural tourism has emerged as an important interdisciplinary field that brings together heritage conservation, community engagement, sustainable development, and cultural exchange. By facilitating meaningful encounters with both tangible and intangible heritage, it contributes to a deeper understanding of the historical, social, and cultural processes that shape places and identities.

This publication seeks to explore the diverse dimensions of cultural tourism through critical inquiry and informed discourse. It underscores the importance of preserving cultural heritage while promoting responsible and inclusive tourism practices that respect local traditions, strengthen community participation, and enhance the cultural value of destinations. It is hoped that the perspectives presented in this volume will encourage further research, dialogue, and collaboration among scholars, practitioners, policymakers, and all those committed to safeguarding cultural heritage for future generations.

We also hope this collection serves as both a valuable resource for industry professionals and a catalyst for policies that prioritize cultural integrity and community-first tourism models.

I would wholeheartedly like to thank NSCCT for undertaking this wonderful series and adding to the knowledge bank of ICOMOS India.

Happy reading to all the readers.

With best wishes,

Shalini Dasgupta

Vice President, ICOMOS India

**Message by Dr Fergus Maclaren**

The 'Incredible India' tourism marketing campaign was launched in 2002, a global branding initiative that rebranded the country as a high-end, diverse, and spiritual tourist destination. India is truly incredible from a cultural tourism standpoint, boasting a millenias-old civilisation that has witnessed the evolution of numerous tangible and intangible cultural heritages found in every part of the country. This is reflected in the many ethnic groups with their own distinctive cultural wealth, festivals, customs and traditions. The webinar series "Connecting the Dots" is a thoughtful, well structured approach to presenting this well woven fabric of cultural heritage. International heritage experts proffered their well-considered views on the important places and heritages of attraction across the country. This included addressing sustainability parameters, the series reflects on the intended goals and principles of the ICOMOS International Cultural Heritage Tourism Charter, and their application, Overall, I believe that "Connecting the Dots" is a very useful platform to inculcate India's incredible tangible and intangible cultural heritage within younger generations, instilling pride and understanding of the country's rich history, traditions and customs.

Fergus Maclaren**President Emeritus, ICOMOS International Cultural Tourism
Committee (ICTC)**

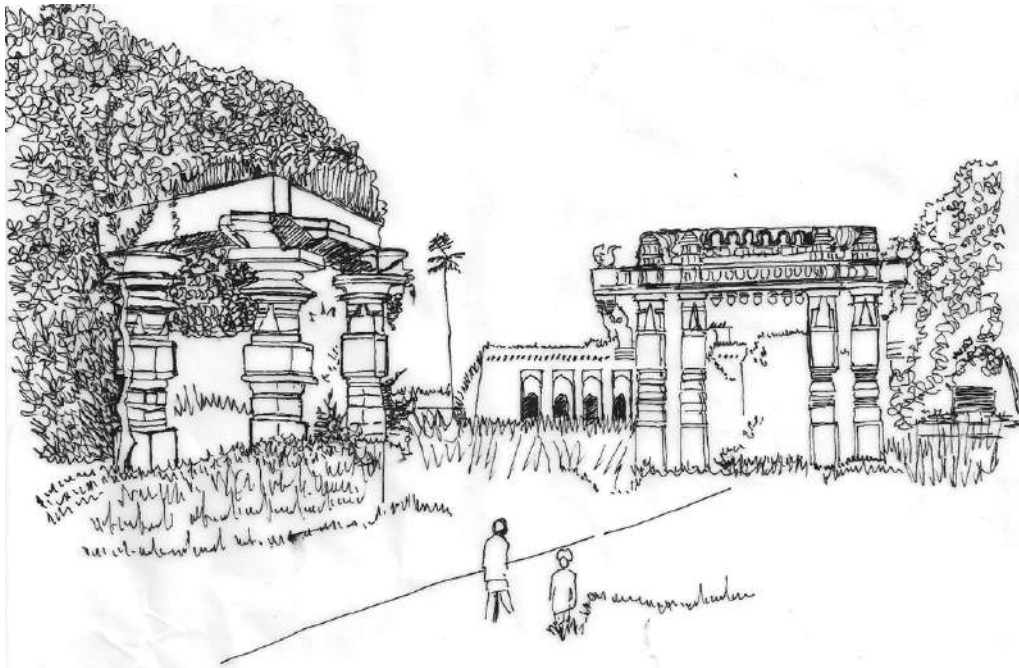
Editor's note

In 2021 the National Scientific Committee for Cultural Tourism (NSC CT), ICOMOS India started a series called '*Connecting the Dots...*', led by NSC Coordinator and co-Coordinators, actively participated by the members. Other than creating awareness about the lesser-known cultural tourism sites across various geographical regions of India among the educators, professionals from various fields, the best practices of Sustainable Tourism were discussed in these enriching and interesting sessions. The talks started from the East of the country, moved to the North, then proceeded to the North-East, then the West and finally reached the South via Central India.

The contributors were mainly members of ICOMOS- India along with some guest speakers, to share their knowledge of the diversity of the tangible and intangible cultural heritage and also best practices of Cultural Tourism across the country. As a result of these scholarly talks, research papers were written. Some speakers have also prepared 'Activity Sheets' as an output of their presentations, targeting educators, teachers and parents in particular, aside from industry experts and heritage enthusiasts.

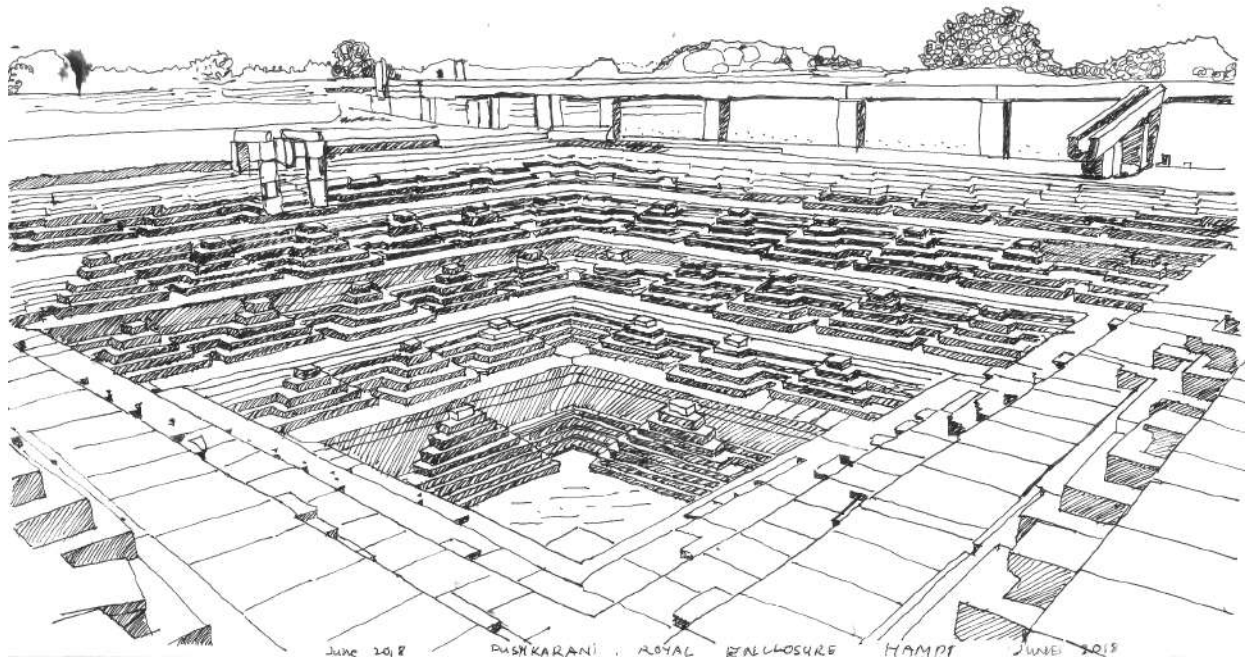
Editor

Ar Madhu Vottery, Coordinator NSCCT ICOMOS India, ICTC Expert Member



Kakatiya Toranam, Warangal Fort

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Pushkarni at Kamalapur, Hampi, World Heritage Site, India



CONNECTING THE DOTS.....

Organised by
National Scientific Committee
of Cultural Tourism, ICOMOS India



Cultural Heritage & Tourism: India and Abroad

Saturdays - Duration : 90 Min,
Time: 5:30-7:00 PM
23rd January till 20th February, 2021

We plan to represent the NSC Cultural Tourism by taking the participants on a visual journey of the colourful cultural fabric of India. The idea is to be inclusive and also present the lesser-known gems of India's vast cultural heritage. The discussion will lead to the best practices of Responsible Tourism. Take-aways and outcome-based event: for tourism entrepreneurs and young adults.

23rd January, 2021
East Zone

30th January, 2021
North-East and West Zone

6th February, 2021
North Zone

13th February, 2021
Central and South Zone

20th February, 2021
INDIA TOURISM and The International connect


Dr. Madhura Dutta
 
Ar Smitta Shree Swain

Rural Tourism of Bengal
Incredible India's involvement
Cultural Tourism in Odisha and the Buddhist circuit


Ar Ibynta B Tiewach
 
Ms Brijeshwari Gohil

Monoliths of Meghalaya
Heritage of Bhavnagar Gujarat


Dr Harveen Bhandari
 
Ar Vipul Varshney

The Shakti Peeth of Himachal Pradesh
Lucknow City of Dreams


Ar Sri Shreamey Phadnis
 
Ar Sri Sanyasurayana Murthy
 
Ar Madhu Vottery

The Ancient India Trade Route in Malwa Nimar Region
Virtual Tour of Hyderabad


Prof Ujjwala Khot Palsuley
 
Ms Ritu Ramni

A round table with collaborators, connecting the learning with academia
Presentation on Cambodia, India and the Hispanic countries

For more information contact NSC-Cultural Tourism Coordinator
Ar. Madhu Vottery at +91 98497 28841, nscct.icomosindia@gmail.com
The webinars will be live on Facebook @icomosindia

COLLABORATOR

TEACHFORINDIA

CONNECTING THE DOTS...

CULTURAL HERITAGE AND TOURISM: INDIA AND ABROAD

The event was organised by the National Scientific Committee Cultural Tourism (NSC-CT) of ICOMOS India in collaboration with Teach For India.

The webinar series was a visual journey of varied popular and lesser known potential cultural tourism sites and their connection with other countries. The webinar was a success with informative and wonderful cases/stories presented by scholars, researchers and eminent guest speakers from ICOMOS and across the country.

Note: The webinar Series was divided in five parts for various zones. The zones are the geographical limitations of the country (not limited to ICOMOS India Zones).



CONNECTING THE DOTS..... Cultural Heritage & Tourism: India and Abroad
Organised by National Scientific Committee of Cultural Tourism, ICOMOS India

East Zone | Webinar 01
Saturday, January 23 2021, @ 5:00PM

Dr Madhura Dutta
Director at banglanatak dot com and leading international collaboration and research initiatives. She has over 18 years of global work experience including UNESCO, All India Artisans & Craftworkers Association, and CSRs. She has a PhD from the Tata Institute of Social Sciences (Mumbai), and MA degrees in Sustainable Development under Commonwealth Scholarship (Staffordshire University, UK) and Sociology (Calcutta University). She is also a freelance writer on culture and development issues.

Rural Tourism of Bengal Incredible India's Involvement
The presentation will be a case study on 'Development of Indigenous Cultural Tourism in West Bengal', designed and facilitated by Banglanatak dot com – a twenty year old social enterprise working towards poverty alleviation and inclusive growth through a culture based livelihood model across India.

Ar. Smita S Swain
Bachelor in Architecture (PMCA Cuttack), Masters in Urban Planning (IIST Shibpur), PG Diploma in Housing and Urban Development (IHS Netherlands). More than 10 years of experience in professional practice as Architect. Worked as urban planner in green field development project of Atal Nagar, Chhattisgarh. Presently pursuing PhD at NIT Raipur. Area of research is tourism impact analysis in heritage cities. Area of interest is study of heritage cities, cultural heritage, and tourism. The case study will focus on strategy, impact, success stories of community-led responsible cultural tourism.

Cultural Tourism and Sustainable Development | Case of Orissa
The case study will focus on strategy, impact, success stories of community-led responsible cultural tourism.

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For more information contact NSC-Cultural Tourism Coordinator Ar. Madhu Vottery at +91-9849728841, nsct.icomosindia@gmail.com. The webinar will be live on <https://www.facebook.com/icomosindia>

WEBINAR 1: 23 Jan 2021

East Zone

The Session was coordinated by Ar Madhu Vottery.

The First speaker was **Dr Madhura Dutta** – A Culture and Development Specialist, Researcher and Writer, the Director at 'banglanatak dot com'

Her talk was quite informative titled '**Indigenous Rural Cultural Tourism in Bengal with the involvement of Incredible India**', demonstrating a case study on 'Development of Indigenous Cultural Tourism in West Bengal'. It was designed and

facilitated by ‘banglanatak dot com’—a twenty year old social enterprise working towards poverty alleviation and inclusive growth through a culture based livelihood model across India. The talk explored the idea of community development through culture based approach in the context of rural parts of Bengal with ‘Art for Life’ Methodology based on 3 key points – safeguarding art through heritage education, capacity building and market linkages for artists and rebranding villages as cultural hubs. The talk underlined the importance of community led local and cultural tourism with a number of success stories across rural Bengal of cultural identity and brand building. Capacity building, global collaborations, technological interventions and connecting with the rest of the world through cultural heritage tourism perspective helped communities to build pride and value in their cultural heritage and made them sustainable economic models. The talk also highlighted the importance of linking cultural heritage tourism to overall sustainable development goals to improve the socio-economic conditions and ensure the continuation of cultural practices of the indigenous communities.

The Second speaker was **Dr Smita Shree Swain** – An Architect and Urban Planner. Currently, she is presently engaged as Project Director, SnJ Associates, Raipur, Chattisgarh.

Her talk titled ‘**Cultural Tourism and Sustainable Development: Case of Odisha**’ **was** focused on strategy, impact and success stories of community-led responsible cultural tourism. Odisha has a significant contribution of tourism industry in the overall economy of the state. The presentation started with the visual introduction of various important and popular cultural tourism sites in Odisha, statistics and analysis of tourist footfalls at these various sites and current tourism practices. Further it introduced lesser known cultural heritage sites and their aspects namely Buddhist Ruins, Tribal Heritage Rural Tourism including local events and festivals showcasing traditional art, craft , cuisine and cultural practices of Odisha that has tremendous potential for tourism development. The speaker talked about probable positive and negative economic, environmental, social and cultural impacts of development of cultural tourism on the indigenous communities with various case examples and highlighted the importance of Responsible Tourism approach in achieving Sustainable Tourism Development.

Q & A Sessions of the webinar was coordinated by Ms Brijeshwari Kumari Gohil and discussed following points

1. How these two topics could be linked to school level education in context of improving Heritage Education, efficient information dissemination and awareness generation amongst younger generations so that the culture is valued, practiced and rooted. It should be passed on to the future generations.
2. How capacity building, global collaborations and connecting with the rest of the world through cultural heritage tourism helped communities to build pride

and value for their own cultural heritage and also make them sustainable economic models.

3. Importance of collaborating with various stakeholders and local governmental bodies for upgradation of infrastructure keeping in mind context of site, villages and surroundings to facilitate cultural heritage tourism.

The session concluded with a brief talk by **Sri Jitu Mishra**, a traveller, scholar and educationist from Virasat-e-Hind Foundation, Odisha. He talked about the work he has been doing for tribal indigenous communities and their villages to develop sustainable and experiential tourism in Odisha through capacity building, skill development and participatory approach.



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CONNECTING THE DOTS.....

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Cultural Heritage & Tourism: India and Abroad



NE & West Zones | Webinar 02
Saturday, January 30, 2021 @ 5:30 PM



Ar Ibynta B Tiewsoh

Ibynta Bakmen Tiewsoh has been teaching for 8 years as an Assistant Professor at the Department of Architecture, North Eastern Hill University (NEHU) in Shillong, Meghalaya. She has collaborated with the faculty and students of TU Berlin in a Design and Built project. She was actively involved with NESFAS, an NGO which is creating habitats for the agrarian communities in Meghalaya. She is a co coordinator with the Design Innovation Center, NEHU. Her research interests are on Conservation, Craft, Materials and Building Technology. She is currently pursuing her PhD in Architectural Conservation from School of Planning and Architecture, New Delhi.

Monoliths of Meghalaya

Monoliths are memorial stones to mark an event or to remember an important individual. The session will map out the main sites where these monuments are found. It will focus on the history and cultural significance of the monoliths in Meghalaya and the influence that Cultural Tourism has had on the conservation of these sites.

Brijeshwari Kumari Gohil has a BA Joint Honours degree in Archaeology and History of Art from the University of Nottingham, U.K. as well as an MA in Heritage Management and Conservation from Durham University, U.K. She has worked as a researcher for Durham UNESCO Chair in Lumbini, Nepal, prior to which, she worked at CSMVS Mumbai. She started the Bhavnagar Heritage Preservation Society- an organisation that works towards the preservation, protection and promotion of Bhavnagar's heritage. She is currently restoring her ancestral home, the Sihor Darbargadh and has been working in various capacities with the Piramal Art Foundations since 2015.

Heritage of Bhavnagar, Gujarat

The kingdom of Bhavnagar was founded in 1723 by Brijeshwari's forefather- Maharaja Bhavsinhji I.

Brijeshwari's discussion would touch upon the built heritage of the city, highlighting its historic significance and present day uses and conditions. The talk would be concluded by discussing the organisation, Bhavnagar Heritage, which strives towards protecting, preserving and promoting the city's heritage.



Ms Brijeshwari Gohil

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For more information contact NSC-Cultural Tourism Coordinator
Ar. Madhu Vottery at +91-9849728841, nsctt.icomosindia@gmail.com.
The webinar will be live on <https://www.facebook.com/icomosindia>

WEBINAR 2: 30 Jan 2021

North East Zone and West Zones

The session was coordinated by Ar Madhu Vottery.

The first speaker, **Ar Ibynta B Tiewsoh**, teaches in NEHU Shillong and is currently pursuing her PhD from SPA Delhi in Architectural Conservation. She was involved in a project with an NGO for creating habitat for the Agrarian community of Meghalaya. Ibynta has collaborated with the students and teachers of TU Berlin for a Design and Build Project.

In her talk, '**Cultural Heritage of Meghalaya**', the speaker provided a comprehensive overview of the state's tourism landscape, focusing on responsible, community-led models. The talk utilized sociological perspectives to examine the impact of rising tourism on the region's iconic monoliths and megaliths. Beginning with a visual tour of popular destinations, the session transitioned into a technical look at the growth and community management of Living Root Bridges. The talk further gave insights on popular tourist attraction the Living Root Bridges, its application, process of growth. Its management and maintenance by local communities and concerns safeguarding these heritage components were also discussed. Key case studies included the eco-tourism model of Mawlynnong Village and the indigenous preservation of the Mawphlang Sacred Groves. The speaker emphasized that since the tourism in Meghalaya's primary appeal is rooted in its natural and cultural heritage, sustainable, community-based solutions are essential for future management.

The second speaker was **Ms Brijeshwari Kumari Gohil**, she has a joint Master's degree in Archaeology and Heritage of Art from University of Nottingham UK.

Her talk titled '**Heritage of Bhavnagar, Gujarat**' was a visual treat with historical narrative of heritage assets of Bhavnagar and various initiatives. The sincere efforts are being made for its protection, preservation and promotion by engaging local communities and encouraging cultural heritage tourism. The talk helped in understanding the traditional architecture, art and craft forms. The presence of various utility-based structures in the city such as the famous Sir Takhatsinhji Hospital and the Darbari Kothar and other interesting facts were shared by the speaker. The discussion helped participants understand the cultural influences of the time and the manner in which art, architecture and engineering cross paths with one another. The talk highlighted the innovative and engaging activities and programmes with multi-stakeholder approach for awareness generation, capacity building, skill development and promotion of cultural heritage of Bhavnagar. These activities are curated by the community for the community starting from school children to local youth to senior citizens. Talk concluded discussing the impacts of cultural heritage to encourage tourism, employment, revenue generation, supporting local artisans, heritage sensitivity and awareness along with the urban planning and heritage conservation

Q & A Sessions of the webinar was coordinated by Ar. Smita Shree Swain and discussed following points

1. How this vast knowledge of cultural heritage can be passed to the younger generation specially school children without putting extra academic burden on them and how they can be actively involved and engaged with their local cultural heritage.
2. Possibilities of including cultural heritage as a subject in the school curriculum or add as an extracurricular activity.

3. Importance of multi-stakeholder collaboration for heritage conservation activities.

This session of the ‘Connecting the Dots’ Webinar series gave the audience an insight to the vast cultural heritage of India. The cross-cultural exchange was met with a lot of appreciation and mention of similar practices of Megaliths found in southern India by the audience.



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CONNECTING THE DOTS..... Cultural Heritage & Tourism: India and Abroad

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North Zone | Webinar 03
Saturday, February 06, 2021, @ 5:30PM




Mr Lokesh Ohri

Sri Lokesh Ohri is an Anthropologist, author and activist. His work is focused on the Himalayas. He has a doctorate from the South Asia Institute, University of Heidelberg, Germany. He was also Marsilius Van Inghen Fellow at the Radboud University Nijmegen, Netherlands. He has worked extensively on the Ganga and published a two volume compendium titled Upper Ganga Region: Cultural Resource Mapping. His latest work, *Till Kingdom Come*, published in India by Permanent Black and worldwide by the State University of New York Press (SUNY), deals with the Himalayan divine-king Mahasu, and how rituals define political life in the Himalayas. He also runs a popular heritage walking group called *Been There Doon That*, in Dehradun, and heads INTACH in Uttarakhand. Mr. Ohri, as the Guest Speaker for the session, will enlighten the audience with his rich experience, connecting the natural and the built heritage.



Dr Harveen Bhandari

Dr. Harveen Bhandari holds a PhD in Planning & Architecture and is currently working as Professor and Deputy Dean (Research & Publications), Chitkara School of Planning and Architecture, Chitkara University, Punjab, India. With an experience of 17 years, she also has many research papers published in national and international journals. Her areas of interest include cultural heritage, living religious heritage, vernacular architecture and 20th century heritage in India under Commonwealth.

The Shakti Peeth of Himachal Pradesh

This session will bring forth the origin and development of the Shaktipeethas, their cultural significance and associated socio-cultural values. The presentation will also acknowledge the need for sustainable interventions at these sites to deal with the growing tourism and which do not deface our heritage.



Ar Vipul Varshney

Ar Vipul B. Varshney is an architect with a Masters degree in Urban Planning. She is a winner of coveted awards like U.P. Ratan 2013 and Shakti Samman 2015. With expertise in Institutional buildings of National Importance, she has authored four coffee table books on Lucknow's heritage. Ar Varshney has also done many works in the field of conservation such as *Khusro bagh*, *Allahabad*, U.P., *Samadhi Sthal* to name a few.

Lucknow- The City of Dreams

Lucknow has a variety of architecture styles, lesser known to many of us. The speaker would take us on a visual journey of the capital of Uttar Pradesh through different historic layers and also share various aspects of cultural heritage of the region.

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The webinar will be live on <https://www.facebook.com/icomosindia>

WEBINAR 3: 06 Feb 2021,

North Zone

The session was coordinated by **Ms Brijeshwari Kumari Gohil**.

The First Speaker **Sri Lokesh Ohri** - an Anthropologist, author and cultural activist. His work is focused on the Himalayas. He runs a popular heritage walking group called 'Been There Doon That', in Dehradun, and is a Convenor of INTACH Dehradun Chapter

His talk about Himalayan communities' unique way of life that explored the community living and the '**Nature Culture linkages/ Connect in the State of Uttarakhand**'. The presentation was a visual journey through the sacred natural landscapes of Uttarakhand highlighting its significance and association with local communities. Discussion also covered the upcoming infrastructure projects and its probable impacts on the natural and cultural landscapes of Himalayas. Promoting slow tourism with a community based approach can be the way forward to safeguard the sacredness of the region- was demonstrated with case examples. The talk enlightened the viewers about the balance between the natural and the built.



Pictures of Himachal Shaktipeeth, shrines of Mother Goddess, by Dr Harveen Bhandari

The second speaker, **Dr Harveen Bhandari**, is a PhD in Planning & Architecture. She is currently working as Professor and Deputy Dean (Research & Publications) at Chitkara School of Planning and Architecture, Chitkara University, Punjab, India. With an experience of 17 years, she also has many research papers published in national and international journals. Her areas of interest include cultural heritage, living religious heritage, vernacular architecture and 20th century heritage in India.

Her talk titled '**Shakipeethas of Himalachal Pradesh**' was focused on the origin and development of these sacred sites of the hilly region of north part of India. It was also about their cultural significance, socio-cultural values associated with them, religious and sacred tourism that it attracts and the dynamic physical and the non-physical changes taking place at such sites. India has a rich repertoire of cultural heritage and a vast number of heritage sites that also includes Living Religious Heritage. Very few of them have gained national and global significance. Religion is a significant aspect in the life of Indians that millions travel to various religious sites annually. Hindu pilgrimage sites dominate the Indian landscape and Shakti Temples or Shaktipeethas of Himachal Pradesh are one such venerated group of Hindu temples that symbolises our ancient cultural landscapes. Talk also highlighted the issues, concerns and challenges that need to address the management of these sites through an integrated approach with community participation.

The third Speaker **Ar Vipul Varshney**, holds a Masters in Urban Planning and is an author of four coffee table books. She has been practicing in the field of architecture and conservation for more than two decades and has received many awards.

Her talk titled '**Lucknow: The City of Dreams**' and presentation took the audience on the visual journey of Lucknow. She discussed the historic layers of Lucknow from Prehistoric to Pre independence. The speaker introduced the cultural heritage of Lucknow to the audience highlighting some of the important architectural marvels, cultural practices, art and crafts, literature, cuisine. The statistics of the current tourism scenario in Lucknow was discussed too along with the projects for boosting the tourism economy.

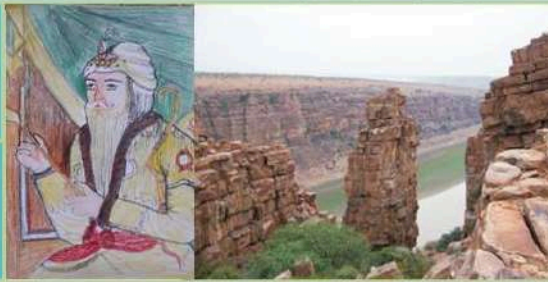


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Central & South Zone Webinar 04

Saturday, February 13, 2021, @5:30PM



Ar GSV Surya Narayana Murthy

Sri Surya Narayana Murthy is a well-known conservation architect, and an International Member of ACLA (Asian Cultural Landscape Association), Korea. He has been practicing as an Independent Consultant in the field of Architecture, Conservation, Planning, and Urban Design with an approach of “reuse, recycle, restore, appropriate use and maintain” as principles of Design, Planning and Execution of projects. He specialises in documenting Indian traditional Building and Historical building Knowledge Systems.

Water as Learnt from Historical, Traditional and Vernacular contexts- “I Learn, Understand and Save Water”. The presentation explains the presence and understanding of water in historical, traditional and vernacular contexts like Alampur (Telangana), Gandikota (Andhra Pradesh), Majuli (Assam), Ramappa temple (Telangana), Amritsar (Punjab), Baidyanath (Jharkhand) taken from the professional experience of speaker. Every drop of context contributes to water – let us understand water to save, restore, regenerate.



Ar Shreeamey Phadnis

Ar. Shreeamey Phadnis is a Heritage Consultant and co-founder of Studio Gestalt. He is an Assistant Professor at the Post-graduate Department of Architectural Conservation at Sinhgad College of Architecture, Pune. He has worked as Conservation Planner with the MMR-HCS, CSMVS and Ved Segar Architects. He has also been a Research Fellow at the National Film Archive of India and a Research Assistant with the University of Toronto.

Ancient Trade Route in Malwa-Nimar region

The uniquely located geographic regions of Malwa & Nimar in Central India have always acted as a gateway between the Northern & Southern halves of India, with the Narmada acting as a strong natural demarcation. As sites occupied from pre-historic times, these areas are a rich repository of varied historical evidences. The session will explore their crucial role in the ancient Indian Trade Route with a focus on Maheshwar.



Ar Madhu Vottery

An author, conservation architect and IVLP- USA 2012 Alumna, Madhu Vottery is an expert member ICOMOS- Cultural Tourism. She loves working with educators, parents and school children. Madhu has designed Hyderabad Heritage Walks, Craft Walk, Nature Walk, Museum and Market Walks for the Telangana State Government. She has worked on UNESCO capacity Building workshops.

Cultural Heritage of Hyderabad-A Virtual Tour

Hyderabad is well known historic city on the International map, yet there are many more interesting sites. The speaker invites the viewers to a virtual tour. She would create virtual walking tours in the historic capital of Deccan. This session would benefit the educators to learn different methods of Heritage Education.

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For more information contact NSC-Cultural Tourism Coordinator
Ar. Madhu Vottery at +91-9849728841, nsctt.icomosindia@gmail.com.
The webinar will be live on <https://www.facebook.com/icomosindia>

WEBINAR 4: 13 Feb 2021

Central and South Zone,

The session was coordinated by Ar. Madhu Vottery and Ar Smita Shree Swain

The first speaker was **Ar. Shreeamey Phadnis** - a Heritage Consultant and co-founder of Studio Gestalt.

His talk titled **Ancient trade Route in Malwa-Nimar Region with a focus on Maheshwar** explored the crucial role of Malwa and Nimar Region in the Ancient Indian trade route. The uniquely located geographic regions of Malwa & Nimar in Central India have always acted as a Gateway between the Northern & Southern halves of India, with the Narmada acting as a strong natural demarcation. As sites

occupied from prehistoric times, these areas are a rich repository of varied historical evidence. The talk was about the architectural character, cultural practices, art and crafts, intangible heritage assets, the events and festivals that contribute to the cultural and religious tourism of Maheshwar and Narmada region.

The second speaker was **Ar Madhu Vottery** - An expert member- ICOMOS Cultural Tourism.

Her talk titled '**Cultural Heritage of Hyderabad- Connecting with the School Education**' was focused on connecting heritage with kids and common people. In this session the speaker shared facts and folklores about Hyderabad that connect people, place and time. The historic city with hundreds of built and natural heritage sites is now on the International map as a UNESCO Creative City network in gastronomy category. The speaker discussed the various collaborative activities that she conducted like heritage walks, engaging kids with sketching of heritage sites and historic personalities. She talked about her innovative activity books, museum walks, nature trails etc. through which school children and teachers are connected to the local cultural heritage of Hyderabad. The second part of her presentation was a Virtual Tour of Cultural Heritage of Hyderabad. The speaker invited the viewers to join a virtual tour with the help of mobile application 'HYDERABAD HERITAGE', (available on PLAYSTORE) specially curated by her after 14 years of research work. She created virtual walking tours in the historic capital of Deccan involving and training a dozen school children. This session benefitted the educators to learn different methods of Heritage Education.

The third speaker was **Sri Surya Narayana Murthy**, a well-known conservation architect, and an International Member – ACLA – Asian Cultural landscape Association, Korea. His topic was ; '**I Learn, Understand and Save Water through Historical, Traditional and Vernacular wisdom**' The presentation explained the presence and understanding of water in historical, traditional and vernacular contexts. He discussed case examples like heritage structures and water systems of Hyderabad, Alampur and Ramappa Temple (Telangana), Gandikota (Andhra Pradesh), Majuli (Assam), Amritsar (Punjab), Baidyanath (Jharkhand) taken from his professional experience. The presentation highlighted the existence and importance of water elements surrounding many historic sites, their association, use and management and impacts. The talk explained the ancient and the historic water systems and their mechanisms too.



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CONNECTING THE DOTS.....

Organized by
National Scientific Committee
of Cultural Tourism, ICOMOS India

Cultural Heritage & Tourism: India and Abroad



Indian connect with Cambodia & Hispanic Countries - Webinar 05

Saturday, February 20, 2021, @5:30PM



Ms Soity Banerjee

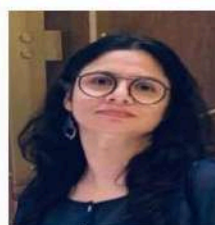
Soity Banerjee has been a travel and food journalist for over 16 years and has contributed to the BBC and the Indian editions of Conde Nast Traveller, National Geographic Traveler and Lonely Planet guidebooks, Outlook, Outlook Traveller, India Today and Mint Lounge, among others. Soity is the Project Editor at Outlook Responsible Tourism Initiative (India), an affiliate member of the UNWTO. She has been invited to discuss ethical tourism practices and policies on several platforms, including the Sustainable Tourism and Destination Asset Management (STAMP) Roundtable at SC Johnson College of Business, Cornell University, The Stream by Al Jazeera English, Indian Start-up Innovation Camp by World Tourism Forum Lucerne, and Confederation of Indian Industries (CII). She has also been involved in outreach programs and policy interventions in several Indian states and union territories.

Changing Landscape of Travel in India: Celebrating Historical Traditional and Vernacular Context Ms Banerjee, our Guest Speaker for the event will throw some light in this context.



Prof Ujjwala Khot Palsuley

Prof. Ujjwala Khot Palsuley is a Conservation Architect and a Doctoral Research Scholar for the study of South-East Asian Architectural History. She has over 19 years of professional experience. She has worked on various World Heritage Sites for UNESCO nominations, conducted Workshops, Research Projects in 16 countries. She has also founded Samrachanā - Heritage Conservation & Research Initiative, to focus on key aspects of Indian heritage.



Ms Ritu Bammi

A Spanish Language Professional & Senior Faculty teaching Cambridge Curriculum in Delhi Public School International, Ritu is a multifaced personality. A post-graduate in History and with a professional diploma in Archival Studies, she has worked with Cultural Archives, IGNCA New Delhi, and looked into the nuances of both Intangible and Tangible Heritage.

Connecting the Cultural Past of India and Cambodia through its Architectural Manifestation

The session will focus on how historically the architecture of South-East Asia and Dravidadesa (Southern India) had developed over a period of time. The influential factors from both these regions formed a rich architectural history. Through the architectural manifestations of these temples, the scholar would connect the cultural past of India and Cambodia.

Intertwining Intangible Cultural Heritage- A facet of Cultural Tourism

The dynamic culture of India has its relation to the Western world in terms of dances, mythology, ethnicity, food, festival and geographical boundaries. The presentation will focus on these facets of Indian culture reflecting in the ethnic cultures of Hispanic Countries. Let us get ready to visit some interesting parts of the world on the wings of words with her.

TEACHFORINDIA

For more information contact NSC-Cultural Tourism Coordinator
Ar. Madhu Vottery at +91-9849728841, nsctt.icomosindia@gmail.com
The webinar will be live on <https://www.facebook.com/icomosindia>

WEBINAR 5: India and Abroad

Indian Connect with Cambodia and Hispanic Countries

This was the last session of the series where 'India and Abroad' was discussed and coordinated by Ar. Madhu Vottery.

The first speaker was Ms Soity Banerjee; a travel and food journalist.

Her talk was about '**Changing Landscape of travel in India: Celebrating Historical, Traditional and Vernacular Context**'. The talk explained what Responsible Tourism is. It also highlighted the issue of the invisible burden that tourism puts on fragile and sensitive cultural sites, landscapes and thereby local communities. The presentation explored amazing stories of social entrepreneurs from local communities across the country that are developing very interesting and

engaging tourist experiences developing responsible and sustainable cultural tourism practices.

The second speaker was Prof. Ujjwala Anand Palsuley, a conservation architect, researcher and academician.

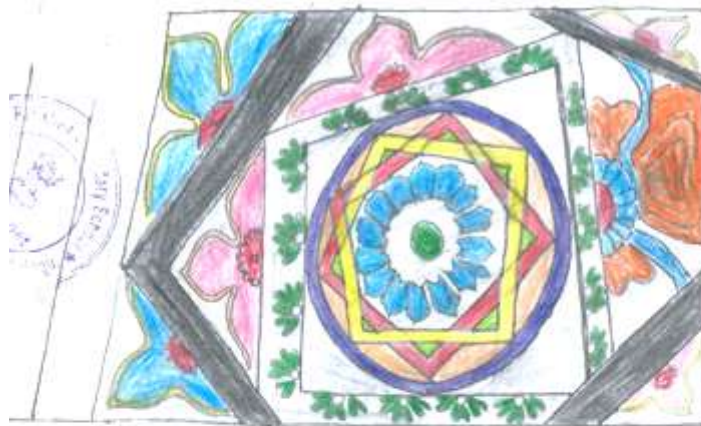
Her topic was **‘Connecting the Cultural Past of India and Cambodia through its Architectural Manifestation’**. India and South-East Asia has always been a topic of discussion for its resemblance in architectural characteristics. The session focussed on historically, how the architecture of South-East Asia and *Dravidadesha* (southern India) had developed. There was also a discussion about the influential factors from both these regions which formed a rich architectural history of this region. Both these regions have examples of architecture which are the epitome of the architectural styles from 8th to 12th Cen CE. The influences of Indian temple architecture on Khmer Temple architecture are much beyond the visible features of the structure which is deeply rooted in the culture of India and has an impact on the overall thought process of the builders and their creations. Talk presented examples with details of architectural styles that connect both the regions. It highlighted the significance of trade routes and important seaports along the coasts that contributed to the cultural knowledge exchanges, connections and influential factors from both the regions.

The third speaker was **Ms Ritu Bammi**, Spanish Language Professional & Senior Faculty teaching Cambridge Curriculum in Delhi Public School (International).

