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## **Cultural Integrity within Traditional Pilgrim Infrastructure along Rath Yatra Route, Puri, Odisha – India**

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### **Abstract:**

The historical street of Bada Danda in Puri city of India, known for the festive procession of Rath Yatra, upholds dynamic historical influences intact within. It has played a major role in transforming the growth and morphology of the pilgrim centre. Encompassing multiple traditional Pilgrim infrastructures, the street upholds historical and cultural significance within it. The study thus focuses on the establishment of significance and recognition of these built structures along the street, impacting the overall character of the city. The aim of the study is to define the cultural integrity of the traditional and historic pilgrim infrastructure along the Bada Danda Street. The architectural values of the structures are intervened with intangible variables, associated with the festivals and duties of main temple. The commercialization of the street and change in land use pattern has led to the loss of authenticity and integrity within these structures. Responsible management and promotion of the existing tangible and intangible heritage resources is required for the conservation of the historicity of the street.

**Keywords:** Bada Danda, historical street, pilgrim centre, processional route, Rath Yatra, socio-religious, traditional infrastructure.

### **Introduction**

The dynamics of heritage in a particular cultural landscape presents the age old historical paradigm and cultural ethos that reflect the universal values. Places of cultural significance reflect the diversity of local communities, depicting the past that has formed a relationship between the tangible and intangible forms of heritage. One such association of people's belief and cultural system towards a sacred geography is visible in the land of lord Jaggarnath, Puri, having a dynamic historical landscape that narrates the cultural continuity from the dawn of

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civilization in various forms. The temple stands as cosmic symbol which gives an insight to the historical chronology vividly with its elaborate rituals. The association of people's belief and cultural system towards the sacred geography narrates the cultural continuity in various forms.

The eastern coastal plains of Odisha, having several layers of Saiva, Sakta and Vaisnava circles as known from Astakosa circumference, formed a sacred geography. The fertile delta formed through lower Mahanadi basin, and tributaries of Kuakhai, Kushabhadra, Daya and Bhargavi rivers, define the favourable settings of settlements dating back from pre-historic times. This region owes its origin to the early settlements of Austro-Asiatic tribes of fishermen and hunter-gatherers. (S. K. Pattnaik & Nayak, 2020)

Puri, located on the shore of Mahodadhi coast, originated as the spiritual fervour that dominates the city to as early as the 4th Century A.D. (Fig. 1). The images made of wood are claimed to have their distant linkage with the aboriginal system of worshipping wooden poles (Kanungo, 2013). Along with the transformation of the pilgrimage city, there was a significant commencement of art forms and traditional knowledge system emerging out from the culture of Jaggarnath. The sevayats involved in the religious practices, rituals and festivals of the temple, exhibiting the traditional knowledge system, are identified in terms of their distinct settlements and the natural resources utilised over time (Dash, 2013). Hence, the Pilgrim centre of Puri has grown around the Jaggarnath temple being the focal point of development, connected to different parts of the region through pilgrim routes and streets.

One such historical street originated as a result of festive and cultural associations with the main temple is Bada Danda. The Bada Danda street dates back to early 12th century A.D., connecting Jaggarnath temple to Gundicha temple, is being utilised as the processional route for Rath Yatra. Being the oldest street of Puri, Bada Danda has accelerated the growth of the pilgrim centre, as a medium for popularization of religious thoughts. The structures developed along the historical street bring out a cultural synthesis centering the worship of Jaggannatha. These socio-religious structures play a significant role in forming the image of the pilgrim centre, encapsulating the cultural, architectural and socio-religious values within.

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***Literature Study:***

The historical street of Bada Danda has undergone transformations dynamically with changing times. The connection to the sacred temple and religious elements demarcated the importance of the street in terms of adjoining social infrastructure, daily practices and festivals embedded with the processions. In recent years' multiple such study of the Bada Danda Street has been conducted in order to analyze its impact over the pilgrimage centre as well as socio – cultural identity.

