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RITUALS AND SPIRITUALS

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RITUALS AND SPIRITUALS

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Traditional Dwellings and Settlements

Working Paper Series

DYNAMICS OF HOMECOMING: SOCIO- SPATIAL PRACTICES DEFINING HINDU RELIGIOUS GEOGRAPHIES FROM MARCEL, GOA, INDIA

Nirmal Kulkarni

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DYNAMICS OF HOMECOMING: SOCIO-SPATIAL PRACTICES DEFINING HINDU RELIGIOUS GEOGRAPHIES FROM MARCELA, GOA, INDIA



This paper examines the unique Hindu religious processions of 'homecoming' and their temporal influence on the built environment. Annually, village protective female deities, travel in a palkhi carried by devotees to their original homes. Through two case studies originating in Marcel, Goa, the research discovers ritualistic ceremonial markers and domestic spaces enroute, to arrive at an interpretation of 'home'. The study uses 'third space' as a theoretical framework and attempts to abstract a conceptual framework to explore these phenomena. This invented tradition, not encountered in ancient Hindu traditions, has transformed over time making it a dynamic annual socio-spatial practice.

1. INTRODUCTION

This paper examines Hindu religious processions of 'homecoming' in Goa, as socio-spatial practices and their temporal influence on the built environment. The study covers temple precincts, appropriation of urban/rural [Rurban¹] networks through ritualistic ceremonial markers and domestic spaces enroute, to arrive at an interpretation of 'home' as a material and ephemeral entity. The research lies at the intersection of religious studies², social space³ and architectural space⁴.

Annually, the village protective female deities, called *gramdevis* (village Goddesses), travel in a *palkhi* (palanquin) carried by devotees to their original homes. The tradition began in the late 19th century. These forms of assertion ritualize space even in contemporary times, as they traverse several kilometers to visit their earlier 'home' amidst great pomp and pageantry, creating a spectacle. Rituals are invented enroute, and stages of incantations of divine prayers (*aartis*), are sung with religious fervor to the accompaniment of musical instruments. Smell of flowers and incense sticks, with devotees shouting *jayjaykars* (celebratory incantations) trudging along materially diverse geographies invoke a sense of a lost ancient time, in a space belonging to today. This study asks as to how we can better understand the dynamics of 'homecoming' through socio-spatial practices of Hindu religious processions in Goa.

Portuguese occupation of Goa in the 16th century and their policies of 'Christianization'⁵ had a profound impact on the Hindu cultural landscape, leading to the displacement of Hindu deities, ultimately affecting the geography. The paper studies two cases originating in temple precincts in Marcel, Goa, India (Fig. 1). Case study one explores Goa's dynamic road geography, with roadside shrines demarcating space, culminating in Chimbél, the original location of the *Devi* (Goddess) *Chimulkarin*. Thereafter, for fifteen days, the procession tours temples in eleven *vaddos*⁶ (municipal wards), transforming 'secular space' to 'sacred space'⁷. Case-study two follows the journey of *Devi Cumbarjuekarin*, first as she traverses the river by boat and then as she visits

over a thousand homes, blessing individual families and assuring them of her love and protective umbrella. Positioned within the larger field of ‘sacred space’, it examines a unique tradition for retaining cultural memory through annual religious ritual journeys. Methods of archival research, ethnographic fieldwork, oral histories, and spatial mapping contextualizes the study.

This paper attempts to construct a conceptual framework, abstracted from the theoretical frameworks of ‘third space’ imagined by Homi Bhabha and Edward Soja. It is not only as an extension of the field, but especially of the topic, arguing that ‘third space’ as imagined by Bhabha and Soja are two viewpoints which fit the contexts of this research, making the trajectory of this article teleological in its approach.

2. SUBJECT & TOPIC: EXTANT LITERATURE MATTERS

With Marx (1843-4), Weber (1904-05) and Durkhiem (1912), religion was drawn into sociological thought. Marx referred to religion as the “opiate of the masses”, which numbed the working classes to harsh realities of life⁸. Weber investigates relationships between religious beliefs and capitalistic formations through “Protestant work ethic”⁹. For Durkhiem, religious symbols and associated rituals was the “glue” binding a society together¹⁰. After the spatial turn in sociology (late 1980s)¹¹, several important scholars like Victor Turner, Lily Kong¹², Diana L. Eck¹³, Kim Knott, and David Gellner focused on ‘religious space’. Gellner categorizes his case-studies as “the three aspects or three radically different ways of approaching religion...that's to say salvation religion, social and communal religion and instrumental religion”¹⁴, which studied ‘religious space’ in static locations. However, Goan religious processions of ‘homecoming’ are dynamic spaces. Kim Knott engages with the study of spatial analysis of religion¹⁵, in which she argues that “ideas about space underpin discussions on urbanization, globalization, identity, diaspora, commodification and consumption...all of which are important in debating contemporary religion”¹⁶. This article draws intermittently on elements of ‘religious space’ referred to above, as it develops.

Processions are largely about visibility and public display. Scholars from diverse fields like sociology, archaeology, anthropology¹⁷, and urbanism¹⁸, recognize its significance for examining politics¹⁹, religious, funerary ritualistic²⁰, popular military²¹, celebrational aspects²², national identity²³ and human rights²⁴. Victor Turner analyzed religious processions through a comprehensive comparative²⁵. Other studies entail physical transfer of sacred elements across specific pathways²⁶, within India and among Hindu diasporas²⁷. Vineeta Sinha attempts “to convey the complexity of ‘Singaporean Hinduism’...to demonstrate the inherent similarities in their enactment despite their varied ceremonial, spiritual and symbolic value”²⁸. They span different spaces and have diverse triggers. The crucial difference observed, is that none of these are ‘homecoming’ processions.

Scholarship on the phenomenon of ‘homecoming’²⁹ concentrates on sense of belonging among migrants³⁰, collective memories, ‘ideas of home’³¹ and transnationalism³². In tourism and diasporic studies, it explores “the temporary visits and journeys in search of home and homelands by migrants, displaced people, exiles and diasporic communities...”³³. Imagination of a ‘home’ as a “lost object”³⁴ can trigger desires “for re-imagining home and for understanding what is at stake when we think of home uncritically as a place of safety and belonging”³⁵. Similarly, some scholars argue that “homecoming is a secular pilgrimage...and the pursuit of an ideal ‘home’ through communal traveling”³⁶ is the journey. The idea of ‘homecoming’³⁷, ‘belongingness’³⁸ and ‘being-at-home’³⁹ play a significant part in philosophical writings as well, mostly in the context of returning to one’s own ‘self’. However, Goan processions of ‘homecoming’ are about the deity(s)/*Devi(s)* annual return, temporally to their original ‘home’, from where they had been historically uprooted.

3. CONTEXTS: THE BUILT ENVIRONMENT AND ITS PEOPLE

In 1510 the Portuguese conquered Goa and ruled until 1961. Post 1540s indigenous religion was severely challenged. In 1567 after the first Provincial Council of Goa was held⁴⁰, a law was enacted which stated that all non-Christian places of worship be demolished and their holy men be expelled, their holy books be destroyed⁴¹. Soon after, coercive policies of ‘Christianization’ instilled fear of annihilation in temple *Mahajans* (literally, high folks)⁴², who resorted to transporting their deities overnight, and fled their original ‘homes’ to territories outside of Portuguese dominion. In spite of this rupture, Hindu religious rituals continued unabated establishing that significance of “the attachment, after 450 years of separation between deity and its village of origin, suggests the importance in Hindu thought of the substantive link between place and person...”⁴³.

Designated as a ‘census-town’, Marcel is a peri-urban (Rurban) area in Orgao village, Ponda district, Goa. Located at 15°30'43.38"N, 73°57'34.81"E., it lies approximately 20 kilometers north-east (slightly) of the capital of Goa, Panjim. The Cumbharjua canal forms a natural barrier on the Western side, and is the riverine boundary of Cumbharjua island. Most of the fifteen temples migrated to Marcel, originated from Choraio island, found an interim location in a place called Mayem, and finally settled in Marcel after the 1750s. The most prominent feature of the landscape is a *maidan* (public open ground), around which seven temples are spatially organized, as are the case studies, Bhagwati Chimulkari and Shantadurga Cumbharjuekarin.

Hinduism has four castes: Brahmins, Kshatriyas, Vaishnavas and Shudras, with hierarchical distinctions ranging from the Brahmins at the top, to Shudras at the bottom⁴⁴. This common belief is debated by scholars⁴⁵. Complexities of indigenous socio-cultural space and the status of elite Gaud Saraswat Brahmins

[GSB/s]⁴⁶ in Goa is an interesting anomaly⁴⁷. Those who identified as GSBs⁴⁸, challenged fundamental norms by allowing the consumption of non-vegetarian foods while still claiming to be Brahmins. After migrating from North India, they settled in Goa, established temples for their *kula devatas* (clan deities), maintaining an unbroken tradition of rites and rituals till today. However, the same deity also protected their village and was known as a *gramdevi* (village Goddess) which was largely ‘Santeri’ as she was known in pre-Portuguese period, and later, popularly as ‘Shantadurga’, an epithet which stuck⁴⁹. Among the villager ‘others’, “the Mahars, Kunbis, Velips, Gaudas, Dhangars, and the Pagis form the tribal population⁵⁰” in Goa, and have been categorized as SCST and OBC⁵¹. The deity therefore has the distinction of being a *kuladevi*, as well as a *gramadevi*. The caste system still influences social dynamics in certain contexts, like the right to architectural and spatial access in temples⁵².

The Hindu temple consists of three parts: the *mukha mandapa* (main entrance), *sabha mandapa* (congregational area), and the *garbhakuda* (sanctum sanctorum) with a *pradakshinapath* (circumambulatory path) around it. This layout is common in Goan Hindu temples, including those in Marcel. The primary deities of temples in Goa are sculpted from stone, then fitted with golden masks in the likeness of humans. Decorative sarees of different colors are worn over the female deities, and finally garlands of flowers are draped over the deities’ ‘body’⁵³. The Shudras, were not allowed to enter the temple, and in some cases not beyond the *mukha mandapa*. The *sabha mandapa* is for Brahmins, Kshatriyas and Vaisyas. The *garbhakuda* however is for Brahmins only. However, not all temples strictly follow this in the current globalized climate.

4. CASE STUDIES

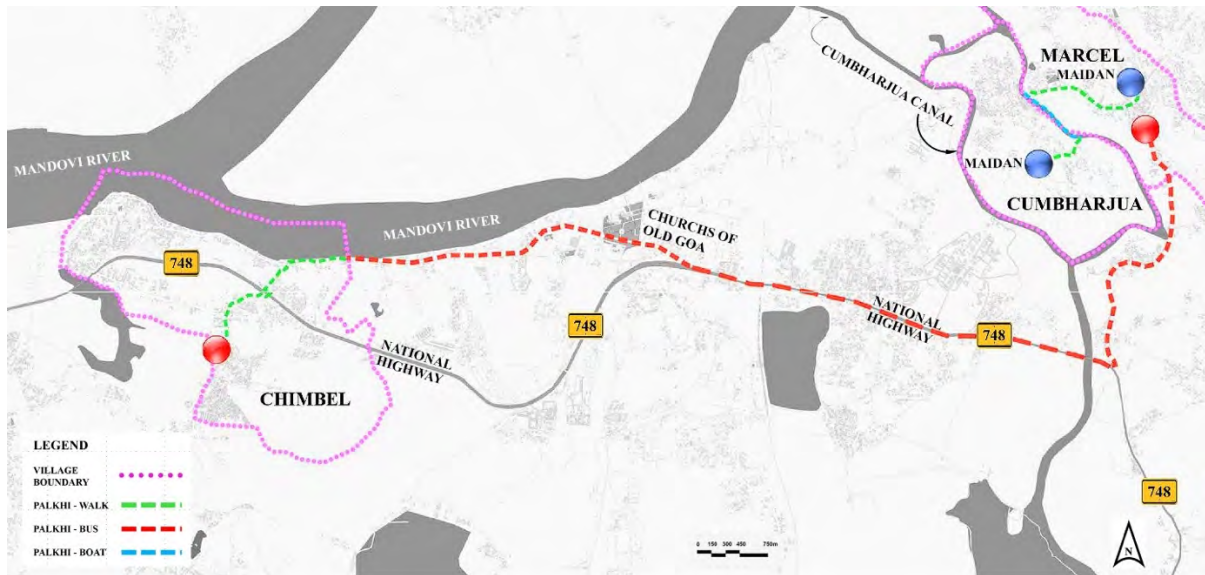


Fig. 1: Map of both processions originating from Marcel showing comparative trajectories. Red buttons represent Chimulkarin procession. Blue buttons represent Cumbharjvekarin procession. (Source: Google maps - Jatin from ADI, conceptualized and processed by author).

Shigmotsav or *Shishirotsav* are annual celebrations of ‘homecoming’ by processions, and are undertaken by individual temples with dates specific to each temple as per the lunar calendar. Processional deities, called *utsavmurtis*⁵⁴ [*Devi*], are full-body icons with masks for faces⁵⁵ and similar coverings of sarees and garlands and are slightly smaller and lighter than the main deity (stone), so they can be paraded comfortably in *palkhis*⁵⁶. One of the main operational concerns for religious processions in public space are religio-political tensions which have been shown to surface occasionally, as in the Ram Navami processions of 2022 where severe violence broke out⁵⁷. However, the cases elaborated here have not experienced such mishaps. Processional congregations require permission from the Government of Goa specifying the dates, times, and routes to be undertaken. Documented permission is required from the *Sarpanchs* (village chieftains) of both villages, on applications stating that “the managing committee will take entire responsibility to accompany and ensure its utmost safety till return to present locality”⁵⁸.

4.1 Case Study 1: *Shigmotsav/ Shishirotsav* of *Devi Shree Chimulkarin*



Fig. 2: Left, *Devi Chimulkarin*, with golden mask, sarees, and flowers, with *utsavmurti* below in the *garbhakuda*⁵⁹.

Fig. 3: Right, *Devi Chimulkarin* original stone, in *garbhakuda*.

The following is an account of the history/myth of *Devi Chimulkarin* (Fig. 2 and Fig. 3) recounted by Mr. Shivanand Chimulkar, the current temple committee president;

“*Devi Bhagwati Chimulkarin*, a form of *Parvati* and *Shantadurga* in *Goa*, originates from pre-Portuguese times, around the 1300s. She was a part of the *panchayatana devatas* of *Shree Nagesh* in *Nageshi*, *Goa*, and was the *kuladevi* of the *Prabhu* family. When the *Prabhus* faced humiliation, they sought *Bhagwati*'s guidance, and she directed them to move her to *Tiswadi*. The *Devi* settled in *Chimul* (*Chimbel*) village and became known as *Chimulkarin*. The deity was again moved to *Chodan* (*Chorao*) and then *Mayem*, when the Portuguese conquered *Tiswadi*. However, after approximately 200 years of being in *Mayem*, it again moved to *Marcel*⁶⁰.”

