

Chapter 16

Public Engagement and Awareness in Heritage Preservation

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Introduction

India's heritage, spanning from the Mauryan era to the British period, showcases our rich and diverse culture through a tapestry of monuments. Despite their profound significance, many monuments suffer from neglect and a lack of community awareness, leading to a state of disrepair. Out of approximately 40,000 heritage structures, only a few receive protection from agencies like ASI and INTACH, emphasizing the urgent need to preserve lesser-known treasures. This paper examines the critical role of community engagement in heritage conservation through two compelling case studies from Uttarakhand: Mahasu Devta Temple in Bisoi and the Maniyan group of temples in Dwarahat. We selected these cases based on their architectural significance, socio-cultural diversity, and varied governance systems. The research unfolds in two phases—first, we examine community settlement structures and their role in heritage protection; second, we assess the findings and offer actionable recommendations for effectively preserving India's built heritage from local to national levels.

Numerous publications underscore the necessity of heritage protection, often focusing on the importance of conserving both tangible and intangible heritage. Some researchers highlight the challenges facing cultural heritage, while others emphasize the crucial role of community involvement. However, few studies in India address the impact of residents' cultural awareness and participation in heritage preservation.

This study aims to fill that gap by assessing the community's knowledge surrounding heritage sites and exploring the economic, cultural, and social benefits of increased awareness. Furthermore, it seeks to galvanize local communities into active participation in cultural preservation and management. The study is structured into two parts: the first reviews relevant research and identifies existing gaps, and the second conducts a primary site investigation at both locations, including surveys, interviews, and perception analysis. Ultimately, the study presents a set of recommendations and strategies to enhance community awareness and engagement in preserving cultural heritage.

Literature Review

Heritage is a cultural process that describes the history of a community, city, or area inherited by a community group to another community (Liyana Halim and Tambi, 2021). Heritage should not be treated as an objective that has to be taken care of individually but should be a part of community development as the other services.

Cultural awareness is a critical issue for achieving heritage management and conservation. It is totally about interpreting the meaning of culture, art, and heritage in the country. It helps communities to become familiar with their own and others' heritage. A community can't recognize and respect other cultures unless they don't have enough awareness and knowledge about their assets and behave positively toward it (Kamel, 2019). Improving locals' awareness regarding cultural heritage is required. For better heritage preservation and management, the local community's support and awareness is necessary.

The motivation for local preservation, spending time and money is not primarily to preserve heritage structures, but to establish and maintain common social institutions in the local society. Effective participation of the community will provide the possibility for acquiring long-term sustainability and also help to build up the community's commitment and continuing involvement in the program.

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Public engagement in heritage management/conservation is vital because it can provide helpful suggestions and improve one's knowledge, assist in the formulation of interventions and decisions, and enhance one's understanding of the significance of heritage and culture (Bruce-Lockhart, 2008).

In the Indian context initially, politicians, bureaucrats, and key actors have to be considered in awareness programs through different mediums, such as seminars, discussions, and conferences with experts in the conservation industry, to discuss various policies, methods, and procedures that ensure the protection of Cultural significant sites and heritage structures (Piera Buonincontri, 2017). Secondly; the authorities and NGOs should educate students in schools about heritage and its importance. The curriculum must be designed in a way that includes subjects related to heritage, such as tourism awareness, cultural heritage, and heritage protection (Asta Adukaite, 2016). The World Monument Fund also recently stated that "sustainable preservation only happens through local stewardship".

Impact of Awareness

Awareness refers to the ability to perceive, experience, or recognize a past occurrence (Hafsah Fajar Jati, 2019). This historical understanding is essential for establishing a bond between individuals and society, as well as between society and the environment. Individuals who do not comprehend or remain unaware of their country's history risk losing their identity (Esther H.K. Yung, 2011).

When the community is unaware of its history and heritage, they often show no concern towards the heritage structures in their neighborhood or surroundings. In many cases, if the community does not belong to the place or the religion to which the heritage structure belongs, there is a clear disconnection that turns into ignorance, especially in the Indian context.

