

The Contrasting Worlds of Heritage Monasteries in Puri, Odisha

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ABSTRACT: Culture is made of both tangible and intangible heritage. Visiting or revisiting the heritage sites which are the part of the past that is still accessible to the present generations comes under heritage tourism. Each heritage site, big or small, holds its significance in the total cultural fabric of a place. However, some of such remnants of the past in a large centre often get subjected to ignorance and ill-management. *Mathas* (monasteries) are a heritage of Puri but many of these important sites are losing their existence. This paper aims to determine the perception of residents and tourists towards four different *mathas* as heritage sites in the holy city of Puri in the eastern Indian state- Odisha. It also studies the role of local tourism stakeholders and popular tourism media in enhancing or diminishing a heritage site by drawing a comparison between the conditions of the four selected *mathas*. The data for this descriptive research has been collected using the anthropological data collection tools and methods from 100 respondents comprising tourists, residents and tour operators. The findings reveal the disparity in development measures in the region attributed largely to ignorance and adherence to the profitable tourism business.

INTRODUCTION

Tourism is a complex socio-economic activity that involves travelling and a temporary and voluntary visit to a place usually away from home for various purposes like leisure, recreation, pilgrimage, business, etc. As an industry, it had a rich historical voyage. From the olden times when only a privileged few could afford to travel, to the modern times wherein the world is witnessing a sharp rise in the frequency of such temporary voluntary movements owing to the improved economic conditions and transport facilities. "Tourism", remarks Crick (1989), "represents the largest movement of human populations outside wartime". Tourism exists as an important social fact in the modern world. The phenomenon of tourism arises from the movement of people and their stay in different places, for a brief period. Such movements take place to destinations that provide temporary respite from

the banal humdrum of the usual daily lives. However, there is always an intention of getting back to the 'home' after a relatively brief stay at a different destination (Urry and Larsen, 2011). Certain aspects of such places distinguish them as tourist destinations, away from home. Such tourism destinations are made and remade through these touristic movements, thus forming their identity. This contributes directly to the livelihood of the residents of these places. Media and internet resources also have an enormous role to play in deciding the further course of touristic patterns.

Heritage refers to something related to the past or history of a place " a set of traditions, values, folktales, material artefacts or natural environment. Thus, a heritage site can also be seen as an existing museum of culture. Heritage tourism, therefore, is visiting or revisiting the heritage sites which are the part of the past that is still accessible to the present

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generations. Each heritage site, big or small, holds its significance in the total cultural fabric of a place.

Puri has been an important pilgrimage destination since time immemorial, visited by people from all walks of life for the holy spectacle of the presiding deity-Lord Jagannath. Popularized as an incarnation of the Hindu God Vishnu, the cult of Jagannath stands synonymous with Puri. The abundant beauty of the pristine blue water of the Bay of Bengal, the coastal Casuarina forests, and various architectural marvels as the heritage of the olden centuries make Puri a popular tourism destination having a natural and cultural treasure trove. Besides its alluring temples, various architectural and cultural marvels are the jewels of Puri's eternal heritage crown. The car festival (*Rath Yatra*) of Puri Jagannath Temple is an unmatched intangible heritage of the world. The tangible heritage includes numerous ponds, temple complexes, *jagagharas* (training centres for wrestlers) and *mathas*. A large part of this heritage is however turning into ruins for multiple reasons. This paper aims to highlight some common underlying reasons for such devastating treatment of these remnants of culture.

The present paper is descriptive in nature and has been curated to provide a brief comparative description of four different monasteries of different sects located in the *Swargadwar* (meaning gateway to heaven) area of Puri and to study the perception of various tourism stakeholders about the selected monasteries and their role in the popularity of these monasteries as tourism destinations.

