

Preserving and promoting the historical  
cultural heritage of rural communities  
in West Bengal and Bangladesh:

Report on a workshop held in Kolkata  
Saturday 29 April 2017

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John Reuben Davies

May 2017

The workshop which is the subject of this report is an outcome of the Memorandum of Understanding between the University of Glasgow and the University of Calcutta, renewed 9 November 2016.

The University of Glasgow and the University of Delhi also operate under a Memorandum of Understanding, signed in May 2014. Both institutions are members of Universitas 21, the leading global network of world-class research-intensive universities for the 21st century.



A Global Challenges Research Fund project financed through



# EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

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This project has been preparatory. We aimed to bring together experts in the field of archaeology, museology, heritage management, history, and education, from the University of Glasgow and from our partner-institutions and other collaborators in India and Bangladesh. This report is the product of a workshop held in Kolkata, West Bengal, in April 2017, in which these academic experts met to discuss the range of issues relating to the promotion and preservation of historical cultural heritage in the cross-border region that is West Bengal and Bangladesh. The objective of the discussions was to provide the evidence-base for future calls under the Global Challenges Research Fund (GCRF). The workshop also enabled the strengthening of existing relationships with the University of Glasgow's partners in India, and the foundation of new relationships with others in West Bengal and Bangladesh, in order to establish a consortium to underpin a larger GCRF project proposal.

The final objective of the wider scheme would be to work towards raising the profile of certain rural locations in Bengal (West Bengal and Bangladesh), building up awareness of their special cultural heritage. Through heritage development and knowledge-exchange schemes a fresh impetus might be given to communities whose historical cultural heritage is gradually diminishing, being eroded, or under threat. Where appropriate, such work also has the potential to develop areas of the creative economy, including the tourist sector. It could also encourage the conservation of cultural heritage, and help build community cohesion and pride.

## How to approach GCRF bids

GCRF research is aimed at addressing global sustainable development challenges, and is intended to transform the lives of the maximum number of poor people. The starting point for research proposals should therefore be a significant problem or development challenge.

The extent to which southern partners have played a leading role in problem-identification and the design, definition, and development of the proposed approach will add to the credibility of proposals for funding as it will demonstrate relevance and also local appetite and capacity to implement solutions.

Successful proposals will need to demonstrate that they address the multiple dimensions of sustainability in an integrated way. The challenge areas are

- Equitable access to sustainable development
- Sustainable economies and societies
- Human rights, good governance and social justice

Many of the GCRF funding calls with an arts-and-humanities element are interdisciplinary. We should therefore be networking with colleagues in other fields –

medical and life sciences, science and engineering, social sciences – in order to identify potential research collaborators.

### **Problems of cultural and heritage resource management outside the city**

West Bengal has a total of 239 local museums and collections that have so far been documented, but there is no central database of these valuable repositories. The development, maintenance, and networking of such repositories of cultural heritage is compromised without a widely accessible database of their location and inventory of their collections. Rajat Sanyal is in a position to work on an inventory or directory of the local museums and collections of West Bengal. A key factor in the importance of this initiative is its local nature and its scope for the participation of local stakeholders. More importantly, it is a scheme that can be extended to Bangladesh.

### **Issues in the religious landscape**

Many sites in West Bengal and Bangladesh show transformation of the religious identity of cult images: something which is often under-appreciated. There is, however, a growing politico-religious atmosphere in India at present that is tending towards the promotion of a monolithic religious identity among the Hindu population, and denial of distinctive identities among the various other cultural communities. Equivalent pressures are current in Bangladesh also. Initiatives to raise awareness of the multi-faceted nature of local religious sites is perhaps something to be explored with communities themselves. This is recognised as a controversial and sensitive issue, and the utmost care must be taken in developing any such initiative, taking full account of the views of community leaders and the needs of the local people.

### **Issues around non-physical heritage**

An urgent need has been identified among the traditional indigenous communities of Purulia to salvage the present. This traditional tribal society is under pressure, with an enacted culture at risk of being lost through the attrition of outward migration and the increasing pressures of modernisation and globalisation. The problem is the disintegration of indigenous social fabric, and the threat to the living heritage and enacted culture at the centre of traditional community life. A proposal would be to create a digital archive with the cooperation of the local people, to include video and audio recordings, as well as photographic records. The possibilities of setting up a museum, or a mobile exhibition, should be considered too. A study of place-names could also be important in this context. The intention is to support marginalised and threatened communities, underpinning their own traditions, by helping them to tell their own story about themselves, both for themselves and for others.

### **Educational programmes**

The discussion around potential educational programmes drew much from the expertise available from the Indian Museum. ‘Know your visitors’ is the key maxim,

with the concept of museum as 'hangout zone'. Specific outside communities should be included in special exhibitions. There should also be two-way outreach and knowledge-exchange.

There is an argument for museums specifically for children. With the establishment of such museums, community participation might be increased, since engaged children usually means engaged parents. History exists when it is brought to life, and so we should be finding ways of creating platforms to recreate the past. This might begin by bringing history and archaeology directly into the schools in the first instance, either with visits by 'experts' or by the provision of learning materials. Experience of bringing new subject-areas of history teaching to the Scottish curriculum suggests that the best policy is to trust school teachers to do what seems best to them.

### **Outreach, awareness and tourism**

The experience of the Indian Museum shows how local museums could act as a nucleus for cultural festivals and events. This in turn would establish a closer relationship between the local people, the museums, and the heritage sites to which they are related. At the present time, the promotion of museums is more important than creating new museums. Awareness programmes are an important mode of interaction with local communities in this respect. In particular, the policy implemented by the Indian Museum of integrating museum activities with local festivals, is one to be pursued further afield. The terracotta-temple sites of Bengal are an obvious focus for development: Bishnupur, as a tentative UNESCO World Heritage site, provides a model for development and its benefits. Other sites should incorporate the region's Islamic heritage also. The possibility of innovative temporary exhibitions, closely tied to the community as well as any particular site, should especially be considered.

### **The problems of contested heritages, official heritage, and the popular domain**

Questions about how to deal with the complex layers of history that make up the cultural heritage landscape in Bengal were discussed. Defining heritage has profound political implications. In fact, we need to think hard about why we need to promote and preserve the heritage of rural communities at all. People must be allowed to speak for themselves: we must not assume that they do not have their own voice, their own mechanisms of preservation. Furthermore, the question was raised about the validity of the division between rural and urban in this context.

We must also be aware of the tension between state-sponsored narratives, the narratives of supra-national NGOs, academics, and local people. There is a difficulty in dovetailing the community perspective and the academic perspective. As with best-practice in studying and publishing the history of Scottish place-names, histories which might be incorrect in a scholarly sense must nevertheless be taken

into account and often included in any initiative, alongside the scholarly version. The idea of a singular historical constant must be rejected.

In all of this, the ethnographic dimension must be considered. It is important to address the impact of colonial politics, partition, and the consequent impact of migration on the understanding of communities, whether their self-understanding, or their understanding and interaction with their historical environment and cultural practices. A key intention should be to support marginalised and threatened communities, underpinning their own traditions, by helping them to tell their own story about themselves, both for themselves and for others.

### **Recommendations**

Running through each of the key themes was the realisation that the community perspective must be a key part of any future initiative as well as the academic viewpoint. Local people must be at the heart of development, and their needs and aspirations must be taken fully into account. Supporting the local community by employing local people is another consideration, along with the mutual need of scholarly experts and local experts, as well as everyday folk. For this reason, relationships that have already been established with particular communities should be the first to be drawn on as we move forward with plans for GCRF bids.

### **Next steps**

John Davies, with the advice of Dauvit Broun, will be responsible for monitoring calls for GCRF bids. The University of Glasgow ArtsLab would be holding a workshop at the end of May 2017 in order to bring together academics from across the disciplines – Arts, Social Sciences, Science and Engineering, Life Sciences – interested in GCRF, so that they can explore synergies for future GCRF awards. This report will act as a body of information for those from other disciplines who are interested in collaborating with our consortium, and can form the basis for prospective funding applications.

## FOREWORD

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This venture was made possible by a grant from the Global Challenges Research Fund, financed by the UK Government's Department for International Development, and delivered through the Scottish Funding Council to the University of Glasgow. But the nature of the funding call, and its short lead-time, meant that if I didn't already have a well-established group of willing collaborators at the University of Calcutta, I would not have been able to pull it together. Here I should mention that this core group, enthusiastically and ably co-ordinated by Dr Bishnupriya Basak, under a Memorandum of Understanding between the University of Glasgow and the University of Calcutta, grew out of a collaboration which was originally enabled by the openness and generosity of spirit of Professor Swapna Bhattacharya (Department of South and South-East Asian Studies, recently retired) who took me under her wing five years ago. Professor Bhattacharya together with Professor Suchandra Ghosh and Dr Sayantani Pal, who travelled to Glasgow in 2014, have gone out of their way to cement the relationship, which has grown with the equally willing and open-handed co-operation of Dr Rajat Sanyal, and now Dr Madhuparna Roychowdhury also.

My own colleagues from the University of Glasgow, Professor Dauvit Broun and Dr Simon Taylor, have also been generous with their time and energies; neither of them has any special obligation to participate.

But I must save a special expression of gratitude for those participants who are new collaborators. First of all, Professor Upinder Singh took the special trouble to fly from Delhi to be present at the workshop in Kolkata. Professor Swadhin Sen, from Jahangirnagar University, Dhaka, joined us via Skype from his field-trip in Bangladesh. Dr Sayan Bhattacharya took leave from his duties at the Indian Museum to be with us, and Dr Sharmila Saha likewise from the West Bengal State Archaeology Museum. My gratitude is due to all.