Due to this lack of awareness, they not only lose economic opportunities but also social benefits, such as social spaces, culture, and beliefs. Even with protection from central or state agencies, if the community is unaware of their heritage, the monument becomes a negative space and a hotspot for gambling, petty crimes, and intoxication. Consequently, no matter how historical the monument is, it starts deteriorating and loses its significance and historic value.

Research Gap

In the field of heritage conservation, we must apply technical interventions with site-specific strategies wherever applicable. In this research, we focus only on the qualitative aspects related to heritage sites, specifically the awareness of communities in protecting their heritage by studying multiple cases (one managed by the community and the other protected by the ASI). After analyzing these cases, we conclude this research with recommendations to improve the quality and sense of belongingness of the community with their heritage.

Primary Case Study

Case 1: Mahasu Devta Temple, Bisoi (Dehradun, Uttarakhand)

Bisoi is a village settlement in the Kalsi Tehsil of Dehradun district in Uttarakhand (India). The village is part of Khat-Behlad, which includes 15 villages of various sizes and populations. These villages play a significant role in the indigenous settlements of Uttarakhand and are inhabited by the Jaunsari tribe. The settlement covers a small area of 285 hectares, with land use predominantly residential, along with some commercial and institutional areas.

The village is self-reliant and sustainable in all manner, their houses are of purely vernacular architecture style, constructed by the locally available Deodar wood, stone, and sun-dried mud bricks.

The settlement housed a Mahasudevta temple. The temple is dedicated to Mahasu and ChaldaDevta. Lord Mahasu is the chief deity of the area and is worshipped by the people of Khat Behlad and the whole Jaunsar-Bawar region. Since the emergence of the temple, its precinct has been the primary focus of the village settlement. Festivals and daily routines are aligned with the temple. At present, the temple is not protected by any central or state agency and is independently managed by the community and Mandir Samiti which consists of 19 members (16 Members & 3 Auditors).



Figure 1 Building height map, Mahasu Devta Temple, Biso, Dehradun; Source-Author

Though the village is not under any agency and there is no campaign running which informs people how to construct their houses or follows any regulation, they with their consciences are building their houses so that the skyline is maintained and the temple is visible from the lowest part of the village.



Figure 2 Temple from the highest point; Source-Author



Figure 3 Temple from the lowest point; Source-Author

Community structure around the monument

The village has a population of 348 with 45 households. The patriarchal and caste hierarchy systems are still dominantly followed in this region dating back to the idea of lineage or kinship of ancient India. According to the Ancient texts, people of the society belonging to their respective caste were bestowed with certain responsibilities, such as Brahmins who are considered the supreme had to perform the duty of the gods whereas Rajputs are considered powerful protectors of the society. Vaishyas are the Merchants -Artisans sector of the society whereas the Shudras are the commoners or peasants.

Here in the village of Biso, people belong to five caste systems namely, Rajputs, Luhars, Naai, Bajgi, and Koltas. Residents of this village hailing from any caste are in charge of certain duties towards the temple. The Chauhans-Rajputs are the dominant caste in the village and are the owners of the majority of land in the village. They also look after the well-being of the temple and are prime members of the MahasuDevta temple committee. The houses of the Chauhans-Rajputs face and encircle the temple precinct. The houses of Chauhan's- Rajputs are triple-storey structures, constructed from stone and wood with extensive decoration on the exterior facade. They are relatively spacious from within and enjoy the privilege of huge private front yards as compared to the houses of other village residents.

Second in the line comes the Sunar and Luhars who are the artisan community of the village. They are responsible for designing the ornaments of the God, The Palki (Palanquin-vehicle of the God), the Flag that unfurls atop the temple, or any materialistic objects required for the temple.