Her talk titled **‘Intertwining intangible cultural heritage of India and Hispanic World - A facet of Cultural tourism’** was about connecting threads of culture between India and Hispanic countries. The dynamic culture of India has its relation to the Western world in terms of dances, mythology, ethnicity, food, festivals and geographical boundaries. The presentation focused on these facets of Indian culture reflecting in the ethnic cultures of Hispanic Countries.

All the five events were received well by school teachers, research scholars, and professors of Architecture, history, design and tourism colleges. The recordings on FB were watched by many viewers. The last event was concluded by the then President ICOMOS India Dr Navin Piplani; the reviews of the people who attended the events were also read. Our collaborators, Teach For India Fellows appreciated the event.

MAIN PAPERS



Roofing pattern

K. Pournami

10th class



Ramappa Temple, Telangana, UNESCO WHS, sketch coloured by ZPHS students

Cultural Tourism and Sustainable Development: Case Study, Odisha

Dr Smitashree Swain¹

Abstract Odisha is one of the unique tourist destinations of the Asian subcontinent. The state attracts tourists from all over the world because of its distinguished culture, art, architecture and heritage. Orissa is referred as ‘India’s best kept secret’ because it has several treasures in the form of cultural heritage which are yet to be explored like the ancient ruins, fairs and festivals, dance forms, art and architecture, craftsmanship, cuisine, textile, indigenous tribes and rural community. These lesser known cultural heritage resources have great potential to attract more tourists in the state. This article covers the current tourism practices and scope for sustainable tourism development in the state.

Keywords: Cultural Heritage, Cultural Tourism, Sustainable Tourism, Host Community

Introduction

Odisha is an eastern state of India. It is rich in natural and cultural landscape. The unique cultural landscape of Odisha comprises distinctive religious practices, magnificent temples, other ancient architectural edifices, fairs and festivals etc. The cultural heritage of present Odisha is the amalgamation of three most prevalent religion of the state i.e. Hinduism, Buddhism, and Jainism. Traces of these religions are spread throughout the state in the form of temples, rock cut caves, various monuments, religious practices etc. The rich diversity of cultural heritage of the state is greatly associated with the lives of people and their community (Das, 2013). The state has 22.5 % of the tribal population. The tribal heritage is an integral part of the cultural fabric of Odisha (Bhaduri & Swamy, 2012). The state boasts of a variety of folk dance forms and music that has immense religious and cultural significance. Some of them are internationally recognised like the ‘Odissi’ dance form. The State is also rich in arts and crafts. The vibrant, colorful and intrinsic design on palm leaf paintings”, silver filigree, canvas, Ikat weave, stone carvings etc. attracts numerous visitors to these craft villages (Praharaj, 1949). The rich and numerous cultural heritage of the state make it a unique destination for cultural tourism.

Cultural Heritage of Odisha

The state has a great repository of cultural heritage. It is rich in both tangible and intangible heritage. The unique cultural heritage attracts numerous tourists throughout the year. Some well-known cultural heritage of the state is discussed below.

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a. *Magnificent Temple Architecture*

Orissa is a land of temples. Temples of different era, scale and different religious values are present throughout the state. This attracts numerous tourists, pilgrims, ethnographers, researchers etc. Kalinga Style of temple architecture is followed in these magnificent structures, though broadly they can be classified as Nagara style. The constructive peculiarities are also distinctive in these temples.(Chand, 2005).



Chausath Yogini Temple, Hirapur



Mukteswar Temple, Bhubaneswar

Some of the magnificent and popular temples are Sun Temple at Konark, Chausath Yogini Temple, Lingraj Temple and Mukteswar Temple at Bhubaneswar: Jagannath Temple at Puri, Raja Rani Temple etc. These temples are important not just for the architectural beauty but also for the associated religious sentiments. These are part of the syllabus of Architectural education across India.

b. *Buddhist Remains*

The state houses many significant Buddhist sites. Buddhism was the main religion during 6th to 15th century in Odisha. During this period numerous stupas and monasteries were built(*Times Travel*, n.d.).



Buddhist remains at Lalitgiri, Ratangiri and Udaygiri, Diamond Triangle of Odisha
Till date about two hundred small and big Buddhist sites have been identified across the state; ruins of monasteries, shrines, sculptures, votive stupas,

inscriptions etc. are found in these sites. Some of the most significant sites are part of a Buddhist circuit in Odisha known as the Diamond Triangle. It consists of Ratnagiri, Udayagiri and Lalitgiri in Jajpur district. Several other Buddhist destinations are Dhauligiri, Khandagiri and Udaygiri Caves. Langudi Hill is also an important Buddhist Archeological site as it is believed that Emperor Ashoka adopted Buddha Dharma at this place- transformation of Chanda Ashok to Dharma Ashok. Ashoka was a Mauryan Emperor who after adopting Buddha Dharma promoted peace, tolerance and welfare.

c. *Fair and Festivals*

The cultural expression of a community is manifested through its religious practices, customs, fair and festivals etc. Odisha, hosts several fairs and festivals throughout the year that are associated with mythological significance, religious sentiments, historical events etc. These fair and festival showcase the rich intangible cultural heritage of the region in the form of religious practices, rituals, native dance form, music, cuisines etc. in the most authentic manner. The local community along with the local administration and state government, come together to host these vibrant and grand festivals. These festivals provide an opportunity to the tourists to experience the soul of the region. It provides a platform for interaction between the tourist and the host community which allows cultural exchange (Bhaduri & Swamy, 2012). Some of the grand and vibrant fair and festivals of Odisha are the Rath Yatra of Puri, Durga Puja of Cuttack, Gaja Laxmi Puja of Dhenkanal, Konark Dance Festival of Konark, Beach Festival at Puri, Dhanu Yatra (it is a famous yatra held in Bargarh where entire town transforms into legendary stage depicting Krishna- Kansa story with Jeera river



Dhanu Yatra, Sambalpur



Bali Yatra, Cuttack

acting as Yamuna), Bali Yatra (it is famous yatra held in the Mahanadi river bank, Cuttack, to commemorate the rich maritime trade history of ancient Kalinga), Shitala Sasthi Yatra (it is a vibrant week long festival of Sambalpur, celebrating the divine wedding of Lord Shiva and Goddess Parvati) etc. (*Odisha Tourism: Festivals*, n.d.) The list is exhaustive with splendid variety. Numerous tourist

visits to witness these grand events. Festivals like Rath Yatra of Puri, Konark Dance festival attract lakhs of domestic and international tourists every year.

d. Art and dance forms

Odisha has a great number of folk dance forms, associated with the ceremonies of worship, marriage, war, courtship, hunting and imitation of antics of animals and daily routine involving household and village life.(Padhy, 2017) The earthly rhythmic foot tapping music, beat of drums, graceful body movement, gorgeous costumes, silver accessories, colourful beads and headgears make the folk dance a great visual delight.



Ghoda Nacha



Paika Nacha

Some of the popular dance form are *Gotipua nacha*, *Danda nacha*, *Paika Nacha*, *Chaitee Ghoda nacha* , *Chhau Nacha* etc. Similarly, some of the distinctive art and craft forms of Odisha are Pattachitra, Chandua, Ikat weave, Silver filigree work etc. The traditional artists beautifully and ornamentally depict mythological events, images of deities on palm leaves, canvas and several other materials.

e. Tribal Heritage

Odisha has been the homeland of sixty-two types of tribal communities. They constitute 22.8% of the total population of the state (Census 2011). The Kondh and Santhal tribes are the most prevalent communities. Some tribes like Sauras and Gadava have ancient roots. They are mentioned in Hindu epics like Ramayana and Mahabharata. Other widespread tribal communities in Odisha are Munda, Oram, and Gond etc.(*Tribal Communities of Odisha, Introduction*, n.d.). These tribal communities still practice their ancient way of living. They express their cultural identity through their custom, tradition, festivals, attire , dance forms (Patra, 2011). The cultural heritage of the tribes is the potential aspect of the socio-cultural life of Odisha. However little is known about their society, cultural values and mysterious traditions. This curiosity to gain in-depth insights of ancient knowledge systems attracts several tourists, researchers.

Cultural Tourism in Odisha

The benefit of tourism is well recognised. The tourism development has created several direct as well as indirect employment opportunities in the state. It not only helps in revival of cultural heritage, economic upliftment but also enhances a sense of pride among the community members. This can be evidently seen in villages like Raghurajpur and Pipili. Cultural tourism has resulted in economic benefit and also revival of the traditional art forms. The recognition, appreciation and economic opportunities has encouraged the young generation of these villages to gladly and actively participate in the upliftment of heritage. The governmental authorities, planners and all other stakeholders are taking several initiatives for the growth and development of tourism in the state (Mohanty, Rout, & Samal, 2019).

However, Odisha's potential for tourism development is yet to be harnessed. Majority of the tourist footfall concentrates in Bhubaneswar and Puri region which houses some important heritage sites. The other regions of the state are yet to be explored where the predominant communities are rural and tribal. These communities manifest their cultural identity through their distinctive way of living, art, dance form, fair and festival etc. These living heritage faces several persisting issues like social discrimination, poverty, illiteracy, unemployment etc. Cultural tourism can play a significant role in combating these issues. It will develop their sense of pride and confidence. It will also create opportunities to improve their living conditions.

Sustainable Tourism Development

The tribal communities are vulnerable to exploitation. In the past there have been many incidents where unplanned and insensitive tourism resulted in resentment among the people, disrupting the peace and tranquillity of the region (*Times of India*, n.d.)

Responsible and community based approach is necessary from all the stake holders i.e. local government, tourism department, travel agents, NGOs, community members etc. for fostering peace and sustainable development in the region

In the World Summit on Sustainable Development, Cape Town, 2002, Responsible Tourism is defined as *"making better places for people to live in and better places for people to visit"* (Goodwin, 2002). It strongly emphasised on the responsibility of all stakeholders to make tourism more sustainable. Murphy (1985) and Waddilove & Harold (n.d.) recommended community involvement for sustainable tourism development. Richards & Hall (n.d.) also opined that without community involvement, sustainable development is not possible.

There are many good examples where government and non-government organisations work as facilitators to promote responsible tourism development. They work towards a community centric approach. Communities are actively involved in tourism planning. They are trained in the field of hospitality, catering and reception services, so that they can provide the best possible hospitality to the tourists.

One of the success stories is Satkosia Sands Resort and Nature Camp. It is set up by the forest department and managed by the local community. This resort provides livelihood to five to six villages (Mohanty et al., 2019). The local community initiative and awareness and their active involvement has resulted in a meaningful sustainable development and an inclusive growth for them.

Many non-government organizations also work for the revival process of Odisha's indigenous culture and heritage through its sustainable tourism model. They actively work with rural and tribal communities. Facilitating from one day to a week-long curated itinerary for travel and engaging the local community in segments like trekking, hiking guide, organizing camp etc. They work toward reviving art and culture of the region by creating market linkages and branding of local agro products, art and crafts. These NGOs not only train the local communities but also the tourists. They educate the tourist about the region, the community, their lifestyle, value system etc. This creates an environment of mutual understanding and respect. This leads to a win-win situation for both the host community and tourists.

Conclusion

Odisha has tremendous potential to expand the tourism sector. Cultural Tourism can play a significant role in tourism development as the state is rich in cultural heritage. Along with well-known cultural heritage, focus should be given on the lesser-known cultural heritage present in the state.

The rural and tribal tourism in the state provides a unique opportunity to showcase the glimpse of Odisha's indigenous culture and heritage. Tourism can play a significant role in economic, social and cultural upliftment of the region. It can address many persisting issues like poverty, unemployment etc. However, the vulnerability of the cultural heritage asset needs to be addressed. For sustainable tourism development, a sensitive and community based approach is necessary. Involving Community in tourism strategy and planning can promote sustainable development.

Note: All the images sourced from the internet.

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Living Culture Around The Megaliths of the Khasi and Jaintia hills: Tourism potential with Built Heritage Conservation

Ibynta Bakmen Tiewsoh, Assistant Professor, Department of Architecture, North Eastern Hill University, Shillong, Meghalaya, India
ibtiewsoh@nehu.ac.in

Abstract The megaliths of the Khasi and Jaintia Hills in Meghalaya represent one of South Asia's most remarkable examples of megaliths, where stone monuments are not merely archaeological remains but active elements of social memory, clan identity, funerary practice, territoriality, and ritual life. Unlike many megalithic landscapes elsewhere that survive primarily as relics of the past, the Khasi and Jaintia megaliths continue to hold cultural meaning within contemporary community life. This makes them doubly significant, as tangible built heritage in the form of menhirs, dolmens, cists, cairns, and memorial stone assemblages, and as carriers of intangible heritage embedded in customary institutions, ancestral obligations, and landscape meanings. Scholarly work shows that these monuments are linked to funerary rites, clan solidarity, ancestral houses, territorial claims, and the social organization of Khasi-Pnar communities. At the same time, official tourism policy in Meghalaya increasingly recognizes cultural heritage, community participation, experiential tourism, and sustainability as central to destination development. This opens strong tourism potential for megalithic landscapes such as Nartiang, Cherrapunjee or Sohra, and Mawphlang. This paper argues that the tourism value of the Khasi and Jaintia megaliths lie precisely in their status as living heritage and that conservation must therefore move beyond monument centric protection toward community-led, landscape-based management. Sustainable tourism can contribute to conservation only when it is governed by customary institutions, supported by state heritage agencies, and designed around carrying capacity, interpretation, ritual sensitivity, and local benefit-sharing. The paper concludes that the future of Meghalaya's megalithic heritage depends on balancing visibility with restraint, visitor access with cultural protocols, and economic opportunity with the safeguarding of both built form and living meaning.

Keywords Living Culture, Built Heritage, Megaliths, Cultural Tourism

Introduction

Meghalaya, which means "abode of clouds" in Sanskrit, is located in northeastern India, bordered by Assam to the north and east, and Bangladesh to the south and west. It became a full-fledged state on 21 January 1972, with Shillong as its capital. The state is widely known for its hilly topography, high rainfall, forests, caves, waterfalls,

and abundant biodiversity, all of which add to its distinctive environmental character and tourism appeal (Government of Meghalaya, 2022; Government of Meghalaya, 2022). The Khasi and Jaintia Hills are located in Meghalaya and are one of the “Seven Sisters,” a group of six states of North Eastern India, namely Assam, Arunachal Pradesh, Manipur, Mizoram, Nagaland and Tripura.



Location map of Meghalaya in India, source: www.freeworldmaps.net

Folklore points out that the Khasis and Jaintias who reside in the Khasi Hills and Jaintia Hills of Meghalaya came to their present location from the north and Sylhet (now in Bangladesh) as the southernmost edge of their migration wherein they were driven back to the hills due to the great floods and here was where they lost their script. The khasi script as we know today was only after the arrival of the Welsh missionaries in the mid-19th century and so all written accounts in the language are post this period. Therefore, many accounts are reliant on oral history (Roberts, 1891).

The Rev. H Roberts in the introduction to his Khasi Grammar states that “tradition, such as it is, connects them politically with the Burmese, to whose king they were up to a comparatively recent date rendering homage by sending him an annual tribute in the shape of an axe, as an emblem merely of submission” (Gurdon, 1907).

The Khasi and the Jaintias have a unique language and institutions. The Khasi language is the only member of the Mon Khmer family which possesses a grammatical gender, distinguishing all nouns as masculine and feminine (Gurdon,

1907). Linguistically, the Khasis are intimately connected with the languages of the Mon Khmer group in Burma and the Malay Peninsula. (Grierson, Logan and Kuhn). Also established the relationship of the Khasis not only to the Mon Khmer languages but also to the Nicobarese and several dialects spoken by tribes in the Malay Peninsula (Schmidt, 1906).

Megaliths: A Built Heritage of the Khasi and Jaintia People

According to Maj Gurdon, there are three principal distinctive features of the Khasis. Firstly, social organisation based on the matrilineal institution, and secondly the method of divination for ascertaining the causes of misfortune and the remedies to be applied, among them the method of ooscopy or egg breaking as the Romans. Third is the custom of setting up great memorials of rough stone, of the same style and character as the menhirs and cromlechs found in Western Europe, Northern Africa and Western Asia (Gurdon, 1907).

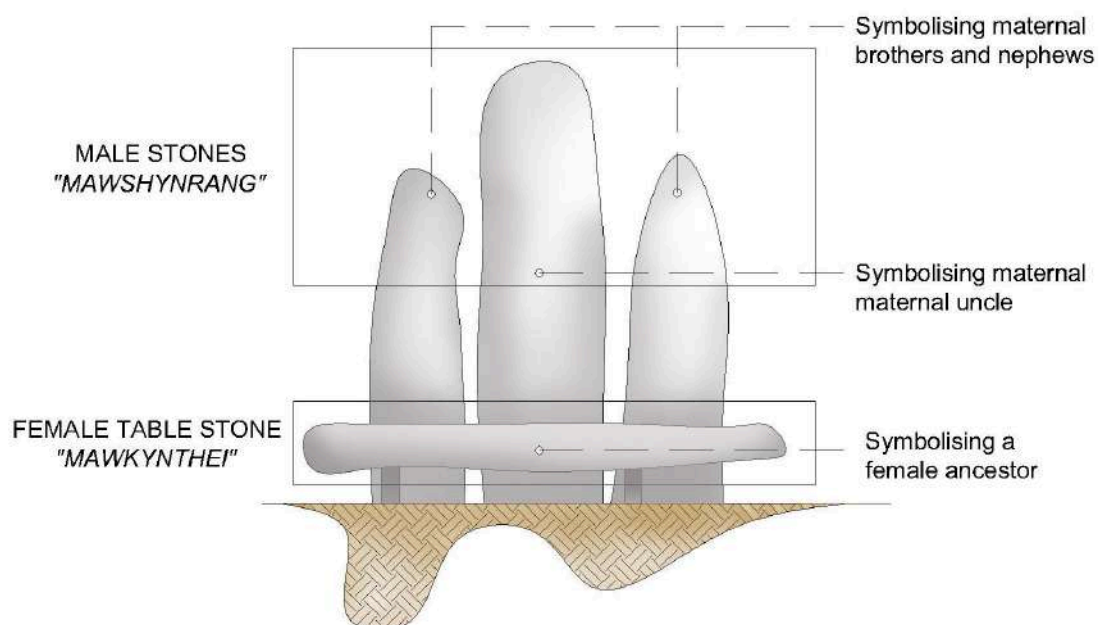
The megaliths of the Khasi and Jaintia Hills form one of the most unique heritage landscapes in the region. In 1840, Capt. Fisher remarks that the Khasis, as a race, are distinct from the neighbouring hill tribes and gives an account of the remarkable megalithic monuments found on the higher plateaus (Fisher, 1840). They are significant not only because of their age, scale, and visual presence, but also because they survive within a society where stone monuments continue to be perceived through living cultural practice. In many parts of the world, megaliths are approached primarily as archaeological remains detached from present social life. In Meghalaya, however, these stones remain tied to ancestral memory, clan identity, funerary customs, and customary governance, giving them an exceptional place within heritage studies (Mitri, 2019).



Megaliths found in Nartiang, Jaintia Hills, Meghalaya

The megaliths are generally made of hewn gneiss, granite or sandstone which are rough hewn, and generally taper to their tops, which are sometimes neatly rounded off. They consist of Menhirs or vertical stones, Table stones or Dolmens and Stone Cromlechs or Cairns. The Menhirs are erected all in one line and always consist of an uneven number of 3,5,7,9 and even 11, but with three stones as the most common. The Table stones are usually placed in the centre, usually one or two in front of the great menhir. They do not face any general direction of the sunrise or of any particular planet. The Stone Cromlechs are found generally in close proximity to the Menhirs and Table stones (Gurdon, 1907).

Broadly, there are 3 main types of megalithic structures in Khasi and Jaintia culture. Menhirs which are the upright standing stones, dolmens are the flat table stones and the Cists/Cairns which are burial stone structures. There are different kinds of megalithic structures, such as mawlynti or mawkjat, mawbyinna or mawnam, mawumkoi, maw shongthait and so on. The most well-known of these is the Mawbyinna. The Mawbyinna are stones erected to commemorate deceased parents or ancestors and consist of 3, 5, 7, 9, or, in an exceptional case, 11 upright stones with a flat table stone in front. The upright stones are called “Maw-shynrang” or male stones, and the flat table stones are the “Mawkynthei” or female stones. The central upright stone is called the “Mawkni” or the maternal uncle’s stone, and the stones to its left or right, “ki Maw Pyrsa ki Para” or the stones of the maternal brothers and nephews.



Symbolism of the mawbyinna megaliths found in Meghalaya, source Author

The *Mawbyinna* symbolizes ancestral remembrance, lineage continuity, and the cultural relationship between community and landscape. These monoliths are erected as memorial stones, often in honor of the dead or to mark important rituals and events, which makes them enduring expressions of collective memory in stone. The symbolic meaning of *mawbyinna* is also tied to Khasi social organization, where megalithic arrangements commonly include upright stones associated with the male principle and table stones associated with the female principle, reflecting gender complementarity within a matrilineal cultural framework. In this way, *mawbyinna* are not merely physical monuments but social texts that represent kinship, ritual obligation, and the continuity of clan identity across generations. Their placement within village landscapes further reinforces their significance as markers of territorial belonging and sacred memory, linking ancestors, community life, and place. Thus, *mawbyinna* may be understood as cultural symbols of remembrance, social order, and identity embedded within the cultural landscape of the Khasi and Jaintia Hills. Their heritage value therefore lies in the relationship between tangible form and intangible meaning.

Major Locations of the Monoliths

Monoliths can be found all over the Khasi and Jaintia Hills of Meghalaya, among the various sites, the more popular known sites are as follows:

A. Jaintia Hills

- i. **Nartiang:** The largest erected monolith of the area is found here at a height of twenty seven feet and two and a half feet thick and the largest table stones can be found here. Some carved stones said to represent two women near Nartiang called “Mawthawdur Briew”
- ii. **Nangbah:** Over 500 stones of various sizes which have been arranged and different functions can be found here.
- iii. **Mookyndur:** There are the major megalithic clusters found in this village, a market area, council gathering space, and a cemetery.

B. Khasi Hills

- iv. **Mawsmat:** In ancient days, this was the headquarters of a local “*syiem*” and has some of the best carved stones.
- v. **Nongkseh:** There existed a very large stone over 20 feet tall, standing above the ground, which unfortunately fell in the great earthquake of 1897.
- vi. **Umstow (Sohra):** There are two rows of fine monoliths on either side of the old cart road. All of these stones except one were thrown down by the great earthquake of June 1897. The centre stone or “Mawkni” was surmounted by a carved stone covering the

shape of a hat, but having a rim with indented edges, to represent a crown. Stones with top coverings or carved heads are however rare.

v. **Nongkrem:** There is a centre stone with a regularly carved top, evidently intended to represent the head of a man (Gurdon, 1907).



Megaliths are found in Nartiang (left), and Mookyndur (right) Jaintia Hills, Meghalaya. Source: Author

Cultural Heritage and Tourism Potential

Many developed economies rely on heritage resources as a major component of tourism and economic development (O’Leary et al., 1998). Numerous people travel each year globally to seek and experience places of outstanding historical values. The World Tourism Organization notes that approximately 50% of all international travels every year involve visits to cultural heritage sites (Timothy, 2011). In the United Kingdom, for instance, heritage sites and visits to cultural events are central to the tourism industry, and are estimated to account for “approximately 4.5 billion pounds a year, directly supporting 100,000 full-time jobs” (Timothy, 2011).

Heritage tourism in the US is also an essential sector of domestic tourism. It achieved an annual growth rate of 13% between 1996 and 2003, with approximately 216.8 million personal trips to heritage sites in 2002. 81% of American travelers away from home in 2002, “visited at least one heritage site or participated in a cultural tourism activity” (Timothy, 2011). The average expenditure was \$623, a figure roughly 50% higher than the expenditure of non-heritage visitors (Ejikeme et.al, 2020). It is argued that people travel to heritage places to experience something different, rejuvenate, and find ways to cope in a complex and unstable world (Timothy, 2011).

Tourism Statistics

From the statistical data on tourism inflow and activity, there has been a steady rise and increase of both international and domestic travellers. The number of Foreign Tourist Arrivals (FTAs) in India during 2018 increased to 10.56 million as compared to 10.04 million in 2017. The growth rate in FTAs during 2018 over 2017 was 5.2% as compared to 14.0% during 2017 over 2016. Tourism continues to play an important role as a foreign exchange earner for the country. In 2018, Foreign Exchange Earnings (FEE) from tourism were US\$ 28.59 billion as compared to US\$ 27.31 billion in 2017, registering a growth of 4.7%. The number of domestic tourist visits in India during 2018 was 1854 million (revised) as compared to 1657 million in 2017, with a growth rate of 11.9 % (Government of India, 2019).

In 2018 the number of Foreign Tourist Arrivals (FTAs) in Meghalaya, increased to 18,114 visitors as compared to 12,051 in 2017. Similarly, the increase is seen in domestic travellers as well, from 9.9 lakh in 2017 to 11.98 lakhs in 2018. The growth rate in FTAs during 2018 was 20.94 % and domestic travellers was 50.31%. (Government of India, 2019).

Policies: National and State

In March 2020, the “Adopt a Heritage” ‘Apni Dharohar, Apni Pehchaan’ was launched by the Ministry of Tourism, Government of India in close collaboration with the Ministry of Culture, Archaeological Survey of India (ASI), State, UT Governments and the Private, Public sector companies, Trusts, NGOs, Individuals, for developing amenities at heritage sites, monuments and tourist sites to make them tourist-friendly and to increase the site’s tourism potential by improving the tourist experience in a planned and phased manner. (Government of India, 2020).

Meghalaya Tourism Policy 2011: The vision of the policy is to position Meghalaya as a preferred tourist destination by taking advantage of its abundant cultural heritage and natural charm. Among the broad objectives for the development of tourism in the State, two are highlighted, firstly, to identify and promote new opportunities for the future development of tourism in Meghalaya on a sustainable basis and secondly, to strengthen the cultural aspects and to actively promote local participation, including community-based tourism. The Department of Tourism will also provide various incentives, subsidies and assistance for the development of tourism in the state (Government of Meghalaya, 2011).

Conservation

Conservation is enhanced when private-sector investors and national or local governments are convinced that there is a financial rationale for establishing protected natural areas. It has been estimated that in a National Park in Kenya, each lion is worth US\$27,000 per year and every elephant herd US\$610,000 in terms of visitor revenues per year. Also, each hectare of the park is estimated to yield US\$40 per year, which is 50 times more than the net profits expected from the land where it is used for agriculture (Boo, 1990).

If a site had a low significance and deemed inconsequential, then there is no purpose. However, in the case of the Megaliths, with adequate publicity, infrastructure and planned visits, there is no doubt that accessible sites will generate visitor interest. This can boost the tourism economy and should generate enough streams of additional revenue which should serve their upkeep and conservation besides further development of other megalithic sites.

It has also been seen from the World Trade Organization that 50% of all international travels every year involves visits to cultural heritage sites and in the United States alone the growth rate of heritage tourism is rising every year. It is safe to assert that the trend worldwide for tourists in the coming years would involve a visit to a cultural heritage site during their leisure holidays to understand the culture and heritage of that place better and create a bond and lifetime memories. Further, each visitor to such a site becomes a cultural ambassador for that community taking back what one has observed and learned during the visit.

Conclusion

There are various tourist destinations promoted by the Department of Tourism, Government of Meghalaya and neatly curated under Khasi Hills, Jaintia Hills, Garo Hills and Shillong and experiences under Festivals, Adventure, Culture and other things. Most of the tourist destinations have been rightfully focussed on the rich natural landscape, flora and fauna which are the strengths of the state and has been drawing in the tourists besides the salubrious climes. Cherrapunjee or Sohra is world famous for its rainfall and almost anyone and everyone who visits Meghalaya do visit the place. So, there is sufficient visibility to the people outside the state to warrant a visit for leisure and the State has been receiving decent footfalls both in the domestic and international travellers. But as we look into the future of what we expect from tourism and how much “cultural heritage tourism” will chart and impact the growth of this sector depends entirely on how we continue from now. Selection of the right “product” or “monuments” to showcase that which is inherently connected to our past cultural heritage, the living culture, evoking pride to the locals and a multitude of other minor factors which can be managed like

accessibility to the site, infrastructure, publicity etc is vital. The only monuments that come to mind are the Megalithic sites located at various places in the state.

The leaning of the Cultural Heritage tourism in the state is towards “dance and festivals” which has its drawbacks being restricted to only a particular time or period of the year and is something intangible that can only be seen and felt but if it was something that was all season and throughout the year, tangible and brings out another angle to the history, that would be a multi-sectoral force multiplier. At present the cultural heritage site promoted by the Government of Meghalaya is that of the Nartiang Monoliths in Jaintia Hills but more needs to be done as the entire potential of the Megaliths is yet to be realised. The Megaliths have created sites that are a living megalithic culture practiced by very few societies in India and even around the world. What makes the Megaliths in Meghalaya even more unique from the rest are the different types of monoliths found and its multiple reasons for erecting, uses, meanings and connotations which remain deeply embedded in the community structure and customs of the people. For a state like Meghalaya, which is better known for its natural beauty, it is important to promote the locals' Megalithic sites. These are the oldest manmade structures, which are still standing and have a direct historical and cultural link and is its heritage. This heritage will help us understand our ancestors, their way of life, beliefs, value system, an emotional bond and bring about a sense of pride. It will also remain our guide and path to the future, which is useful for Heritage Education and cultural awareness. The delicate relationship of the Megaliths which are of cultural tribal heritage value and tourism are hand in hand. The connection between the two, is conservation which is the detailed indisputable fact to ensure its sustainability.

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From Tourist, to Traveller, to a Seeker: Infusing Pilgrimage, Values into Tourism in the Himalayas

Sri Lokesh Ohri, Anthropologist, writer, wanderer; working with communities in the Himalayas to create a better tomorrow through slow travel, arts and culture.

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Abstract Uttarakhand is a scenic north Indian state in the Himalayas. In the year 2000, the state of Uttarakhand was created. Ever since, the rhetoric of Devbhumi, the land of gods, has set the stage for the commodification of this sacred land's spiritual wealth. The effort has been to bring in the hordes by promoting mass tourism and to break records, leading to a situation where, today, the ecologically fragile mountain state receives tourists several times the size of its population. The state, essentially known for pilgrimage, has witnessed a gradual degradation in travel values, with simplicity, slowness and frugality, giving way to crassness, overcrowding and irresponsible garbage disposal. In a nutshell, tourism today has become a menace, and despite its contribution to the economy in a state where polluting industries and other means of employment generation cannot be deployed, one needs to think about how the travel industry can sustain the very mountain landscapes it thrives on. Let us look at the Himalayas and the trajectory of travel, while also looking for a solution to the pervading issues.

Keywords Char Dham, Devbhumi, Mountain Landscapes, Pilgrimage, Uttarakhand

Introduction

The data on mass tourism and its impact on mountain landscapes clearly points out that something is amiss. The state received 60.3 million tourists in 2025, a record high. 230+ million tourists visited the state in just three years (2022–2025), a number equivalent to twenty-two times the state's population. This reflects a 60%+ increase in just a few years, indicating rapid intensification of tourism pressure. The district of Haridwar alone received 34.2 million visitors, over half of total, the other major concentrations being Dehradun at ~67,00,000 and Tehri being ~53,00,000 visitors. This shows that tourism is highly uneven, clustered only in pilgrimage circuits (Char Dham – the four highly fragile and remote pilgrimage sites of Badrinath, Kedarnath, Gangotri and Yamunotri and Haridwar-Rishikesh) and select hill stations (Nainital, Mussoorie). Seasonality is another concern, where peak domestic tourism occurs from May to July, the sweltering summer months in the plains. This creates short-duration, high-intensity crowding, rather than an evenly distributed tourism. This is still religious tourism, with a high-volume-low-spend model, subjecting the mountains to the classic indicators of mass tourism pressure: carrying capacity stress, temporal overcrowding and unmanageable traffic and congestion.



Locals getting ready for travellers

While the rapid growth in numbers has begun to seriously test infrastructure and ecological limits, it also leads to the phenomenon that the infrastructure often overwhelmed in peak season, created generally by pumping steel and concrete in the landscapes, remains underutilised and under-maintained in off-season. Uttarakhand, therefore, represents a classic case of toxic mass tourism: high-volume, seasonally concentrated, faith-driven, and increasingly expanding into fragile terrains. The data suggests not just growth, but intensification beyond sustainable thresholds, making it a critical site for debates on carrying capacity, ecological resilience, and the dire need for alternatives. But before we enter the debate, let us look at what these sacred Himalayan landscapes are. Space and place provide a good standpoint. Space is usually abstract, sometimes a vacuum too, and homogenous, whereas a place is particular and differentiated, filled in. Space transforms into place when belief and knowledge coalesce. This can be understood by thinking of the difference between the Ganges and the Ganga, the former, for some just a body of water, often filled with contaminants and pollution, its waters unworthy of even wading in, while the same water, for the devout, is a purifying goddess to be worshipped, its waters often used for drinking and offering libations.



Travellers at Koti Banal Village

The notion of a place is thus, an idea, consciously and deliberately constructed, propagated and ascribed to, and sometimes even imposed on the landscape. In India, this idea of sacred place is reinforced over centuries, through pilgrimage narratives called *mahatmya*. Therefore, the place-making of a sacred site is not inherent but ascribed by people's agency and reinforced by cultural and behavioural patterns. A space becomes a sacred place when men and women of higher knowledge have visited it for centuries. In these places nature and culture come together, and these landscapes are entrusted to specific communities who remain their custodians. One can refer to them as sacred landscapes.

Tirtha, the word that generally denotes pilgrimage in India, describes a sacred landscape as conveying a sense of crossing, a spiritual ford that enables us to cross from 'here' to 'there'. Walking through the Himalayas gives one the conviction that certain places are powerful and that our being there is destiny's way of helping us ford a significant phase in our life. Being present among these lofty mountains, while evoking a sense of insignificance and vulnerability, also brings us close to our treasured values that are reinforced by nature. These are essentially the values of simplicity, frugality and simply going slow. That is why journeys in the Himalaya are special.

Here, the mountains themselves can be gods. *Om Himalayaya Namah!* This means-I bow to thee, Himalaya! It is a phrase we hear often. Himalayas are the region where the snow never melts, where the gods meet and the deities and fairies are in the clouds, where adventurers discover hidden lands or lost languages, where Reinhold finds the Yeti, and we converse with demons within. But talking of sacredness, the term does not even have a Hindi or Sanskrit equivalent!

In Sanskrit, sacredness is only referenced in various ways, like *punya*, *pavitra*, *shuddha*, *sukt*, *mangala*, *daivya*, *pujya* or *vaidika*, all denoting sacredness with aspects such as merit, purity, chastity, auspiciousness, divinity, worshipfulness or something inspired by the *Veda*-s.



A theatre workshop in Himalayas for cultural connect

These are places where encounters are mutually constitutive of person and location. Here, embodied persons interact with geographic location with a significant overlap of culture, social location, personal history, sense experience, natural environment, and spiritual position. The primary orientations of bringing people to these places might vary from the economic to the devotional to the touristic. The shared effect, however, produced by being here knits these diverse causes into a common, often tacitly shared experience of power of the place; accompanied by a feeling of vulnerability. This feeling takes the form of what spiritual people bring to the place, yet it is at the same time shared, sometimes explicitly and sometimes implicitly, as an experience of shakti. This shakti is the power that pervades the place experience of the sacred in the Himalaya.

Sacredness has nothing to do with a religious denomination. It is, instead, something that has the capacity to elevate one's consciousness and give us strength to face and realise the truth. A good test of this would be to bear witness to your own mind and see whether it is in a state of stillness. Therefore, this land is sacred, not just because it is *devbhumi*, the abode of gods, but also because it is *tapobhumi*, a land that leads us to meditate upon our own state and the state of our world, offering answers to seekers. And only a true seeker has the potential to realize.

So, before coming to the mountains, think of who you want to be – a tourist, a traveller or a seeker. Here is a good yardstick to find out. A tourist is one who is looking for photo-ops, comfort food and ticking boxes on the places visited. A traveller, on the other hand, blends in, is more involved and is looking for experiences. The Himalayas, however, give their best to those that want to go beyond travel, and are seekers. Seeking is neither tourism, nor is it travel. Seeking is preparation, the gradual weeding, ploughing,

watering and contouring of the fields of consciousness. Only once you have done all of that, must you sow the seeds and by the time it is done, you are too exhausted to even wait for realization to germinate. But if the preparation is right, the seedlings of self-knowledge will eventually appear.

Therefore, why come to the land where gods reside, as a tourist? To travel slowly in the Himalayas, and experience their spiritual power, is to return to a more truthful rhythm of being. It is to let the mountains set the pace—not the clock, not the itinerary, not the restless urge to ‘cover’ ground. In choosing slowness, one begins to notice what hurried journeys erase: the changing texture of light on terraced fields, the cadence of distant temple bells, the quiet labour of village life, the long memory carried in rivers and forests. Slow travel transforms the Himalayas from a backdrop into a presence. It deepens encounter, turning fleeting sights into relationships, and landscapes into lived experience. The traveller ceases to be a consumer of views and comforts of life, and becomes, instead, a participant in a fragile ecology and a layered culture. Conversations linger longer, silences become meaningful, and the act of walking itself acquires a contemplative quality. It is towards this form of travel, enriched by an experience of the sacred, that we must proceed now, before we lose the golden goose – our landscapes – that bring in the numbers.