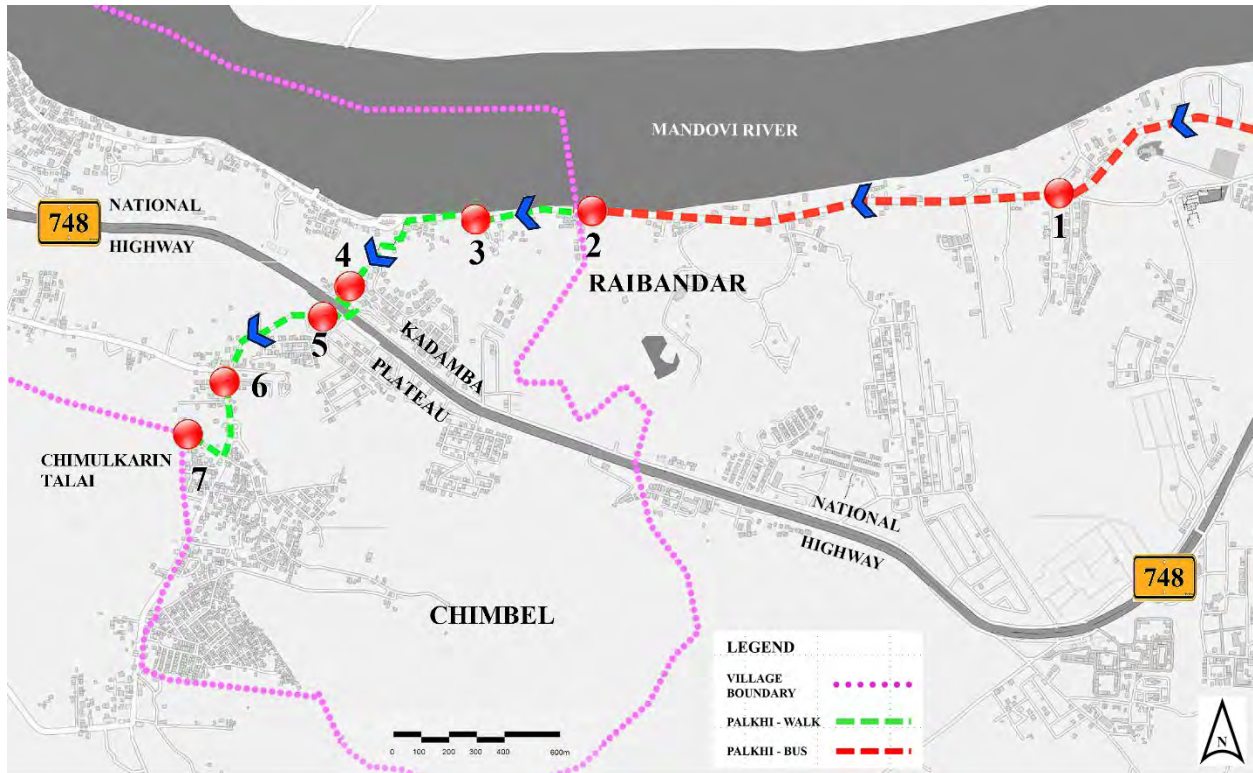


Fig. 4: Map of Chimbel with all 'stops', corresponding to Table 1, below. (Source: Google maps - Jatin from ADI, conceptualized and processed by author).

The following is based on my experience of the procession⁶¹, from Marcel to Chimbel (Fig. 4), and some components of oral histories collected from Mr. Shivrekar, *Bhat/pujari* (head priest) for Shree Chimulkarin temple at Marcel;

Chimulkarin Procession: Date - 10th April 2023

STOPS	NAME & PLACE	TIME	MODE OF TRAVEL	LATITUDE-LONGITUDE	ELEVATION in METERS	RITUAL DEPOSITS
Temple Precinct	Starting from temple, Marcel	2.00 pm	Palkhi	15°30'43.38"N, 73°57'34.81"E.	26	Flowers of various hues
Bus Boarding	Marcel	2.10 pm	Palkhi	15°30'42.29"N, 73°57'37.82"E	34	None
1st Stop	Baingineshwar Ghunti	2.55 pm	Bus	15°30'1.32"N, 73°54'5.60"E	25	Vida (betel leaf with betel-areca nut), banana, flowers and perform the aarti (prayer) with camphor lamp to Chimulkarin and Baingineshwar.

						<i>Padyapuja tirtha</i> , extra flower garlands, whole coconuts, camphor lamps, sarees for the <i>Devi</i> , and incense sticks.
2nd Stop	Mohan Wagh Residence, Raibandar	3.15 pm	Bus	15°29'58.72"N, 73°53'0.84"E	26	
3rd Stop	Vitthal Mandir Gateway, Raibandar	3.45 pm	Palkhi	15°29'58.72"N, 73°52'51.58"E	20	Flower garlands, camphor lamps, and incense sticks.
4th Stop	Saibaba Mandir, Chimbhel	4.15 pm	Palkhi	15°29'50.49"N, LON - 73°52'42.02"E	80	Flower garlands, camphor lamps, and incense sticks, sarees for the <i>Devi</i> .
5th Stop	<i>Devi Paduka Ghumti</i> , Chimbhel	4.30 pm	Palkhi	15°29'47.91"N, 73°52'40.11"E	77	Vida (betel leaf with betel nut), banana, flowers and perform the aarti (prayer) with camphor lamp.
6th Stop	Our Lady Of Livra Febres Chapel, Chimbhel	4.50 pm	Palkhi	15°29'42.56"N, 73°52'28.94"E	32	Vida (betel leaf with betel nut), banana, flowers and perform the aarti (prayer) with camphor lamp.
7th Stop	<i>Devi</i> Chimulkarin Talai, Chimbhel		Palkhi	15°29'32.92"N, 73°52'26.83"E	23	Sarees, fruits, sweetmeats, , banana, flowers and perform the aarti (prayer) with camphor lamp, oil lamps.

Table 1: Number and description of stops on the processional path are correlated with Fig. 4.

Temple precinct, Marcel: On the morning of the procession, a daily routine commenced around 9.00 am which began with removal of stale flowers, called *nirmalya* (earlier day's offerings), after which both deities (primary and *utsavmurti*) were given a bath. After ritualistic prayers the *garbhakuda* is sanctified with lighting of lamps, incense sticks, offering fresh flowers, and spraying holy water on and around the deity. The devotees, men, women, and children of all ages, some of them *Mahajans*, included the president of the temple committee, Mr. Shivanand Chimulkar⁶². Hindu devotees from different castes, notably Bhandaris, Gaudas/Kunbis⁶³, some from Chimbhel, were eager to join today's festivities. The *palkhi* was being prepared for the procession. In the afternoon, around 2.00 pm, after offering the *naivedya* (ritualistic holy food) to the *Devi*, the *utsavmurti* of the *Devi*, was placed reverentially in the *palkhi*. *Devi* was offered communal prayers,

requesting *Her* permission for the journey to begin, so *She* can give ‘*darshan*’⁶⁴ to all her devotees, along the way, and at the village, including Christians who equally partake of the festivities⁶⁵. The *palkhi* circumambulated the temple precinct and proceeded to where the bus was waiting.

Bus boarding, journey by road: As per the current tradition, *She* goes by *palkhi* to the road where the bus is waiting. The bus belongs to a Christian who has loyally accepted this honorable task for several years. This apparent aberration seems to be a common phenomenon. Scholars “have also reported such sharing or convergence of religious practices among the Goans”⁶⁶. During earlier times, he had a tempo and the *utsavmurti* along with the *palkhi* would travel in it⁶⁷. He attributes his transport business’s success to *Devi*, refusing others to take on this divine task, a remarkable cross-cultural motivation. The *utsav murti*, is enthroned on the first seat and the *palkhi* is kept atop the bus, secured with metal clasps. Four devotees hold it firmly in place. The bus proceeds along the Marcel – Banastari state road. While on this road, the driver has to skillfully negotiate the bus, since the *palkhi* on the top interferes with low-hanging electrical cables and tree branches forcing the speed of the bus to reduce considerably. It becomes a hindrance to the traffic, but assuming right of the way, the bus appropriates urban road networks for the divine call⁶⁸. After three kilometers, the bus exits onto National highway no 748. An interference with the urban layer begins and the highway is consumed within the ‘religious geography’ the procession spawns as it continues its journey towards Chimbél. After 4.3 kilometers, it again exits the highway onto the Old Goa state road traveling through the Christian heartland of Goa, ie., *Velha* (Old) Goa, a destination place for UNESCO world heritage churches⁶⁹. Since this was a part of the route devised in the 1920s⁷⁰, the only reason could have been to be able to ‘storm across’, as a show of ‘contestation’.

Stop 1, Baingineshwar, Raibandar: The first stop is one of the most critical where regional geographies and traditional territorial distribution of space is observed with great respect. The shrine here belongs to the spirit Baingineshwar who is a guardian of the territory which follows. A small wayside shrine marks his presence. From the number of flowers and offerings inside, it appeared to be a popular spot for locals to offer their obeisance. The *Devi* requests the protection of Shree Baingineshwar, since *She* is entering his territory. The *Bhat* alights and offers ritualistic prayers and conveys the message of the *Devi*.

Stop 2, Dr. Mohan Wagh residence, Raibandar: The bus journey ends here, since the balance distance shall be on foot. They removed the *Devi* from the bus, lowered the *palkhi*, placed *Her* back in it, and positioned her within Dr. Wagh's compound on a ground mat. At this juncture, around 100-150 people have gathered for *Her darshan*. The Wagh family undertakes to provide water, cold drinks fruits and sweet-meats to all those gathered. After, the *Bhat* performed the *puja*, distributed the *prasad*, the devotees offered flowers to the *Devi*,

took the *tirtha*, of the *padyapuja* and offered donations. The temple's musicians travel with the procession along with the *palkhi* throughout. Here they perform on the steps of the Wagh residence.

Stop 3, Vitthal Mandir gateway, Raibandar: The Vitthal Mandir Gateway opens out onto the Raibandar main road, beyond which the marsh of Mandovi river starts. The area is very picturesque with the river in the foreground and distant green mountains in the background. As a mark of respect to the *Devi*, the head-priest of Vitthal Mandir welcomes the *Devi*, and similar *pujas* are performed. The journey continued. Just 50 M west of this was a small village road which leads upwards on the hill where it meets the highway 748 again. The steps were very rough and the *palkhi* had trouble negotiating the levels. A rise of almost 60 M was achieved in a distance of approximately 370 M to the next stop.

Stop 4, Saibaba temple, Raibandar: This is one of the newer additions to the stops in the procession. Here too, the procession does not enter the temple precinct. The head-priest comes to the road where the *palkhi* rests and offers prayers and does the ritualistic needful. The devotees accompanying from Wagh residence are joined by patrons from here. At this point the highway passes on a flat hillock known as the Kadamba plateau. At LAT - 15°29'47.88"N, LON - 73°52'43.74"E, the procession crosses under the highway, to move westwards and downhill towards Chimbél.

Stop 5, *Devi paduka ghunti*, Raibandar: The procession stopped at a small shrine to venerate a spot where during earlier times it was believed to have the *Devi's Paduka* (footprints) as impressions on a stone⁷¹. There are steps which lead westwards down the steep slope from here and the procession continues downwards, again going through the careful process of negotiating the level difference.



Fig. 5: Left, view with Our Lady of Livra Febres 'chapel' and 'church square'. (Source: Photographs by Author).

Fig. 6: Right, drummers and other percussionists at 'church square'.

Stop 6, Our Lady of Livra Febres chapel, Chimbél: We had almost reached the end of the day's journey. At the penultimate stop, the church square (Fig. 5), the procession halted and prepared for what seemed to me the most vibrant performance. Since this is believed to be the original place of the *Devi*, the location has a great significance. Religious connotations suddenly took on political dimensions of high drama, an expression of 'contestation'. To mark the spot, several garlands, flowers, lamps, and incense sticks were deposited on the compound wall of the church. The crowd, included six drummers (Fig. 6) of various types of drums (*dhhol*, *taashé*, *nagare*), beaten at ear-shattering decibels till it reached a crescendo. During the parade, the youth (boys and girls), dressed in bright parrot-colored garments, danced with great vigor, singing, and screaming at their heart's content. Almost every household offered plates of *prasad*⁷² for devotees. The final lap was along a narrow village street, bound on both sides by compound walls and houses. Amidst the slowly dancing procession and the 'oshio, oshio' chants, along with cars and motorcycles trapped in the midst of the crowd, the entire experience felt surreal.

Stop 7, *Devi* Chímulkarin talai, Chimbél: It had taken about 110 minutes to cover the distance of approximately 300 M from the church square to the *talai* (holy water tank). At the *talai*, a large square was cleared up, what seemed to be vehicular parking at other times, expressing how 'secular space' transformed to 'sacred space' in the community's lifecycle. A crowd of 700+ eagerly awaited *Devi's* arrival. At the *talai*, a puja with *talai's* holy water was performed, and the *palkhi* was placed on a velvet-covered table. Devotees came for *darshan*, offered obeisance touching *Devi's* body with reverence. The procession's final stop for the day was *Thorla Mandap* (elder pavilion). Over the next 15 days, *Devi* visited 11 *vaddos* for devotees' offerings and blessings, and an overbearing sense of 'sacred time'⁷³.

Return journey: As the festivities neared completion of this 15-day exuberance, the *Devi* embarked on her journey back to Marcel. The same bus carried *Her* back bypassing any intermediate halts. Upon reaching Marcel, the *Devi* was transferred back to the *palkhi*, and carried along the road to *Her Praakaar*, where after circumambulating the temple, *She* entered the *sabha mandapa*. After ushering *Devi* onto the *chowk*⁷⁴, the *Bhats* performed an *aarti*, engaged in puja rituals, and led the congregation in community prayers which marked the conclusion of the *Shimgotsav* program. Finally, before retiring her to the *garbhakuda*, purification rites were conducted⁷⁵. These rituals are essential because, after the extensive journey *Her* 'body' had been touched by countless 'hands' making it unsuitable to return to the sanctum. Upon completion of this, the *Devi* is transferred from the *palkhi* to the *garbhakuda*. With this final act, the comprehensive 15 to 16-day celebration draws to a profound and sacred closure.

4.2 CASE STUDY 2: *Shigmotsav/ Shishirotsav of Devi Shree Cumbharjuekarin*



Fig. 7: Left, *Devi Cumbharjuekarin* with golden mask, sarees and flowers in *garbhakuda*.

Fig. 8: Right, *Devi Cumbharjuekarin utsavmurti* in *palkhi* sitting astride a horse.

Devi Cumbharjuekarin (Fig. 7 and Fig. 8) is taken by *palkhi*, from the *maidan* at Marcel by foot to Tariwada jetty, where *She* boards a boat, travels to Thappan *vaddo* at Cumbharjua island and goes to the maidan here (Fig. 9). The temple land at Marcel, approximately a hectare, originally belonging to Cumbharjuekarin temple was donated by the Orgao Comunidade in 1554⁷⁶ to the deity which moved from Cumbharjua village which lies across the Cumbharjua canal (a part of the network of riverine tributaries of the Mandovi river) from Marcel. However, during later years, due to litigations, other temple committees benefitted off the same land and it was subdivided. Also, this temple has not remained a temple of only the GSBs. According to Amendments and Rectifications of Bye-laws effected on 2nd October 1983, Article 6: Para: “Equally are *Mahajans*...grouped as Tatallapkars, Kharvis, Gavdes, Mollogeakars, Mittgavdes, Simpiss, Sonars, Kansars-Lohars, Sutars, Parits and others of different classes...are equally *Mahajans* enjoying all rights...”⁷⁷. As a result, this temple ranks high on the scales of social justice.