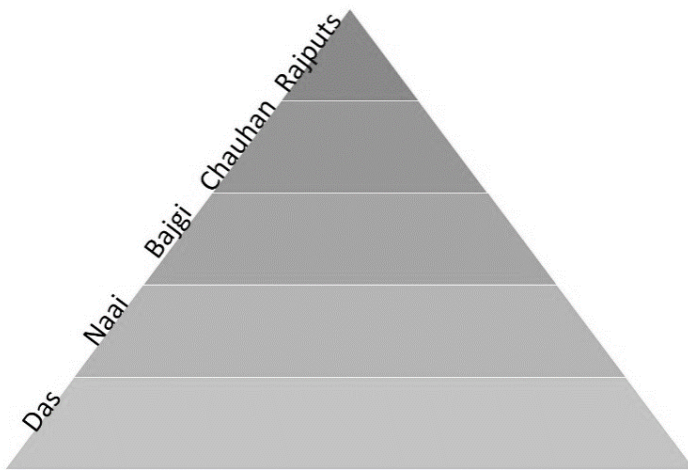


Figure 4 Social Hierarchy, Bisoi Village; Source-Author

Third in the lines are the Bajgi community, these people are responsible for playing drums during religious or socio-cultural events of the village and temple. Each family from this section of the community has to serve the temple for 2 months by playing drums during the prayer time of the temple. The fourth community in the village is the Naai. These are primarily the barbers of the village, but over the period they have taken a variety of jobs in the village. The last community of the village is, the Koltas and Das. These people are the lower caste of the village generally involved with agricultural activities. They have the least to null role in the temple activities.

In general, females of the village Bisoi are restricted from entering the temple of Mahasu Devta all around the year. If anytime they wish to enter the temple, they must offer a goat to their

deity. Apart from this, they can enter the temple thrice a year during festive seasons- after offering goats to the deity. The three important festivals of the village that also allow women to enter the temples are namely, Jagraa, Magh, and Dussehra.

Jagraa is one of the festivals that is compulsory for all the residents of the village, even those who have out-migrated have to be present in the village, especially the elder son of the house. All the people of the village come together and pray to their deity to bless them. Jagraa is a 7-day long festival, where the people wear colorful clothes and dance to the tune of drums and trumpets in the morning and revere their deity in the evening. In Jagraa during the night, possess the spirit of Mahasu devta in the bodies of the temple pandit. It is believed that people tell their wishes and sorrows to the god directly during Jagraa and get solutions.



Figure 5 Community Mapping, Mahasu Devta Temple, Bisoi, Dehradun; Source-Author

Case 2: Maniyan group of Temples, Dwarahat (Almora, Uttarakhand)

Dwarahat is a town and Nagar Panchayat located in the Almora district in Uttarakhand (India). The city is famous for its ancient temple built by the Katyuri kings. Dwarahat means Way to Heaven, was once the seat of the Katyuri Kings whose empire was from the Sutlez River in the west to the river Gandak in the East.

Dwarahat has 55 ancient temples of exquisite architectural value, divided into 8 groups. These were constructed in the Indo-Aryan, Maru-Pratihara, or Nagara types. The temples are constructed mainly of masonry blocks of pre-Cambrian granite available in the locality. Instead of mortar or concrete mix, iron clamps, and dowels have been used to tie adjoining blocks.



Figure 6 Building height map, Maniyan Temple, Haat Village, Dwarahat (Almora); Source-Author



Figure 7 Temple from the highest point; Source-Author

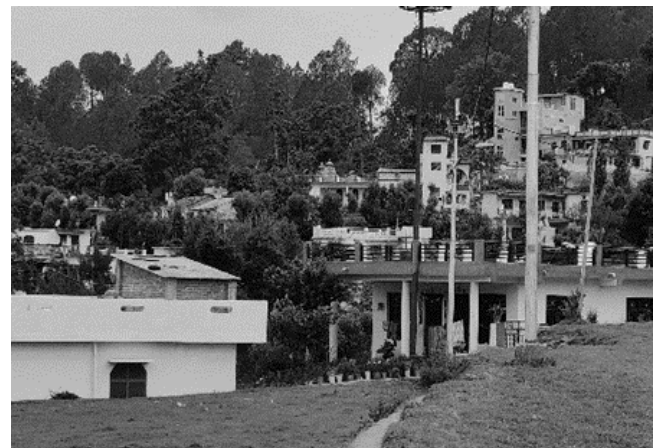


Figure 8 Temple from the lowest point; Source-Author

The temples are under the protection of the Archeological Survey of India (ASI), and is few exhibitions also happened in the past by the ASI, but due to a lack of awareness in the community, people of the town are constructing their houses and violating the norms/regulations set by ASI, which is continuously hindering the skyline of the historical temples.

