

DEVELOPING SUSTAINABLE TOURISM DESTINATIONS OFFERING AUTHENTIC FOLK EXPERIENCE

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Abstract. In 2004 banglanatak dot com initiated an experimental “Art for Livelihood” project, targeting 3200 folk artists (Patachitra - singing stories painted on scrolls, Baul Fakiri – Sufi music of Bengal, Jhumur – tribal lifestyle music and dance, Chau – tribal masked dance with martial art imbibed, Gambhira and Domni – folk theatre forms) in six economically backward districts of West Bengal. The project primarily aims at enhancing the livelihood basis of the artists while providing a new positive identity to their localities as creative hub, rather than that of impoverished rural villages. The emergence of such new rural creative hubs is in turn gradually leading to the development of new tourism destinations to bring additional income opportunities to the so-far economically marginalized areas. The paper presents innovative strategies for developing villages as heritage tourism destinations. Village of Pingla with 52 Patachitra painter families is attracting regular visitors. Yet, the village is deprived of any major historical sites of interest. Santhal communities in Tunta, not only present folk songs, dance and craft, but also take the visitors to neighbouring 6th century terracotta temples. Result is safeguarding of heritage by community themselves. Much of existing heritage tourism is largely centered on the promotion of historical monuments and sites or static imaginaries commoditizing local cultural traditions. Such tourism models have not necessarily brought expected benefit to the local population. Heritage tourism initiatives have often failed to invest in the capacity building of local human components, especially the poor segment of society. This has led to classical situation where local heritage resources are being exploited by outside business ventures leaving local communities as mere low-end tourism sector ‘labour’. The paper shares successful approaches for placing traditional artistic skill of local population as prime mover of income generation and development of sustainable community led tourism.

1. Introduction

Heritage is our legacy from the past, what we live with today, and what we pass on to future generations. Our cultural and natural heritage are both irreplaceable sources of life and inspiration. (<http://whc.unesco.org/en/about>). Natural and cultural heritage sites have always been recognized as the world’s tourism assets. In recent decades heritage tourism destinations are also offering traditional culture as a product. The wide spectrum of living expressions and traditions inherited mostly orally through generations by communities worldwide are providing opportunities of developing tourism. The intangible cultural heritage of people is manifested in the daily life, rituals and festivals of the host communities. Cultural heritage tourism aims at developing tourism beyond individual monuments and includes festivals, traditional crafts, cuisine, festivals, vernacular architecture etc. Visitors enjoy songs, dance, art and craft, participate in rituals and experience and absorb the local culture.

It is being increasingly recognized that cultural tourism may play a positive role safeguarding heritage and fostering socio-economic development. Firstly this

extends tourism to lesser known destinations. Development of tourism attracts investment in infrastructure. Cultural tourism creates new markets and audience for local art and crafts. The folk artists and crafts persons earn from sale of traditional crafts, performances, dissemination of oral knowledge, collaborations and exchanges to take the traditional art forms into and contemporary creative expressions. The community at large earns by offering tourism services ranging from boarding, lodging, tour guidance, transportation etc. Increasing opportunities of performance and income renew the community’s interest, especially that of the youth, in their own traditions. There is greater ownership on heritage and traditions. In recent years the role of tourism in eradication of poverty has received increasing attention from various agencies like the World Bank, regional development banks, the UN agencies and others working to alleviate poverty. The World Tourism Organization (UNWTO) has promoted poverty alleviation as a major objective of sustainable tourism development. (UNWTO,2011)

Despite its professed benefit for poverty alleviation, employment generation and strengthening of cultural

diversity and community pride, a mere introduction of cultural tourism does not however lead automatically to local empowerment. It becomes a valid tool only if it is intended to and designed to serve community's interest. Much of the existing cultural heritage tourism promotes static imaginaries commoditizing local cultural traditions. Concerns have been raised that in some circumstances 'traditional ceremonies and performances staged specifically for tourists can be reduced to superficial'.(UNWTO,2011) There are numerous examples of the insignificant share of income from sale of crafts which reaches the actual producer. In the prevailing situation, local community, artists and artisans remain low end 'tourism workers' or a mere object of tourist entertainment.

This paper presents how development of cultural heritage tourism emerged as a corollary to a rural livelihood improvement project and how such approach is likely to become a successful case of sustainable cultural tourism.