John Reuben Davies  
University of Glasgow  
May 2017





# CONTENTS

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|  |    |
|--|----|
| EXECUTIVE SUMMARY  | 1  |
| FOREWORD   | 5  |
| PARTICIPANTS   | 9  |
| INTRODUCTION   | 11 |
| WORKSHOP   | 15 |
| How to approach GCRF bids  | 15 |
| Heritage, culture, community:<br>reflections from local museums in West Bengal                   | 18 |
| Village deities in West Bengal:<br>a case study of the Biharinath temple, Bankura                | 20 |
| Landscape, place-names, and heritage   | 24 |
| The living heritage of Purulia, West Bengal  | 25 |
| The Indian Museum: education, study, enjoyment   | 28 |
| The past in dialogue with the present:<br>establishing children’s museums around excavated sites | 30 |
| Cultural-religious heritage and tourism:<br>a case from West Bengal                              | 32 |
| Museums, local heritage, and religious culture:<br>perspectives from contemporary West Bengal    | 34 |
| The popular domain and official heritage   | 37 |
| CONCLUSIONS AND NEXT STEPS   | 45 |



# PARTICIPANTS

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## DELHI

Professor Upinder Singh, Head of Department (History), University of Delhi

## DHAKA

Professor Swadhin Sen, Professor (Archaeology), Jahangirnagar University

## GLASGOW

Professor Dauvit Broun FRSE, Director of Arts Lab & Professor of Scottish History,  
University of Glasgow

Dr John Reuben Davies, Research Fellow, School of Humanities (History),  
University of Glasgow (Principal Investigator)

Dr Simon Taylor, Lecturer, School of Humanities (Celtic & Gaelic), University of  
Glasgow

## KOLKATA

### University of Calcutta

Dr Bishnupriya Basak, Assistant Professor (Archaeology), co-ordinator of MoU  
collaborations with University of Glasgow

Professor Suchandra Ghosh, Ancient Indian History and Culture

Dr Sayantani Pal, Associate Professor (AIHC)

Dr Madhuparna Roychowdhury, Assistant Professor (AHIC)

Dr Rajat Sanyal, Head of Department (Archaeology)

### Indian Museum

Dr Sayan Bhattacharya, Education Officer, Indian Museum

### West Bengal State Archaeology Museum, Behala

Dr Sharmila Saha, Keeper of Collections



# INTRODUCTION

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## **Brief description of the project**

The stated aim of this project in the initial proposal was to raise the profile of certain rural locations, building up awareness of their special cultural heritage. Through heritage development and knowledge-exchange schemes a fresh impetus might be given to communities whose historical and cultural heritage is gradually diminishing, being eroded, or under threat. Where appropriate, such work also has the potential to develop areas of the creative economy, including the tourist sector. It could encourage the conservation of cultural heritage, and help build community cohesion and pride too.

The proposal was based on relationships built through collaboration with the University of Calcutta in 2014/15 during which a number of wider contacts in Kolkata, West Bengal and India were also established. The original work focused on the ancient and early medieval property records of Bengal, which preserve early evidence of present communities, ancient physical features and boundary markers, and the earliest forms of place-names in Bengal.

The funding applied for was intended to finance a small-scale pump-priming project aligned with Global Challenge Research Fund themes to provide the evidence-base for future GCRF calls. It has enabled us to strengthen existing relationships with the University of Glasgow's partners in India in order to establish a consortium, and fund the workshop held in Kolkata on 29 April 2016 – of which this is the report – to develop specifics for a larger GCRF project proposal.

## **Overview of strategic importance ODA compliance**

### **Direct and primary relevance to the development challenges of India**

Based on academic studies (see below) and the overarching themes identified by the Arts and Humanities Research Council, where the arts and humanities can make strong contributions to global challenges, our proposal focused on areas where culture and heritage intersect with creative economies in conservation, tourism and heritage economies. We have also concentrated on capacity-building in museums and where culture and heritage intersect with conflict and humanitarian action in the area of cultural preservation and conflicted heritage.

### **Promotion of economic development and welfare**

West Bengal is known as the cultural capital of India. It has vast physical as well as cultural diversities that can draw a considerable number of tourists from home as well as abroad. But other states of India draw a greater number of tourists than West

Bengal, which only has about 3% of domestic tourists and 6% of foreign tourists in India.<sup>1</sup>

Bangladesh is even less widely known as a tourist destination in the international tourism market. Only 300,000 foreign tourists came to Bangladesh in 2010, of which more than 70 percent came for business and official purposes. The contribution of the earning from tourism to the country's GDP is less than 1 percent. The sector received recognition as an industry in 1999, but attention from the government to make it a vibrant industry has been relatively limited.<sup>2</sup>

Tourism is a major driving factor in the promotion of local economies, socio-cultural changes and the life-style of people living around tourist locations: studies show how rural tourism has improved civic amenities like communication, sanitation, transport facilities and the standard of living for the people in general.<sup>3</sup> Tourism can provide value for a destination through social and cultural factors, including the conservation of cultural heritage and consequent enhancement of community pride. It has been argued that realising and respecting the value of cultural and landscape heritage is a key factor in encouraging the growth of tourism.<sup>4</sup>

## **Expected outcomes, deliverables and potential impact**

### **Expected outcomes**

Through face-to-face meetings, we have been able to expand an existing network of scholars, heritage and educational professionals, as well as government agents, which can collaborate in promoting the cultural heritage of specific rural communities in West Bengal and Bangladesh. In the long-run, our objective is to lay the foundations for the telling of new stories about the history of local communities; and to raise awareness of possibilities in relation to rural heritage and encouraging cooperation between educational, heritage, and governmental bodies in West Bengal.

### **Deliverables**

The main deliverables were the establishment of a consortium in preparation for new GCRF funding calls, and to produce the basis for a proposal. This report is the main output in this respect.

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<sup>1</sup> N. C. Jana & S. Tarafder, 'Tourism in West Bengal: potentialities, problems and prospects', in *West Bengal: Geo-Spatial Issues*, ed. N. C. Jana *et al.* (Burdwan, 2012), 69–79.

<sup>2</sup> Ziaul Haque Howladar, 'Tourism in Bangladesh: problems and prospects', *The Independent* (Bangladesh, 6 November 2015), on line at <http://www.theindependentbd.com/printversion/details/21969>

<sup>3</sup> N. Ray, *et al.*, 'Tourism and its impact on socioeconomic condition: evidence from West Bengal, India', *Global Journal of Business Research* 6:2 (2012), 11–22.

<sup>4</sup> See S. Bhutia, 'Growth & development of tourism sector in West Bengal: issues and concerns', *American International Journal of Research in Humanities, Arts and Social Sciences* 3:6 (March–May 2014), 239–46.

## Potential impact

We would be looking in the longer term towards a degree of policy impact at West Bengal state-government level in areas where education, cultural affairs, and panchayat and rural development intersect; also policy impact in heritage institutions (especially district and local museums), specifically in heritage development and community engagement. The primary level of impact would be on cultural heritage conservation and heritage economy development/community cohesion and engagement with specific rural communities if further GRFC bids are successful.

## Introduction to the Workshop, Kolkata 29 April 2017

At our initial meeting at the Alipore Campus in February, we identified six main strands that we should consider at the Workshop, and at the heart of these strands was the network of local museums and private collections in Bengal. This is why we invited representatives from the leading museums of Kolkata in addition to those who have a special interest in the history of museums.

In addition to the specific issue of local museums, we also considered issues relating to landscape; to non-physical heritage; the possibilities of educational programmes; the specific issues of Bangladesh, as well as the the concepts of official and consumer heritage; tangible, and intangible heritage; and finally the possibilities relating to tourism, with presentations on museums, local heritage and religious culture. Indeed, understanding religious dynamics is also crucial to the sustainability of any development project; and whereas this may be complicated enough in West Bengal, Bangladesh presents its own special problems.

During the discussion of each theme, we kept in mind how we could involve non-academic partners, and especially the members of the particular communities we might wish to work with. We thought about maximising the impact of our work on all stakeholders, helping to build the capacity of our partners, sharing best practice, and supporting the communities with whom might work.

We also had to think about raising awareness of problematic issues and possibilities in relation to rural heritage and encouraging cooperation between educational, heritage, and governmental bodies both in West Bengal and in Bangladesh.

## Participants

Professor Davit Broun, Dr John Reuben Davies, and Dr Simon Taylor, the participants from the University of Glasgow, bring transferable skills from the Scottish scenario, primarily in knowledge exchange through their use of educational field trips, pioneering endeavours in name-studies, language heritage, and the development of innovative digital resources, and curriculum material from K1–K9 at an internationally excellent standard.

Dr Bishnupriya Basak, Professor Suchandra Ghosh, Dr Sayantani Pal, Dr Madhuparna Roychowdhury, and Dr Rajat Sanyal from the University of Calcutta, combine a range of experience, from sensitive work with tribal communities, local heritage work, to museum research and children's education initiatives.

Professor Upinder Singh from the University of Delhi is the country's leading historian of ancient and early medieval India, and has worked in depth on the history of ancient Bengal. She also brings a high-level, all-India perspective to this initiative.

Dr Swadhin Sen from Jahangirnagar University, Bangladesh, is not only an archaeologist, but also a leading theorist on cultural heritage and engagement with communities, who has worked in many culturally and politically sensitive situations throughout Bangladesh.

Dr Sayan Bhattacharya is Education Officer at the Indian Museum, India's largest, oldest, and most important museum. Over the past four years he has pioneered new education, outreach and engagement initiatives at the Museum. Dr Sharmila Saha is currently Keeper of the State Archaeology Museum, and has played a key role in its redevelopment, and in its relations with the local communities from which its collections are drawn.

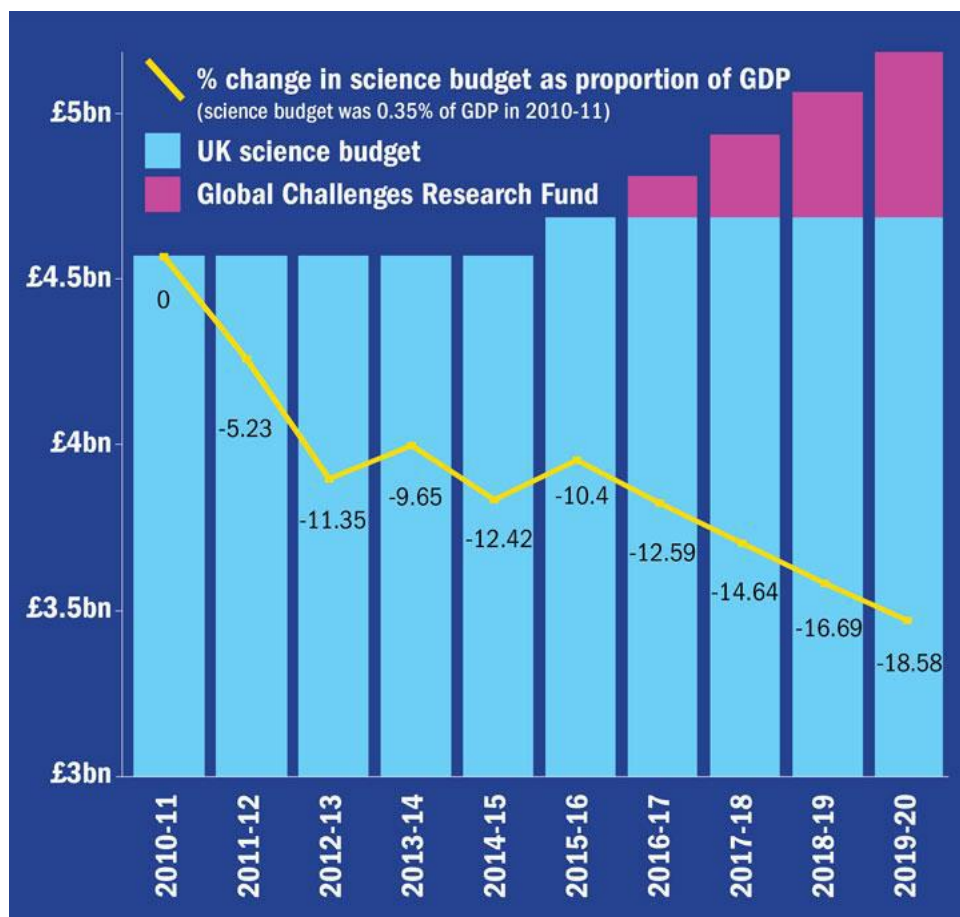


# THE WORKSHOP

## Background: Global Challenges Research Fund

The Global Challenge Research Fund (GCRF) was announced by the UK Government in a budget statement on 25 November 2016. The fund will provide £1.5 billion over 5 years.

