

We are delighted to present Volume 6, Issue 1, 2025 of the INTACH Journal of Heritage Studies (IJHS). This issue is based on the theme ‘Heritage and Communities’, examining the interconnectedness of heritage and communities through diverse case studies, exploring how these connections manifest in diverse local settings, while also situating the discourse in a broader global framework. The issue is structured into five sections: the first section is ‘Perspectives on Culture and Communities’, the second section is ‘Craft Communities: Challenges and Opportunities’, the third is ‘Visual Diaries’, followed by ‘Reviews’ and ‘Documentation Feature’.

Section one includes articles by Madhura Dutta and Nidhi Batra who discuss the role of communities as stewards and kin with respect to cultural and natural heritage. Dutta (2025) offers a historical perspective, analysing international reports, declarations and conventions from the mid-20th century to 2017. She also provides an overarching view of how communities have increasingly come to be seen as stewards of cultural heritage. In the preceding issue of the Journal (Volume 5, Issue 2), Tim Badman (2024) established a crucial link between nature and culture, emphasising on the importance of active participation of diverse local communities in nature conservation. Nidhi Batra (2025) takes this discussion forward in the context of the Aravallis and highlights the need to integrate traditional practices into modern policies, preserving resources and promoting sustainability. Through her advocacy for ‘commoning’, she emphasises reconnecting communities with their traditional knowledge and re-establishing ties to the land, promoting ecological awareness and sustainable heritage conservation.

The idea of bringing ‘communities’ at the heart of the discourse around heritage at the global platforms has been developing strongly over the past few decades, addressing the disconnect that emerged in the 19th and 20th centuries. This disconnect was represented in international charters and guidelines that emerged in the 20th century, with a focus on an expert-led approach. For instance, the Athens Charter of 1931 emanated from concerns about the protection, restoration and conservation of ‘historic’ monuments raised by architects and technicians of historic buildings. On the other hand, in the 21st century, the Rome Charter connected the

keywords ‘right to participate’, ‘cultural life’, ‘cities’ and ‘communities’. It was published in October 2020, after the world had experienced the impact of COVID-19, with lockdowns highlighting the crucial role of culture in urban life. Therefore, it positioned culture as a resource for communities and emphasised the need for ‘cultural democracy’ (Rome Charter, 2020, p. 2). In particular, the first and last of the five actions in the Rome Charter most explicitly highlight the need to discover cultural roots and protect both tangible and intangible cultural resources, which are integral to community identity (ibid., pp. 10, 12).

The focus on cultural democracy brought forth in the Rome Charter was acknowledged in the call for proposals of the 2022 cycle of INTACH’s annual Research Scholarship Programme, themed ‘Culture, Cities and Communities’. The proposals received for the award of scholarship highlighted the interconnectedness between heritage and communities, emphasising that the preservation and understanding of heritage cannot be separated from the people who have lived, interacted with and shaped these spaces throughout history. This issue features two papers from the 2022 cycle of the Research Programme in the section ‘Craft Communities: Challenges and Opportunities’, taking the case of two traditional craft communities facing present-day challenges. These papers resonate with Dr. Dutta’s view of communities as custodians of heritage as well as align with Batra’s call for integrating traditional knowledge into policy. Nilkanta Das (2025) talks of the need for collaborative efforts and sustainable tourism among the Rudra-Paul Community in Agartala, Tripura. Meanwhile, Ramiya Gopalakrishnan and Rama Raghavan (2025) focus on preserving the heritage of Kodumbu Weavers Colony in Kerala through training programmes and innovative marketing strategies. Both studies emphasise on preserving not just the tangible aspects of these crafts but also the intangible heritage of traditional skills, knowledge and cultural practices that underpin the respective communities’ identities and resilience.