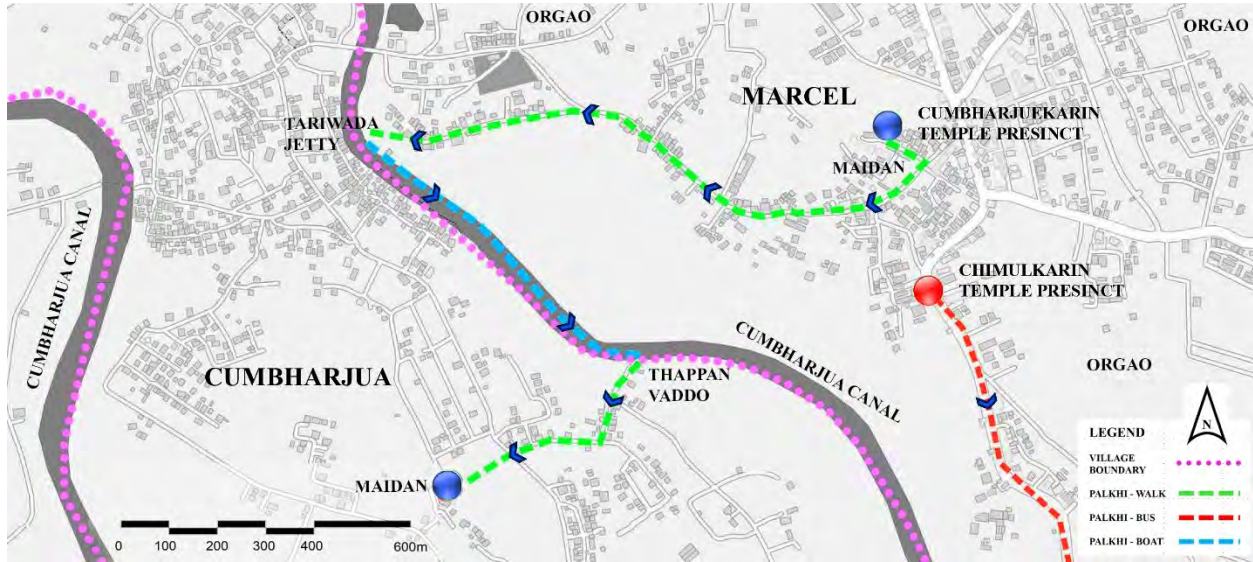


Fig. 9: Map of processional path of *Devi Cumbharjuekarin*, from temple precinct, Marcel, Orgao to Cumbharjua. (Source: Google maps - Jatin from ADI, conceptualized and processed by author).

Every primary deity has *parivar devatas*⁷⁸, also known as *panchayatana*, and are a part of every temple precinct. However, in this case, Ramay Sati, Gadhwans, and Tirkhajan⁷⁹, three of the five affiliate deities never moved from Cumbharjua. Only Grampurusha, who is located within the *garbhakuda*, and Rawalnath who is located around the *maidan* in Marcel accompanied the *Devi* during the migration. Most of the account below has been obtained from Dr. Shivaji Shet⁸⁰. The ritual of a deity traversing a settlement of over 1000 households in a Rurban settlement is fascinating and unheard of in today's times of globalization⁸¹.

Devi Cumbharjuekarin also gets ready for the 'homecoming' procession to her original home in Cumbharjua. The *utsavmurti* of the *Devi*, sitting astride a horse, inside the *palkhi*, travels 7 to 8 days before *Gudi Padwa*⁸² on the day of *Holi*.⁸³ After the *pujas*, *aartis* and other ritualistic preparations, *She* ascends the *palkhi*, which is placed on the *chowk*. Several devotees as well as all committee members had gathered to begin the procession with great pomp and fanfare. Amidst loud music, the *palki* exits the temple's north-side entrance, moving east briefly before turning south towards Tariwada jetty. There, it crosses the Cumbharjua canal by boat to reach Cumbharjua island for the *Shigmotsav* at her original home. The boats are provided by the Parab family as an ancient tradition, since the *Devi* belonged to their household, and they had aided *Her* escape to Marcel.

The *palkhi* is taken by boat to Thapan *vaddo*, about 700 M eastwards along the canal. After alighting here, *She* passes through several fields, kept open by eager farmers (devotees of the *gramadevi*), in the hope that their fields (local produce like chillis, brinjals, lintels, etc.) shall reap a good yield in the coming year. Such is the devotion of the simple folk of this village. *She* is then taken to a large maidan, where for 7 days *She* will be available for people to pay their respects, in a *ghumti*.⁸⁴ During these 7-8 days, at night there are special

festivities, *Nataks* (dramas) organized by inviting various *natak mandalis* (drama associations) from all over Goa and there are competitions with prizes awarded for best performances.

The actual home-to-home procession however, begins on *Gudi Padwa* which is the first day of the Hindu calendar for Maharashtra and Goa⁸⁵. When the *Devi* finally boards the *palkhi* again, *She* first visits the Ramay Sati temple, the Gadhwans temple, and then the Tirkhajan place, as a mark of respect towards her *panchayatana devatas*. Of these three, the Ramay Sati and Gadhwans have larger shrines. The Tirkhajan however is just an open space. The idea of an open space as a representative of a powerful spirit is very baffling⁸⁶. The mysticism it draws on, takes its roots from traditional belief systems, probably once based in tribal origins. Once this part of the procession begins, for 24/7, *She* goes from home-to-home, blessing the devotees, through day and night. Such is the spirit of the procession. The committee members take 12-hour duties for accompanying the *palkhi*. In accompaniment are *Bhats* and other sub-castes (*Katkars, Zalmis, Khamelis, one Divekar* and one *Nallakar*) who have been given rights to regulate and moderate the *palkhi*, and provide various ritualistic services. All rituals are systemically followed and the 'others' get full and complete representation in the socio-cultural lives of society as it is organized.

Over the next month, the *Devi* travels extensively through all the 9-10 *vaddos* of Cumbharjua, casting a sacred spatial network over the entire geography of the village, which is difficult to fathom, and equally exciting to imagine⁸⁷. As the procession approaches its end, again in Thappan *vaddo*, it goes back to the maidan at the *ghumti*. Here, as a fitting conclusion to a successful processional journey at Cumbharjua, the celebration of *dhulwad* (also called *gulalotsav*) begins with *gulal*⁸⁸ from the bucket which is placed in the *palkhi* and to which every house contributes. As an honor, the committee president applies the *gulal* to the forehead of the *Devi* first. Thereafter, the Zalmi, Bhat, and rest of the committee members who are present. Finally, all devotees regardless of their caste are allowed do the same. Simultaneously they apply *gulal* to each other and all the devotees as well as the *Devi* are entirely covered in the crimson powder. After this event, the *palkhi* again visits the *panchayatans* at Cumbharjua, and returns to the boats which transport *Her* back to Marcel.



Fig. 10: *Bhat* and *Devi* covered in *gulal*. Photo taken at the last house in Marcel.

In Marcel, about 90 homes have yet to be covered. From Tariwada jetty, on the way back to the temple, *Devi* visits *Her* Rawalnath temple, the last of the *panchayatans* to be honored. After completing the balance of the homes (Fig. 10) at Marcel the *palkhi* goes back to the temple, where at the larger *sabha mandap*, a final *gulalotsav* takes place⁸⁹. The *Devi* is then taken inside the *chowk* (inner mandap) and the next day, a sanctification process⁹⁰, more or less like the one at the Chimulkarin temple, takes place for the whole day. She is bathed in milk, holy water, the sarees are changed, and thereafter, no one other than the *Bhats* can touch her.

Donations collected from more than a thousand households are meticulously recorded⁹¹. Larger pieces of jewelry are retained in the same form and at various times the *Devi* at the temple is dressed in those. Smaller pieces are smelted and larger jewelry items are fashioned out of them. Similarly, every house offers two sarees which are then auctioned off to the highest bidder at public religious ceremonies, throughout the year, and the money collected adds to the coffers of the temple.

5. THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK: CONCEPTUAL CONSTRUCTS

For the purposes of this article, theoretical frameworks mean established and widely accepted concepts as valid theories. Conceptual frameworks are the propositions this paper advances, derived from the findings of the two cases. Examining Homi Bhabha's and Edward Soja's propositions of 'third space', it attempts to overlap commonalities and extract differences, to abstract a conceptual framework for the Goan processions of 'homecoming'.

Bhabha argues that formulations of cultures and their peculiarities are constantly in flux, influenced by a combination of historical context, societal world views and power dynamics. For him, the ‘first space’ belongs primarily to indigenous societies. The ‘second space’, an appropriated space, is that of colonial occupation. The ‘third space’ he introduces is a resultant of the interactions between the first and second spaces. The ‘third space’, also an “in-between space”, a space of layered multi-cultural strands, therefore has the potential to exhibit cultures of hybridity, contestation and transformation. A space of multivalent nature, it mostly gets evidenced in the built environment. According to Bhabha, “this moment of reflection is never simply the mirror of *your* making”, but extending beyond the reflected sameness, it acquires its own particular cognizable identity and therefore “belongs to you, too”⁹².

This idea of culture being an imaginative process, causing ‘cultural translations’⁹³, rather than being a tangible and static entity, is what this article draws upon as its essence. The socio-spatial practice of these processions can be viewed as a practice of contestation. Secondly, the evolution of caste system in Goan Christianity⁹⁴ can also be considered as contestation, framing the religio-social space of Goan Christians into a ‘third space’ phenomenon⁹⁵, an excellent example of hybridity.

Soja reflects upon an imbalance between the disciplines of history, social science and geography, with the former two somehow wielding an advantaged position over the third. Calling for a balanced platform to exercise these three disciplines concurrently and with equal justice, he developed the conceptual ‘third space’⁹⁶. Influenced by theoretical constructs from Henri Lefebvre’s social spatiality, he crafts the term ‘triple dialectic’ intended to span all interpretive perspectives⁹⁷. For him the first space is ‘physical’, the second is a ‘mental space’ and the ‘third space’ is in the social realm, formed by the overlap of the other two.

Soja’s physical and intellectual journeys to Los Angeles can metaphorically ‘mirror’ those of the Goan processions. On the one hand there is the physicality and materiality of the ritual journey, and on the other hand, there is a ‘mentality’⁹⁸, an overbearing feeling of the journey ‘home’, an ‘imagined space’ no doubt. All aspects of a ‘homecoming’ journey can be seen where the procession takes a stop. Like Soja, this work too is embedded in the phenomenon of a journey. Framing ‘temporality’ as an inherent aspect of this journey which defines space as ‘sacred’ as opposed to ‘mundane’, the intersection of space and time is crucial. Interestingly, *Bhat* Shivrekar mentions the visible joy he sees on the face of the *Devi* as she nears home. How does this imagination gain reality? In whose mind? The imagined space spirals out from the core, touching all realms, embracing all of space, as it were. Very importantly however, what spirals out, also has the potential to spiral in, therefore forming an all-encompassing cyclical circularity, rife with possibilities.

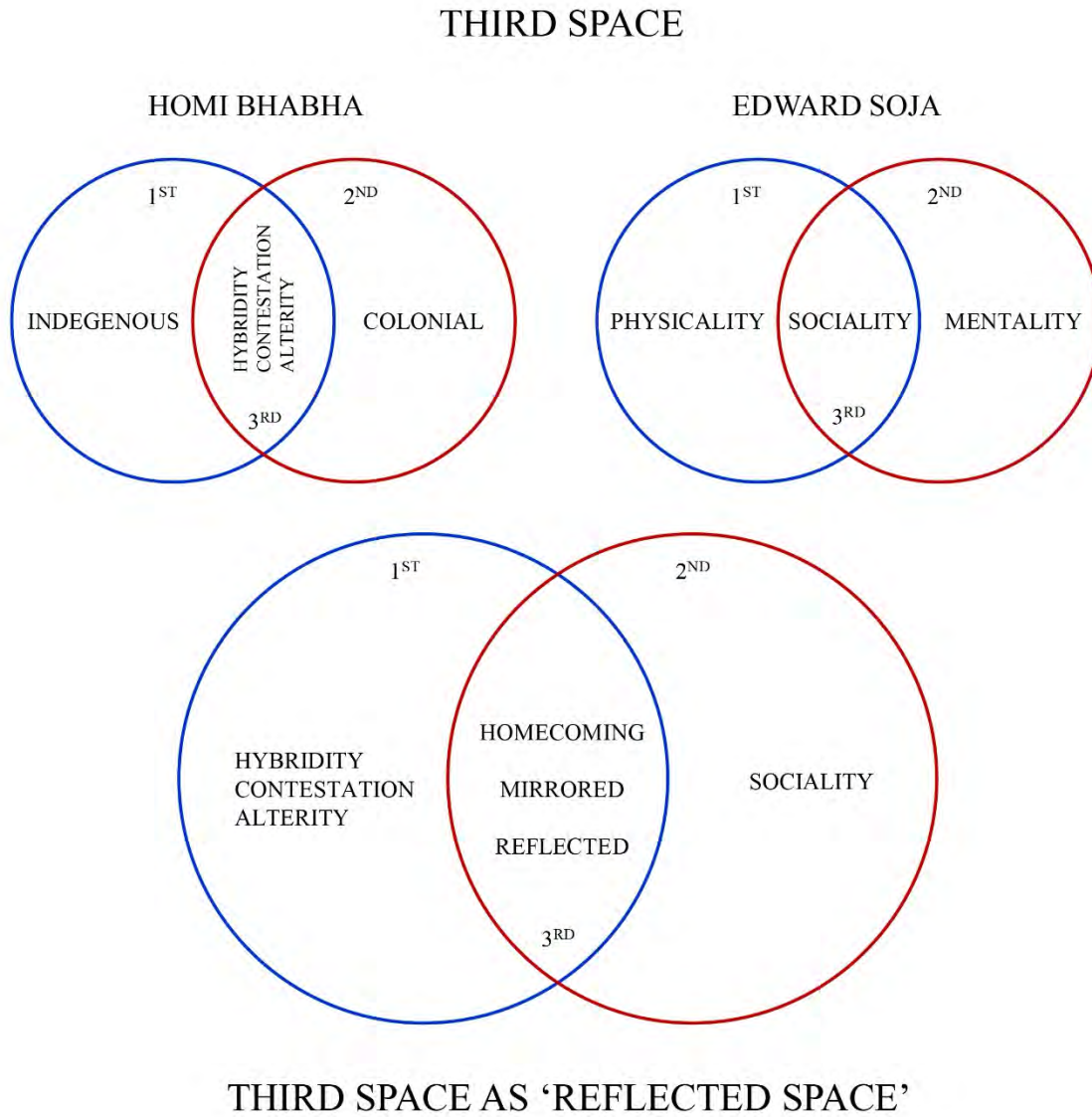


Fig 11: Diagram of 'third space' of homecoming as an abstracted 'reflected space' below, derived from Bhabha's and Soja's 'third space' constructs above. (Source: Author).