Travellers appreciating the local *Kumaoni Pichoda* (traditional attire for women)

There is an ethical grace to slowness. It treads lightly, reducing the pressures of over-tourism, respecting local ways of life, and allowing economies to benefit more sustainably. In a region as ecologically sensitive and culturally intricate as the Himalayas, such mindfulness is not merely a virtue, but a necessity.

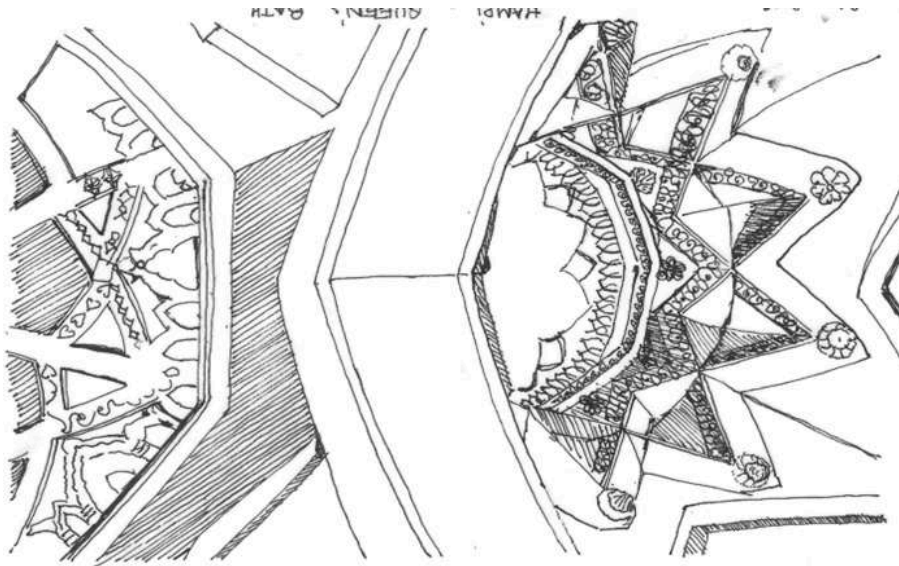
Ultimately, slow travel in the Himalayas is less about reaching a destination and more about being reshaped by the journey. It invites humility, patience, and attentiveness, qualities that the mountains themselves embody. And in that unhurried passage, one discovers that the greatest landscapes are not only outside, but also quietly unfolding within. Therefore, any tourism model that we develop must keep in mind the unhurried aspects of seeking our age-old pilgrimage values, rather than the values of facts, figures and the breaking of records.



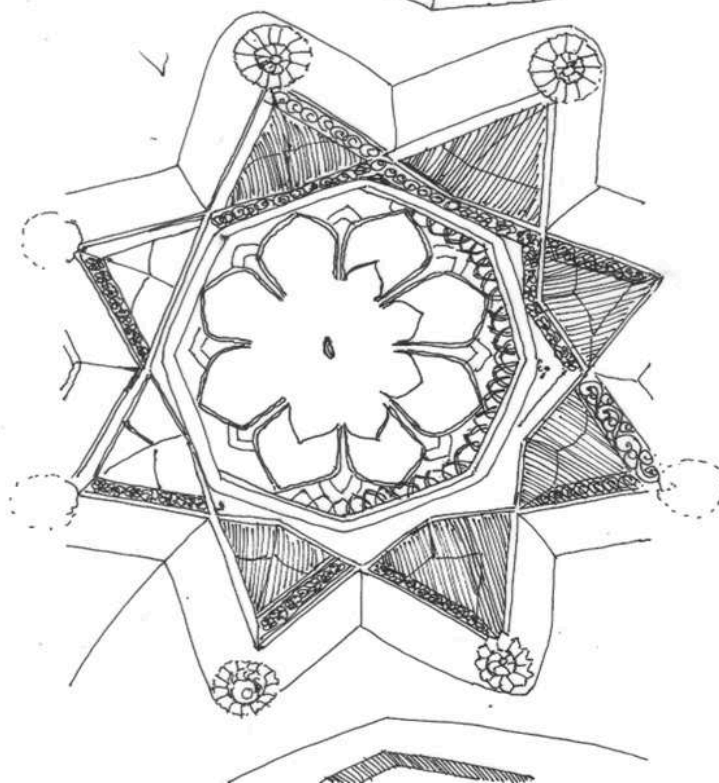
Guests in a Van Gurjan's hut

Note- All the images are credited to the author.

INTELUDE



Hampi Queen's Bath June 2018

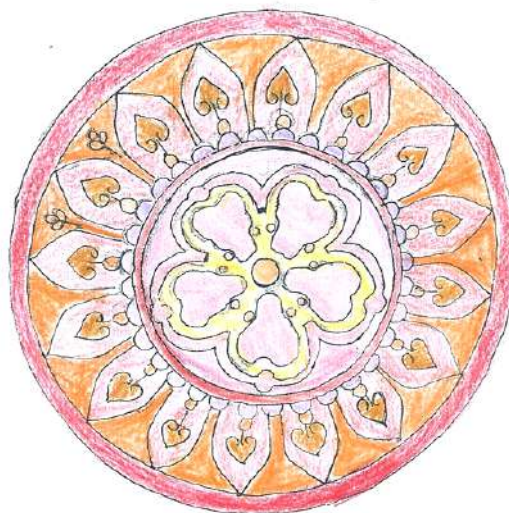
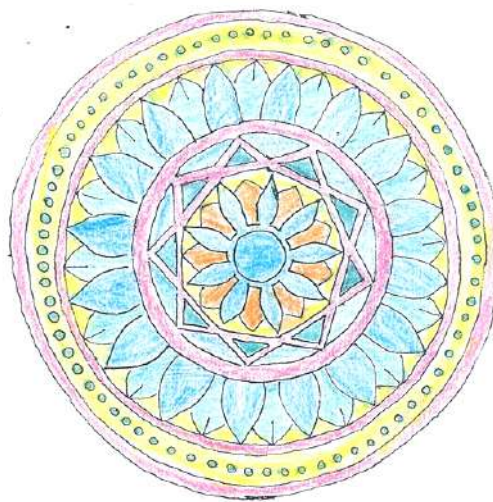


WORK ON ACTIVITY SHEETS

INTERTWINING INTANGIBLE CULTURAL HERITAGE OF INDIA & HISPANIC WORLD

A facet of Cultural Tourism

Two medallions from Bidar Fort, Karnataka, coloured by Kirtana (10), Nidhi (10), Sketch of Buddha by Nanditha Raju (9 years), Hyderabad





Heritage Activities for children, to introduce them to their Local Heritage

Ar. Shreamey Phadnis, Co-coordinator NSCCT

Introduction:

Pune is a culturally rich city and also an educational hub. Pune is referred to as the Oxford of the East. Being the past capital of the Peshwas and an important Colonial city in recent times, it is replete with rich built heritage. Being a town of great antiquity and historicity, there are also multiple layers to its heritage. We have proposed some activities for children in their early teens, so they develop a sense of belonging and responsibility to their own heritage.

1) Heritage Kit : Heritage Gift Hamper

The Heritage kit includes a Journal, Puzzle, Famous food sample, Coloring book & Postcard.

The **Puzzle** includes a tangram and a poster having information of how to play the puzzle with different ideas .

Postcards will have the images of heritage structures, natural Heritage, intangible heritage & cultural events etc. which are in and around Pune.

The **coloring book** will include the Heritage structures, natural heritage and also intangible heritage of Pune.

The **Journal** will include a brief history of pune and blank pages for children to write about structures, places or food eaten, or any experience they have about Pune.



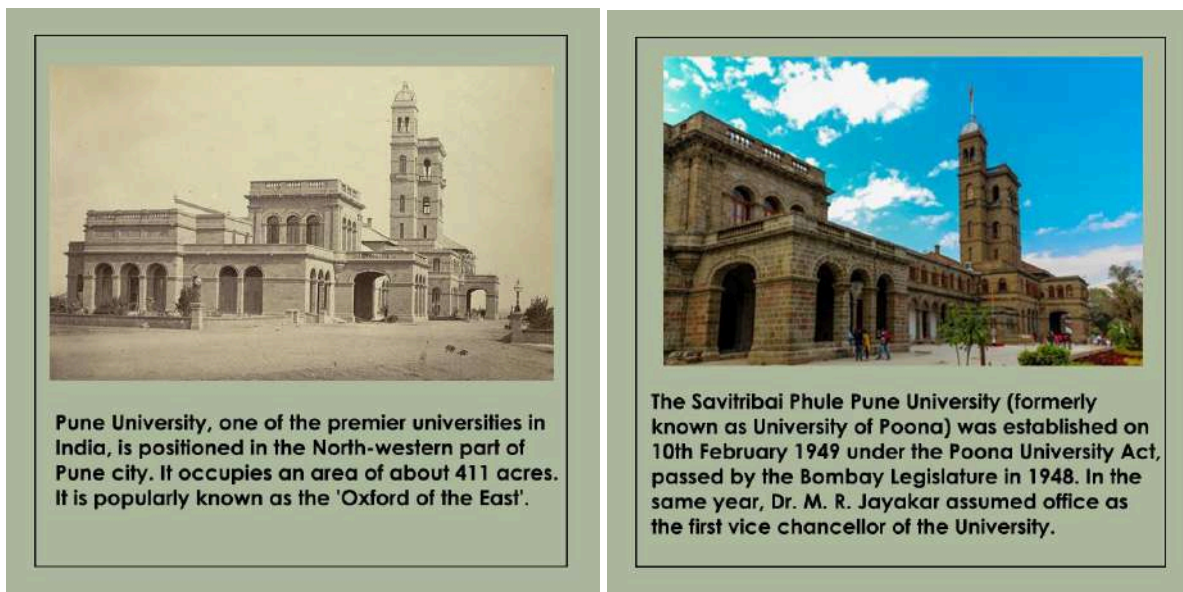
Sample Kit box



Or a Jute Bag

2) Know Your City : Memory Game

The memory game seeks information about the history of pune including built heritage, food, natural heritage etc. The game can be played by children 10 - 14 years old. There would be two cards of the historic structure/place. On one card there would be information and a small old photograph of the historic structure/place. The other card would have the present information & photograph of the same site.



3) Killa DIY Kit : Hands-on Heritage

This activity is directly inspired by the classic Diwali Maharashtrian tradition of making small sized forts. Anything that has action, drama and a thrilling story attached to it, leaves the children mesmerized. No wonder that forts, which offer all this, are such an attraction. So making a fort in mud would be really exciting to the children. Now-a-days most of the children don't know enough about the forts or have the proper knowledge of the process and material required to build a fort (*Killa*).

‘Killa Making’ activity kit will include an information booklet of history and types of forts in Maharashtra, the ancient processes and materials required to build a fort. The booklet would include the process of how to build a fort on a small scale in an open space in front of the house or on the ground. It would also have information about how to decorate the fort and from where they could find all the material required in Pune, Maharashtra. The kit will include some samples of material required to build a Mud Fort like jute bag, clay/ Plaster of Paris (PoP) figurines (Chatrapati Shivaji Maharaj, Mavale soldiers, Gavlan, cows, goats etc.) required to decorate the fort, colour paper, black clay tiles, paints, discarded woven plastic bag/woven jute gunny bags, cardboard and stones which forms the basic structure.



Clay Statues



Dry soil



Jute or Gunny bags



Broken Brick or Stones



Children making fort in their Society premises

4) Pune Darshan : Board Game

In this game, one can choose from 5-6 different themes related to the heritage of Pune - famous personalities & places of Pune, events (battles, freedom fighter movements etc.), cuisine (famous eateries and traditional items), sartorial heritage (traditional clothing, jewelers, head-gear, etc.), water bodies (like *kund*, *talav*, rivers, wells etc.), architecture (forts, *wada*-s, churches, temples, etc.) and so on. From these Board Games children would get to know every single fact about Pune and also the heritage sites around it. To illustrate this idea better, the author has detailed it out below:

Fort Board Game - An interesting board game which includes a map of Pune district. On the map, the locations of forts will be marked. Every fort will have an information card which will include the details of the fort. For example- which era it belongs to, the ruler/patron and other interesting facts of the fort. The game would be of three levels: beginners, intermediate and advanced. All three levels would have some questions related to the historic period the fort belongs to. In the Beginners Level with 40 cards in it, the questions would be asked during the Chatrapati Shivaji Maharaj period, In Intermediate Level with 40 cards in it, the questions would be from the Peshwa period. In the Advanced Level with 40 cards in it, the questions would be from the Deccan Sultanate period.

The Board Game would contain a board with a map of Pune district on it, with exact locations of these forts, three boxes of individual levels, Information Cards of the forts, multicolored objects for every fort based on its historic period, dice and a small bottle.

How to play - This Board Game can be played by multiple children by distributing the forts in equal numbers. First they have to read all the information of the forts they have selected. After reading the information the game would start by rolling the bottle. When the bottle stops at a child, that child will roll the dice. Whatever number the dice throws up, that many questions would be asked by any other child to him/her. If he/she can't answer the question, one fort would be lost to the child who was asked the question. If the question is rightly answered, then the child asking the question would lose its fort to him/her. Each player would have at least 10 Quiz Cards. The game will be played to a pre-set timer. The child with the most number of forts in the end would win.

Outcome:

By playing the games children will get to know their forts and facts related with forts like construction period, who built the fort, past and present use of the fort, etc.

Image Courtesy:

Sample kit box: <https://www.geotobox.com/product-detail/small-black-magnetic-gift-box/>

A Jute bag: <https://www.jaypore.com/multicolored-handmade-jute-potli-cotton>

Old Pune University:

<https://marathivishwal.wordpress.com/2010/01/31/old-pune-old-pune-university/>

Present photograph of Pune University: (Edited by Author)

https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Pune_University_main_building.jpg

Mud Statues: <https://depositphotos.com/5540993/stock-photo-colorful-clay-toys.html>

Dry soil:

<https://www.shutterstock.com/video/clip-18336850-soil-agriculture-farmer-hands-holding-pouring-back>

Jute or Gunny bags:

https://www.alibaba.com/product-detail/Jute-gunny-bags-for-Nuts-Coffee_144158213.html

Broken Brick or Stones:

<https://www.dreamstime.com/pile-red-bricks-destruction-broken-stone-texture-old-ruin-debris-pile-red-bricks-destruction-broken-stone-texture-old-ruin-image161254777>

Children making fort in their Society premises:

<https://allaboutbelgaum.com/lifestyle/childrens-diwali-forts-learning-lab-sorts/>

CULTURAL HERITAGE TOURISM AND SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT GOALS

A virtual tour of Hyderabad

Ar Madhu Vottery, Author, Conservation Architect, Heritage Consultant Telangana Tourism
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The Heritage Education projects curated and conducted by the author makes the students learn about Sustainable Development Goals as they move around a historic complex. The game presented here is actually something similar

Hyderabad is a medieval city, few of the walls with two gateways are still existing. The monuments invite visitors as experienced by children who played this game.

Methodology:

1. Discussion with mentors and research guides
2. Going through websites like NASAKIDS
3. checking the maps for climate change effects globally on
www.ss2.climatecentral.org
4. Learning about international climate action methods and discussing with teammates.
5. Bringing down the level of action, from global, to regional to local
6. Formulating the most effective methods that can have a long term impact.
8. Choosing the map with water channels, lakes and historic sites as a Game Board where the players choose to visit many important sites during a Heritage Tour.

CLIMATE ACTION: BY HYDERABAD CHILDREN

(for 2-4 players)

START (if you throw ONE, keep the pawn at 1)

1. Visit to the Stepwell at Devar Yamjal Ramalayam, (800 years old) desilting work is going on, get one more chance to roll the dice.
2. Visit to a Herbal garden at Telangana State Forest Academy, Dulapally, get one more chance to throw.
3. **Nala** (storm water Channel encroachment (loose one chance). Get a RED CARD
4. Report to GHMC for **Removal of unauthorised construction on nala**, go to 5, GREEN CARD
5. Lake is getting lost, take action right now (go to 7, Pollution Control Board office)
6. Go for shopping, forgot your bag, go home (START) to get a bag, RED Card

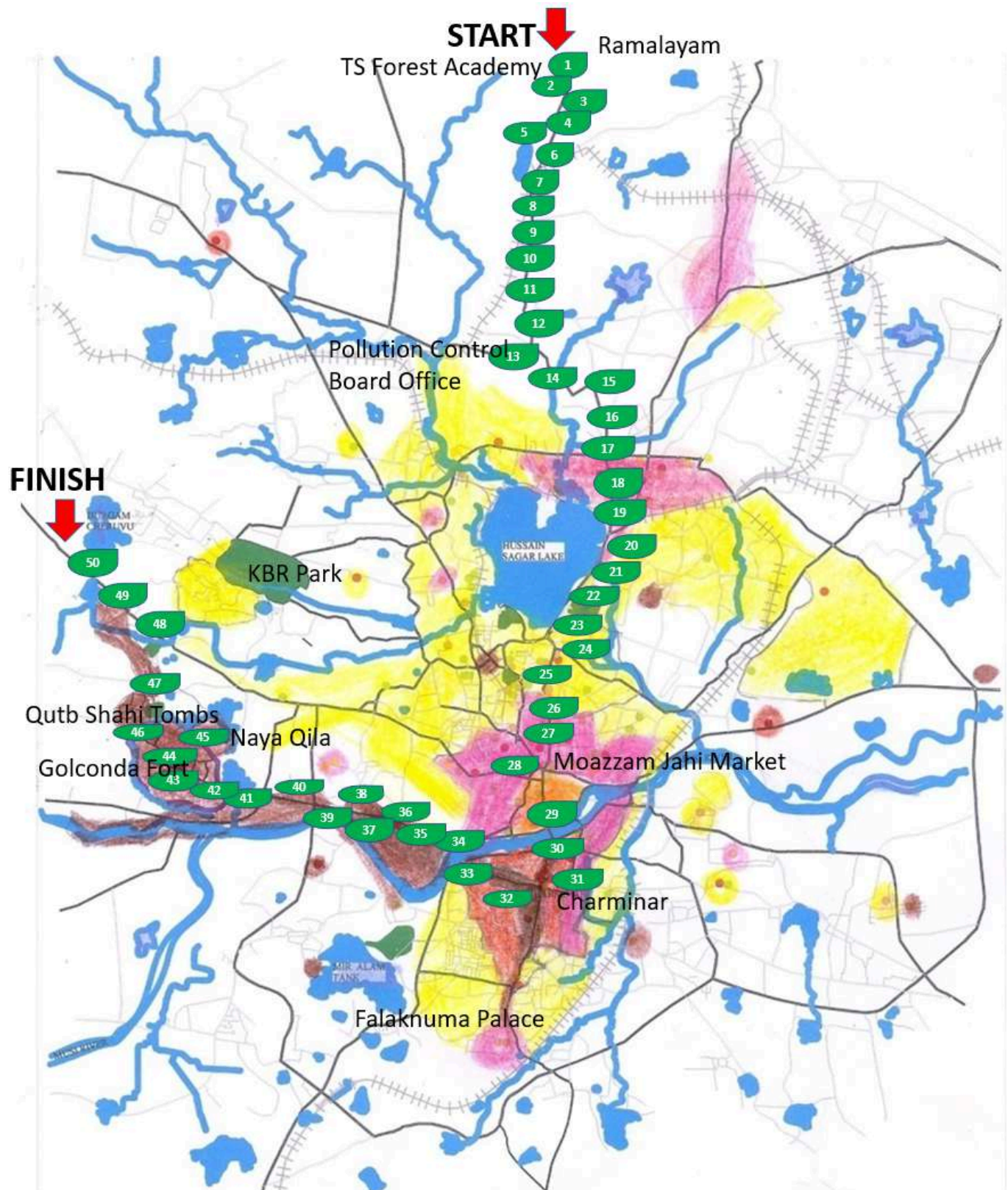
7. Summer in the Deccan Plateau is scorching hot, eat *Munjal*(ice apple), drink coconut water, convince the seller not to use plastic straw and go to 10.
8. Industrial Area (go for plantation) get one more chance to roll the dice, get a GREEN CARD.
- 9.
- 10.
11. Eat with dirty hands, fall sick, go back to 9, RED CARD
12. Go for sports-items shopping, choose a bicycle (get one more chance to roll the dice), GREEN CARD.
13. Pollution Control Board office visit, learn about the Climate Change ill effects, get a GREEN CARD
- 14.
- 15.
- 16.
- 17.
- 18.
- 19.
20. A STAR Hotel- A conference on Climate Action, plan it in open area (go to 20), get a GREEN CARD
- 21.
22. Indira Park- document the varieties of plants, visit the nursery, gift plants, collect a GREEN CARD
- 23.
24. Liberty Junction- Vehicular Pollution, check your vehicle for pollution level, collect a RED CARD, fall sick go to 20.
25. Got stuck in Urban Heat Island, change to 'Sustainable Building Materials'. GREEN CARD

- 26.
27. ...
28. Moazzam Jahi Market-Restored Historic Building, forgot your eco-friendly cutlery (go back to 26), collect a RED CARD
- 29.
- 30.
31. Charminar, climb up and come down, experience the busy city and the Conservation Zone (wait for one chance)
32. Laad Bazar, go for bangle shopping, plan a Capacity Building workshop with locals & UNESCO Creative City, get a GREEN CARD.
33. Visit Chowmahalla Museum, get the cool breeze from historic fountains, collect your GREEN CARD.
34. Purana Pul, the erstwhile entrance to the Walled City of Hyderabad. Notice the pollution in the river here.
- 35.
- 36.
- 37.
38. Jhamsingh Temple and well, survey the well desilting work. Collect a GREEN CARD, now go to 40
39. Toli Masjid, a plantation in the historic area, go to 41.
40. You are on the way to Golconda, Via Historic trade routes, make note of historic stepwells, temples, mosques. Learn about River Musi, Muchukunda.
41. Langar Houz Clean up, Get a GREEN CARD
42. Fateh Darwaza, climb up and check the cannon, look for physical damage of the historic gateway.
43. Check the damage in the outer fort wall due to FlashFloods, join hands for restoration of bastions. Collect a GREEN CARD
44. Visit the Katora Houz, Flash Floods damage assessment, convince the locals about waste segregation.

45. A walk into Camel Stable, Go to Naya Qila, clean up Shah Hatim tank, notice encroachment in Full tank Level, get one more chance to roll the dice.
46. Fateh Rahbar Canon located at Athara Sidhi, Patancheruvu Darwaza nearby, Moat has fresh water here, talk to locals about Climate Action, promote waste segregation Collect a GREEN Card
47. Visit to Qutb Shahi Tombs, Go for Bird Watching and identification of native species in the historic Walled Garden. Get a GREEN CARD.
48. Urban Heat Island in the most modern part of the city, Heat Stroke, sickness. Wait for one turn.
49. Go to Urban Development authority, talk to officers for advocating Climate Action and promote 'Sustainable Building material and design'. Collect a GREEN CARD
50. Durgam Cheruvu Cable Bridge, join a morning walk.

FINISH.

GAME BOARD:



Rules of the game

START is the opening of the game. No specific throw is needed to enter the game.

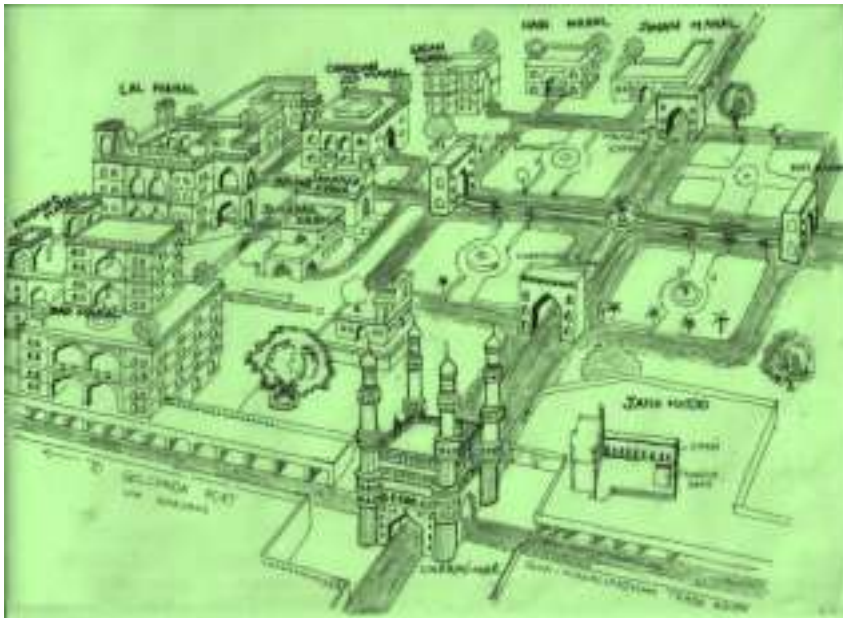
RED CARDS (15 nos) are RED and GREEN CARDS (5 nos) are GREEN in colour.

FINISH is the closing of the game at 50. After reaching 45 or more, any number of five or more than five will finish the game.

The player(s) with maximum number of GREEN cards and lowest number of RED cards wins

GREEN CARDS (sample): total 15 cards are needed

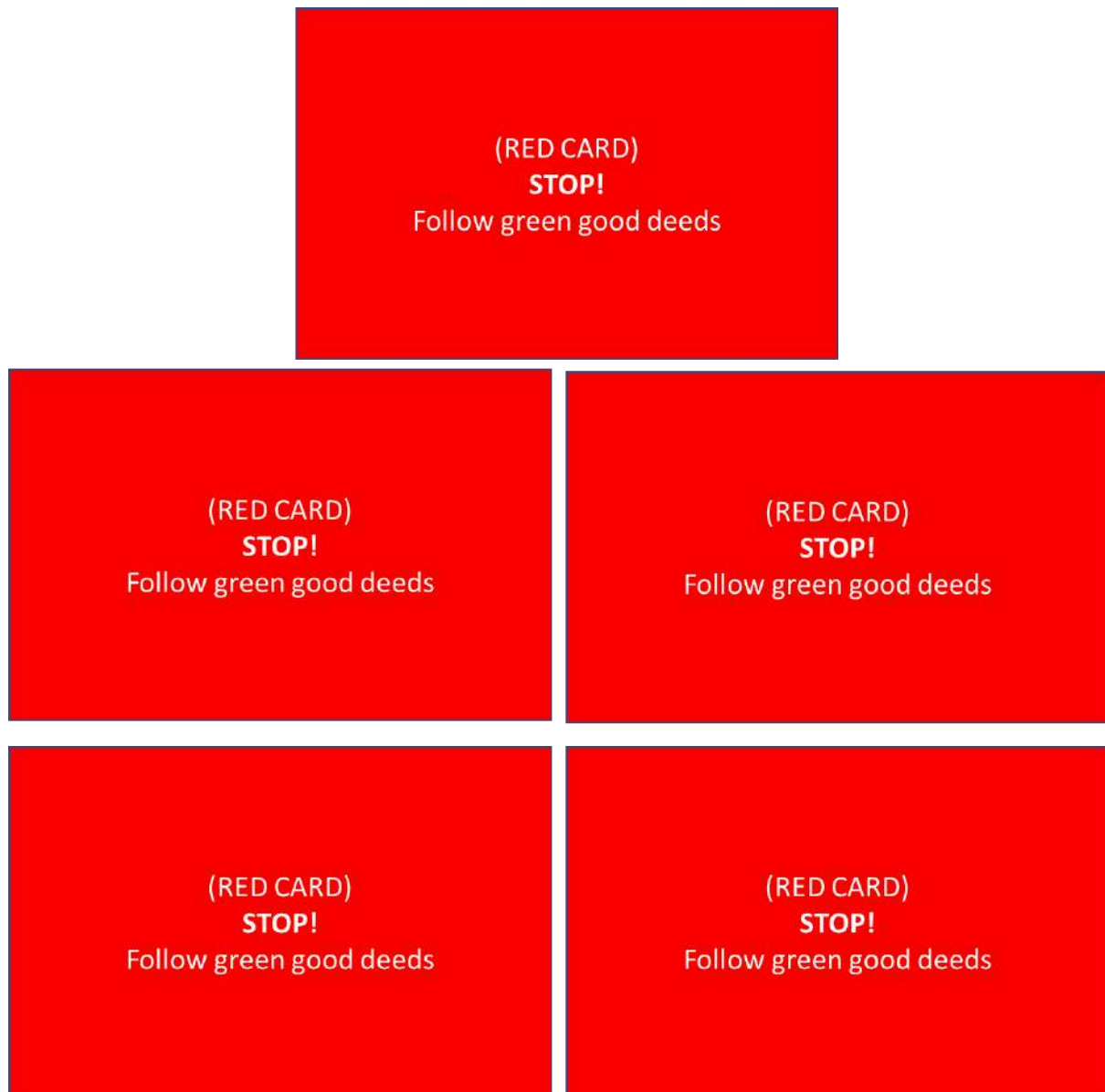
RED CARDS (Sample)





at Devar Yamjal Village,
Hyderabad





Research support: Ar Madhu, Dr Anuradha Ram

Mentor: Mrs Hemadevi

Team Members: Kirtana Vottery, Aditi Kedia, Raasi Mahanti

Game was submitted at Climate Heritage Network

The concept of the game very well matches with Sustainable Development Goals

- Goal 9- Industry Innovation, Infrastructure- Move to sustainable building material, Practice 4 Rs (Reduce, reuse, recycle and repurpose) in daily life.
- Goal 11- Sustainable cities and communities -Save Built Heritage, stand against demolition of heritage, encourage adaptive reuse.

- Goal 13-Climate Action -START EARLY Create awareness among different age groups about climate change and gear up for climate action with above written methods
- Goal 15-Life on land- Save nature, plant trees 2. Save lakes and rain water channels, recharge borewells.
- Goal 17-Partnership for the goals- The game can be replicated in many cities, towns with rich built and natural heritage.

Further reading and Research

The National Action Plan on Climate Change (NAPCC) is a government document that includes eight ambitious goals set for the country to achieve.

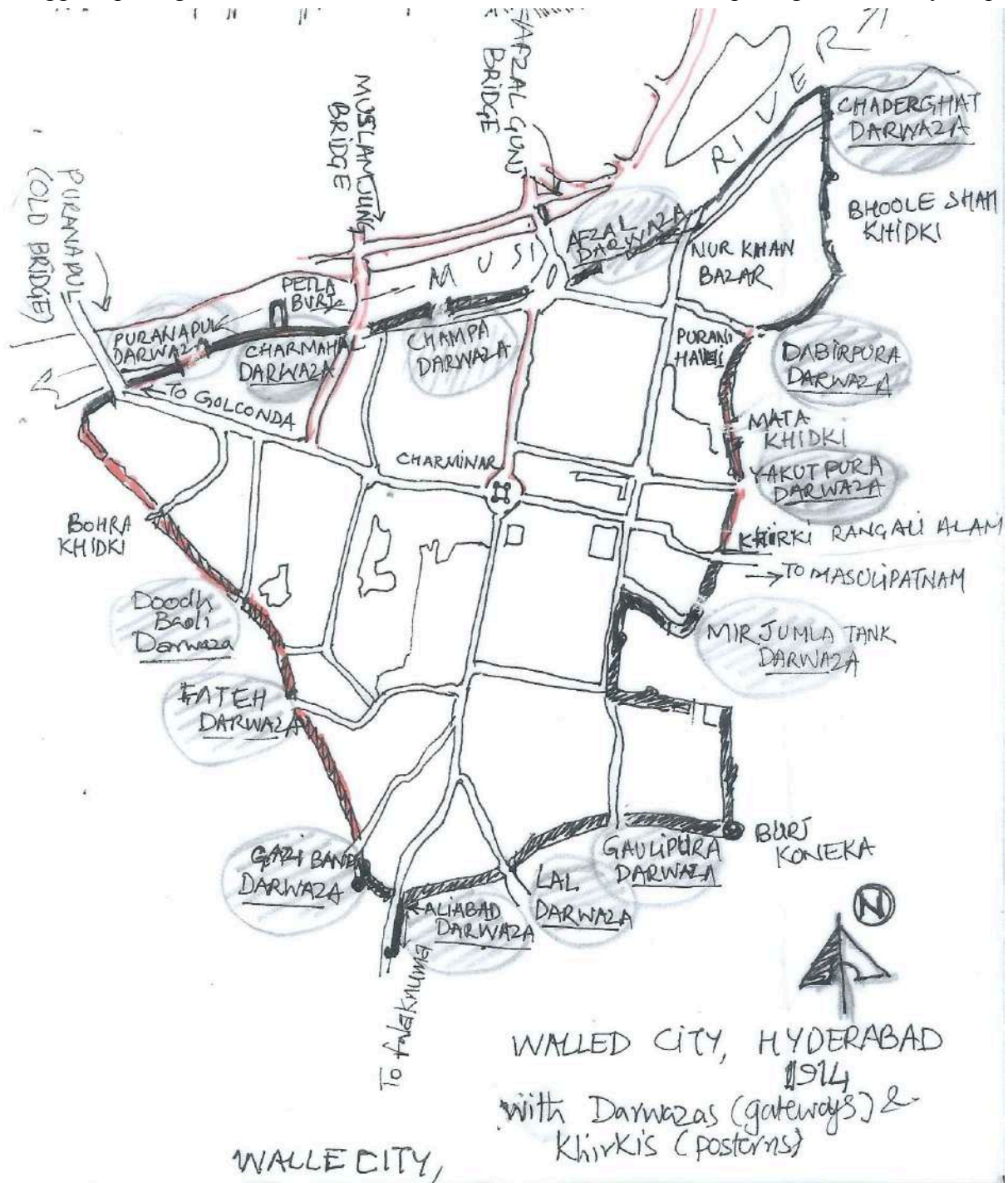
National Mission on Sustainable Habitat

National Water Mission

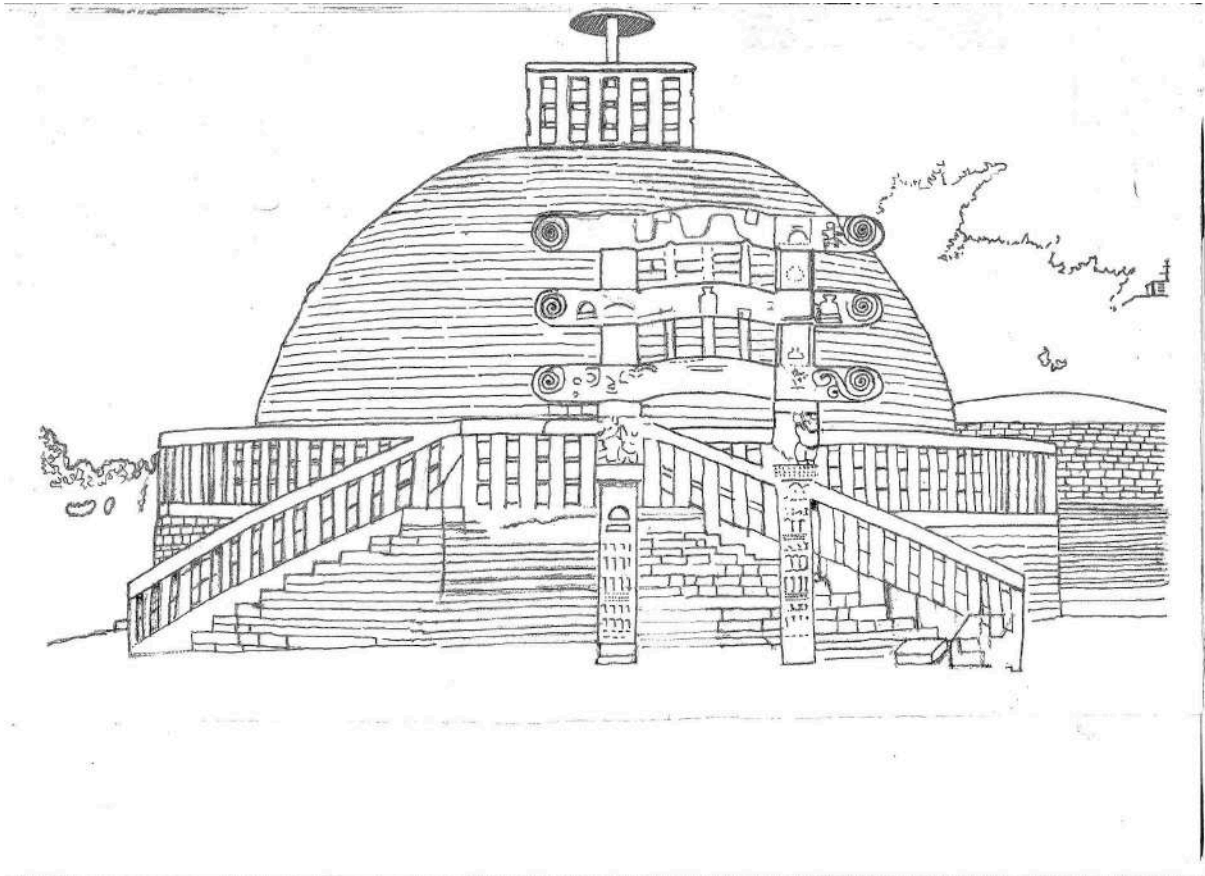
National Mission for a Green India

National Mission on Strategic Knowledge for Climate Change

Activity on Hyderabad Walled City: Check the openings in a Walled City map, *Darwaza* is a bigger opening, *Khidki* is a smaller one. Count the number of openings on the city map



Activity on UNESCO World Heritage Site, Sanchi : Notice the sketch of Sanchi Stupa, built with bricks. Label various parts named as *Anda* (the egg), *Torana* (the entrance gateway), the *Vedika* (railing), *Chatra* (the umbrella)



Sanchi Stupa

Did you know astronomers also study ancient sites for their location on ground with respect to movement of Sun, moon and other planets and star constellations? Check with your elders about it, learn from their experiences. Speak to your science teacher about the same.

