

## A Study on Awareness And Perceptions of Temple Heritage

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### Abstract:

Religious travel and visit to temples has been undertaken since ancient times and is thus one of the common ritual in the Hindu culture. This exploratory ethnographic study aims to understand the visitation experience and level of awareness of heritage and history of temples dedicated to Hindu Gods. This research aims to assess the difference of opinion amongst the various generations and the reasons for their indifference regarding information pertaining to the art and architecture of the temples. During the fieldwork, it was observed that most of the visitors to the temples were short of the knowledge and historical significance. The findings revealed that most of the temples do not provide this information on the premise nor do they have any means and arrangements with tour operating agencies to help tourist and local visitors. The researcher studied the causes and suggested ways of increasing the flow of information to the visitors.

**Keywords:** Awareness, Temple, Heritage, Perception, History

### Introduction:

A temple is a structure built with a purpose and has always remained dedicated to religious and/or spiritual activities such as prayer, meditation, sacrifice and worship. There are billions of temples all over India. *Kuldevata Pujan* is performed with utmost reverence in the Indian households and temples. In this regard, the processions of deity and celebrations in their honour give joy to the mind, increases positivity and provides peace. This tradition of *Upaasanai*, i.e. a method for approaching or getting close to a deity is one of the most important aspects of *Sanaatana Dharma*.

Indian society believed in personal advancement as well as social harmony. This deep understanding provide desirable satisfaction for enriching various sect in people's lives. Due to the periodic attacks on Hindu religion by foreign invaders, framework of the society was heavily shattered. However, the temples and the Gurukuls (schools established for vedic studies) came forward to hold the cultural values, traditions and festivities. Pooja, Kuldharm, Kulachar were strictly observed by people for happiness and peace in the *Grihasthashrama*. Thus, worship has played a major role in maintaining religious practices in India.

Temple is a social institution, it reflects a combination of dharma, beliefs, values and the way of life. A temple also reflects cosmic philosophy and its effects on the universe. The purpose of a temple goes beyond just the social rituals and is also extended to spiritual life. Some temples have served as a venue to mark meditation and health centres, festivities; to celebrate arts through drama, dance and music, wedding, naming and threading ceremonies; to study Vedas in Pathshalas; to perform individual rituals viz. Homa or Yajnya, Abhishek etc. Thus, the temples have served as a center of important social, economic, artistic and intellectual functions. So, the temples play a significant role in the transformation of culture and economics. They act as networking sites and bring people together. That is why, the temple culture cannot be associated merely with the rituals, fairs and festivals but should also be seen for its multifunctional dimensions.

Heritage is defined as the function of passing on the knowledge to the next generations. The concept of heritage contains both intangible elements i.e. art, rituals, festivals etc. and tangible elements i.e. temples, sanctuaries, bridges, monuments etc. This cultural asset should be accepted as a heritage by society and should be protected by society.

Awareness is a significant component in the protection of temple heritage. The people may harm it when they have not enough conscious. When there is not sufficient awareness for this heritage, these are on the risk of being extinction.

In addition, most of the temple visitors are not aware of the wealth of temple heritage and architecture. Temple heritage along with temple history includes temple art, temple architecture and iconography.

❖ **Temple history** includes name of a temple, its period of construction, who built the temple, the geographical and religious requirement of the region, the raw material used, the petron behind the temple i.e. the king and his ideals, the purpose of the structure etc. One can get more information about a particular temple from *Sthalapurana*. Sthala means place or region and purana means story associated with sthala. *Sthalapurana* mainly describes historical significance of a temple and also the sacredness of the region. These are written by scholars and along with history they enrich our knowledge of local customs, culture and unique practices associated with the temple. Another source of information is temple library. Here, we may get manuscripts (means hand written documents) and manuals.

❖ **Temple architecture** includes basic elements of Hindu temples :

Garbhagriha—Literally means a womb house. It is a cave like sanctum which houses the main icon of a temple.

Mandapa—The entrance to the temple after ardhmandapa.

Antarala—It is a place between the garbhagriha and mandapa.

Shikara or Vimana—It is a mountain like spire on top. In north India, it is called Shikhara and is curved in shape. In the south India, it is a pyramidal tower and is called Vimana.

Amalaka—Stone like disc seen at the top of a temple.