5.1 Homecoming as an Abstracted Third Space: A 'Reflected Space'

The conceptual framework of Goan processions of 'homecoming' is based on a synthesis of above theories, a kind of a synthesis of syntheses. The blended mix of the two theories results in a refracted framework for religious 'homecoming' processions as they traverse space on the built environment. Partitions between boundaries and categories of spaces cannot be clinically observed and they tend to bleed into one

another easily. However, to clarify its conceptual framework with relation to its three space types, following is the proposition the paper puts forth. The ‘first space’ is a blend of Bhabha’s ‘third space’ (hybridity and contestation) and Soja’s ‘second space’, (‘mentality’ - anticipating ‘homecoming’). The ‘second space’ is that which corresponds to Bhabha’s ‘liminal space’ of alterity and Soja’s ‘third space’ of ‘sociality’. Finally, the ‘third space’ is the space of ‘homecoming’, which embraces all the concepts put forth above, a blend of the two spaces, which produces a ‘sociality’ related to ‘home’ as a space of anticipation, in an already hybrid space (Fig. 11).

The ‘third space’ of ‘homecoming’ thereafter invents the idea of a ‘reflected space’ based on the metaphor of a cracked mirror which reflects the same object through its multiple shards. Here the ‘home’ is what is shattered by colonial invasion and further atrocities heaped upon indigenous communities which forces an eviction at gun-point. It builds on the feelings of estrangement from one’s ‘home’, being in ‘mental space’, and a sense of belonging to the ‘physical space’ of the ‘home’, encompassing its material and spatial dimensions, which is essentially a ‘reflected’ reality, albeit temporal. Thereby, the intersection of space with time gets heightened. Rituals of the processions offer opportunities of temporal residence in multiple homes, where once there was a singular entity, adding to its dynamics. In the context of these case studies, the metaphor of ‘reflected space’ allows alternate perspectives of viewing. It purports to further abstract the concept and sharpen what lies in the domain of the mental, as an offshoot operating within the overarching umbrella of ‘mentality’. This seemingly complex mix is apparent as a socio-cultural phenomenon, especially in the Goan space.

6. FINDINGS

This paper limits itself to Hindu socio-cultural practices of annual festivals from specific temples in Goa. Without the historical rupture and temple relocations due to colonial intervention, the regional religious landscape and associated ritualistic innovations would not have developed. Regardless of their scope and magnitude, these processions fulfill a variety of roles. They disseminate divine blessings, delineate sacred boundaries, and highlight religious diversity, among other purposes. They present as forms of contestation and ‘identity enforcement’, paradoxically fostering a sense of togetherness and cohesion among diverse communities melding them together, diffusing boundaries, equating castes, thereby dissolving hierarchies, even if temporally.

Utsavmurtis ‘mirror’ the likeness and qualities of the primary deity from the *garbhakuda*, reinforcing human-divine relationships transforming domestic space to ‘sacred’ with the deities’ visitation. The opportunity to ‘touch’ the *Devi*, typically unthinkable, especially for the ‘others’, opens ‘sacred space’ to all, in secular spaces.

Temporal sensorial experiences mark the built environment through procession rituals during stops, spawning a rich 'religious geography', traced through maps. Furthermore, processions in this age of globalization, allow devotees caught up in busy lives (even from distant diasporas), the convenience of '*darshan*' at appointed times. At every stop, the *Devi* gets donations which accompanying committee members note in a register, aggregating it in the annual collections⁹⁹. Finally, this unique invented tradition, not encountered in ancient Hindu traditions, has transformed over time making it a temporal and dynamic annual socio-spatial practice. The sum of these findings draws 'homecoming' firmly into an abstracted 'third space', answering the research question. Furthermore, any of the findings above, when viewed from the lens of 'reflected space', adds to explorations of socio-spatial dimensions in the theoretical realm.

7. CONCLUSIONS

This paper analyses 'homecoming' as being constitutive of, a heightened sense of anticipation on the journey, a long-awaited desire about to be fulfilled. Without the physical journey to the 'imagined' place, fulfilment of that desire is not possible. A palpable emotional contact with the divine, heightened by the physical proximity, of 'touch' even, and the feverish energy accompanying the *palkhi* are tangible evidences of unique expressions of 'homecoming'. There is an added element of visiting several 'homes', as your own, and therefore the joy of 'homecoming' exponentially multiplying. There are three kinds of actors. The first is the *Devi Herself* who is eager to go 'home'. Secondly, it is the devotees who accompany the *Devi's palkhi* who are blessed with the sacred duty of accompanying the *Devi* to Her 'home'. Thirdly, it is the devotees waiting for the very day when the *Devi* will visit and bless their physical homes, an opportunity to redeem all misgivings. Considering future potential, one can draw connections between 'materiality' and 'sense of living' in a home and investigate as to which aspect makes a house a home¹⁰⁰, in the paradigm of 'reflected space'. The aim being, to develop relationships between communities and the world around, in this temporal existence. In the context of these case studies, the metaphor embraces the idea literally, however, the extent and domain of 'reflected space' is not imagined to be narrow enough to apply only to these case study types. Playing with the idiom of 'reflected space', especially within the disciplines of architectural space, will illuminate several dimensions which are not currently perceived in more specificity. For example, in colonial spaces, their architectural and spatial configurations appear to 'reflect' the 'home' that the colonial masters yearned so dearly in faraway places which they colonized. This resulted in mirroring 'home-like' environments, from individual buildings to planning of cities within appropriated spaces of indigenous people.

NOTES AND REFERENCES

¹ The term "rurban" refers to a combination of rural and urban areas, typically characterized by a mix of open spaces and built environments. It may describe a geographic area that is situated near a city or town but maintains some rural characteristics, such as agricultural land or natural habitats. The term can also refer to the social and cultural dynamics of these areas, where urban and rural ways of life blend together.

https://rurban.gov.in/index.php/public_home/about_us/#gsc.tab=0

² The term 'religious studies' here refers to early sociological studies conducted by Marx, Weber and Durkhiem, and may even be synonymous with 'socio-cultural' studies.

³ The term 'social space' here refers to sociological theories developed by Homi Bhabha and Edward Soja, and focus particularly on their articulations of 'third space'.

⁴ The term 'architectural space' here encompasses the physical spatiality, ranging from individual homes, temples, churches, to larger geographies of urban infrastructure and 'rurban' settlements.

⁵ Ines G Županov, "Conversion Historiography in South Asia: Alternative Indian Christian Counter-Histories in Eighteenth Century Goa," *The Medieval History Journal* 12, no. 2 (2009): 312.

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- ²⁴ Siobhan Burke, "Dancing Bodies That Proclaim: Black Lives Matter," *The New York Times* 9 (2020).
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⁴¹ Ângela Barreto Xavier, “Reducing Difference in the Portuguese Empire? A Case Study from Early-Modern Goa,” *Changing Societies: Legacies and Challenges. Vol. 1. Ambiguous Inclusions: Inside out, Outside In*, 2018, 249.

⁴² Temple *Mahajans*, mostly from clans of Gaud Saraswat Brahmins, are custodians of particular ‘avatars’ of Hindu deities, which are their ‘*kula devatas*’ (clan Gods).

⁴³ Paul Axelrod and Michelle A Fuerch, “Flight of the Deities: Hindu Resistance in Portuguese Goa,” *Modern Asian Studies* 30, no. 2 (1996): 395.

⁴⁴ The Brahmins, occupying the highest position in the social hierarchy, consisted of scholars and priests who were responsible for religious and intellectual pursuits. The Kshatriyas, the warrior and ruling class, possessed the authority to govern and protect society. The Vaishyas, engaged in commerce, trade, and agriculture, played a vital role in economic activities. Lastly, the Shudras, occupying the lowest rung of the varna system, were primarily laborers and servants.

⁴⁵ MV Nadkarni, “Is Caste System Intrinsic to Hinduism? Demolishing a Myth,” *Economic and Political Weekly*, 2003, 4783–93.

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⁵¹ These are Scheduled Castes, Scheduled Tribes and Other Backward Castes of Goa whom the government has the responsibility of protecting – Department of Tribal Welfare, Government of Goa. Source - <https://www.goa.gov.in/departement/goa-commission-for-scheduled-castes-and-scheduled-tribes>

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⁵³ In Goa, as in the framework of Hindu beliefs all over, Gods and Goddesses take on human-like forms, having bodies, ‘mirroring’ our wants, wishes, tastes and emotions. Consequently, they wake up, bathe, dress extravagantly, eat *prasada*, rest, and even go on leisurely outings, much like we do.

⁵⁴ *Utsavmurtis*, are crafted in the likeness of the primary deity, and are regularly taken for weekly *palkhi* circumambulations within the temple *prakara* on days designated as auspicious by the Hindu calendar. The frequency depends on the system of rituals followed for particular deities. This lived experience is a part of my fieldwork from various temples and particularly from these two temples.

⁵⁵ Alka Hingorani, *Making Faces: Self and Image Creation in a Himalayan Valley* (University of Hawaii Press, 2012).

⁵⁶ *Palkhi* (palanquin) is a mobile carriage for the ‘body’ of the deity, with its own materiality which includes a mirror, held with human hands. While on this procession, it serves as a temporary home for 15 days, is crafted from solid wood with intricate carvings.

⁵⁷ Uday Singh Chander, “ROUTES OF WRATH: WEAPONISING RELIGIOUS PROCESSIONS” (Chander Uday Singh for Citizens & Lawyers Initiative, March 2023), https://www.livelaw.in/pdf_upload/routes-of-wrath-report-2023-2-465217.pdf.

⁵⁸ This matter is taken from a copy of the letter obtained from the archives of the temple documents of Shree Cumbharjuekarin temple committee.

⁵⁹ All photographs in this paper are by author unless otherwise mentioned.

⁶⁰ According to historical documents available with the Mahajans, the recorded year is 1751, but this has not been verified.

⁶¹ Both case study accounts, described in first person, are organized as narratives based on my fieldwork.

⁶² The Mahajans of this temple take their name from that of the Deity Chimulkarin, which is the name of the village Chimul. During Portuguese times it came to be called Chimbél, and the name stays till date, as do others in Goa.

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⁶⁸ During the early 1900s, the *Devi* would arrive by boat from Marcel, through the Cumbharjua canal, and on the jetty, and they would do the *padyapuja* (prayers of holy feet). Thereafter she would visit inside every household of the villagers to fulfill the idea of 'homecoming'. Every home therefore was the 'reflected' home of the Goddess. Currently however, due to the increase in population and the number of households, the Goddess visits the primary temple precincts in every municipal *vaddo* (municipal ward) which defines the spatial distribution of Chimbél Rurban area. The devotees along with their families come to Her and offer their prayers, flowers, aartis and donations.

⁶⁹ <https://goa-tourism.com/history/unesco-heritage/>

⁷⁰ These were colonial times since Goa was under Portuguese dominion till 1962.

⁷¹ The myth is that during the construction of this highway, the contractor was unmindful of this sacred spot and it was desecrated by the workings of the bulldozer. The villagers protested and the contractor, who was fearful of the backlash, was made to erect a small shrine for its commemoration.

⁷² *Prasad* is food offered to deities. Devotees get to eat after the Gods have blessed it. Here it was watermelons, bananas, sweetmeats and water, cold drinks etc. are the common offerings which are most welcome, and I had my share with them.

⁷³ Mircea Eliade, Willard R. Trask, and Mircea Eliade, *The Sacred and the Profane: The Nature of Religion*, A Harvest Book (San Diego: Harcourt, Brace, 1987).

⁷⁴ Two significant pujas take place – one unfolds within the *sabha mandapa*, while the other occurs at the *chowk*, a space immediately outside the *garbhakuda*.

⁷⁵ The entire kavach, which encompasses the hands, legs, feet, chest, and face mask of the Devi, along with all her ornaments, is meticulously separated and arranged on a *chaurang*, a decorative four-legged wooden table. Following the Hindu ritualistic tradition, twelve kalash, sacred vessels, are thoughtfully arranged in a circular pattern, and a *havan*, a sacred fire ritual, is conducted. Purification continues with *proakshan*, the sprinkling of purified water, graced with flowers, tulsi leaves, and *bael* leaves, over every part of the *kavach*. Two additional

Brahmins lend their expertise to perform the *havan* (holy fire), culminating in the *kavach's* placement in the *garbhakuda*.

⁷⁶ According to the historically coinciding accounts from the temple book written by local historian N.S. Dhume, and the account told by Dr. Shivaji Shet, the current temple committee president.

⁷⁷ This information was available from the temple archives.

⁷⁸ The *Parivar devatas* (affiliate deities) are a set of five or more deities which completes the family of associated Gods and Goddesses. Some are located within the *garbhakuda* and some outside it, some are even placed in the *prakara* (temple precinct).

⁷⁹ Tirkhajan is a male protective spirit, so there is no deity and temple associated with it. It is just an open designated space where rites are consecrated by believers. These spirits in Goa, are believed to have supernatural powers and have been known to be visible to some, who indicate that there is a strong spiritual presence capable of healing.

⁸⁰ Dr. Shivaji Shet is a PhD in Art History from the Shantiniketan college. He is the current president of the Cumbharjuekarin temple committee. He understands and appreciates research efforts and was most helpful in providing me with detailed information about the *Shigmotsav*, as well as graciously provided access to the temple archives for my documentation. Among the documents available in temple archives, I was able to copy the Cumbharjuekarin Compromissos, or Temple Bye-laws, and copies of the Portuguese records from the 16th century, procured from the Directorate of Archives and Archeology department, Government of Goa. He travelled along with the *palkhi* for 30 days, as a part of his responsibility in managing the processional challenges and observe administrative duties like recording the donations of cash and jewelry which every household offered.

⁸¹ Since the dates for both the processions were clashing, I was able to do fieldwork only for the Chimulkarin Shigmotsav. However, I did visit Cumbharjua during the later period and was able to experience the Cumbharjuekarin Devi's *palkhi* travelling from home to home.

⁸² Venita Gomes, "Here's How Goa Celebrates the Festival of Gudi Padwa," *Gomantak Times*, April 2, 2022, <https://www.gomantaktimes.com/my-goa/art-culture/heres-how-go-celebrates-the-festival-of-gudi-padwa>.

⁸³ Times reporter, "Happy Holi 2023: Story, History, Significance and All You Need to Know," *TIMESOFINDIA.COM*, March 4, 2023, <https://timesofindia.indiatimes.com/life-style/events/when-is-holi-2023-date-story-history-significance-and-all-you-need-to-know/articleshow/98333530.cms?from=mdr>.

⁸⁴ A specially built cemented platform with a small shrine to accommodate the *Devi*.

⁸⁵ In 2023 it began on 22nd March 2023, and because this is as per the Hindu lunar calendar, the dates differ every year as per the Gregorian calendar.

⁸⁶ Henn, "The Becoming of Goa. Space and Culture in the Emergence of a Multicultural Lifeworld," 334.