The Place – Identity of heritage cities is affected by the parameters of: - sensory cognition of place, distinctiveness, invariants, historical knowledge and narrativeness of the place. Hence, the major concentration of people - identity elements is found along the processional route of Rath Yatra and the Sea beach, according to the locals and their own perception about their place. The Bada Danda route follows a remarkable combination of sensory values, event places (in terms of festivals and processions), and significance (Nanda, 2020). Therefore, the historical street of Bada Danda contributes as one of the major element of the pilgrim city which needs to be managed and conserved strategically. Its highly exposed nature is one of the driving factors for its involvement in the daily activities and rituals, but at the same time is highly prone to threats in terms of modern day initiatives and development. In such case, the adjoining historical structures play an important role in up keeping of its authenticity and identity as a defined pilgrim centre.

Similarly, the impact of Socio – cultural and physical aspects in the place making of the pilgrim centre plays an important role in terms of spatial quality having religious and functional utility. The Bada Danda Street as compared to other streets of Puri, comprises of high opportunities for interaction and sense of belongingness among the locals as well as the floating population. (Tandon & Sehgal, 2020)

In recent years, Puri has witnessed significant growth in terms of mixed use and commercial structures. The modernization has also impacted the construction style of the new developments, not only breaking the historical character, but also its haphazard positioning obstructs the visual connectivity with the existing historical structures. This has further impacted the user travel experience in terms of visual connectivity, built environment, safety and comfort. The route of Bada Danda has been under threat due to encroachment, undefined kiosk and traffic congestions. Such problems along the street not only impact the

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pedestrians travel experience, but are also threat to the unrecognized heritage structures along the street. (Mohanty & Chani, 2019)

The Bada Danda Street not only acts as a connecting medium for the main temple, but also forms an integral part of core of the pilgrim centre. Encompassing the cultural and traditional architecture, along with socio-religious activities, the core area of the pilgrim centre is vulnerable to inappropriate changes. Therefore, the heritage structures are needed to be conserved within the core, as a representation of non – renewal capital resource, through capacity building. The role of stakeholders and development agencies are needed to be strategically integrated with the existing heritage enhancing awareness and responsible development of the historical layers. (Chandan & Kumar, 2019)

The structures developed along the route bring out a cultural synthesis centering the worship of Jaggannatha. Being a medium for propagation and popularization of religious thoughts, the historical street has undergone development in terms of Mathas, Dharamshalas, Temples, resident of Zamindars and commercial spaces. The historical structures play a significant role in diffusion of knowledge in the absence of formal educational institutions to impart education. (Rath, 2002)

During late nineteenth century, the lands granted by the kings for the socio religious structures mainly Mathas of Puri, despite possessing large areas, lack the ability to utilize and generate equal income from these land as well as structures. The system of land tenure followed in Odisha is partly responsible for such cases (Mukherjee, 1977). The monasteries are present in overall fabric of the pilgrim centre, with the major concentration being in the surrounding sahis (colonies) and along the historical streets, listed and categorized on the basis of different cults and followers of Jaggarnath. These religious structures have declined in number due to their efforts to transcend the Jagganath cult without sufficiently subsuming it instead (H. S. Pattnaik, 1994). The same scenario stands true even in present times, where the economic stability and independency of these structures are lacking due to loss of recognition.

Thus, the existing studies focusing on the historical street of Bada Danda are limited to the overall physical infrastructure, as well as the user experiences in terms of local and tourist point of view. However, the existing and unrecognized historical pilgrim infrastructures along the street are needed to be further listed, studied and analyzed. The study will help in conservation and maintenance of these layers, in order to promote awareness among visitors as well as locals about the existing heritage resources. These heritage resources can be further utilized, retaining historicity, integrity and significant values as well as

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to attain capacity building, enhancing the overall economic development of the pilgrim centre.