The GCRF's purpose is to support cutting-edge research that addresses the challenges faced by developing countries through challenge-led disciplinary and interdisciplinary research, strengthening capacity for research and innovation both within the UK and developing countries, and providing an agile response to emergencies where there is an urgent research need. GCRF is administered through delivery partners including the Research Councils and national academies.



The £1.5-billion for the GCRF will come from the Department for International Development's Official Development Assistance (ODA) budget. The cash will then be passed on to the Department for Business, Innovation and Skills to spend as it sees fit. Funding will need to be spent on projects that are ODA-compliant. GCRF will contribute to the UK's target to spend 0.7 per cent of GDP on international development. ODA-funded activity focuses on outcomes that promote the long-term

sustainable growth of countries on the OECD Development Assistance Committee (DAC) list. It is administered with the promotion of the economic development and welfare of developing countries as its main objective.

**DAC List of ODA Recipients**  
Effective for reporting on 2014, 2015 and 2016 flows

| Least Developed Countries   | Other Low Income Countries<br>(per capita GNI <= \$1 045 in 2013)        | Lower Middle Income Countries<br>and Territories<br>(per capita GNI \$1 046-\$4 125<br>in 2013)  | Upper Middle Income Countries<br>and Territories<br>(per capita GNI \$4 126-\$12 745<br>in 2013)   |
|---|--|--|--|
| Afghanistan<br>Angola<br>Bangladesh<br>Benin<br>Bhutan<br>Burkina Faso<br>Burundi<br>Cambodia<br>Central African Republic<br>Chad<br>Comoros<br>Democratic Republic of the Congo<br>Djibouti<br>Equatorial Guinea <sup>1</sup><br>Eritrea<br>Ethiopia<br>Gambia<br>Guinea<br>Guinea-Bissau<br>Haiti<br>Kiribati<br>Lao People's Democratic Republic<br>Lesotho<br>Liberia<br>Madagascar<br>Malawi<br>Mali<br>Mauritania<br>Mozambique | Democratic People's Republic of Korea<br>Kenya<br>Tajikistan<br>Zimbabwe | Armenia<br>Bolivia<br>Cabo Verde<br>Cameroon<br>Congo<br>Côte d'Ivoire<br>Egypt<br>El Salvador<br>Georgia<br>Ghana<br>Guatemala<br>Guyana<br>Honduras<br>India<br>Indonesia<br>Kosovo<br>Kyrgyzstan<br>Micronesia<br>Moldova<br>Mongolia<br>Morocco<br>Nicaragua<br>Nigeria<br>Pakistan<br>Papua New Guinea<br>Paraguay<br>Philippines<br>Samoa<br>Sri Lanka | Albania<br>Algeria<br>Antigua and Barbuda <sup>2</sup><br>Argentina<br>Azerbaijan<br>Belarus<br>Belize<br>Bosnia and Herzegovina<br>Botswana<br>Brazil<br>Chile <sup>2</sup><br>China (People's Republic of)<br>Colombia<br>Cook Islands<br>Costa Rica<br>Cuba<br>Dominica<br>Dominican Republic<br>Ecuador<br>Fiji<br>Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia<br>Gabon<br>Grenada<br>Iran<br>Iraq<br>Jamaica<br>Jordan<br>Kazakhstan<br>Lebanon |

A Strategic Advisory Group sets the agenda.

- 1) Criteria
- 2) Priority challenge areas
- 3) Specific calls

### **Core criteria (as of January 2017)<sup>5</sup>**

- Problem and solution focused
- Research excellence
- Likelihood of Impact
- Capacity building and partnership

### **Problem and solution focused proposals**

GCRF research is aimed at addressing global sustainable development challenges, and is intended to transform the lives of the maximum number of poor people. The

<sup>5</sup> <http://www.rcuk.ac.uk/documents/international/sagcriteriaforgcrffunding-pdf/>

starting point for research proposals should therefore be a significant problem or development challenge.

The extent to which southern partners have played a leading role in problem-identification and the design, definition, and development of the proposed approach will add to the credibility of proposals for funding as it will demonstrate relevance and also local appetite and capacity to implement solutions.

A balance of research will be sought across all the challenge areas thrown up by the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). Successful proposals will need to demonstrate that they address the multiple dimensions of sustainability in an integrated way.

## Challenge areas

- Equitable access to sustainable development
- Sustainable economies and societies
- Human rights, good governance and social justice

But ‘the challenges facing societies and individuals across the globe are often complex, protracted and multi-faceted and cut across the three areas above.’<sup>6</sup>

## Specific calls

### Open Calls

| Call title   | Council | Closing date  |
|--|---------|---------------|
| <a href="#">Antimicrobial Resistance in a Global Context – A Cross-Council call in partnership with the Department of Health</a> | All     | 11 July 2017  |
| <a href="#">MRC-AHRC Global Public Health: Partnership Awards Call</a>   | MRC     | 08 June 2017  |
| <a href="#">Pump-priming awards in global nutrition research and global mental health research</a>                               | MRC     | 5 May 2017    |
| <a href="#">Diagnostics, prosthetics and orthotics to tackle health challenges in developing countries</a>                       | EPSRC   | 25 May 2017   |
| <a href="#">Research Networking Highlight Notice for International Development</a>   | AHRC    | 25 April 2017 |

Many of the GCRF funding calls with an arts-and-humanities element are interdisciplinary. We should therefore be networking with colleagues in other fields – medical and life sciences, science and engineering, social sciences – in order to identify potential research collaborators.

<sup>6</sup> <http://www.rcuk.ac.uk/funding/gcrf/challenges/>

# Heritage, culture, community: reflections from local museums in West Bengal

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## West Bengal Directorate of Archaeology and Museums

The Government of West Bengal's Directorate of Archaeology and Museums is responsible for the preservation of 108 State Protected Monuments and Sites under the purview of the *West Bengal Preservation of Historical Monuments and Objects and Excavation of Archaeological Sites Act 1957 and Rules 1964*. The Directorate also maintains and administers the State Archaeological Museum in Kolkata with seven display galleries, representing the history and culture of West Bengal. Apart from these, six District Museums and about twenty Rural Museums in West Bengal are provided with financial aid and technical assistance. The Directorate undertakes projects and schemes to continue the archaeological and museum activities as regular programmes.

The Directorate's budget also covers exploration and excavation. This has recently included the excavation at Moghalmari, a Buddhist site of the 6th century CE, in the Dantan Police-station area, Paschim Medinipur. The conservation of the Moghalmari site has also been taken up, and several conservation projects of state-protected monuments are included in the state government's budget.

The State Government's principal museum is the State Archaeological Museum at Behala, where a new building now has seven galleries. There are also District Museums which are looked after by the Government of West Bengal with regular financial and technical support: Acharya Jogesh Chandra Purakirti Bhavan (Bankura District Museum) at Bishnupur; Malda District Museum at Malda; Dakshin Dinajpur District Museum at Balurghat; Uttar Dinajpur District Museum at Raiganj; Murshidabad District Museum at Jiaganj; and Bagnan Ananda Niketan Kritishala (Howrah District Museum).

The Directorate publishes books, albums, excavation reports and journals on a regular basis. It also organizes lectures, seminars, and workshops, highlighting recent archaeological activities West Bengal. The Directorate also organizes exhibitions, awareness campaigns and other extra-mural activities in Kolkata and other towns of West Bengal. Dr Sharmila Saha plays a significant role in these activities.

## Local museums and local collections in West Bengal

Apart from District Museums, there are several rural museums initiated by the local people and NGOs for displaying various artefacts of regional and local character in different parts of the state. These are being supported regularly with annual grants from the state government. Several site museums are also being constructed at

archaeological sites: at Chandraketugarh in North 24 Parganas; Pakbira in Purulia; Mangalkote in Burdwan; Jagjivanpur in Malda; and Moghalmari in Paschim Medinipur. Funds have also been set aside for construction of museums at Moghalmari and Pakbira.

Dr Rajat Sanyal observed that apart from well-known and celebrated museums that are generally referred to in the context of studies in Heritage Management, a large number of what may be termed 'local museums' and 'local collections' might play a significant role in areas of the preservation of historical and/or cultural heritage of rural communities. Dr Sanyal noted that in West Bengal a total of 239 local museums have so far been documented. He has already visited nearly 130 of these museums.

### Types of museums and collections

- Archaeological Museum
- Industrial Museum
- Rail Museum
- Science Museum
- Handicrafts Museum
- Ethnographic Museum
- Biographical Museum
- University Museums cutting across areas (the University of Calcutta has at least 5 departmental museums)

### Proposal

The problem is that there is no comprehensive or accessible directory or database of the local museums and collections of West Bengal. Dr Sanyal's proposal is for a two-phase project:

#### Phase 1

- Compilation of a Directory of Museums

#### Phase 2

- A complete digitized database of collections

Rajat Sanyal is the only person who has attempted the work to create an inventory or directory of all the local museums and collections of West Bengal. A key factor in the importance of this initiative is its local nature and its scope for the participation of local stakeholders. More importantly, it is a scheme that can be extended to Bangladesh. Without wishing to make any political point, the historian of South Asia is constantly aware that the artificial separation of Bengal into East and West has tended to hamper any work on the cultural heritage of the region.

## Village deities in West Bengal: a case study of the Biharinath temple, Bankura

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Dr Sayantani Pal focused on the Biharinath temple, Bankura, in the context of cultural landscapes. Place and landscape are shaped by culture, religious, secular, and industrial. People relate to the natural world and so a natural landscape is modified into a cultural landscape. Cultural landscape is therefore the tangible outcome of the complex interaction between human groups with their own practices and a natural or modified environment. This interaction is time and space specific; and so each place has its own cultural identity. This identity may become a resource for the further development of that place.

Biharinath is significant because it shows a long process of religious appropriation of cults in the context of the Biharinath Hill and the surrounding areas. This locality came to the attention of archaeologists with the discovery of Palaeolithic tools. Biharinath is the tallest hill (451 m) of the Bankura District of West Bengal and one of the dense forest areas of the district. It is a part of the Eastern Ghats. Both the Susunia and Biharinath Hills stand as the commanding features of the landscape. From Susunia we have a 4th-century CE cave inscription referring to the dedication of the cave to Cakrasvāmin.