2. Heritage & Livelihood – a Case Study from India

In India, rural communities constitute 60% of the country's entire population and 75% of unemployed people. 45% of rural population is reportedly not formally educated. Despite an important sum of government budget devoted to rural development, much remains to be done in terms of basic infrastructure, employment, health, education and the overall well-being of rural population. Stigmatized with the image of poverty and backwardness, it is seldom realized that rural India is also a hub of traditional arts and cultures, which are mostly practiced by the marginalized/ lowest sections of the society. With five millennia of history, 28 states and 8 union territories with some 638,000 villages, India is a great repository of diverse traditional cultural expressions including customs, rituals, artifacts, performing arts etc. The investigation by the Anthropological Survey of India conducted between 1985 and 1992 identified some 4635 communities across the country, suggesting there will be potentially as many varieties of cultural practices and expressions. (banglanatak,2011) These once-vibrant tradition are however being obliterated due to the lack of public attention and the absolute poverty of the practitioners. This large pool of creative talents needed to be tapped into to offer another pathway for rural development.

banglanatak dot com, a social enterprise in India, works with a mission to foster pro-poor growth using culture based approaches. The organisation's vision is to synergise cultural and economic development leading not only to preservation of cultural heritage and

diversity but also facilitating sustainable development of people. The flagship initiative of the organisation 'Art for Livelihood (AFL)', initiated in 2004, aims at utilizing the potential of a community's intangible cultural heritage (ICH) - skills like performing arts and crafts - for creating sustainable livelihood opportunities. The initiative demonstrates the potential of intangible cultural heritage as social and economic capital.

banglanatak has worked with 3200 folk artists performing six folk art forms of Bengal. The artists live in 150 villages across six districts of the state. Two of the folk forms are Chau and Jhumur - dance and song traditions of indigenous communities of Chotonagpur plateau area. Purulia Chau is a vigorous form of martial dance and drama. Dazzling costumes, rhythmic drum beatings, powerful acrobatic movements and somersaults in the air make the dance a marvel to watch. Jhumur songs and dances are integral to the social practices and rituals of agrarian and artisan communities as well as forest dwellers. Jhumur songs are soulful manifestations of our everyday strife and tribulations. This common thread of human emotions like happiness, sorrow, love and loss are soulfully weaved in each rendition which makes this folk form widely accepted among all cross sections of the society. The third art form Patachitra is scroll painting of Medinipur region of Bengal. The painters called Patuas or Chittrakars (meaning artists) are unique tribe of folk artists who are painters, lyricists, performers and singers all in one. They paint stories with brilliant natural colours on long scrolls and sing them as they unfurl the scrolls. Baul/Fakiri are mystic songs of Bengal preaching about universal brotherhood and celebrates humanity. Baul & Fakiri philosophy carries influences of Hindu Bhakti Movements and Sufism. Domni and Gambhira are social satires popular in Malda region of Bengal. The performers use a wonderful mix of song, dance and satire to communicate common man's woes, concerns and worries. A decade back the art forms were languishing. With rapid urbanization, influx of electronic entertainment, obliteration of traditional festivals, the art forms were losing their traditional audience. The project has enabled the folk artists to create sustainable, long term income generation models for themselves while at the same time safeguarding and protecting their cultural legacy. The Eastern Zonal Cultural Centre, an autonomous body under the Ministry of Culture and the Ministry of Rural Development supported this unique and innovative initiative between 2005 and 2009. The European Union provided funding support between 2009 and 2011 to facilitate multi cultural exchange, collaboration and partnerships and raise awareness on the role of culture in social inclusion and economic

empowerment. International Institute for Culture, Tourism and Development (IICTD), London Met University, was a partner in research on possibilities of developing cultural tourism.

The project primarily aimed at enhancing the livelihood basis of the artists while providing a new positive identity to their localities as creative hub, rather than that of impoverished rural villages. The project adopted a holistic methodology consisting of: baseline study on Knowledge, Attitude and Practice of the practitioners; training of the artists for quality improvement of performance/production, as well as in basic business skills; creation of Self Help Groups (SHGs) and opening of the bank account for each of the SHGs; the provision of health insurance to the artists and their family members; textual as well as audio-visual documentation on the art forms; and finally, the creation of direct market linkages and development of new audiences. Development of cultural tourism targeted taking people to these lesser known areas, expand the benefit of Art for Livelihood initiative to wider community and create incentives for community led action for preservation and protection of heritage. The project has led to increase in average monthly income from 8 Euro in 2004 to 50 Euro in 2010 for the 3200 beneficiaries. 30% are earning 100 Euros per month. The project has helped hitherto marginalized communities to gain confidence in their artistic skills and take part in the development process. Quality of life indices has improved. Percentage of household having sanitation has increased from less than 10% to above 85%. 95% of the children of the beneficiary families are going to school.