ANTHROPOLOGY OF TOURISM

Tourism is an important field of study for anthropologists. In the present world where the movement has become so frequent with people travelling to different places more often than ever before to avoid the banality of daily lives, anthropological insights on the causes and impact of such movements become significant. Tourism has emerged as one of the largest industries across the globe and a chief contributor to the overall economy of the world today. As a form of leisure activity, it structures the personal life cycle to provide alternate periods of work and relaxation (Graburn, 1983). Tourism for research in Anthropology can be defined

as the temporary movement of people to destinations different from their usual place of residence and work, the activities were undertaken during their stay at such a place and the tourism facilities that cater to their needs during the travel. Through the lens of distinguished anthropological scholars, tourism has been seen as a modern leisure activity (Nash, 1981), as a modern variety of the traditional act of pilgrimage (MacCannell, 1976; Graburn, 1977), and also as an acculturative process (Nuñez, 1963). Tourism is seen by anthropologists as an inextricable aspect of the social, cultural, and economic life of people (Burns, 1999). Many definitions of tourism exist in the literature, but almost all of them involve a purpose and scope. Along the same lines, there are numerous definitions of a tourist as well. Quoted here is Valene Smith (1989) who identifies the tourist as a temporarily leisured person who visits a place away from home voluntarily, to experience change. The merit of travelling finds a mention in the *Aitareya Brahmana* (7.15) of the ancient *Rig Veda* where Lord Indra, whose one portfolio is travelling and the protection of the wayfarer, says to King Harishchandra, "There is no happiness for the person who does not travel; living amongst men, even the best man frequently becomes a sinner; for Indra is the traveller's friend. Hence, travel/wander!" Modern travels re-signify our forms of deeming the geographical displacements. The tourism industry has great significance for a destination. It can act as an important instrument of development for regions with rich cultural and natural resources. For destinations with a dying heritage, tourism can act as a revitalizer. Tourism is also a source of social benefit for the stakeholders involved, including the residents who directly or indirectly contribute to shaping the tourism facility of a tourist destination.

HERITAGE, TOURISM AND CONSERVATION

Heritage includes monuments, buildings and sites of outstanding universal value from the point of view of history, art or science. It also includes rituals, rites and performances associated with a culture. On the other hand, natural heritage comprises the natural features and natural sites of outstanding universal value from the aesthetic or scientific point of view.

Heritage tourism depends upon inherited socio-

cultural and economic materials to attract visitors. Religious tourism is one of the most prevalent forms of heritage tourism in the developing world today and is among the earliest precursors of modern-day tourism. The pilgrimage takes many forms, but central among these is the desire of religious adherents to supplicate deities for blessings, become closer to God, offer more sincere prayers, become healed, and receive forgiveness for sins (Timothy and Nyaupane, 2009). Sustainability is the key to safeguarding tangible and intangible heritage across the globe. In the context of tourism, the sustainability approach becomes even more important because each generation has to pass on the heritage assets- both natural and cultural- to the next generation with minimum loss in size and quality as they inherited from their forbearers. Such heritage has to be protected from excessive damage and overuse, as well as its commodification. If damaged or distorted, such assets would not be passed on to future generations and people will become deprived of the glory of the past, unable to benefit from their rightful heritage.

Pilgrimage in India: A Heritage

In India, pilgrimage to various destinations is one of the major purposes of travelling and is considered a highly meritorious act, usually associated with the spiritual welfare of the pilgrims. Timothy and Nyaupane (2009) suggest that pilgrimage should also be considered a form of heritage tourism since the pilgrimage sites are heritage sites and the rituals and rites performed at such pilgrimage sites are a part of the intangible heritage that demonstrate the socio-cultural beliefs and practices of the residents of the pilgrim site. Thus, the pilgrimage sites act as living museums of the past where people from different cultural backgrounds come together for a sacred performance in a particular geographical area.

PURI: A HERITAGE CITY

Puri, a coastal city in the eastern state of Odisha, is the abode of Lord Jagannath who is believed to be a form of Hindu God Krishna and is worshipped with great devotion by Hindus from all over the country. This makes the city an important DHAM or pilgrimage destination. The annual car festival or the *Rath Yatra* is one of the revered religious processions across the

globe and a huge number of people attend the procession every year. Besides the car festival, a large number of rites and rituals performed in the Jagannath Temple attract visitors from all over the country throughout the year. The Jagannath cult forms the identity of Puri where the lives of residents are centred on religious and cultural practices associated with the Lord of the Universe “Lord Jagannath”.