***Aim:***

To define the cultural integrity within the Traditional Pilgrim Infrastructure along Bada Danda Street - Puri, formulating conservation approach for the heritage resources

***Research Questions:***

- What are the existing historic Pilgrim infrastructure along the Bada Danda street and its significance?
- What are the Impact of Development Policies and Urban scenarios over the existing Heritage Resources in the Bada Danda processional route of Puri?
- What are the Economical Outcomes and interdependency of the structures with the Jaggarnath temple?
- How the historical & processional street of Bada Danda influencing the existing Pilgrim infrastructure adjoining it?

***Objectives:***

- Understanding the administrative framework, role of stakeholders and agencies in the functioning and development of historical socio – religious infrastructure.
- Identifying and Defining the significance of existing historical socio- religious structures exhibiting tangible and intangible values.
- Analysis of conservation and management issues at broad and building level, in terms of dynamic transformations and legislative framework.
- To formulate Conservation Approach, for rejuvenation of the Traditional Pilgrim Infrastructure along Bada Danda Street in pilgrim centre of Puri.

**Methodology**

The functioning of the Jaggarnath temple is integrated with the settlements, forming altogether an economic spine for communities, along with the existence of spiritual and religious belief system in the sacred geography of Purusottama Kshetra. The objective of the study is to establish the cultural integrity of the existing historic Traditional Socio – Religious Infrastructure along the street of Bada Danda, Puri.

***Approach:***

The study deals with the 2.5 Km long stretch of Bada Danda (also known as Grand Road) of Puri connecting the Shree Jaggarnath Temple to the Gundicha temple, in order to analyse the present day scenarios and probable future changes. The street holds its significance in terms of the oldest street acting as a medium for religious practices and processions. Being one of the oldest and most active streets of Puri, it further accelerated the growth of the pilgrim centre. The scope of the study is limited to the mapping and analysis of layers of historical and cultural values of the street, excluding the modern day development interventions, although the impact of it is taken into consideration. (Fig. 2)

For the analysis of the cultural integrity of the street, the method adopted in the paper is fourfold in nature, that is:

- (1) Primary Survey of the existing historic Socio-religious and Pilgrim Infrastructure along the Bada Danda Street.
- (2) Inventorying and Mapping of the structures, in order to analyse the historicity, significance and values.
- (3) Identification of current threats and issues existing in these structures, in terms of urban pressure and development initiatives.
- (4) Formulation of conservation approach and proposals for the rejuvenation and revival of the historic Pilgrim infrastructure along the route.

***Data Analysis:***

The results from the primary survey and secondary data collection are triangulated, in order to achieve comprehensive understandings on the findings and interpretations. In order to eliminate the contradictions, and rectification of the secondary sources in terms of historic structures, the analysis relies on the primary survey and observations. Also, on the other hand, the primary survey and interviews are based on targeted population of stakeholders, inhabitants and users of the structures to follow an unbiased approach.

**Results and Discussion**

***Analysis of role of Development agencies and stakeholders:***

The development of Puri has been undertaken by multiple state and central government agencies under different schemes and initiatives in recent years. Analyzing chronologically on the basis of targeted year for achievement of goals of development, the first running body is the Puri City Development Plan – 2006, undertaken by Puri Municipality. The following initiative addressed the idea of development of the city in terms of Global tourism business city. The parameters

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of heritage conservation and preservation were dealt through the tools of improved urban facilities, environmental conditions, disaster management and image of the city. Despite addressing the broader level aspects, it lacked the refined identification of the heritage layers.

The other perspective plan developed for targeting 2031 is Comprehensive Development Plan, under Puri Konark Development Authority (PKDA). The plan envisages the overall development of Natural and cultural heritage associated with the region of Puri and Konark. For the pilgrim centre of Puri, heritage walks along the main streets of Puri, connecting several cultural museums along the route has been proposed. But the building level assessment and utilization of the existing historical resources along the street are not taken into consideration while mapping the heritage walks. (PKDA, 2013)

In case of City HRIDAY Plan of Puri, the mapping of heritage structures is done to building level. The major importance is given to the temples and the surrounding precinct, eliminating the socio-religious structures in order to attain heritage corridor (HRIDAY, 2017). Hence the structures are needed to be conserved in terms of retaining the original use rather than demolishing them.

