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PILGRIMAGES, SACRED PLACES AND PATHWAY TO RWYC
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PILGRIMAGES, SACRED PLACES AND PATHWAY TO RWYC

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HINDU PILGRIMAGE PLACES & ARCHETYPAL REPRESENTATION: THE PATHWAY TO RWYC (RECONNECTING WITH YOUR CULTURE)

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ABSTRACT

Hinduism is experienced through its distinct spirituality, the vividness of sacredness, symbolic architecture, and serene landscapes. The temples and shrines in Hinduism preserve the coded sacrosanct messages, consisting of distinctions and a variety of symbols, designs, iconography, aesthetic valuers, mythological contexts, depictions of historical and literary events, and oral traditions. Hindu temples communicate divine and universal messages by unifying and amalgamating these elements and notions. Nine of the 43 UNESCO World Heritage Sites (WHS, July 2024) in India fall in the category of the religious heritage of Hinduism, i.e., Chola temples, Hampi shrines, Mamallapuram, Pattadakal, Khajuraho, Sun temple at Konark, Elephanta caves, Ellora caves, and Hoyasala temples (3 together). To date, 56 properties are listed in the WHS's Tentative List from India, and 10 of them are associated with Hinduism; they are Bishunpur, Ekambra, Srirangapattam, Kakatiya, Sri Ranganathasvamy Temple at Srirangam, Majuli Island, Bhojeshvara, Sun Temple-Modhera, Virabhadra, and Kanchipuram. In Southeast Asia, there are five religious WH sites, viz. Prambanan Temple (Indonesia), Angkor Wat (Cambodia), Pashupatinath Temple and other temples (Nepal), Mỹ Son Sanctuary (Viet Nam), and Mother Temple of Besakih (Bali, Indonesia). In most cases, their essential properties represent cultural icons and possess universal values; however, they are still not inscribed in the WHL. The process of 'getting inscription' becomes too complicated due to internal politics, governmental priorities, and lack of coordination. As recent discourses identify the unique characteristics and holy-heritage value of Hinduism and its temples, it will affirm the value of the divine (e.g., metaphysical) in the human experience. As a result, pilgrimage and heritage tourism may promote and contribute to global understanding—passing on the pathway to RWYC.

Keywords: Heritage ecology, Cultural wholes, faithscapes, Hinduism, Sacredscapes, Riverfront heritagescapes, Hindu gods, Southeast Asia, Universal messages.

HERITAGESCAPES, SACRED SITES, AND HINDUISM: THE PERSPECTIVE

Various forces can threaten the preservation, restoration, and maintenance of religious sites, including globalisation, democratisation, countervailing community choices, the priority of a market economy, the commodification of culture, and the politics of religious and ethnic groups. (This article identifies notable examples of Hindu temples and associated sacred spaces in the sequence.)

Cultural heritage, especially of religious built forms, has been historically significant. However, beginning in the nineteenth century and continuing today, perhaps partially in response to "modernity," cultural tourism has become more popular and explicitly reinforces the value, use, and conservation of religion; tourists who appreciate cultural developments increasingly comprehend the significant role of religious beliefs and practices in shaping local geographies through physical structures and associated rituals and performances. Political control, identity, hegemony, and social security are all religiously symbolised (see Harvey 1979). Monuments and buildings are recurring testaments of successive generations, typically of the dominant community or a ruler's patronage, each, in turn, manifesting the then-current understanding of the human place in and of nature.

These sacred built structures are, symbolically, the repositories of knowledge about the former understanding of our planet as a 'home' and our relationship with it as an 'actor'. In a broad sense, such heritage refers to places where the spirit of nature and culture meet and are memorised and maintained by rituals and festivities. Together,

they shape the interactions between humanity and divinity and thus form an environment of *faithscapes* (Singh 1997). Broadly, sacrosanct built forms possess at least four attributes:

    (i)   *external* (e.g., architecture, visibility, design, environmental context),

    (ii)   *internal* (images, association with divinities, aesthetics),

    (iii)   *eternal* (e.g., universal message, inherent/ imposed meanings, spiritual feelings, cross-cultural context and linkages), and

    (iv) *manifest* (e.g., adherents' belief systems and supporting mythologies). However, the transfer of context and content from one to another is often confused, whether intentional or not, and sometimes results in conflict and contradictions between adherents. Similarly, signs, words, and symbols representing one set of believers-built heritage and related inherent values may differ from those of non-believers, tourists, or other groups (Vukonić 2006, p. 244).

The four basic issues for expressing representations and discursive construction of religious heritage include (i) understanding cultural significance, (ii) information on the value of heritage, (iii) conservation in response to religiosity-spirituality, and (iv) cultural responsibility (Waterton, Smith and Campbell 2006, p. 350).

Some heritage practices (and religio-ritual traditions) commonly associated with an ancient period were constantly in flux, even as they passed from generation to generation. Lowenthal (1998, p. 226) argues that "heritage, far from being fatally predetermined or God-given, is in large measure our own marvellously malleable creation". Of course, heritage is not an innate or primordial phenomenon; people created and converted it into symbolic form and, in many cases, associated it with a belief system and its symbolic expressions and mythologies. The understanding of religious heritage as an expression of culture is primarily that of a community or society with a relatively agreed-upon set of universal values. Conflict and contention are possible, if not probable, when one culture interacts with another culture that holds different values, mainly if control or assets are at stake. This condition is more prevalent in the built religious heritage landscape in South and South East Asia, exemplified by varying forms of Hinduism, a virtual ensemble of various Hindu traditions.

In Sanātana Hindu tradition, heritage is called '*dharohara*', a combination of two words, i.e., *dharā*- ('the mother Earth/Lord Vishnu who holds'), and -*ihara* ('endeavour of identity through time'). The word also carries the meaning of 'bearing' and 'preserving' the surface of the mother Earth. It is best explained in terms of the 'root' ('*shrota*') and 'identity' ('*asmitā*') — a framework of continuity of inter-connectedness and a personality of culture. In Asia, whether significant religious tradition elements should include heritage environments is debated (Singh & Rana 2019, pp. 152-153). Altogether, the Indian word *dharohara* thus connotes a broad and expanded frame; therefore, it should be better translated as heritagescapes (mostly in plural) and be explained in the purview of 'heritage ecology' concerning 'deep-spiritual geography' (Singh 1995, p. 197).

Religious traditions and customs result from popular habituation, an informal process (Eiter 2004, p. 173). Statutory law, in contrast, applies to all members of a society, regardless of their roots. Consequently, conflicts can occur in all heritagescapes when divergent practices clash; however, conflicts can be formed by recording claims by individual religious groups.