⁸⁷ I was a part of visiting a few homes on 3rd April 2023, and have a lived experience of the mobility of the *palkhi* and its accompanying procession.

⁸⁸ Katrin Bossmann et al., "Holi Colours Contain PM10 and Can Induce Pro-Inflammatory Responses," *Journal of Occupational Medicine and Toxicology* 11 (2016): 1–11.

⁸⁹ I was fortunate enough to be a part of this to experience the festivities.

⁹⁰ *Samprokshan vidhi, shuddhikaran vidhi* (sanctification rites).

⁹¹ Temple records in the form of hand written registers were made available to collect this archival data.

⁹² Karin Ika and Gerhard Wagner, eds., *Communicating in the Third Space*, Routledge Research in Cultural and Media Studies 18 (New York: Routledge, 2009), ix.

⁹³ Homi K Bhabha, “‘Race’, Time and the Revision of Modernity,” *Oxford Literary Review* 13, no. 1 (1991): 193–219.

⁹⁴ Ronnie Po-Chia Hsia, *A Companion to the Early Modern Catholic Global Missions*, vol. 80 (Brill, 2018), 240–41.

⁹⁵ Robert S Newman, “Goa: The Transformation of an Indian Region,” *Pacific Affairs*, 1984, 436.

⁹⁶ *Thirdspace. Expanding the Shape of the Geographical Imaginations*, YouTube (FILO UBA, 2019).

⁹⁷ Edward W. Soja, *Thirdspace: Journeys to Los Angeles and Other Real-and-Imagined Places*, 18. [Nachdr.] (Malden, Mass.: Blackwell Publ, 2014), 6.

⁹⁸ Influenced by Henri Lefebvre, Soja derived this filtered construct from the 'conceived space.

⁹⁹ Ram Nath⁹⁹ (name changed), critically comments that “the main purpose of such a procession is to gather donations”.

¹⁰⁰ Martin Heidegger, “Building Dwelling Thinking,” *Spaces of Visual Culture. London, Routledge*, 2006, 66–76.

Traditional Dwellings and Settlements

Working Paper Series

TEMPLES ON THE ROOFTOP: PRACTICING RITUAL ALLIANCE TRADITION IN HIGHRISE RESIDENCES IN PUTIAN, CHINA

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**TEMPLES ON THE ROOFTOP:
PRACTICING RITUAL ALLIANCE TRADITION IN HIGHRISE RESIDENCES
IN PUTIAN, CHINA**



This paper examines the cultural background of Putian and the evolution of urbanization policies to reveal the transformation of temple forms following the shift of land ownership from village collectives to the state. With the rapid rise of high-rise residential areas, these temples have become unique architectural forms that successfully integrate commercial functions on the ground floor while preserving local traditional culture, reflecting the resilience of traditional culture. The paper specifically focuses on the policy background, layout and form, and architectural details of rooftop temples to thoroughly analyze the comprehensive impact of urbanization on these temples.

By showcasing the construction of temples on rooftops, the paper explores how local communities, constrained by land and policy limitations, have managed to continue their traditional culture and inject new dynamics into it by reorganizing temple ownership and land allocation. Temples on the rooftop not only demonstrates the adaptability of local communities to urban living but also vividly embodies their enduring traditions. These temples serve as tangible expressions of cultural pride, providing continuity and a sense of belonging amidst the transformative forces of urbanization. Additionally, they foster a strong sense of community through religious and cultural activities, nurturing a profound sense of community awareness.

1. INTRODUCTION

Located in Xialin Street, Putian, Fujian Province, an entire temple complex is situated on top of a 2-story flat roof, with commercial function below, and high-rise residential buildings behind the temple, forming a modernized skyline. In this context, the traditional grandeur of the temple contrasts sharply with the modern simplicity of the residences, making this architectural structure particularly unusual.



Fig. 1: Putian Modern Residence: Happy Homestead Residence and temples on the rooftop. (Source: author)



Fig. 2: temples built on the top of the bungalow in the high-rise residences (Source: author)

Gerald L. Bruns provided an interpretation of Hans-Georg Gadamer's concept of tradition in 1991, challenging the understanding that tradition is "ho-mogenous master narrative in which everything is joined to-gether in a vast program of conceptual integration." Instead, Bruns argues that tradition is not a structure

at all, but a “the historicity of open-ended, intersecting, competing narratives that cannot be mastered by any Great Code.”¹ Based on the interpretation of the concept of tradition, scholars have conducted research on the ways in which tradition persists and its influence in modern life. Adnya Sarasmita revealed the impact of informal behaviors that emerged through the historical baptism of Alun-Alun square, a traditional space with political center symbolism, on the modernized city². Moreover, Nagwa Sherif examines the evolving forms of tradition of the Nubian community due to their relocation in new settlements on one hand, and to the impact of globalization induced by international tourism on their traditions and everyday life on the other³. In the academic research on the transformation of temples in response to the urbanization process, specifically examining the ritual alliance tradition in the southeastern coastal region of China, Zhong Jianhua explored the case of "Donggang Ancestral Temple" in Putou Port, Zhangzhou City, Fujian Province. The study preliminarily investigated the internal and external driving forces of the changes in folk beliefs in Minnan under the backdrop of urbanization, as well as the characteristics of temple relocation⁴. However, it didn't involve in the analysis of the details for the temple. Apart from that, there is scarce research conducted by scholars in this field. On the other hand, Singaporean scholars have conducted systematic research on united temples in the context of urbanization.

This paper describes the phenomenon of building temples on the rooftops of residential areas in Putian, through field research methods, the author explains how villages like Caicha Village and Xiacha Village relocated temples to transform them into community activity centers in modern residential areas while retaining their ritual activities' spaces and maintaining their core role in ritual alliances. This reflects the resilience of traditional culture in the context of urbanization.

Regarding the new form of combining temples with commercial spaces, the article examines the architectural details of the temples from the aspects of layout, facade, and space, analyzing the social and human reasons for some of these architectural details and engages in dialogue within the academic fields of sociology, anthropology, and architecture.

2. BACKGROUND

In recent years, traditional culture has been influenced by urbanization deeply, and in some regions, traditional culture has shown a gradual trend of fading away.

2.1. Ritual Alliance Tradition and Temples

Putian, located in Fujian Province, derived its name from its historical background. The region, known as the Putian Plain, was originally a shallow sea and marshland with abundant reeds. The early settlers cleared the

reeds and reclaimed the land by draining the sea, hence the name "Putian." The area was also referred to as "Puxian" in ancient times. The Putian Plain is a deltaic plain located on the edge of the Xinghua Bay, surrounded by mountains on three sides⁵. The local inhabitants not only had to reclaim land from the sea but also had to address irrigation issues. Freshwater resources were scarce in this region, making water distribution a focal point of resource contention, directly affecting people's daily activities such as irrigation and farming⁶. Local conflicts over water distribution were common, and there was an increasing number of organized worship ceremonies. Small local villages formed alliances with neighboring villages and gradually developed into regional communities with stable social structures, known as ritual alliances, amidst the complex interplay of local authorities and religious beliefs in Putian. These ritual alliances further led to the formation of "Qijing," which refers to independent societies or temples that held their own procession rituals and typically had well-defined territorial boundaries⁷.

For centuries, these ritual alliances have been the most significant social network in the local area, assuming various social responsibilities such as maintaining irrigation systems, showcasing local authorities' power and managing local infrastructure such as roads, bridges, village sanitation, charity, education, and local defense. The temple committees in Putian, together with the regional ritual alliances, are often referred to as the "second government of China," indicating their role in local self-governance.

The local religious beliefs in Putian have developed and been passed down for several centuries, and their ritual activities are inseparable from the daily life of clans, villages, or regional communities. One's identity, status, rights, and obligations are all defined through the temple and ritual systems. It can be said that ritual alliances, as a form of social practice, have become an integral part of local daily life, deeply intertwined with people's everyday activities. The settlements on the Putian Plain have a vibrant belief system, and as the locals say, "Out of the 365 days in a year, there are around 300 days of performances in Putian⁸". In fact, in contemporary Fujian Province, various deities from local religious beliefs feature a mixture of ancient and modern elements. According to statistics shown, there are over a thousand different deities worshipped⁹. As early as 2002, a report from the Department of Ethnic and Religious Affairs stated that there is a temple in almost every village in Fujian, and even a village cannot exist without one¹⁰. A research report from CPPCC organization revealed that there are approximately 25,102 sites for religious activities with an area of more than 10 square meters in the entire province, with approximately 3,000 of them located in Putian¹¹. Therefore, in Putian, temples are closely intertwined with people's daily lives.



Fig. 3: Putian Ritual Activity: Mazu Procession (Source: https://www.thepaper.cn/newsDetail_forward_16571752)



Fig. 4: Putian Ritual Activity: Fire Jumping (Source: https://www.thepaper.cn/newsDetail_forward_16571752)

2.2. Policies of Urbanization

With the acceleration of urbanization, traditional ways of life in rural villages are facing challenges.

In November 2000, the General Office of the Communist Party of China Central Committee and the General Office of the State Council jointly issued a notification forwarding the "Opinions of the Ministry of Civil Affairs on Promoting Community Development Nationwide." The notification emphasized that vigorously promoting community development is an important aspect of adhering to the Party's mass line, carrying out grassroots work effectively, and strengthening the construction of grassroots political power. It is also an important approach for China's urban modernization in the new century. Following the directives from the central government, communities across the country quickly embraced the wave of community development, entering a new phase of overall advancement and comprehensive expansion¹².

3. NEW FORM OF TEMPLES IN XIALIN STREET

Faced with challenges such as demolitions, land development restrictions, and the need for several villages to merge, the villagers have achieved their vision of rebuilding the temples by giving them a new form. The following discussion will explore the urbanization policies, reorganization and new form, and practical model of the temples.

3.1. Urbanization Policies

Under the national policy framework, Putian established three streets and four townships, including the Xialin Street where the case is located. In response to Chairman's report at the 16th National Congress in 2002, which called for "improving grassroots autonomous organizations and democratic management systems, enhancing urban residents' self-governance, and establishing well-organized, civilized, and harmonious new communities," Xialin Street established administrative villages in Xialin, Tangpo, and Goutou in May 2002. Later in December, the village committees of Xialin, Tangpo, and Goutou were transformed into neighborhood committees. The pace of urbanization reform accelerated.

In October 2010, the Standing Committee of the 11th National People's Congress of the People's Republic of China passed the "Organic Law of Villagers' Committees ". In November of the same year, the "Opinions on Strengthening and Improving the Construction of Urban Community Residents' Committees" was issued by the General Office of the Communist Party of China Central Committee and the General Office of the State Council¹³. By the end of 2011, Xialin Street had jurisdiction over four community residents' committees (Xialin, Tangpo, Goutou, Putang) and seven village residents' committees (Dingdun, Xiahuang, Xiaocuo,

Bantou, Mulan, Tieling, Yushang), with a total of 77 residents' groups and 105 village groups. As of October 2023, Xialin Street has nine communities and two administrative villages under its jurisdiction¹⁴.

In the context of urbanization, in order to accelerate the work of urban-rural integration, the Putian Municipal Government issued a notification in 2012 regarding the launch of the "Happiness Home" pilot project. It was decided to initiate the pilot construction of "Happiness Homes" in the first batch of 16 villages in the city (a practice involving the demolition of villages and the construction of new buildings in designated areas for the resettlement of villagers). The goal was to build a group of new communities within three years, and to achieve the overall goal of "Happiness Home" construction in the entire Putian region from 2015 to 2020¹⁵. In subsequent phases of the project, the demolition and resettlement of villages, including Caicha Village, Xiacha Village, and Xialin Village mentioned in this article, were quickly involved.

3.2. Community Reorganization and New Building Form

In this section, the paper will discuss the ownership and allocation of rooftop temples, layout forms, and architectural details.

After the government implemented the "Happiness Home" demolition plan, the bidding process for demolition proceeded as usual, and a developer was selected for this site. The developer carried out planning and design, including some commercial properties, and promoted the blueprint of the project online. However, upon completion, the original entrance plaza was transformed into a temple and commercial properties on the ground floor, while leaving roads around the area. After acquiring the land, the challenge for each village lies in how to reorganize the spatial layout of the temples within the limited land area and preserve the original function and form of each village's temple. In order to maximize land utilization and generating profits, the organizers of the temple chose to first construct a two-story framework structure as commercial function for rent. Subsequently, temples were built on the top platform of the building to serve as a community center for managing daily affairs, which is the core of daily life for relocated residents in urban, providing space for festival rituals, and a stage for performances. This design essentially preserved the public space and functions which traditional temples and community centers possessed.



Fig. 5: Sand table of the floor plans at Happy Homestead (Source: www.0594.com)

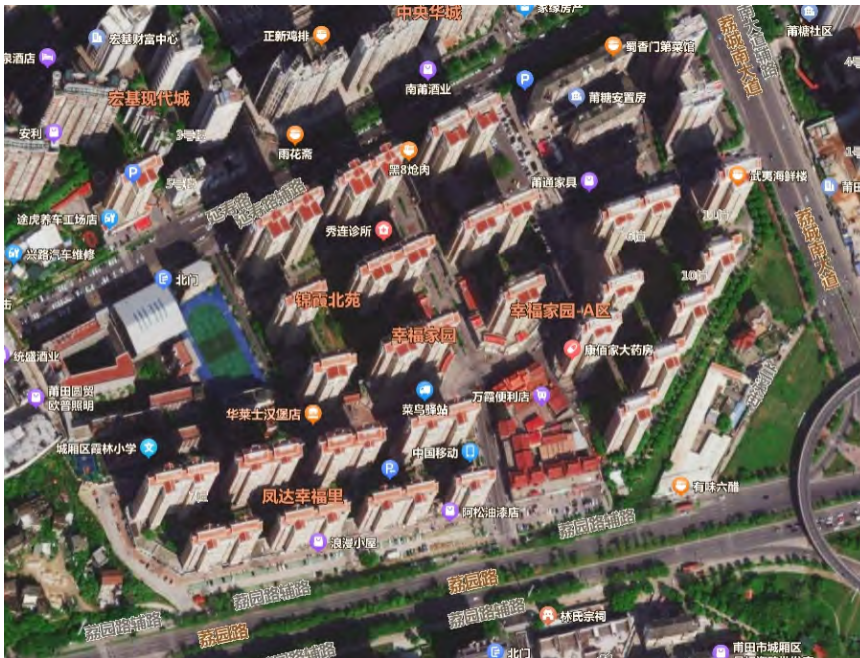


Fig. 6: Current status map of Happy Homestead (Source: <https://map.baidu.com>)

Since the newly developed residential area originally belonged to Caicha Village and Xiacha Village, the designated temple land was divided between the two villages based on the proportional allocation according to the original temple's land area. The northern half of temples was within Caicha Village and served as the Caicha Community Activity Center, which was located within the jurisdiction of Tangpo Community. The southern half belonged to Xiacha Village and served as the Xiacha Community Activity Center, which was located within the jurisdiction of Xialin Community. As for Xialin Village, which was located across the street, due to certain reasons at the time, they were unable to have their own designated land for building a

temple. Therefore, they reached an agreement with Xiacha Village to put Lin clan temples from Xialin Village together with Chen clan temples from Xiacha Village¹⁶. A boundary marker was erected to indicate the division between the two temples. The inscription on the marker reads:

“The reconstruction project of Chen clan temples and Lin clan temples in Xialin Community and ancestral temples was completed in August of the lunar year 2015¹⁷. The reconstructed temples are located by the Mulan River, facing the Hugong Mountain and overlooking the Liyuan Avenue. They are magnificent, sacred, and dignified. This is the perfect embodiment of "Lanshui Zhongling opens the blessed land, Hushan Gongxiu presents the Wenfeng.