Community structure around the monument

In the Haat village of Dwarahat, people belong to three caste systems namely, Saha, Chaudhary, and Mathpals. The residents of the Haat village previously used the group of temples and its precinct for worshipping and leisure. The Saha and Chaudharies are the dominant caste in the village and are the owners of land and businesses in the village. Earlier the Saha and Chaudharies were the only residents of the village they brought Mathpals (Brahmins) from the different parts of adjacent hill towns to look after the well-being and as priests of their temples. Initially, the houses of the Mathpals community faced and encircle the temple precincts. The people of the Mathpal community were the main priests and caretakers of the temples of Dwarahat, they had small houses with separate cattle shelters. In the hierarchy, the second houses were of Saha's. They were indulged in different trades like crops, pulses, fabrics, and groceries. Lastly are the houses of Chaudhary's. The houses of Saha-Chaudhary are double-storey structures, constructed from stone and wood. They are relatively spacious from within and enjoy the privilege of huge private front yards as compared to the houses of other village residents.

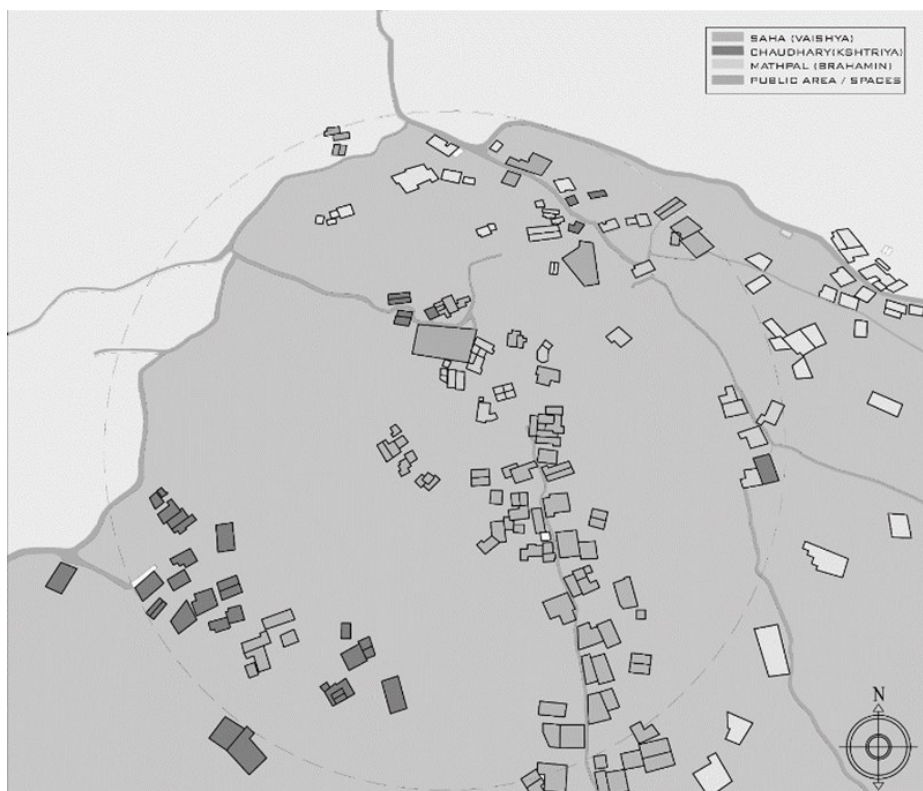


Figure 9 Community mapping, Maniyan Temple, Haat Village, Dwarahat (Almora); Source-Author

Very similar to the Garhwal region here in Kumaon, people celebrate Jagraa but in a different way. Here in Dwarahat, the tradition of Jaagra festivals is losing its significance with time. Rather than the entire village coming together and celebrating, now individual families celebrate Jaagra at their convenience.