Kalash—It is the topmost part of a temple.

Jagati—This is common in north Indian temples and is usually a raised platform.

Vahana and Vahana Mandapa—It is the vehicle of the main deity on which gods and goddesses are supposed to ride or be seated which along with the small mandapa or dhwaja and are placed axially.

Panchayatana – Main shrine is built on a rectangular plinth with four subsidiary shrines that are smaller and at the four corners of a temple. Thus, there are a total of five shrines and hence the name Panchayatana. (Panch = Five)

- There are three types of temple architecture or styles :  
Nagar style, Dravid style, and Vesara style.

Nagar style –The Nagar style is associated with Northern parts of India. In this style, the structure is divided into two buildings, the main shrine and an adjoining mandapa. The difference between these two buildings is the shape of shikhara. In the main shrine, a bell shaped structure is added. Nagar style temples are mainly formed of four chambers viz. Garbhagriha, Jagmohan, Natyamandir, Bhogmandir. The plan is a square with number of gradual projections in the middle of each side, by which the shikhara is recognized as triratha, pancharatha, saptaratha, navaratha.

Dravid style— The Dravid style is associated with Southern parts of India. The most important characteristic of Dravid temple architecture is that these temples have more than four sides in the sanctum or garbhagriha and vimana are pyramidal. Vimana is built above the garbhagriha. Decorative Pillars are massively used in this style. Circular Pradakshina path is around the garbhagriha. The entire structure is encircled within a courtyard surrounded by high walls. Gopuram is the high gate in the courtyard which allows passage of people.

Vesara style – The Vesara style is a fusion style of both Nagar and Dravid styles of architecture. Many temples in Central India and Deccan have used the Vesara style of temple architecture. In this style structures are finely finished, figures are much decorated and well - polished.

❖ **Temple art-** includes decorations with beautiful carvings, paintings and sculptures. These are found on the inner and outer walls of the temples, on the ceiling or vitana, on the shikharas of the temples. It includes mural panels, decorative panels, vitana decorative elements (e.g. flowers, geometric designs), makartorana, decorative pillars, panels of epic scenes, panels

of narrative scenes (e.g.jatak), different humans, animals, birds images etc. Images of sursundaris, yaksha-yakshi, gandharva, apsaras, dwarfpals, ashtanayikas, dikpals, saptamatrika and other deities. Their relative meaning is an interesting aspect of Iconography. Sometimes we can see contemporary images or panels which indicate historical events e.g. war, special festival etc. The sculptural decoration on the main doorway also includes various kinds of motifs like birds, attendants, purna-ghatas, mithun figures i.e. couples, swastikas, foliated scrolls and images of river Ganga with her vehicle Makara and river Yamuna with her vehicle Tortoise.

- ❖ **Iconography** – The temple and its iconography is an integral part of Indian culture and heritage. The temples are built to keep the images of the deities. Previously, icons were typically made of stone. For ritualistic worship, bronze icons were used. Deities have their own particular mudra, asana, symbol, dress, ornaments, aayudha, vahanas, avatar, ayudhapurushas etc.

Mudras – Dhyanamudra, Varad mudra.

Aasana -Lalitasana, Padmasana, Yogasana, Sukhasana etc

Symbol and Aayudha—For Shaiva and Shakta (damru, trishul, noose, ankush, baana, sword etc.) For Vaishnav (shankha, chakra, gada, padma)

Vahana – It is the vehicle of the main deity. (Shiva- Nandi, Vishnu-Garud, Shakti- Tiger etc.)

Avatar – Incarnations

Ayudhpurusha—manifestation of a weapon as god man.

## Background of study:

This research was undertaken with an aim to study the awareness about the Temple and Heritage with respect to Art, Architecture and Iconography. This study does not extend over heritage preservation, which is a missing link. It was observed that Heritage Awareness in India, natives and international tourist are very different. We have architectural marvels, but it is not transferred to the society and require efforts from local as well as central tourism agencies to run an awareness campaign.

## Literature Review:

There has been collective literature found on the cultural heritage, but study regarding awareness of the temple heritage are limited. In the book by Shika Jain, India: UNESCO World Heritage Sites, she has discussed about world heritage sites in India. The world heritage sites by The United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) aims to promote awareness and preservation of tangible and intangible cultural heritage. UNESCO has given 38 sites in India; all are presented in this book together with commentary and photographs. The author emphasizes that the cultural sites in India are a rich repository of country's long and layered history.