INDIA'S HINDU RELIGIOUS WORLD HERITAGE SITES

India's Hinduism is simultaneously and inseparably cultural and religious, tangible and intangible, historic and present. As a result, India's Hindus possess colourful heritagescapes, a combination of mystic-religious sacredscapes and ancient monuments, all drawn from a variety of literature and traditions. The latest UNESCO World Heritage Sites lists 1,223 properties, 43 of which are in India (2024, cf. Fig. 1). Nine of these 43 sites are associated with Hinduism. Chola temples, Hampi shrines, Mamallapuram, Pattadakal, Khajuraho, Sun temple at Konark, Elephanta caves, Ellora caves, and Hoyasala temples (3 together) (cf. Table 1, cf. Appendix). Additionally, 51 sites in India are listed on the WHS Tentative List, of which 10 are associated with Hinduism. Bishunpur, Ekambra, Srirangapattan, Kakatiya, Sri Ranganathasvamy Temple at Srirangam, and Majuli Island (cf. Table 2, cf. Appendix).

Hindu religious World Heritage Sites may further be categorised, generally speaking, according to their association with major deities (images) and their affinities or avatars. Consequently, though monistic, the Hindu religion appears polytheistic, where one God dominates the sacred territory on cosmic principles and other auxiliary or associated gods have supporting functions. Many Hindus focus on one "god" after another, what Max Müller termed '*kathenotheism*'. That is how Hindus are often seen as *Pañchadevapūjaka* (worshippers of five gods together) after they have sequentially devoted before the images of the typical five categorical divinities, i.e., Shiva (god of dissolution-recreation), Surya (Sun-god), Ganesha (elephant-headed god), Devi (mother goddess), and Vishnu (god of sustenance and life) (cf. Table 3, cf. Appendix):

    (i) *Shiva*, one of the Hindu pantheons of gods, is known as the cosmic dancer and god of dissolution-recreation (cf. Fig. 2). Five of the 8 WHS are predominantly associated with Shiva. The three heads (*Trimūrti*, in Elephanta Cave, no. 7) represent three essential aspects of Shiva: creation, protection, and dissolution. The temple of Brihadishvara (Chola, at Thanjavur) is built on granite and sandstone slabs and is surrounded by life-size images of eight deities protecting the temple; their placement conforms to axial and symmetrical rules of geometry. Virupakha (Hampi) symbolises the god of progeny who controls the river Pampa/Tungabhadra. The nine Shiva temples at

Pattadakal represent various forms and stories associated with Shiva. Ardhanarishvara (in Elephanta cave) represents the sublimated form of Shiva, who controls two forces of nature, i.e., male (*purusha*) and female (*prakriti*). Shiva is also represented here as a cosmic dancer (*Naṭarāja*), lord of yoga, and killer of a demon. Kailashanatha Temple (Ellora), incorporating Mt Kailasha (the resort) and Shiva, representing possibly the world's largest monolithic structure, is carved out of one single basalt rock-cut, with four parts, i.e., the body of the temple, the entrance gate, the Nandi shrine, and a group of five shrines surrounding the courtyard.

Fig. 1. India-Bharat: UNESCO World Heritage Sites, 2024

Fig. 2. Shiva as Cosmic Dancer, Natarajeshvara.
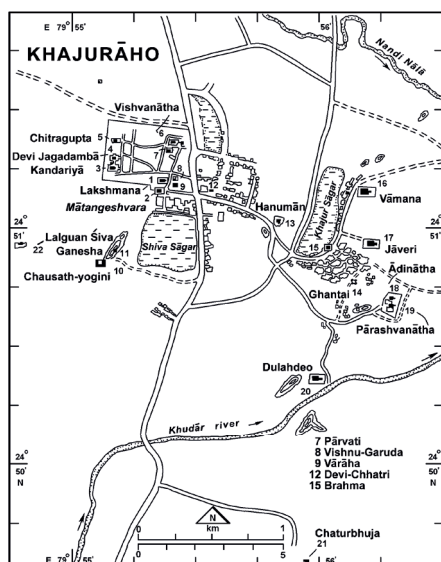
Fig. 3. Khajuraho: Location of temples.

Fig. 4. Khajuraho - Matangeshvara (Shiva), an active temple.

(ii) *Shiva* and *Vishnu* (the god of sustenance) together or side-by-side is the other prevailing depiction in the religious WHS. The territory of Mahabalipuram presents both images, i.e., of Shiva (Shore temple) and Vishnu-Varaha (Boar-form Vishnu, rock-cut temple, and Thirukadalmallai temple). The giant open-air reliefs such as the famous 'Descent of the Ganga' and other sculptures depicting stories from the *Mahābhārata* (e.g., Pancha Rathas, the five chariots) show the close relationship between the Shaivism and Vaishnavism groups of Hindu tradition. Similarly, the religious heritage buildings at Khajuraho present a combination of three religious groups, viz. Shaivism, Vaishnavism, and

Shaktism (goddess-adherents). Of the twenty-two temples in Khajuraho (cf. Figs. 3 and 4), seven are dedicated to Shiva, seven to Vishnu, four to Devi (goddess), one to the Sun god, and the remaining three to Jain Tirthankaras. Of them, only Matangeshvara is functionally active in terms of rituals and festivities. The location of these temples is formerly interconnected from a perspective of cosmic geometry. However, to comprehend the spiritual connections, we need a deeper understanding of how the human and the divine interact (cf. Singh 2009a, p. 75).

On the WHS Tentative List, Ekambra (Bhubaneshwar, the Temple City) contains a multitude of Shiva and Vishnu statues, including the most famous one, the Harihara image ('Shiva-Vishnu in one'), in the Lingaraj temple. The depicted superimposition and integration of Shiva and Vishnu facilitate and realise the cooperation and interaction of their respective adherents. Similarly, Shiva (Hoyasaleshvara) and Vishnu (Chennakeshava I) are treated equally in the Hoyasala area. The sculptures and frescoes of Vishnu's incarnation depict stories from the epics the *Rāmāyaṇa* and the *Mahābhārata*. Statuary of Garuda (Vishnu) and Ganesha (Shiva) protect their master deity and are worshipped together.

(iii) *The Sun-God Surya* is an auxiliary image in most Hindu temples. However, at Konark (cf. Fig. 5), a 13th-century Surya temple is riding in a seven-spirited horse-chariot of twelve pairs of exquisitely decorated wheels, representing 7 days and 12 months, respectively. Since the images were removed from the main temple long ago, the sanctuary is no longer regarded as a holy place or functional temple. In the northeast corner of the Konark compound, a modem building houses the old doorway arch showing the planets of Hindu mythology, i.e., Sun, Moon, Mercury, Venus, Mars, Jupiter, and Saturn. In personified form, they are seated cross-legged on lotuses, each carrying a water pot in the left hand and a rosary in the right (Singh 1997, p. 124).
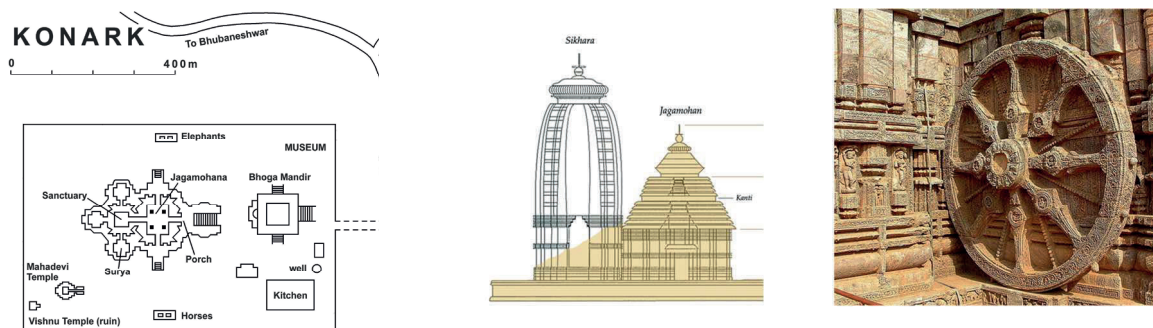

Fig. 5. Konark, the Sun temple: Spatial plan; Architectural design; and the Sun wheel at a corner.