Results and Discussions

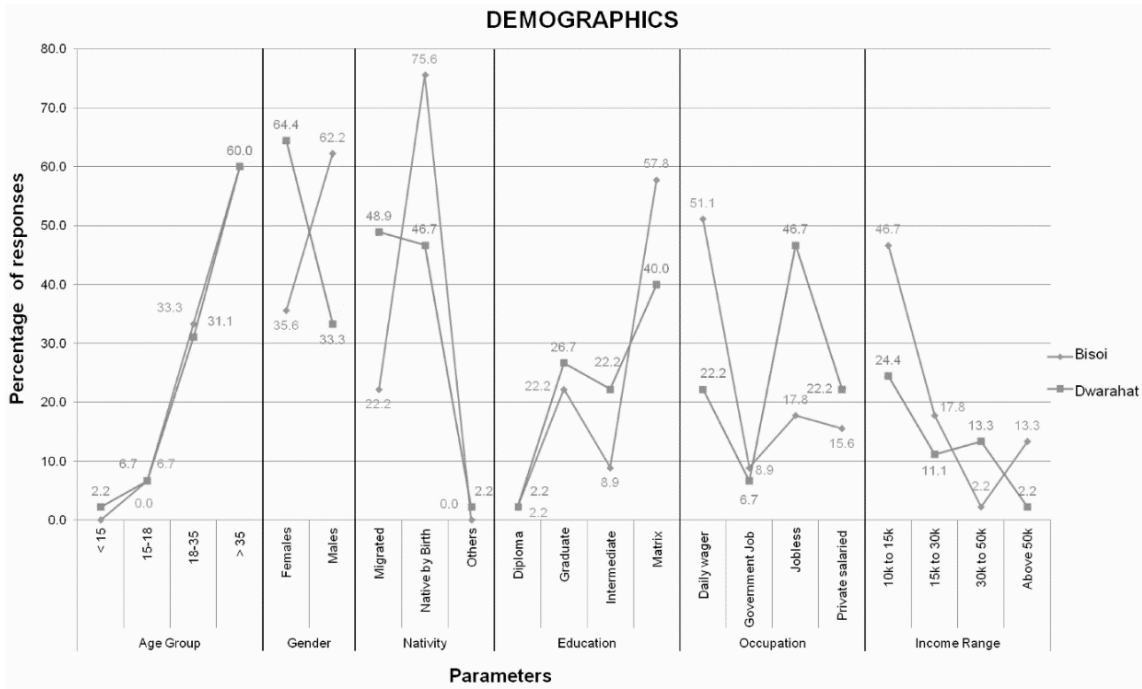
During the site study, researchers conducted a structured interview with families within the regulated area (200 meters) to assess the level of awareness among village residents. They used a questionnaire containing 13 questions about demographics, residents' perceptions, and their level of heritage knowledge. The consolidated results of the primary survey are as follows:

Demographic Study

During the survey, interviewed a random sample for demographic analysis. In Bisoi, 60.0% of the population were above 35 years old, 33.3% were aged 18-35, and 8.7% were below 15. In Dwarahat, 60.0% were above 35 years old, 31.1% were aged 18-35, and 6.7% were below 15. Of the surveyed sample, 35.6% were males and 62.2% were females in Bisoi, while in Dwarahat, 64.4% were males and 33.3% were females. This indicates that females in Bisoi were more involved and conscious of their culture and heritage. Despite being restricted from participating in temple activities regularly, they were fully aware of their beliefs, whereas females in Dwarahat were neither involved nor knowledgeable about their culture.