Saints and religious *gurus* along with their disciples have been visiting Puri since ancient times to render their services to Lord Jagannath, many of whom stayed for longer periods giving rise to *mathas* or monasteries that provide various services to the main temple throughout the year and especially during the annual car-festival which is an indelible part of the heritage and cultural fabric of India. The secondary literature on the history of Puri mentions as many as eighty-four such monasteries in the city. However, many of these have either been demolished for development works or stand on the verge of extinction due to negligence. This paper aims to draw attention to the legacy of the past left behind by the revered saints and religious leaders.

The Mathas

A *matha* is a residential monastic institution with a focus on spiritual and religious traditions for ascetics or renouncers of the material world. It is a place, headed by a *Guru* (a saint) who is also the Pontiff, where saints and practitioners of meditation reside, living an ascetic life, following a *Dharmic* (righteous) code of conduct. It also provides religious and Vedic education to the young boys who dedicate their lives to religious practices and preaching. Some *mathas* also act as Charity centres for economically and physically weaker sections of the society where they are provided food and medical treatment for free or at a minimal cost. The *mathas* and their pontiffs are highly respected by the State. The establishment of this institution may be dated back to *Boudha Vihar* where the *guru* (teacher) and the *shishya* (disciple) stayed in one place to follow a disciplined life (Mishra, n.d.). The abode of ascetics, the *mathas* developed into centres for knowledge propagation and as custodians of moral and spiritual traditions. They also played a significant role in the social and cultural awakening of the masses (Jayaraman and Subramaniam, 2018).

Many sects established different monasteries in the vicinity of the Jagannath Temple of Puri. These *mathas* have stood the test of time and are highly revered by the devotees even today. Different *mathas* have various duties or *sewa* to offer during the annual rituals of the Jagannath Temple. Along with the *Vaishnavite* (the followers of Hindu God Vishnu) sect, the Sikh guru Guru Nanak and Saint Kabirdas also have monasteries dedicated to their stay at Puri centuries ago. Many of the *Matha* traditions have sunk into the collective unconscious over time, a few are still kept alive and practised with great veneration specifically during the annual Car Festival or the *Rath Yatra* of Lord Jagannath (Pradhan, 2019).

Stakeholders in Heritage Tourism

Tourism is a pan-human, historically conditioned social process that can include a variety of social actors (Nash, 2007). In a tourist destination, the involvement of many different stakeholders is seen. The residents of a tourist destination are the most important stakeholders in a tourism venture because they are directly or indirectly affected by the tourism development measures in that particular area. In the case of Puri which is a renowned tourist city in India, tourism is an important source of livelihood for a majority of the residents and the greatest contributor to the economy of the city. The locals work as tourism facilitators, accommodation facility providers, tour

operators, owners of eateries, souvenir sellers, etc. Besides this, being a pilgrimage site, a huge section of the population of Puri provides services to the temple and acts as temple *pandas* or religious guides to the visitors. Another important section of stakeholders in tourism is the tourists themselves. The government, NGOs and other independent community groups also have an important role to play in tourism. For a tourist destination, mass media creates meaning and also shapes the consciousness of how a destination or an environment should be interpreted. Urry and Larsen (2011) quote Horne (1984) who remarked, “The camera and tourism are two of the uniquely modern ways of defining reality.” Almost all individuals today have a smartphone and there are numerous examples of what a simple picture or video can do in the media space where the world has become one common village. These tools, therefore, play a significant role in the popularity of a destination and culture.

MATERIALS & METHODS

The present research paper is descriptive in nature and utilizes both primary and secondary data collection methods. The study was conducted in Puri—a coastal heritage city in the state of Odisha, located on the eastern coast of India (Figure 1). The four different *mathas* or monasteries had been purposively selected to represent various sects housed in the region (Figure 2).

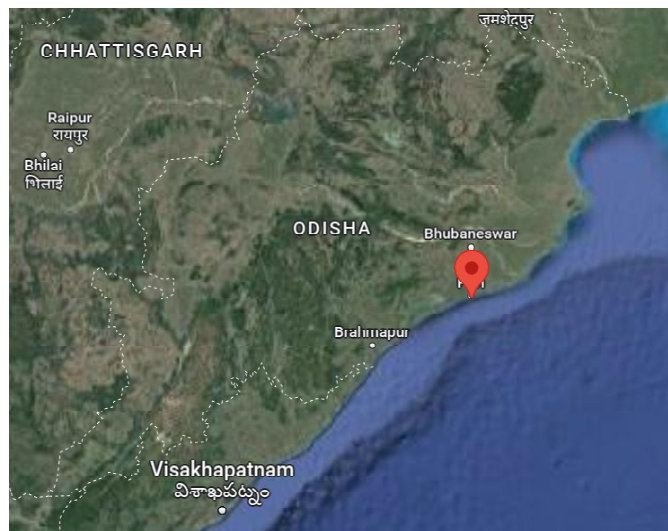


Figure 1: Locating Puri in Odisha (Google, *n.d.*)