Note: All the illustrations are by the author, Board game was honoured and briefly published at CoP 21 report

Exploring the common cultural threads of India, Spain and two Spanish speaking countries of Latin America & its significance.

Ms. Ritu Bammi Spanish Cambridge Faculty & Cultural Events Coordinator, Delhi Public School International Saket, New Delhi (A Pathways Cambridge School) ritubammi73@gmail.com

Introduction

The fundamental facets of Cultural Tourism:

- Having a tour around a village or town and understanding local crafts
- Taking a crash course with the natives such as cooking, art, embroidery etc.
- Visiting historical monuments, natural or built heritage and local markets
- Stay with a family in a homestay and understand their daily life
- Being part of Performing Arts and Festivals
- Trying the local food and beverages

ACTIVITY – 1**DANCE FORMS****Kathak & Flamenco**

Kathak and Flamenco are excellent examples of how dance can connect two different nations, cultures and people. Flamenco has its origin deeply rooted with the Romani Clan(tribe) of north west India, which traveled through ages to become a popular gypsy culture.

Flamenco & Kalbelia Folk Songs and Dances have a lot in common. They both are inscribed in the representative list of the Intangible Cultural Heritage of Humanity by UNESCO in the year 2010.

If we compare one may notice similarities in Classical dance form Kathak & Flamenco.

Help: The vocals of Kalbelia tribal groups of Rajasthan during performance have similar musical notes. The Jodhpur Flamenco festival has become very popular in the last few years, to promote a link between Rajasthani folk musicians and Flamenco gypsy artists.

**Activities:**

- Record the origin of Flamenco & make a list of the ethnic groups.
- How has the music and dance form changed during all these years?
- Identify the steps (foot & hand movements)-similarity & differences.
- Make a list of Instruments used during the repertoire.
- Find about the eminent performers of these dance forms.

ACTIVITY – 2**THE FESTIVALS**

Although celebrated miles apart, there are major Indian & Spanish festivals whose commonness can't be missed.



- Holi & La Tomatina

Help- Tomatina as the name suggests, the festival is played in Buñol, Spain on the last Wednesday of the month of August with squashing of tonnes of tomatoes, while colors are used for Holi.

- Jallikattu & Tauromaquia-Los. San Fermín (Running of the Bull)



Help- Both the festivals end with taming of the bull, but in the Spanish part the bull is finally killed by “Matador”.

Dahi Handi and Los Castells



Help- The human towers are the same for both the festivals, but *Janmashtami* (celebrating the birth of Lord Krishna) culminates in breaking of the pot. Los Castells has been declared as the masterpiece of the Oral Intangible Heritage of Humanity by UNESCO in 2010.

- Dussehra & Las Fallas: (Spain's annual festival of fire)



Help- The major similarity is burning of huge effigies but unlike Las Fallas, Dussehra features demon king and his brothers and depicts good over evil. The effigies of Las Fallas are caricatures of famous personalities and are satirical and humorous in nature.

Activities:

- A. Talk to the elders about the traditions and find, if any, myth/anecdote attached to the Indian festivals.
- B. Find out similar information about the Spanish festivals.
- C. Pick up one common festival and make a poster of special activities, food, festivities attached to it.

ACTIVITY – 3**MYTHOLOGY**

The Mythological Gods & Goddesses in the 'Aztec Civilization' of Mexico and 'Incan Civilization' of Peru and their parallels in India. Deity worship was popular in these cultures during the medieval period; in India it is part of the living tradition of many communities.

Sun God

Aztec: *Huitzilopochtli* or 'Hummingbird of the South' or 'Blue Hummingbird on the Left'



Hindu: Surya



Inca: Inti is Ancient Inca Sun God, son of Viracocha, Interestingly Virochana in Sanskrit means the Sun.



Help- The worship of Sun God is an active phenomenon in Hindu temples, while only specific festivals are attached to its counterpart of Aztecs & Inca Deities.

Mother Goddess

Aztec: Coatlicue or 'Serpent Skirt'

Hindu: Kali



Help- Both these goddesses are grotesque figures of their respective cultures, but the reverence as a Mother Goddesses remains unparallel.

Activities:

- A. Find the festivals associated with these deities.
- B. Identify the Built Heritage(Temples) attached to the Gods & Goddesses.
- C. List the rituals attached to worship of these deities.

ACTIVITY – 4

GASTRONOMY

India & Spain

Common Ingredients:

Saffron



Garlic



Rice-Basmati/Bomba



Common Dishes

- Biryani and Paella



- Kheer/Phirni and Arroz con leche



- Gujjiya and Empanadas



India & Mexico-

- Kidney beans, & Different types of chilies)



Dishes:

- Rajma Curry and Frijoles



Activities:

- Explore how the trade route impacted the exchange of ingredients from the (New world) Latin American continent to the rest of the world. Ex. Potatoes, maize, cocoa etc.
- Identify spices other than chillies, popular in Indian cuisine.
- Make a list of popular Mexican & Spanish dishes which are liked by Indians.
- Prepare a simple Hispanic dish and share the knowledge with your family & friends.

ACTIVITY – 5**TEXTILE**

Handloom Textiles of Peru & North East India appear to be made in the same looms though thousand miles away.

Peru



North-east India

**Activities:**

- A. Identify the Indian states and their looms where you find similar weaves to that of Latin American counterparts.
- B. Make a list of prominent fabrics/colours used.
- C. Make your own dress/clothing item(Scarf/Stole) using a specific textile.

ACTIVITY – 6**CROSSWORD**

Use the clues to fill in the words above.

Words can go across or down.

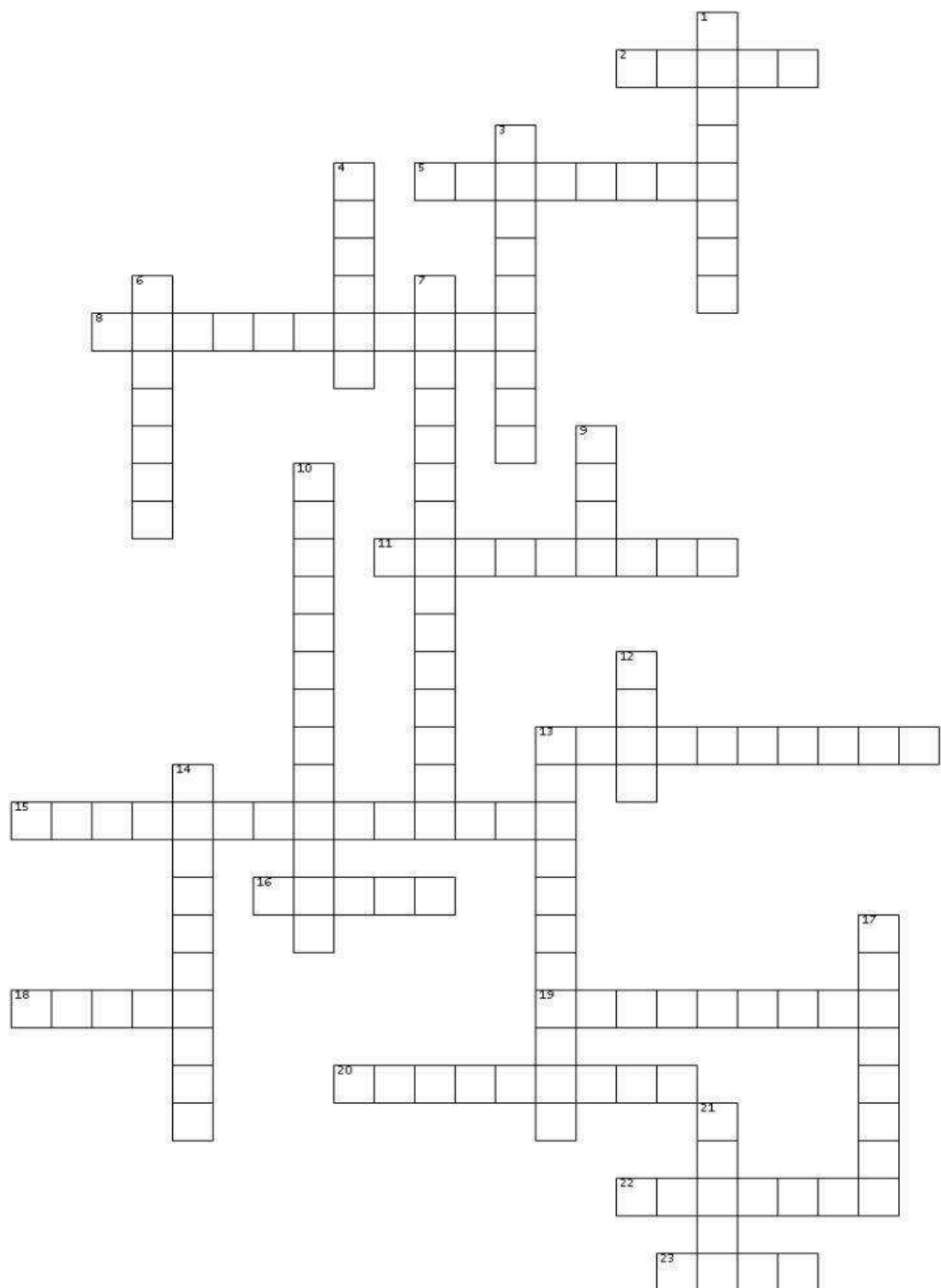
Letters are shared when the words intersect.

ACROSS**Intangible Cultural Heritage**

- 2.
- 5.
- 8.
- 11.
- 13.
- 15.
- 16.
- 18.
- 19.
- 20.
- 22.
- 23.

DOWN

- 1.
- 3.
- 4.
- 6.
- 7.
- 9.
- 10.
- 12.
- 13.
- 14.
- 17.
- 21.



24 of 24 words placed

WORDS:

Flamenco, Kathak, Holi, La Tomatina, Jallikattu , Tauromaquia, Los San Fermines, Dahi Handi
Los Castells, Dussehra, Las Fallas, Huitzilopochtli, Surya
Inti, Coatlicue, Kali, Basmati
Bomba, Arroz con leche, Kheer, Empanadas
Gujjiya, Frijoles, Rajma

ACTIVITY – 7

ART & CRAFT

- A. Make a model of a Flamenco dancer & Kathak dancer as a decoration for your home.
- B. Make a Poster of costumes & adornments of both the dance forms.(Flamenco & Kathak)
- C. Choose a deity and prepare a Head Gear.
- D. Create a Sketch & a Symbolic Representation of a deity.
- E. Draw a sketch of what you would want as a dress of the textiles / fabrics and include the colour scheme and texture of the selected textiles.

ACTIVITY – 8**MAPS**

- A. Draw a Cultural Route Map of Flamenco that shows how it travelled from Asia to Europe with different ethnic groups.
- B. Draw a Trade Route Map of the earlier ages about the food items found across the globe. (Esp. From Hispanic America to the rest of the world.)

ACTIVITY – 9**CALENDAR**

Sun	Mon	Tue	Wed	Thu	Fri	Sat
30	31	1	2	3	4	5
6	7	8	9	10	11	12
13	14	15	16	17	18	19
20	21	22	23	24	25	26
27	28	29	30	31		

Free Calendar Templates Dreamcalendars.com

- A. Make a Calendar of the similar Indian & Spanish Festivals.
- B. Make a Calendar of the dates/period assigning to different deity worship.

ACTIVITY – 10

BROCHURES/ PAMPHLETS



- A. Prepare a Travel Brochures/Pamphlets of destinations covering these Intangible Heritage components.
- B. Identify Built Heritage sites in India and Spain which have similar architectural characteristics.



Help - Flamenco comes from the southern state of Andalusia, where Alhambra (UNESCO, WHS) is situated. Kathak also belongs to Lucknow Gharana, Uttar Pradesh a state which has the honour of having the great Taj Mahal (UNESCO WHS). Both the dance forms are enlisted as Intangible Cultural Heritage of Humanity by UNESCO in 2010. The dishes mentioned above can also be highlighted in the brochure.

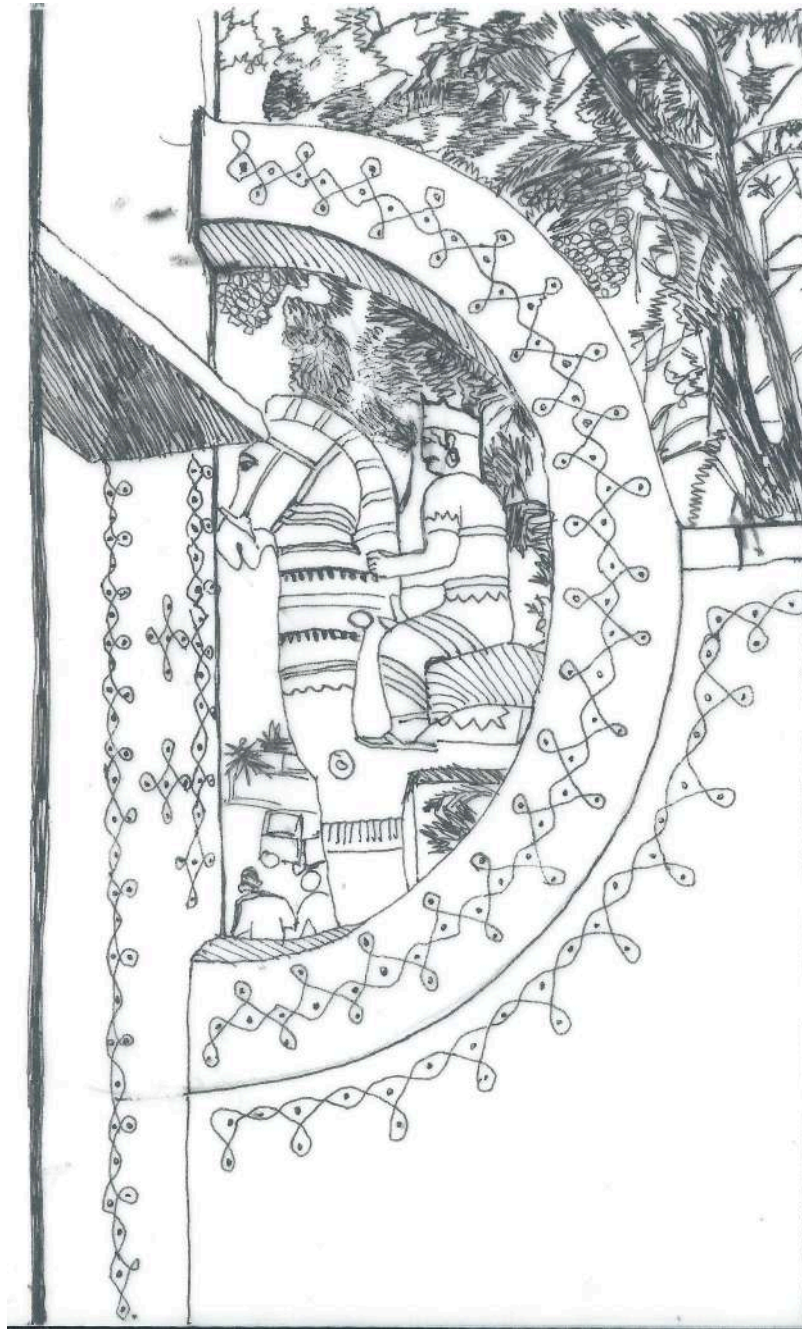
Image Courtesy:

Kathak <https://www.tradeindia.com/>

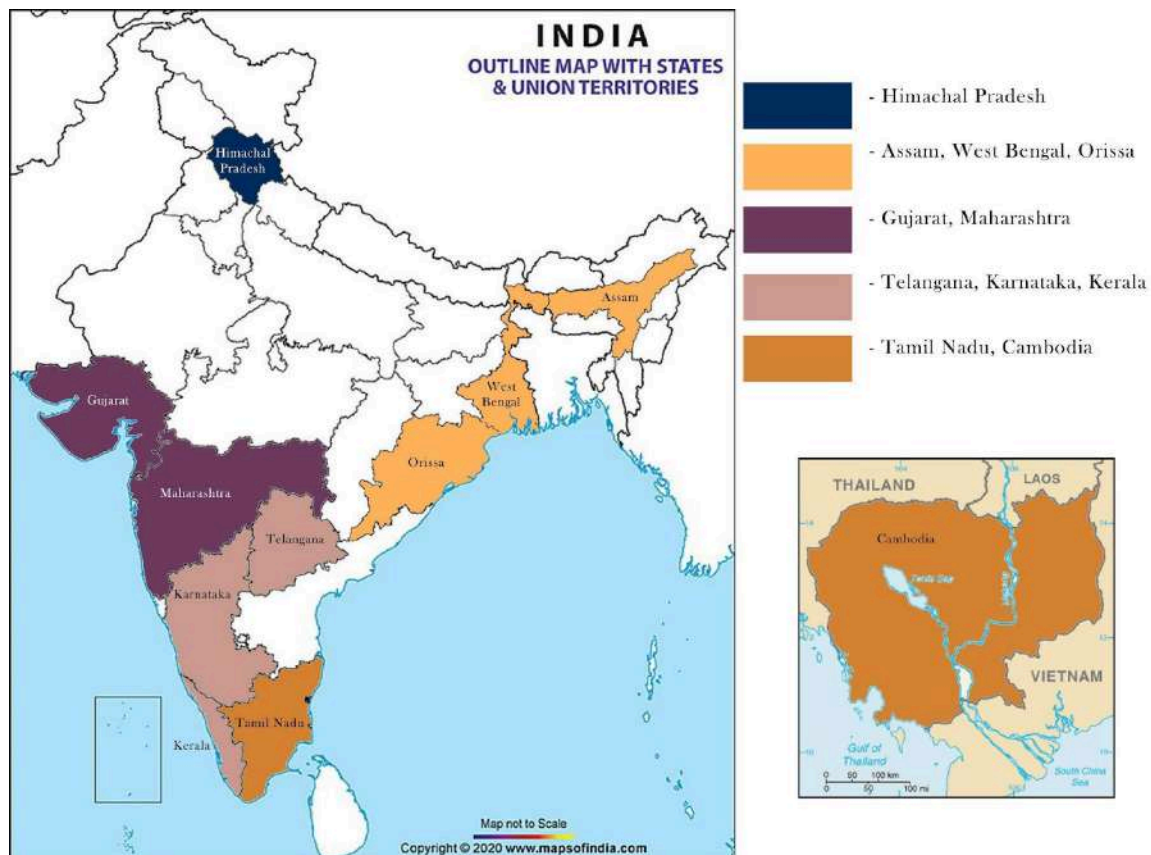
Flamenco <https://www.britannica.com/art/flamenco>
 Holi <https://www.india.com/festivals-events/happy-holi->
 Tomatina <https://www.hellotravel.com/spain/be-part-of-tomatina>
 Holi <https://www.india.com/festivals-events/happy-holi->
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 Las Fallas-<https://travelnotjustadream.wordpress.com/tag/las-fallas/>
 Huitzilopochtli <http://www.windsofolympus.com/huitzilopochtli.html>
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 Inti <https://www.worldhistory.org/Inti>
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 Kali <http://divyadarisanams.blogspot.com/2010/11/tantra-temples-in-india-bajinath-temple.html>
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 Basmati <https://www.thenaturespalette.com/>
 Bomba https://www.gourmetsofspan.com/store/p337/La_Bomba_Paella_Rice.html
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 Paella <https://www.thespruceeats.com/seafood-paella-recipe>
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 Kheer <https://www.cookingcarnival.com/rice-kheer/>
 Empanadas <https://therecipecritic.com/empanadas/>
 Gujiya <https://foodviva.com/desserts-sweets-recipes/gujiya/>
 Chillies <https://muybuenocookbook.com/mexican-chiles/>
<https://www.kannammacooks.com/popular-indian-chillies/>
 Frijoles <https://www.camelliabrand.com/recipes/frijoles-de-la-olla-mexican-bean-stew/>
 Rajma <https://www.indianveggiedelight.com/rajma-masala-instant-pot/>
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 Taj-<https://whc.unesco.org/en/list/252/>
 Alhambra-<https://whc.unesco.org/en/list/314/gallery/&maxrows=59>

CONNECTING THE DOTS... Season 2

Responsible Tourism and lesser-known Festivals of Indians



Sketch by Madhu V



Map of the regions represented by the speakers, source -NSCCT

CONNECTING THE DOTS..... Season 2
Organized by National Scientific Committee of Cultural Tourism, ICOMOS India

Our Festivals & Responsible Tourism: India and Abroad

Collaborating with NSC Intangible Cultural Heritage and Historic Towns and Villages.

Webinars Sat, May 13, 20, 27, June 3, 10 2023, @ 18:00 IST

ICOMOS INDIA
Council on Monuments and Sites

Session 1-East Zone, 13 May

Dr Madhura Ar Sayantan Sri Jitu M

Session 2-North and North-East Zone, 20 May

Dr Harveen Dr Sanjib Er Dilip

Session 3-West and Central Zone, 27 May

Ar Shreeamey Ar Yash Gupta Ar Shivani S

Session 4-South Zone, 03 June 2023

Dr D Satya Ar Roshini Ar Nandhini

Session 5- Beyond India, And Reflections, June 10

Dr Ujjwala Ar Madhu, V Dr Mrinalini Atrey Dr Niyati

For more information contact NSC-Cultural Tourism Coordinator
Ar. Madhu Vottery at +91-9849728841, nscct.icomosindia@gmail.com.
The webinar will be live on <https://www.facebook.com/icomosindia>

Registration link-<https://us02web.zoom.us/join/register/tZwpce2pqT0tG9Uev5lFh-5CmUnlAhMVlemS>

75 आज़ादी का अमृत महोत्सव 1972-2022 50 YEARS SERVING THE WORLD HERITAGE CONVENTION

EDITOR's NOTE:

CONNECTING THE DOTS... Season 2: Responsible Tourism and lesser-known Festivals of Indians', celebrated 'Azadi Ka Amrit Mahotsav' and 50 years of World Heritage Convention. The discussion also led to the best practices of 'Responsible Tourism'. The event meant for tourism entrepreneurs and young adults, in its last episode it explored international connections too.

This webinar series looked into the various typologies of the lesser-known festivals from various regions of India. Different cases would be discussed like Rural Festival, City Based, Celebration for Folk, Tribal or Brahmanical deity. Another type would also be about the festivals on the sites of the World Heritage Status.

The output was aimed at the learnings for Responsible Tourism, connecting these festivals to the celebrations of Chola Temples with Cambodia Temples. The event was possible because of collaboration with members of NSCCT with NSC ICH and NSCHTV, other than specially invited speakers.

Intangible Cultural Heritage Inventory/ Webinar Format that was given to the speakers

1. Name of the event
2. Location- Rural/ Urban/ Ru-urban/ World Heritage Site
3. Antiquity- since when is the celebration been there
4. Transformation- What change has been observed?
5. Type- folk/tribal Festival
6. Connection with any other temple, region, festival
7. Astronomy connection- Planning of the festival calendar and the Cultural Heritage site with respect to the Solar path/ *nakshatras* etc.
8. Celebration Details, facts and folk stories etc

CONNECTING THE DOTS.....
Season 2
Organised by
National Scientific Committee
of Cultural Tourism, ICOMOS India

**Our Festivals & Responsible Tourism:
India and Abroad**

ICOMOS INDIA 
Council on Monuments and Sites

Collaborating with NSC Intangible Cultural Heritage and Historic Towns and Villages

East Zone | Webinar 01
Saturday, May 13, 2023, @18:00 IST



Curated by Ar Sayantan



Dr Madhura Dutta

Rural Tourism of Bengal, lesser-known village festivals
The presentation will be about the 'Harnessing the power of folk festivals for responsible Village Tourism'. It's also about empowering local cultural communities, creating multi-cultural awareness, and ensuring well-being of rural creative collectives in West Bengal.

DR MADHURA DUTTA is the Director at 'banglanatak dot com' with leading international collaboration and research initiatives. She has over 20 years of global work experience including UNESCO, All India Artisans & Craftworkers Association, and CSRs. She has a PhD from the Tata Institute of Social Sciences, Mumbai, and MA degrees in Sustainable Development under Commonwealth Scholarship from Staffordshire University, UK and in Sociology from Calcutta University. She is also a freelance writer on culture and development issues.

Durga Puja: The Intangible cultural Heritage UNESCO
Durga Puja in Kolkata has always been a socio-religious celebration involving the masses. Over the years, this celebration has metamorphosed into a carnival of artistic expressions with artists producing their best to turn the City of Joy into a public art gallery - with myriad art installations - during a ten-day window in the months of September-October. The UNESCO tag 'Intangible Cultural Heritage' has brought global attention to Durga Puja. We plan to present a special glimpse of previous years' Durga Puja installations to experience the Durga Puja Art and temporary architecture of the festival and the process of transformation of the city.



Sri Jitu Misra

Intangible Heritage of Indigenous Odisha
The intangible heritage of Indigenous Odisha with special reference to Bhima, the Mahabharata hero - how he plays a central role as a fertility deity in the culture of Gonds, Kondhs and Bhatra tribes. The tribal festivals and rituals would be talked.

JITU MISRA, an archaeologist by training and a heritage enthusiast by heart. He has co-founded Sarna Educational and Cultural Services, a Bhubaneswar based startup working in the areas of Immersive and intervention and sustainable crafts.

Ar Sayantan Maitra Boka



A Curator, Architect and Collaborative Artist Sayantan has explored in the realm of public art doing site specific interventions with LAYOUT Collective. He is the Chief Coordinator of NGO, Shelter Promotion Council (India) through which he has curated and produced public art festivals in Sikkim, Nagaland, Meghalaya and West Bengal as the first of its kind which comprised a melange of new media art and contemporary art addressing issues of sociopolitical and environmental nature.





For more information contact NSC-Cultural Tourism Coordinator
Ar. Madhu Vottery at +91-9849728841, nsctt.icomosindia@gmail.com.
The webinar will be live on <https://www.facebook.com/icomosindia>

WEBINAR 1: May 13, 2023**East Zone**

The session was coordinated by Madhu Vottery, Coordinator NSCCT.

The first speaker was Dr Madhura Dutta, who invited the viewers to Eastern India and discussed the best practices of Responsible Tourism.

Next in the sequence was Sri Jitu Misra. The eloquent speaker shared many interesting stories of tribal regions of Odisha. Talking about the intangible heritage of Indigenous Odisha with special reference to Bhima, the Mahabharata hero, the speaker discussed how he plays a central role as a fertility deity in the culture of Gonds, Kondhs and Bhatra tribes.

The third speaker was Ar Sayantan Maitra Boka. Sayantan is a Curator, Architect and Collaborative Artist, he has explored the realm of public art doing site specific interventions. This talk was a visual treat from the streets of Kolkata focussing on Durga Puja. Durga Puja in Kolkata has always been a socio-religious celebration involving the masses. Over the years, this celebration has metamorphosed into a carnival of artistic expressions with artists producing their best to turn the City of Joy into a public art gallery - with myriad art installations -during a ten day window in the months of September-October. The UNESCO tag 'Intangible Cultural Heritage of Humanity in 2021' has brought global attention to Durga Puja. He presented a special glimpse of previous years' Durga Puja installations to experience the Durga Puja Art and temporary architecture of the festival and the process of transformation of the city.

CONNECTING THE DOTS.....
Season 2
Organised by
National Scientific Committee
of Cultural Tourism, ICOMOS India

Our Festivals & Responsible Tourism: India and Abroad

Collaborating with NSC Intangible Cultural Heritage and Historic Towns and Villages

North, NE Zone-Webinar 02 Saturday, May 20, 2023, @18:00 IST



ICOMOS INDIA
Council on Monuments and Sites



Dr Sanjib Borkakoti

Dr Borkakoti, an industrial economist by training, is a published author. He is deeply interested in the life and works of medieval reformer litterateur Srimanta Sankaradeva, who preached an egalitarian social outlook. He is trying to spread the humanitarian ideology globally.

Agrarian Festivals in Assam and responsible Tourism
there are several Agrarian festivals in Assam. As much as 69% of Assam's population is engaged in agricultural sector., hence agricultural festivals are the most predominant in this state. Namely, Bihu, Bwisagu, Ali-ai-ligang, Junbeel Mela, Karam Puja, Porag, Baikho, Bishu Dima and Bhatheli. Author and academician. The speaker will give a glimpse of these festivals in his presentation and discuss the salient features of each. It will be an eye-opener to the rich traditions of the ethnic groups in Assam.



Sri Changkakoti, NE Zone representative is an engineer by profession. He wears many hats; a published author, he is currently busy studying seventh-century Hand-gesture scripture & a seventeenth-century Vaishnava Musical Rhythm scripture and will publish the translation with commentaries of the same. He has also published 30 papers on music & cultural subject. Dilip ji was indirectly involved with ICOMOS and National Museum, New Delhi since 1998 on Majuli project, a river island in Assam. He shall be talking about the **Buddhist Cultural Tourism in Assam** and the related festivals would be discussed in detail by the scholar.



Er Dilip Changkakoti

Dr Harveen Bhandari is Professor and Dean (Research & scholastic developments) Chitkara School of Planning & Architecture, Chitkara University, Punjab, India. Harveen has done extensive research on Shaktipithas of HP and has evaluate the cultural significance of these shrines.

Festivals at Shaktipithas of Himalayas- Shaktipithas of Himalayas are venerated Hindu temples that symbolize our ancient cultural landscapes. The festivals and traditions followed in these shrines are the topic of discussion. The Heritage of temples would be discussed through festivals, annual celebrations and daily rituals. Through which the significance of pilgrimage to these shrines in enhanced.



Dr Harveen Bhandari




For more information contact NSC-Cultural Tourism Coordinator
Ar. Madhu Vottery at +91-9849728841, nscct.icomosindia@gmail.com.
The webinar will be live on <https://www.facebook.com/icomosindia>

The registration link: <https://us02web.zoom.us/join/register/tZwpce2pqT0tG9Uev5IFh-5CmUnIAhMVlemS>

WEBINAR 2: May 20, 2023

North and Northeast Zone

The session was coordinated by Ar Shreeamey Phadnis, Co-coordinator NSCCT who invited the senior scholar Dr Sanjib Kumar Borkakoti. Dr Sanjib took the participants on a visual journey of the Bihu festival. He discussed the types of Bihu and the cultural traditions connected to it. This talk was further complemented by another presentation by Er Dilip

Changkakoty who chose to talk on Buddhist Cultural Tourism in Assam. He talked in a great detail about various Buddhist monasteries, their cultural traditions and the Festivals celebrated regularly

Dr Harveen Bhandari discussed the ‘Shaktipithas of Himachal Pradesh’ (the state that lies at foothills of Shivalik ranges). She started with a mention of 51 Shaktipeeth sites, then about 6 Shivalik sisters named Vaishno Devi Temple, Kangra Devi, Chamunda Devi, Jwalamukhi, Chintapoorni Devi, Naina Devi Temples. Mansa Devi Temple was also mentioned. The festivals in these temples connected to the mother goddess are just not celebrations but a way of life. Extravagant rituals, processions and community feasts. How national and international tourists travel from one end of the globe to another to attend these festivals. Festivals have many legends, stories around them.

CONNECTING THE DOTS.....
Season 2
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National Scientific Committee

Our Festivals & Responsible Tourism: India and Abroad

ICOMOS INDIA
Council on Monuments and Sites

Collaborating with NSC Intangible Cultural Heritage and Historic Towns and Villages

West and Central Zone- Webinar 03

Saturday, May 27, 2023, 18:00 IST





Ar. Yash Gupta

YASH GUPTA is an Architect with Master's degree in Conservation and Regeneration from CEPT University. Throughout his career, Yash has been involved in a wide variety of projects, ranging from the development of heritage policies, nomination dossiers, conservation management plans, and heritage impact assessments for various organizations. He brings a unique perspective to each project, using sustainability and community engagement.

Jinordhar practices of historic Ahmedabad: an intersection between tradition, modernity and authenticity

The research explores the sacred landscape of the Jain community in historic Ahmedabad, which comprises interconnected temples, monasteries, and religious institutions. The landscape has played a significant role in the city's cultural and economic development since its establishment in 1411. Central to this landscape are the Jinordhar practices, which involve the renewal of Jain temples and serve as a medium for spiritual connection with the divine. These practices have resulted in multiple cycles of restoration and reconstruction of Jain temples, creating a dynamic and transformative sacred landscape with layers of historicity and meaning.

Mahashivratri - association and celebrations at Markanda temple, Gadchiroli, Maharashtra.

Located along the River Wainganga, the Markanda temple at Gadchiroli is dedicated to lord Shiva built between 9th to 12th Century A.D. The temple complex presently has 18 temples dedicated to lord Shiva. There are numerous Shiva lingam in the temple complex outside the smaller and larger shrines. The temple is a pilgrim site at the regional level where people come from the districts of Chandrapur, Gadchiroli, Nagpur, and Bhandara and also from the border states of Andhra Pradesh and Chhattisgarh. Pilgrims come to the temple to the count of 450-600 per day. This number increases to 10-15 lakhs during the festival of Shivaratri in the month of February. The village transforms during these 10 days hosting various religious and recreational events. The association of the people with the site and surrounding is visible through the transformation during the festival of Mahashivaratri.



Ar. Sreeamey

SREEAMEY PHADNIS is an Assistant Professor in the Dept. of Architectural Conservation at SCSA Pune. He is a co-founder of the Heritage Consultancy's Studio Gestalt'. He has worked in various capacities for the documentation, restoration and promotion of heritage pan-India with various organizations in India.

'The religious landscape of Parner & Shri Ram Janma Utsav therein' Named after Rishi Parashar, Kasba Parner in Ahmednagar district of Maharashtra is unique. As a Shri Kshetra, it is a Prati Kashi of the Deccan, with several sacred sites and historic settlements like Takli Dhokeshwar, Devi Bhoyra and Siddheshwar Wadi. One such Maratha temple complex is the 250-year-old fortified Shri Ram Mandir, built by Sardar Parnerkar, Huzur Fadnavis

of Indore State. The entire temple is adjacent to a historic Kund and is surrounded by high defensive walls that once housed a Wada and other ancillary structures. The religious celebrations and traditions therein are also being revived through current conservation efforts. The Ram Janma Utsav deserves a special mention here.

Ar Shivani Sharma

SHIVANI SHARMA is a Conservation Architect, graduated from S.P.A. Bhopal in 2017. She is a Principal Architect at The Achintya Studio, Nagpur specializing in the field of consultancy in Heritage and design. She is also an academician working as visiting faculty at SSPAD and PIADS, Nagpur.







For more information contact NSC-Cultural Tourism Coordinator
Ar. Madhu Vottery at +91-9849728841, nsct.icomosindia@gmail.com.
The webinar will be live on <https://www.facebook.com/icomosindia>

The registration link: <https://us02web.zoom.us/join/register/tZwpce2pqT0tG9Uev5IFh-5CmUnIAhMVlemS>

Webinar 3: May 27, 2023

West and Central Zone

The webinar was coordinated by Ar Madhu Vottery, NSCCT Coordinator, who introduced all three speakers-Ar Shreeamey Phadnis, Ar Yash Gupta and Ar Shivani S.

Ar Yash Gupta opened the session with **Jinordhar Practices of Historic Ahmedabad: Intersection of Tradition, modernity and authenticity**. Jain temples cultural mapping is done by Yash. 6 sq miles WHS Ahmedabad Walled City of almost 150 Jain temples, that

started with wooden temples and have seen series of Jeernoddhar- renewing the old, a Codified Knowledge System. Sompuras are the craftsmen involved, Shilpis are also part of the team.

The sacred landscape of the Jain community in historic Ahmedabad is a remarkable network of interconnected temples, monasteries, and religious institutions that have played a crucial role in the city's cultural and economic development since its establishment in 1411. The sacred landscape encapsulates several religious festivities and ritualistic practices centered around the Jain temples. Amongst these, the practice of Jirnodhar (renewal of the temple) has been a primary medium for the community to spiritually connect with the divine. These Jirnodhar practices have resulted in multiple cycles of restoration and reconstruction of Jain temples, creating a dynamic and transformative sacred landscape with layers of historicity and meaning. Although the sacred landscape played a vital role in Ahmedabad's UNESCO World Heritage nomination, modern heritage protection laws have created conflicts with the traditional Jirnodhar practices. This research examines the role of Jirnodhar in the evolution of the city's urban landscape, while also exploring the varying interpretations between conventional material authenticity and the community's spiritual authenticity.

He talked about 'Shilparatnakar'- a dialogue between Vishwakarma and his sons, the book has 14 chapters. He mentioned the Local traditions, community led practices are the best example, down up approach, Karyakarta takes up the call. It is a very effective model of conservation.

Ar Shreamey Phadnis took up next and spoke on '**The religious landscape of Parner & Shri Ram Janma Utsav therein**'. Named after Rishi Parashar, Kasba Parner in Ahmednagar district of Maharashtra is unique. As a Shri Kshetra, it is a Prati Kashi of the Deccan, with several sacred sites and historic settlements like Takli Dhokeshwar, Devi Bhoyra and Siddheshwar Wadi. One such Maratha temple complex is the 250-year-old fortified Shri Ram Mandir and a historic well- *kund*. The religious celebrations and traditions therein have also been revived through current conservation efforts. The Ram Janma Utsav deserves a special mention here.

The last speaker was Ar Shivani Sharma who spoke on '***Mahashivratri* - association and celebrations at Markanda temple, Gadchiroli, Maharashtra**'. The talk was about a temple located along the River Wainganga, the Markanda temple at Gadchiroli is dedicated to lord Shiva built between 9th to 12th Century A.D. The temple is a pilgrim site at the regional level where people come from the districts of Chandrapur, Gadchiroli, Nagpur, and Bhandara and also from the border states of Andhra Pradesh and Chhattisgarh.