3. Challenges and Issues in developing cultural heritage tourism

Loss of heritage is a barrier in developing cultural heritage tourism. Living heritages across the world are getting obliterated as they have lost relevance in the contemporary way of life. Sites of natural heritage are threatened owing to factors like deforestation and pollution. Historical monuments, temples, palaces and buildings are often in a state of neglect. Establishing a comprehensive overview of cultural resources is a challenge in most countries. In India for example, 3667 monuments of national importance are under the direct responsibility of the Archaeological Society of India. Besides these the state governments protect 3573 monuments. There are large number of monuments outside the purview of ASI or the state governments. There is no comprehensive list of unprotected monuments in India. There are many historic structures belonging to various Government agencies like the Central Public Works Department, the

Indian Railways (including two world heritage sites), the army and the navy. (banglanatak,2011)

Another problem is the lack of information on the oral traditions or on the practitioners of art and culture. There are multiple studies and research papers on the heritage sites and traditional art forms, but such data is usually scattered among various institutions. Absence of a comprehensive overview deters planning efforts. In India, while crafts forms are better inventoried, thanks to the efforts of institutions like Development Commissioner of Handicrafts, there is dearth of information on the diverse genres of performing arts and the artists.

Lack of understanding on the value of heritage among the local community is often a limitation. Villagers take little interest in protection or maintenance of historical monuments. The young are not interested to learn traditional arts. Songs, dance styles, weaving and craft making techniques are lost with death of the living heritages. The cradles of traditional culture are often geographically isolated and lack basic infrastructure like transportation, sanitation, accommodation, waste management etc. Many communities live in fragile environments and high footfalls pose threat of environmental damage.

An oft raised concern is commoditization of heritage and loss of authenticity in attempts to cater to market demands. This is often the result of lack of control or participation of the artist community in developing tourism packages. The result is 'fixed' staged performance. The artists have limited repertoire and a few representative styles are on offer. Another problem is introduction of competition for the limited income. Tourism also poses the risk of jeopardizing the social fabric by importing of bad habits (e.g. drug abuse and alcoholism) and increasing vulnerability to violence against women and children. Making community an active stakeholder in the tourism development process is imperative to address the afore-mentioned issues. As elaborated in the next section, it is important to establish a process where the village artists become cultural producers instead of mere cultural representatives of the art forms. It is thus critical to invest in the people to empower them to re-invent their tradition, control the artistic narrative produced, conditions of production, interact directly with the consumers 'of their cultures, and in doing so, reflexively articulate their own histories'. (Tamar Gordon,2010)

4. Roadmap for developing community led cultural tourism

Banglanatak has evolved a model for community driven heritage development which nurtures the local cultural forms, establishes community based decision making structures, inculcates entrepreneurial skills and encourages creativity and innovation. Key steps are

- Mapping skills and resources
- Organizing people for art
- Strengthening art & craft skills
- Exchange & Collaboration
- Capacity building for tourism
- Documentation & heritage interpretation
- Developing centres for practice, dissemination & promotion
- Marketing & Promotion

4.1 MAPPING SKILLS & RESOURCES

The first step is to draw up an inventory of the art forms and artists to prepare a road map to develop heritage tourism and other creative industries based on intangible cultural heritage. Lack of data and information deter drawing up effective plans for revival and revitalization. Lack of comprehensive information on the geographical spread of folk artists, their number and their level of skills leads to lack of support. Mapping artist communities and identifying the change makers and process owners from among the community is important. A database of skills helps to plan and improve the overall tourism experience in the communities. A baseline assessment of the wider community's understanding of tourism is also important. Besides skills mapping, it is also important to identify elements of built and natural heritage in order to develop a regional plan for developing tourism. While developing villages as tourism destinations, banglanatak worked with local experts and IICTD, London Met University, to plan tourism itineraries trails for visitors.

4.2 ORGANIZING PEOPLE FOR ART

Revitalizing and reviving heritage skills as means of livelihood necessitates mobilizing changes in mindset and attitudes as the folk artists become cultural producers. It is important to develop community based structures for decision making and sharing of income. Banglanatak formed Self Help Groups (SHG) or Common Interest Groups (CIG) based on the art traditions to initiate collective action.