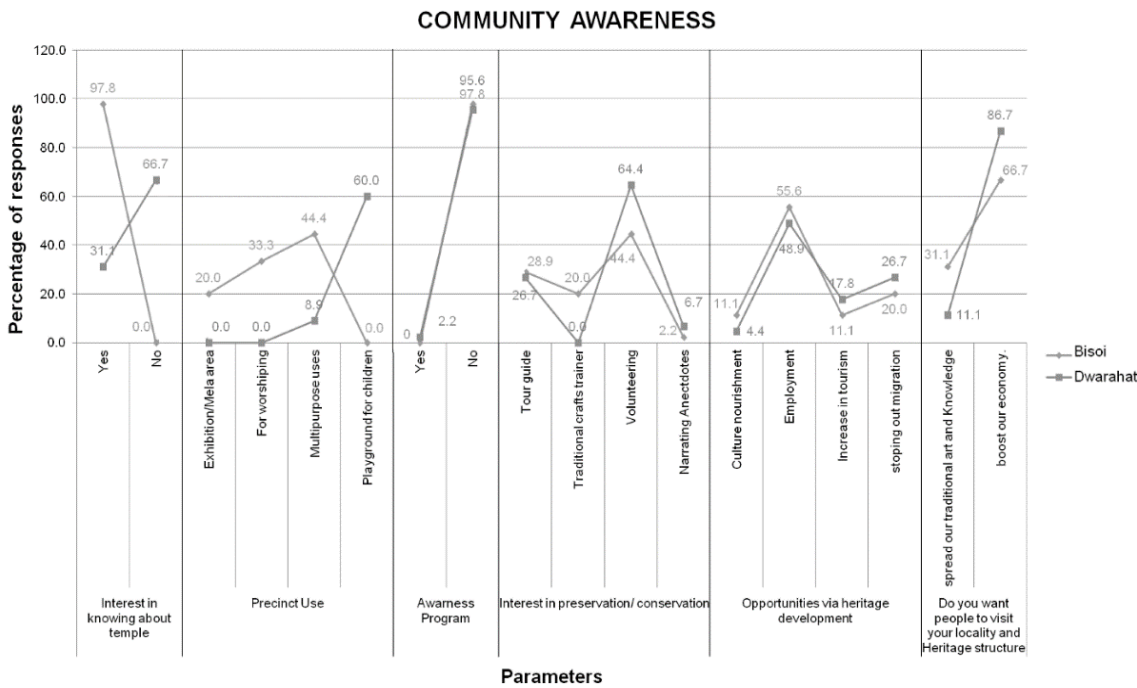
In Bisoi, 75.6% were residents or had lived there since their forefathers, while 22.2% had relocated after marriage. In Dwarahat, 46.7% were locals, and 48.7% had migrated. This data shows a minimal difference between native and migrated populations. The influx of migrants did not bring anecdotes or folklore to pass on to the next generation, leading to a significant divergence in cultural roots and customs in Haat village.

In Bisoi, over 24.4% of the survey sample were educated above the intermediate level, while in Dwarahat, it was higher at 42.2%. Our findings suggest that education plays an essential role in recognizing the worth of heritage structures, but it doesn't necessarily imply awareness in an educated community. Most of the population in Bisoi village are daily wage workers, primarily involved in agricultural work, earning between 10-15 thousand per month. In Bisoi, 15.6% are privately salaried, 8.9% are government salaried, and 17.8% are currently jobless. In Haat village, 46.7% are jobless, mainly due to fewer opportunities as people don't have their agricultural lands.



Graph 1 Line graph- Comparative Demographics line graph of Bisoi & Dwarahat; Source-Author

Level of Awareness



Graph 2 Line graph- Comparative Community Awareness line graph of Bisoi & Dwarahat; Source-Author

While assessing the level of awareness, we discovered that the local authorities had no written texts, documents, or authentic documentation of either of the temples. Instead, people passed down anecdotes about the temple's formation, beliefs, and rituals from generation to generation. According to the survey, all the samples in Bisoi knew about the temple precincts' purposes, such as worship (33 percent), exhibition/mela (20.0 percent), and multipurpose use (44.4 percent) of the monument and its precincts. However, in the instance of Dwarahat, the surveyed samples did not know much about the uses, and these structures currently have little relevance in their lives.

Perception of Residents

The state or central government currently does not run any intervention or awareness programs to protect and conserve the Mahasu Devta Temple and its precinct in Bisoi. The villagers are interested in learning more about conservation and preservation techniques and exploring new developments that could be implemented in the village for their monument. However, in the case of Dwarahat, the Haat village community is uninterested in learning about the temple. They believe that ASI, which protects the structure in Dwarahat and imposes certain restrictions, has deprived them of their moral right to contribute to the welfare of the temple and its environs. Although the central body protects structures, they do not run any awareness programs.