CONNECTING THE DOTS 20
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Collaborating with NSC Intangible Cultural Heritage and Historic
Towns and Villages

South Zone- Webinar 04
Saturday, June 3, 2023, @18:00 IST

**Our Festivals & Responsible Tourism:
India and Abroad**

ICOMOS INDIA
Council on Monuments and Sites



Dr Satya D

Tribal festivals of Telangana
The world's most congregated tribal fair to commemorate the legendary goddesses Sammakka-Saralamma takes place biennially in a tribal hamlet Medaram in Tadvali mandal of Mulugu district of Telangana, India. The well known Thousand Pillar Temple inscription of Hanumakonda offers the date 1159 A.C.E. to a historical figure that appears in the folklore also. Thus the 864-year-old fair has been made official from 1996.

The 4-day long fair receives 125 lakhs of pilgrims during the lunar calendrical Magha Purnami that falls in early February. The insignia of the goddesses like saffron box, nose ring, etc. are brought from and sent to a hill cave nearby.

DR. SATYANARAYANA DYAVANAPALLI is working as Curator of Tribal Museums, Government of Telangana, India. He is well known scholar and published several books on history, culture, arts, travelogues of Telangana region.



Festivals in rural and urban context: A case of Belur's Brahmotsava and Bengaluru's Karaga
Festivals are an integral part of the cultural heritage of any place. They share a deep-rooted connection with the geographical landscape of the place, the community, and have very specific traditions associated with them. The process of celebration of the innumerable festivals across India varies from region to region.

This talk will look at two significant festivals set in two different contexts in the state of Karnataka – The Brahmotsava festival celebrated in the Hoysala temple town of Belur, which has been nominated for World Heritage Status and the Karaga festival celebrated in the historic core of urban Bengaluru.

Ar. ROSHINI M is an architect with an MA in Conservation Studies from the University of York, UK. She has worked with various heritage conservation organisations like Masons Ink (Bengaluru), Sahapedia and INTACH Bengaluru chapter. She was an INTACH Heritage Academy research scholar and a Sahapedia-UNESCO fellow for the year 2019-20. She is currently working as an Assistant Professor at School of Architecture, REVA University, Bengaluru.



Ar. Nandhini V

Women: A celebration of Kerala
Like every other state in India, Kerala has a diversified culture that is distinctively unique and specific to each precinct. For the upcoming webinar, she would be discussing about the women centric festivals celebrated in Kerala, that has a strong root of traditional and social values. Myths, rituals, food and art forms related to these festivals and their significance in the current trends will also be focused during the session.



आज़ादी का अमृत महोत्सव



50 YEARS SERVING THE WORLD HERITAGE CONVENTION 1972-2022

For more information contact NSC-Cultural Tourism Coordinator
Ar. Madhu Vottery at +91-9849728841, nscct.icomosindia@gmail.com.
The webinar will be live on <https://www.facebook.com/icomosindia>

The registration link: <https://us02web.zoom.us/join/9849728841?pwd=Z0p0TG9UeV5lFh-5CmUlnAhMVl0eS>

Webinar 4, South Zone, June 03, 2023

The webinar was Coordinated by Ar Madhu Vottery, with a beautiful mix of speakers- Senior scholar Dr. Satyanarayana Dyavanapalli and young scholars Ar Roshini and Ar Nandhini

Dr. Satyanarayana Dyavanapalli is working as Curator of Tribal Museums, Government of Telangana, India. He is a well known author having published several books on history, culture, arts, travelogues of Telangana region.

In this presentation, Dr. Satyanarayana focused on the tribal festivals of Telangana, particularly the Medaram Jatara synonymous with Kumbh mela of Tribals, and other community-based celebrations that are integral to the cultural identity of the region. Kolam

Dasra, Bathukamma and Bonau were discussed too. The connection of Medaram Jaatra to the known Thousand Pillar Temple inscription of Hanumakonda was discussed too.

Ar Roshini had an eye-catching presentation titled '**Festivals in Rural and Urban Contexts: Belur Brahmarathotsava and Bangalore's Karaga**'. She discussed the festival that is centered around the Chennakeshava Temple, an ASI protected Hoysala-era monument, currently a UNESCO World Heritage Site under "Sacred Ensembles of the Hoysalas." Unlike the Karaga, which is tied to civic identity, this festival represents Vaishnava temple traditions in a rural setting. Ritual Structure and Celebration Spanning 12 days, the festival reenacts the divine wedding of Lord Chennakeshava to his consorts.

Ar Nadhini concluded the session with her talk titled 'Women: A celebration of Kerala'. These festivals offer more than spiritual fulfillment. They are vehicles of social expression, tools for gender empowerment, and mirrors of evolving cultural identities. From young girls performing rituals for future fertility to men embodying feminine divinity, Kerala's festivals demonstrate a unique inclusivity and reverence for gendered experiences. It emphasizes the importance of respecting belief systems, nurturing cultural education, and challenging stereotypes—all of which are essential to creating a more inclusive and culturally rich future.

In her presentation she underlined the inseparable connection between tangible and intangible heritage. Temples and other heritage structures lose their cultural and spiritual relevance if the associated rituals and beliefs disappear. The preservation of built heritage must, therefore, go hand-in-hand with safeguarding the intangible heritage it embodies.

The presentations also called for greater recognition, documentation, and policy-level support for intangible cultural practices, particularly those that foreground women's roles.

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**Our Festivals & Responsible
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and Historic Towns and Villages

**Beyond India & Reflections-
Webinar 05, Saturday, June 10, 2023 @ 18:00 IST**

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Dr. Ujjwala Palsuley

DR. UJJWALA ANAND PALSULEY, a Conservation Architect -has been in the field for over 20 years as a Practitioner, Researcher, and Academician. She has a keen interest in Architectural history and the traditional knowledge systems of India. Her research focuses on Southeast Asian Architectural History, with a special focus on Khmer Architecture, Cambodia, and Dravidian temple architecture. Other than presenting papers at International & National Conferences she has also published a book on her research. She has founded Samrachana-HCRI, Pune and working as the Principal of MMCOA, Pune.

**Celebrating Cultural Heritage:
Traditional Festivals in Cambodia and India**

Traditional festivals play a significant role in the cultural and social fabric of India, it is equally significant in the lands of Angkor in Cambodia which was historically influenced by the Indic culture. These festivals are an essential part of their cultural heritage, and they showcase their unique customs, beliefs, and traditions. In Cambodia, the traditional festivals are rooted in the country's Hindu and Buddhist cultures. The transfer of knowledge and the Indianization of the region is reflected in various aspects of Cambodian life, culture, art, and architecture. The session will take an overview of the festivals in the Angkor region influenced – directly or indirectly –by the Indian culture, especially from the Dravida region.




The registration link: <https://us02web.zoom.us/join/9tZwpc2pqT0tG9Uev5Ifh-5CmUnIAhMVlem5>

Panel members:



Ar. Madhu Vottery

MADHU VOTTERY, the NSCCT Coordinator, an Expert Member of ISC Cultural Tourism is an author and conservation architect. In her 20 years of rich professional experience, with International (UNESCO, WMF) and national projects, she has received awards, a National Scholarship, a Fellowship, and an Exchange Program (IVLP, USA 2012), Madhu is Pride of Telangana (2021), for her love to work with school and college students.



Dr. Mrinalini Atrey

DR. MRINALINI ATREY, with a doctorate in History, works as a Lecturer at The Law School, University of Jammu, Jammu, India. Her research work is largely focused on Local Deity Cult, Folk Rituals, folk Narrative Songs, and women's role in the transmission and recreation of intangible cultural heritage. She coordinates the ACHS (Association of Critical Heritage Studies) India Chapter and the National Scientific Committee on Intangible Cultural heritage -ICOMOS India.



Dr. Niyati Jigyasu

DR NIYATI JIGYASU, is an Architect and an academican with more than 22 years of experience. Her research work examines the interlinkages and intersections between tangible and intangible attributes in historic areas. She has been involved in various capacities for projects international and national projects including resource person at the "UNESCO Sub-regional inception workshop linking world heritage sites and local cultural assets" held in Malaysia in 2018. Niyati is ICOMOS India NSC HTCVC Coordinator.

For more information contact NSC-Cultural Tourism Coordinator
Ar. Madhu Vottery at +91-9849728841, nsctt.icomosindia@gmail.com.
The webinar will be live on <https://www.facebook.com/icomosindia>

Webinar 5, Beyond India and reflections, June 10, 2023

Led by Ar Shreamey, NSCCT Coordinator this was the concluding session

Dr Ujjwala opened up the session with an interesting trip to Cambodia. Her rich research experience was quite motivating as she explained about the festivals celebrated there and the similarities with Indian ones. It was an unmatched experience for the audience. After which Ar Madhu Vottery, Dr Niyati Jigyasu (NSCHCTV) and Dr Mrinalini Atrey (NSCICH) had an engaging panel discussion about Responsible Tourism best practices as they reviewed all the earlier sessions.

Research Papers



A Regenerative Cultural Tourism Framework for Rural Empowerment in West Bengal

Author: Dr. Madhura Dutta

Keywords: Cultural Tourism, Intangible Cultural Heritage, Sustainable Development, Community Driven Development

Abstract

This paper presents a case study of the cultural tourism model of West Bengal under the Art for Life (AFL) programme by Contact Base (banglanatak dot com) in India, which applies a responsible model of tourism to foster sustainable livelihoods for rural creative communities. The initiative addresses alleviation of poverty and social alienation by safeguarding and revitalizing the intangible cultural heritage (ICH), fostering community empowerment, and enabling holistic village development. The core of the model involves transforming artists' villages into cultural tourism hubs. The paper discusses the methodology and process for empowering artists, recontextualizing traditional art forms while maintaining their authenticity, connecting creators directly with audiences and consumers, and facilitating sustainable, community-driven development. This approach also aligns with contemporary regenerative tourism frameworks, which advocate for the active restoration and improvement of social, environmental, and economic systems, moving beyond just sustainability. The paper argues that celebrating and revitalizing ICH through community-led tourism is a powerful and replicable model for unlocking a prosperous and self-reliant future for rural communities.

I. Introduction

The traditional cultural and creative industries of India, underpinned by a wealth of cultural and creative skills, provide livelihoods for millions of cultural professionals and rural-based enterprises. These communities sustain themselves through the creation of heritage-based products and services. Key platforms for the dissemination and promotion of these art and craft forms include festivals, cultural events, and cultural tourism initiatives.

This paper presents findings from the "Art for Life" (AFL) Programme, a flagship initiative by banglanatak dot com. The program is designed to identify, cultivate, and strengthen traditional local cultural skills and capacities for the purpose of fostering sustainable income generation, poverty alleviation, and a more inclusive economy. The program's conceptual framework is grounded in a regenerative model of development. Recognizing that poverty often stems from a lack of employable skills and that a loss of cultural heritage leads to

social alienation and diminished self-worth, the organization began its work in 2004 with a focus on revitalizing traditional skills for sustainable livelihoods. The initiative was launched experimentally with six folk art forms across six districts of West Bengal, initially engaging 3,200 folk artists. Over a 20-year period, AFL has evolved into a robust and proven model, demonstrating the efficacy of culture-based approaches for the economic, social, and cultural empowerment of rural creative communities. Today, AFL revitalizes traditional cultural practices—including folk arts, crafts, and performance—through community-led enterprise, intergenerational skill transmission, and immersive cultural tourism, positively impacting the lives of over 70,000 tradition bearers across West Bengal, Bihar, Maharashtra, Odisha, Jharkhand, Rajasthan, and Nagaland, encompassing a diverse array of folk music, dance, theatre, painting, and handicrafts.

II. Regenerative Cultural Tourism within the Art for Life Initiative

The AFL model is based on a three-pronged approach: safeguarding the art, empowering the artists, and developing the artists' villages into cultural hubs. The development of artists' villages as cultural destinations is a crucial strategy. It provides the essential context for understanding the art practices and the communities that create them, thereby fostering appreciation for authenticity and directly connecting otherwise marginalized practitioners with external audiences, customers, and other market stakeholders. Village festivals are instrumental in this process, serving to celebrate the art and artists and create a platform for visitors to experience these art forms in their original, native setting. This approach effectively mitigates the decontextualization and disassociation that can occur when art and artists are presented in isolated urban environments.

The development of villages as cultural hubs and destinations aligns directly with contemporary theoretical and policy discourses on regenerative, and responsible tourism. These frameworks move beyond the concept of 'sustainability' to emphasize the active improvement and restoration of the social, environmental, and economic conditions of a place and its resident community. The focus is on leaving a place better than it was found, thereby fostering a mutually beneficial relationship between hosts, guests, and the environment. Anna Pollock writes in her article "Regenerative Tourism: The Natural Maturation of Sustainability" (Pollock, 2019) about the concept in the tourism industry, framing regenerative tourism as the next logical step beyond sustainability, focusing on the idea of creating thriving, living systems. Dianne Dredge in the paper "Regenerative tourism: transforming mindsets, systems and practices" (Dredge, 2022) discusses tourism as an evolutionary concept and emphasizes a bottom-up approach that is place-based, community-centred and environment-focused as one of the key principles of regenerative tourism. It states, "Regenerative tourism, at its simplest, seeks to ensure travel and tourism reinvest in people, places and nature and that it supports the long term renewal and flourishing of our social-ecological systems."

The 2022 ICOMOS Charter on Cultural Heritage Tourism advocates for a paradigm shift from mass tourism to sustainable and ethical practices. It highlights a rights-based and people-centered approach, treating cultural heritage as a 'common good' rather than a

commodity. This charter underscores the need for participatory governance, ensuring local communities are empowered and involved in decision-making processes. The goal is to prevent the commercial exploitation of heritage sites and ensure the equitable distribution of tourism's benefits, fostering a more inclusive and just model of cultural tourism that respects and preserves the authenticity of heritage for future generations. This approach ensures tourism acts as a force for positive change. The Charter also addresses the importance of cultural identity and custodianship of the host community upholding their rights.

Under the AFL model, notable rural tourism destinations of West Bengal state in eastern India include Naya (Patachitra artists), Charida (Chau mask makers and dancers), Bikna (Dokra metal casters), communities of Baul and Fakiri wandering bards, and Natungram (wooden doll makers). Annual village festivals are an integral part of their cultural offerings. These three-day festivals, held over weekends, attract a substantial number of visitors. Artist collectives actively manage event logistics, including stall setup, visitor workshops, and cultural performances. This direct engagement provides a significant opportunity for heritage education for students and the general public. These hubs also serve as a source of inspiration for urban artists, photographers, and writers, promoting co-creation and cultural exchange. By facilitating direct interaction between creators and audiences, along with networking opportunities for business, the festivals have become vital, community-owned cultural tourism assets.



Village lane of Charida

The festivals also serve as crucial platforms for cultural and creative exchange, fostering collaborations with artists from other parts of the country and internationally. AFL has strategically integrated international partnerships into these rural events, creating inclusive spaces for creative interaction, learning, and co-production. These collaborations have

resulted in joint performances and products that have enhanced creative inspirations and ideas for both local and global artists. Such partnerships have also significantly improved the global outreach and awareness of these villages, establishing them as recognized destinations for cultural enthusiasts and special interest visitors.

To further strengthen these cultural hubs, many villages have established community-owned museums and resource centers on communal land. Positioned at the heart of these villages, these integrated spaces serve multiple functions, including work, exhibitions, collaborations and artist interactions. With 20 active cultural hubs and 18 community museums in West Bengal alone, the initiative showcases diverse traditions such as Kantha, Patachitra, Chhau Mask, Chhau dance, Baul music, Mat weaving, etc. These museums, designed collaboratively with the community, document and display artworks, community narratives, and the craft-making processes, thereby contextualizing folk traditions within their historical and social evolution. This approach has proven vital for the conservation and dissemination of cultural heritage. Museums in locations like the villages of Patachitra artists (Naya), Chau dancers (Balarampur and Maldi), Chau mask makers (Charida), Dokra makers (Bikna and Dariyapur), Baul singers (Gorbhanga, Jalangi and Hariharpara) are popular.



Dokra Mela at Bikna village

The resource centres housing the museums also have space for exhibitions and basic accommodation for visitors. The museums are freely accessible, and during village festivals tourists from all over the world enjoy these spaces for information, research, exchange, workshops and collaboration. Equipped with computer facilities, they have also enabled online heritage education programs, allowing artists to generate income and connect with

global audiences. Ultimately, these museums have fostered a profound sense of community pride and underscore the importance of traditional cultures not just as economic assets but as fundamental to the intellectual, emotional, and spiritual well-being of the tradition bearers.

While these festivals and museums have empowered rural artists to articulate their traditions and products to a wider audience, increased exposure also presents risks of misappropriation and exploitation. To address these challenges, AFL provides training to host communities on communication, contextual branding, and the strategic use of intellectual property tools such as Geographical Indications (GI), copyright, and ethical codes. This empowerment enables artists to secure fair commercial transactions and ensures the protection of their creative rights. As a result, many of these art forms now feature their own brand logos and GI tags, which are used not only for economic value creation but also for reinforcing cultural pride, recognition, and intergenerational continuity.

III. Impact of Rural Cultural Tourism on Holistic Community Empowerment

The community-led cultural tourism destinations within the AFL framework have demonstrably addressed several sustainable development goals (SDGs) charted by the United Nations (United Nations, 2015). Overcoming poverty and marginalization (SDG 1) is a crucial impact. For instance, the Chhau Mask Makers of Charida, previously a subsidiary craft industry lacking independent recognition, have transformed their village into a vibrant cultural hub. Over 115 community-led micro-enterprises now rely on full-time mask production as their primary livelihood. Similarly, the Dokra Metal Craft hub of Bikna, once a remote and unknown village, now supports nearly 300 artisans who earn a sustainable and dignified income while actively preserving their ancient craft. The Patachitra hub of Naya village is home to over 250 active and, in some cases, internationally acclaimed artists, attracting year-round visitors. The Gorbhanga village of Baul musicians has also emerged as a significant international music tourism destination, ensuring sustainable livelihoods for its musicians. A significant outcome across these villages is the advancement of gender empowerment (SDG 5). The enhanced living standards resulting from the program have also improved access to clean water and sanitation (SDG 6). By stimulating fair employment and economic growth (SDG 8) based on traditional skills, the model has effectively reduced rural-to-urban migration, fostering balanced regional development (SDG 11). The AFL framework further underscores the value of strategic partnerships (SDG 17), demonstrating greater resilience against economic shocks, notably during the COVID-19 pandemic.

There has been a catalytic effect of the positive impacts of community led rural cultural tourism model under AFL. The Ministry of Tourism, Government of India, integrated Bengal's cultural destinations into the "Incredible India" international tourism brand. A campaign launched between December 2020 and January 2021 promoted these cultural villages as domestic weekend getaways, establishing a robust foundation for sustainable and responsible tourism. Several of the developed cultural hubs have received international recognition. Bannabagram village, for instance, has been documented as a "best practice" by UN Tourism (Stowell & Shi, 2024). The Patachitra hub of Naya has been documented as a "best practice" by the UNWTO. The case study of the AFL programme also led to a global

partnership between UNWTO and banglanatak dot com in 2018, focusing on promoting community-led responsible cultural tourism. Furthermore, the initiative was recognized with The Sustainability Champions: Pathfinders award at the Indian Responsible Tourism Summit & Awards 2023.

IV. Conclusion

India's rural villages, repositories of rich cultural heritage and traditional craftsmanship, hold immense potential for holistic development. While often seen through the lens of agriculture, a more dynamic and sustainable model is the strategic use of festivals to boost creative village economies. This approach not only stimulates financial growth but also preserves cultural identity and fosters community empowerment, moving beyond simple economic transactions to a truly holistic form of progress. Festivals are powerful economic engines. It creates a temporary marketplace, generating a surge in demand for local handicrafts, textiles, and art, and at the same time creates awareness and appreciation for the art and the artists. This strengthens the local creative ecosystem, encouraging the next generation to learn and continue these age-old creative and cultural practices. Tourists, both domestic and international, are drawn to authentic, vibrant celebrations, which creates opportunities in hospitality, food services, and guided tours. The fusion of tradition and commerce transforms villages into cultural hubs, fostering a sense of pride and community. This model of development is inherently sustainable and regenerative, as it is rooted in the village's unique identity and skills, rather than relying on external non-authentic offerings. The festival-led development model in West Bengal, as part of the Art for Life project, sets a powerful example of how safeguarding, revitalizing and celebrating intangible cultural heritage can be the key to unlocking a prosperous and self-reliant future for rural India.

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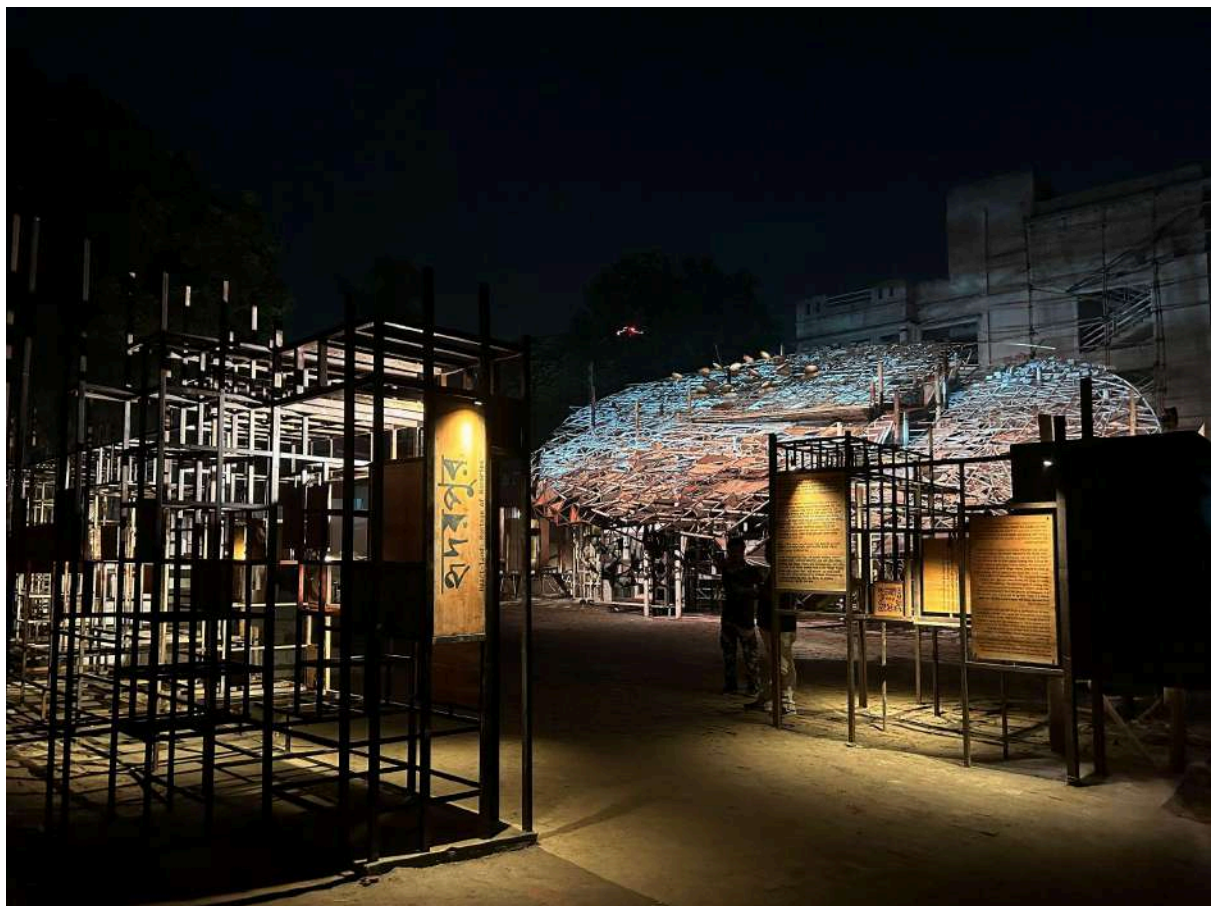
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Durga Puja: the Art & Architecture:

Ar Sayantan Maitra Boka

Abstract Durga Puja, inscribed in UNESCO Representative List of Intangible Cultural Heritage of Humanity in 2021, transcends its identity as a religious festival to become a profound cultural phenomenon. For the people of Kolkata, it is not merely an event but an emotion—an annual transformation of the city into an immersive, living gallery of art, architecture, and collective experience. During this time, the urban fabric is re-scripted through temporary constructions, ephemeral aesthetics, and participatory rituals that blur the boundaries between sacred and secular, art and life. The present paper is about the Tangible and intangible aspect of the festival.

Keywords Durga Puja, Kolkata, Intangible, Sensory Landscape, Exhibition Design



Naktala Udyan Sangh, courtesy- Sri Pradeep Das

Introduction

Durga Puja, celebrated every year in the month of October over ten days, commemorates the mythological return of Goddess Durga to her parental home. The festival unfolds through the construction of temporary shrines—pandals—that house the idols (*pratima*) of the goddess

and her pantheon. Crafted traditionally from straw and clay, these idols are eventually immersed in the river Ganges, marking the cyclical nature of creation and dissolution. Yet, beyond ritual, it is the architectural and spatial imagination of these pandals that define the festival's contemporary identity.

Each year, Kolkata awakens into a heightened sensory landscape. Streets swell with people, lights stretch across neighborhoods, and open spaces mutate into dense nodes of artistic production. The city resembles a forest in full bloom—alive, vibrant, and unpredictable. Temporary gallery spaces emerge in every conceivable corner: crossroads, courtyards, streets, and public squares. These pandals, primarily constructed using bamboo scaffolding and layered with diverse materials, range from modest neighborhood shrines to monumental installations rivaling global exhibition design.

The experiential dimension of Durga Puja lies in its paradox: it is rooted in religious ritual yet operates as a deeply non-religious, inclusive public festival. It gathers people across class, religion, and background into a shared urban performance. In an era marked by globalization, gated communities, and fragmented social life, Durga Puja revives the idea of the “neighborhood” as a living cultural unit. Each locality asserts its identity through the design of its pandal, transforming architecture into a medium of collective expression and pride.

Context

Historically, Durga Puja evolved from elite zamindari patronage into the Barowari or Sarbojonin model—community-organized celebrations. This shift democratized both participation and authorship, enabling a wide spectrum of creative practices. Today, pandals are designed by artists, architects, craftsmen, and local residents, resulting in a unique confluence of vernacular traditions and contemporary design thinking. Themes range from replicas of historical monuments to abstract explorations of political conflict, environmental crisis, or social commentary.



Arjunpur Amra Sabai Club, courtesy- Sri Bhabatosh Sutar

Materials used and the Architecture

Material experimentation is central to this evolution. Designers employ terracotta, bamboo, jute, matchboxes, recycled metal, glass, textiles, and even discarded industrial components. Some pandals emphasize sustainability, while others pursue spectacle through fragility and intricacy. The result is a constantly shifting language of materials that reflects both innovation and resourcefulness.

Architecturally, a pandal is both simple and complex. At its core lies a central hall designed to accommodate large crowds, often with multiple प्रवेश (ENTRY) points to ensure fluid movement. Within this space, the idol of mother goddess Durga is accompanied by different gods and goddess Saraswati, Lakshmi, Ganesh, and Kartik—is elevated on a platform, ensuring visibility for all visitors. The spatial organization must balance devotion, circulation, and spectacle, transforming constraints into opportunities for design ingenuity.



Dumdum Tarun Dal, courtesy- Sri Pradeep Das

The Festive Fervour

The act of “pandal-hopping” becomes the primary urban activity during these days. Families, friends, and strangers traverse the city, navigating through dense crowds and illuminated streets. The city operates in a suspended temporality—day and night lose distinction as activity continues uninterrupted. At peak hours, the density of crowds can be overwhelming, almost tidal in movement. Yet, within this chaos lies a collective rhythm, a choreography of bodies moving through space.

The urban network of pandals creates a unique spatial logic. Streets adorned with elaborate lighting systems connect one pandal to another, forming a luminous web across the city. These “avenues of light” guide visitors, linking disparate neighborhoods into a continuous experiential landscape. With approximately 4,500 pandals across Kolkata, the city becomes an intricate matrix of nodes and pathways, where getting lost is not a failure but an essential part of the experience.

The typology of pandals reflects their relationship to urban space. At crossroads, pandals function as visual anchors, visible from multiple directions. In courtyards, they create intimate, community-driven environments. In public squares, they expand into large-scale installations capable of accommodating massive crowds. Each typology negotiates the tension between occupation and coexistence—transforming spaces of movement into spaces of gathering without entirely disrupting their primary function.

This transformation is what defines Durga Puja as an architectural phenomenon. It is an extreme form of architecture—one that prioritizes form, temporality, and experience over permanence. Pandals do not seek longevity; instead, they embrace ephemerality as a fundamental condition. They exist intensely for a brief period, only to be dismantled, recycled, or dissolved. This cycle challenges conventional notions of architectural value, which often prioritize durability and permanence.

Motivation

The question then arises: what motivates such immense investment of time, labor, and resources into structures that last merely ten days? The answer lies in the nature of cultural production itself. Durga Puja is not about preservation but about renewal. It is a process of continuous reinvention, where each year offers an opportunity to reimagine form, space, and meaning. The festival redirects attention from the monotony and struggles of everyday life toward a collective celebration of creativity and imagination.

Moreover, these ephemeral architectures shape how people perceive and inhabit their city. They encourage exploration beyond familiar boundaries, prompting residents to traverse neighborhoods they might otherwise never visit. The city becomes a shared territory, temporarily dissolving social and spatial hierarchies. In this sense, Durga Puja is not only an artistic event but also a powerful tool of urban cohesion.

The negotiation between permanence and impermanence, between function and spectacle, between individual and collective, defines the essence of Durga Puja architecture. Pandals do not merely occupy space; they transform it, infusing it with new meanings and possibilities. They demonstrate that architecture can be as much about experience and memory as it is about structure and utility.

Conclusion

In conclusion, Durga Puja stands as a remarkable example of how art and architecture can emerge from collective desire and cultural continuity. It reveals a city capable of reinventing itself through ephemeral gestures, where every street corner holds the potential for transformation. The pandal becomes more than a temporary shrine—it becomes a lens through which we understand the relationship between people, space, and time.

As the festival ends and the city gradually returns to its everyday rhythm, the physical structures disappear, but their impact lingers—in memory, imagination, and anticipation. Perhaps that is the true architecture of Durga Puja: not what is built, but what remains within us after it is gone.



Hatibagan Nabinpally, courtesy- Sri Anirban Pandawala

Note: The author is an architect, curator and vice-president of massArt , which curates Preview Show of Durga Puja Art , an NGO dedicated at focusing Durga Puja Art to the world. The website to explore his work is <https://massart.in/>

Agrarian festivals in Assam and Responsible Tourism

Dr Sanjib Kumar Borkakoti, Expert Member ICICH, ICTC, involved in Sankaradeva study and carried out research on medieval hagiographies.

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Abstract Assam has many agrarian festivals, most important among them being Bihu. Numerous ethnic groups live in this state, each having their distinctive cultural practices. This is why there are a number of festivals in Assam. Majority of these festivals are held in the post harvest period, which is the most opportune time for the people, since agricultural works happen to be their main occupation. Naturally, these festivals have a connection with agricultural activities too. Excess tourism may however affect the essence of these festivities. So there needs to be restraint among tourists.

Keywords Agrarian Festival, Assam, Bihu, *Mela*, Tourism, Tribal People

Introduction

Assam is one of the most beautiful states of India, located in the north eastern region of the country. It is located south of the Eastern Himalayas, along the Brahmaputra and Barak River valleys. Around 69% of Assam's population are engaged in the agricultural sector, which is higher than the all India percentage 54%. Paddy is the most important foodgrain produced in Assam. Tea is the most important cash crop of Assam, contributing 60% of all-India output. The harvest seasons of paddy happen to be pleasant seasons. Naturally people find it opportune to engage in festivities in this season. Thus, numerous agrarian festivals evolved over time. Spring is also a favourable season for festivals. The tea tribes of Assam engage in festivities in the autumn season. The festivals are held in such a season, which is also very congenial for tourism. Hence, these festivals themselves have become part of tourism too.

Major agrarian festivals of Assam are Bihu, Bwisagu, Ali-ai-ligang, Junbeel Mela, Karam Puja, Porag, Baikho, Bishu Dima and Bhatheli. Some of these festivals would be discussed in this Paper.

Bihu

This festival is celebrated by all the people of Assam. The Bihu festival takes place three times in the year and they have separate names too. These are Rongali Bihu (April), Bhogali Bihu (January) and Kangali Bihu (October). Though basically it is an agrarian festival, both farmers and non-farmers celebrate it all over Assam. The Chutia tribal people of Assam

originally introduced this festival in the 5th- 6th century. The Ahom rulers offered royal patronage to Bihu festivities. Traditional handwoven *Gamocha* (similar to stole) is gifted to near and dear ones during Rongali Bihu. During Magh Bihu or Bhogali Bihu, a holy fire called *Meji* is lit at dawn. Kati Bihu or Kangali Bihu is known for protection of crops by lighting lamps called Akash-Bonti in the paddy fields. The Bihu songs are accompanied by vibrant dances. Colourful events are held in the Rongali Bihu all over Assam.



Young people performing Bihu dance during Rongali Bihu, photo by Jiten Das

Bwisagu

Bwisagu means the start of the new year. This festival is observed by the Bodo community, at the beginning of the first month of the Bodo year, around mid-April, when Rongali Bihu is also celebrated. On the first day, cows are worshiped. The next day, young people bow down to their parents and elders. People worship the deity Bathou or Shiva by offering chicken and rice beer. Bagarumba dance is performed to appease Bathow, who is symbolized by the Sizu tree. Instruments like Serja, Sifung etc are used in this dance.



Bodo girls performing Bagarumba dance, photo from Internet

Ali-A-Liganag

It is a spring festival celebrated by the Mising tribe of Assam. It marks the beginning of the Kharif paddy cultivation and initiates the sowing of seeds. Paddy sowing starts on the first day of the festival. The festival is held on the first Wednesday of February. People perform Gumraag dance to the tune of Oi Nitom songs. Some activities like ploughing and tree cutting are forbidden during the festival period. This shows how nature is respected by the people. The last day is called Lilen, when a community feast is held. Home-made wine Apong and pork meat-Purang Apin etc are relished.



Ritual of sowing the seeds during Ali-ai-ligang, photo from Internet

Junbeel Mela

It is a three-day annual fair organized by the Tiwa tribe. It is held in January on the first weekend of Magh Bihu. The place where it is held is Dayang Belguri. The mela started around the 15th century. It was first planned as a political event, which was accompanied by a market. The tribal communities of nearby hills as well as plains converged there. They exchanged their merchandise with those of the non-tribal people in a barter system. That barter system still continues. It is in fact the only fair in India where the barter system is still alive.

Bishu Dima

Bishu Dima or Busu Dima is an annual three day cultural festival celebrated by the Dimasa Kachari tribe. It is a post-harvest festival, celebrated after the completion of grain harvest. It is celebrated when all work for Jhum cultivation is completed. It is thus an occasion for relaxation from hard toils. It is usually held in January. It commences on January 28 and ends on January 29. Dima alludes to the Dimasa tribe, while Bishu refers to Bihu. So it is similar to Bihu celebrated in the plains.



Dimasa women performing dance during Bishu Dima festival, photo by Nunit Langthasa

Bhatheli

The Bhatheli festival is celebrated in the old undivided districts of Kamrup and Goalpara. It is basically a magical rite associated with the fertility-cult. The Bodo-Kachari community calls it Bhaitheli. They put a tall decorated bamboo in the field, and make a small hut close by. They offer eatables, a black pigeon and a black goat for the deities there. They pray to the deities, so that no harm is caused to the village. They pray to the deities to leave the people in peace and go away downstream. The Kachari people symbolize the departure of the gods by putting the offerings, the pigeon and the goat on a raft, which is let loose in the river. In fact Bhaitheli means going downstream.



Celebration of Bhatheli festival, photo from Internet

All these festivals of Assam are eco-friendly as they are closely linked with the agricultural activities. Artificial things are mostly avoided in the celebration. Even the container for putting indigenous wine is made from bamboo. People like to wear handloom-made clothes during the festival, which are also given as gifts. This is a special feature of these festivals.

Do's and Dont's for the Tourists: Assam attracts a lot of tourists in the festival period. But excess tourism during the festival period may affect the essence of these festivities. So there needs to be restraint among tourists. The state administration also needs to look into this aspect. Both the tourists and the administration should give attention to the following things.

- The festivals are related to the community traditions socially, culturally and spiritually. Any tourism effort should take cognizance of that.
- Tourists should have prior briefing about the customs and traditions.
- Tourists must be careful about the authenticity of any program while documenting any festival, since commercialisation has led to unacquainted people trying to cash in on the demand. This has happened with Bihu, with some so-called artists performing them in a distorted manner.
- The absorption capacity of any place has to be kept in mind in allowing tourists.
- Tourists must not pollute the environment with non-biodegradable objects.

Conclusion:

Assam has numerous agrarian festivals, observed by the numerous ethnic groups of the state. Majority of these festivals are linked with agriculture and held in the post harvest period. The elements of these festivals constitute the intangible cultural heritage of the state and hence needs to be preserved carefully. For example, use of handloom-made clothes during the festivals is a special feature. The celebrations have an eco-friendly aspect. Excess tourism may however affect the essence of these festivities. So there needs to be restraint among

tourists coming to the state during the festivals. The state administration also needs to attend to this aspect.