Another study from the 2022 cycle by Binita Pandya and Miral Hadakia (2025) has been placed in the section ‘Visual Diaries’, highlighting the role of historic buildings as visual expressions of cultural and social values. The authors use visual tools of drawings and photographs to highlight Surat’s architecture as a reflection of the cultural diversity and economic growth of the region, showcasing the community’s resilience and adaptability. They examine the diverse histories and cultural practices of communities that are embodied in built form, making these structures not only physical landmarks but also living testaments to the evolving relationship between people, their environment and their traditions.

Other studies supported by the 2022 Research Programme that are not included in this issue of the Journal cover enquiries into places, crafts and communities such as the Sali weaving community of Yeola, Maharashtra; traditional craft of wooden shipbuilding in Beypore, Kerala; historic cities of the erstwhile princely kingdoms of Travancore and the Kandyan Kingdom of Ceylon and the culture of their communities; the cultural evolution of Kathak in Varanasi, Uttar Pradesh; and the impact of the World Heritage Site of the Taj Mahal on a community living in its vicinity. In a case study of the historic core of Thrissur town, scholars evaluated the dynamics of the cultural diversity of the historic core of Thrissur town, Kerala by studying the various communities of the area; and another explored the often-overlooked contributions to cultural production through architecture under the British East India Company's Public Works Department, focusing on the city of Chennai. Together, these studies presented a rich tapestry of research that underscored the critical intersection of culture, communities and heritage, providing valuable insights into the sustainability, preservation and transformation of cultural practices in the face of changing socio-economic and environmental contexts.

In the 'Visual Diaries' section of this issue, turning attention once again towards the intangible indigenous knowledge, Shivangi Katoch (2025) echoes Badman's and Batra's emphasis on the vital connection between nature and culture. She illustrates how the communities of Banjar Valley, Himachal Pradesh actively engage in heritage conservation through traditional practices, particularly weaving, which reflects a sustainable relationship with the environment. Her perspective resonates with Badman's call for the involvement of local communities in heritage conservation, illustrating that their cultural practices, passed down through generations, are key to preserving both cultural and natural landscapes. The practices in Banjar Valley, like those explored by awardees of the 2022 research cycle, highlight the importance of integrating indigenous knowledge and skills to create a more holistic approach to heritage conservation. The section also includes visual documentation of Paithan, the historic town in the Aurangabad District of Maharashtra. Undertaken as part of the Post Graduate (PG) Diploma in Heritage Studies (2023-24), with our former consultants Aanchal Mehta and Pragya Nagar, the students went on an eight-day field visit to Aurangabad. During the field trip, students immersed themselves in exploring the heritage of Paithan. Mehta and Nagar's (2025) work adds a visual dimension to the broader conversation in this issue about preserving intangible heritage and fostering community-driven, sustainable heritage practices.