After formation of SHGs, bank linkages were facilitated. These groups are the building blocks for micro enterprise development. Activity Clusters were then formed to create professionally managed and self reliant community enterprises. The approach

strengthens community participation and facilitates dovetailing with opportunities for micro and small enterprise development offered by Government schemes. In the Art for Livelihood Project, six activity clusters have been developed. These are co-operative structures comprising of 233 Self Help groups. There are 2904 men and 329 women. The SHGs have been provided with instruments, costumes, masks and other accessories.

4.3 CAPACITY BUILDING IN ART & CRAFT SKILLS

Comprehensive training and capacity building programme is needed for strengthening basic performance skills as well as capacity building of the artists to innovate new ways of rendering the art forms. In Art for Livelihood Project, decentralized training at the village level was conducted under the aegis of the living legends Guru (Teacher) of the art forms for widening and strengthening the skill base to the Shishya (Disciple) to establish a Parampara (Practice), where the knowledge and skills are passed on to the next generation. The folk artists are required to be equipped with new skills for performance.

The challenge in developing creative industries based on heritage is to create new markets for traditional heritage. Banglanatak uses the strategy of facilitating exchange between the practitioners of folk art and contemporary art and theatre directors, musicians, composers, new media artists and designers. These workshops facilitate an understanding of the dynamics of culture, place and society in different environments. The folk artists gain confidence and improved ability to understand their own cultural context and to further innovate. Exposure visits is organized to various festivals in India and abroad. The process empowers the folk artists with confidence and better understanding of audience and markets. They are artistic in the modern sense. They become cultural entrepreneurs who understand markets.

The above photo shows Chau dancers. Chau dance of Purulia, now part of UNESCO's Representative List of Intangible Cultural Heritage, is a vigorous form of martial dance and drama popular in the Chotonagpur area in Eastern India. Beautiful rhythmic patterns and vigorous dance movements, masks and brightly coloured ornamented costumes worn by the dancers have made Chau dance extremely popular art form. When the project started, however, the Chau groups were mostly in a moribund state. The Chau artists of Purulia are daily labourers, share croppers or bidi (tobacco leaf)-binders. In their day-to-day struggle for life, many of them had stopped practicing their Chau dance. The artists were living in abject poverty. The



Figure 1. Chau Dance



Figure 2. Tourists learning about natural colour

illiterate artists were also exploited by event organizers who dole out small payments for shows. Chau dance traditionally used to be performed for hours. The productions were based on mythology and epics. The repertoire was very limited. To appeal to wider range of audience, the Chau dancers have developed short modern productions based on stories from Shakespeare and Tagore and imbibed diverse art

forms. The Chau dancers now have a wide repertoire of productions of duration ranging from 15 minutes to one hour. Improved skills, creativity and innovation enables diversification of tourism experiences. As a result tourists come back again and again to enjoy new performances. There is no stereotype or made up imaginaries. With greater participation of youth average age has decreased.

As of 2011, average fee per show has increased from 30 Euro in 2004 to 100-300 Euro in 2010. In 2005, the average number of shows per year was between 10 and 12, while in 2010, 25% groups get 100 shows per year. None of the dancers had electricity at home when the project started while approximately 40% of the members of Chau group have electricity at home. New festivals like Vasanta Utsav celebrating India's festival of colours Holi at the site of 6th century temples or 100 year old Royal palace are building up economic activity involving tourism as a pivotal point. Product diversification is also important for traditional crafts. The scroll painters of Naya are now using their painting tradition to make a wide variety of products.

4.4 CAPACITY BUILDING FOR CULTURAL TOURISM

Development of cultural tourism expands the benefits of local cultural capital to the larger community. It also promotes greater awareness and ownership in protecting heritage. Capacity building for managing tourism has to be initiated with sensitization of the community on responsible tourism, benefits and pitfalls. The folk artists are not skilled in showcasing their culture and lifestyle for tourists. Capacity building needs to address innovating activity packages for the visitors. Banglanatak has so far worked with the artist communities to plan and organize village tours, arts training workshops, jamming sessions with modern and traditional instruments etc. to enhance the overall tourism experience.

At Pingla for example, the folk painters called the Patuas make natural colours from leaves, fruits and flowers. The Patuas were guided to document their knowledge. The young people learned about making colours and now take tourists in a 'colour trail' demonstrating how the colours are extracted from marigold, runner beans, saffron, turmeric, Aparajita (flower), Kundri and then kept in coconut shells mixed with betel gum to thicken their consistency and make them last longer. The photo below shows visitors learning to make natural colours.

