



*Journal of Advances and  
Scholarly Researches in  
Allied Education*

*Vol. IV, Issue No. VIII,  
October-2012, ISSN 2230-  
7540*

**ANALYSIS OF CULTURAL HERITAGE,  
CONTESTATION AND CONTEXT SET-UP OF  
VAST INDIAN GEOGRAPHICAL STRUCTURE**

AN  
INTERNATIONALLY  
INDEXED PEER  
REVIEWED &  
REFEREED JOURNAL

# Analysis of Cultural Heritage, Contestation and Context Set-up of Vast Indian Geographical Structure

Rajender Kumar<sup>1\*</sup> Dr. Bhupendra Talukdar<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Research Scholar, Department of Geography, CMJ University, Shillong, Meghalaya

<sup>2</sup> Professor, Department of Geography, CMJ University, Shillong, Meghalaya

**Abstract –** *In the frame of archetype the natural, spatial and design: attributes of landscape in India is studied and illustrated with examples from Braj, Pavagarh, village plans, and pilgrimage centres and that landscape symbols express all that a culture holds dear and externalise deeply felt emotions. It is further observed that as Indian society modernizes; secular thinking in the workplace and public sphere replaces religiosity ordained tasks (Sinha, 2006a).*

*The diversities, distinctions and desperateness scattered all over India and at the other end unifying forces of traditions made this country a web of cultural whole. It is with these characteristics in studying cultural geography of India emerges a variety of topics. In the present review emphasis is placed on research that has been conducted in or about India. The first attempt to review the literature on cultural geography of India is presented by Wescoat et al. (2003). In the evolution and growth of geography in India since late 1990s a cultural turn took place through reinterpreting the ancient Indian classics using multidisciplinary approaches and illustrating them with field studies and contemporary contextuality (cf. Wescoat, et al. 2003). Examining Indianness' in geographical context is a subject of self-retrospection as well as re-assessment (Singh, R.P.B. 2008e). Presently, issues of conversation and contestation have received more attention, like fluidity and dynamics of tradition, lineages of art. inter-culturalism and the question of body, dimensions of woman power in India. legacy of Gandhian politics, the humanist perspective and the civilizing role of history, and the debate on science in post-independence India. The long-standing and continuing debate on Indian culture and on what constitutes 'Indianness' manifests itself in many ways. some more subtle than others.*

**Keywords:** *Distinctions, Culture, Desperateness, contemporary, Examining, Environment, and Ecosystems.*

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## INTRODUCTION

### Cultural Geography

Since the turn of the 21<sup>st</sup> century, a review of good number of works published on cultural geography of India, mostly by scholars from abroad; indicate that this branch has mostly been used as a way and approach narrating or analyzing landscape and culture, putting aside the theoretical construction and critique of the philosophical ideas as popular in the West (Singh, R.P.B. and Singh, R.S. 2004). The acceptance of regional and territorial use of geographic skill in social sciences is now a common practice, yet in cultural context, territoriality is a prominent tool (Delage and Headley, 2008b). Mobilizing the metaphors of pregnancy and lactation to address the imperatives arising from British academic geography's postcolonial position has influenced

geographers dealing with culture of India, especially fascinating to foreign scholars.

In recent debate geography as a discipline is considered 'pregnant' but 'in trouble' to illustrate the paradoxical struggle of the discipline to be a global discipline whilst at the same time marginalizing the voices and perspectives that make it global. Moreover, Geography is also considered as a discipline whose 'milk is flowing'— suggesting ways that the discipline can acknowledge its global interconnectedness to produce a mutually responsible academic agency Noxolo. et al. 2008). In cultural geography discourses in the West. critique of representational and non-representational context, expression and exposition are given more emphasis (Lorimer. 2007); however in India more emphasis is continues to be laid on descriptive-narrative and ethnological interpretation. Cartographic

representation and mapping of attributes of cultural heritage has recently got attention by the NATMO, covering aspects like physical and cultural bases of ancient India, religions and philosophy, Bhakti movements, social reforms movements, art and culture, an performing arts, and also short introduction to each of the maps.