(iv) *Vishnu*, God of sustenance, in reincarnated form *Krishna*. As a patron deity, Vishnu is represented in four places on the WHS Tentative List. At Srirangapattanam, Vishnu is reclining on a snake bed with his two wives on one side, Sridevi ('goddess of wealth') and Bhū Devī ('mother Earth'), and Brahma ('the creator'). The surrounding shrines include images of Narsimha (a 'Man-Lion form'), child Krishna, Srinivas, Hanuman ('monkey god'), and Garuda (an 'eagle-man' vehicle of Vishnu). The temple complex of Ranganathasvamy at Srirangam is one of the largest religious complexes in the world. It contains a large temple dedicated to Vishnu, representing his many forms like Narsimha, Rama, Hayagriva, Krishna, and Dhanavantari. This sacred compound has 21 *gopurams* (towers), 39 pavilions, 50 shrines, the *Ayirām kāl Maṅḍapam* (a hall of 1000 pillars), and several small water bodies. The 1000-pillar hall is made of granite with sculptures of horses riding, and it is unique among all the Hindu religious buildings.

Majuli Island, famous as the Brahmaputra River's largest island, is a tentative-listed natural site. It has 22 *Sattrās* (monasteries of socio-religious institutions) dedicated to the 16th-century Vaishnavite socio-religious reformer and saint Srimanta Shankar Deb (CE 1449–1568). He taught that serenity can be achieved in nature through religious rituals and festivities. Regrettably, conflict arose between Christians and Hindus when the former immigrated onto the island. Subsequent divisions in local politics, contentious diversification, and, ironically, wide-scale indifference to the importance of religious heritage have hindered this site's potential to be listed finally in the WHL.

The small town of Bishnupur, about 130 kilometres northwest of Kolkata, is famous for temples of terracotta and lateritic earth. In addition to carving stone, artisans developed the technique of baking the area's rich red earth to make long-lasting bricks and sculptures. They focused on depicting the life of Vishnu, his principal incarnation, Krishna, and aspects of everyday life, like bullock carts, riverboats, and hunting scenes.

(v) *Goddess/ Devi*. In most cases and religious heritage sites, the female aspect of major deities is represented as a goddess or a *devī*. However, the Svayambhu Alyam ('Mother Earth'—*Bhū-Devī*) temple, in affinity with Svayambhu Gudi and Rudreshvara (both forms of Shiva) at Kakatiya, contains unique depictions.

Fig. 6. Chola temple (Shiva), Airavateshvara – one among three inscribed in the UNESCO World Heritage List.
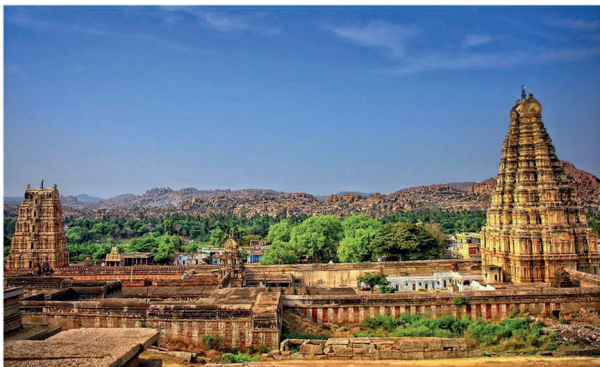
Fig. 7. Hampi, Virupakha temple: An overview of the compound; and a sacred structure in the inner court.

Fig. 8. Monolithic temples and structures at Mamallapuram: the ascent of the Ganga River; and standing elephant.
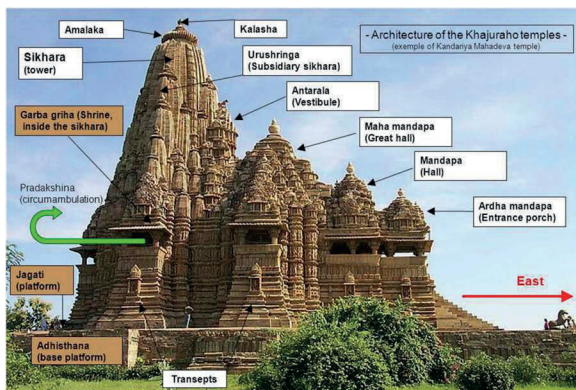
Fig. 9. Khajuraho: architectural plan of Kandariya Mahadeva temple; and front view of the Lakshmana temple.
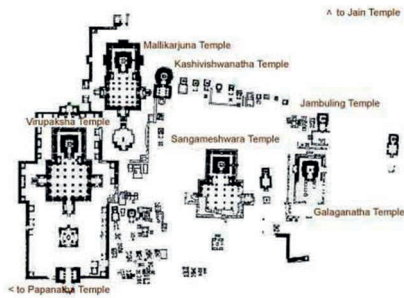
Fig. 10. Pattadakal temples: the spatial plan; structure of inner courtyard; and divine sculptures.

Fig. 11. Elephanta cave Temples: the three entrances; the Trimurti Shiva image; and dancing Shiva.
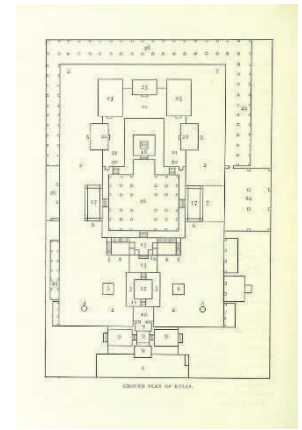
Fig. 12. Ellora cave, Kailashanatha Temple: the main temple; inner structure; and spatial overview of the plan.
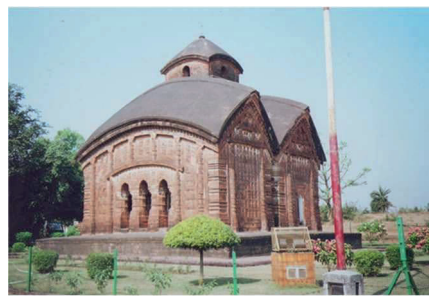
Fig. 13. Bishnupur, Terracotta Temples: an overview of the temple; a similar building; and image of lying Vishnu.