Large scale tourism infrastructure development may not be congenial to the cradles of sub-altern culture. Tourism poses threats like pressure on the environment and disruption of traditional life style. To address this, home stay based models or tent tourism may be promoted. The villagers need to be trained in hygiene, cleanliness, food preparation, first aid, waste management etc.

Prior to organizing village festivals banglanatak organizes community forums with the villagers to plan the event. This creates a platform for setting expectations. A management team is formed by the villagers and they oversee the entire activity.

4.5 HERITAGE INTERPRETATION

Information about the destination and the experience offered is critical for drawing tourists. Unfortunately insufficient information is available on folk heritage and sub altern culture. Documentation of oral traditions is the key to facilitating heritage interpretation. The aging artists are the living repositories of knowledge and skills. With their demise styles and techniques of the art forms as well as knowledge on history and evolution of the art forms are lost forever. Documentation not only safeguards the living heritages and restores cultural memory, but plays a key role in strengthening access to information. Brochures, books, audio and video CDs and websites on the art forms need to be developed and widely circulated to build awareness among potential consumers. These products may also be commoditized from where the artists may earn an income. Community participation is critical to identify documentation needs. The Bauls and Jhumuriyas, for example, pointed out the need for having books documenting the lyrics. The Chau dancers identified the need for documenting dancing styles. The process led to revival of lost dance styles like 'Bagh (Tiger) Chaal (Step)' or 'Mayur (Peacock) Chaal' emulating movement of the animals. Access to lyrics led to improved rendering of songs. The Patuas helped in documenting the mythological tales and this helped the visitors to understand the painted stories even if they do not understand the songs sung in Bengali.

4.6 COMMUNITY RESOURCE CENTRES

As part of the project Art for Livelihood, Folk Art Resource Centres have been developed in six villages. In all cases the land has been donated by the community. These resource centres have emerged as hubs of local culture and pivots for developing tourism. They embody the community's culture, past and present. The resource centres are becoming seats for practice, preservation, promotion and dissemination of local culture within the villages. They are being used as library, practice and exhibition space. The resource centre at Pingla displays old and new scrolls as well as diversified Patachitra products. The Patuas regularly hold workshops on painting, on Pata songs and on extraction process of natural colours.

The centres are facilitating educational tourism. There is a constant flow of visitors including academics, musicians, film makers, students and others and hence income for the people. Tourists enjoy not only the final product but also the process of production, training, composing, design, mask making etc. There is complete absence of 'made up' imaginaries or scripted performance. In this way, cultural tourism

to the villages has slowly emerged as an important offshoot of the Art for Livelihood project.

4.7 MARKETING & PROMOTION

There is little or no awareness on ICH. It is thus important to build awareness on the traditional cultural heritage by promoting the art forms through exhibitions, festivals and cultural programmes. Performances may be organised in schools, colleges and youth festivals to draw interest of the young people who are mostly unaware. As for example, the Baul and Fakirs are wandering Sufi minstrels.

While the art form has won popularity at international level, the larger majority of practitioners was without recognition and had no respect from organizers of the shows or even the audience. After seven years of action, the Bauls and Fakirs from Nadia now enjoy recognition as full-fledged artists. Income per show has increased from 0–8 Euro to 25-130 Euro. The number of shows per year has increased from 8-10 to 60-80. New promoters and patrons have emerged and Baul-Fakirs are now featured in the group of Grammy-Award winning artist, Tanmoy Bose, or in the national-award winning film of master film director – Gautam Ghosh. Television channels now regularly telecast Baul-Fakir music. Golam Fakir, one of the leading singers who used to earn his living by carrying dead bodies from police station to morgue in 2004 is now a celebrity, travelling to Europe, China, Bangladesh. Encouraged by commercial success and new livelihood opportunity, the average age of Baul-Fakiri singers has decreased from 62 to 43 years old. Thanks to the popularity of the artists, Nadia is now emerging as destination of music

lovers. And the villagers now proudly introduce their locality as Golam's village.

The organization of village festivals constitutes a particularly important component of marketing the new tourism destinations. Visitors become aware of the seats of traditional culture. Culture becomes a capital attracting investment. Such festivals also facilitate interaction with musicians, art lovers, art critics, researchers and academicians opening up new avenues. The Art for Livelihood project has established models for developing responsible tourism offering authentic experience of indigenous life.