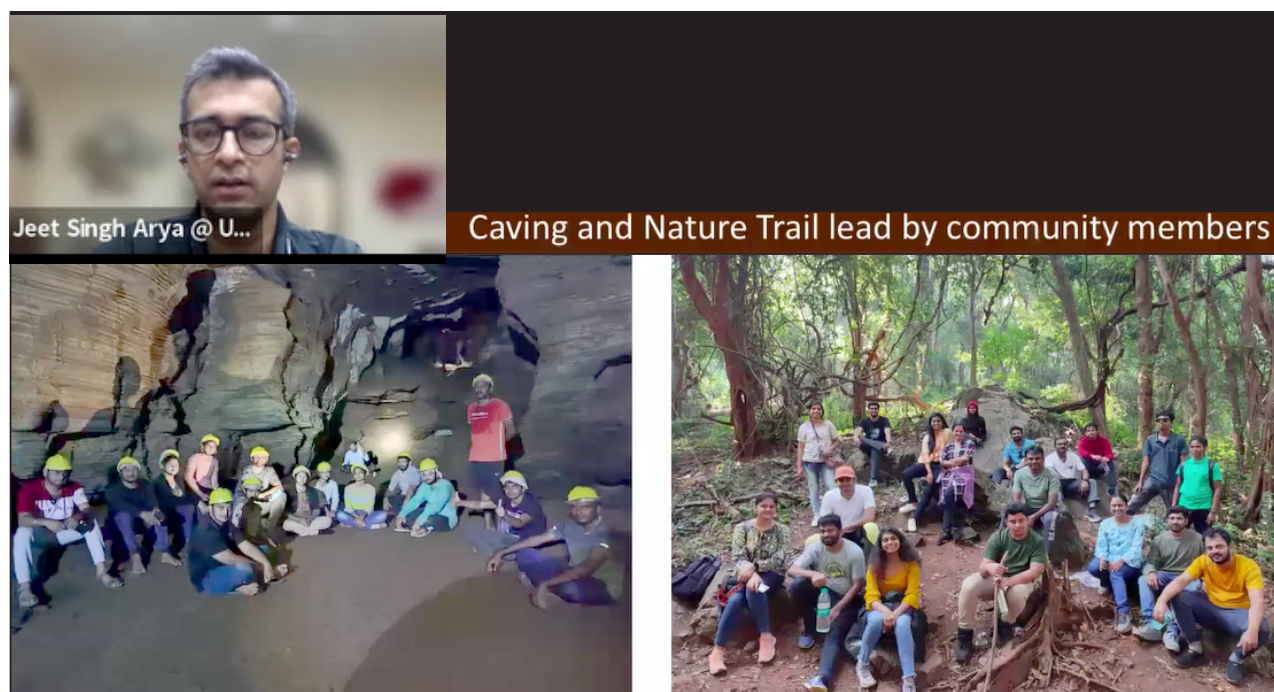
As part of its ongoing commitment to preserving and promoting our rich cultural heritage, the INTACH Heritage Academy (IHA) has hosted a diverse range of courses and activities over the past two years, all centred around the theme of heritage and communities. Through immersive workshops, interactive sessions and expert-led discussions, the academy has provided participants with unique opportunities to explore cultural practices, explore heritage conservation techniques and uncover the profound connection between communities and their environments. For instance, the course ‘Community Led Conservation’, conducted as part of the above-mentioned PG Diploma in Heritage Studies (2023-24), focused on understanding how local communities play a crucial role in preserving heritage sites.

Concurrently, in collaboration with Make It Happen, the ‘Storytelling in Heritage Tourism’ course centred on the transformative power of storytelling as a tool for community engagement. A key learning outcome was to help participants recognise the pivotal role local communities play in heritage tourism.



Participants’ visit to Mangar Bani under the guidance of Nidhi Batra who, in line with her emphasis on nature-culture linkages, guided participants through a natural heritage site to observe conservation efforts firsthand. The visit provided invaluable insights into how local communities contribute to preserving the natural environment.

Amreen Shaikh, Head of Experiences at Make It Happen, shared insights on transforming tourism from traditional tours to immersive, community-driven experiences and emphasised the role of local communities in creating sustainable tourism that celebrates cultural heritage while empowering its people.



Jeet Singh Arya, Founder, Unexplored Bastar, drawing from his experience in rural India, underscored the importance of creating tourism models that respect and celebrate local cultures, ensuring that economic opportunities derived from tourism are channeled back into the communities.

In July-August, the Academy was also invited to conduct two in-person courses based around cultural heritage at Kumaraguru College of Liberal Arts and Science (KCLAS), Coimbatore. These five-day programmes were held at the KCLAS campus, complemented by site visits to various locations across Coimbatore. The courses were designed for second year undergraduate students from diverse disciplines, including Management, Commerce, Psychology, Visual Communication, Creative Tamil, Data Science and others. One of these courses was themed 'Culture and Community' and was based on the vision that communities are the custodians of both tangible and intangible heritage, playing a crucial role in preserving cultural values amidst the pressures of



changing times and emerging threats. The course aimed to immerse students in Coimbatore's cultural context, engaging them with local communities to highlight the connection between heritage, community identity and the challenges of preservation in a modern world. Further in September, IHA conducted a course on Intangible Cultural Heritage (ICH) that introduced the different facets of ICH alongside its significance in the wider context of heritage, in addition to the methods to safeguard it.