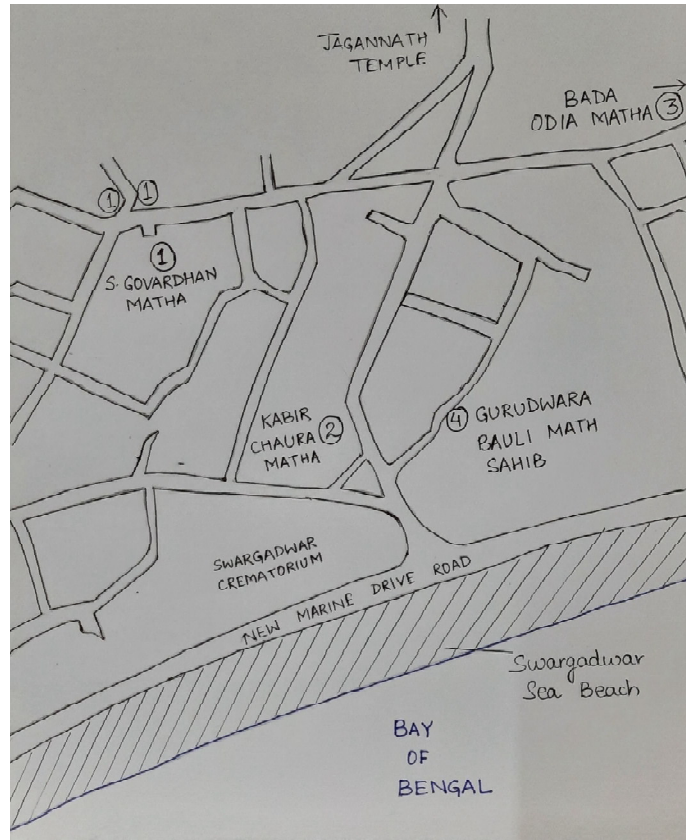


Figure 2: Location of the selected *mathas* in the Swargadwar area of Puri
 Source: From the author's field notes; not to scale

The responses of tourists about the selected heritage sites were collected through questionnaires while those of the residents of the city and tourism workers were collected through formal and informal interviews carried out during repeated visits to the sites. The language of communication has largely been English. However, the help of a local tour guide was taken as and when needed for the translation of some responses into Odia, especially in the case of older natives. Secondary data has been collected through books, yearbooks, websites and journals published in the English language.

Out of 68 questionnaires filled up by the tourists, 8 incomplete forms have not been considered for this study. 23 residents of the city were interviewed individually and in groups as well. Besides these, informal interviews were carried out with 12 students of a local school (aged between 14 and 16 years) during

a Heritage Bike Ride trail initiated by the local administration and a non-profit organization working in the city. 2 different local tour operators, a trustee of a Heritage tourism operator and 2 tour guides were interviewed individually during one of the visits to the monasteries.

Brief Description of the Selected Sites

For presenting a comparative picture of the monasteries or *mathas* of different sects in Puri, four such monasteries have been selected for this paper. A brief history and description of each of these is being provided here:

Shankaracharya Govardhan Matha: Born in 8th century AD, Adi Shankaracharya is associated with the rejuvenation of *Vedic* studies and the unification of the people across the four directions of India. In the 32 years of his life span, Adi Shankaracharya

travelled far and wide across the length and breadth of India to wake people up from a deep slumber and spread the *Vedic* teachings to have righteous religious rule over the country. During those times, travelling was difficult and the modes of communication were limited. So, he established four institutions or *peethas* in the four directions of India to protect and propagate the Hindu *Sanatan Dharma*. Govardhan Peetha at Puri was established in the 8th Century to deal with the knowledge of the *Rig Veda*. The presiding deities of this Vedic *Peetha* (school or seat) are Purushottam and Goddess Bimala. There's an old idol of Ardhanareshwara (Half male-Half female figure) which is believed to have been installed by Adi Shankaracharya himself. The Govardhan Peetha is the oldest monastery in Puri, located in the vicinity of the Swargadwar area of the city. The present Head is the 145th Shankaracharya of Puri Swami Nischalananda Saraswati who is one of the most important person of Puri.