Fig. 14. Ekambra (Lingaraja Temple), an Odisha temple complex: the three perspectives of different areas inside.

Fig. 15. Hoyasala Temples: Uma Maheshvara; the main temple in the compound; and dancing Shiva.

Fig. 16. Srirangapattanam: an overview of the temple; the upper part of the main gateway; and the lying Vishnu.

Fig. 17. Srirangapattanam Temples: the front of the main complex; the Chariot; shrine dedicated to Shiva & Nandi.

Fig. 18. Ranganathswamy temple, Srirangam: the bird's eye view of the temple complex; and the lying Vishnu.

Fig. 19. Majuli Island, Assam: Dakhinapat Sattra (monastery); Auniati Sattra; a typical saint's *ashrama*.

HINDU RELIGIOUS WORLD HERITAGE SITES OUTSIDE OF INDIA

Starting around 200 BCE and continuing until around the CE 15th century, Southeast Asia was under Indian influence through India's trade, cultural, and political relations. Consequently, Hindu-Buddhist beliefs and practices were absorbed by local polities, cultures, and religions throughout Southeast Asia. Of course, Buddhism eventually prevailed in the region, but Hindu temples, sculptures, and architecture have been reasonably preserved. Among such religious WHS, five are noteworthy, viz. Prambanan Temple (Indonesia), Angkor Wat (Cambodia), Pashupatinath Temple and other temples (Nepal), Mỹ Son Sanctuary (Viet Nam), and Mother Temple of Besakih (Bali, Indonesia) (cf. Table 4, cf. Appendix). The important characteristics and contemporary concerns are noted below:

(i) **Prambanan Temple Complex, Central Java, Indonesia**. Prambanan Temple complex consists of 224 small temples, built during the heyday of Sailendra's powerful dynasty in Java in the CE 9th century. The main structures include the Prambanan Temple (also called Loro Jonggrang), Sewu Temple, Bubrah Temple, and Lumbung Temple. The Hindu temples are decorated with reliefs and masterpieces of stone carving, illustrating the *Rāmāyaṇa* epic's Indonesian version. The images are primarily of Shiva, his assistants, and associates. The earthquake of 27th May 2006 destroyed the central Shiva temple, which has yet to be restored. One enclosed cluster of temples dedicated to the three primordial Hindu gods and three small temples dedicated to their "animal vehicles" (Bull for Shiva, Swan for Brahma, and Eagle for Vishnu) is noteworthy. Other minor temples were at the entrance gates or outside the central enclosure. The Shiva temple has four statues: located in the central chamber is the Shiva statue; in the north chamber stands the Devi Durga Mahisasuramardini (goddess) statue; in the west chamber stands the Ganesha ('elephant-headed god', son of Shiva) statue; and the south chamber contains the statue of Agastya, a great mythical devotee of Shiva. The other two temples enshrine images of Brahma and Vishnu, respectively. In the Vishnu temple, the story of Kresnayana (stories of Krishna, a form of Vishnu) is carved, while the Brahma temple houses the continuous story of the epic *Rāmāyaṇa*. The temples of Shiva, Vishnu, and Brahma are all decorated with reliefs illustrating the *Rāmāyaṇa* period [history of the Hindu Bhagavān—Lord- God's incarnation] Rāma, written around 300 BCE). In 2007 and 2008, those responsible for the spatial planning aspects of heritage sites determined that Prambanan's temple compounds and related areas were a strategic national asset warranting protection, integrated management, and preservation.
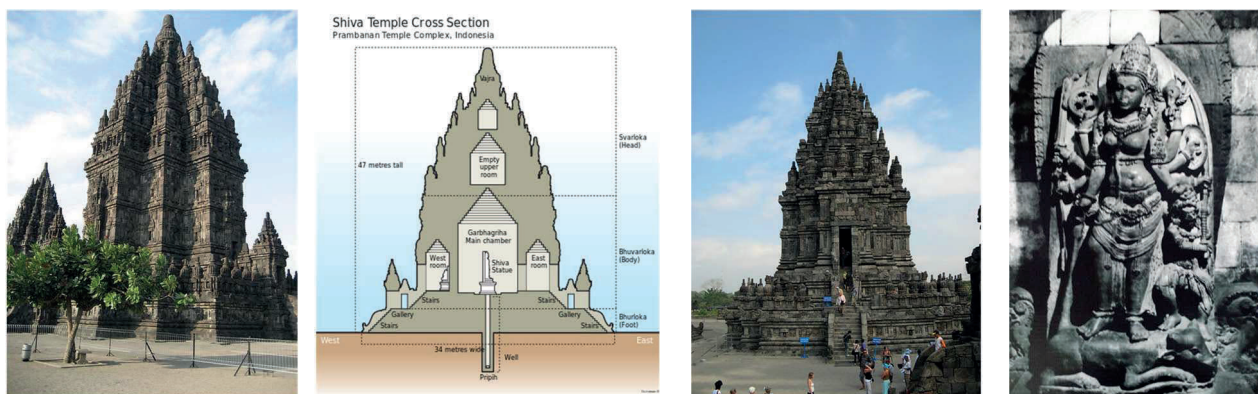
Fig. 20. Prambanan Temple Complex: the rear-view; the cross-section; front view; the goddess Durga.

(ii) **Angkor Wat, Cambodia**. Angkor Wat is the principal temple complex of Cambodia, once serving as the seat of the Khmer Empire. In the 12th century, Suryavarman II dedicated it to Vishnu, the god of preservation, breaking from the Shaiva tradition of previous kings. Though Angkor Wat was subsequently used for Theravada Buddhist worship, it remains the largest existing Hindu temple complex. A rare architectural achievement, the carvings on the main Angkor Wat temple walls tell the stories of Vishnu, also in his reincarnated forms, from the ancient Hindu epics, the *Rāmāyaṇa* and the *Mahābhārata*, dating from ca. fifteenth century BCE. The Angkor Wat main temple, which

has a high classical style of Khmer architecture, is the best-preserved and is the only one to have remained a significant religious centre since its construction. Several temples of Angkor Wat depart from the typical eastern orientation, suggesting that Angkor Wat's alignment was due to its dedication to Vishnu, who was associated with the west. Virtually all its surfaces, columns, lintels, and roofs are carved. Miles of reliefs illustrate scenes from ancient Hindu literature, including unicorns, gryphons, winged dragons pulling chariots, warriors following an elephant-mounted leader, and celestial dancing girls with elaborate hairstyles.

Fig. 21. Angkor Wat, Cambodia: front view of the temple; the ancient Ta Prohm temple—ruins of the inner part.

Fig. 22. Angkor Wat, Cambodia: image of the Mahābhārata war; fresco depicting Vishnu and Lakshmi.