Students at the local flower market, Phoolmarket of Coimbatore, interviewing the artisans, especially a community of basket weavers working in the vicinity, and carrying out documentation fieldwork.

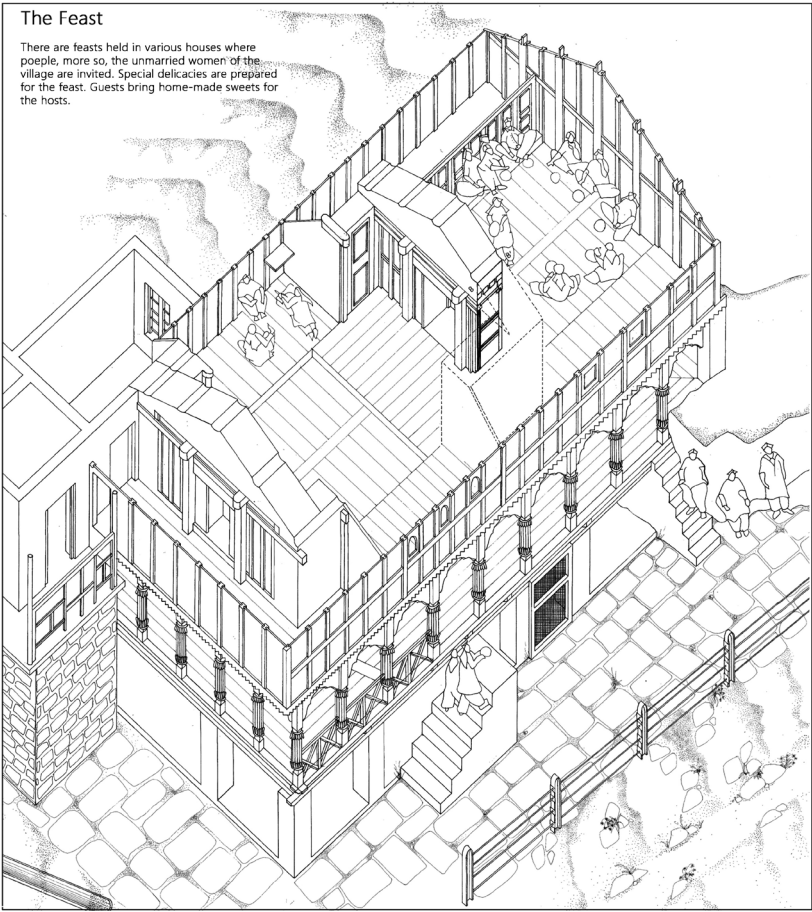
In order to further create sensitivity towards heritage, particularly among undergraduate students, INTACH also offers a nationwide awards programme for the documentation of heritage in India. While the awards programme was originally instituted to encourage documentation of unprotected architectural heritage by students of architecture in the country, the focus shifted to interdisciplinary documentation, by undergraduate students across disciplines in 2024. Despite the emphasis



Session on ICH & Communities by Dr. Madhura Dutta focusing on the preservation of ICH, requiring sensitivity toward the communities themselves, who embody and perpetuate these traditions and involving an understanding of the delicate balance between tradition and innovation.