The socio-religious structures mainly Mathas, Ashrams, Jagaghars and Akhadas of Odisha are recognized in terms of religious importance, and uphold their rights directly under the government (Religious\_Endowment\_Act, 1969). The act however in present scenario is being utilized in a way overpowering the rights and needs of the stakeholders of such structures. Despite holding associational and religious values, as perceived by the locals, these structures are being overpowered by modern development initiatives. The other issue is in the lack of adequate identification of further different categories of Pilgrim Infrastructure such as Dharamshalas, Sevayat & Zamindar residences, Kings' Palace, Institutional and Recreational structures of colonial era. Therefore, along the Bada Danda Street, all these historical built forms play an important and integrative role in the formation of the image of the city. (Fig. 3)

### ***Historical Pilgrim Infrastructures along Bada Danda:***

The built structures along the Bada Danda Street of Puri have witnessed multiple eras with reference to political influences and ideologies. Hence, the entire street reflects the mixture of different architectural styles, varying from Kalinga, Colonial and native vernacular construction systems. This amalgamation of multiple architectural characters within the single streets depicts the societal rules of time with continuously changing era. Hence, for the identification of such

structures exhibiting various historical and cultural values, the study is done through inventorizing on the basis of visual survey. The values associated with the built forms are analysed on the basis of socio-cultural values having intangible variables into consideration, & Economic values considering the tangible income through these buildings. (Throsby and Mason, 2003) (Fig. 4)

Through the visual survey, out of the total 132 structures identified throughout the historical sahis of Puri, 31 structures belong to the processional street of Bada Danda, varying in terms of use and identity. Therefore, this further reveals that the particular street of Bada Danda in itself encapsulates the identity of the Pilgrim centre evolved through time as representative case. Hence, the Bada Danda Street in itself is a trailer of different heritage resources present throughout the pilgrim centre. These structures are varying in terms of architecture, condition and threat towards them, inter-related to the political influences and communities involved throughout changing time. (Fig. 5)

The different categories of Pilgrim Infrastructure identified along Bada Danda are as follows:

- (i) Mathas: Originally these were developed as religious institutions headed by prominent Mahants and saints imparting religious knowledge and enhancement of Hindu religious beliefs. However, the mathas present over this particular street got transformed in later period in terms of making use of the existing exposure of the street. Hence these Mathas have transformed into traders selling spaces, recreational structures, etc.
- (ii) Ashrams: Dedicated to specific Mahant, Ashrams were constructed in Puri to establish religious and cultural influences of the associated saint, as well as providing shelter to the pilgrims and needy. Connected with certain rituals of the temple of Jagannath, there are four Ashrams (hermitages) in Puri town. However, the Ashrams identified during the visual survey are less recognised in present time due to lack of awareness and identity of their values.
- (iii) Dharamshalas: Developed in order to house the floating population visiting the pilgrim centre, Dharamshalas were constructed in order to gain monetary benefits from the existing demand of the Pilgrim Centre. In present scenario, many of the old Dharamshalas are partially being utilised as commercial spaces, taking benefit from the existing exposure from the populations.
- (iv) Residential Structures: Developed in line with the construction of Jaggarnath temple, the residences of sevaks of the temple are majorly having high density within the historical sahis developed around the temple. The higher class group of Puri, majorly the merchants and zamindars migrated from different places to the pilgrim centre, in order to sustain trade practices. Hence, their built forms

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differ from the residences of the sevayats, in terms of the scale and spatial organisation, being more open and courtyard planned in nature.