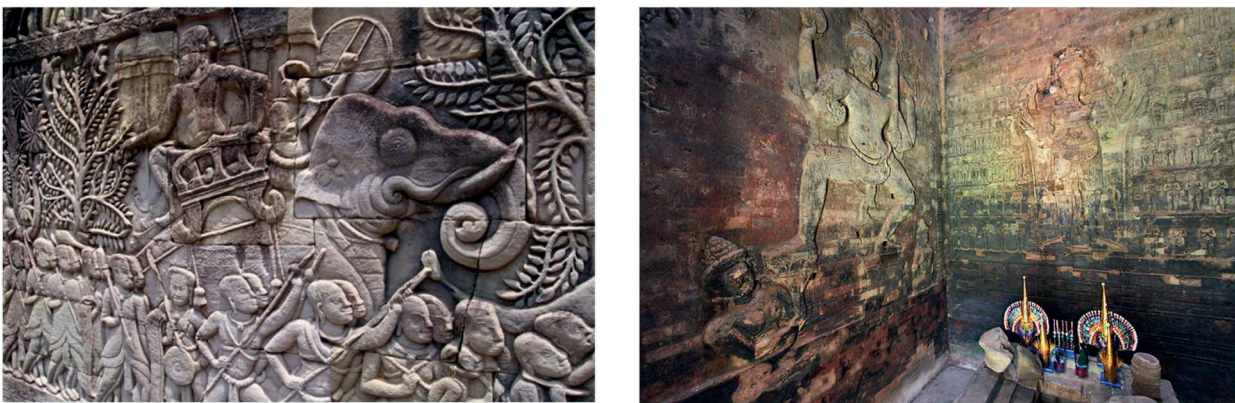(iii) **Pashupatinath and other Hindu temples** in **Kathmandu Valley, Nepal**. In the Kathmandu valley, amidst the several Buddhist temples, is the oldest temple of Pashupatinath, dedicated to Shiva, but there are many other Hindu temples in this area, including the Changu Narayan (Vishnu, in Bhaktapur), which sprang from a traditional Newari settlement. Another Hindu temple complex contains one of the earliest inscriptions in the valley, dated to the CE fifth century. These are unique, tiered temples made mostly from fired brick with mud mortar and timber. The roofs are covered with small overlapping terracotta tiles and gilded brass ornamentation. The windows, doorways, and roof struts have rich decorative carvings. Most of the principal monuments are in Durbar Square, the city's social, religious, and urban focal point. They were built between the CE 12th and the 18th centuries by the ancient Malla kings of Nepal. Some of the most popular among Hindu devotees are the temples of Taleju (local goddess), Kal Bhairab (black-form Shiva), and the Jagannath (Vishnu-form) Temple. Under the government's patronage, an Integrated Management Plan for the Kathmandu World Heritage Property was adopted in 2007. Several voluntary organisations and NGOs are now cooperating to conserve and preserve this rich architectural area. Due to the tragic earthquake (7.9 Richter scale) on 25th April 2015, many of the heritage buildings and temples have been badly damaged, including the ones mentioned above; in such a drastic situation, naturally, priority will be given to human calamities, not the heritage at this stage, except cleaning the debris and ruins. Many of these images and structures are now repaired, renovated, and restructured, befitting the original forms. However, Pashupatinath temple was saved.

Fig. 23. Pashupatinath Temple and nearby temples, Kathmandu (Nepal).

Fig. 24a. Pashupatinath Temple, Nepal: main shrine.

Fig. 24b. Pashupatinath Temple, Nepal: inside.

(iv) **Mỹ Son Sanctuary, Viet Nam**. The tower temples of Mỹ Sanctuary (Duy Phu Commune, Duy Xuyen District, along the coast) were built over ten centuries of continuous development in what was the heart of the ancestral homeland of the ruling Dua Clan, which unified the Cham clans and established the kingdom of Champapura (Sanskrit for City of the Cham people) in CE 192. During the CE 4th to 13th centuries, this unique culture owed its spiritual lineage to Hinduism in the Indian subcontinent. Many temples were built with fired brick and stone pillars and decorated with sandstone bas-reliefs depicting scenes from Hindu mythology, honouring the patron Hindu deities Shiva and Vishnu and his incarnation Krishna. Although Mahayana Buddhism penetrated the Cham culture, probably from the CE 4th century, and became firmly established in the north of the kingdom, Shaivite Hinduism remained the established state religion. The temples contain a variety of architectural designs symbolising the greatness and purity of Mount Meru, the mythical sacred mountain home of Hindu gods, especially Shiva. Shiva is first depicted at the centre of the universe and then set on Earth in the mountainous homeland of the Cham people.

Fig. 25. Mỹ Son Sanctuary, Viet Nam: main sanctuary; the environs & ruins; ten-handed goddess Durga.

The placement of the temples themselves reflects the principle of cosmological archetypes: the central tower (*Kalan*) symbolises the sacred mountain (*Meru*) at the centre of the universe, which is built from brick or stone blocks and decorated with reliefs; the square or rectangular base (*bhūrloka*), representing the human world; and the main tower (*bhūvaloka*), above this, picturing the divine beings, constructed entirely in brick, with columns and a false door

facing east. The interiors are plain, with small niches for lamps. The Shiva lingam is centred on a plinth, symbolising the entire spirit world. From the 13th century, the Champa Kingdom slowly declined and was absorbed by the growing power of Vietnam. It ceased to exist as an entity in the late 15th century when worship ceased at Mỹ Sơn. With significantly increased numbers of tourists visiting the site, managing its restoration will be increasingly important; it should also be addressed as part of a Heritage Management Plan under the ongoing Master Plan (2008 to 2020) as required for the site.

(v) **Pura Besakih, Eastern Bali, Indonesia**. Without repeating the historical context of Hinduism carried to the island of Bali centuries ago with the expansion of Javanese Hinduism, it is important to note that the official designation of the Balinese religion is "Hinduism." Unfortunately, only five religions are recognised according to Indonesian law; however, Bali Hinduism is not one of them. The Hindu community in Bali was unsuccessful in stopping the construction of a hotel adjacent to the world famed temple of Tanah Lot; still, resistance did accomplish two long-term results: (a) restrictions on the height and proximity of hotels for religious sites, and (b) the awakening of many Balinese to the fragility of their environment, to say nothing of the opportunities to act with a sense of empowerment over their land and culture.

Fig. 26. Pura Besakih, Eastern Bali: Overview; the devote Hindus performing the pilgrimage and rituals.

The move to declare Pura Besakih a UNESCO preservation site has not been successful, mainly due to strong local protests and changing democratic reform towards strengthening the local community (cf. Salazar 2014, p. 3845). In this instance, the Balinese Hindu community refused to relinquish its authority over this symbolic centre, fearing the good intentions of the World Heritage site project might impugn their jurisdiction over practices and care of Bali's most significant pilgrimage site (Fischer 2003, pp. 6-7). It is observed that lack of clarity concerning the functioning of the temple under the patronage of Balinese Hinduism after it had become a World Heritage Site, lay at the heart of the dispute; moreover, the rising Islam as the dominant political power in the frame of globalisation serves as an obstacle in making Besakih into a World Heritage Site (cf. Hitchcock and Putra 2012).