Apart from occupying their respective land areas, Chen clan and Lin clan have unused areas respectively, which basically match the unused corner areas.

The main passageway of the temple staircase covers an area of 156 square meters. The East Stone Gate occupies the midline of the site, measuring 10.90m in length and 9.80m in width, with an area of 107 square meters. Chen clan and Lin clan each have equal ownership rights.

The southern gate has a 6-meter-wide passageway, the three-story temple has a 5-meter-wide passageway, and the staircase and platform of ancestral temples have a 3-meter-wide passageway. Chen clan and Lin clan have ownership rights proportionally divided according to 0.6092 and 0.3908, respectively.

The boundary between Lin clan temples and Chen clan ancestral temples is marked by a drip line.

To facilitate management, there is no northern gate. The boundary is defined by the midline between the two stage pillars, extending north and south. The ownership of the eastern playground and corner land belongs to Chen clan, while the ownership of the western playground and corner land belongs to Lin clan.

The shared areas and public passageways inside the temple are jointly owned by all parties, with shared rights of access and use.”



Fig. 7: Cai Cha Community Center and Xia Cha Community Center (Source: author)



Fig. 8: Three Clan Temples: Cai clan, Chen clan and Lin clan (Source: author)

The two newly constructed temple complexes have significant differences in layout and form. In the Caicha Community Activity Center, the Longshan Shang Palace (deity-related temples¹⁷) is dedicated to the worship of the camphor tree deity and is accompanied by the Cai clan ancestral temples on two sides. Additionally, there is a Zhonghui Shrine to commemorate the Chinese great outstanding calligrapher Cai Xiang from history of Putian. The Longshan Shang Palace is a shared temple used for ritual activities. It is situated on a artificial platform with one-layer height difference from the surrounding temples. Its construction and renovation were funded through voluntary donations by villagers, and the temple walls are adorned with donation boards and merit boards, known as the "Longshan Shang Palace Devotees' donations." Notably, there are inscriptions stating "Stone inscriptions for donations of 500 yuan or more". The temple is integrated with the Caicha Market located in the north of Cai clan temples, with the Longshan Shang Palace and Cai clan ancestral temples on the top floor, a training center on the second and third floors, and a vegetable market on the ground floor. The Caicha Community Activity Center places public spaces such as the stage and square on the roof, combining them with the temple complex. The Xiacha Community Activity Center has a horseshoe-shaped layout, with an entrance on the ground floor. The Chen and Lin clan temples on the roof are connected to the main courtyard through a zigzag staircase. The commercial spaces face away from and surround the main courtyard (public space), and there is a stage and basketball court, which can be used as a banquet venue for Lin clan branch descendants' weddings. In the Xiacha Community Activity Center, the playground and stage, along with other public spaces, are located on the ground floor, while the temples are situated individually on the third floor, without community activity areas on this level.

龙山上宫信徒题缘

序号	姓名	金额	序号	姓名	金额	序号	姓名	金额
1	陈国兴	5000元	31	陈国兴	5000元	61	陈国兴	5000元
2	陈国兴	5000元	32	陈国兴	5000元	62	陈国兴	5000元
3	陈国兴	5000元	33	陈国兴	5000元	63	陈国兴	5000元
4	陈国兴	5000元	34	陈国兴	5000元	64	陈国兴	5000元
5	陈国兴	5000元	35	陈国兴	5000元	65	陈国兴	5000元
6	陈国兴	5000元	36	陈国兴	5000元	66	陈国兴	5000元
7	陈国兴	5000元	37	陈国兴	5000元	67	陈国兴	5000元
8	陈国兴	5000元	38	陈国兴	5000元	68	陈国兴	5000元
9	陈国兴	5000元	39	陈国兴	5000元	69	陈国兴	5000元
10	陈国兴	5000元	40	陈国兴	5000元	70	陈国兴	5000元
11	陈国兴	5000元	41	陈国兴	5000元	71	陈国兴	5000元
12	陈国兴	5000元	42	陈国兴	5000元	72	陈国兴	5000元
13	陈国兴	5000元	43	陈国兴	5000元	73	陈国兴	5000元
14	陈国兴	5000元	44	陈国兴	5000元	74	陈国兴	5000元
15	陈国兴	5000元	45	陈国兴	5000元	75	陈国兴	5000元
16	陈国兴	5000元	46	陈国兴	5000元	76	陈国兴	5000元
17	陈国兴	5000元	47	陈国兴	5000元	77	陈国兴	5000元
18	陈国兴	5000元	48	陈国兴	5000元	78	陈国兴	5000元
19	陈国兴	5000元	49	陈国兴	5000元	79	陈国兴	5000元
20	陈国兴	5000元	50	陈国兴	5000元	80	陈国兴	5000元
21	陈国兴	5000元	51	陈国兴	5000元	81	陈国兴	5000元
22	陈国兴	5000元	52	陈国兴	5000元	82	陈国兴	5000元
23	陈国兴	5000元	53	陈国兴	5000元	83	陈国兴	5000元
24	陈国兴	5000元	54	陈国兴	5000元	84	陈国兴	5000元
25	陈国兴	5000元	55	陈国兴	5000元	85	陈国兴	5000元
26	陈国兴	5000元	56	陈国兴	5000元	86	陈国兴	5000元
27	陈国兴	5000元	57	陈国兴	5000元	87	陈国兴	5000元
28	陈国兴	5000元	58	陈国兴	5000元	88	陈国兴	5000元
29	陈国兴	5000元	59	陈国兴	5000元	89	陈国兴	5000元
30	陈国兴	5000元	60	陈国兴	5000元	90	陈国兴	5000元

Fig. 9: Donation Red List for the temple (Source: author)



Fig. 10: Playground at the Xiacha Activity Center: Venue for the Lin clan descendants' wedding banquet on September 19, 2023. (Source: author)

The difference in the forms of the temples between the Caicha Community Activity Center and the Xiacha Community Activity Center is reflected in the following aspects: The entire Cai clan temple complex opens inward and appears closed to the outside. The overall appearance is structured in the form of "boxes" placed above the ground floor. The ground floor is recessed and designed as an independent framework structure. The facade is more visually consistent compared to the Chen and Lin clan temples. In the Chen and Lin temple complexes, there is no complete facade, but rather several temples placed on the roof independently, with each temple displaying its individual form, surrounded by open platforms and railings. Both temple complexes have a layered structure: the Chen and Lin clan temples have three levels, with elevated pillars on the ground floor, the form of box on the second floor, and independent temples on the third floor. They exhibit the characteristic form of "dispersed upper levels and unified lower levels." Moreover, the Cai temple complex appears more like a complete and unified entity from the outside, particularly with a more modernized facade. The difference in their forms is due to the layout of the temples, specifically how each group of temples incorporates public spaces such as squares and stages. This follows the traditional layout of temples in original villages, where the arrangement of squares, stages, and temples creates a unique and site-specific temple complex. By following this traditional layout while integrating modern architectural forms, a distinctive and locally characterized architectural style is formed.

The four facades of the entire temple complex, including the Chen and Lin clan temples and Caicha clan temples, are completely different. According to the boundary marker at the entrance of the Xiacha Community Activity Center, the overall orientation of the temple complex is towards Hugong Mountain,

making the south facade more grandiose. The ground floor of the south-facing commercial space is of bigger scale than that of other directions, primarily housing automotive parts shops and restaurants. The way the commercial entity connect with the Chen and Lin clan temples on the roof is particularly unique: the platforms on the lower level of the Chen and Lin clan temples extend approximately 2-3 meters from the wall of the commercial entity, with the western facade exhibiting the most significant extension compared to the south facade, which has a lesser extension, and the east facade has no extension. Considering the background of the joint construction of the Chen and Lin clan temples, it is speculated that this irregular form is a result of two factors. Firstly, during the allocation of temple space between the Chen clan and Lin clan, the ground floor area alone could not meet the distribution requirements, leading to the Lin clan extending their space on the western side to fulfill the area requirement. Secondly, during the process of self-construction by the villagers, there was a greater degree of freedom, allowing for the continuation of the construction practices within the original village, which resulted in such irregular forms.



Fig. 11: Temples facing Hugong Mountain as a whole. (Source: author)



Fig. 12: The platform of the Lin Clan Temple extends outward by 2-3 meters. (Source: author)

Furthermore, the south-facing facades of all the temples are grand and luxurious, consistent with the form of traditional Chinese architecture. However, on the backside of the temples, the treatment of the facades follows the approach of modern architecture—complete and concise, without the kind of space made by eaves and colonnades typical of traditional Chinese architecture. In terms of the roof treatment, the form still adheres to the traditional roof style of local temples, with no additional details at the junction with the walls, but rather a direct connection. From this treatment, it can be inferred that the roof serves a symbolic purpose, especially in the context of modern high-rise residences, emphasizing its traditional significance. The roof is also the most prominent architectural element from a distance. Therefore, the roofs of these temples represent the resilience of traditional culture from rural areas to urban regions about architectural appearance.

Regarding the details of the windows on the facades, the northern facade of the Cai clan temples has a very simple window design, and some walls do not have windows at all. This is related to the function of the interior rooms. Rooms containing deities do not have windows but instead have ventilation holes on the side walls to prevent moisture damage to the wooden roof structure. However, some windows are located in awkward positions that do not correspond to the roof above. The walls beneath two roofs do not have windows but instead have a window on the wall between the two roofs. Are these windows purely decorative on the facade without conforming to the logic of modern architectural practice? Could it be that the windows were added for decorative purposes, and the roofs were deliberately interrupted to add decorative details for the overall aesthetic? It is speculated that since the spaces of the second and third floors are used as a local community training center, the rooms serve practical purposes, making the setting of windows reasonable. Moreover, the symbolic significance of the roof is also prominent, making it more likely that the roof was

treated decoratively. Faced with the complexity of traditional roofs and the simplicity of modern facades, in his work "Complexity and Contradiction in Architecture," Robert Venturi mentioned that "an accomplished architecture must have multiple meanings and focal points of composition: its spaces and elements become simultaneously readable and viable in multiple ways." It is through the simultaneous existence of multiple elements that the entire building becomes meaningful. Faced with the contradictions and strong contrasting differences in the design approaches of the facades, layouts, and components such as windows and roofs, Venturi proposed two methods of dealing with them—adapting to contradictions and parallel contradictions. Adapting to contradictions means tolerating and accommodating, allowing for spontaneous activities. It involves typical disintegration, where the result is approximated and preserved. On the other hand, parallel contradictions do not compromise. It involves strong contrasts and unharmonious confrontations. The result of adapting to contradictions may be an impure integrity, while the result of parallel contradictions may lack overall coherence¹⁸.



Fig. 13: Northern facade of the Cai Clan Temple. (Source: author)



Fig. 14: Broken roof and peculiar window positions. (Source: author)

3.3. A Practical Model for the Region

By building temples on the rooftops and allowing traditional practices to persist in modern settings, it made the reality for residents to continue following traditional ways of life after relocating in the city. Whether the form of rooftop temples can serve as a practical model for the transformation of religious spaces in the context of urbanization in China is worth further exploration.

In fact, similar cases of this practice already exist. Earlier, it was mentioned that due to limited available land, the Chen clan temples from Xiacha Village and Lin clan temples from Xialin Village were constructed together. In reality, after the relocation and resettlement work was completed, Xialin Village also acquired a plot of land to build its temple. Coincidentally, the form of the temple is extremely similar to the case discussed in this article. Both temples are built on the rooftops of commercial buildings, facing each other directly along Liyuan Avenue, presenting a similar layout and identical overall shape. It is the new site for Lin clan temples. It seems that the construction of temples on commercial rooftops has become a template for local relocated residents to follow their traditional ways of life, and it has received positive feedback. At the time of writing this article, construction of the new Lin clan temples was underway, and our team visited the site. The entire temple complex is incredibly magnificent. Since it has a similar construction area to the temple complex opposite it, but only the Lin clan temples is being built, the layout is grand, and there are more types of temples. The commercial space below the temples also has an additional floor compared to the

commercial building in the opposite complex mentioned in this article, totaling three floors. The ground floor is used as a shopping mall, and it is now open for business.



Fig. 15: Newly built Lin Clan Temple. (Source: author)



Fig. 16: Northern facade of the newly built Lin Clan Temple. (Source: author)



Fig. 17: Roof stage of the newly built Lin Clan Temple

4. CONCLUSION

In the early stages of the second half of the 20th century, faced with challenges such as limited land and rising land prices in the context of urban development, temples in Singapore responded to these issues by creating a new form called "united temples" to address these challenges¹⁹. By comparing the different forms and organizational methods of temples domestically and internationally, we can clearly see that temples in both countries, when faced with the impact of urbanization and national policies, have chosen new architectural forms to minimize construction costs and maximize the utilization of limited land. However, there are significant differences in per capita land area and population density between the two countries, leading to substantial variations in the way they use urban land. This results in different organizational strategies chosen by the two countries when facing the challenges of urbanization.

In the context of urbanization in high-rise residential areas, the Temples in Xialin Street, Putian, has been built on the rooftops of two-story houses, while incorporating commercial functions on the ground floor. It is evident that after the demolition and resettlement of various villages, they have preserved local traditional culture in a new architectural form while also adapting better to urbanized living. This paper provides an overview of the cultural background of Putian and the development of urbanization policies, showcasing the transformation of temple forms following the shift of land ownership from village collectives to the state. Specifically focusing on the policy background, layout and form, and architectural details of rooftop temples,

the paper thoroughly analyzes the comprehensive impact of urbanization on local temples that serve as symbols of traditional culture. It also reveals how local residents, in response to urbanization policies, have devised new rules to reallocate temple ownership and land, injecting new dynamics into their traditional culture.

The construction of temples on the rooftops in high-rise residential areas signifies an intriguing intersection between urbanization and the preservation of traditional culture. These temples not only adapt to the demands of urban living but also serve as dynamic embodiments of local traditions. By embracing the concept of temples on the rooftops, communities have managed to retain their cultural heritage while embracing the rapid urbanization taking place around them. This unique approach not only showcases the resilience of traditional culture but also highlights the ingenuity of local residents in finding innovative ways to integrate tradition into the modern urban landscape. The temples on the rooftops stand as tangible symbols of cultural pride and provide a sense of continuity and belonging amidst the transformative forces of urbanization. They serve as vibrant centers for religious activities and cultural events, fostering a strong sense of community and preserving the essence.