## CULTURAL JOURNEY: PILGRIMAGE AND SACRED PLACE

Started in 1970s by Surinder Bhardwaj through his pioneering publication on Hindu Places of Pilgrimages (1973), study of pilgrimages has not been popular in comparison to Indology. However, it has received attention recently in geography too. The tradition of Bhardwaj has been continued by Stoddard and his associates, though taking only numerical dimension (Foster and Stoddard, 2008). In a study of history of religions attribute of space has been taken prominently as a basic frame (Zeiler, 2008). As a cultural practice, pilgrimage and pilgrimage places are in continual transformation as the societal forces shaping them are changed. As with any cultural practice, pilgrimage is both a window and mirror, revealing and reflecting the effects of these forces in people's lives. This continues in modern India, and has become even more complex as Hinduism in the Diasporas has extended Hindu sacred horizons. Pilgrimage to such spirituo-magnetic nexus is an expression of the richness and variety of life and culture within India. and wherever else, Hindus are settled (Bhardwaj and Lochiefeld. 2004).

Use of theoretical frame of pilgrimage studies in a geographical perspective has attracted people even from religious studies, especially to emphasize Victor Turner's constructs, territorial context and emerging conflicts (cf. Delage. 2004. 2005, 2008; also Singh, R.P.B. 2006). The study of feminine divine and her association with different ults, traditions has proved the potential capacity of geographic skills in narrating the :eeper spirits, as exemplified in the study of Chhinnamasra goddess at Rajarappa (Singh, R.S. 2008b). Study of the origin and growth, and the role of various active agents in the process of making a local goddess, indicates the locality in time frame converges into egionality through continuity and increasing pace of devotees and visitors and their upporting auxiliary functionaries (Singh, R.S. 2007). Conversely, the universality ubmerges into locality like in case of goddess shrine at Karnachcha (Singh, R.S. 2008a).

In pilgrimage studies using 'text' as a way to see the past and understanding context' is to see the contemporary situation receiving strong attention with reference to image worship that looks simple but it possesses the complex, fluid, and contested nature of religiosity and cultural underpinnings. The five essays in a recent anthology deal with these themes. The studies establish the notion of 'crossing the religious boundaries' from locality to universality (Granoff, and Shinohara, 2004a).

Essays included in the Proceedings of a Conference on Sacred Space and Sacred. Biography in Asian Religious Traditions' explore the role of sacred place in creating a specific local religious identity (Granoff, P. and Shinohara, K.2004b).

Use of religion in public awakening and consciousness in the elections is also a land of enquiry in contemporary cultural geography by British scholars, e.g. in the context of feeling of nationalism and reformative frame for maintenance of identity and as a 'show' (Oza. 2004). Additionally, the study of contrapuntal geographies of and security, while making comparison with USA and Israel has also been a new addition that reflects the similarities, transformations and changing life ways (Oza, 2007).

Studying the social and cultural issues as being the root cause of present political crises in Nagaland, Kibami (2004) propounds that ethno-linguistism is an important dimension to understand the present crisis, especially in providing a strong base not only to understand language dynamics but also to help in language planning in a multilingual country like India. It is noted that the in-group clashes among the Nagas have bearings on their separate identities, but the mass conversion to Christianity in Nagaland has brought together (Kibami, 2004).

A study of topographic symbolism of pilgrim landscapes offers an insight into aspects of the mother goddess' divinity. The study of Pavagadh Hill in Gujarat, notes that the primeval landscape of bare rock, ephemeral springs, and layered vegetation, has the evolved into a cultural landscape of worship in temples and shrines, small communities draw their sustenance from pilgrimage, and holy organizations that facilitate and manage it (Sinha. 2006b), A study of multiculturalism and integrative form of culture and built architecture has been undertaken by geographers-turned architects and their team, e.g. case study of the Yamuna riverfront.

Study of sacred geography of Pun emphasizes the variety of existing religious centres and landscape that comprising temples, maths, Sahis inhabited by ritual functionaries, sacred tanks, holy trees and the auxiliary and supportive secular institutions and organizations (Patnaik, 2006). The study reveals the blending of sacred and profane, thus resulting to the 'wholeness' in the holy territory of Pun.

Ethno geographical study of Sun goddess festival in Bhojpur Region illustrates the interlinking chain from locality to universality (Singh. R.P.B. 2008d). similarly, the applicability and contextuality of Gaici theory in indian culture has been tested in a cross cultural perspective, emphasizing the roots in Indian culture (Singh, R.P.B. 2008e). The most sacred month for Hindus, Le. Karttika, records variety of festivals and celebrations that make the sacred scape a fantastic web of culture

The conflation of the West with modernity is being challenged by new critical interventions on the themes of 'occidentalism' and 'plural modernities'. In this context an interesting study compares two important figures in the articulation and invention of the West, the Japanese Westerniser' Fukuzawa Yukichi and the Indian poet and advocate of spiritual Asia Rabindranath Tagore. Fukuzawa and Tagore developed contrasting narratives both of the West and of Asia, narratives which they employed to express novel and distinctive visions of the nature of modern life.