FRAMING 'HRIDAY' AND 'PRASHAD'

The Government of India's Ministry of Tourism and Culture and the Ministry of Urban Development are reviewing the relationship between tourism and cultural development to see them as complementary. Both ministries want to preserve the ancient roots of heritage properties and the traditions of spirituality, sacrality and pilgrimage. As a result, two innovative and appropriate national programs have arisen: (i) *Heritage City Development and Augmentation Yojana* ('HRIDAY'), and (ii) *Pilgrimage Rejuvenation And Spiritual Heritage Augmentation Drive* ('PRASHAD'). With these programmes, the ministries of Culture and Tourism and Urban Development will collaborate to strengthen and promote the heritage sites and centres of pilgrimage tourism.

(i) National mission of 'HRIDAY'

The National Mission of the "*Heritage City Development and Augmentation Yojana*" ('HRIDAY'), launched on 21 January 2015 with an allocation of 5000 million rupees (ca US$ 84 million) for the next 27-months, aims to revitalise through conserving and preserving the distinct and unique characters of the *heritage cities*, and to maintain the continuity of their traditions of heritage (tangible, intangible, and cultural landscapes, including written, oral, and performed ones), to ensure they will be used as a resource for sustainable development and ecological restoration. In a broad sense, it aims to bring together urban planning, economic growth, and heritage conservation in an inclusive manner with the objective of restoring, reviving, and strengthening the soul and heritage of the city. It is hoped that beautification, preservation, and sustainable development within this purview will result more rationally and sustainably. Consequently, a holistic view of the site, its cleanliness, planning, and the livelihood of its people and economy will emerge. (cf. Singh 2015, p. 115). The major twelve sites selected at the priority level include Varanasi, Amritsar, Warangal, Ajmer, Gaya, Mathura, Kanchipuram, Vellankini, Amaravati, Badami, Dvaraka, and Puri. None of them are official religious WHS yet, and only eight are broadly associated with Hinduism; however, in their respective development plans, the emphasis has not been laid on the religious codes and manifested symbolic meanings that may enhance universal values and encourage mass awakening for preserving and maintaining of the religious heritage and making them more functional for the society and environment.

Cultural heritage sites are a people's time-specific (short- and long-) understanding of the divine order and humankind's response. "Religious," from that view, is scientific, recreational, aesthetic, economic, and sacramental. Thus, the symbolic meaning of 'HRIDAY' (literally '*heart*') is the core concern for India's 'inclusive-sustainable development of heritage-and-pilgrimage cities'. This frame would be taken as a core concern under the HRIDAY Programme.

The protection, augmentation, management, authenticity, and integrity of properties (both tangible and intangible) are also important considerations, together with the above specific characteristics. In the above context, three basic meanings, in historical context, to the understanding of heritage sites are:
   • a *political* meaning – to assume responsibility for the decisions;
   • a *cultural* meaning – to save culture rootedness and sense of continuity; and
   • a *didactic* meaning – to promote citizen's participation.

These meanings are associated with deconstructing the value of cultural heritage into its parts, identifying the following six *value elements*:
   • *aesthetic value*: the visual-iconographic beauty of the building, site, and so on;
   • *spiritual value*: the significance of the asset in providing understanding or enlightenment or in representing a particular religion or religious tradition;
   • *social value*: the role of the site in forming a cultural identity or a sense of connection with others;
   • *historical value:* connections with the past;
   • *symbolic value:* objects or sites as repositories or conveyors of meaning; and
   • *authenticity value:* the uniqueness of visiting 'the real thing'.

(ii) **National mission of 'PRASHAD'**

The National mission of '*Pilgrimage Rejuvenation And Spiritual Heritage Augmentation Drive*' ('PRASHAD') is included in the Union Budget 2014-2015, a proposed Rs. 1000 million (ca US$ 17 million) initiative. It aims to beautify and improve the amenities and infrastructure at pilgrimage centres of all faiths. Under 'PRASHAD', the old historical-cultural pilgrimage routes and associated sites with heritage repositories will also be developed. However, no detailed plans for such pilgrimage-heritage cities have yet been structured. Of course, a good mass of detailed works on pilgrimage routes are already available concerning Varanasi, but no plans have been formulated. I opine that Varanasi will be conceived as a model pilgrimage-heritage city that records the continuity and popularity of at least fifty such pilgrimage routes that are well-marked, mapped and supported by the literature.

Resurrection and renovation (and expansion) are the new projects initiated by the present government under the philosophy of *dharmacracy* to rejuvenate the ancient Sanatana Hindu Dharma and its representative architectural and heritage symbols—the temples (cf. Singh, Rana, & Kumar 2021b). This initiative will serve as a force to revive and activate the religious and spiritual landscapes of Bharat-India, as these places are beacons of Sanatana Hindu Dharma, reverence, and continuity of cultural traditions. With the support of the judiciary, mass awakening, collaboration of the NGOs, and active public participation by the Hindu organisations to re-establish the ancient glories and project their identity that was once already suppressed brutally in the past, several supporting projects started in the recent past. Having a glimpse of such projects, the seven selected are highlighted with the areal coverage and the cost involved (Table 5). The architectural plan of the Jagannath Temple is illustrated here as an example (cf. Fig. 27).

Table 5. Bharat-India: Selected Temple Complexes (Corridors) Projects, 2022~2025.

Se	Temple complex – Corridor	Area covered		Project Cost, 2022~2025	
		Acres	Hectare	Rs, Million	US$, Million
1	Rāma Janmabhumi Temple, Ayodhya, U.P.	70	28.33	18,000	218
2	Jagannath Temple, Puri, Odisha	16	6.48	9,430	105
3	Kashi Vishvanatha Temple Corridor, Varanasi, U.P.	13	5.11	9,000	100
4	Mahakal Temple, Ujjain, Madhya Pradesh	116	46.98	8,500	95
5	Virat Ramayana Mandir, East Champaran, Bihar	161	65.16	5,050	56
6	Chaitanya Chandrodaya Temple, Mayapur, W.B.	35	14.16	2,380	27
7	Jagannath Dham Sanskrit Kendra, Digha, W.B.	20	8.09	1,430	16

(Source: collated from various documents by the author).

As with 'HRIDAY', interconnectivity and reciprocity between pilgrimage and tourism are integral to human travel, 'pilgrimage-tourism' is more inclined to metaphysical and life philosophy when defined in the most profound

sense, where sacred and profane are interactive. Pilgrimage tourism can then easily be seen as a strategy for heritage awakening, deeper experiences, and the transfer of religiosity into global humanism and spirituality. The sustainable frame of pilgrimage tourism and heritage should be promoted in three ways: philosophical, organisational, and managerial. The eco-healing approach to pilgrimage tourism is considered a post-modernist way to consider pilgrimage as a bridge between recreation and spirituality; this way, pilgrimage tourism will provide a rational alternative for cultural consciousness and strategy for poverty alleviation that ultimately helps heritage preservation facilitate the goal of religion and spirituality.