The area also has coal deposits. The Biharinath bloc represents the south-central Raniganj coalfield in Trans-Damodar region. The people here are largely dependent on coal mines, or they visit the Asansol/Durgapur area to find a job. Biharinath is also a tourist spot, primarily because of its scenic beauty. The place attracts trekkers in large numbers. Since tourism is flourishing at Biharinath, people here are gradually gaining tourism-related jobs.

The Biharinath Dham temple is situated at the north slope of the Biharinath Hill. It can be approached from the nearby village of Tiluri in the Police-station area of Saltora. It is presently a Saiva temple. The site, however, possesses the ruins of a brick-built structure of an older shrine. The image of Vishnu Lokeshvara, Tirthankara Parshvanatha, and an inscribed lion, which can be assigned to 11th–12th century CE, indicate the antiquity of the shrine.

Inside the modern sanctum, the main object of worship is a Sivalinga. Besides, an unidentified deity (now covered with garments) standing on a large pedestal also occupies the central place of the chamber. She is surrounded by small Sivalingas as well as modern Saiva idols. A trisula is also kept beside her to establish her Saiva identity.





There are several ancillary chambers inside the temple complex housing various deities. In one chamber an unfinished sculpture of a deity, a Nandi, has been placed together with small Sivalingas. Interestingly what we find together are small terracotta models of horses typical to Bankura. These are actually votive objects which are offered on the fulfilment of a *manasika* (a vow). Outside the wall of the chamber the Saiva Om symbol occurs on the top right while the top left is occupied by a figure of Hanuman.



In another chamber, an image of Vishnu Lokeshvara with 12 arms and standing under a canopy of 7 serpent hoods has been identified. There is a miniature six-armed dancing figure of Siva or Nataraja carved on a medallion on the middle face of the

Pancaratha pedestal below. The figure of dancing Siva on the pedestal no doubt introduces a Saiva element. Stylistically the image has been dated to c. 1100 CE. The image appears to have belonged to a panel of some old temple and it was removed from its *in-situ* position. On the top of the image, a smaller image of another deity has been placed, together with modern idols of Ganesha and Siva. A large standing image of Parshvanatha has been found in the temple also. From Biharinath Hill, the figure of a lion, the distinguishing emblem or cognisance (*lāñchana*) of Māhavīra, has been found. It bears an inscription in characters of the 12th century CE. In another chamber the central figure is a modern idol of Radhakrishna.

The temple thus shows how images of different strands of religious belief – Jaina, Saiva, Vaishnava – as well as local cults and rituals, have been assimilated within a single temple complex that derives its popularity for being a place of Saiva worship.

The distance between Biharinath and Tiluri is not considerable and both the sites have yielded Jaina cultural remains. It may be assumed that both the sites were considered as tirthas (places of pilgrimage) by the Jaina community.

In addition to this, the main entrance of the temple has a notice on the outside wall which tells those wishing to perform a marriage ceremony within the temple to submit their identity cards and other documents. This indicates that the chief role of the Biharinath temple for the rural communities of the area is to conduct the marriage ceremonies of the local Hindu population. The name of the artist of the gateway and its sculptures has also been engraved in bold letters on the top, that is, Bablu Sutradhar of Bankura. The scenes depicted are those of devotees worshipping a Sivalinga, and a male and a female figure carrying pitchers full of water for bathing the linga. In this way the Biharinath Saiva temple, primarily consisting of ancient sculptures of different religious systems, has incorporated the local artisans also within its fold.

It appears that the fragmentary Jaina sculptures at the site were collected and formed the chief objects of worship when the modern temple was constructed. The local people who are presently the main devotees at the temple must have very little knowledge of the religious identity of the sculptures. Still the temple occupies a central place in the locality, with its location on the slopes of the Biharinath Hill.

## Proposal

Several sites in West Bengal show the kind of transformation of the religious identity of cult images that is evident in the Biharinath temple, Bankura. There is, however, a growing politico-religious atmosphere in India at present that is tending towards the promotion of a monolithic among the Hindu population, and denial of distinctive identities among the various other cultural communities.



Initiatives to raise awareness of the multi-faceted nature of local cults, with which the neighbouring community has become a vital part throughout the ages, is perhaps something to be explored with members of the community themselves.

This is of course a controversial and sensitive issue, and the utmost care must be taken in developing any initiative, taking full account of the views of community leaders and the needs of the local people. (See the account of Dr Sen's contribution below.)

## Landscape, place-names, and heritage

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Simon Taylor, a specialist in onomastics, began by focusing on what he sees as the problematic distinction between 'tangible' and 'intangible' heritage. A place-name is an everyday object, used by anyone who lives in, travels to, or knows a particular place. But a place-name is also an everyday object which holds a key to the past. The toponym is often the oldest artefact in any given location. In many cases the toponym describes the physical location of a place; in others it may relate to some special man-made feature or historical aspect of the community. To say that a place-name is 'intangible' is therefore somewhat limited. In this respect a place-name is often tied up with community and tourism. An etymology can often form the basis for a community's projection of its self-identity, and the place-name in this respect also holds a memory.

Often a local etymology can be incorrect in purely linguistic terms or in relation to the motivation of the original name-coiners, but Dr Taylor thinks it is important to incorporate incorrect local etymologies in the record of a toponym, since they are an important part of the history of a place-name and the identity of a place: they add an important dimension. (Similar points were made later on by Swadhin Sen about allowing local perceptions of a community's history to have space in relation to archaeological sites.)

Place-names can often be the main source of evidence for settlement of particular peoples, on account of the linguistic elements they incorporate. The data in West Bengal are still significantly untapped, as in many parts of Scotland too. In Scotland as in Bengal boundary clauses containing place-names and place-descriptions in early records of property transfer often provide the richest seam of evidence for the history the history of language, landscape and the identification of historical sites. In Scotland the evidence is preserved on parchment and written in ink, whereas in Bengal the medium is incised writing on copper-plates. In Scotland it is often possible to identify whole boundaries from their descriptions in medieval documents, and Dr Taylor has led a popular series of historical place-name walks in the Scottish countryside, relating history to place.

Dr Taylor had produced a series of glossy educational leaflets to accompany these walks, with maps and historical explanations of the landscape and toponymy. While similar types of walks might be difficult in the Bengal climate, as well as for other practical reasons, a number of lessons can be taken from the Scottish scenario. Incorporating place-names and early toponymic evidence in any presentation of a locality's cultural heritage is important: a place's toponymy holds so many aspects of a community's historical memories and identity. This is also a key way of including local people in such initiatives, since local knowledge is often essential to the study of toponymy and its relationship to topography as well.

# The living heritage of Purulia, West Bengal

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Dr Bishnupriya Basak led a discussion on living heritage, focusing her presentation on Purulia in West Bengal. Purulia emerged as a district in November 1956 when the erstwhile Manbhum district was partitioned between Bengal and Bihar. Earlier, under the East India Company, as well as later, this was part of the Jungle Mahals. Constituted of a sizeable tribal population, Purulia holds the third position in West Bengal under this category. Therefore it is no wonder that the district, particularly the region of the Ajodhya hills adjoining Jharkhand, is a rich treasure-trove of folklore, traditional dances like the *Cchhau*, and many indigenous ceremonies and rituals.



## Development as anathema

In the colonial period there was agrarian intervention, disturbance of water bodies and large-scale deforestation driven by the government. Drought became a common phenomenon. Indigenous communities become 'ecological refugees', and forced migration ensued. In the post-colonial period, under the Left Front government, there was a further process of migration. Environmental degradation made the cost of agricultural operations very high, and low agricultural productivity and deforestation resulted in a nutritional crisis. This affected migratory trends, and there was more emigration than immigration. The impact of modern developmental policies has seen *Adivasi* (or tribal) society plunging into a crisis, with traditional/indigenous social fabric disintegrating.

## Sacred spaces in the Ajodhya hills

In Ayodhya, the hills are becoming centres of annual ceremonies, and rituals are emerging as *sacred* to the local populations. Every part of the landscape, a sacred

grove, a tree or a stone, becomes an object of veneration to the local tribal communities as seen through some other festivals, such as the *Baha Parab*.

A form of ancestor worship venerates the hills and deities residing in the hills. Matha, Kana and Bhussu dungri (*dungri* – hillock/large outcrop) appear as mnemonic places where the ancestral past is cemented through legends, ceremonies and *mantras* (*mantra* – utterances during the conduct of worship) uttered by the priest. At Matha, Kana and Bhussu Dungri the *than* or the sacred site was marked by huge boulders perched on the hills or by rocks carving out a small niche. At Matha the first rites were performed in the *Laya's* or the priest's house in front of an earthen mound, a metre in height, representing the hill. The matha site is now appropriated by Brahmanical Hindu communities.

The ceremony at all three places shares some commonalities, the sacrifice of animals being the most elaborate one. Goats, cockerels and pigeons were sacrificed here to propitiate and thank the *buru* or the god for his assistance in some task or other during the past year. At the end of the sacrifices these places (except for Kana) became centres of festivity through songs, dance and merriment. It is through these rituals and custom that the peoples' attachment to these places is cemented and strengthened and the significance of these places preserved.

Elements of sacredness and identity are forged through another ceremony surrounding the Ayodhya hill. This is the *Disum Sendra* or the Annual Hunt of the tribal people. Although the forested tracts are fast dwindling in the face of rapid deforestation, hunting still retains its ritualistic flavour, invoking the primeval forces. The hill becomes a congregation point for the tribal communities of the locality, as well of far-flung places, on the night of *purnima* or the full moon in the month of *baishakh* (April–May).

The veneration of landscape assumes a different dimension in *Baha Parab*, the festival of flowers. Held in the month of *falgun* (corresponding to February-March in the Bengali calendar), celebrating the first full moon of the month and the first blossoming of *Sal* (*Shorea robusta*) flowers, this is a festival exclusively of the Santal tribe. Here, the sacred site shifts from the hill to the *jaher than*, or the sacred grove, in the Santal village. The *jaher than*, a place dominated by *Sal* trees, is the most auspicious place in every village, generally situated in the margins.

As in the other ceremonies, sacrifices of cockerels and chicks form the most prominent and elaborate of all rites. The communal feasts and traditional songs and dances, which follow, provide the people with a sense of identity. Ancestor worship forms an integral part of this ceremony as well, when the first rites are performed in honour of the founder of the village at the *Majhi than*, before the ceremony commences at the *Jaher than*.

### **Proposal: salvaging the present**

Dr Basak sees an urgent need to salvage the present among the traditional indigenous communities of Purulia. Here is a traditional tribal society under pressure, with an enacted culture at risk of being lost through the attrition of outward migration and the increasing pressures of modernisation and globalisation. The dignity and self-respect the traditional tribal communities of Purulia, it might be argued, could be fostered and bolstered through co-operative initiatives. Having worked closely with these communities and gained a profound level of trust, Dr Basak would be in a position to take such an initiative forward, working with local contacts and community representatives in Purulia, and including local stakeholders in any future project.