The villagers are eager to assist in any way they can if the government or a private institution runs awareness programs. The people of Bisoi, well aware of their religious beliefs and traditions, are interested in providing services such as tour guides, traditional craft trainers, storytellers, and so on. Although residents in Haat village are unaware of their legacy, they can play an important role if ASI, in addition to protection, educates them or establishes some SHGs to spread awareness and employment.

Despite being hundreds of miles apart, both places are dealing with comparable issues such as out-migration, a lack of opportunity, and rising unemployment. If properly cared for, these heritage structures could become magnets for domestic and international tourism and pilgrimage, benefiting the local community both culturally and economically.

Perception of Temple Committee

Members of the Mahasu Devta temple in Bisoi, interviewed apart from the random survey, expressed their unwillingness to hand over the monument and its rights to the government. They believe that if the monument is absorbed into the mainstream, it will lose its spiritual essence and become a recreational place, leading to irresponsible tourism and jeopardizing the village's and temple's current ecosystem. Committee members also expressed concerns about the politicization of the temple's operations and the loss of key rights.

Drawing from the repressed fear of the Bisoi Temple committee, a similar scenario occurred in the case of Haat village, Dwarahat. The ASI appointed a few locals whose job is merely to patrol the temple precinct and prevent vandalism.

Conclusion and Recommendations

Researchers tested people in the regulated areas of Bisoi and Dwarahat to determine their level of cultural knowledge. They identified a common factor at both locations: the need to reduce outmigration and boost employment, aside from differences in education, sex ratio, and income. The study found that although one site is solely community-protected and the other is federally protected with little to no community involvement, the awareness and management levels are comparable at both sites. To provide better coordinated management and employment for the natives, it is necessary to adopt a comprehensive approach that integrates both parties.

Heritage sites are a big tourist draw and a significant contributor to the economy of distant towns as well as the nation. They are a source of pride for each community and proof of its cultural beliefs, rituals, and customs. Cultural awareness is the simplest way for a community to conserve and protect its legacy without the assistance of a specialist institution.

Based on the above, the study presents some recommendations that should be considered as follows:

At community level

- Regular exhibitions should be organized with the help of surrounding communities so that they have an involvement and set a platform where they can showcase their traditions and generate an economy.
- For specific sites like Dwarahat where the town has a large no. of heritage temples, a pilgrim circuit may be planned with multiple activities like temple Darshan, spiritual recital evenings, and fairs/ processions.
- We can connect the existing fairs of Bisoi & Dwarahat to their respective heritage buildings and could be extended beyond its spiritual essence culminating in an alternative source of cultural awareness and recreation.
- Educational programs should be adopted in schools and colleges and implemented under the supervision of the Ministry of Tourism, and the Ministry of Education to raise students' awareness.
- A skill development center should be implemented whereby the training programs are conducted to educate the locals about their heritage and methods to protect it.

At the local/Regional level

- Local administrations and councils need to pay more attention to what residents have to say concerning their thoughts about their heritage as they are considered the closest group.
- To enhance the level of awareness, the committee or authority should distribute flyers, and large-scale audiovisuals (documentaries, movies, clips, graphics, etc.) should be displayed in public places/squares.

- Local authorities should allocate specific places and establish small projects for those who are selling souvenirs and handicrafts.
- Official entities, key actors, the private sector, and academic members should collaborate to draw an ambitious plan or develop a national project aiming at raising cultural awareness.
- Supervision should be increased in and around the heritage structures to control and minimize negative behaviors, along with providing guidebooks that explain the rules and instructions that must be followed, and a minimal penalty should be imposed on breach of set regulations.
- Relevant authorities should track the results of awareness campaigns that have been carried out to evaluate their effectiveness and determine points of strength and weakness.

At National level

- Integration of remote heritage structures with the national schemes and programs (Adopt a Heritage, PRASAD, Swadesh Darshan).
- Funding may be raised from multiple sources at the national level for unprotected heritage sites having national importance.
- Promotion of remote heritage villages via television advertisements, and slogans, involving celebrated personalities to evoke curiosity at the domestic/international level.

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