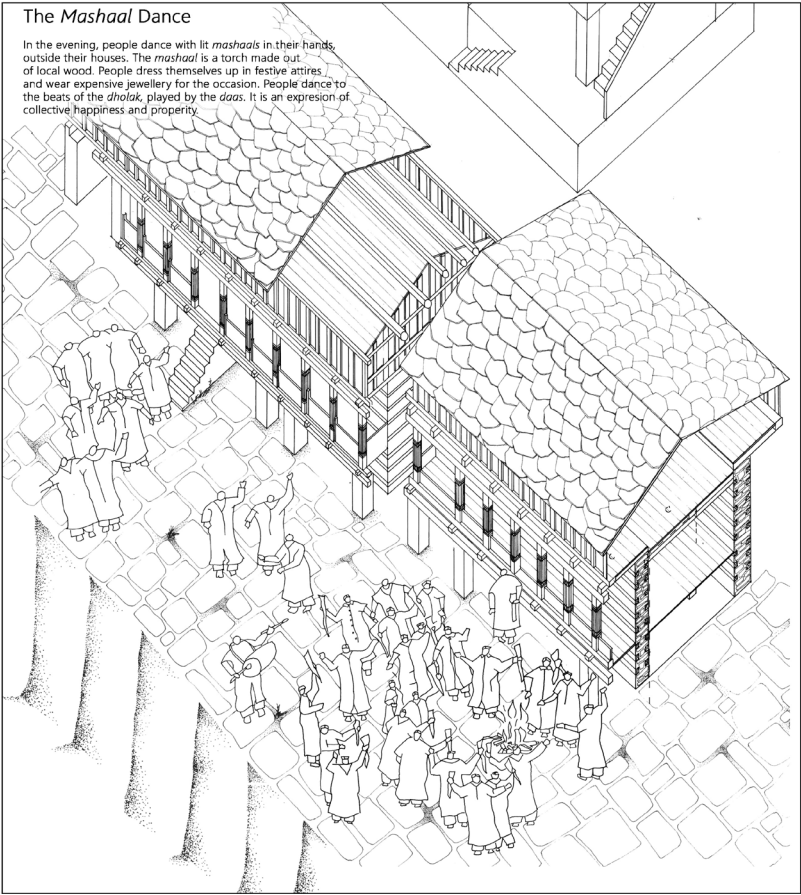
The Feast

There are feasts held in various houses where people, more so, the unmarried women of the village are invited. Special delicacies are prepared for the feast. Guests bring home-made sweets for the hosts.



The Mashaal Dance

In the evening, people dance with lit *mashaals* in their hands outside their houses. The *mashaal* is a torch made out of local wood. People dress themselves up in festive attires and wear expensive jewellery for the occasion. People dance to the beats of the *dholak*, played by the *daas*. It is an expression of collective happiness and prosperity.



Panels depicting the feast and the mashaal dance of the people of Chakrata from ‘Building Stories – Chakrata’.

Rohan Shivkumar, Dean,
B Arch., KRVIA presenting
'Documenting Heritage:
The case of Chakrata' as part
of the online workshop on
interdisciplinary heritage
documentation organised by
IHA in March 2024. He brought
into discussion how technical
drawings can be converted
into reflections of everyday
life, bridging architecture
with the cultural and spiritual
rhythms of the community,
offering a deeper, more
holistic view of heritage.

In the contemporary global discourse, terms such as creative economies, cultural industries, cultural entrepreneurship, sustainability and creative industries are actively being discussed. In this context, INTACH Heritage Academy's 2015 publication, 'Asia-Europe Network of Urban Heritage for Sustainable Creative Economies', in collaboration with Europa Nostra, International Institute for the Inclusive Museum, International National Trusts Organisation (INTO) and Yangon Heritage Trust, holds relevance. The publication emerged out of the Asia-Europe Foundation (ASEF) Experts' Meeting and Public Forum on 'Investing in Heritage Cities: Stimulus for Sustainable Tourism and Livelihoods' held in June 2013.



Panels highlighting the architectural and cultural significance of the ancient Jain Basadis in the village of Varanga Udupi, Karnataka, depicting the deep, enduring connection between built heritage and the communities that uphold it.