## **CULTURAL NOTIONS AND CHANGING REFLECTIONS**

The literary images and fictive literature are rich cultural resource in explaining the roots of culture and traditions that developed in the past and continued as legacy and continuity of maintaining identity (cf. Dhussa. 2007). An attempt is made to recapture the past relocate priorities, recover lost myths and unveil the process of nation construction, an effort to unfold a multi-layered reality (Jam, 2006). A recent study of Vikram Seth's *A Suitable Boy* is a good example that portrays the variety, distinctions and contrasts of Indian culture (Festino, 2005). Classical study of folk art in India, illustrated with Mithila art and painting, has also drawn special attention jointly by an expatriot Indian and an American geographers (Cotton and Karan, 2007).

A comment by Narayan on the "false geography" of his "imaginary town" provides the departure-point for a discussion of Malgudi, which argues against the frequently held view that it is a metonym for a quintessential India, or South India. Taking its cue from the cultural geographer Doreen Massey's assertion that "the identities of places are always unfixed, contested and multiple". the paper contends that Malgudi is a multifaceted and transitional site, an interface between older conceptions of "authentic" Indianness and contemporary views that stress the ubiquity and inescapability of change in the face of modernity (Thieme. 2007). The mystical, erotic and metaphysical expression of Indian art has influenced the contemporary American art exemplified in a recent study where Indian deities, Mandala, Chakra, body-soul metaphor and cosmicised representations are given preference.

Examining class, gender, and work in Tiruppur. South India, where export of united garments has been led by a networked fraternity of owners of working-class and outer caste origins, it is noted that the class mobility is hinging on their "toil." Chari : (2004) very admirably portrays how history, geography, gender, and work practice shape local sites of global production. The issue of caste and land quality in Bihar has intricate relationship that led to hierarchy, dominance and the power relationship (Thakur and Sinha, 2007). Mapping the changing profile of

reservation debates on caste, class and politics in India, a study has argued for developing new paradigms for the discussion of caste and interrogates the democratic and secular roles of caste in relation to class and politics.

The impact of cultural globalization with special reference to Kolkata (Calcutta), illustrates how the City-symbol of Bengali culture, is changing fast under the sway of globalization in which the traditionality of the culture is lost for the several ongoing processes—may it be called feminism or postmodernism! (Ray, 2005). Kashmir, as known internationally for proxy militias, Islamic terrorists, and human rights abuses by the Indian security forces, is reflected in its regionality called Kashmiriyat, the language of belonging as expressed by Kashmiris themselves, prior to foreign rulers, colonization, and the creation of national boundaries (Zutshi. 2004). Language has played an important role in not only identity formation but also "contextual coexistence" of various linguistic groups and understanding of spatiality of languages and their explanation is imperative

The issue of women's empowerment in India. with reference to socio-spatial disparities in regional and societal contexts is a good example of practicing modern cultural geography (Gupta and Yesudian, 2006). Gender concerns in coal mining displacement and rehabilitation in India emphasize the engendering mining communities Ahmad, and Lahiri-Dutt, 2006). The journey of women's struggles and their emotional and intellectual responses to patriarchal control and imposition has received a scholarly analysis (Jam. 2006a). Hindi cinema offers a means of examining the evolving geographies of the multi-sited, multi-national Indian diaspora and its relationship to the homeland'. Mohammad's paper (2007) seeks to elaborate an understanding of Bollywood's visibility in the new Diaspora as a response to political, economic, and technological transformations that have taken place in India.

An overview of the Sufi traditions of South Asia emphasizes some emerging research angles on the problematic convergences between texts, territories and the transcendent elements in Sufisni (Green, 2004). Islam as it is practiced by millions of Muslims in South Asia, has an empirical validity and is a dynamic process of adjustment and accommodation as well as conflict with other religions, with which it coexists'

## **LANDSCAPE, CULTURAL HERITAGE, CONTESTATION AND CONTEXT**

In the frame of archetype the natural, spatial and design: attributes of landscape in India is studied and illustrated with examples from Braj, Pavagarh, village plans, and pilgrimage centres and that landscape symbols express all that a culture holds dear and externalise deeply felt emotions. It is further observed



that as Indian society modernizes; secular thinking in the workplace and public sphere replaces religiosity ordained tasks (Sinha, 2006a).