The problem is the disintegration of indigenous social fabric, and the threat to the living heritage and enacted culture at the centre of traditional community life.

The proposal is to create a digital archive with the cooperation of the local people. This would include video and audio recordings, as well as photographic records. The possibilities of setting up a museum, or a mobile exhibition, should be considered too. A study of place-names could also be important in this context. The intention is to support marginalised and threatened communities, underpinning their own traditions, by helping them to tell their own story about themselves, both for themselves and for others.

# The Indian Museum: education, study, enjoyment

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The Indian Museum, Kolkata, was founded on 2 February 1814 by Dr Nathaniel Wallich, a Danish botanist. It is the first museum in the Asia-Pacific region, and has played the role of a leader in setting the tone for the museum movement in the continent. The Museum has grown enormously in terms of its collections and scope, to become the largest repository of the nation's cultural heritage. It celebrated its bicentenary in 2014, in connection with which the building as a whole, as well as a number of galleries, were refurbished.

The Museum provides the widest scope of reaching out to the varying sections of the society through the heritage objects and further paves the way for interactions on issues of cultural legacy and inheritance. Since the last two centuries, this built form of the Museum has been targeting the widest possible audience section through the promotion of both tangible and intangible forms of heritage. Social-inclusion issues have been taken up in recent years by the Indian Museum have also helped to promote our culture and heritage in an unconventional manner, to involve and engage the socially neglected and underprivileged sections in our heritage study and promotion.

According to the ICOM Statutes, adopted during the 21st General Conference in Vienna, Austria, in 2007:

A museum is a non-profit, permanent institution in the service of society and its development, open to the public, which acquires, conserves, researches, communicates and exhibits the tangible and intangible heritage of humanity and its environment for the purposes of education, study and enjoyment.

This definition is a reference-point in the international community.

## Conceptualizing a Visitor–Museum–Object bridge

The fundamental motto and challenge of a museum is to establish an 'accessible bridge' between a museum's objects and its visitors. The challenge is to create an Animate–Inanimate connection. There are two broad categories of 'bridge': Macro-bridge and Micro-bridge.

### Micro-bridge

The key pillars to establish this bridge are:

- Clarity in the visibility of objects
- Informative communication
- Illustrative communication
- Assistance
- Ambience

## **Macro-Bridge**

The key pillars to establish this bridge are:

- Adequate and proper signage
- Transparency of gallery and facility information/availability
- Access facility
- Clear route map on flyers
- Flyers on gallery collection/ display

## **Building the Bridge**

The Indian Museum has been using the following elements to establish the bridge:

- Pedestal/ platform
- Lighting
- Labels
- Assistance (guided)
- Illustrative display of selected reserve collection
- Ambience creation in some galleries
- Digital kiosks
- Activities (workshops, seminars, gallery talks, quiz, storytelling, etc.)
- Outreach programme

## **Activities of the Education Department of the Indian Museum**

The Indian Museum's Education Department under Dr Sayan Bhattacharya has developed a number of activities that can serve as a model of best practice in education and outreach.

1. Awareness campaigns: in-house and outreach
2. Celebrating International Days
3. Cultural programmes – promoting 'intangible' Heritage
4. Guided tours
5. Programmes with special children
6. Hands-on activities
7. Special lectures
8. Workshops and seminars
9. Exhibitions, in-house and mobile
10. Training courses in conservation and other areas of museology

Dr Bhattacharya also outlined some key maxims for those promoting a museum and engaging the community. First, a museum should know its visitors; moreover, it should be alive, acting as a 'hangout' zone for the community. There should be visits arranged for children from surrounding areas. A museum should also be a venue for enacted culture, raising awareness outside communities – World Music Day can often provide an appropriate opportunity in many cases. There should be a two-way process of outreach and knowledge-exchange, the museum going out to meet people as well as bringing them inside.

# The past in dialogue with the present: establishing children's museums around excavated sites

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Dr Suchandra Ghosh made the case for children's museums. A page in a text book, she argued, talking about heritage and how museums are a repository of our past is not enough to instil in a child a love for our heritage or curiosity about any object which is a slice of our past. The lost phase of our cultural past could be brought alive through establishing a children's museum around an excavated site. The museum could showcase the excavation procedure. Selected artefacts, featuring the uniqueness of a site, could be displayed. Objects, though they may look mute, speak vividly and honestly of their times. Each of these objects has a life-story to share. With a little bit of imagination, along with the objects, one could build up a story which will attract a young mind and also would aggravate their curiosity and scientific temper.

## Ways of Generating Interest

Children could be shown an excavation video to help them understand how the past is unravelled. They could be taken to a local site when excavation is in progress. Let them be acquainted with the excavation tools. Dummy tools could be made for the children to use. An artificial space could be created where the children might use the shovel. Let them enjoy the feel of digging and recovering some object. This could be the prelude before their actual visit to a museum.

## Museum: and interactive and educational space

The nature of the site should be reflected in the display of the objects. The daily life of the people of the past should be brought to the forefront through the display of pottery (cooking vessels, plates, jars, lids), antimony rods, nails, spindle whorls, beads, lamps, roof tiles, gaming counters, stone weights, etc. Thus acquaintance and engagements with objects of daily life would give the children a sense of the past and they would try to relate that to their present. The Kerala Council for Historical Research, Pattanam, and the Sharma Centre for Heritage Education, Chennai, have established children's museums for developing awareness of Indian heritage among the children. They also have outreach programmes to connect with rural India. These programmes would supplement textbook information with interactive practical workshops. A sense of respect and sensitivity might in this way be developed among children towards their past.

## Proposal: a children's museum at Moghalmari/Chandraketugarh

In the case of Bengal, like Pattanam there is an argument for a museum for children at Moghalmari/Chandraketugarh. With the establishment of the museum, community participation might be increased. The Buddhist character of Moghalmari could be displayed through objects related to Buddhism. Children could be made aware of



people having different kinds of belief systems. Textbook information on Buddhism would be supplemented through this museum.



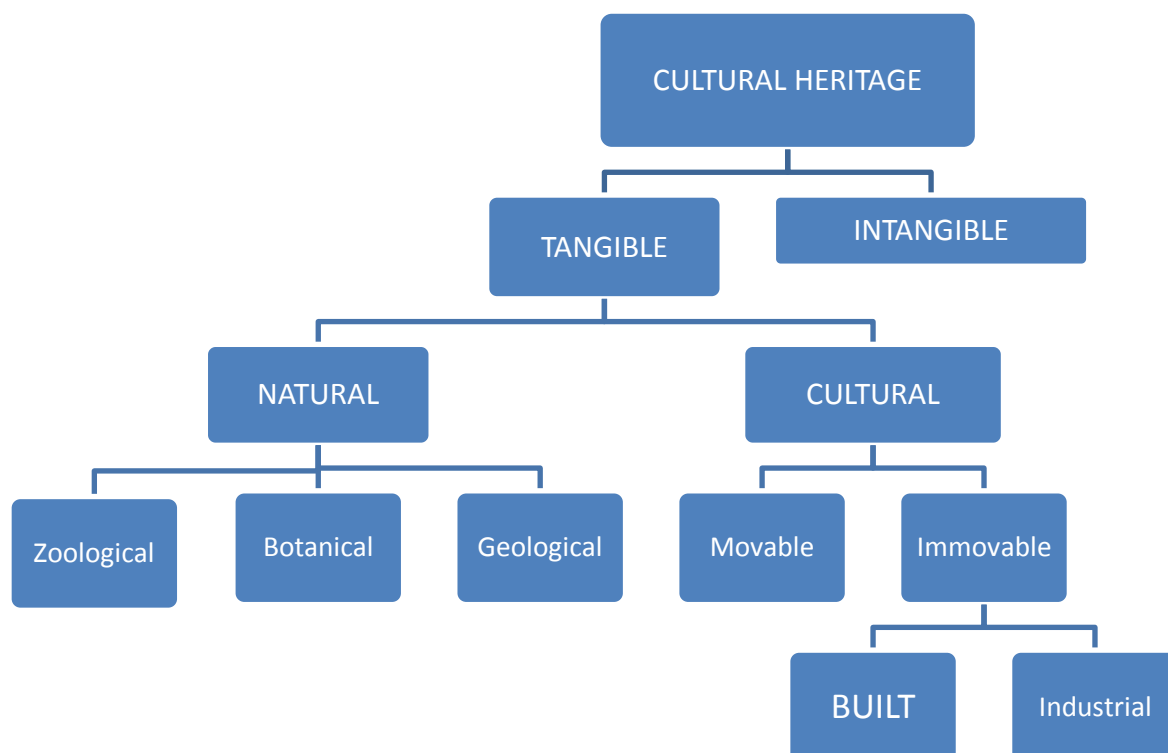
Harvesting scene: village children will relate to such a depiction...the unchanging sickle and the method.

In the initial approach to schools, a video could be produced of how archaeological investigation is done. This would be a prelude to a visit to a museum and archaeological site, where hands-on activities would be provided. There could be an emphasis on daily life in the past, with a focus on the continuities with the past: it is hoped that the image (above) of the harvest – with the unchanging sickle and the method – would help children relate to such concepts. And it should be remembered that engaged children lead to engaged parents.

# Cultural-religious heritage and tourism: a case from West Bengal

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Dr Sharmila Saha gave a definition of cultural heritage as the legacy of physical artefacts and intangible attributes of a group or society that are inherited from past generations, maintained in the present and bestowed for the benefit of future generations. Cultural heritage can therefore broadly be analysed in the following categories:



Dr Saha highlighted the Bishnupur group of temples, which are a Protected Monument under the control of the Archaeological Survey of India. The Bishnupur group has also been included on UNESCO's Tentative List of World Heritage sites. Dr Saha thinks this example of built heritage may be used as a model heritage site.

The significance of Bishnupur as a place is that it was the capital of the Malla dynasty. The Malla kings patronised many handloom and cottage industries including silk, tussar, conch-shell carvings, bell metal, pattachitra, etc. Along with this the Malla kings constructed terracotta and brick-made temples. Many cultural practices imprinted their material and non-material culture to the indigenous Bishnupur culture, and the terracotta temples witness that acculturation process. The temples of Bishnupur and surrounding areas were constructed in the 16th or 17th century. The temple architecture of the neighbouring state, Orissa, had a great impact on the temples of Bishnupur too. The influence of Mughal- and South Indian-

styles can also be found. The mixture of tangible or natural resources and intangible resources in the form of religious beliefs makes the temples part of a cultural environment which becomes a resource-base for tourism. But it is very difficult in low-income countries to promote tourism because in most cases the supply of basic needs gets priority in national planning programmes. Thus heritage sites like Bishnupur, although having good tourism potential, have until recently experienced difficulty in gaining proper priority at local, regional, national, and international level.<sup>7</sup>

But with the prospect of according UNESCO World Heritage status to Bishnupur, conservation and beautification activities have been boosted in and around the temple town. A major impediment to the award of World Heritage status has been encroachment around the heritage structures. Although all 22 nationally-protected monuments were once on the same sprawling campus, they stand highly fragmented today. The Archaeological Survey of India is therefore trying restore the common pathway which would connect all the temples together.