The above photo shows the colourful Patachitra fair, POT Maya, in the village of the Patuas at Naya in November 2010. This was attended by over 5000 people and brought to the artists a total turnover of 10,000 Euro in 3 days. With a lot of visitors coming over to the villages to stay and experience folk art, the artists feel proud about it and have even taken initiatives in 'home stay' based tourism development process. The world artists now come to them to see scroll painting and learn usage and production of natural colors. Patachitra artists also exhibited their work in UK and Paris. Encouraged by increased recognition, the artists maintain the resource centre and the village in extremely clean condition. The place is now a new cultural tourism destination, attracting over 200 persons since the fair in last November and generating a business over 16,000 Euro.

Banglanatak has also started festivals offering unique tourism experience integrating built, natural and intangible cultural heritage. At Purulia, Basanat Utsav or the onset of spring or "Basanta " is celebrated with colours in a three day festival held during Holi. The festival has been held at the site of a



Figure 3. Patachitra on display during POT Maya fair

seventh century Jain temple, Bandhar Deul and also in a century old palace of the local king. The event is managed by the local community. Colourful dance, lilting folk music, trees laden with the orange flame-of-the forest flower and the terracotta temple or the gracious backdrop of the palace provide a beautiful experience. 1500 tourists live in tents and nearby hotels. More than 50,000 local people throng to enjoy the performances.

Tourists enjoyed living in 'royal ambience' in front of the Kashipur palace (Figure 4) and reveled in the festival of colours in front of the old Terracotta temple at Chelyama (Figure 5). Prior to these festivals local people attached little importance to these built heritages. The palace grounds were covered with bushes while the temple lay abandoned. The festivals made villagers conscious of their assets.

Approximately 1000 tourists from Kolkata and abroad have attended six village festivals organized around the resource centres in past two years. Village tourism has benefited the larger folk artists community. Department of Tourism, Government of West Bengal is sharing information on cultural heritage tourism in its website. Tour operators have come forward to promote heritage tourism. UNWTO is documenting the model as a best practice of developing tourism based on ICH.



Figure 4. Tents in front of Kashipur palace



Figure 5. Playing Holi in front of temple

5. Conclusion

In all the cases, cultural tourism development was not the primary goal of banglanatak dot com. It has emerged merely as one element of the Art for Livelihood project and only after six years of thorough investment in strengthening social and cultural capital of the folk artists through training, exposure and promotion. Tourism festivals have provided new contexts to revitalise social functions which are obliterated with changing times. Owing to constant creation of new tourism products by the living heritages there are no stereotypes and many people visit the festivals repeatedly.

ICH based tourism has worked towards achievements of the Millennium development Goals of eradicating poverty (Goal 1), promoting gender equality (Goal 3) and fostering global partnerships (Goal 8). Average income of the 52 families of folk painters in Naya village of Pingla is now 120 Euro. 40% of artists are earning in tune of 250 Euro per month. They have learned spoken English to tell non Bengalis their stories. Most of the Patuas now have sanitary latrines at home. 60% have access to electricity. Many of them live in brick houses. Heritage based tourism augments income opportunities for the women. They not only benefit from performance and making of crafts and textiles but also from managing food preparation, boarding and lodging and maintenance of hygiene. The women have gained the confidence to travel alone across the country and the globe. They enjoy greater respect and recognition. The exchanges and collaborations with world artists have fostered new partnerships.

Preservation of heritage is ensuring intergenerational sustainability, where future generations remain capable of pursuing the livelihood based on cultural capital. New income opportunities and enhanced social status thanks to their traditional art and cultural skills have built communities' pride and ownership in their culture in general. Santhal communities in Tunta, now not only present folk songs, dance and craft, but also take the visitors to neighboring 6th century terracotta temples. The result is the preservation of heritage by community themselves.

Development of cultural heritage tourism with the local community as a key stakeholder thus strengthens the community economically, socially and culturally. Investing in intangible heritage is of critical importance for developing sustainable tourism. The heritage tourism model developed by banglanatak dot com is enhancing local assets, promoting cultural diversity and strengthening capabilities of local communities.

The folk artist communities are now able to meet their needs, build their assets, respond to contingencies in future, improve quality of living and have greater self esteem and community pride.

Experience of banglanatak dot come tells that a truly community-led cultural tourism has to look into and to invest in peoples' creative and artistic skills first as a starting point rather than historical monuments and sites. In fact destruction of cultural heritage may lead to loss of identity for the people and breakdown of cultural system affecting economic outputs and welfare.

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