Figure 3: The view of the pond outside Bimala Devi temple Shankaracharya Matha, Puri
Source: Author's own data collection

This monastery is highly revered by the Hindus and has a high visitor footfall throughout the year. It is a nicely maintained and well-kept property. The newly constructed Bimala Devi Temple beside a pond is another centre of attraction for visitors (Figure 3). The chanting of the Vedic hymns can be heard within the complex. The monastery also provides accommodation facilities for visitors. The *matha* has been declared an autonomous body by the Odisha Government in 2019.

Kabir Chaura Matha: Saint Kabirdas was a Hindu-Muslim patron saint of northern India. He is said to have been born from a lotus and conquered the demons by his *siddhis* and *sadhanas* (yogic practices). As per the traditional tales, when Kabir died, the Hindus and Muslims fought for his corpse

as both of them regarded him as their saint and desired to conduct the funeral according to their specific customs. The corpse then miraculously turned into roses and was equally divided among the two sections for the final rites. The Kabir Matha, located near the Swargadwar beach, stands as a testimony of the merit of Saint Kabir. As per the legend, in the 1300s, when the Jagannath temple was being built in Puri, owing to the vicinity to the beach, the sea waves would destroy the site frequently. Saint Kabir was on the pilgrimage to Puri at that time. The people of Puri suggested the king request the saint to help them get through this situation. When the king approached Saint Kabirdas for help, the latter buried his *kubari* (a supporting stick used by the saints) at the site (Figure 4). The narratives tell that the sea never crossed the site of the *kubari* ever since and the temple and other complexes stand tall even today.



Figure 4: The Kubari inside the shrine in Kabir Chaura Matha, Puri
Source: Author's own collection

This now somewhat dilapidated *matha* has been constructed in a way to incorporate both Hindu and Muslim traditions. The mosaic architecture and the paintings depicting the said act of the holy saint are

distinctive features of the place. A small room houses the wooden *kubari* and a raised platform depicting the shrine of the saint. The complex houses the mausoleum of different Head-priests of the *matha*. This *matha* is affiliated with the *Kabir-Panth* (sect) of Varanasi. The surrounding vicinity of the *matha* has guest-houses for tourists which come to life during peak tourist seasons and festivals of the Kabir sect.

Bada Odia Matha: The Bada Odia Matha was established by Atibadi Jagannath Das in the 15th Century CE. Jagannath Das was an ardent disciple of Sri Chaitanya Mahaprabhu and a renowned Odia poet who composed Odia Bhagawat. Sri Chaitanya Mahaprabhu was a 15th Century saint who was extremely devoted to Hindu God Krishna and Goddess Radha and worshipped them through ecstatic singing, chanting and dancing. He spent 18 years of his life in Jagannath Puri and eventually attended salvation there. He was the founder of the *Atibadi* sect of *Vaishnavism*. This *matha* has one of the largest concentrations of 19th-century Odia wall paintings. The Bada Odia Matha is associated with many rituals of the Jagannath Temple and the *Rath Yatra*. The *matha* is also responsible for cleaning and repairing the pedestal of the Holy Trinity in the sanctum sanctorum of the Jagannath Temple. The *matha* is decorated with murals and life-size paintings of the Holy Trinity of Puri, the stories of Lord Krishna and Lord Rama along with their consorts and allies, and other religious descriptive images. However, the complex was highly unkempt with the paintings losing their colours and lustre until it caught the attention of the authority. The outer structure of the monastery was dilapidated and required repairs and restoration work. The murals were on the verge of extinction and were eventually cleared out by painting them in plain paints. Despite the ‘renovation’, this *matha* still awaits its due respect and attention from the residents, visitors and the authorities as well (Figure 5).