- (v) King's Palace (Srinahar): The Pilgrim centre served as a regular visit for different kings around Puri. The Palace of Gajapati King, on the Bada Danda street near by temple, is constructed to serve the king, his family and decedents even in present day, when they are in Puri to take part in rituals (e.g. Chhera Pahera) of Rath Yatra.
- (vi) Institutional Structures: Different Institutional structures developed in the city exhibiting the traditional knowledge base, as well as administrative powers. The contribution for institutional structures varies from the traditional needs of sevaks and pilgrims, in terms of Aushadhalays, Sanskrit & Ayurvedic institutions. In later period colonial developments also contributed towards institutional development within the city.
- (vii) Recreational Structures: The development during Colonial period led to rise of multiple Health Resorts for the officials, near to the sea and away from the congested temple zone. Traditional recreational spaces also elevated in terms of Theatre spaces for Natya Mandali, Commercial areas for artisans and traders.

***Issues Identified:***

These heritage structures along the street are having high degree of exposure towards the pilgrims in terms of visual and physical accessibility. However, this particular factor, on one hand is highly advantageous to these built forms, promoting their existence, but at the same time it acts as a threat, that is deteriorating the historicity of these structures due to the modernization and urban pressure. Therefore, if not handled through a responsible conservation management, these structures can not only lose their historical & cultural values but their existence as well. (Fig. 6)

***Mathas:***

The Mathas which have transformed later in terms of change in use of the structures are intact in terms of structural stability. However adequate management, listing and conservation of these Mathas are lacking leading to future threats in terms of urban pressure.

***Ashrams:***

The Residing ashrams are however being maintained and alive due to their active use throughout the years, but the Shrine based ashrams lack architectural and structural integrity due to lack of maintenance, and ignorance towards the shrines.

***Dharamshalas:***

The extensive commercialisation of these structures, is leading to its direct revenue generation, but at the same time over powering the existing fabric in terms of undefined and unplanned urban pressure. Lack of adequate management and guidelines for the modern day development of the structures is leading to loss of architectural and aesthetical authenticity within them.

***Residential Structures:***

The modernization of built spaces in terms of materials and construction system, leading to decline in number of the historic authentic houses of sevaks. Improper management and lack of restrictive guidelines for the traditional and historical residences is leading to loss of existing historicity.

***King's Palace:***

The Kings' palace (Srinahar) is quite intact in nature, and requires only specific guidelines to be followed for the future interventions to be followed in terms of Architectural and functional authenticity.

***Institutional Structures:***

The traditional knowledge system associated with these structures is declining through the indirect impact from physical conditions of these structures deteriorated due to urban pressure and natural processes.

***Recreational Structures:***

Being very few in number, with respect to other typologies, these were developed to enhance the leisure and cultural themes within the region. These structures are facing high threat from the modernisation and urban development, which may lead to disappearance in future times if not catered adequately and urgently.

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### *Conservation Approach*

To some extent there have been attempt for the establishment of cultural significance within the Pilgrim centre, for selective heritage resources, through the existing development initiatives. However, there are certain gaps in the existing models, needed to be rectified and approached adequately. Enhancement of Traditional skills, techniques and materials are required to be executed for two way conservation of existing historical fabric as well as socio- cultural values.

Therefore, there is a need of revival and rejuvenation of these built forms along the street, in terms of their original use or adaptive reuse, whatever is feasible and appropriate for the case specific built forms.

### *Case Example of Annapurna Theatre:*

The Annapurna Theatre Puri was financed by King of Keonjhar as a part of Uttarparswa Matha. It was established in the year 1933, by Somnath Das. This theatre is one of the first and initial theatres of Orissa, originating the traditional Natya Mandali (Playa and performances within). The values associated with the theatre are Historical Value- The structure was historically constructed as Uttar Parshav Matha, later developed its use as a theatre for one of the first significant Natya Mandli in Odisha. Associational Value – Associated with Somnath Das, one of the known and prominent theatre performers of Odisha. Architectural Value – Amalgamation of Colonial Architecture along with elements from Kalinga Architecture. Cultural Value – The Mahari Dance form is being continued even in present scenarios, propagating the culture of Puri. Use (Direct) Value - The shops in the front of the building are given on lease to shopkeepers, generating direct revenue.