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TO 'SEE' AND TO BE 'SEEN': DECONSTRUCTING THE MANY LAYERS OF THE INDIAN SUBCONTINENT'S DARSHAN RITUAL

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TO 'SEE' AND TO BE 'SEEN': DECONSTRUCTING THE MANY LAYERS OF THE INDIAN SUBCONTINENT'S *DARSHAN* RITUAL



The Paper critically examines the Indian subcontinent's ritualistic practice of Darshan along with its spatial manifestations, to demonstrate how this traditional yet dynamic ritual has maintained its link with the past and at the same time has reinvented itself over centuries to acquire a timeless appeal. As a Hindu performative ritual, Darshan entails devotional gazing i.e., 'seeing' by humans of God-as-image, i.e., the Darshan-eyyah (worthy of Darshan), with the latter granting permission to be 'seen' by the devotee, i.e., the Darshan-arthi (seeker of Darshan). This two-way exchange makes the engagement between two unequal protagonists transactional, with the one not possible without the other. As a dynamic tradition, Darshan encompassed other entities deemed sacred in Hinduism such as natural landscapes, personalities, pilgrimage sites and material objects, while also reinventing itself to define worldly relationships. The paper analyses two scenarios of Darshan's reinvented other-worldly avatar. First, where Darshan was institutionalized by the subcontinent's two prominent successive rulers, the Mughals and British, as an instrument of power. The second, in the contemporary, global, technologized, world where it continues to be appropriated and readapted by Hindus as well as by new-age protagonists who rule politics to popular culture. Even as Darshan reinvents itself, its spatial moorings remain the same, in that the two protagonists operate from clearly delineated territories, separated by a threshold, with neither overstepping their boundary. With the desire to 'See' and to be 'Seen' being universal, Darshan that centres on the ocular, has a timeless appeal.

1. INTRODUCTION

Traditional living cultures are inherently characterized by a dynamism that they manifest in multiple ways. Typically, traditions – comprising a compendium of beliefs, customs, mores, practices and rituals, among others – form the mainstay that define a culture's past, negotiate the present and are ready for the future. The Paper asserts that as traditions constantly reinvent themselves, more often than not, they follow a non-linear evolutionary trajectory. This lends them great diversity so much so that they often transcend their original meaning as well as geographical limits to become relevant for all times and for the world at large. Based on this premise, the Paper set in the Indian subcontinent – that can unarguably be called a cauldron of diverse living cultures – examines one such tradition, i.e., the ritualistic practice of *Darshan*. *Darshan* may be rather simplistically explained as an act of devotional gazing by a group of people of an entity that they perceive to be higher than themselves. I critically analyse this traditional yet dynamic ritual and demonstrate how it has maintained its link with the past and at the same time has reinvented itself over centuries to acquire a larger appeal. To examine *Darshan* as an act along with its spatial manifestations, I first analyse the ritual as it originated in Hinduism as part of a compendium of Hindu rituals and embodying a sacred symbolism. Then, other worldly manifestations of *Darshan* – significantly, its transformation into a political act – are explored across time and space. Thereafter, *Darshan* is examined in the here and the now in its various avatars. The Paper concludes by arguing that it is this adaptability of *Darshan* that enables it to transcend its chronological as well as geographical limits to stay relevant.

2. TRADITION AND *DARSHAN*

The term tradition has multiple meanings and has been variously defined across disciplines. The Oxford English Dictionary defines tradition as ‘customs, values, or beliefs, of a society or group transmitted from one generation to another’¹. This makes tradition both a process that ‘transmits’ and an object i.e., ‘customs, values, or beliefs’ that are ‘transmitted’. The Paper draws on Brown’s contention that ‘tradition is a constant process across time and in time, linking past with the present, thus ensuring continuity’ while also being ‘dynamic and ever-changing as culture and societal needs alter’.² Further it recognizes that tradition is ‘not a bounded entity made up of bounded constituent parts, but a process of interpretation, attributing meaning in the present though making [sic] reference to the past’.³ This interpretative attribute of tradition defines its relationship with the past not as one of seamless continuum but as discursive that in turn propels it to take multiple trajectories. It is within this framework that the tradition of *Darshan* is examined.

Darshan, a Sanskrit term, that literally means ‘seeing’, connotes ‘seeing the sacred’.⁴ It is an expression that has been and continues to be used when Hindus visit a temple to ‘see’ God. This act to ‘see’ God is called ‘*Darshan karna*’ (doing *Darshan*) and is firmly entrenched in the Hindu faith as a ritualistic tradition. ‘Seeing’ embodies a complex physical and mental engagement with God within the temple confines. Eck, in her seminal work on *Darshan* describes the Hindu ritual as an act where ‘it is not only the worshipper who sees the deity, but the deity sees the worshipper as well. The contact between the devotee and the deity is exchanged through the eyes’.⁵ Given the centrality of the ocular to *Darshan*, the latter has been called the ‘Hindu counterpart of the notion of gaze’ in the scholarly discourse.⁶ However, the discourse on the gaze is primarily Eurocentric with a rather limited exploration of ways of seeing beyond this socio-cultural ambit. *Darshan* is one such way of seeing that does not find representation within the western discourse as it operates on the Cartesian model of the gaze – that is in fact its dominant theoretical framework – that relies on the binary epistemologies of the ocular, i.e., the subject and object dualism. In contrast, *Darshan* as a traditional practice is far more nuanced as here both the subject and the object engage in a ‘reciprocal, two-way exchange’.⁷ It therefore follows that *Darshan* cannot be simply read via the western rubric of the gaze but requires a more nuanced understanding of how it is shaped, enacted and negotiated by different actors in different contexts across time and space. This is what this Paper sets out to do as it examines the various interpretations of this traditional yet dynamic practice.

3. *DARSHAN*: TO ‘SEE’ AND TO BE ‘SEEN’

As originally conceived, *Darshan* formed part of a litany of Hindu performative rituals. It entailed the devotional gazing i.e., ‘seeing’ by humans of the divine with the latter granting permission to be ‘seen’, thereby making the engagement mutual. Scholars have argued that *Darshan* ‘is conceived as an outward

reaching process, as extrusive, a medium through which the seer and seen come into contact'.⁸ It follows that for this outwardly reaching out to happen, both the 'seer' and the 'seen' have to be manifested physically. Hinduism, where *Darshan* originated, elucidates the logic and modality of this ritual. The *Vishnu Sambita*, an eighth century Hindu religious text states 'Without a form, how can God be meditated upon? Where will the mind fix itself? When there is nothing for the mind to attach itself to, it will slip away, from meditation or will glide into a state of slumber, Therefore the wise will meditate on some form'.⁹ The 'form' here is the 'seen', i.e., God manifested as the deity and physically represented as an image, while, the 'wise' is the 'seer', i.e., the devotee who is desirous of 'meditating upon' God via the image. *Darshan* therefore goes beyond merely looking at the deity, as the devotee is expected to shed material attachments as she/he progresses towards the deity, making it the focus of their attention visually and more significantly, mentally. Clearly, this seeing is not merely ocular but entails incorporation of the 'seer' into the being of the 'seen' as the former holds the latter firmly in her/his consciousness. This makes *Darshan* a transactional act, that takes place between two contrasting un-equals, the 'seen' *Darshan-eeeyah* (worthy of *Darshan*) and the 'seer' *Darshan-arthi* (seeker of *Darshan*). Within the ambit of Hinduism, God as the physical deity is *Darshan-eeeyah*, and the devotee is the *Darshan-arthi*. Further, when viewed from a gender perspective, both the 'seen' and the 'seer' in Hinduism can be male as well as female. The powerful *Darshan-eeeyah*, is a giver, the incorporator, who is aloof and distant while being the epicentre of the act. The weak *Darshan-arthi*, is a seeker, the incorporated, positioned within the zone of influence of the epicentre, who desires to become one with the giver vicariously and be gratified by the experience. Needless to say, the *Darshan-arthi*'s act of *Darshan Karna* (doing *Darshan*) is always in tandem with the *Darshan-eeeyah*'s simultaneous act of *Darshan Dena* (granting *Darshan*), with the one not possible without the other. Even as *Darshan* is an experiential act with no two experiences being the same, in terms of its enactment, it does subscribe to a specific setting as the two protagonists operate in a space whose articulation may have evolved with time but its fundamental moorings remained unchanged.



Fig.1: *Darshan* as a performative ritual in the Hindu temple with devotees engaged in ‘Seeing’ God-as-image (Source: Janhwij Sharma).

Going beyond the realm of the spiritual, I demonstrate that *Darshan* – a highly dynamic and transformative practice – operated beyond religion to encompass worldly matters, where the ritual, even as it acquired newer meanings, remained transactional and was observed between two unequal entities.

4. SPATIALIZING *DARSHAN*

Darshan’s two protagonists, the *Darshan-eeyah* and the *Darshan-arthi*, operate from clearly delineated territories. *Darshan-eeyahs* are ensconced in a private, spatial enclosure, detaching them from *Darshan-arthis* who occupy a semi-public/public space. The resultant ‘Seeing’ and being ‘Seen’ takes place via a fenestration that acts as a threshold that physically separates the two protagonists’ realms. As the ritual evolved over time, this threshold was variously manifested physically as well as more recently, in the digital space. Whether real or virtual, its setting, size, materiality and ornamentation has always been articulated carefully. During the course of its

enactment, not only is the threshold and the private space occupied by the *Darshan* giver deemed as sacred, but the larger public space occupied by its seekers is equally sanctified by the act.

Specifically, in case of the Hindu ritual, the *Darshan-eevya*, i.e., the deity – anthropomorphized either as male or as female – as image occupies the sanctum sanctorum of the Hindu temple i.e., the *Garbhagriha*.¹⁰ The *Garbhagriha* is a small, dark chamber set at the core of the temple. It is the place where God-as-image resides and where only the temple priest has access for the performance of rituals. The *Darshan-arthi* i.e., the devotee, male and female, stands at the threshold of the *Garbhagriha* for devotional gazing. This threshold is spatially articulated as the *Garbhagriha*'s doorway that can be ornate or austere; may often have guardian deities flanking its jambs and also closes at certain hours of the day in keeping with the deity's prescribed regimen. Nevertheless, it acts as a territorial marker that both protagonists honour with neither overstepping into the 'other' space. Further, while the *Garbhagriha* is the sacred, epicentre of the ritual, the space occupied by the devotee whether the temple *Mandapa* (hall) or even open space in case of single cell temples or way side shrines, is equally sacralised as the ritual is underway. This act and its spatial manifestation persist to this day and can be witnessed across temples from the largest to the impromptu shrine.



Fig.2: The *Garbhagriha* is the sacred, epicentre of the ritual that is separated from the rest of the temple space by the doorway (Source: Janhwij Sharma).



Fig.3: The *Garbhagriha* doorway is very carefully articulated as the separator of the two realms (Source: Janhwij Sharma).



Fig.4: In modest single cell temples, the separation of the two realms remains the same (Source: Janhwij Sharma).

Meanwhile, with time, *Darshan* encompassed other entities deemed sacred in Hinduism such as natural landscapes, places of pilgrimage, personalities and material objects thus elevating these to the status of the

venerated *Darshan-eyyah*. At the same time, the tradition was also expanding beyond the realm of the sacred into the material world to reinvent itself as a new form of tradition. In the process of transformation, *Darshan* exhibited an amenable dynamism as it transcended divinity to define worldly relationships. Likewise, the threshold – whether physically manifested or even imagined – remained significant to the spatiality of the ritual and together with the enveloping space inhabited both by the ‘Seer’ and the ‘Seen’, it was reimagined and reinvented in ways more than one, to stay relevant with the changing times, while maintaining a continuity with the past.

5. DARSHAN: THE ‘INVENTION OF A TRADITION’

As a dynamic, transforming ritual, I position *Darshan* within Hobsbawm and Ranger’s ‘Invented Tradition’ construct.¹¹ This construct is ‘a set of practices, normally governed by overtly or tacitly accepted rules and of a ritual or symbolic nature, (...) that normally attempt to establish continuity with a suitable historic past’ that is ‘largely factitious’. Further, it is stipulated that ‘rapid transformation of society’ acts as a significant catalyst that propels this phenomenon where the ‘Invented Tradition’ results by ‘readaptation’ of the old under new circumstances.¹²

I critically examine *Darshan* as an ‘Invented Tradition’ as it evolved from an ‘ancient material’ i.e., the Hindu ritual of ‘seeing’ and to be ‘seen’, into an ‘invented tradition[s] of a novel type for quite novel purposes’.¹³ To do this, I situate *Darshan*’s transformational trajectory in two scenarios. First, where it was institutionalized by the subcontinent’s two prominent successive rulers, the Mughals followed by the British, as a highly overt power flexing tool. While doing so, I also employ the gender perspective to show that *Darshan* in its reinvented avatar was male-centric. In the second scenario, I situate *Darshan* in the realm of the contemporary, to demonstrate it as a highly popular phenomenon where equally the powerful protagonist remains a male.

To demonstrate *Darshan*’s transformation from a highly personal deity-devotee relationship in Hinduism to one of ruler-ruled relationship, I draw a parallel with Cohn’s work on the Mughal court ritual, the *Durbar* (formal assembly of court functionaries).¹⁴ Relying on the ‘Invented Tradition’ rubric, Cohn demonstrates how the *Durbar* ritual was appropriated and readapted by the subcontinent’s colonial regime as an instrument of legitimacy. Likewise, I explore how *Darshan* was instrumentalized first by the Mughals and thereafter by the British to claim their authority over the subcontinent. Conforming to the construct, the new version of *Darshan* was directed at ‘establishing or legitimizing institutions, status or relations of authority’.¹⁵ The transformation, however, was not homogenous but was hinged on polity that primarily shaped its contours. Thereafter, I examine the second scenario by positioning *Darshan* in the contemporary to demonstrate how it has morphed into a ritual orchestrated by the new-age *Darshan-eyyah-Darshan-arthi* duo to showcase status and

authority. At the same time, it has also taken on a virtual avatar that allows its original binary of deity-devotee to engage in a digital, spiritual transactional act.

Just as tradition is reinventing, so are its spatial moorings. The underlying premise of space remains the same, i.e., as two distinct realms, one occupied by the ‘Seer’ and the other by the ‘Seen’ that are separated by the threshold. Their articulation however is transformed in keeping with the nature and purpose of reinvention. The ‘Seen’ variously occupies a personal spatial enclosure like the *Qila* (Palace-fort) during the Mughal and colonial eras; a home and a digital *Garbhagriha* in present times. Likewise, the ‘Seer’ stands in the immediate public environs of the *Qila*, a home or in front of a digital screen, as the case may be. Just as the temple *Garbhagriha*’s doorway, these ‘invented’ thresholds receive equal attention in terms of articulation as the intermediary space between two realms. Indeed, as discussed later in the Paper, the *Garbhagriha*’s doorway transformed into a specially designed and designated fenestration called the *Jharokha-e-Darshan* (literally window meant for *Darshan*) in the Mughal era that was also used by the British to announce power and intent. In its contemporary avatar, the fenestration takes the form of a terrace or a balcony of the ‘Seen’s’ home and equally as a digital screen. In any case, the threshold serves as a marker of two distinct territories that each protagonist, the ‘Seer’ and the ‘Seen’ must not trespass.