Fig. 27. The Jagannath Temple Complex (Corridor) Project, Puri (Odisha): Development Model.

UNESCO supports both 'PRASHAD' and 'HRIDAY' as they complement UNESCO's view of heritage conservation and its uses for sustainable development. The profound sense of attachment is a pre-requisite for awakening (of awareness) and action; once a person develops deep feelings (of love) for a place, they would help care for it. Realisation and revelation are inseparable. As 'caring for the place (the *Earth*)' is inherent in pilgrimage tourism, it provides the opportunity to intimately sense and feel deeply for the place and the people – their behaviour, their heritage, and the present in which they live, act, and sustain the cherished tradition. (cf. Singh 2015, p. 116). People's appreciation for religious heritage sites often develops gradually, given the prevalence and marketing of modern and secular sites. Being the secular state where the ethics of religion is defined as personal, religion is not given exposure; of course, in practice, this so firmly controls life, pilgrimages, and related activities.

THE RIVERFRONT RELIGIOUS HERITAGE OF VARANASI, THE CAPITAL OF HINDUISM

The holy city of Varanasi possesses about 3300 Hindu sanctuaries, 1388 Muslim shrines, 45 Sikh sites, 11 Buddhist places, 4 Jain shrines, and countless markers to many folk deities. The city is famous for its many pilgrimage routes, festivities, and rituals. Most festivities occur on the Ganga riverfront, dotted with religious rest houses, temples, monasteries, and other structures, representing tangible and intangible heritages (cf. Singh 2009b). Additionally, according to *Article 2* of the UNESCO World Heritage Convention of 2003 and 2005, all the criteria related to tangible and intangible cultural heritage are already part of the age-long religious traditions of Varanasi. This includes oral traditions of ritual performances, folk music and songs; performance arts like traditional dance, music, and theatrical performances on special festive occasions throughout the year; social practices in celebrating festivals and events; knowledge and practices concerning nature (like naturopathy, alternative medicine, yoga) and the universe (classical astronomy and astrology); and traditional craftsmanship like toy and pot making, silk embroidery, etc. Moreover, other characteristics, as required by *Article* 2, are also a part of life in Varanasi, having been transmitted from generation to generation, being constantly recreated by communities and groups in response to their environment, their interaction with nature, and their history; providing communities and groups with a sense of identity and continuity; promoting respect for cultural diversity and human creativity; being compatible with international human rights instruments; and complying with the requirements of mutual respect among communities and of sustainable development.

The Ganga riverfront with its *ghats* (stairways; cf. Figs. 28 and 29) fully justifies the criteria of Cultural Landscapes as designated in *Article 1* of the Convention, precisely that of a cultural landscape "that retains an active social role in contemporary society closely associated with the traditional way of life, and in which the evolutionary process is still in progress . . . by virtue of powerful religious, artistic, cultural associations of the natural element." Varanasi's riverfront ghats, which evolved over centuries into the spiritual centre of Hinduism, fulfil the

requirements of 'an organically evolved landscape' and 'an associative cultural landscape' in the cultural landscape criteria of the UNESCO World Heritage List.

Fig. 28. The Riverfront Ghats of Varanasi: Rana Mahal-Darbhanga-Ahilyabai-Dashashvamedha-Man Mandir.

Fig. 29. Varanasi: The Riverfront Heritage, Ghats.

The conservation of most heritage properties faces intense pressure. Even though many of these properties are presently in the same physical condition as in the last couple of decades, they have been maintained without the legal and administrative measures needed. Consequently, their architectural integrity is increasingly being threatened. Thankfully, for the first time, heritage protection issues have been discussed in the *Master Plan* for 1991-2011, and specific heritage zones, sites, and properties have been identified. In the follow-up *Master Plan* for 2011-2031, the earlier Plan has been revised to ensure the complete preservation of heritage sites and oversee the city's development. Hence, it maintains the spirit of religion and spirituality.

The Ganga riverfront with its *ghats* (stairways; cf. Figs. 28 and 29) substantially justify the criteria of 'Cultural Landscapes' as designated in *Article 1* of the UNESCO World Heritage Convention, and specifically of a cultural landscape "that retains an active social role in contemporary society closely associated with the traditional way of life, and in which the evolutionary process is still in progress . . . by powerful religious, artistic, cultural associations of the natural element." Varanasi's riverfront ghats, which evolved over centuries into the spiritual centre of Hinduism, fulfil the requirements of 'an organically evolved landscape' and 'an associative cultural landscape' in the cultural landscape criteria of the UNESCO World Heritage List.

One also has to keep in mind the story of putting Varanasi at the margin while proposing a dossier for enlisting in the World Heritage City of UNESCO, referring to highlights of Delhi's dossier that focuses on Old Delhi's Shahjahanabad area that served as the capital under Mughal Emperor Shah Jahan from 1638 to 1648, and the British capital planned by architect Edwin Lutyens; this was prepared in February 2014, and finally after approval by the ICOMOS evaluation experts in October 2014, already submitted to UNESCO, expecting that by June 2015 the final decision with favour may be declared. However, in April 2015, the proposed dossier for Delhi was withdrawn, most probably due to political interference and clashing of the political images and policy of *dharmacracy*—using the Hindu agenda for political supremacy (see Singh 2016, p. 443). After such a happening, there was little hope that the Riverfront Varanasi could compete with and get its dossier submitted to the concerned bodies! It is reported that Prime Minister Narendra Modi's plans to popularise the ancient heritage of his political constituency, 'the holy-heritage city of Varanasi', maybe on mission mode (Singh & Rana 2022). Still, the city has again lost an opportunity to be listed among UNESCO World Heritage Cities. Varanasi does not even figure in the shortlist of cities that could be nominated as a World Heritage City by UNESCO in the experts meeting in October 2014. Experts blame bureaucratic delays, lack of coordination between Central and State governments, and shortage of documentation regarding the city's plans for Varanasi missing out on the opportunity (cf. Venugopal 2015, also Singh & Rana 2023, p. 265). The first attempt to discuss the rationality and validity of inscribing the riverfront ghats of Varanasi in the WHL was proposed in 2021 (cf. Singh, Dar, & Rana 2001).

In continuing several initiatives in the past, on 9 February 2009, with the initiatives of INTACH (Delhi) and the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Cooperation (MFAC) of Spain, a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) was signed to conserve, protect and preserve the heritage monuments and promote cultural heritage in the temple city of Varanasi and develop world-class infrastructure in the area, which will pave the path in inscribing Varanasi as 'World Heritage City'. According to this MoU, experts from Spain will intensively work in Varanasi for documentation, inventory, and status reporting of the heritage properties and heritagescapes. On that line, no progress was made. Also, the role of the local chapter of INTACH (Indian National Trust for Art, Culture, and Heritage) has been negligible in coordination, primarily due to a lack of vision, insights, and plans that were undemocratically handled for personal interest (cf. Singh and Rana 2016). Such programmes are mainly based on outsiders' creations — that are superimposed here, keeping away the assessment of local requirements and understanding, and without hearing the local voices; however, through media, they propagate the rationality and suitability of the plans and designs they have crafted out!