The West Bengal state government is enthusiastic about Bishnupur, and has been preparing a land-use master-plan for the town which would be a roadmap for its controlled urban growth. Removal of encroachments and subsequent rehabilitation is also a part of the plan. The government plans to build a world-class tourism hub there, according to the Tourism department. In the eyes of the West Bengal Government, Bishnupur is also the cradle of the famous Bishnupur *gharana* of Hindustani classical music, the tradition of which has been alive since the 14th century and probably much earlier, and this as much as the temples is qualification enough to bring the world there. It is one of the most important sites of India's intangible cultural heritage.<sup>8</sup>

Dr Saha presented the Bishnupur site as a model for how to approach built cultural heritage. In seeking to manage and promote the cultural heritage of a locality, we should therefore bear in mind the following determining factors.

- The presence of a rich cultural heritage (both intangible and tangible) in the surrounding area.
- The presence of important archaeological findings.
- The need to implement and maintain proper conservation methodologies.
- Infrastructural facilities.
- Public awareness of the rich cultural heritage of a region.
- Government policies.

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<sup>7</sup> N. D. Chatterjee, 'Heritage site management problem in developing countries: a case study on Temple Town Bishnupur, District Bankura, west Bengal, India', in *Proceedings of the 2nd International Conference on Social Sciences, University of Kelaniya* (2013), p. 6.

<sup>8</sup> Krishnendu Bandyopadhyay, 'Heritage buzz prompts facelift of Bishnupur in Kolkata', *The Times of India*, 6 July 2015, on line a <http://timesofindia.indiatimes.com/city/kolkata/Heritage-buzz-prompts-facelift-of-Bishnupur-in-Kolkata/articleshow/47952073.cms> (accessed 16 May 2017).

## Museums, local heritage, and religious culture: perspectives from contemporary West Bengal

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Dr Madhuparna Roychowdhury's theme develops the factors presented by Dr Saha in a more specific way. She began her contribution by reminding us how archaeology as a feature of the historian's method of critical enquiry became an endemic preoccupation in the museum movement in India in the period of high nationalism. It was from this period in particular that local museums came to have a role in creating an awareness about the history and heritage of a place.

### **Interface between museums, tourism and community participation**

Dr Roychowdhury went on to explain how the relationship between museums, tourism, and community participation can be studied as a part of museum history. For pre-independence Bengal, we have several examples of local landowners collecting archaeological collections from their own localities. Such collections frequently resembled the character of small-scale local archaeological museums. For example, direct community participation was evident in the Vikrampur Museum or the Tamluk Museum. The connection with tourism culture is evident from a long report of the Curator of the Nalanda Museum {{REF.}}. Here we have the Curator's vision of how to make the museum adequately attractive in order to blend it with elaborate tourism packages.

### **Museums and promotion of heritage tourism in post-independence West Bengal**

These perspectives are useful in visualizing the role of a few local museums in post-independence West Bengal for the promotion of heritage tourism. Gaur, for example, was a medieval site announcing the glory of the Bengal sultanate. The Malda Museum, maintained by the Archaeological Survey and known as the Gumtigate Museum, was once located within the main heritage site. Later it was shifted to a distant building. The museum as it stands today has a large number of sculptures and copper-plates collected from all over the district. Dr Roychowdhury expressed her view that the museum-community interface could be strengthened if the museum at Malda, maintained by the State Government, were to be more firmly integrated with the historical buildings of the place.

### **Museum, local heritage and religious culture**

There are significant temple sites in West Bengal – such as that at Bishnupur, which Dr Saha highlighted – and religious culture, as we have already seen, is a key issue in local heritage. Some of the temple sites carry with them the tradition of community participation in fairs and festivals surrounding the temple. Such temple sites often created the basis of a local cultural heritage.

One such site is located in the 17th/18th-century terracotta temple complex at Antpur in the Hooghly district. Dr Roychowdhury envisaged here a small local museum, which would present aspects of the history of Vaishnavism and terracotta temple architecture in medieval Bengal. Such a museum could act as a nucleus for cultural festivals and events through which the local community might become naturally interested in the Vaishnava heritage of Bengal, which produced in the long run a series of syncretic values. By way of accommodation of appropriate vestiges of the temples in the museum display, visitors would have a better knowledge of the larger history of the place. This in turn would establish a close relationship between the museum and the temple as an archaeological site.

At the present time, however, the promotion of museums is more important than creating new museums. Awareness programmes are an important mode of interaction with local communities in this respect. In particular, the policy implemented by the Indian Museum of integrating museum activities with local festivals, is one to be pursued further afield. Museums can act as a nucleus of secular festivals in celebrating the composite culture of Indian society, and this is one of the ways through which the museum-community interface could be strengthened.

# The popular domain and official heritage

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Dr Swadhin Sen began his contribution by pointing out that the urban middle-classes are very familiar with the notion of 'safeguarding heritage'. But a different version of cultural heritage is being produced in contemporary Bangladesh – one with a particular attraction for the elite consumer-middleclass. It is a brand, a commodity, a product in which intellectual and financial investments can be made: a product that can be consumed, and more importantly, the consumption transforms the identity of the consumer.

## Official assumptions and the authorised heritage discourse

During the last decade or so, various NGOs have been established to work on cultural heritage in Bangladesh. There is an intimate connection between heritage, past, and identity. These connections are represented through various assumptions that we think of as normal, established, emancipatory.

1. The past can be read, reconstructed, and circulated through archaeological remains that are identified as 'heritage' (a more common term is now cultural resource in the USA). The heritage is local and global at the same time. The heritage is essential for the identity of a 'nation' and 'ethnic groups' in the sense that the root of a collective (a nation or ethnic group) can be traced back, reconstructed and interpreted through archaeological works on 'heritage'. Heritage helps us to know and reconstruct the past glory, pride, and all the good recognition of a nation. The glorious and prosperous past of a nation is essential for building a better national future. At the same time, heritage is perceived as being entwined in the identity of universal humankind as it endorses the history of the human race.

2. Heritage can be protected and preserved. It is our sacred duty to protect heritage for posterity and for present study. We can protect our heritage: we must protect our heritage. The opposite is regarded as anti-national, anti-state, inhuman, and uncivilized. The desire and action to protect heritage thus becomes a standard as well as a process to become a true citizen and patriot. Without the apparent expressions for the protection of heritage, people could easily be labelled as 'unconscious' and 'ignorant' of their civilized self-identity.

3. According to the norms and processes of protection, as well as the codes of conduct for preservation now codified as a systematic management system, heritage must be managed. Fixing the terms and conditions of management must be under the sole authority of institutions (such as state and transnational agencies like UNESCO, ICOMOS, etc.) and experts. In heritage vocabulary, the authority of the institutions and specialists is popularly known as 'stewardship'. In the USA and West European countries, Cultural Resource Management (CRM) has turned into an established discipline and institutional practice. State legal and juridical systems

have endorsed this particular aspect of stewardship. Renowned universities are offering degrees in CRM.

4. Heritage turns into an industry: a field where both financial and intellectual investments are made and profit is sought. Branding is done with a nationalist aura. Selective symbols from the past are commodified and consumed within an exotic marketing policy. Tourism and sustainable development, in this way, become enmeshed in the neo-liberal economy. A past is manufactured, sold, and appropriated in many ways across the world. The most obvious example in India is the Taj Mahal, transformed into replicas consumed in their hundreds of thousands in celebration of immortal love, as if consumption would reproduce the past in the present.

Heritage, understood through its essential manifestations in our modern living, Dr Sen argued, is embedded into our existence. In celebration of our joy; in memorialising our pain and distress; in manifesting our love and loyalty for country; in disseminating nationalist pride; in representing ethnic supremacy and others' ethnic inferiority; in validating war; in legitimising religious dictums, and so on. But it is crucial to point out that heritage has profound political implications. By embedding it deep into memories, by manufacturing and consuming it in the global market, and by making it an essential tool to construct identities, heritage often validates dominance and repression. Simultaneously, heritage may symbolise and mobilise resistance. It depends upon what heritage means in the relationship of the powerful and the weak.

### **Ownership of the past**

Heritage, then, is not as simple as might seem. It is not only something from the past: it is enmeshed with our present. The meaning of the same heritage can be very different to the various individuals or communities who perceive it. The most fundamental question raised by the activists of indigenous-rights groups from the CRM sector is about who owns the past. In the USA, remains from burials of indigenous groups were perceived normally as objects of heritage and objects for the scientific study of the past. The objects of heritage were thus appropriated into a grand American National Identity. The history of the colonization of the land, what was named as America, was not so important to the specialists. The ethnic genocide committed by the Europeans in a not-so-distant past was out of focus in the scientific study of the past and its objects. Projects were being launched in the name of the search for a multiple and flexible American identity. In the early 1990s, archaeologists and indigenous-rights activists began to raise their voice in terms of ownership. They proclaimed that the relics and human remains from hundreds of burials were intimately connected with the identity and history of the indigenous groups. These remains cannot be owned either by some community of experts, scientists and archaeologists, or by the white Americans. The objects and skeletal



remains have a deep religious significance that is intimately linked to the identity of the groups to which they belong. Various groups from the indigenous groups endorsed this position and claimed, 'We own our past' and started concerted mobilisations protesting against the very process of the study, manipulation and exoticisation of their identity by experts and the state. In the mid-1990s, as an outcome of the protests, the Native American Grave Protection Act (NAGPRA) was enacted. In Australia, parallel and similar resistance movements have given rise to the amendments of the existing laws and regulations pertaining to archaeological heritage. A code of conduct for archaeologists and CRM managers has been formed.

These events have brought the issue of democracy of heritage to the fore. From another perspective, the movements of indigenous groups in America and Australia were for democratizing the heritage, and established the rights of the dominated and less privileged groups to their pasts. It was also about emancipating the past from the monopoly of a few experts.

### **The case of Mahasthan**

The archaeological site of Mahasthan has been identified as the ancient capital of Pundranagar. The site's history has been under the close scrutiny of historians and archaeologists since the colonial period. Archaeological excavations have been conducted and the history of the place has been written and revised over and over again. These histories are written by the experts; yet the experience of the past, and history, are different in many ways for the local people of the area. The oral narratives of the locals narrate histories in ways that are completely opposite to the established historical narratives of the site.