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4. Er Nunit Langthasa, Maibong

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Buddhist Cultural Tourism in Assam

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Abstract

Assam, located at the crossroads of Indic and trans-Himalayan cultures, holds an important yet underexplored place in South Asia's Buddhist heritage list. This study explores both tangible and intangible aspects of Buddhist traditions—especially *Mahayana* and *Vajrayana*—through key sites like Hajo, Kamakhya Temple, and Bodoland, and through cultural expressions like *Charyagit* and *Kamrupia Dholia*. Using literary, historical, and ethnographic methods, it emphasizes the need to promote. The current state of Buddhist monasteries and Intangible heritage is discussed, emphasizing the urgent need for conservation, documentation, and integration into sustainable tourism. By doing so, the paper aspires to foster scholarly engagement and promote Assam's rich Buddhist heritage within both regional and global cultural narratives.

Keywords Buddhist Cultural Tourism, Assam heritage, Mahayana Vajrayana traditions, Charyapada, Kamakhya Temple, Buddhist festivals, Monasteries in Assam

Introduction:

Tourism is an educational visit to the places, monuments and pilgrimages of Buddhist culture; enjoyment of performing arts, participation in festivals and other cultural events, acquisition of knowledge of folklore or arts. Since ancient times, there existed a pilgrimage route from Kashmir to Pragjyotish (Present Guwahati) along the foothills of the Himalayas.¹ This route also connected Kashmir with Garhwal, Kumaon, Nepal, Tibet, and Bhutan, Anga, Banga, Kalinga, Magadha & others. There was probably a unique cultural entity in the entire region and Sage Bharat refers to it as the Odramagadhi instinct in the *Natyasastra*.²

Buddhist cultural tourism in Assam has a strong potential with its sacred geography, historical sites, and living traditions. There is a deep interweaving of *Mahayana* and *Vajrayana* Buddhism with Assamese culture through rituals, festivals, and artistic expressions such as *Charyapada*, *Ojapali*, and *Kamrupia Dholia*. Assam holds considerable tourism potential due to its natural landscapes, wildlife, and vibrant cultural heritage. With focused promotion, improved infrastructure, and sustainable management of renowned destinations such as UNESCO's WHSs, the Kaziranga and Manas National Park, Charaideo Moidams and the Kamakhya Temple. The state can significantly expand tourism-driven economic opportunities.

Methodology

The methodology adopted in this study is interdisciplinary, combining historical, ethnographic, musicological, and visual research approaches. It begins with a detailed literary and historical analysis, drawing from ancient sources such as the *Natyashastra*, *Rajatarangini*, *Samveda*, *Charyapada*, and *Harshacharita*, alongside a comparative study of Sanskrit, Assamese, and Buddhist texts. Field surveys were conducted with the help of local informants to identify significant sites, record oral histories, and gather cultural insights from practitioners. A musicological lens was applied to compare Buddhist *Charyagit* with Assamese forms like *Bargit* and *Deh-Bichar Geet*,³ while also examining ritualistic performances and esoteric dance traditions. Visual anthropology supported this with photographic documentation and cataloguing of monastic architecture, artifacts, and associated practices. The research integrates inputs from architecture, history, religious studies, and performance arts, drawing on multilingual academic sources to present a holistic understanding of Assam's Buddhist cultural landscape.

Ancient Buddhist places

Six of the most commonly mentioned ancient sites are –

- (i) Hayagriva Madhava Temple in Hajo,
- (ii) Kamakhya temple in Guwahati,
- (iii) Sri Surya Pahar, Goalpara,
- (iv) Mayong village
- (v) Drum Circus in Nalbari
- (vi) Vyahpara village of Sipajhar



Hayagriva Madhab Temple, Hajo

Photo courtesy: Dr.(Prof) Hari Prasad Agarwal

(i) Hayagriva Madhab Temple, Hajo

It is believed among Bhutanese, Nepali & Tibetan Buddhists that Guru Padmasambhava (Rimpoche) attained Mahanirvana in Hajo⁴ and his physical body is under the foundation of the Hayagriva Temple. It is considered as part of the sacred geography of Hajo for the Buddhists, located 23 km North-West of Guwahati.



Kamrup Kamakhya Temple, Guwahati; photo source- internet

(ii) Kamakhya Temple, Guwahati

It is said that originally Kamakhya Temple was a Buddhist Temple. Later on it was worshipped as a temple of Lord Visnu and finally of the Goddess Kamakhya. It is also said that Vajrayani Buddhist Guru Padmasambhava went to Kashmir through the foothills of the Himalayas with the Goddess Tara, (one of Goddess of *Dasamahavidya* of Kamakhya) with Bell & Vajra instruments. He returned from Kashmir to Bhutan and finally attained Mahanirvana in his native place Hajo (therefore, there is no Yoni Peeth in the Goddess Tara Temple on the Nilachal Hill).

(iii) Sri Surya Pahar:

Other than the rock carving of Lord Buddha, there are more than twenty five granite *stupas* of different shapes and sizes in the Sri Surya Pahar, Goalpara. The distance between this hill and Guwahati is 132 Km.

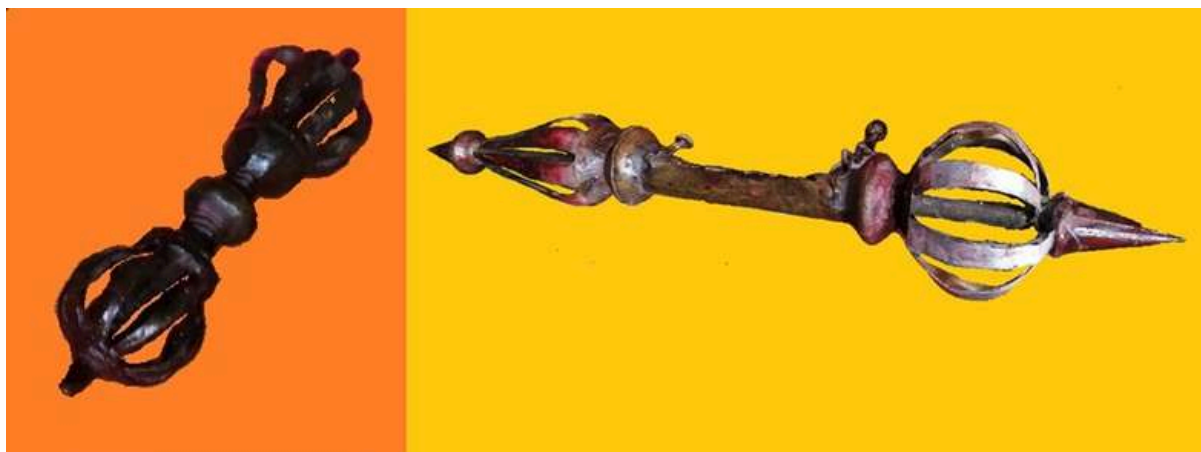
(iv) Mayong

In ancient times, Yoga was known among the *Nath* community as well as the Brahmin in Kamrup. These *Nath*-s lived in the middle of the Brahmaputra valley and were probably Buddhist. Their main place of residence was Mayong, a secluded village on the bank of the river Brahmaputra in Assam. It is referred to as the “Land of the Occult.” There are ten caves and an inscription in Tibetan script on the rock of the hill.

(v) Drum Circus in Nalbari

There are drumming practices in the *Kaihati*, *Roumari* and *Kaithalkuchi* areas. It is called the ***Kamrupia Dholia***. It is a kind of Circus or Drama mixed with *Sutradhari* dance, Puppet dance, various somersaults, funny acts, jokers, use of masks & others. It is

said that this style of drama is very ancient and it evolved into the dance & songs now prevalent in the *Vajrayani* and *Mahayani* Buddhist monasteries. It is noteworthy that the dress worn by the *Sutradhar* in drum circus is still being used by the Vaishnavas, Vyas Maestro and Buddhist Lamas during the traditional performance on specific festivals in Assam. This dress is similar to ones worn in Nepal, Bhutan and Tibet.



Devices used by Vyas Maestro at Jagar-geet performance, photo by author

(vi) Vyahpara village of Sipajhar

The ballad or Gatha music, which dates to the fourth century, is accompanied by costumes such as *Vajra* and Buddhist maestro. It is noteworthy that the *Jagar* song of Vyas Ojapali mentions goddesses like *Rashseni*, *Tara*, *Vajraseni* and others ⁵.

The Ojapali is performed during the autumn Durga Puja in Darang Royal Palace, Mohanpur, Mongaldoi; and Uparhali Durga Temple, Vijoynagar. On June 16, [mv7] the sacred ceremonies are performed in *Ardhanarishwar Temple* in Patidarang, Mongaldoi. On 16/17 November [mv8] it would be at Rudreswar Temple, Mahripara, Mongaldoi and on 2nd October, Ojapali was performed at Parijati Temple, Vyaspara, Sipajhar.



Charya (Geet) Dance performance, photo courtesy- Mr Dilip Nath, Sipajhar

(vii) Buddhist Literature in Assam- Charya Geet

Kamakhya Temple has a long association with Mahayana Buddhism. Buddhist lamas from Nepal, Bhutan and Tibet often visit Kamakhya Temple in Kamrup. Locals believe that the *Charya Git* they sing was composed in Kamrup Kamakhya. On closer observation, it can be seen that the ragas and melodies of *Deh-Bichar Git* and some of the *Bargit* of Assam are similar to those of the *Charya Git*. Scholars believe that the writers of the Charya Geetas, such as *Luipaad*, *Sarahpaad*, *Minnath*, *Naagaarrjun*, *Dhendhanapaad*, *Goralapaad*, *Dadrikapaad*, *Kahnupaad*, *Bhusukupaad*, *Shantipad*, *Dombipaad*, *Dhendhanpaad*, *Savarapaad* and *Mahidharpaad*, had special connections with Kamrupa⁶.

A. Theravada Festivals:

(i) Buddha Poornima

The Buddha Purnima or the *Sangken festival* is celebrated in Upper Assam, as the traditional New Year's Day by the Theravada Buddhist communities, namely *Tai Phake*, *Tai Aiton*, and *Tai Turung* communities. It is celebrated in the last days of the year and as the festival ends the New Year begins on the next day.

(ii) Poichang-ken Festival

Celebrated during the mid-April, the main attraction of the festival is splashing clean water, which is the symbol of peace and purity. The celebration takes place for three

consecutive days. The idol of Buddha is taken out and after the ceremonial bath. The holy bath of Buddha is an auspicious event in the festival. The procession is accompanied by drums, dances and enjoyment. During the celebration the locals make homemade sweets and distribute them. The exchange of gifts is also a common trait of the festival.

(iii) Kathin Chibar festival

Celebrated during mid-October, *Kathin Chibar* (or *Chibar* means cloth) *Dan* (means donation) is a ritual of offering clothes to Buddhist monks for the winter. In Assam, the villagers, especially the women folk follow the *Panch-sheel* (five principles of peaceful co-existence) weave clothes for the monks through the night and offer to them in the morning. Prior to that, the women take part in a rally, carrying *Kalpataru*, an artificial tree with money hanging from it. The procession stops in front of every household of the village to offer blessings to the owner.

(iv) Maiko-Chung-fai festival

During the Assamese month of *Magh* around mid-February on the full moon day, the sacred *Maiko-chung-fai* festival is celebrated for two days. This is one of the traditional Buddhist festivals with colorful programs. The festival is meant for making offerings to the fire. For the purpose, a 15-foot to 20-foot tall *meji* is erected with firewood and bamboo, which is decorated with the traditional art and culture of wood, bamboo, *chako-tan-khan*, flowers & others.

The program of the festival includes hoisting of the World Buddhist Flag, Triple Gem Prayer, community feast, administration of Silas, cultural function, religious discourse, setting fire to the *meji*, among others.

B. Mahayani and Bajrayani Festival

(i) Saga Dawa Duchen Festival

It is the festival of *Vaishakha* month, which is the fourth lunar month. The 15th day of this lunar month, the full moon day, is called *Saga Dawa Düchen*. This day is the most important holy day of the year for Tibetan Buddhists. It is known as Buddha Purnima, Vesak or Buddha Day. The goal of the festival season is to pray for the long life of all the holy Gurus of all traditions, for the survival and spreading of Buddha's teachings in the minds of all sentient beings, and for world peace. Buddhists devotees go to monasteries and temples to pray during the *Saga Dawa Festival*.

(ii) Chotrul Duchen Festival

It is the ‘festival of miracles’. Also known as *Chonga Choepa* or the Butter Lamp Festival, it takes place on the fifteenth day of the first month in the Tibetan calendar during the full moon (*Bumgyur Dawa*). The first fifteen days of the year celebrate the fifteen days during which the Buddha displayed miracles for his disciples to increase their devotion.

To commemorate the occasion, Tibetans make lamps, traditionally of Yak / Methoon butter, called butter lamps, in the shapes of flowers, trees, birds, and other auspicious symbols. They also create elaborate displays for the lamps in their homes and in public spaces, sometimes erecting structures looking as large as a building. All the lanterns are lit in celebration on the 15th day of the month.

(iii) Chokhor Duchan Festival is the festival of turning the wheel of Dharma, celebrated in the first week of August. This is called the day of “The Turning of the Wheel of the Dharma”. This holiday is sometimes celebrated by making pilgrimages or making offerings to the Buddha. But, more than that, it’s a big opportunity to reflect on the path of Dharma and how it’s impacting our lives.

(iv) Lha Bab Duchan Festival is one of the four Buddhist Festivals commemorating four events in the life of the Buddha. It occurs on the 22nd day of the ninth lunar month, to observe the Buddha's descent from the *Tra-vas-trimsa* heaven to earth.

Conclusion:

This study reveals that Assam’s Buddhist cultural heritage—rich in sacred geography, oral traditions, rituals, music, and performative arts—is a vibrant living tradition deeply rooted in the region’s socio-cultural fabric. In line with the ICOMOS Charter on Intangible Cultural Heritage (2003), heritage must not only be inherited but actively practiced, sustained, and transmitted. From *Ojapali* and Charyapada to *Theravāda* and *Vajrayāna* festivals, Assam presents compelling examples of cultural continuity that require urgent documentation and safeguarding. Buddhist cultural tourism potential must be appreciated by mapping sacred circuits, preserving endangered practices, and using digital tools. Buddhist cultural tourism is a means of revitalization, identity affirmation, and global scholarly engagement within the evolving discourse on living heritage and sacred geography.

The findings resonate with the ICOMOS Cultural Tourism Charter (2022), which calls for tourism that promotes understanding, respects diversity, and empowers local communities. Assam’s sacred sites and traditions hold immense potential for culturally responsible tourism, driven by community participation and ethical interpretation—fostering both sustainability and cultural resilience. Assam must be added on the Global Buddhist Tourism map.

Furthermore, the Charter on the ‘Interpretation of Cultural Heritage (2008)’ underscores the need for inclusive, multilingual narratives. Assam’s Buddhist heritage must be interpreted through a framework that bridges local oral histories with broader Himalayan and trans-regional Buddhist traditions.

The Assam Tourism Policy (notably 2017 & 2022) aims to establish the state as a premier global destination, focusing on sustainable eco-tourism, cultural heritage, and improved infrastructure. It prioritizes increasing tourist footfall, public-private partnerships, skill development, and new tourism circuits, with a recent shift toward a "Concert Tourism Policy" to boost the economy.

The state needs a holistic, community-based conservation model and inclusive Tourism Policy. This policy must appreciate Assam’s cultural diversity and connect it to global Buddhist networks. Buddhist cultural tourism is a means of revitalization, identity affirmation, and global scholarly engagement within the evolving discourse on living heritage and sacred geography.

FOOTNOTES:

¹ Pad No – 295 to 305: Daranga Rajavamsaali; edited by Shastri, Dr Biswanarayan

² Sage Bharat’s Natyasastra, Chapter No 6; Verse No 25-26
 आवन्ती दाक्षिणात्या च तथा चैवोद्दमागधी ॥ २५॥
 पाञ्चालमध्यमा चेति विज्ञेयास्तु प्रवृत्तयः ।

Translation: The *Āvantī* (represent Aryavatta), the *Dākṣiṇātyā*, the *Oḍhramāgadhī*, and the *Pāñcālamadhyamā*— these are to be understood as the (four) principal regional styles (of dramatic expression or instincts of speech/recitation).

The *Oḍhramāgadhī* local usage: Eastern [countries such as] Aṅga, Vaṅga, Kaliṅga, Vatsa, Oḍhra (Oḍra), Magadha, Puṇḍra, Nepāla, Aṃtargira, Bahirgira, Plavaṅgama, Malada, Mallavartaka, Brahmottara, Bhārgava, Mārgava, Prājyotiṣa, Pulinda, Videha and Tāmralipta, adopt the Local Usage known as the *Oḍhramāgadhī*. In relation to other countries too known in the Purāṇas is belonging to the East the *Oḍhramāgadhī*. Local Usage is applied. Verse No 43 – 46.. The Nāṭyaśāstra ascribed to Bharata-Muni; translated into English by Ghosh, Manomohan; Asiatic Society of Bengal: Calcutta

³ Page No 69 – 98, Caryapada; Hazarika, Dr. Parikshit

⁴ Historically, Hajo is known as Manikut, Apurnaba, Bishnupuskar and Sujabad. The last name dates back to Mughal rule. In addition, during the Ahom and Koch rule, the place was known as Koch Hajo.

⁵ Vyah Maestro, Sri Barun Sarma sings traditional devotional songs

⁶ Page No – 11, Caryapada; Hazarika, Dr. Parikshit & Page No 137, The Hevajra Tantra: Snellgrove, D. L.

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6. Mr Barun Sarma, Sipajhar (Vyah Maestro)
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Photograph Source

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Appendices

LIST OF BUDDHIST MONASTERY IN ASSAM

Sl No	Name of Monastery	Location
1	2	3
1	Gyanarakkhita Buddha Vihara	Guwahati, Assam
2	Brahmaputra Budhha Temple	Guwahati, Assam
3	Buddhist Monastery	Guwahati, Assam
4	Vishnu Buddha Temple	Guwahati, Assam
5	Mettabhavana Therawada Buddhist Monastery	Guwahati, Assam
6	Buddhist Temple	Guwahati, Assam
7	Dhamma Chakra Buddha Vihar	Guwahati, Assam
8	Buddha Mandir	Guwahati, Assam
9	Dhamma Rajika Buddha Vihar	Guwahati, Assam
10	Maitri Buddha Bihar/Temple	Guwahati, Assam
11	Pandu Buddhist Temple	Guwahati, Assam
12	Dhamma Rajhika Buddha Vihar	Guwahati, Assam
13	Ashokarama Buddhist Temple	Lokhra, Guwahati, Assam
14	North Eastern Buddhist Cultural Association	Guwahati, Assam
15	Guwahati Buddha Vihar Samity	Guwahati, Assam
16	Namphake Buddhist Monastery	Dihing Kinar Bangali, Assam
17	Buddhist temple	Silamahekhaity, Assam
18	Buddha temple	Changsari, Assam
19	Buddhist Monastery of Bhitari Kalioni	Burhagohain Khat No.1, Assam
20	Burhagohain Khat No.1, Assam	Anadhowapara, Assam (between Tangla and Paneri)
21	Anadhowapara Buddha mandir	Anadhowapara, Assam
22	Zangdok Palri Monestery(Buddha mandir),	Mushalpur, Bangnabari, Assam
23	Tashi Chhoiling Buddhist Monastery	No.3 Dhulapadung T.E., Assam
24	Banlung Buddhist Monastery	No.2 Tengani, Assam
25	Buddha Mandir, Bogamati	Nc Sukla Bagan, Assam
26	Rangapara Buddhist Temple (Buddha Vihar)	Rangapara, Assam
27	Buddha Mandir	Lumding, Assam
28	Buddhist Monastery	Ledo Bangali Gaon, Assam
29	Borhulla Buddhist Monastery	Borhulla Buddhist Monastery
30	Ananda Buddhist monastery	Sapekhati, Assam
31	Desangpani Khamyang Buddhist Monastery	Disangpani Shyam Gaon, Assam
32	Kumchai Buddhist monastery Temple	Hahchara Pathar, Assam
33	Buddha Temple	Salganga Grant, Assam
34	Suvham	Dibrugarh, Assam
35	Tamang Buddha Temple	Amlokhi, Assam

LIST OF BUDDHIST MONASTERY IN ASSAM

Sl No	Name of Monastery	Location
1	2	3
36	Mounglang Monastery	Ledo
37	Monastery	Rath Gaon, Assam
38	Choedhar Ling Monastery	Missamukh Pam, Assam
39	Buddhist Park	Boro Bhatarmari, Assam
40	Woilawun Buddhist Monastery	Diphu, Assam
41	Borkhamti Buddhist Temple	Bor-Khamti, Assam
42	Chabua Buddhist Monastery	Chabua, Assam
43	Kamba, Hinayana Buddhist Monastery	Saliki N.C., Assam
44	Buddhist Temple	Sonari, Assam
45	Borpathar Buddhist Temple	No.2 Borpathar, Assam
46	Naphuk Buddhist Monastery	Naphuk Gaon, Nahakatia, Assam
47	Therovada Buddhist Monastery	Golaghat, Assam
48	Manmawmukh Buddhist Monastery (Temple)	Manmawmukh, Assam
49	Buddhist Temple	Lumding, Assam
50	SD FACT EDUCATION	Niz-Hajo, Assam
51	Tipamfake Buddhist Monastery	DihingKinar Naga, Assam
52	Jorhat Buddha Bihar	Rajabari, Jorhat, Assam
53	Buddha Mandir	Dibrugarh, Assam
54	Nanglai Buddhist Monastery	Digboi, Assam
55	Buddha Temple	Sribhuyan, Gosainbari, Assam
56	Buddha Mandir	No.4 Barangajuli, Assam
57	Buddhist Temple	Bongaigaon, Assam
58	Digboi Buddha Vihar	Digboi, Assam
59	Ashok Vihara (Buddhist Temple)	Kachomari, Assam
60	Buddhist Temple	Iama bosti, Assam
61	Buddhist Temple	Silapathar, Assam
62	Margherita Buddhist Temple	Margherita, Assam
63	Borfakial Buddhist Temple	Tai Phake, Ningda Gaon, Assam
64	Balijan Buddha Vihar	Bokakhat, Assam
65	Duliajan Buddha Vihara	Sarupather Gaon, Assam
66	Buddha Mandir	Manmaw Kuhar Bari, Assam
67	Ashoka Buddha Vihar	Bhitar Kalioni, Assam
68	Charaideo Buddhist Monastery	Charaideo, Assam
69	Buddhist Temple	Potharshyam Village, Titabor, Assam
70	Buddhist Monastery	Silonijan, Assam

The religious landscape of Parner and Shri Ram Janma Utsav therein

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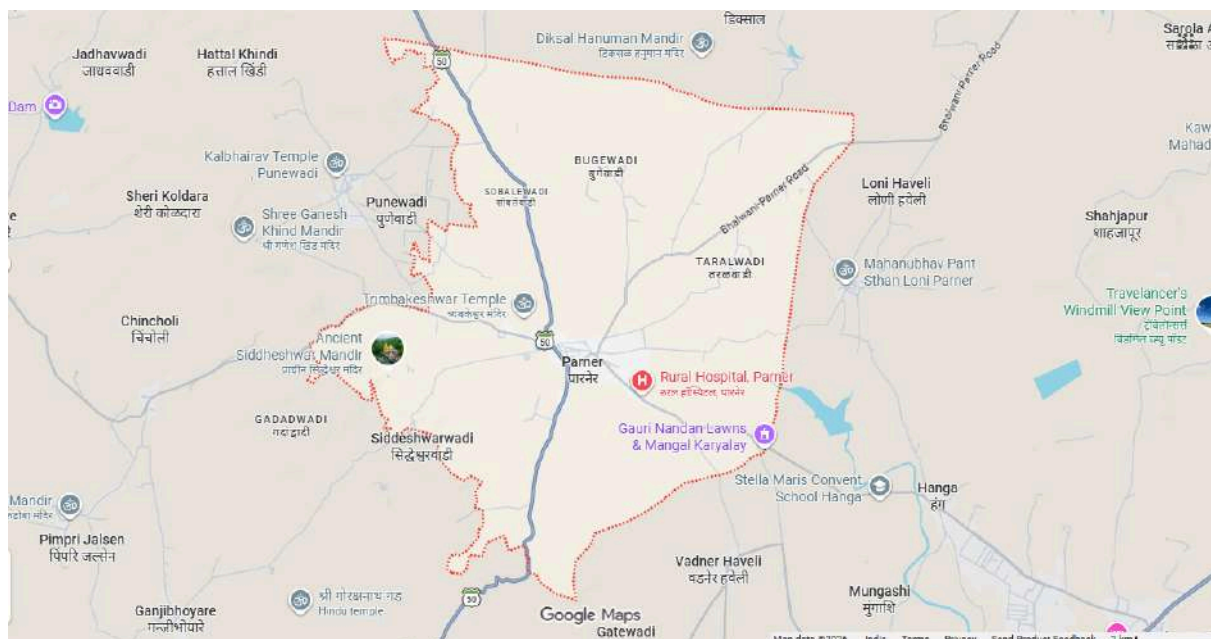
Abstract

This paper explores the Sardar Phadnis Shri Ram Mandir at Parner, Maharashtra. As a site of architectural conservation and cultural revival, this historic site is positioned for cultural tourism in the future; not just for itself, but for the entire cultural region. From examining the conservation project and its present, the paper further deals with future challenges and expected outcomes.

Keywords Parner, Maratha Temple, Ram Janma Utsav, living heritage, intangible heritage

Introduction

Shrimant Sardar Phadnis Ram Temple situated in the town of Parner in Ahmednagar District, Maharashtra. The temple was constructed around 1776 AD by Ragho Raoji Huzur Phadnis, the Chief Accountant for the Holkars. The Taluka is named the same, the town of Parner is its Head Quarter. Though modest and humble as per the modern setting, this town holds an important place in the Historic Context. The region of Parner is a Central Plateau Region, surrounded by the Sahyadri, Adula, Baleshwar, Harishchandragad, Ratangad, Kulang and Ajuba Ranges. There are 4 main rivers that drain the whole of Parner having Kalu River to the north, Ghod river to the South, Sina River to the East and Kukdi river to the West.



Location of Parner, courtesy- Google map

Regional Context:

Historically, Parner was an administrative Subah as well as a geographic Pranta. Culturally, it has been a '*Prati Kashi*' with its own *Panch-kroshi*. And within these layers lay the village or *Kasba* of Parner.

While studying Parner, as a town as well as a Taluka, one can identify layers of history ranging from the Yadava Era till the most recent British Era. The town must have been a place of importance even before the period of available tangible evidence. Presence of a variety of Historic structures including residential, religious and cultural properties confirms this fact. One such important site is 'Shrimant Sardar Phadnis Ram Mandir, located on Shivaji Road. This road passes through the Centre of the town of Parner.

Site:

The Shrimant Sardar Phadnis Ram Temple is located on Shivaji Road in the town of Parner. Its exact location coordinates are 19° 0'2.77"N latitude and 74°26'17.00"E Longitude respectively and the altitude is 790 meters (2,592 ft). Parner, Ahmednagar and parts of Sangamner, Shrigonda and Karjat Talukas form the Central Plateau region. The soil around the Temple Complex is reddish brown in color. To the north is the Nageshwar Temple and a Stepwell. Towards the South is the main Shivaji Road, towards the West is an open area which has been used as a public park in the current scenario, and towards the East is a small patch of open space adjoined by a Government Godown. The Temple is surrounded by a massive defensive compound wall approximately 4.4m in height. This grand defensive compound wall encloses the Temple itself, 3 rooms for the caretakers and tenants, 3 raised platforms with plantations on the North and South sides, 2 wells, one assumed overhead tank, one fountain, and an extensive open space towards the east.

To summarize, the site is a fortified temple complex with a Maratha period temple, a *Kund* (water tank used for religious purposes). It used to have a residential *Wada* (not extant) with a *Barav* or stepwell (still extant) for residents.



Glimpse of the built & unbuilt areas of the site

History:

The House of Huzur Phadnis is a prominent family reputed and known in Madhya Pradesh, Maharashtra and Karnataka for their valour and service towards the Peshwas and later Holkars. They were the Heads of the Chief Secretariat and Accounts for the Holkars. The family is originally from a small village near Parner called Devi Bhoira. Mahadeorao Vyas was the founding father of the House of Huzur Phadnis. Phadnis is a post title adopted from the original *Farsi* word Faranvis. Mahadeorao was granted the *Fadnisi* by Subedar Malharrao I Holkar. The Fadnisi was made hereditary from Mahadeorao's Son, Raoji Mahadeo onwards. Raoji Mahadeo's son Ragho Raoji built the Ram Temple at Parner after he assumed the Huzur Phadnis post.

It was built by Ragho Raoji Huzur Phadnis, the Chief Secretary and Accountant for the Holkars of Indore. The exact date of commencement and completion of the project is not known but it is assumed to have been built around 1776 CE. Some lands in and around Parner were granted to the House of Huzur Phadnis in return for their honorable service by the Peshwas. Some lands were granted by the Holkar royals for the upkeep and maintenance of Ram Temple. The history of the town goes back to the Deccan Sultanate period, truly coming into its own during the Maratha empire. It thrived during the confederacy and colonial periods as a town. Post independence, it continues to be an important centre, slowly growing into a city.



Huzur Fadnis family circa 1910 CE

Legacy:

The Temple was privately owned by the Huzur Phadnis Family until the formation of a Public Trust Deed in the year 1985. After India got Independence, all *Jagir*, *Sanad* and *Inam* systems were discontinued. The 7th descendant of Ragho Raoji Huzur Phadnis, Sardar Shrikrishnarao Ramchandraro Huzur Phadnis took initiative to form a Public Trust with the name ‘Sardar Phadnis Shree Ram Mandir Dharmik Trust, Parner’. This opened the temple to the public. A few repair works and additions were carried out around the same time. Thus, the site has architectural, political, social and familial values.

Study:

To propose a sound conservation and management plan a thorough condition assessment is important. This can be achieved through visual analysis and identification of the issues that have led to the visible damage and also those that might further deteriorate the structure. It is also important to note that every site is unique and each will possess unique sets of potentials, threats and demands. The main aim of this report would be to work towards a holistic conservation and management approach. It is also essential to frame guidelines and recommendations for short term and long term maintenance frameworks. To ensure proper work, the following invasive and non-invasive studies were carried out:

- Drone Survey
- Photo documentation
- TSS Mapping & Measured Drawings
- Photogrammetry
- Thermography
- Material Testing
- Structural Audit

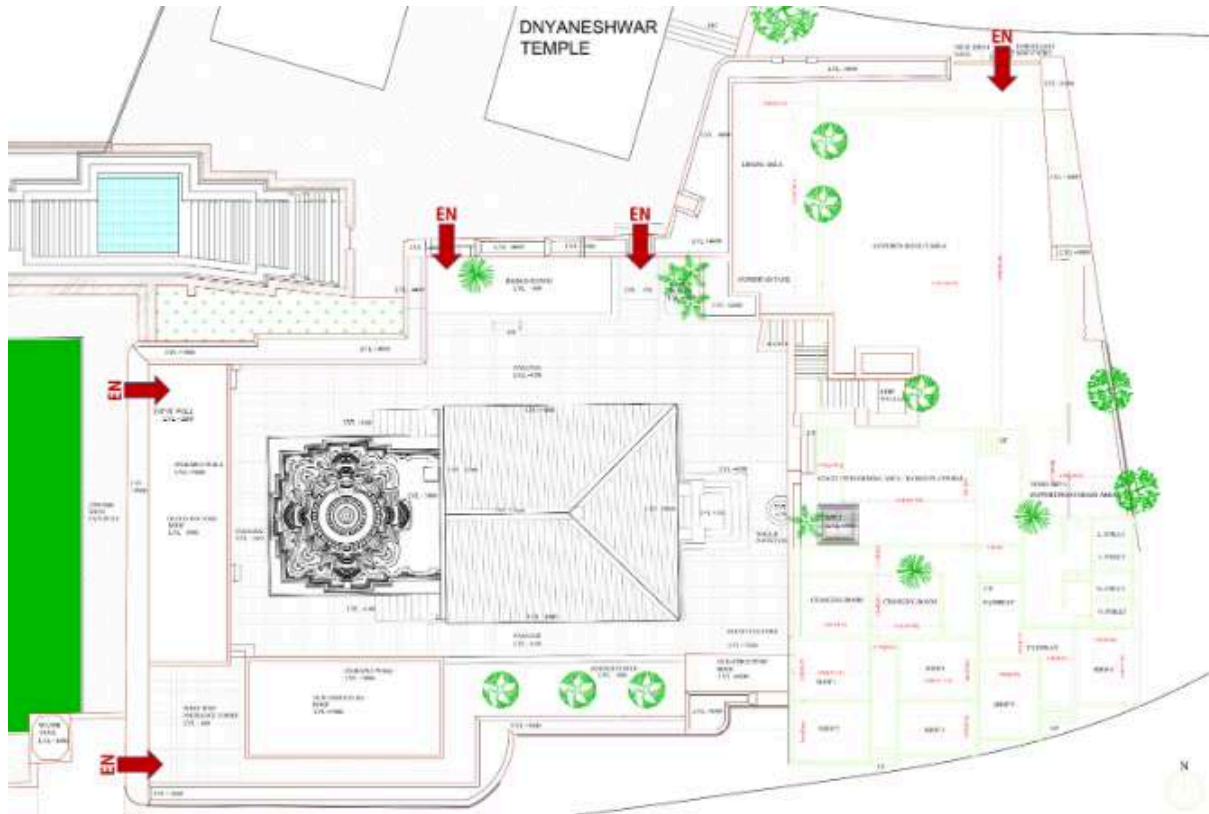


The conservation proposal and work thereafter was then done, based on the findings of the team

Solutions:

The current stage of conservation in Parner town is undeniable against the ethical principles of conservation. Taking the unawareness into consideration, the current interventions may feel correct to the society but in fact they harm the property more than it was damaged by natural means. This Project would be the first example of Sound Conservation in Parner town. This would help set a conservation and renovation process based on the Principles of Heritage and Architectural conservation of Ancient Structures.

The vision for Shrimant Sardar Phadnis Ram Temple can be broken down into two parts. The first part deals with the repairing of the temple to its former Aesthetic Glory and with increasing the longevity of the original Structure. The second part deals with Value Addition to the Structure in order to make the space more accessible and useful. The second part also deals with Revenue Generation so as to make the Temple self-sufficient for its uninterrupted working and in order to arrest external dependency in terms of revenue.



Sri Ram Mandir Plan

Architectural Conservation:

The process of conservation for the Shri Ram Mandir began with a vision in 2018. In 2019 the temple was completely documented in detail. There was a gap of two years in 2020 and 2021 when no work could be carried out due to the COVID-19 epidemic. All tests and investigations were carried out in 2022. Phase 1, 2 and 3 were carried out in 2023, 2024 and 2025 respectively. The current and penultimate phase is being carried out in 2026, and is almost over. Different works within the conservation framework were carried out in the latest phases. Quotations were called from different contractors and vendors. A combination of restoration, refurbishment, renovation, reclamation, revival, recreation, retrieval and renewal works has been done across phases and locations. For this, we had to renounce preconceived assumptions and old knowledge, rediscover and resurface holistic solutions.





Glimpses of various conservation and restoration works being carried out on site

Culture & Tourism:

To study and improve the cultural tourism of Parner, it is also essential to know and understand all the stakeholders - people as a resource. While its owner is Sardar Phadnis Shri Ram Mandir Trust registered with the Charity Commissioner Ahilya Nagar circle, its custodian is the Shrimant Sardar Phadnis family. Its local guardian is the Auti family and the local caretaker is the Shinde family. Its hereditary priest is the Purkar family over generations and current priest is Shri Padalkar. Most important stakeholders are all the devotees - mostly villagers from the Parner region.

Additionally, it is also important to understand money as a resource. The land on which the temple is built belongs to the temple ever since its inception. There is also a temple owned by Aamrai in nearby Siddheshwar-wadi village, where Chhattar family is the caretaker. There are temple owned agricultural lands in Taralwadi, where the Wable family is the caretaker. This apart, there are fixed deposits in the bank and modest charitable donations by devotees mostly during Ram Navami Utsav. Lastly, the Phadnis family manages most of the expenses across the year, including repairs and maintenance (and most of the conservation cost).



Key stakeholders of the temple planning and discussing the festivals

Festivals and Events: Gudhi Padwa, Ram Navami & Dashmi

The most important festival celebrated at the temple is the *Chaitra Navami* of Shri Ramchandra. On the *Chaitra Shukla Navami*, Shri Ram's birth or *Janma* is celebrated with great pomp and splendour. This usually falls in late March or early to mid April. The Navratra starts with the first day of the Marathi New Year - *Gudi Padwa*. It ends on the tenth day/ Dashmi with a popular *Kaala* - or *Handi* breaking ritual. Throughout the ten days - there is *Bhajan*, *Naam Jap* and *Haripath Vachan* every day.

On *Navami* and *Dashmi* there is *Kirtan* by popular *Kirtankars*. At exactly noon on *Navami*, Ram Janma is celebrated, where baby Ram's idol is serenaded in a traditional crib. It is followed by a *Mahaprasad* of fasting items for all villagers. On the next day, *Maha Aarti* is done at noon, followed by a *Mahaprasad* of lunch for all villagers. Every evening, the *Ramraksha Stotra* is chanted for the well-being of the village.