Varanasi did not figure in the recent shortlist of cities (October 2014; even recently, in June 2019) that could be nominated as a World Heritage City by UNESCO. Experts blame bureaucratic delays, lack of coordination between Central and State governments, and shortage of documentation regarding the city's plans for Varanasi missing out on the opportunity. The approach lacks persistence. The dossier submitted to UNESCO requires a ten-year vision for the city that includes financial, management, and structural plans and an intensive proof document on the city's heritage value. Most of it is already ready, but unless civic bodies, NGOs, and bureaucrats interact more, specific details will always be missing, making the document incomplete (Singh 2016, p. 443).

Over time, crossing all the hurdles and complexity, ultimately on 13th April 2021 the "Iconic Riverfront of the Historic City of Varanasi, India" has been listed [https://whc.unesco.org/fr/listesindicatives/6526/] in the UNESCO WHL under the Criteria: (**iii**), (**iv**), and (**vi**) (Singh & Rana 2023, p. 265-266):

> Criterion (**iii**): *to bear a unique or at least exceptional testimony to a cultural tradition*. The city of Varanasi, specifically in the relationship of the riverfront with the Gaṅgā River, is unique in architectural, artistic, and religious expressions of traditional Indian culture. It is a living symbolisation of Indian culture and traditions, in all its religious rituals, multi-ethnic artistic traditions, architectural treasures, a particular relationship with life and death, and ancient educational forms and methods.

> Criterion (**iv**): *to be an outstanding example of a type of building, architectural or technological ensemble*. The stepped ghats are a unique Indian typology of an architectural interface of the river with the land, and the Varanasi Ghats are the most brilliant representation of this form. The built heritage of the riverfront includes the

magnificent edifices towering above the ghats, and the quaint alleys behind flanked with multiple typologies of architectural and open spaces.

Criterion (**vi**): *to be directly or tangibly associated with events or living traditions, with ideas, or with beliefs*. The tangible heritage of Varanasi, especially of its riverfront, is linked strongly to the living cultural, spiritual, and religious traditions of three of the major religions of the world - Hinduism, Buddhism, and Jainism. Traditions practised here include wooden toy making, saree making, silk weaving, metal, wood, terracotta handicrafts, particular painting forms, using the Sanskrit language and Vedic chanting.

The Gaṅgā riverfront of Varanasi, in comparison to similar historic-heritage cities of India, and also some from Asia, is a harmonious conglomeration of various styles of architecture by different rulers in the form of stately buildings constructed on the ghats (steps leading to the river) and beyond them. The steps at the riverfront and the built forms at the platforms are a distinct response to the unique geographic conditions formed by the Gaṅgā River and serve the purpose of continuing cultural traditions. The still extant intangible practices associated with the riverfront demonstrate Varanasi as an outstanding example of the continued relationships between people, nature, architecture, and spirituality. However, the riverfront development strategy has not been included in the Master Plan 2021−2041, except for highlighting tourism and tourist facilities like cruise ship services, water-based games, and related commercial infrastructure. Moreover, the conservation of the river ecosystem and the maintenance of spirituality and religious traditions are not given a place in this ongoing plan.

Our present Prime Minister, Hon'ble Narendra Modi, proclaimed a decade ago: "Our pilgrim (sacred) cities will be models of care and respect for the environment that will showcase environmentally sound technologies and practices and in doing so pilgrims, local officials, faith leaders and millions of faithful around the world will be inspired to be part of an unprecedented collaboration to combat climate change and loss of biodiversity" (Singh 2013, p. 363). Suppose we want to stay alive, survive, and continue the salvific power of pilgrimage places, in that case, we should minimise human greed and awaken ourselves through lifestyle changes and a more profound quest for realisation (Singh & Rana 2025, p. 230!).

EPILOGUE: FROM PERSPECTIVE TO APPEAL

Culture is constantly in flux, but our technological age seems to be changing more quickly than in the past. So, while humans have always ritualised their understanding of the cosmos, the planet, society, nature, and themselves, today, some traditional festivities, structures, and religious expressions are not only quickly changing but disappearing. The heritagescapes that survive will be those we preserve. Let us rejoice, for we are alive, and life is good; let us celebrate renewal, caring for one another and our cosmos. There is a need for heritage ecology at this crucial time (Singh 1995, p. 210). Visits to heritage sites and heritagescapes, our efforts to understand, and the work to keep the mind and heart open to the sacred manifestation all invigorate our vision with insight and purpose (c.f. Jarow 1986, p. 12). This is the real pilgrimage – 'an enacting of an internal process in the external world.' Heritage ecology is also a way to pilgrimage – a way of relating to the land (Earth/Nature spirit) and the people (human psyche), similar to that of marching from realisation to revelation (Singh 1995, p. 211). *Reverential development* is unitary in the broadest and most profound sense, combining reverence and sanctity of life with contemporary economic, social, moral, cultural and traditional premises to bring peace and harmony to nature (Skolimowski 1990, p. 103). The fact that this may be difficult to implement in no way negates their importance and desirability.

For a religious heritage to become a resource for development, it first needs to be documented, then protected, and finally utilised according to specific heritage guidelines and legislation. Only then will policy efforts and interventions become environmentally, socially, and culturally sustainable with increased stakeholders' awareness and participation. We may separate ourselves from the web of our heritage in pursuing modernity and secularism, but it will always be at the cost of our hearts and souls (Singh 2015, p. 120).

A recently founded Global Hindu Heritage Foundation (GHHF) has taken initiatives and used non-violent actions of mass awakening and realisation to preserve the cultural heritage among Hindu communities worldwide. Their GHHF's objective is to protect, preserve, conserve, promote, and maintain Hindu culture, Hindu temples, monasteries, temple institutions, endowments, trusts and other related institutions globally (cf. Rao 2007). The GHHF's attempts are expected to help conserve and preserve Hindu religious heritage sites, making Hindu heritage ecology in service of humanity through the ethics of integrating humanity and divinity.

According to Hindu theology, the spirit of place exists everywhere, imbuing the earth and the heaven with its unique and ineradicable sense of rhythm, mood, and character; different experiences of this result in a variety of local forms of faith and traditions, but the fundamental ethic of reverence is everywhere. "Disturbing the spirit and misusing the manifested power of sacredness and its attached cultural landscapes brings calamity to society. If harmony is disturbed, the spirit of place begins to lose its power to sanctify life" (Singh & Rana 2023, p. 267). The meaning of understanding and action is determined by the more profound principle of intrinsic value that is to be continued and cherished. After all, intrinsic value requires a new moral thought rooted in place and tradition. American cultural geographer Tuan (1984, p. 9) says, "We need to be rooted in place, for without roots, we cannot develop those habits and routines that are an essential component of sanity. We need to have a sense of place because without it, we shall have failed to use our unique capacity for appreciation".