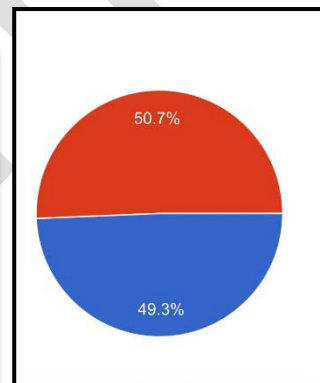
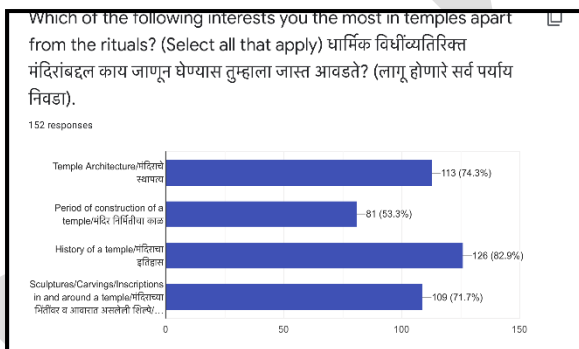
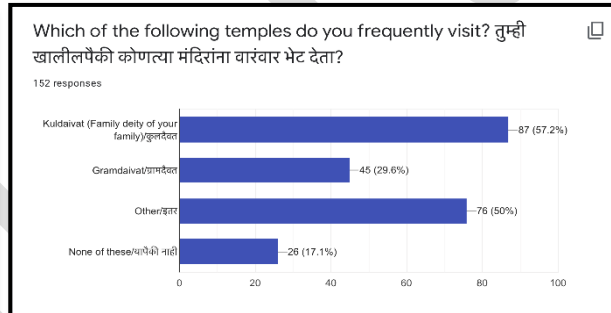
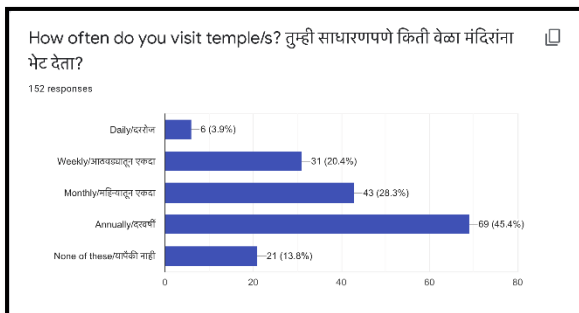
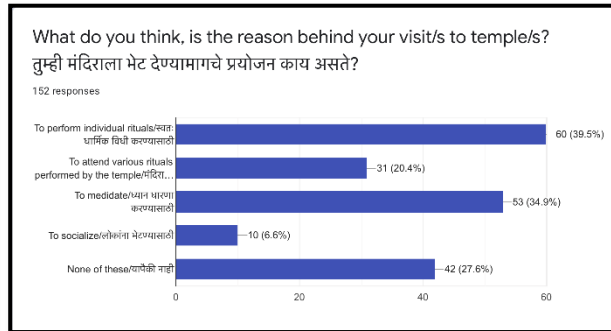
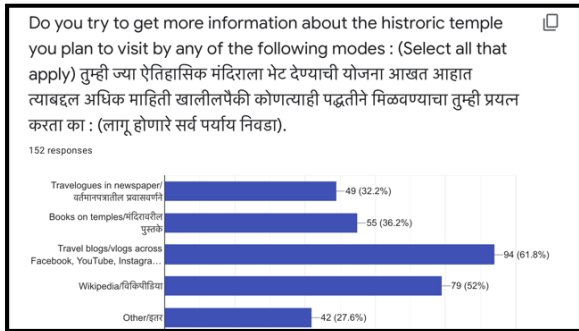
It is found that a good amount of published literature which concentrated on the history, architecture, sculptures, iconography, and cultural heritage of the temples.