Within the time frame of the 12<sup>th</sup> through the 14<sup>th</sup> centuries, a particularly creative period in Gujarat. Islamic influence has been predominant that do not necessarily fall into specific sectarian categories. In fact, the local traditions formed its 'communities' as exemplified in the Arabic, Persian and Sanskrit inscriptions is illustrated in Maru-Gurjara style at Bhadreshvar as studied by Patel (2004). Using a case study of the sacred complex of Tirumala-Tirupati, a popular pilgrimage centre in south India, a paper explores casual linkages between different factors that shape the environment in a pilgrimage centre, and also notes the environmental effects i.e. seasonality on traditional pilgrimage to be limited over time and space. It is argued that significant changes in scale, frequency and character of such visitation over the past few decades reflect new pressures on the environment of sacred sites (Shinde, 2007).

The issue of heritage contestation has recently drawn attention of historical geographers, architects and conservators. Some of the UNESCO sites in India have been recently studied (Singh, R.P.B. 2008f). Champaner-Pavagarh, like other heritage sites in India, exhibits both the palimpsest of landscape layers inscribed over time and the juxtaposition of Hindu and Islam traditions in architecture and city planning (see Sinha, 2004). Both Hindu and Islamic cultures exploited the visual potentials of the topography. The concept of cultural landscape as a heritage resource is a recent development on the line of old idea of historic conservation and certainly did not guide monument-centric colonial efforts at restoration (Sinha and Harkness, 2006). On this line the Yamuna riverfront around the Taj Mahal is suggested as cultural heritage landscape'. This also raises the issue of suspicion of tension between the Hindus and the Muslims at some places (Sinha, 2005). Defining heritage territory under the strict control of heritage law will help avoiding conflicts and contestation together with active public participation

This can be exemplified with a case study of riverfront heritagescape of Varanasi where history, culture and the lifeways together resulted into evolution of a unique landscape. ie. faithscape (Singh, R.P.B. 2004). Studies dealing with the historical processes involved in assessing the heritage area of Champaner-Pavagadh, Gujarat. India refer the failure of the mechanism and also prioritization of the concern for heritage preservation (Sinha et al., 2004a, 2004b). Historical formation and the deterritorialisation of the Muslim minority in India, soon after independence have been noticed prominently resulting in diverse structure and forms of sacred landscape (Delage, R. 2007).

Following the scale of UNESCO World Heritage the riverfront of Varanasi is also considered as landscape

of contestation, which needs critical appraisal for urban-regional development (Singh, R.P.B. 2004a, 2007b, 2008f; also Dar. 2005). Maintenance of cultural mosaic, religious multiculturalism and blending of diversification and distinctiveness of lifeworld make this city eternal (Singh, R.P.B. and Singh, R.S. 2008). Study of another UNESCO site of Khajuraho refers to re-establishment of the ancient glories by re-interpretation of the old literature together with conservation strategy to save it (Singh. R.P.B. 2006e).

Based on the aesthetical and conservational studies of water with reference to design themes, illustrated with South Asian examples from medieval history it is noted that if history is any guide, water will not be a cause of war in the 21<sup>st</sup> century' (Wescoat, 2005). Inspired by the conservation work of Sir Bernard Feilden with a study of conserving Mughal Garden, it is concluded that historical water-works help us rediscover traditional methods of water conservation that ultimately enhance human experiences and understanding (Wescoat, 2006). Metaphorically, Indian landscape was an icon of garden as in Mughal period (16<sup>th</sup>-17<sup>th</sup> centuries). Emperors realized and used it as political metaphor. This study indicates the historical ways to project environmental well-being (Wescoat, 2007a). Recent explorations are made to understand and navigate the spectrum of cultural conflicts associated with landscape heritage conservation. To link the case of Champaner—Pavagadh with the theme of human rights, the six types of conflict examined, may be viewed as progression from cultural to socio-economic and ultimately to human rights.

## VARANASI, THE HOLY CITY & SYMBOL OF INDIAN CULTURE

Considered and mythologised as city of Shiva, Varanasi has been distinctively presented in the tradition of lithographs showing this city (Chakraverty, 2005). Since the last twenty the city is facing the problem of illegal encroachments and threats (Dar, 2005; also Doytchinov and Hohmann, 2004). Mahamaya temple is a representative of such a cultural symbol that is also a subject of threat (Dwivedi. 2005). The study of boatman and their role in the formation of life along the riverfront is itself a 'lifeworld' of his own and is considered to be a special feature (Doron, 2005a, 2005b). The riverfront of the Ganga at Varanasi is in itself a sacredscape where a unique faithscape emerged and constantly awakened by rituals performed there (Singh, R.P.B. 200c.. and 2007d).