Kala Seva through Kirtan



Anna Seva through Prasad

Seva and Daan: *Kala Seva* and *Anna Seva*

As per traditional Hindu scriptures, there are many types of *Seva* or service that one can perform. This can be an act of devotion, charity, artistry or for any other reason dedicated to the deity. In this act of devotion - faith or *bhakti* - is a powerful tool. The use of *bhakti* by devotees results in - strength or *shakti* - from the deity. This *Bhakti* - *Shakti* transactional instrument lies at the core of various *seva*-s that one can perform in a temple, to profess their devotion and faith. In addition, this *seva* is also done free of cost as a '*Daan*', as an act of charity. *Sevas* done with no monetary or self-righteous/ self-contentment motives.

At this temple, there are two types of *Seva*-s performed - *Anna* (food) and *Kala* (art). The *Prasad*, *Bhojan* on the *Navami*, *Dashmi* and even tea, snacks for all devotees, artists across the ten days is often sponsored or partly sponsored by local businesses and families. Also, there are specially organized *bhakti sangeet* and *sugam sangeet* performances in the temple in this period, that are free for all attendees. *Nrityakala* and *Gayan* historically began from temples and moved to royal courts over time. Today, in democratic India, it has found a strong audience once again in temples and other religious sites - *ghats*, *mandaps*, etc.



Bhakti-Sangeet performance



Mahaprasad Gaav Jevan

Challenges and Outcomes:

Despite much work happening over the last decade and continuous engagement of the stakeholders - the site faces many challenges. The challenge earlier was apathy and neglect, before all stakeholders stepped up and took collective responsibility. Now that they have done so, a sustainable model for revenue generation needs to be developed. To increase the temple's revenue, its exposure needs to increase. This in turn requires more evolved protocols and management processes than exist at present.

The current administration and management will also have to learn and build their own capacity. In turn, they will also have to promote and create more awareness about the temple's history, its values, their conservation and most importantly - boosting its cultural tourism as a driver for development. Heritage Economics is a severely under rated and neglected area of study in India. The temple as an entity should learn to responsibly and successfully manage its own growing funds and finances.

Another area not given sufficient importance - is the Risk Assessment and Disaster Management. The site is prone to a variety of risks and issues - vandalism, safety and

security, fire, drought, overcrowding, etc. That is the next step in the order of things. The temple must evolve dynamically and consistently.



Shri Ram Palki Shobha Yatra



Child Bhajan Artiste

Mahashivratri at Markanda Temple, Gadchiroli: Association, Ritual Landscape, and Responsible Cultural Tourism

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Abstract

The Markanda Temple complex, protected by the Archaeological Survey of India, is located along the Wainganga River in Gadchiroli district of Maharashtra. It is an important ancient sacred site dating between the 9th-12th centuries CE. Comprising a group of eighteen temples (Originally 24 as mentioned in A 1879, Report of a Tour in the Central Provinces in 1873-74 and 1874-75 by Alexander Cunningham) dedicated to Lord Shiva, the site represents a significant example of medieval temple architecture embedded within a living cultural landscape. While daily visitation remains modest, the scale of activity during *Mahashivratri* is exceptional, with nearly 10 to 15 lakh pilgrims visiting the site over a span of ten days. During this period, the temple precinct and its surrounding landscape undergoes a remarkable transformation.

This Paper examines how the festival reshapes the spatial, social, and cultural character of Markanda Temple. It focuses on the relationship between the built fabric and ritual practices, and also discusses how the temporary activities and community participation makes it expand the functional boundaries of the site. It discusses how the functional boundaries of the temple are expanded due to the pilgrim activities and local communities; participation. The study also reflects on emerging concerns related to crowd management, environmental stress, and heritage conservation, and suggests the need for a more responsive and context-sensitive approach towards managing such living heritage sites and the timeless traditions.

Keywords Markanda Temple, Wainganga River, *Mahasivaratri*, pilgrims, cultural landscape

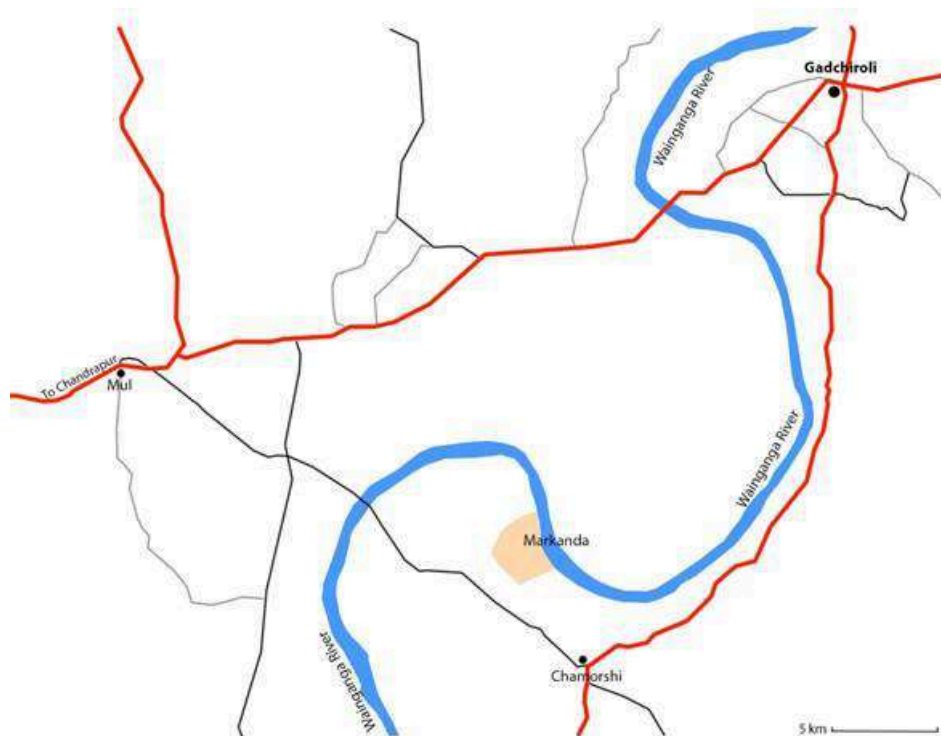
Introduction

The ancient temple sites in India are often discussed in terms of their architectural or historical value, but in practice, they function as living environments shaped by continuous use. Their meaning is not fixed in stone; rather, it evolves through rituals, seasonal gatherings, and the communities that engage with them. Festivals play a crucial role in this process, as they bring together people, practices, and space in ways that reveal the dynamic nature of heritage.

Mahashivratri, dedicated to Lord Shiva, is one such occasion when this transformation becomes particularly visible. Across the country, the festival is marked by night-long activities, offerings, and pilgrimages. At Markanda Temple, however, the scale and intensity of this event give it a distinct spatial character. For most of the year, the temple complex

remains relatively calm, with a steady but manageable number of visitors including approximately 400 people on weekdays and 1000-1200 on weekends or on holidays. During *Mahashivratri*, this condition changes dramatically, as the site becomes a major regional pilgrimage centre.

This paper looks at the Markanda Temple complex not only as a group of historic ancient temples, but as a landscape that is periodically redefined through ritual activity. It attempts to understand how the festival reorganizes space, how people engage with the site, and what this means for conservation and management.



Location of Markanda Temple along river Wainganga in context to Gadchiroli

Local Legends:

As per Indian ancient texts and folklore, Rishi Markandeya (or Markanda or Markandeya) was fated to live only until the age of sixteen. In his quest to defy destiny, he performed intense penance on the banks of the Wainganga River. Pleased with his devotion, Lord Shiva appeared before him, granting him eternal life. This divine intervention turned the site into a sacred place of worship, attracting devotees seeking blessings of longevity and protection.

Site Context and Background

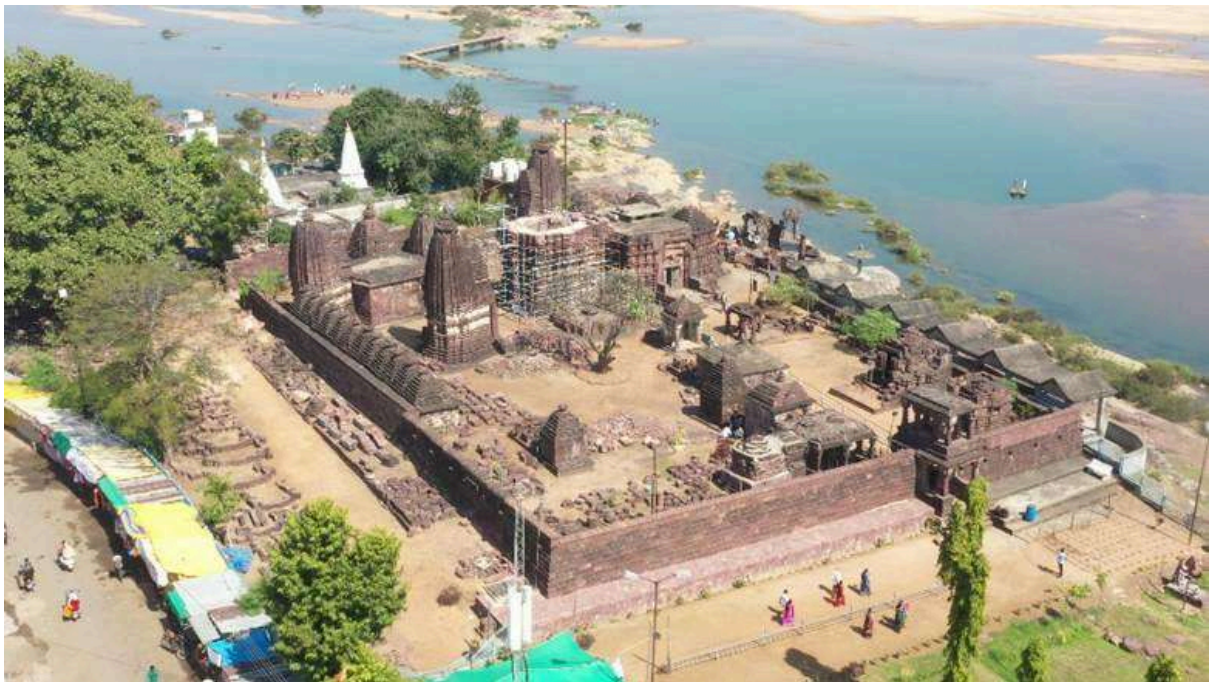
Markanda Temple is situated in Gadchiroli district of Maharashtra, along the banks of the Wainganga River, within a largely rural setting. The river is not just a geographical feature but an integral part of the site's sacred identity. In many Hindu traditions, the proximity to

water enhances ritual significance, and at Markanda Temple, the river becomes an extension of the temple landscape, especially during festivals.

The temple complex consists of eighteen shrines, primarily dedicated to Lord Shiva, along with several smaller lingams distributed across the site. Built in stone between the 9th and 12th centuries, the main Markanda Temples display intricate carvings and a high level of craftsmanship. The clustered arrangement of other smaller shrines create a dense sacred core, around which other activities unfold.

Markanda is referred to as *teerthakshetra* because the River Wainganga is *uttarvahini* in the specific geographical context. It flows from north to south and takes a turn to the north direction again in this region. That's why *uttarvahini* (flowing towards north) and hence a *teerthakshetra* due to this unique geographical phenomenon.

Despite its historical importance, Markanda Mandir functions largely as a regional pilgrimage destination. Visitors come from nearby districts such as Chandrapur, Nagpur, and Bhandara, as well as from neighbouring states like Chhattisgarh and Andhra Pradesh. This regional network of devotees contributes to the site's continued relevance and ensures that it remains an active place of worship rather than a static monument.



Group of temples along the Wainganga River; source – *DRONAH*, India

Tangible Heritage Framework

The physical layout of the Markanda Temple complex provides the basic structure within which all activities take place. The temples, arranged in close proximity, define a clear sacred precinct. Architectural elements such as the mandapa and garbhagriha establish zones of movement, pause, and ritual engagement.

The site is a Centrally Protected Monument by the Archaeological Survey of India under the AMASR (the Ancient Monuments and Archaeological Sites and Remains) Act, with regulated zones extending up to 100 and 200 metres from the Protected Area boundary of the temple complex. These are meant to control development and safeguard the integrity of the ancient monuments. However, these boundaries are primarily designed with a static understanding of heritage in mind.

During festival periods, particularly Mahashivratri, these limits are effectively exceeded. Temporary stalls, circulation paths, and gathering spaces emerge beyond the protected zones, indicating that the functional extent of the site is much larger than what is officially defined. This highlights a key tension between regulatory frameworks and the lived reality of heritage sites.

Intangible Heritage and Ritual Calendar

The cultural significance of Markanda Temple is closely tied to its rituals and its Festival calendar. On regular days, the temple receives around 400 visitors, maintaining a steady rhythm of Puja (worship). However, this pattern changes significantly during certain periods of the year, following the Temple Calendar (the Indian Hindu calendar which begins with *Chaitra* month, parallel to the month of March)

Mahashivratri is the most important event, drawing an estimated 10 to 12 lakh pilgrims over ten days. Other occasions such as *Shravan Somvar* (auspicious Mondays in the holy Hindu month of Shravan (July-August) dedicated to Lord Shiva) and *Rishi Panchami* (Fifth day of the bright half of the lunar month of Bhadrapada, falling in August or September) also see increased footfall, though on a smaller scale. These fluctuations indicate that the site operates in cycles, alternating between phases of relative quiet and intense activity.

The rituals performed during these times include *darshan*, offerings, *upvas* (fasting), and river-based practices including bathing are essential to the identity of the site. They are not supplementary to the architecture but are deeply embedded within it. The temple, therefore, cannot be understood without considering these recurring practices.



Markanda Temple and Wainganga River during MahaShivratri

Spatial Transformation During Mahashivratri

The most striking aspect of Mahashivratri at Markanda Temple is the way it transforms the spatial organization of the site. What is usually a contained temple complex expands into a much larger and more complex landscape of activity.

Within the temple precinct, the number of visitors increases exponentially. Long queues form for *darshan*, and movement becomes highly regulated to manage the flow of devotees. Spaces that are typically open and accessible become controlled and directional, adapting to the demands of the crowd.

The riverbank emerges as another important zone during the festival. Pilgrims gather here for ritual bathing, social interaction, and rest. Temporary facilities are set up to accommodate these activities, turning the river edge into an active extension of the sacred space.

At the same time, the surrounding village undergoes a visible transformation. A fair develops at the interface of the temple and the local settlement, with shops, food stalls, and areas for entertainment. This temporary setup caters to the needs of pilgrims while also creating economic opportunities for local residents.

These three layers, the temple, the river, and the village function together during the festival, creating a landscape that is both structured and fluid. The boundaries between sacred and everyday spaces become less rigid, allowing for a more integrated experience.



Markanda Village during Shivaratri festival

Association and Community Engagement

The scale of the festival is sustained not only by religious belief but also by strong community participation. For many visitors, coming to Markanda Temple during Mahashivratri is an annual practice that carries personal and collective meaning. It is an act of devotion, but also a social experience.

The local community plays an active role in organizing and supporting the event. From setting up temporary infrastructure to managing services for visitors, their involvement is essential to the functioning of the festival. This creates a sense of ownership and continuity, ensuring that the event remains rooted in local context.

The relationship between people and the site is therefore not passive. It is continuously reinforced through participation, memory, and shared experience.

Visitor Perception and Tourism Dynamics

Observations and survey-based insights from the festival indicate that visitors come to Markanda Temple with varied expectations. While many are motivated by religious intent, others engage with the site as part of a broader experience that includes the fair, food, and social interaction.

This overlap between pilgrimage and tourism introduces a new layer of complexity. The site begins to function not only as a place of worship but also as a destination. This can be beneficial in terms of visibility and economic activity, but it also raises concerns about how the site is perceived and managed.

Balancing these different expectations becomes important, especially when considering the long-term sustainability of the site.

Issues and Challenges

The large influx of visitors during Mahashivratri places considerable pressure on both the built and natural environment. The temple structures are subjected to continuous use, increasing the risk of wear and damage. Informal activities within protected areas further complicate conservation efforts.

Environmental issues are equally significant. Waste generation, lack of sanitation facilities, and the impact on the river ecosystem are recurring concerns. These challenges are not unique to Markanda Temple but are characteristic of many large pilgrimage sites.

What is required is not simply stricter control, but a more nuanced understanding of how such sites function.

Way Forward: Towards Responsible Cultural Tourism

At present, the Mahashivratri festival at Markanda Temple and the village is coordinated by the Gadchiroli District Administration under the leadership of the District Collector, with the involvement of multiple departments such as Revenue, Irrigation (owing to the proximity of the Wainganga River), Electrical, and Water Works. Preparations typically begin nearly a month in advance, with inter-departmental coordination focusing on infrastructure, safety, and basic services. Local residents are also engaged during this process through consultations and site visits, reflecting an existing, though informal, model of participatory management.

However, managing a site like the Markanda Temple requires an approach that goes beyond logistical arrangements and recognises the interconnected nature of its tangible and intangible dimensions. The festival should not be viewed merely as a periodic event to be controlled, but as an integral component of the site's cultural identity.

From a conservation perspective, there is a need to systematically study the dynamics of such festivals using appropriate analytical tools such as spatial mapping of activities, movement patterns, temporal use studies, and visitor behaviour analysis. These methods can help in understanding how the site expands, adapts, and functions during peak periods, thereby informing more grounded and context-responsive planning strategies.

In this direction, planning interventions could include clearer zoning of activities across the temple precinct, river edge, and village areas; provision of well-designed temporary infrastructure that responds to peak demand; and the implementation of efficient waste management systems, particularly along the riverfront. Strengthening the role of local communities in decision-making processes is equally critical, as they are not only service providers but also custodians of the site's continuity.

Additionally, concepts such as carrying capacity and visitor awareness can be introduced in a sensitive manner not to limit access, but to guide and distribute use in ways that reduce stress on both the built fabric and the natural environment. Such an approach would help ensure that the cultural and spatial integrity of the site is sustained over time while accommodating its living traditions

Conclusion

The Markanda temple complex demonstrates that heritage is not static, but continuously shaped by use, rituals, and collective participation. During Mahashivratri, the site expands beyond its physical boundaries, functioning as a dynamic cultural landscape where the temple, river, and village operate together.

Such conditions call for moving beyond a monument-centric approach towards one that engages with both tangible and intangible dimensions of heritage. While current administrative efforts provide a base, there is a need for more research-driven understanding of festival dynamics through tools like spatial and temporal mapping.

In this sense, Markanda offers important insights for managing similar living heritage sites, where conservation must support not just preservation, but continuity and change.

Note: All the images are by Author, otherwise mentioned.

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Promotion of Tribal Fairs and Responsible Tourism: A Case Study of a South Indian State - Telangana

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Abstract: The state of Telangana represents a distinctive case in South India where tribal cultural practices have been actively integrated into state-supported tourism frameworks. With nearly 10 per cent of its population comprising Scheduled Tribes, the state has institutionalised the promotion of tribal fairs. These fairs, organised for around three days or more and known as *jatras*, serve as instruments of cultural preservation and sustainable regional development. This article, based on field work, examines the major tribal festivals, their socio-cultural significance, and the implications of increased state involvement and tourism. It further evaluates the challenges posed by environmental degradation and cultural transformation, arguing for a balanced approach grounded in responsible tourism and community participation.

Keywords Tribal Fairs; Responsible Tourism; Indigenous Culture; Telangana Jatras; Environmental Sustainability; Koya; Gond; Chenchu; Lambadi

Introduction

Indigenous communities embody long-standing cultural traditions, ecological knowledge, and unique belief systems that are integral to understanding regional histories. In India, tribal populations are unevenly distributed, and among the southern states, Telangana stands out for its relatively high proportion of tribal inhabitants. According to the Census of India 2011, the state is home to approximately 3.2 million tribal people belonging to 32 officially recognised communities, of which around eleven constitute major indigenous groups. These communities are primarily located along the river basins of the Godavari River and Krishna River, as well as in forested regions such as the Nallamala Forest. The Chenchu inhabit dense forest zones, while groups like the Lambadi and Yerukala are largely settled in plains.

In recent decades, globalisation and socio-economic transformations have posed challenges to the preservation of tribal cultural systems. In response, the Government of Telangana has adopted a strategy of promoting tribal fairs (*jatras*) as both cultural institutions and tourism assets. This field work article explores this intersection of culture and tourism, focusing on the implications for sustainability and indigenous identity.

Tribal Fairs as Cultural Institutions

Tribal fairs in Telangana serve as vital socio-religious institutions that reinforce community identity, oral traditions, ritual dances and ecological relationships. These festivals are deeply embedded in mythological narratives and clan-based systems.

The ‘Medaram Jatra’ is the most prominent among them, attracting over 15.5 million participants and often described as the largest gathering in the world that attends a tribal fair. Held biennially at Medaram, Mulugu District, the festival centres on the worship of the tribal

(Koya) goddesses Sammakka and Saramma. Historical references, including an inscription (check image) at the Thousand Pillar Temple (Veyi Stambhala Gudi at Hanumakonda, Telangana), suggest that the festival may date back to the 12th century CE. The inscription contains a line in which it is stated that Kakatiya king Rudradeva defeated one local chieftain, Eda; Eda was a relative of the tribal goddesses, their traditional ballads narrate.

Another major event is the ‘Nagoba Jatra’, held at Keslapur, Adilabad District. Organised by the Mesram clan of the Gond community, it includes distinctive rituals such as the ceremonial induction of newly married women into the clan. A public durbar (meeting) is held on the final day of the celebrations to hear and address the petitions of the Gonds.

The ‘Jangubai Jatra’, celebrated at a picturesque cave site Kotaparandoli along the Telangana–Maharashtra border, is rooted in Gond mythology. It commemorates the role of Pahandi Kupa Lingo, who is believed to have liberated ancestral deities with the assistance of the goddess Jangubai.

Other tribal festivals include the Kolam community’s ‘Dantanpalli Jatra’, the Naikpod’s ‘Gandhari Maisamma Jatra’ at Gandhari Rock Fort in Mancherial District, and Chenchu jatras in the Amrabad Tiger Reserve, Nagarkurnool District. Banjaras celebrate Santh Sevalal Maharaj Jayanthi during the third week of February across the State. These events collectively form a network of cultural practices that sustain tribal identity.

State Intervention and Institutional Support

The Government of Telangana has played a significant role in promoting tribal fairs, particularly since the late 20th century. The recognition of Medaram Jatra as a state festival in 1996 marked a turning point in policy.

The State support includes infrastructure development, financial assistance, and administrative coordination across departments. Facilities such as roads, sanitation systems, and temporary shelters are provided to accommodate large numbers of pilgrims. Importantly, the state generally refrains from interfering in ritual practices, allowing traditional authorities—such as tribal priests—to maintain control over ceremonial aspects.

This approach reflects a hybrid model of governance, combining institutional support with cultural autonomy. It has contributed to increased visibility of tribal traditions and has also facilitated economic opportunities through tourism. The Government support enables more than 55% of the State population (i.e. about 2 Crore pilgrims) to avail Government-provided facilities.

Responsible Tourism and Environmental Challenges

While the promotion of tribal fairs has enhanced cultural visibility, it has also introduced environmental challenges. Large gatherings, particularly during the Medaram Jatra, exert pressure on forest ecosystems and wildlife habitats, especially in regions like the Eturnagaram Wildlife Sanctuary.

Medaram Jatara, picture by Author

Flag used in Jatra, picture by Author

Similarly, festivals in the Nallamala Forest have witnessed increased non-tribal participation, leading to issues such as plastic pollution, vehicular congestion, and disturbance to wildlife. In response, regulatory measures have been introduced, including restrictions on entry duration and controlled access to ecologically sensitive zones.

These developments highlight the need for a responsible tourism framework that balances cultural promotion with environmental conservation. Such a framework must prioritise ecological sustainability while ensuring that tribal communities benefit from tourism.

Cultural Transformation and Adaptation

The increasing interaction between tribal communities and mainstream society has led to noticeable cultural transformations. Several tribes have transitioned from animistic and nature-based worship to temple-based practices influenced by broader Hindu traditions. For example, the Yerukala community has shifted from stone worship to temple construction, while the Lambadis (or Banjara) have institutionalised festivals such as the Loka Masand Jatra and the celebration of Santh Sevalal Maharaj Jayanthi. Andhs and Pardhans also institutionalised the Jayanthis of their Gurus - Phulaji Baba and Heera Suka, respectively.

Similarly, architectural transformations—such as the reconstruction of tribal shrines in stone temple styles—reflect processes of cultural assimilation and adaptation. While these changes indicate dynamic cultural evolution, they also raise concerns regarding the erosion of indigenous traditions.

Memory, Identity, and Political Recognition

Tribal fairs also serve as platforms for the articulation of historical memory and political identity. The commemoration of leaders such as Kumram Bheem, who was martyred in 1940 while fighting for tribal land rights, has become an important aspect of cultural and political consciousness. The establishment of a memorial at Jodeghat and the large-scale celebration of his birth anniversary reflect the integration of tribal history into state narratives. Such initiatives contribute to the recognition of tribal contributions and reinforce community identity.

Towards a Framework of Responsible Tribal Tourism

The Telangana experience offers important insights into the development of responsible tourism models. The key elements include-

Community Participation: Ensuring that tribal communities retain control over cultural practices

Environmental Regulation: Protecting ecologically sensitive areas through controlled access

Cultural Sensitivity: Avoiding commercialisation that distorts traditional practices

Economic Inclusion: Providing livelihood opportunities for tribal populations

Responsible tourism must be viewed not merely as a regulatory mechanism but as an ethical framework that respects both cultural diversity and ecological balance. In this regard, the ‘Telangana Tourism Policy 2025-2030’ stipulates the following as a measure of promotion of Tribal tourism:

“The eco-tourism framework in Telangana strongly emphasizes the promotion of tribal tourism by integrating local communities into the core of tourism development. It advocates a community-based ecotourism model that leverages the traditional ecological knowledge, cultural practices, and skills of tribal populations, enabling them to actively participate as guides, hosts, and entrepreneurs. By fostering initiatives such as eco-villages and providing capacity-building programs in sustainable tourism and conservation, the policy aims to enhance the socio-economic well-being and self-reliance of tribal communities. Simultaneously, it ensures that tourism activities respect cultural heritage, operate within ecological limits, and contribute to the conservation of forests, biodiversity, and indigenous traditions, thereby creating an inclusive and sustainable model for tribal tourism promotion.”

Conclusion

The promotion of tribal fairs in Telangana illustrates a complex interplay between cultural preservation, tourism development, and environmental sustainability. While state intervention has enhanced the visibility and viability of tribal traditions, it has also introduced new challenges that require careful management of natural areas, especially the Tribal Landscape—a geographic area where the natural environment is intrinsically linked with the cultural, spiritual, and historical practices of indigenous people.

A balanced approach—grounded in responsible tourism, community autonomy, and ecological awareness—is essential for ensuring the long-term sustainability of these cultural institutions. The Telangana model, despite its challenges, offers valuable lessons for other regions seeking to preserve indigenous heritage in an era of rapid change.

Note: The author has been the incharge officer for Tribal Museums and Tribal fairs across the state since 2012.

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Festivals in Rural and Urban Contexts- A case of Bengaluru's Karaga and Belur's Brahma Rathotsava

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Abstract Bangalore is a south Indian city and capital of Karnataka state. This paper examines Bengaluru's Karaga and Belur's Brahma Rathotsava with the help of the International Charter on Cultural Heritage Tourism (2022). It highlights how urban and rural festivals negotiate heritage, tourism, and community rights. By analyzing ritual space, pluralism, and safeguarding needs, the study underscores participatory governance, resilience, and sustainability as central to managing living heritage in contemporary India.

Keywords Cultural Heritage, Intangible Heritage, Cultural Tourism, Religious Tourism and Festivals

Introduction

Festivals are among the most vivid expressions of intangible cultural heritage (ICH). They unite communities, reaffirm traditions, and transform public space into a shared cultural stage. In India, where ritual landscapes span dense metros and agrarian towns alike, the same cultural impulse plays out through very different spatial, social, and tourism dynamics.

Cultural heritage is one of the most universal tourism products across the world. Cultural tourism is a form of special interest tourism, where culture forms the basis of either attracting tourists or motivating people to travel. It is driven by four principal factors: tourism, use of cultural heritage assets, consumption of experiences and products, and the tourist itself. This paper focuses on religious or pilgrimage tourism, which is one of the earliest and most prevalent forms of cultural tourism, especially in India, where people travel to satisfy religious requirements and gain access to divine blessings.

This essay discusses two examples - Bengaluru's Karaga—a city-wide, water-worshipping celebration rooted in the Tigala community and Belur's Brahma Rathotsava, the 12-day chariot festival at the Hoysala-era Chennakeshava temple and interprets both with the help of the International Charter for Cultural Heritage Tourism (2022) adopted by ICOMOS. The Charter asks heritage and tourism stakeholders to focus on heritage protection, community rights, participatory governance, resilience, and climate action in every destination plan and visitor experience. It articulates three overarching objectives and seven operational principles to guide responsible management, monitoring, capacity building, and equitable benefit-sharing across the “heritage commons.”

Two Festivals, Two Geographies, One Living Heritage

The urban case: Bengaluru's Karaga

Karaga (or *Karaga jatre*) unfolds annually in the *Chaitra* month across the historic neighbourhoods of old Bengaluru. The festival is anchored in the Draupadi cult tradition kept alive by the Tigala community. The core narrative honours Draupadi as *Adi Shakti*, who took form to defeat Timarasura and promised to visit the Tigalas' ancestors. This visit becomes a city-wide choreography that respects water and nature through the worship known as *Gange pooje* at the erstwhile tanks and lakes—fitting for a city once known as *Kalyanapuri* for its many water bodies. The *Karaga* itself—a sacred, unbaked earthen pot borne without using hands—embodies the goddess's power (Image 1); the priest, protected by *Veerakumaras*, moves it through the city's ritual topography. The route maps relationships between temple, guild streets, markets, water sources, and shrines—an urban palimpsest embodied as a moving ritual (Image 2).



Image 1: The main priest with the Karaga mounted on his head; source: PeeVee

Karaga's daily arc binds temple, street, gymnasium (*garadi mane*), dargah, and vanished waterscapes now remembered through shrines. The *Gange pooje* is performed at *Uppuneerina Kunte/Karagada Kunte* in Cubbon Park; at the *Hasi Karaga Mandapa* (considered a *Shakti Peetha*) on Days 3 and 7; it is also performed in Sudhama Nagara's Muneshwara temple; and at other loci connected to the old tanks such as Kempambudhi and Dharmambudhi (today's Majestic). On Day 6, the community's *Aarati Deepotsava* gathers women and girls (Image 3) in a luminous procession to the Dharmarayaswamy temple, re-centering intergenerational participation. The most attended event is the *Pete Karaga* night

procession on Day 9, when the priest—dressed in turmeric-yellow sari, with red-bordered adornments—visits the Hazrat Tawakkal Mastan dargah in Cottonpete, underscoring a long-standing, syncretic gesture of mutual reverence in the urban fabric.



Image 2: Map showing the important locations of the Karaga Festival; source-Author



Image 3: Women and young girls of the community on their way to the Dharmaraya Swamy temple, source-Revival Heritage Hub.

The Rural Regional Case: Belur's Brahma Rathotsava

The Brahma Rathotsava (chariot festival) is a multi-day event with massive participation from the surrounding villages and pilgrims (Image 4). The festival symbolizes a sacred urbanism of a smaller scale but deep historical reach. Celebrated in the Chennakeshava temple complex—part of the “Sacred Ensembles of the Hoysalas” World Heritage Site—the 12-day cycle foregrounds chariot processions through the four streets-*Vaikunta Beedi* rimming the temple. The towering wooden chariot is pulled through the temple streets as the deity is paraded, with elaborate ritual stages framing the movement.



Image 4: A view of the crowded main street leading to the Chennakeshava Temple; source-INTACH Bengaluru Chapter

The festival's singular hallmark: it is commenced by reciting verses from the Quran—a powerful emblem of shared civic life and inter-community harmony in a temple town. The program is carefully sequenced: flag-hoisting at the Garuda pillar (Day 1); *Suryamandalotsava* and *Shesha-vahana* (Day 2); further *Shesha-vahana* and *Divya Hamsarohana* (Day 3); *Hamsa* (swan) and *Pushpaka* mantapa processions (Day 4); *Divya Hanumanotsava* (Day 5); *Divya Garudotsava* (Day 6); *Divya Brahma Rathotsava*—the central chariot festival—on Day 7 (Image 5); *Belli Hanumanotsava* and *Adda Pallaki* (Day 8); *Teppotsava* at Vishnusamudra and *Ashwa-rohana* (Day 9); *Mahabhisheka* and *Divya Simhotsava* (Day 10); *Divya Gajarohana* and *Mohini-alankara* (Day 11); and *Shayanotsava* (Day 12).



Image 5: A view of the Divya Brahma Rathotsava (the chariot festival); source- INTACH Bengaluru Chapter

Understanding the festivals in the context of ICTC Charter 2020

The ICOMOS Charter reframes cultural heritage tourism as stewardship of the “heritage commons,” with three objectives—centering protection and community rights; enabling participatory governance; and aligning with the SDGs and climate action—and seven principles that operationalize planning, monitoring, cooperation, capacity, and sustainability. When mapped onto Karaga and Rathotsava, the Charter highlights distinct priorities and shared strategies:

A, Heritage protection at the center of tourism planning (Principle 1)

Karaga’s ritual cartography criss-crosses an ever-densifying metropolis. The worship of water at historic tanks—now parks, markets, or transit hubs—makes intangible practice a living archive of Bengaluru’s lost hydrology. Heritage planning here must not merely “accommodate” the procession; it should recognize the festival as conservation advocacy in motion. For Belur, the focus is the integrity and setting of a medieval temple ensemble under heavy seasonal load. The Charter explicitly calls for visitor management to be integrated with heritage management and for tourism revenues to contribute transparently to conservation—both directly applicable here.

B. People-centered and rights-based governance (Objective 2; Principle 3–5)

The Charter urges participatory governance and shared decision-making, establishing joint festival management committees. Karaga is driven by the Tigala community and at Belur, temple functionaries, chariot crews, and neighbourhood associations coordinate an intricate festival.

Belur’s Qur’anic opening and Bengaluru’s dargah visit each demonstrate inter-community respect embedded in the practice. Tourism interpretation should center these gestures—not as curiosities, but as civic ethics—combating polarizing narratives and elevating the festivals as examples of pluralism.

Rural Urban Contrasts and Convergences

☐ Spatial governance

Bengaluru's festival negotiates multilayered jurisdiction—municipal, traffic, markets—typical of large cities. Belur's festival is embedded in a temple-town commons with clearer ritual corridors but intense concentration on specific days. Both require different aspects of the same Charter principle: plan *with* heritage at the center and build visitor management into the heritage plan itself.

☐ Heritage palimpsests

Karaga reactivates a palimpsest of lost lakes—Uppuneerina Kunte, Kempambudhi, Dharmambudhi—through ritual, reminding the city of what once cooled and sustained it. In Belur, the palimpsest is architectural and processional: the chariot and *vahana* roster re-inscribe cosmology upon streets designed to hold it.

☐ Pluralism as practice

The Karaga's visit to a Sufi Dargah and Belur's Qur'anic recitation are not add-ons; they are constitutive gestures that orient each festival toward civic harmony. Making this legible to visitors fulfils the Charter's call to raise awareness and cooperation among all stakeholders for conservation and social cohesion.

☐ Gendered custodianship

From the Karaga priest's feminized attire during *Pete Karaga* to women-led *Deepotsava*, gendered symbolism and participation are bridges between ritual authority and community continuity—priority stories for interpretation and rights-based tourism.

Conclusion: Managing Living Heritage as a Commons

Bengaluru's Karaga and Belur's Brahma Rathotsava remind us that living heritage is not a performance staged for visitors but a commons stewarded by communities. Tourism can either fray that fabric or strengthen it. The ICOMOS International Charter for Cultural Heritage Tourism (2022) gives practitioners, authorities, and communities a shared playbook to choose the latter—placing heritage and rights at the core; planning with data and humility; building capacity for risk and climate shocks; and distributing benefits fairly.

For Karaga, this means embracing the festival as the city's own ecological conscience—using *Gange pooje* to reconnect residents with hydrological heritage while managing night-time surges with care and co-decision. For Belur, it means protecting stones and streets with smart micro-infrastructure, honouring pluralism in narrative, and smoothing peak pressures without excluding locals.

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Intangible Heritage as a Lens for Social Transformation

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Abstract This paper reflects a personal journey and immersive experiences in Kerala over the past year, explored through the intersecting lenses of gender, cultural heritage, and art forms. Central to this discussion is the role of local traditions in shaping community identity and social perception. With an academic background in heritage conservation and urban regeneration, the attempt here is to bridge tangible with the realm of intangible heritage—particularly cultural tourism and traditional performance practices—has been both enlightening and deeply transformative. The paper examines how intangible cultural practices act as living archives, carrying forward collective memory while continuously adapting to contemporary contexts. By situating gender within these practices, it highlights the often-unseen roles of women and marginalized voices in sustaining and transmitting heritage. The paper argues for a more inclusive and interdisciplinary approach to conservation—one that recognizes intangible heritage not merely as a cultural expression, but as an active agent in shaping resilient, socially cohesive communities

Keywords Gender, Cultural Heritage, Intangible Heritage, Community Identity, Traditional Performance.

Introduction

The central theme of the paper is the prominent and often unacknowledged role of women in Kerala's cultural traditions, specifically in festivals and performance arts. Through fieldwork, interviews, and first hand observations, the speaker examined how deeply women's participation is woven into the rituals, narratives, and performances associated with intangible heritage, while also highlighting a few areas where gender restrictions still prevail.