Figure 5: The Bada Odia Matha of Puri awaits due respect.
Source: Mishra, 2018

Gurudwara Bauli Matha Sahib: The Bauli Matha is a *gurudwara* and monastery of its kind. According to an old resident of the *matha*, when Guru Nanak visited Puri on a pilgrimage, he constructed a deep well, also known as ‘*bauli*’ at this site. It is said that the concept of *bauli* did not exist in the coastal town of Puri before this time. The well has been constructed in a way that it has two different passages for drawing water based on the Hindu system of avoidance relationship between the elder brother-in-law and his sister-in-law. The well is dedicated to Lakshmi- the wife of Lord Jagannath, and His elder brother Balabhadra. The *bauli* has a general large opening on the upper part for Lord Balabhadra and a narrower passage for Goddess Lakshmi for drawing water from the well (Figure 6). There is a room housing the idols of the Hindu Gods, a decorated pedestal holding Guru Grantha Sahib, and a narrow shrine having centuries-old conch shells. This place is maintained by the *Udaseen* sect of ascetic Sikhs and the Hindus. A Hindu priest looks after the temple and

rituals associated with the worshipping of the idols while the Sikh priest looks after the daily worshipping of the highly revered Guru Granth Sahib. Thus, this place has a lot of significance in preaching harmony to the world. However, like the previously mentioned monasteries, the Bauli Matha also awaits due attention and recognition by the people. This *matha*, despite being located in the prime centre of the infamous Swargadwar, is not a frequently visited place. It has now been encroached upon by various other accommodation facilities, thereby failing to attract visitors to this exquisite site of India's strong socio-religious philosophy. The conditions of the entrance to this site itself speaks of massive ignorance on the parts of all the stakeholders involved (Figure 7).



Figure 6: The Bauli or the well



Figure 7: The entrance of the Bauli Matha, Puri

Sources: Author's own collection

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

TABLE 1

Age distribution of the respondents

Age-group	No. of respondents	Percentage (%)
≤20 years	14	14
21-28 years	25	25
29-36 years	32	32
37-44 years	09	9
45-52 years	07	7
53-60 years	09	9
>60 years	04	4
Total	100	

As we can see from Table 1, 57% of the total number of respondents belong to the age-group 21-36 years. This particular section includes young enthusiastic travellers and explorers (including residents) trying to taste the sap of pristine and tranquil natural heritage Puri and its beaches have to offer. For a majority of this section, a pilgrimage was a secondary and subsidiary option. The older respondents, comprising 29% of the total, cited pilgrimage or visiting the Jagannath temple as their preference. 89% of the total respondents were Hindus, followed by fewer respondents of other faiths. 63% of tourists preferred travelling with their families for

pilgrimage as well as leisure holidays. The significance of the monasteries in the cultural history of Puri has already been discussed but awareness about the same and specifically the selected sites was analyzed through the responses of the respondents, as presented in the following table, Table 2.

TABLE 2

Awareness about the selected sites among the respondents

Awareness about selected <i>mathas</i>	Number of respondents	Percentage
Knew about 1 site	13	13.00
Knew about 2 sites	34	34.00
Knew about 3 sites	07	7.00
Knew about 4 sites	28	28.00
Knew about none of the selected sites	18	18.00
Number of respondents	100	

Of the total respondents, 18% knew about none of the selected monasteries. This section mainly comprised of non-Odia older tourists travelling in groups from their native state. They relied entirely on their tour guide for all the pieces of information regarding their visit. Thus, tour guides have a significant role in promoting any tourism destination. 34% of the total respondents comprising both tourists and residents knew about two of the four selected *mathas*. Only 28% of respondents knew about all four monasteries, including their history and location. These were mainly the locals residing in the vicinity of these sites.

A positive sign is that 37 of the 60 tourists responded in affirmation when asked if they would like to visit these *mathas* and explore their historical significance. However, the two tour operators remarked that not many tourists are interested in visiting the monasteries. The ill-kept state of many of these *mathas* does not appeal to the aesthetic sense of the visitors. The tour managers do agree that these *mathas* are an indelible part of Puri's history, yet they seem unconvinced about the touristic appeal of these sites at present. The heritage tour package provided by one of these companies includes only the renowned Jagannath temple, Sun Temple and some of the ponds (locally called "*pokharis*") used for the rituals of Lord Jagannath. The manager of 'Heritage Tours' travel company mentioned the need to restore and renovate the *mathas* of Puri which he said are 'essential not only for tourism consumption purposes but also for the cultural restoration of Puri'.