Source: BMS College of Architecture

Activities in and around Kere Basadi

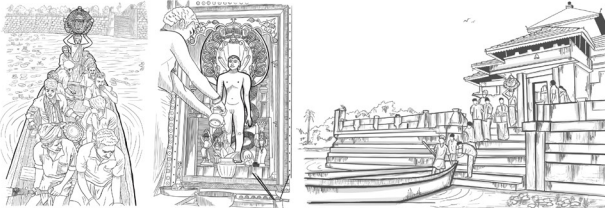


Access to Kere Basadi is only possible by boat. The scenic boat ride to the Basadi is considered a spiritual experience in itself.

Local Beliefs



It is locally believed that taking a ceremonial bath in the Devana Kere and performing Puja to Goddess Padmaswati at Kere Basadi cures all skin related ailments. Once cured, the devotees perform the Akki-Huruli Seve ritual of feeding rice and beans to the fish in the lake, all of which is an integral part of the cultural experience.

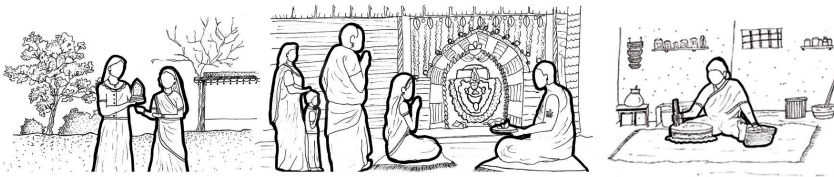
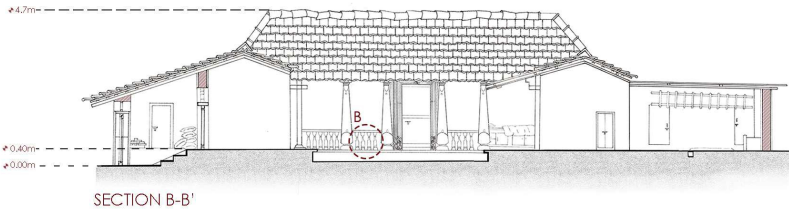