A mythical Hindu king, Parashuram, and a Muslim peer, Shah Sultan Mahisawar, are the main actors in the history that would be categorized by the experts as legend or myth. The defeat of the local Hindu king, Parashuram, at the hand of Mahishawar is described in the story. The (hi)story has supernatural interventions, unlike our established history-writing. The line of narration does not follow the experts' version of cause and effect, history and archaeology. More importantly, the conclusion of the story has alternative versions. One describes the defeat of the Hindu raja as a consequence of the supernatural power of the Muslim saint; the other describes the victory as an effect of betrayal and treachery by the Muslim saint, who threw a piece of beef into the palace of the king to end the king's supernatural supremacy.

The case of Mahasthan is one among many examples of the existence of the different and oppositional narratives about the past which still relate to archaeological and heritage sites in the present. It makes the varieties of history apparent, and shows us that history produced in fundamentally opposing principles and norms can exist, even when authority and dominance of one norm is evident in



the urban space. Moreover, the various versions, including the experts' one, have political implications. The 'mythical' history has a different significance for the identity of two religious groups – Hindu and Muslim. Respective versions represent the religious supremacy of each group. The dominant version, supported by the archaeological proof and objective support, is invoked by the experts, media and academia, for asserting a nationally owned past. A past of glory, prosperity and communal harmony of the nation. A past that is owned by the dominant groups and desired by the powerful ideology of the state. The heritage of a different period, this version claims, proves that the nation became civilized thousands of years ago, that the ancestors established a prosperous urban centre many years back, that the Hindu, Buddhist and Muslim monuments and artefacts prove that from the very remote past the people of Bangladesh had been living in communal harmony and peace. But the (hi)story of the locals defies and delegitimizes these versions. The common people contest these versions in different ways.

In November 2010, construction of a multi-storied building was started at Mahasthan by the Sultan Mahiswar Mazar Committee. Local representatives of the Government Department of Archaeology initially failed to stop the construction on this prominent heritage site. It was only stopped after a High Court ruling and intervention. The incident received huge media coverage; committees of enquiry with experts were formed at different times, and the issue became international. Dr Sen was among the few who protested from a different point: the construction of a new building on the site was deplorable, but the existence of a different narrative of the past, of the site's archaeological heritage, and its oppositional relationship with the dominant history had to be taken into account, he argued. This was not to say that we have to endorse the perception of the past and heritage at the popular level; rather, this was an event that overtly showed the undemocratic terrain of history-writing and heritage-making in Bangladesh. The (hi)story proves that the narrative of communal harmony and the apolitical ideal of heritage are not valid. The ordinary folk are heterogeneous and their perceptions of the past and of heritage are manifold. In order to protect heritage in a democratic way, we have to engage with popular perceptions, Sen would argue. We must not assume, as often we do, that everyday people have no perceptions of the past; that they are unaware and ignorant about the past and about heritage. This position also presupposes that they are not good citizens of the country as the believers in the dominant historical narratives are; that they are uncivilized and can only be civilized through education and awareness-raising programmes. Interestingly, the prospect of these civilizing programmes opens the door for direct financial investments in the heritage sectors. Possibilities for the transformation of the heritage and the past of the ordinary people into a heritage industry lurks on the horizon of the present.

### **Problematism of the protection of the past: encounters of the experts' perceptions with the popular perception of the past**

It could be argued, moreover, that urban perceptions of the past revolve around experts' knowledge and nationalistic aspirations and validation of the politics of the nation-state. On the other hand, popular perceptions are a performance of memorialization. Unlike the urban elitist experience of heritage in museums or air-conditioned conference rooms, their everyday experience is shaped by interaction with their local heritage and past. Their invocation of past is more the celebration of their living in the world through communitarian and religious identity. They address the archaeological heritage in terms of worshipping at a mazar (a tomb-shrine) that is built on some ancient remains of temples or shrines. In a way, there is recognition of the conflicts in the common understanding of heritage.

What is required is the encounter of the experts' perception and practice with the heterogeneous popular perception of the past.

Dr Sen went on to argue that the very idea of the protection of the past is problematic. The protection of the past is one of the most crucial reasons for the failure of laws and regulations concerning preservation and conservation. The past, when it becomes a distant territory inaccessible for everybody signifies only exclusion. Dr Sen therefore proposes that initiatives should be taken by academics and other professionals to understand the popular domain. On a larger scale, Sen would argue that various national and international laws and regulations about preservation and conservation must be conceptually re-cast and re-thought.

Theoretical polemics, discussions and researches on democratising cultural heritage are central to contemporary cultural resource management or cultural heritage management. These debates hinge around public participation and access to heritage sites and monuments, contestation of monopolising expert-knowledge on heritage issues, community engagement in heritage management projects, awareness-raising programmes about the protection and preservation of cultural heritage, etc. The circumstances in which archaeologists on the margin of the 'third world' state work, particularly, during fieldwork, compel us to rethink these polemics and discourses.

We must be aware of the many types of encounter between 'us' (the professionals from the 'centre') and 'them' (the actual people who are living with the archaeological sites, destroying them, and sometimes, preserving them). Popular perceptions of the past and heritage must be taken into serious consideration if any effective measures against the indiscriminate plundering of archaeological sites in Bangladesh are sought. We are not here talking about 'raising the awareness' of an 'uneducated' mass. Nor are we arguing for a wholesale submission to the logic of destruction of

archaeological sites for expansion of cultivable land, for using bricks to build new houses, or for choosing ‘human’ need instead of ‘artefacts’.

The situation on the ground is much more complex. Democratizing the cultural heritage, therefore, requires a sincere and patient engagement with the complex articulation of power, land, and the legal system, at a grass-roots level. We also need to take into account communitarian identity politics. Any archaeological ‘fieldwork’ is a collective team work. If the work is sincerely and seriously perceived and undertaken, if various tasks are done by maintaining honesty, rigour, and respectful interaction with the locals, the pressure on a team becomes significant.

Any work involves coordination with the local administration and law-enforcement agencies, with local quarters of power, with the people one needs to perform mundane daily activities and to solve day-to-day problems. It also involves maintaining a respectful relationship with the local workers. It can sometimes become difficult to have a patient and democratic engagement with the burden of mass suspicion.

There are often logical grounds behind the grammar of distrust, if the ‘urban’ and ‘rural’ dichotomy is accepted and the inequality in contemporary neo-liberal consumer-culture is considered. The increasing disparity between the ‘experts’, ‘university academics’, ‘professionals’, and local general actors plays a key role. The condition of distrust towards state institutions and, more importantly, ‘developmental enterprises’ by various non-governmental organizations, also plays its part in the construction of the grammar of popular suspicion. When corruption is overwhelming in any government and non-governmental project at grass-roots levels in Bangladesh, how can we expect that we will be greeted with respect and tolerance? Unscrupulous practices in the field have generated an air of generalization – the suspicion that everybody working with government funds is corrupt. This is the fundamental trend of perceiving the professionals from the ‘centre’ by those at the ‘margin’ of the state. The perception is not only confined to the domain of the popular; the local elites assume the same. When distrust, disbelief and suspicion are pervasive, democracy fails.

The inescapable desire to consume a ‘glorious’ and ‘classical’ past covertly plays its part in the construction and articulation of suspicion. Only the oldest or largest or most unique artefacts are significant. Only the remains of a civilization comparable to Greece and Rome are worth the public’s attention. These are the perceptions of the educated urban middle class. Mainstream media is not interested in understanding the lives of past societies and cultures. Again, democratic norms and values in the field and the democracy of things turn into handmaidens of the tyranny of nationalistic aspirations in the processes and production of the representation of ‘past’ and ‘cultural heritage’.

### Religious sensitivities: the case of Biral Upazila

One season a planned excavation of one of the sites at Biral Upazila had to be postponed. The site is a structural mound with a small contemporary temple of the local Hindu goddess *Buri* on top. The temple committee gave verbal permission after the archaeological team's communication with them. But the community leaders unexpectedly organized a religious ritual on the temple mound in order – as they claimed – to seek permission from the divinities associated with the site for permission to conduct excavation. Hundreds of people gathered. The ritual was epiphanic: four different gods and goddesses revealed their presence and gave utterance through four chosen men. The epiphany denied permission. The revelations suggested that any excavation on the site would bring disaster to the community. Consequently the archaeological team had to leave the site.

Dr Sen has not taken this event as the public display of 'uneducated superstition'. Rather, he has found such perceptions and fear in relation to many archaeological places, especially those which are under re-use as places of worship by Muslims, Hindus, and indigenous nations. The crux of the matter is that some of the local Hindus are alleged to be illegally possessing a large portion of the *debottara* property (the property endowed for defraying the cost of worshipping a deity) of the temple.

The 'secular' and the 'religious' were found to be enmeshed in a multi-layered way in this particular case at Biral. 'Secular' distrust has been translated into 'religious' performance of epiphany, and vice-versa. Several local Hindu community leaders later expressed secular hopes and expectations. Would the archaeologists be giving funds for the restoration and renovation of the temple? Would they leave the high and convex mound levelled, so that a fence could be used to enclose the edifice and the territory? Hope and desire bring doubts and suspicions to the fore, as well as heightened expectations.

Concurrently, the land as personal property is central to the formation of distrust. Settlement surveys generate and legitimise forged documents. Land registration offices produce fake documents of lease and ownership of *khas*, *debottara*, vested property lands. Most of the archaeological sites are on such lands, yet in many cases, the current possession of these lands is either illegal, or the ownership has been legalised through a process of corruption and forgery. In the case of Ghoraghat, the suspicion was generated among the current landholders because of their fear of losing the land and their continuous right to cultivate it. Archaeologists and other related professionals are trusted neither by the forger nor by the victims of forgery. 'We' and 'they' both become victims of the pathology of distrust and suspicion.

## Democracy and cultural heritage

What, then, asked Dr Sen, does democracy in relation to 'cultural heritage' mean in the conditions in which we are working? How are the ideals and practice of democracy connected to democracy in the inter-related disciplines of archaeology, anthropology, and cultural studies? How do trans-national agencies and funding agencies act in conditioning relations between the democratic culture and cultural heritage? Can democratic ideals and practice within the nation-state and among nation-states provide framework for a democratic approach to cultural heritage? Can we encounter democracy on this suspicious terrain by simply labelling the popular domain as illiterate and uneducated, when claims to sensitizing pseudo-archaeological discoveries are circulated widely in the media, and consequently, consumed fanatically by the nationalistic pride of an urban, educated middle class? Is this fanatical consumption and manifestation of cultural heritage democratic? Is the consumption of and belief in such weird discoveries as the 'oldest fortified city', or 'the cradle of the Bengali nation' at the site of Wari-Bateshwar 'superstitious'? What kind of democratic culture of professional work perpetrates such a massacre of the past and of cultural heritage? These questions must be raised before delving into the complex terrain of suspicion and distrust in terms of democracy and cultural heritage.