Understanding Festivals as Cultural Signifiers Festivals are essential elements of cultural expression and social identity. According to UNESCO, they are both celebrations of belief systems and instrumental tools for economic development, often serving as key catalysts for the growth of cultural tourism. Intangible cultural beliefs and practices, such as festivals and rituals, are more difficult to quantify and preserve compared to tangible heritage. Nevertheless, their dynamic and evolving nature makes their documentation, appreciation, and continued practice essential for sustaining cultural heritage.

UNESCO has provided a framework for assessing the contribution of Intangible Cultural Heritage (ICH) to development goals such as community integration, social harmony, sustainability, education, and cultural transmission. The speaker emphasized that while tangible heritage, such as temples and historic buildings, can often be valued materially, intangible elements—including rituals, performances, and knowledge systems—hold equal, if not greater, significance in shaping collective memory and cultural identity.

Women in Kerala's Traditional Art Forms

Kerala's rich cultural landscape includes a variety of performance traditions. Two key examples are:

1. *Mudiyettu* – A ritualistic, dramatic performance traditionally devoid of female participation.
2. *Chenda Melam* and related percussion arts – Once male-dominated, but now increasingly performed by women, even at large-scale national events like the 26th January Parade on Kartavya Path (earlier called Rajpath) in New Delhi.

It is observed that while certain art forms still resist women's participation due to traditional or superstitious beliefs (e.g., floods being blamed on deviation from ritual purity), others have embraced inclusivity. Women have broken stereotypes by mastering traditionally male performances, sometimes carrying instruments that weigh over 20 kilograms, marching and performing under the sun with great enthusiasm and skill. Some other art forms highlighted for their central involvement of women and children include:

- *Nangiar Koothu* – A solo performance form where women are the primary narrators and performers.
- *Thiruvathirakali* – A graceful circular dance performed during Onam, symbolizing femininity, fertility, and community bonding.
- *Mappilappattu* and *Oppana* – Musical traditions from Kerala's Muslim communities, performed during weddings, celebrating womanhood and love.
- *Tribal dances* – Often led by women to mark transitions like marriage. Each of these traditions reflects a unique intersection of gender, spirituality, and cultural storytelling, often passed down through matrilineal or community-based practices.

Three Inspiring Women-Centric Festivals in Kerala

They exemplify the spiritual, cultural, and social importance of women in Kerala's heritage. Each of these festivals is geographically and contextually distinct, but together they paint a broader picture of gender roles in intangible cultural heritage.

1. **Pooram Ritual** – Worship of *Kamadeva* performed mainly in northern Kerala, this nine-day domestic ritual is centered around the worship of Kama Deva (the god of love). The practice involves girls (prior to puberty) waking up early, fasting, collecting flowers, and making floral arrangements daily. On the final day, they create a floral figurine of Kama Deva as a culmination of their devotion.



Image 1: Thechi flower Sacred Ixora (English), Paranti (Sanskrit) in the context of Kerala.

Source: <https://www.smpbkerala.in/herbal-data/Ixora-coccinea.asp>

Key aspects of the ritual: The floral deity is constructed from the flowers collected over the nine days. The offerings include traditional dishes like *pura ada* (steamed rice-jaggery cakes) and *pura kanji* (a sweet rice porridge). Specific flowers (like *thechi*, hibiscus) and tulasi

leaves are prescribed for the ritual. The ritual concludes with a temple visit and purification ritual. Interestingly, there are two narratives surrounding eligibility, where one explains it as a ritual for a girl upon reaching puberty, creating a gap in continuity unless another young girl is born into the family.



Image 2: Handmade Kamadeva figurine during Pooja ritual

Source: <https://polika.co.in/en/article/kerala/culture/traditions/celebrations-and-rituals/pooram-festival-in-north-kerala/>

In the other one (practiced in neighboring areas), women continue the tradition regardless of age or marital status, ensuring unbroken transmission. This divergence in interpretation adds a layer of complexity to the conservation of such traditions, highlighting how ritual continuity and adaptation vary even within short geographical distances.

2. Attukal Pongala – A Global Symbol of Female Devotion Recognized in the Guinness Book of World Records for the largest gathering of women, Attukal Pongala is a powerful symbol of female religious agency. Conducted at the Attukal Bhagavathy Temple in



Image3: Several thousand women gathering to celebrate the festival by preparing Pongal: a sacred prasad

Source: <https://www.keralaruchi.com/public/uploads/events/attukal-pongala.jpg>

Thiruvananthapuram, it is dedicated to Goddess Kannaki, a symbol of chastity and righteous rage from the Tamil epic Silappatikaram.

During the festival millions of women gather to cook a sweet offering (pongala) on the streets using temporary hearths. The entire city of Thiruvananthapuram shuts down in reverence to this massive collective ritual. The belief is that Kannaki's rage was pacified at Attukal, where she attained a calm, divine form. The event is inclusive, attracting women of all religions and backgrounds, from across India and abroad. Attukal Pongala is unique for making the domestic act of cooking a sacred ritual and transforming public space into a site of collective female devotion and empowerment.

3. ***Chamayavilakku*** – Men Celebrating the Feminine Divine Held at the Kottankulangara Devi Temple in Kollam, Chamayavilakku is an extraordinary ritual where men dress as women to honor the goddess. The highlights of the festival is that the participants (men) wear saris, makeup, and jewelry, fully embracing the feminine identity for a night. The festival includes a beauty contest among male participants, judged on their transformation.



The legend involves boys discovering a bleeding coconut and being instructed by priests to build a shrine and worship the goddess dressed as women. This act is seen as an offering of humility, devotion, and transformation. In a society where gender norms often remain

Image 4: Men dressed as Women performing the pooja

Source: <https://theshesaga.com/2023/04/01/chamaya-vilakku/>

rigid, Chamayavilakku challenges binaries and creates a space of cultural legitimacy for gender fluidity and cross-gender performance.

The speaker draws a poignant comparison with the social ostracization of transgender individuals, noting how society often disrespects real expressions of gender diversity while embracing symbolic ones in festivals. This raises important questions about representation, authenticity, and social acceptance.

Conclusion

There is an inseparable connection between tangible and intangible heritage. Temples and other heritage structures lose their cultural and spiritual relevance if the associated rituals and beliefs disappear. The preservation of built heritage must, therefore, go hand-in-hand with safeguarding the intangible heritage it embodies. Moreover, these festivals offer more than spiritual fulfillment. They are vehicles of social expression, tools for gender empowerment, and mirrors of evolving cultural identities.

From young girls performing rituals for future fertility to men embodying feminine divinity, Kerala's festivals demonstrate a unique inclusivity and reverence for gendered experiences. The presentation calls for greater recognition, documentation, and policy-level support for intangible cultural practices, particularly those that foreground women's roles. It emphasizes the importance of respecting belief systems, nurturing cultural education, and challenging stereotypes—all of which are essential to creating a more inclusive and culturally rich future.

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Cultural Assimilation Celebrated Through Traditional Festivals in Cambodia and India

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Abstract This paper investigates how festivals became living symbols of cultural assimilation between India and Cambodia. Unlike monuments and inscriptions, which preserve culture in stone, festivals offer a dynamic and cyclical expression of shared values. Through rituals, performances, calendars, and community practices, they demonstrate how Indian cosmologies and Khmer adaptations merged into enduring traditions. By analyzing archaeological, epigraphical, and contemporary evidence, this study traces the continuity of cultural assimilation through festivals from the ancient period to the present (Briggs, 1999; Sharan, 2003).

Keywords- Temple traditions, Khmer Culture, Cultural continuity, Local Traditions

Introduction

The civilizational tapestries of the Indian subcontinent and Southeast Asia are intricately woven through a centuries-old history of cultural, religious, and political interaction. Among the various regions that absorbed and creatively transformed Indian traditions, Cambodia represents a remarkable instance of deep cultural assimilation. From the nascent centuries of the Common Era, vibrant maritime trade, migration, and scholarly dialogues linked the Indian mainland to the fertile Mekong Basin, fostering the emergence of a distinctive *Khmer* culture. This culture seamlessly integrated *Indic* elements while remaining profoundly anchored in its own indigenous systems and agrarian rhythms (Cœdès 1968; Higham 2004).

Historical Foundations of Cultural Exchange

1. Trade and Geography

Cambodia's strategic maritime positioning between the Indian Ocean and the South China Sea established it as a pivotal node along ancient trade routes. Indian merchants, pilgrims, and scholars traversed the Bay of Bengal, serving as conduits for sacred texts, complex rituals, and sophisticated artistic paradigms. Ports such as *Oc Eo* during the *Funan* period (1st–6th centuries CE) and later settlements under the *Chenla* polity (6th–8th centuries CE) acted as vibrant centers for this cross-cultural exchange (Higham 2004).

1. Political Dynasties and Indianization

The architectural and political landscape of the *Khmer* civilization was significantly influenced by two major Indian dynasties: the Pallavas of Kanchi and the Cholas of Thanjavur. Pallava artistic and structural models served as prototypes for *Khmer* temple architecture, while Chola maritime prowess reinforced the enduring presence of South Indian cultural influence in Southeast Asia (Khot-Palsuley 2019).

The phenomenon of "Indianization," as conceptualized by Georges Cœdès (1968), was not a process of passive cultural dominance but a dynamic adaptation. Indian concepts of divine royalty, *Sanatan* traditions, Buddhist philosophy, and the Sanskrit language were reframed within Southeast Asian social structures. Cambodian monarchs selectively employed these ideas to consolidate their authority, blending them with local animism and agrarian practices.

Khmer Civilization and Religious Syncretism

The *Khmer* Empire (802–1432 CE) marked the cultural and political zenith of Cambodian civilization. Jayavarman II, the empire's founder, instituted the concept of the *Devaraja* (God-King), effectively merging *Indic* religious and political ideology with *Khmer* governance (Briggs 1999).

- *Shaiva* worship was central to the early Angkorian temple complexes.
- *Vaishnava* traditions gained prominence at Angkor Wat, particularly during the reign of Suryavarman II.
- The iconography of *Harihara* reflects a conscious effort to synthesize and reconcile different sectarian traditions.
- Mahayana Buddhism, under the patronage of Jayavarman VII, significantly transformed the empire's spiritual landscape during the late Angkor period (Higham, 2004).

Contemporary festivals continue to reflect this religious syncretism, intertwining Hindu and Buddhist rituals within the traditional *Khmer* seasonal calendar.

Temples as Festival Centers

Khmer temples, inspired by Indian architectural archetypes, functioned as the epicenters of ritual and community celebration. Iconic monuments like *Banteay Srei* (967 CE), *East Mebon* (10th century), *Baphuon* (11th century), and Angkor Wat (12th century) were not merely static structures but dynamic hubs of festive activity (Mannikka, 2000).

Historical epigraphy provides further validation of this living heritage:

- **The Preah Khan Inscription** (Jayavarman VII) records elaborate annual festivals in the months of *Phalguna* and *Chaitra*, featuring water processions and diplomatic offerings from Java and Champa (Sharan, 2003).
- **The Ta Prohm Inscription** provides a detailed account of royal endowments intended to support week-long spring celebrations, specifying the necessary resources and ritual articles (Briggs, 1999).
- A **1632 CE record at Angkor Wat** documents the Japanese pilgrim Marimoto Kazufusa observing the *Khmer* New Year in accordance with the Hindu calendar, illustrating the longevity of these traditions (Higham, 2004).

These records confirm that festivals were intrinsic to the socio-religious fabric of *Khmer* life.

Indian Concepts of Time and Calendrical Systems in Cambodia

The enduring use of Indian timekeeping systems throughout Southeast Asia is a striking indicator of cultural continuity. Ancient Hindu texts like the *Surya Siddhanta* provided the mathematical basis for calculating the sidereal year, informing the calendars that dictated the timing of sacred festivals (Richmond, 1956).

The *Saka* era (commencing 78 CE) was widely adopted, as evidenced by inscriptions at Angkor Borei (533 *Saka*). Cambodia utilized this system for over a millennium, demonstrating how *Indic* calendrical science structured the rhythms of *Khmer* ritual life (Cœdès, 1968).

Festivals: Case Studies of Cultural Assimilation

1. Khmer New Year (Choul Chnam Thmey) and Indian Chaitra Festivals

Celebrated in mid-April, the *Khmer* New Year closely parallels Indian traditions such as *Chaitra Pratipada*, *Ugadi*, and *Vaisakhi*. These celebrations share a focus on seasonal transition, agrarian renewal, and ritual purification (Higham, 2004).

The festival unfolds over three distinct days:

1. **Moha Sangkrant (Sankranti)** – marks the cosmic transition, mirroring the Indian solar new year.
2. **Virak Vanabat** – involves communal games like *Chol Chhoung* and tug-of-war, echoing Indian village sports.
3. **Vearak Loeng Sak** – features the ritual bathing of elders and Buddha statues, a traditional practice of ablution found across India.

2. Royal Ploughing Ceremony

The *Preah Reach Pithi Chrot Preah Neangkol* inaugurates the rice cultivation season, aligning with Indian festivals like *Pongal*, *Bihu*, and *Makar Sankranti*. These rituals synthesize agricultural cycles with royal patronage to ensure cosmic fertility and communal prosperity (Briggs 1999).

3. Ancestors' Day: Pchum Ben and Indian Pitru Paksha

Cambodia's *Pchum Ben*, a fifteen-day observance honoring deceased ancestors, shares profound similarities with India's *Pitru Paksha* or *Sarvapitri Amavasya*. Both involve sacred chanting and merit-making offerings to the departed (Sharan, 2003).

In the Angkorian era, this was the *Śrāddha* festival, established by King Yashovarman I. The shared mythological framework of Yama, the god of death, and the annual opening of the underworld is immortalized in the bas-reliefs of Angkor Wat (Mannikka, 2000).

4. Vesak and Buddhist Festivals

Visak Bochea (Buddha Purnima) in Cambodia commemorates the Buddha's birth, enlightenment, and final *parinirvana*. Similar to Indian *Vesak* observances, the festival features temple processions and chanting, bridging Indian Buddhist roots with *Khmer Theravada* practices (Higham 2004).

5. Water and Moon Festivals

Cambodia's *Bon Om Touk* (Water Festival) marks the natural reversal of the Tonle Sap River with boat races and moon worship. This event resonates with India's *Kartik Purnima* rituals and Kerala's *Vallam Kali* boat races, showcasing how civilizational practices align with natural environmental cycles

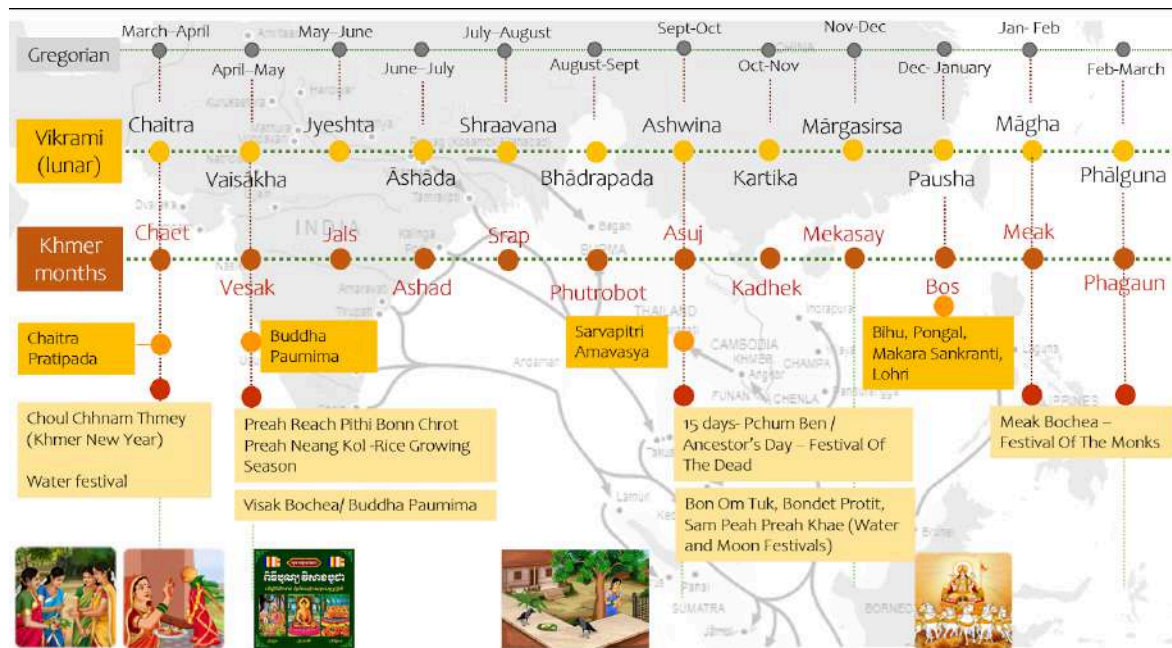


Figure 1: Festivals celebrated in India and Cambodia: a comparative study

Symbolism and Performance in Festivals

Festivals were more than rituals; they were performative spectacles.

- **Dance and Music:** Indian classical dances, such as Bharatanatyam, parallel Khmer Apsara performances, immortalized in Angkor reliefs. The Khmer Royal Ballet, which performs the Reamker (Ramayana), exemplifies Indian narrative assimilation (Mannikka, 2000).
- **Mythology:** The **Samudra Manthana (Churning of the Ocean)**, depicted at Angkor Wat, symbolizes cosmic balance and features in Khmer festive storytelling (Briggs, 1999).
- **Light and Water Rituals:** Diwali in India and Bon Om Touk in Cambodia both express purification, renewal, and divine harmony (Higham 2004).

Cultural Continuity, Modern Relevance, and the Cultural Tourism Charter

Despite colonial disruptions and modern challenges, these festivals endure.

- Khmer New Year celebrations continue with games, rituals, and family gatherings.
- Pchum Ben remains one of Cambodia's most sacred festivals.
- Bon Om Touk draws millions to Phnom Penh.
- Indian diasporas sustain parallel traditions of Diwali, Pongal, and Pitru Paksha.

The survival and popularity of these festivals align with the ICOMOS International Cultural Tourism Charter (1999), which emphasizes the dual responsibility of tourism: to enrich the visitor experience while safeguarding heritage.



Figure 2: Festival celebrations on the bank of Tonle sap lake

1. **Festivals as Living Heritage:** In accordance with Principle 1 of the ICOMOS Charter, cultural heritage is recognized as a dynamic and evolving living entity. The festivals of India and Cambodia serve as profound manifestations of this principle, ensuring that intangible traditions are actively practiced and transmitted across generations rather than being preserved as static relics of the past (ICOMOS, 1999).
2. **Interpretation and Education:** Principles 2 and 3 of the Charter emphasize the necessity of meaningful and ethical interpretation. Ceremonies such as ‘*Choul Chnam Thmey*’ and ‘*Pchum Ben*’ provide immersive platforms where heritage is experienced as a lived reality, offering visitors and scholars profound insights into the foundational civilizational values shared between these regions.
3. **Community Participation:** Principle 4 underscores the critical importance of community-led management and engagement. Both Cambodian and Indian festivals remain deeply rooted in local custodianship, ensuring that the socio-economic benefits of tourism are directed toward the tradition bearers and indigenous communities who safeguard these practices (ICOMOS, 2022).
4. **Mutual Respect and Diplomacy:** Under Principle 5, cultural tourism is envisioned as a vital conduit for fostering international cooperation and understanding. The shared ritualistic threads and festive traditions linking India and Cambodia reflect this diplomatic role, serving as bridges that reinforce cultural ties in the contemporary era.
5. **Sustainable Development:** Principle 6 provides a necessary safeguard against the over-commercialization of cultural landscapes and environments. While these vibrant festivals attract substantial audiences, aligning their management with the Charter

facilitates the development of responsible policies that maintain a delicate balance between authenticity, conservation, and public accessibility.

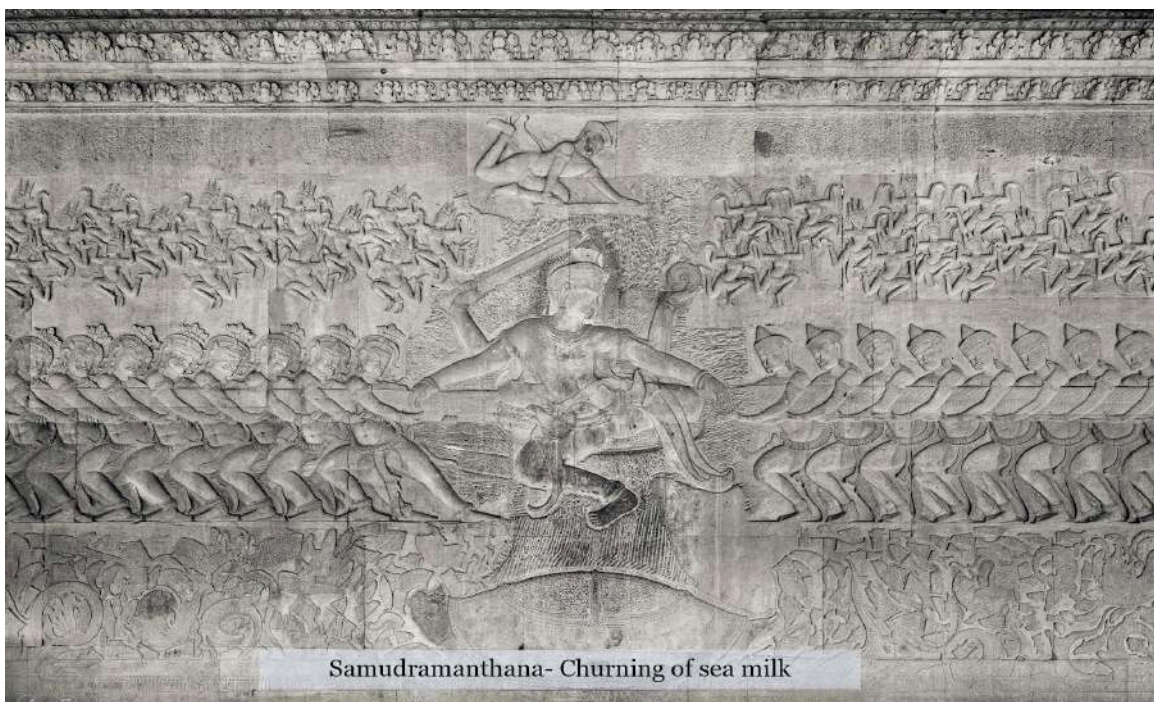


Figure 3: Cultural memory of Samudramanthana

Consequently, the integration of festive traditions within the framework of the International Cultural Tourism Charter elevates these celebrations from mere cultural memory to heritage practices of profound global significance. They serve not only as enduring symbols of the civilizational links between India and Cambodia but also as robust models for sustainable heritage tourism development.

Conclusion

The traditional festivals of Cambodia and India function as living archives, documenting centuries of cultural assimilation. While deeply rooted in Indian cosmologies, these practices have been intricately reshaped by Khmer contexts, revealing a convergence of maritime trade, divine kingship, religious philosophy, and agrarian rhythms within ritual celebrations. Epigraphical records, architectural manifestations, and extant living traditions demonstrate that this assimilation was not a process of passive borrowing, but rather an active and creative dialogue that significantly enriched the cultural fabric of both civilizations.

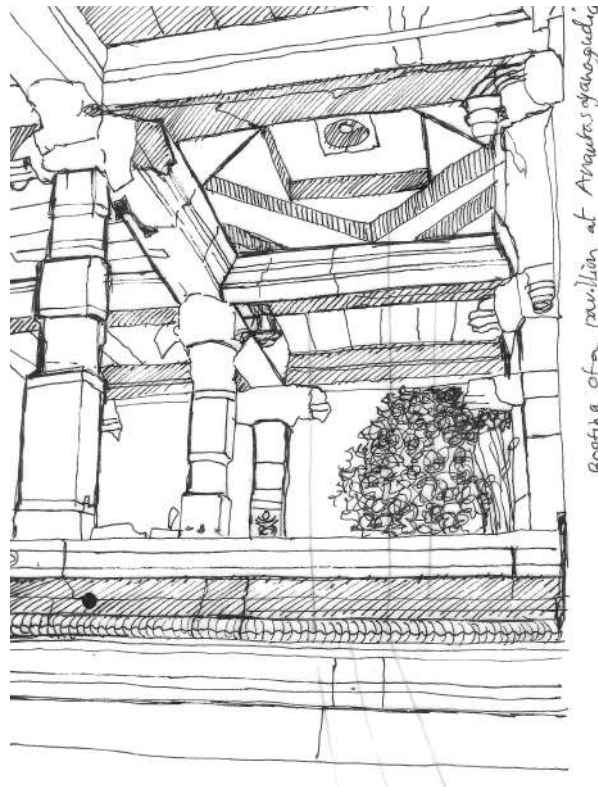
Through the scholarly examination of these festivals, we transcend colonial narratives of unilateral "Indian dominance," recognizing instead the reciprocal and celebratory essence of this cultural exchange. In the contemporary era, as both nations strengthen their geopolitical and cultural ties through initiatives such as the *Act East* policy, these shared celebrations serve as vital bridges. They remind us that cultural assimilation flourishes through mutual respect and shared joy rather than conquest. When positioned within the principles of the **International Cultural Tourism Charter** (ICOMOS, 2022), these traditions provide definitive pathways for responsible tourism development, ensuring the continuity, sustainability, and empowerment of local communities while inviting global engagement with these vibrant legacies.

Note: All illustrations and photographic documentation are credited to the author, unless otherwise specified.

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EPILOGUE



Detail of a pavilion at Anantashayagudi

Festivals, Temples, and Responsible Tourism: India and Abroad

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The *Connecting the Dots...: Season 2* webinar series highlighted the critical intersection of festivals, temples, and responsible tourism. Temples in India are vibrant cultural hubs. They host annual fairs, rituals, and festivals that draw millions of visitors. Beyond their spiritual significance, temples sustain local economies through crafts, food, and services. They are living ecosystems that must be sustained through responsible tourism practices. Without careful management, indiscriminate tourism risks commodifying festivals and overwhelming temple infrastructure.

Festivals at temples must remain community-led. When tourism dominates, festivals risk losing authenticity and becoming spectacles tailored to external audiences. Community custodians—priests, artisans, and local residents—must lead the narrative, ensuring that rituals retain their dignity and meaning. Responsible tourism frameworks must empower communities to safeguard their traditions while benefiting economically.

Visitor Management strategies are essential to balance access with preservation. Overcrowding, pollution, and infrastructural strain can damage both tangible and intangible heritage. Strategies such as crowd control, sanitation facilities, heritage awareness campaigns, and regulated visitor flows help sustain temple ecosystems. Preservation must extend beyond physical structures to include rituals, crafts, and intangible practices.

Safeguarding temple festivals requires interdisciplinary collaboration. Architecture provides insights into spatial planning and conservation. Risk management addresses vulnerabilities such as overcrowding, fire hazards, and climate risks. Perspectives on intangible heritage ensure that rituals and traditions are respected. Together, these disciplines create holistic strategies that enable meaningful visitor experiences while protecting heritage.

UNESCO's 2003 Convention for the Safeguarding of Intangible Cultural Heritage recognises rituals, festivals, and social practices as intangible heritage. It emphasises community participation and integration of heritage into sustainable development. The Operational Directives (2016 revision) highlight visitor management and responsible tourism to avoid over-commercialisation. The 1972 World Heritage Convention protects temple complexes as tangible heritage, requiring a balance between conservation and tourism.

Temple fairs (e.g., Madurai Meenakshi, Puri Jagannath Rath Yatra): Annual rituals draw millions, requiring careful visitor management to protect both ritual sanctity and structural integrity.

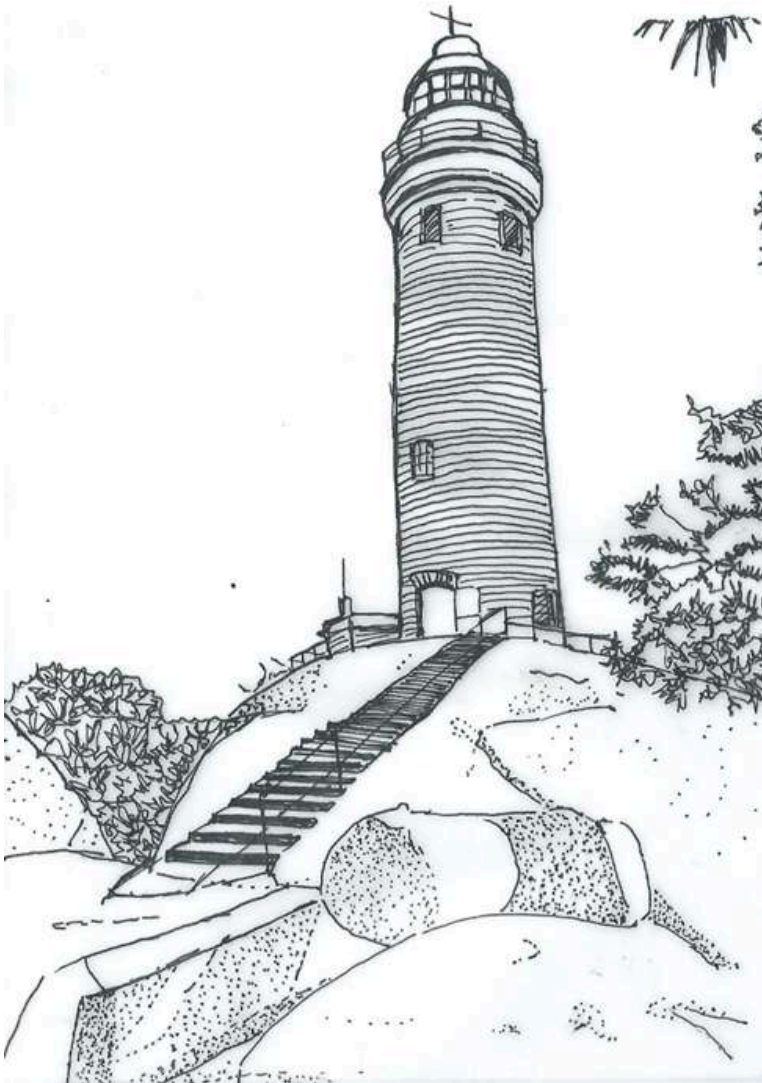
Indiscriminate tourism risks commodifying festivals and overwhelming temple ecosystems. Infrastructure upgrades must not disrupt ritual practices. Tourism promotion must not overshadow community custodianship. Host communities must be empowered to lead heritage interpretation and ensure economic benefits reach artisans and residents.

The case study presented by Dr. Ujjwala Palsuley drew upon her rich research experience to explain the festivals celebrated in Cambodia and their striking similarities with Indian traditions. Her presentation was motivating and offered the audience an unmatched experience of comparative heritage. Taking the discourse beyond India to Cambodia provided a powerful example of transformation, where earlier Vishnu–Shiva temples were absorbed into Buddhist traditions. This comparative lens compels us to contemplate how tangible and intangible heritage can be protected, especially in temple spaces that host annual fairs and festivals. It raises critical questions: What should be the extent of intervention? How can host communities safeguard their heritage in spaces witnessing indiscriminate tourism?

This session, with its blend of comparative study, scholarly depth, and ceremonial resonance, reaffirmed the central message of the series: that cultural tourism must remain rooted in dignity, sensitivity, and community leadership, ensuring that both tangible and intangible heritage continue to thrive as vibrant legacies for generations to come.



Edulabad Temple and Ratha



Lighthouse, Mamallapuram (UNESCO WHS) Tamilnadu

General Terms, Phrases and Their Descriptions

<i>Aarati Deepotsava</i>	Festival of lights
<i>Agrarian Festival</i>	Festivals associated with agricultural activities
<i>Assam heritage</i>	Important sites in Assam
<i>Assam</i>	North Eastern state of India
<i>Bargit</i>	Songs composed by Srimanta Sankaradeva and Madhavadeva
<i>Bihu</i>	Festival of Assam associated with agricultural activities
<i>Charyapada</i>	10-12 th century poems of Vajrayana Buddhism, by the Assamese scholars
<i>Chenda Melam</i>	Percussion art (like drums) in Kerala
<i>Durga Pooja</i>	Biggest festival of Bengal
<i>Ganga/ Ganges</i>	River Ganga
<i>Gangajal</i>	Water of River Ganga, considered very sacred by Indians
<i>Gavlan (Marathi)</i>	Milkmaid
<i>Ghat</i>	Steps leading to water of river or pond forming interface between land and water. Ghats give direct access to the waterbody
<i>Jatra/Jatre</i>	Congregation of people, a traditional Indian festival or fair, often celebrated to honor a local deity, spanning multiple days with processions and rituals. These vibrant, community-driven events, characterized by intense devotion and large crowds
<i>Kalyanapuri</i>	City of lakes or City of stepwells
<i>Kamakhya Mandir (Temple)</i>	A <i>Shakti-Peeth</i> , Temple dedicated to Kamakhya deity
<i>Kalyanapuri</i>	City of lakes or City of stepwells
<i>Kirtan/ Kirtana, Kirtanakaar</i>	A devotional poetry is Kirtana, people who sing it are called <i>Kirtanakaar-s</i> (in Maharashtra and Telugu states)
<i>Mandir</i>	Temple, shrine

<i>Mawla</i>	Soldiers of Chhatrapati Shivaji Maharaj from Maval area of Maharashtra.
<i>Mahayana & Vajrayana</i>	Sects within Buddhism
<i>Mandir</i>	Temple, shrine
<i>Mela</i>	Community market
<i>Monasteries in Assam</i>	Monasteries in Assam associated with Buddhism
<i>Mudiyettu</i>	A ritualistic, dramatic performance in Kerala traditionally devoid of female participation.
<i>Nacha</i>	Dance (in Oriya) ● <i>Chaiti Ghoda Nacha</i>- a primitive dance form the artist wears colourful wooden dummy horses and dances to honour the avatars of Mother Goddess. It is similar to Kachchi Ghodi dance performed in Rajasthan, Maharashtra, Gujrat. Thanjavur also has a similar traditional dance for the Mother Goddess. ● <i>Danda nacha</i>- a sacred and energetic folk dance, performed to honour Lord Siva and Goddess Parvati ● <i>Gotipua nacha</i>- a dance performed by young boys dressed as females to praise lord Jagannath. It is a precursor to classical Odissi dance form. ● <i>Paika Nacha</i> : it is a martial folk dance in which dancers wear dhoti, a turban with peacock feathers. They dance holding a sword and shield, performed by Paika-the warrior community
<i>Pete</i>	Market Town (Kannada)
<i>Phadnisi</i>	Office of Phadnis
<i>Puja/Pooja/Pooje</i>	Refers to the <i>Sanatan</i> (timeless Indian) traditional practices of worship
<i>Nangiar Koothu</i>	A solo performing art where women are the primary narrators and performers (in Kerala)
<i>Pete</i>	Market Town
<i>Puja/Pooja/Pooje</i>	Refers to the <i>Sanatan</i> (timeless Indian) practices of worship
<i>Ratha</i>	Chariot

<i>Rathotsava</i>	Chariot festival
<i>Sutradhar</i>	Anchor, Compere
<i>Teerth/Tirth, Tirthkshetra</i>	A pilgrimage, a sacred pilgrimage site in Indian religions that is characterized as a place of spiritual purification, renewal, and liberation. <i>Teerthksheta</i> is a combination of two words. <i>Teerth</i> is a holy place or a crossing point and <i>kshetra</i> is the area/field. It guides individuals from the material world towards their spiritual freedom.
Tourism	People traveling to places outside their own environment
Tribal	People living in pristine condition
<i>Uppuneerina Kunte</i>	Salt water pond
<i>Veerakumaras</i>	Warriors from the Tigala clan believed to be the protectors of Goddess Draupadi
<i>Ratha</i>	Chariot
<i>Rathotsava</i>	Chariot festival
<i>Teerth/Tirth, Tirthkshetra</i>	A pilgrimage, a sacred pilgrimage site in Indian religions characterized as a place of spiritual purification, renewal, and liberation. <i>Teerthksheta</i> is a combination of two words. <i>Teerth</i> is a holy place or a crossing point and <i>kshetra</i> is the area/field. It guides individuals from the material world towards their spiritual freedom.
<i>Thiruvathirakali</i>	A graceful circular dance performed during Onam festival, symbolizing femininity, fertility, and community bonding in Kerala.
<i>Uppuneerina Kunte</i>	Salt water pond (in Telugu and Kannada)
<i>Uttarvahini</i>	A Sanskrit term used to describe a river or waterbody that flows in a northward direction. In Hindu belief systems, a north-flowing river is considered especially auspicious, as the north is symbolically associated with spiritual ascent and liberation. Sites located along an <i>uttarvahini</i> stretch of a river

	are therefore often regarded as having enhanced sacred significance
<i>Veerakumaras</i>	Warriors from the Tigala clan believed to be the protectors of Goddess Draupadi
<i>Mappilappattu and Oppana-</i>	Musical traditions from Kerala's Muslim communities, performed during weddings, celebrating womanhood and love.
<i>Pura/poora-ada</i>	Steamed rice-jaggery cakes
<i>Pura/poora kanji -</i>	A sweet rice porridge
<i>Thechi - Flower</i>	Sacred Ixora (English), Paranti (Sanskrit) in context of Kerala

WEBINAR LINKS:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=yBkedHXx0CE> Connecting the Dots...2: webinar 5

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=F30sz8J4qNA> Connecting the Dots...2: webinar 2

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=rppolY2wZeM> Connecting the Dots...2: webinar 4

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=N5XCkhZ6LdU> Connecting the Dots...2: webinar 3