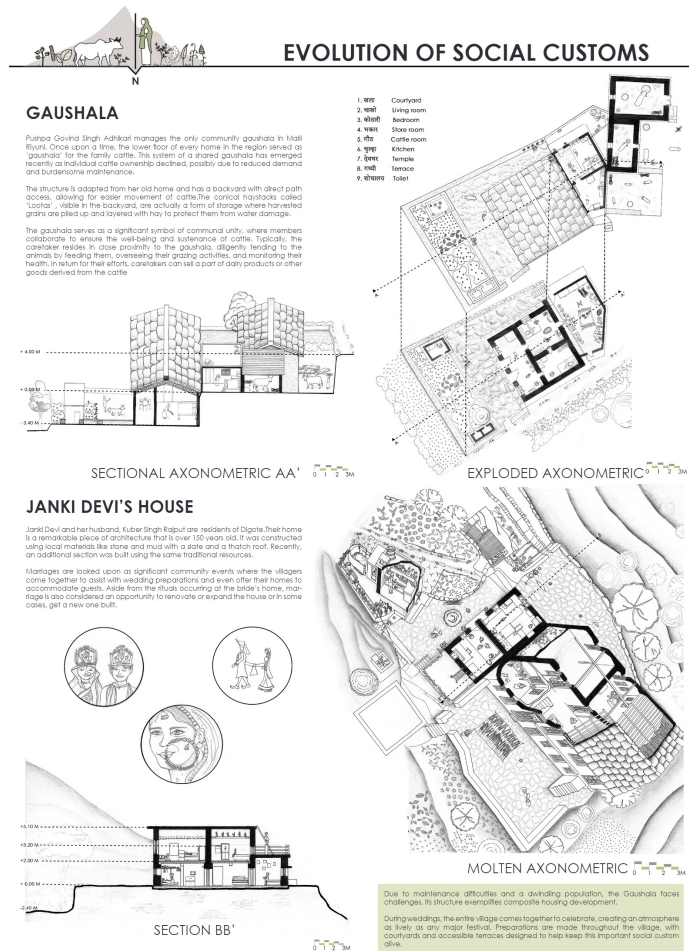
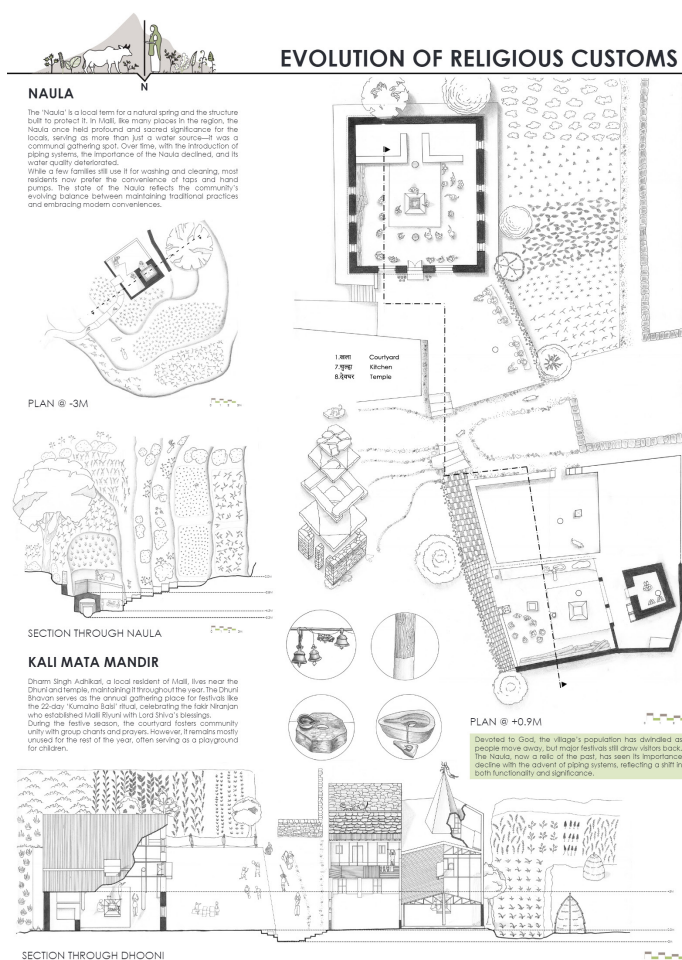
During the annual Rajkavyatra Mahotsava at Varanga, the idol of Sarvajna Yaksha is taken by boat to the Chaturmukha Kere Basadi. Panchamrutha Abhisheka is performed for Lord Panchamrutha and Sarvajna Yaksha at Kere Basadi, after which the Sarvajna Yaksha idol is returned to the Chandraswathi Basadi and Neminatha Basadi for additional rituals.



Panels depicting a connection between the natural environment, cultural practices and agricultural lifestyle of the village of Palahalli, Karnataka, underscoring the importance of conserving not just the physical buildings but the cultural practices and community connections that make these rural villages unique.

Source: Rizvi College of Architecture





in Yangon, Myanmar and the subsequent creation of the network of experts to address the challenges and potentials related to the notion of creative economies and sustainable management in a historic built environment. Not only does the publication address definitions and terminologies and the need for heritage-linked creative economies strategy, but among the listed activities undertaken by the network in its first year are first, the identification and mapping of heritage-linked local economies in select heritage cities in India¹ with an elaboration on the framework adopted; second and more importantly, approaches to engage with local communities for developing creative solutions; and third, training programmes for experts and selected stakeholders. A way forward with several short-term goals focusing on further networking, collaborating and garnering support were also included. Thus, heritage and community engagement are positioned as fundamental pillars in fostering sustainable creative economies, where the preservation of cultural heritage is intrinsically linked to local economic development, inclusive growth and the empowerment of communities.

Over the last few decades, the engagement of the community has been established as a key factor towards successful conservation. This has been highlighted by various scholars, drawing parallels between community involvement in various parts of the world over time. While

Panels depicting religious and social customs of the Majkhali village, Kumaon providing valuable insights into how Majkhali's inhabitants have maintained their traditions while adapting to historical changes.