The role of historicity and cultural patronage during 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> centuries has been a new wave of revitalizing the city's religious landscape and related architectural built-up; in fact in this period the city has been re-created to fit into the ancient panorama of its sacredscapes (Feitag, 2005). A monumental work that integrates architecture, photography, cosmology, culture and geography, illustrated with the pilgrimage routes and symbols in Banaras is an example of cultural geography of a city Gutschow, 2005).

The Heidelberg University has completed its 3-years project dealing with Visualised Space in Banaras: Images, Maps, and Representations (Gaenszle, and Gengnagel, 2006). Many other associated attributes of codifying the maps and processional routes, field study based on the ancient maps and texts have also added new dimension (Gengnagel, 2005a, 2005b, 2006). The behavioural study of pilgrims and tourists in Varanasi further support the image of the city as 'holy centre' and place of pilgrimages for Hindus and also for others (Rana, P.S. and Singh, R.P.B. 2004). The study of life style and lifeways of Muslim communities shows space affinity and temporal consequences that influenced Hindus and reciprocally influenced by too, thus emerged the multiplicity of culture (cf. Lee., 2005; Showeb. 2004-2005). Another study of daily data for continuous two year of the tourists and visitors are used to test the theory of Self Organized Criticality that supports the pattern and ordering of chaos and fractals (Malville, 2004; Malville, and Singh, 2004; Singh and Malville. 2005a). The spatial structure of the goddesses' sites in Banaras forms many such patterns, where shapes like triangle, square, circle, pentagon, hexagram. and other meet (Singh and Singh 2008a, 2008b, 2008c). The detailed analysis of nine mother goddesses in Banaras also supports the same pattern (Wilke, 2006). Similarly in case of sites associated to Shiva, Ganesha and Surya (sun god) in Banaras also form series of alignments that converge to various symbolic shapes (Singh, R.P.B. 2008a).

Even in the establishment and growth of the Banaras Hindu University. the archetypal cosmogonic design has been taken as a base for the basic plan (Singh.. R.P.B. 2007a). The city has maintained its cultural image through the process of spatial manifestation and set breathe of the Indian culture (Singh, R.P.B. 2007b). The 'id' of various cultural attributes and variety of landscapes has presented the amalgamation of culture where multiplicity of religion and society converges into mosaic (cf Mitchell and Singh 2005). Iconographic and cosmic design of goddesses in Varanasi reflected the deeper sense of cultural astronomy and positively corresponding alignments (Singh, and Singh, 2006). The role of goddess in Hindu society has a frame of consciousness that developed in the past and further emerged as a 'motherly force linking humanity to divinity' (Stille, 2004). To activate and re-energise such rituals many old healing trees and their products are still used (White. 2005). This study is further comparable and projected with the similarities and contrasts with the goddess territory of Vindhyachal, a neighbouring sacred territory which emerged in the frame of 'landscape as temple' and spatial manifestation of all the 52 Shaktipithas scattered all-over India (Singh, R.P.B. and Singh, R.S. 2008b, also 2008c)

## **GANDHI, A CULTURAL SYMBOL AND A VISION**

In the 21<sup>st</sup> century Mahatma Gandhi has been considered as icon of India and as a way to make this world more humane, peaceful and harmonious: that is how in geographical debate emphasis has been laid on his contribution to understand development, human development, ecological and political practices.

The making of one of modern India's most enduring political symbols, Khadi; a homespun, home-woven cloth has been explored with the background of image of Mahatma Gandhi who clothed simply in a loincloth and plying a spinning wheel as familiar around the world. Trivedi's work brings together social history and the study of visual culture to account for khadi as both symbol and commodity (Trivedi, 2007) Weber (2006) noted that it is difficult to understand Gandhi without understanding his spiritual quest. Gandhi's importance as an environmental thinker may be marked in terms of the strategies and vistas opened up by his pursuits, both public and private, towards a sustained animal and environmental liberation struggle. In fact, Gandhi's environmental thinking is rooted in his larger philosophical and moral thinking.

Gandhi's thought on ethical and humanistic frame of political thought is of a state consisting of self-governing village communities small enough for love' to be a practical reality and for communal approval and disapproval to be effective moral forces without the need for routine and formalized coercion. The ends of such a state will be achieved not through threats and force, but through persuasion and consensus (Adams and Dyson. 2003). Against Nehru's high modernist vision, Gandhi's postmodern view of India's future has been more suited to India but it is tyranny that has never been used (Rudolph and Rudolph, 2006). These ideas have not yet examined in the field of geography.

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### Corresponding Author

**Rajender Kumar\***

Research Scholar, Department of Geography, CMJ University, Shillong, Meghalaya

[dr.ranga333@gmail.com](mailto:dr.ranga333@gmail.com)