However, in present time, the theatre is not only losing its physical fabric and built form authenticity, but also the intangible art form associated with it. Therefore, the conservation approach required for this particular theatre is as follows - Conservation of Physical fabric of the Structure by Preventing further decay, Reversal of Incompatible Material & original built fabric of the theatre is required to be done. Revival of space utilisation of Built Environment and Site through compatible themes to revive the traditional and cultural values existing originally is needed to be done. This can be done through the proposal of Promenade theatre (Platform for Nukkad Natak) within the site premises. Other than that the spaces can be proposed as Gallery dedicated to the theatre culture of Odisha providing knowledge about famous Odia theatre artists, dramas and

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plays. This will help in revenue generation of the theatre, reviving it economically stable. Other than this Revenue and Capital Generation for overall economic development of Built Structure and associated Communities can be done through inducing workspaces for Set and Scenery preparation, Costume preparation, and props preparation within the built form. Engaging the retired lower income class performers of the theatre, this proposal will provide an occupational opportunity to them as well as use of their traditional knowledge system. (Fig. 7)

Similarly, in case of remaining Pilgrim infrastructure present in Bada Danda, such thematic and contextual revival of the spaces can enhance the tangible and intangible values within them (Table 8). The following guidelines are needed to be taken into consideration and implementation in order to not only retain the building façade and street character, but to revive the structures from their core existence and identity.

- (i) Inclusion in Existing Development Initiatives: The Unrecognised categories of Pilgrim Infrastructure are needed to be included within the framework of existing development initiatives harmonically so as to be in line with modern day developments at the same time retaining their individual identity as heritage resources.
- (ii) Promotion and Awareness: Informed community and stakeholders associated with these built forms having heritage value play a very important role in keeping the historical legacy alive with changing time. Therefore, it is important to keep the owners informed of their assets beheld within these heritage structures. Pilgrim promotion plan and influx towards these unexplored dimensions of Puri can lead to further revenue generation and economical outcomes, leading to a structurally integrated heritage system and framework.
- (iii) Contextual Modern day initiatives: The newer additions in terms of physical services and utilities are needed to be in harmony with existing theme.
- (iv) Architectural authenticity and integrity: A controlled and sensitive intervention helps in enhancing the structural stability and minimizing the original fabric & historicity. Building Material, Construction system and Height should be in harmony with existing individual as well as surrounding built form. Controlled commercialisation and change in land use are one of the major factors help in minimising urban pressure and threats. Repair and conservation works should be based on the original material and its compatibility with newer interventions.
- (v) Amalgamation of Plots: Multiple divisions of plots due to ownership conflicts is leading to disturbance in existing structural system, hence such legal issues are needed to be managed appropriately, in order to keep the structural integrity of the structures intact in nature.

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- (vi) Controlled commercialisation: Elimination and defined arrangements of bill boards and advertisements is required over the commercial spaces within these identified structures so as to avoid the overpowering of commercial spaces on the existing aesthetical and architectural values of the structures.

### **Conclusion**

Responsible management and Conservation approach is required for the dilapidated architectural fabric and historicity of the structure along the streets, forming direct visual connectivity with the locals and pilgrims. Revival of the original land use, in terms of reconciliation as well as adaptive reuse can promote the capacity building and economic development of the stakeholders as well as the entire pilgrim centre. Therefore, integrative promotional plan for the pilgrims will enhance the use and identity of the structures, in terms of individual practices, rituals, festivals and functions followed within them on daily, monthly and yearly basis.

The revival and rejuvenation of the Pilgrim infrastructures along Bada Danda is needed to be catered throughout the year, on the basis of varying influx of pilgrims in relation to the festivals associated with the particular street. This approach for revival of historical pilgrim infrastructure along the street can be further taken forward in terms of similar conservation and management approach for the other six historical streets of Puri.

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