Source: Rachana Sansad's Academy of Architecture

¹ including Jaipur, Sanganer and Bagru in Rajasthan, Chanderi in Madhya Pradesh and Lucknow and Agra in Uttar Pradesh

Smith (2006) acknowledges that communities are often excluded from decision-making on heritage, seven years later, Smith and Waterson (2013) emphasise a participatory approach towards heritage, exploring actions for collaborations. The community-centric approach to heritage conservation, where the community serves as the primary stakeholders and active participants, is also evident in the works of Taylor and Lennon (eds. 2012). Their edited volume brings together expert discussions on cultural landscapes and discusses the role of communities in heritage conservation across different regions of the world. While Lennon (2012) describes cultural landscape as the 'combined work of nature and man', Taylor and Lennon (2012) argue that communities should be recognised as 'stewards, producers and sometimes owners' of these landscapes. They highlight the importance of local participation in conservation efforts, supported through appropriate training and strengthened by education programmes.

With regard to intangible heritage, the community has an even more important role to play. Reconnecting communities with their indigenous knowledge is essential for preserving the cultural identity and shaping community-driven conservation practices. This has been emphasised by Ostrom (1990), who analysed how local communities managed shared resources and provided a framework for community-based sustainability. Similarly, work by Brosius, Lowenhaupt and Zerner (2005) emphasises the important role of communities in the management of cultural resources through case studies that examine the dynamic process of inclusivity in heritage conservation. Examining the approach towards traditional knowledge systems, the authors give a critical view arguing that managing cultural resources is sustainable only if this traditional knowledge is integrated with modern policies, thereby reinforcing community-led conservation efforts.

Keeping this in view, the 'Reviews' section of this issue seeks to bring into focus the insights and reflections discussed earlier, presenting a review of two recent works within the Indian context that examine the relationship between heritage and communities. The works of Arati Kumar-Rao and Madhura Dutta illustrate how cultural practices shape communities and address the challenges and outcomes of these interactions in the contemporary world. While Kumar-Rao emphasises the interconnectedness of nature and culture, highlighting the role of indigenous systems and community-led governance in fostering sustainability, Dutta explores the role of Indian crafts in sustainable development, with a particular focus on community-driven initiatives aimed at preserving cultural heritage. Additionally, a review has been undertaken to critically examine INTACH's publications, which underscore the complex relationship between heritage and communities.

On assessment, it has been found that these works by incorporating indigenous knowledge systems and emphasising community engagement, underscore the importance of local involvement in conservation efforts, thereby reinforcing the core principles set out in the INTACH Charter for the Conservation of Unprotected Architectural Heritage and Sites in India.

This issue, thus, presents two distinct yet interconnected lines of thought emerging from global conversations on heritage, with a particular focus on the vital relationship between heritage and communities. The first centres on the nature-culture nexus, with an emphasis on bringing marginalised communities to the forefront, ensuring diversity and inclusivity and promoting sustainability in the face of climate change. This framework is explored in the preceding issue by Badman and in the current issue by Dutta, Batra and Katoch, finding expression also in the 'Documentation Feature'. The second thread explores the significance of indigenous knowledge, positioning communities as key stakeholders in heritage conservation, the importance of their involvement in decision-making and ensuring that heritage practices are not only preserved but also remain relevant to contemporary communities. This perspective is examined in papers by Dutta, Das, Gopalakrishnan and Raghavan, and Mehta and Nagar. Together, these contributions offer a thorough examination of the dynamic relationship between heritage and communities, addressing both contemporary challenges and opportunities that shape this intersection. We sincerely hope that readers will gain valuable insights from these discussions, deepening their understanding of the intricate connections between heritage, community engagement and sustainable conservation practices. This issue aims to inspire further reflection and action in the ongoing dialogue around heritage preservation and its indispensable role in community development.

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