Suspicion and distrust are, perhaps, one of the fundamental articulating principles of democratic culture. The principles, in another way, determine the extent, limit and scope of 'democracy' in any condition – in our case, in reference to professional work on cultural heritage. The democracy of 'things' is as much necessary as the democracy of culture and cultural heritage. It could be the only available way – yet not the most effective one – to protect and preserve hundreds of archaeological sites in the north-western part of Bangladesh from the land-grabbers, looters, brick-robbers and the corrupt land-related legal system. Democracy in cultural heritage, simultaneously, cannot be ensured by the nationalistic dogma of an urban class. The democracy of cultural heritage must contest the despotic production and consumption of nationalistic pride through the indiscriminate manufacture and circulation of the 'oldest', 'largest', 'greatest' discoveries by media and professionals.



## CONCLUSIONS AND NEXT STEPS

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On Thursday 27 April there was an op-ed by Samantak Das in *The Telegraph* of Calcutta.<sup>9</sup> Das is Professor of Comparative Literature at Jadavpur University in South Kolkata, and has spent thirty years as a volunteer for a rural development NGO. Speaking of his childhood in rural Bengal, in the village of Kalanabagram, near Burdwan, about 60 miles north-west of Calcutta, Das reflects, 'This is where I learnt to ride a proper "full-size" bicycle and swim in a pond; this is where I decapitated my first chicken and caught my first fish with my own hand-made fishing rod'. He continues that his thirty years as a volunteer for the NGO has its roots in what he calls, 'this forgotten corner of Bengal'. Here he not only learned to do all those things that a boy learns to do, but also learned first hand about the importance of education in combating social, economic, political and other ills; where he realised, as a child of 12, the importance of a library and a museum, no matter how small. This short article seemed to crystallise the central theme and ethos of our workshop.

The principal conclusions of our discussions, with significant input from Professor Swadhin Sen, are set out below.

### Local Museums and Private Collections

Rajat Sanyal is in a position to work on an inventory or directory of the local museums and collections of West Bengal. A key factor in the importance of this initiative is its local nature and its scope for the participation of local stakeholders. More importantly, it is a scheme that can be extended to Bangladesh.

### Cultural Landscape

Several sites in West Bengal show the kind of transformation of the religious identity of cult images. There is, however, a growing politico-religious atmosphere in India at present that is tending towards the promotion of a monolithic religious identity and denial of distinctive identity among the various cultural communities of the country. Initiatives to raise awareness of the multi-faceted nature of local cults is perhaps something to be explored with members of the community themselves. This is recognised as a controversial and sensitive issue, and the utmost care must be taken in developing any such initiative, taking full account of the views of community leaders and the needs of the local people.

### Non-Physical Heritage

Dr Basak sees an urgent need to salvage the present among the traditional indigenous communities of Purulia. Here is a traditional tribal society under pressure, with an enacted culture at risk of being lost through the attrition of outward migration and the increasing pressures of modernisation and globalisation. The dignity and

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<sup>9</sup> Samantak Das, 'A place to learn', *The Telegraph* (Calcutta edition), Thursday 27 April 2017, p. 10.

self-respect the traditional tribal communities of Purulia, it might be argued, could be fostered and bolstered through co-operative initiatives. Having worked closely with these communities and gained a profound level of trust, Dr Basak would be in a position to take such an initiative forward, working with local contacts and community representatives in Purulia, and including local stakeholders in any future project.

The problem is the disintegration of indigenous social fabric, and the threat to the living heritage and enacted culture at the centre of traditional community life.

The proposal is to create a digital archive with the cooperation of the local people. This would include video and audio recordings, as well as photographic records. The possibilities of setting up a museum, or a mobile exhibition, should be considered too. A study of place-names could also be important in this context. The transformation of place-names is, however, almost universal in Bengal, and the entire enterprise requires a detailed understanding about the landscape and archaeological sites and hence requires an intensive survey initiative. At the same time the role of critical and reflexive ethnography would need to be adequately addressed. It is important to address how and why the names have been transforming: for example, through colonial politics, partition, and the consequent impact of migration have played a key role in these changes. The intention is to support marginalised and threatened communities, underpinning their own traditions, by helping them to tell their own story about themselves, both for themselves and for others.

### **Educational Programmes, Outreach and Tourism**

The discussion around potential educational programmes drew much from the expertise available from the Indian Museum. 'Know your visitors' is the key maxim, with the concept of museum as 'hangout zone'. Specific outside communities should be included in special exhibitions (here the case of Purulia comes to mind). There should also be two-way outreach and knowledge-exchange.

There is an argument for museums specifically for children. With the establishment of such museums, community participation might be increased, since engaged children usually means engaged parents. History exists when it is brought to life, and so we should be finding ways of creating platforms to recreate the past. This might begin by bringing history and archaeology directly into the schools in the first instance, either with visits by 'experts' or by the provision of learning materials. The experience of Dauvit Broun and John Davies of bringing new subject-areas of history teaching to the Scottish curriculum suggests that the best policy is to trust school teachers to do what seems best to them.

The experience of the Indian Museum shows how local museums could act as a nucleus for cultural festivals and events. This in turn would establish a closer



relationship between the local people, the museums, and the heritage sites to which they are related. At the present time, the promotion of museums is more important than creating new museums. Awareness programmes are an important mode of interaction with local communities in this respect. In particular, the policy implemented by the Indian Museum of integrating museum activities with local festivals, is one to be pursued further afield.

The partition of India could be another key moment and process to address community-level heritage-making, as well as state-level official and elitist heritage-making in Bengal. An ethnographic enterprise to understand the dynamics of material remains, memories, rituals and partition could be a significant element in any initiative. Temporary exhibitions in association with monuments or objects (including photographs, installations and other visuals) could be organized. Here we might look to a recent initiative in Bangladesh. 'Embracing the Other', is a photographic exhibition inside the Bait Ur Rouf mosque in Dhaka, where Bangladeshi photographer Shahidul Alam's images celebrate the openness to 'the other' that a mosque should symbolise, undertaking the task of combating both Islamophobia and extremism, with photographs of the Bait Ur Rouf mosque on display inside the mosque itself.<sup>10</sup>

### **Contested heritages, official heritage, and the popular domain**

Swadhin Sen in particular raised questions about how to deal with the complex layers of history that make up the cultural heritage landscape in Bengal. Heritage is embedded in our existence, and the concept has profound political implications. Defining heritage is an historical act in response to different needs and pressures. In fact, we need to think hard about why we need to promote and preserve the heritage of rural communities at all. People must be allowed to speak for themselves: we must not assume that they do not have their own voice, their own mechanisms of preservation. Furthermore, the question was raised about the validity of the division between rural and urban in this context.

We must always be aware of the tension between state-sponsored narratives, the narratives of supra-national NGOs, of academics, and of the local people. We must take account of local versions of history, for example, the oral histories that are being locally produced and printed. Myth too is socially useful history which comes to be seen as fact. There is therefore a difficulty in dovetailing the community perspective and the academic perspective. As with best-practice in studying and publishing the history of Scottish place names, histories which might be incorrect in a scholarly sense must nevertheless be taken into account and often included in any initiative, alongside the scholarly version. The idea of a singular historical constant must be rejected. In this context, we might look to a neighbourhood museum project in the south-west Delhi neighbourhood of Mehrauli, which focused on the narratives of

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<sup>10</sup> <http://artradarjournal.com/2017/05/05/photo-gallery-inside-a-mosque-with-bangladeshi-photographer-shahidul-alam/>

those who have lived in Mehrauli for generations, allowing old-time residents to narrate the history of their locality.<sup>11</sup> Many other practices in various museums throughout the world, which have attempted to represent marginalised, excluded, and suppressed histories by going beyond the canonised and authoritative 'educating' role of state and official museums, could be attempted. This could be particularly useful in the case of Bengal, where many aspects of the past and the present are shared.

The question was raised about diverging from the 'official view' of heritage in Bangladesh – whether the Bangladesh government would accept a non-state view. In response it was observed that the Bangladesh High Commission in Kolkata is keen to encourage cultural heritage initiatives, and that there are good contacts with the Chittagong Heritage Society. Nevertheless, we need to bear in mind that there are already many urban initiatives, both virtual and real, for 'promotion' and 'preservation' of heritage in Bangladesh, as elsewhere, these days; and heritage societies or similar initiatives are inclined to represent not only the dominant discourses, but also tend to subvert, exclude and appropriate heterogeneous ideas and practices.

In all this, we must understand heritage as not 'something already out there'. Professor Sen is keen for us to think of heritage even as a verb – a process that gives various meanings through representations, discourses, and everyday living with the material world. Today's heritage scholars are now thinking of heritage not as a thing with defined meanings and values, but as an 'inherently political and discordant' practice that performs the cultural work of the present. It can be utilized by different interest-groups and individuals for different purposes and with varying degrees of hegemony and legitimacy. It tells us more about the present, in other words, than the past.<sup>12</sup> In that sense, heritage is essentially constructed. Laurajane Smith, Emma Waterton, and many others working on 'community heritage' have pointed at these conceptual and critical differences.<sup>13</sup> If we would like to endorse these multi-layered aspects of heritage, then we must take into account the intermingling of the heritage industry, transnational funding, and tourism. Tourism, in both secular and religious terms, creates various new meanings and representations of heritage: Bishnupur, as an important place of heritage-making, points toward this fact. In this case, again, taking into account differing ethnographic representations could be a very useful tool.

Finally, archaeological remains which have been transformed into national, state-level or local heritage could be addressed in their popular contexts. It could be a matter of great interest to look for the transformation at various levels of interactions

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<sup>11</sup> <https://scroll.in/magazine/825450/history-through-the-eyes-of-a-mehrauli-residents-not-historians>

<sup>12</sup> Laurajane Smith, *Uses of Heritage* (Oxford, 2006), 11, 38.

<sup>13</sup> L. Smith and E. Waterton, *Heritage, Communities and Archaeology* (London, 2009).

among various stakeholders of the heritage in the process of becoming and being heritage. In this respect, the location and roles of the various stakeholders from Bangladesh, and the process of engaging with them must be carefully thought out.

In summing up our discussions, Professor Upinder Singh drew out the major consideration running through each of these key areas, namely, the realisation that the community perspective must be a key part of any future initiative, not only the academic viewpoint. Local people must be at the heart of development, and their needs and aspirations must be taken fully into account. Supporting the local community by employing local people is another consideration, along with the mutual need of scholarly experts and local experts. For this reason, relationships that have already been established with particular communities should be the first to be drawn on as we move forward with plans for GCRF bids.

### **Next steps**

John Davies, with the advice of Dauvit Broun, will be responsible for monitoring calls for GCRF bids. The University of Glasgow ArtsLab would be holding a workshop at the end of May 2017 in order to bring together academics from across the disciplines – Arts, Social Sciences, Science and Engineering, Life Sciences – interested in GCRF, so that they can explore synergies for future GCRF awards. This report will act as a body of information for those from other disciplines who are interested in collaborating with our consortium, and can form the basis for prospective funding applications.

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