- 1) Marathi Book named 'Mandir Kase Pahave' by Dr.G.B.Deglurkar focusses on how to see temple. This book gives general characteristics of the temple style viz. Nagar, Dravid, Vesara. It contains information about structure of the temple from plinth to Shikhara, different sculptures and images with photographs.
- 2) Another Marathi Book named 'Prachin Mandire, Murti, ani Bhavpurna Shilpe' by Mr. Udayan Indurkar. This book discusses sculptures and images in and around the temple. This book contains an explanatory information about many narrative scenes for e.g. Gajasurvadh – Verul, Andhakasurvadh – Verul, Arjunanugraha – Mahabalipuram and many more. According to the author, Indian temples have everlasting influence in our culture; temple architecture is closely related with spirituality and philosophy.
- 3) Marathi book named 'Bharatiya Murtishastra' by N.P.Joshi has elaborated iconography of deities with literary and archeological tools.

## Research Methodology:

Quantitative method is used to gather data on Indology Survey—A Case Study On Temples. The survey method and questionnaire tool were used for collecting data. A closed-ended online survey questionnaire was designed using Google form for data collection from the respondents. A random sample was collected using a questionnaire. Total of 152 responses were analysed.

The survey results are as follows:



## Observations:

Almost 74.3 % respondents prefer to go historical places than pilgrimage tours.

61.8% respondents try to get information about historical temples from social media viz.travel blogs, travel vlogs across Face Book, You Tube, Instagram etc.

32.9% respondents are interested in the history of temples than temple art and architecture.

Maximum % of respondents i.e. 57.2%, have visited or visit only their Kuldaivat temple, out of which 45.4% visit once in a year and 39.5% visit only to perform individual rituals. They are not interested in attending rituals like Pooja, Palakhi, Satsang performed in the temple.

Interesting result is that, 34.9% respondents have visited or prefer to visit temples only for meditation.

50.7% respondents are not interested to visit temples with an expert or a guide to get more knowledge about history and heritage of the temple.

### Conclusion:

- 1) The younger generation (below 40) has acquired basic knowledge on the temple heritage or history, but senior citizens have been attracted to the site only due to its religious values.
- 2) Though the temple management has implemented an adequate approach to information boards, most of the visitors do not access to this information. So such visitors need to provide the service of local guides in order to understand the value of the temple heritage.
- 3) Perceptions of visitors regarding temple heritage---The community assumed that the existence of the temple complex is only a historical heritage, which is nothing but an ancient building. They have not realized that the historical heritage is the national and international tourism destinations that has potential to improve the economy of local communities.
- 4) The results indicate that respondents who visited heritage sites and temples were more likely to be aware than those who did not.
- 5) The finding of this study provides important information for Ministry of Education, Ministry of Culture, Ministry of Tourism and Tourist Companies.

### Recommendations:

- 1) People are unaware about temple's actual purpose, with historical, social and folklore significance. Protection and Conservation of temple heritage is more difficult task, but role of the Government and voluntary organizations is important. Temples across India need to be developed in such a way, wherein they are centers of culture, spirituality and heritage. To achieve this, everyone including Government must participate and devote adequate attention. People must take interest to develop these social institutions with necessary financial help, spiritual
- 2) With the efforts of some Government or voluntary organisations; to provide, to educate tourism awareness education to the community. Thus, the tourism awareness education may play an important role in supporting temple tourism development.
- 3) Photo exhibitions and Information boards on temple art, architecture and iconography for tourists, officials, public, and students can be organized for heritage awareness.
- 4) The awareness that the existence of the temple can be a new source of income eventually. So economic role of temples is an important aspect. As a result of the increasing awareness of temple heritage, so many visitors will want to visit these places. An entrepreneur like lodging, restaurants, souvenirs, entertainment, small shopkeepers around the temple (temple market or temple centered trade), temples as financiers and treasurers, priests, temple kitchen – Prasadam making and selling, maintenance of Dharmashalas – tourist accommodation and others will develop and create possible employment.
- 5) So as to run various activities, like cleaning, maintenance of the building, temple office, temple library, temple may act as an employer.
- 6) Promotion of pilgrimage, fairs, festivals and religious tourism may encourage visitors.
- 7) A meditation room should be provided.
- 8) Visitors must visit temples with an expert or a guide to get more knowledge about its history and heritage. They must be encouraged through advertising and by raising awareness about its advantages. It must be ensured that the expert or guide is well trained and knowledgeable.

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