Books on the Jagannath Cult, including the District Gazetteers and other informative brochures, mention different *mathas* of Puri in great detail. However, with the decline in consumption of information through authentic literary and reference books and evident negligence towards the *mathas* in mass media resources, these institutions are losing the opportunity to become important historical and spiritual tourist attractions.

Another important factor that has led to the degradation and apparent loss of the heritage assets of Puri, reflected through the data is the negligence and ignorance along with overtourism. To address this issue, the Ministry of Urban Development, Government of India launched the *HRIDAY* (Heritage City Development and Augmentation Yojana) Scheme in 2015 across different heritage cities of India, including Puri. The main objective of this Scheme was "to undertake strategically and planned development of heritage cities aiming at the improvement in overall quality of life with a specific focus on sanitation, security, tourism, heritage revitalization and livelihoods retaining the city's cultural identity" (MoUD & NIUA, 2015). Along the same lines, the government of Odisha and the Puri Administration proposed the *ABADHA* (Augmentation Basic Amenities and Development of Heritage & Architecture) Scheme in Puri (Works Department, Government of Odisha). This Scheme aims at land acquisition, rehabilitation, resettlement and road network development in and around the Jagannath Temple which is the most important cultural attraction for the visitors as well as the residents of Puri.

In recent times, the administration of Puri, Puri Municipality, and a non-profit organization Odisha Ecotourism Foundation have been jointly working to promote the heritage monasteries amongst the visitors as well as the residents of Puri, through the '*Puri Dham Heritage Walk and Ride*' project. While the government body ensures the availability of the resources required for this project, the Odisha Ecotourism Foundation Trust is responsible for all the other arrangements and execution of the same. The visitors are provided with the facility they opt for, i.e. bicycles or E-rickshaws or EMVs. To instil further knowledge of the cultural heritage of Puri in the residents, a group of school students

accompanied by a tour guide, are taken for a heritage bicycle ride to a minimum of five different *mathas* every Sunday. Three of these five monasteries, namely, the Shankaracharya Govardhan Matha, the Kabir Chaura Matha, and the Gurudwara Bauli Matha Sahib, were selected for this study. Out of these, the Shankaracharya Govardhan Matha is well-maintained and receives the most visitors among the four selected monasteries. Kabir Chaura Matha belongs to the Kabir-Pantha or the followers of Kabir comprising both Hindus and Muslims. However, the monastery awaits renovation works which are long pending now. The Gurudwara Bauli Matha is a better-maintained property but with an insignificant number of visitors. The Odia Matha, however, is a site that requires proper restoration work to save the infamous mural art on its walls. Needless to say, a lot of efforts are needed on the parts of all the tourism stakeholders for equitable treatment and proper functioning of these *mathas*.

CONCLUSION

The differences in the present conditions of the selected monasteries are a result of multiple interrelated reasons. The basic reason underlying such disparity is ignorance of the parts of various tourism stakeholders. Another noteworthy reason is overtourism- a term that has become popular in recent times and an issue facing almost all the mass tourism destinations across the globe. Overtourism favours profitable business over sustainable business leading to defilement or loss of heritage. A ray of hope shines through the darker skies of this loss as more and more people are getting aware of the negative impacts that human activities trigger. Government, NGOs and social activists have a significant role to play in the sustainable development and maintenance of heritage sites. The mass media as well as the social media, having a strong hold over society globally, can act as an important tool in bringing about the change towards sustainability and better treatment of the endangered heritage, both tangible and intangible. Alongside the change in the system and its functioning, changes in the individual and social behaviour of the residents of any tourism destination as well as the visitors are equally essential.

A classic example of religious syncretism in India, Puri's cultural heritage is an asset not only for its

residents but also for the country as a whole. In the turbulent and trying times, these testimonies left behind by the saints and sages of the glorious past can guide us on the path of unity and universal brotherhood- the very essence that binds the diverse cultural fabric of India. Awareness and recognition of the heritage, its preservation and conservation is a pre-requisite for any society to prosper. One cannot strive for a better future without being properly equipped with the past and present.

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