5.1. The Appropriation and Readaptation of *Darshan*

There is a large body of archival sources that affirm the appropriation and readaptation of *Darshan* as a ritual following the Islamicization of the subcontinent and under the rule of the Mughal dynasty. Some scholars have speculated that this ritualistic practice was transmitted to the Mughals not as a Hindu religious practice but had in fact been instrumentalized for power by Hindu rulers, in the early medieval period.¹⁶ However, the exact modalities of how this appropriation took place and the nature and extent of transformation of the original practice is not known. Further, there is absence of archival evidence of the spatial implications of this appropriation. In contrast, there exists archival as well as physical evidence that affirms the Mughals’ appropriation and readaptation of *Darshan* as an important instrument of polity.

5.2. *Darshan* and the Mughals

The Mughals appropriated and readapted *Darshan* as part of a highly ritualized compendium of protocols that defined the notion of *Badshah-i-yat* (kingship) that was centered on the male-as-ruler. The institution of kingship stood on a bedrock of imperial etiquette whose adherence and ostentatious showcasing was a necessary instrument for empire building. Among the bouquet of official rituals and imperial practices was *Darshan*. The credit for ‘inventing’ this centuries old Hindu tradition goes to *Badshah* (Emperor) Akbar (r.1556-1605) whose egalitarian outlook propelled a cultural plurality in Mughal court affairs.¹⁷ To his son,

Badshah Jahangir (r.1605-1627) goes the credit for decreeing *Darshan* as an exclusive royal practice by a royal *Farman* (decree) that forbade provincial administrators to appear in the *Jharokha*.¹⁸ This imperialization of *Darshan* served the Mughal monarchs well as it publicly signalled their might across the empire.

Darshan was specifically orchestrated to project the Mughal *Badshah* (Emperor) as a semi-divine, paternalistic ruler of his people. He was showcased as a benevolent and just protector who remained aloof but at the same time incorporated his subjects within the imperial fold via the gaze.¹⁹ To transmit this notion of the imperial persona, *Darshan* – with its original association with divinity; transactional nature that went beyond the ocular and engagement between two unequals, i.e., the mighty *Badshah* and the powerless subject – was perhaps most suited as an imperial ritual. Indeed, *Darshan* – as was the case with other court rituals notably *Durbar* – entailed that Mughal subjects-turned-*Darshan-arthis* were incorporated into the royal fold as they gazed at their emperor-turned-*Darshan-ee-yah*. As opposed to the *Durbar*, where adherence to social and occupational hierarchy was the order of the day, *Darshan* was more people centered as it allowed everyone to gaze at the *Badshah*, thus making him approachable. The people here were primarily male as can be read from Mughal era pictorial representations of the ritual. In any case, as far as Muslim women are specifically concerned they lived in *Purdah* (were veiled) and would typically not be a participant in the ritual. Further, women in general are notable for their invisibility in public space in the Mughal era. This makes the Mughal version of *Darshan* largely a male bastion. The only exception perhaps being the case of *Badshah* Jahangir's favourite wife, *Badshah Begum* (Empress) Nurjahan (1577-1645) who as some scholars claim appeared with the *Badshah* for *Darshan*.²⁰ This was a highly unusual occurrence.

Darshan took place every morning at day break with the *Badshah* presenting himself to his subjects. Some subjects, popularly referred to as *Darshaniyas* during the Mughal era, prostrated before the *Badshah* thus validating his semi-divine status. The *Badshah's* act of *Darshan Dena* and his subjects' simultaneous act of *Darshan Karna* took place at the *Jharokha-e-Darshan* fenestration in the *Qila* wall. While the *Badshah* was positioned at an elevation in the *Jharokha*, his subjects stood at the foot of the *Qila* wall. This differential positioning, unlike the original Hindu ritual, did not have provision for a direct ocular engagement between the ruler and subject as here the latter looked up to 'see' their emperor, who in turn did not necessarily reciprocate directly but nevertheless allowed himself to be 'Seen'. In doing so, the iconoclasm of the original ritual was cleverly avoided in keeping with the tenets of Islam.²¹ *Darshan* was a daily ritual performed without fail. There was no question of the *Badshah's* absenteeism as *Darshan* implied his and by extension the empire's wellbeing as the *Badshah* was perceived as the embodiment of the empire in the Mughal worldview. Likewise, for the subjects-turned-*Darshaniyas*, their day began only after the *Badshah's* *Darshan* with some fasting till they set their eyes on him.

With time, the *Badshah* while at the *Jharokha* for *Darshan*, also participated in a number of other imperial activities – that necessitated the presence of court officials – like inspecting parades, watching animal combats and dispensing justice. This inclusion may be read as stripping away, so to speak, from *Darshan* its iconoclastic trappings to make it more appealing as an imperial act.²² Successive Mughal *Badshahs* – not as egalitarian as *Badshah* Akbar – continued to observe *Darshan* unfailingly. In fact, *Darshan* was observed even when the imperial court was on the move as makeshift arrangements were made for this ritual.²³ Eventually, it was abolished by *Badshah* Aurangzeb (r.1658-1707), an orthodox follower of Islam, who objected to its Hindu origins.

Just as the tradition was reinvented so were its spatial needs. Central to the Mughal ritual was the *Jharokha-e-Darshan*.²⁴ Typically, a *Jharokha* was a window opening that projected from an upper floor in a building such as a palace or an elite mansion to overlook the space below. This window was imperialized into the *Jharokha-e-Darshan* i.e., a window meant only for the *Badshah* to grant *Darshan* and it was provided in the outer wall of Mughal *Qila* that overlooked a public realm like a *Maidan* (open space for assembly) as in case of *Badshah* Akbar's capital city of Fatehpur Sikri – where the earliest architectural manifestation of the *Jharokha-e-Darshan* was produced – or a riverfront space as in the case of capitals like Agra and Shahjahanabad.²⁵ In any case the *Jharokha* was like a cantilevered extension of a space, akin to a balcony. It was supported by a set of brackets. There was a platform for standing/seating and it was here that the *Badshah* was positioned for *Darshan*. A railing marked the platform's edge and it had a pyramidal or a curvilinear roof that was carried on columns. Often the balcony was partially screened with a *Jaali* (perforated screen usually in stone) shutter but provision for an opening to allow *Darshan* was mandatory. The *Jharokha-e-Darshan* was located in the outer wall of the *Qila* to overlook its environs and it was at this window that the *Badshah* appeared every day at dawn.



Fig.5: A typical Mughal era *Jharokha* window. Here it occurs as a set of symmetrically placed twin windows in the external façade of the imperial *Zenaana* (loosely harem) building in *Badshah* Akbar's imperial capital, Fatehpur Sikri. (Source: Janhwij Sharma).



Fig.6: Mughal imperial *Jharokha-e Darshan* in the external wall of the Mughal *Qila* at Shahjahanabad. This was used by *Badshah* Shahjahan for the performance of the *Darshan* ritual.

In the early twentieth century, the same fenestration was used by the British royal couple to show themselves to their Indian subjects. (Source: Janhwij Sharma).



Fig.7: Mughal imperial *Jharokha-e Darshan* as it appears today (Source: Janhwij Sharma).



Fig.8: Mughal imperial *Jharokha-e Darshan* when viewed from the foot of the *Qila* (Source: Janhwij Sharma).

Darshan continued unabated till it was abolished by *Badshah* Aurangzeb. The latter's demise initiated the downfall of the Mughal empire and the ritual was not initiated till the British occupation of the subcontinent in the nineteenth century.

5.3. *Darshan* and the British

Appropriation of a pre-existing tradition was not an aberration as far as the British were concerned when they established their rule as the British East India Company that post the uprising of 1857 was replaced by the British monarchy. As Cohn has demonstrated, among the compendium of Mughal court rituals, the *Durbar*, was adopted by the Company to conduct the business of governance. Indeed, Company officials held *Durbars* at all scales ranging from an official administering a *Mofussil* (provincial/rural) town to the Governor-General ruling the subcontinent from Calcutta.²⁶ The *Durbar* offered a forum where British might was orchestrated to signal their dominance. By appropriating this centuries old Mughal court tradition, the Company was also subconsciously projecting itself as a parallel power force to the Mughals, who despite their political downfall continued to dominate public perception as the flagbearers of polity to religion and everything else in between.

In fact, the need to firmly establish the British colonial regime as a seamless successor of Mughal rule became dominant once the British had suppressed the 1857 uprising and were aggressively showcasing themselves as the legitimate inheritors of the Mughal legacy. This called for not only planning *Durbars* on a grand scale but also appropriating the *Darshan* ritual to lend greater credence to drive home the new reality of Indians being the subjects of the British crown. The colonial ruler-ruled relationship was centred on power alone as opposed to the semi-divine, paternalistic one that the Mughals and their subjects shared. This led to the transformation of *Darshan* into a purely power orchestration act underpinned by political expediency.

The most powerful demonstration of *Darshan* was undisputedly organised as part of the third Delhi *Durbar* held in 1911-1912.²⁷ The cynosure of this spectacularly mounted event was the British monarch himself, King George V, who attended the event with his consort, Queen Mary. The British emperor-turned-*Darshan-ee-yah* showed himself with his consort – recalling a possibility from *Badshah* Jahangir's reign – to his Indian subjects-turned-*Darshan-arthis* to cement the legitimacy of British rule in public perception. In a departure from the paternalistic messaging behind the Mughal *Darshan* ritual, this public orchestration was largely visual as the agenda of empire made a clear distinction between the ruler and the ruled.

To host the *Darshan* ritual, the *Durbar* organizers planned a 'Badshahi Mela or people's fete' as part of a series of public events.²⁸ The *Mela* (fair/fete) ran concurrent with the duration of the *Durbar* and its venue was the sandy bank of the Yamuna abutting the Mughal *Qila*. The *Darshan* ritual was scheduled on what they explicitly

stated as the ‘principal day’ of the *Durbar* thus underscoring its significance among a plethora of events organized on the occasion.²⁹ It was fashioned with the intent to forge a link between the ‘Seer’ i.e., Indian *Durbar* attendees and the ‘Seen’ i.e., their *Farangii Badshah* (foreign ruler) and his consort.

The royal couple positioned itself in the *Qila’s Jharokha-e-Darshan* – that had hosted this ritual for the Mughal *Badshah*, Shahjahan (r.1627-1658) in the seventeenth century – and much like their Mughal counterpart granted *Darshan* to the crowd gathered below. However, the *Jharokha-e-Darshan* was found to be too ‘small’ for the rulers’ comfort.³⁰ With ‘comfort’ of the ‘Seen’ taking precedence, a departure was made from practice with the couple moving to the more spacious riverfront terrace along the *Qila’s* ramparts. Here they sat on their thrones with ‘pages’ in attendance for ‘nearly an hour’.³¹ The *Durbar* organizers hoped that this ocular exchange would effectively transmit to the ‘Seer’ – the teeming masses gathered at the foot of the *Qila* – the message of the Mughal British continuum via the ‘Seen’ i.e., the royal couple. The message delivery was far from effective, particularly when viewed against the steadily intensifying nationalist movement across the subcontinent including Delhi, where the same year an assassination was bid was made on the incumbent Viceroy not very far from the *Qila*. Two decades later, the *Qila’s Jharokha-e-Darshan* hosted the incumbent Viceroy as the inauguration celebrations of the new capital of British India, New Delhi, were underway in 1931.³² Once again, the Viceroy positioned himself at this special fenestration to inspect an animal parade emulating *Badshah* Shahjahan. This ceremony too was merely a visual spectacle that formed part of a much larger compendium of celebrations that marked the inauguration of New Delhi, that in any case with its newly designed capitol complex became the new power centre and warranted a new set of rituals for its demonstration.³³



Fig.9: The projecting ledge adjoining the Mughal imperial *Jharokha-e Darshan* where the imperial couple sat to give *Darshan* (Source: Janhwij Sharma).

The above discussion has demonstrated how the original Hindu tradition was reinvented as a political instrument, although under different considerations, first under the Mughals and thereafter under the British. The independence of India notwithstanding, *Darshan* propelled its reinvention trajectory and today it has adapted itself to the needs of the current times. This dynamism has cemented its essence as a tradition that is here to stay.

5.4. *Darshan* In the Here and the Now

As opposed to the past, *Darshan* today operates in a rapidly transforming world that is characterized by the ubiquity of the visual. Given the enormous currency of the visual in present times, it is only befitting that *Darshan* with its focus on the ocular has been appropriated and reinvented by new-age *Darshan-eyyabs* and *Darshan-arthis*. The reasons for this reinvention are polyvalent including spirituality, authority and vanity, to name a few. Notwithstanding the new setting, *Darshan* fundamentally continues to be a transactional act between two un-equals, the *Darshan* giver as powerful and the seeker of it as weak. Likewise, it also tends to be a male bastion in its worldly avatar with the ‘seen’ at the centre of the gaze.

In the spiritual world of Hinduism, while the original tradition remains as robust as ever, *Darshan* has reinvented itself into a virtual act of ‘Seeing’ and to be ‘Seen’. Indeed, temples today offer the devotee the choice of either physically standing at the *Garbhagriha* to engage with God-as-deity or conducting this engagement in cyber space with a digital screen operating as the *Garbhagriha*’s threshold. Prominent temples in India have a strong presence in cyberspace with their own dedicated domains that offer a range of services including *Darshan*.³⁴ Specifically for *Darshan*, devotees can log onto the temple website that they wish to access either physically or in the virtual world. In case of the former, they can register online for undertaking physical *Darshan* at a date and time of their choosing. In case of the latter, the website has provision for live *Darshan* for devotees who cannot pay obeisance to their God in person. With not just prominent temples of the country – whose spiritual appeal transcends geographical boundaries – but those with regional as well as local significance marking their digital presence in cyber space, this new-age avatar of *Darshan* is highly popular.

In more worldly matters, the male *Darshan-eevabs*, ruling politics to popular culture, have turned to *Darshan* as a tool to capitalize on the power of the visual to showcase their power and popularity. In return, their legions of fans-turned-*Darshan-arthis*, aspire to connect with their idols – highly popular political leaders, spiritual seers and actors – to soak in their perceived greatness and be gratified by this encounter. Additionally, the *Darshan-arthis* not only gaze at their idols with their ‘eyes’, but also employ the technological eye i.e., personal devices like the ubiquitous mobile phone, to immortalize *Darshan* as it no longer remains a transient affair but is available for perpetual consumption. In fact, not only does the intervention of technology grant the *Darshan-arthis* to relive the act later, it equally permits those who cannot make it to the *Darshan* spot in person, to vicariously turn into *Darshan-arthis* as they view the spectacle in digital space at leisure. By far the most powerful enactment of *Darshan* is orchestrated by a group of film-actors-turned-stars who give *Darshan* to their fans while safely ensconced on the balcony or terrace of their otherwise heavily fortified, formidable mansions, an event that finds a prominent place in media reportage.³⁵ Unlike the Mughal ritual, this is not a daily regimen but occurs on special occasion like their birthdays, popular festivals or sometimes as a thanksgiving for the success of their films. The *Darshan-arthis* gather in the public space abutting the mansion in large numbers to gaze at their idols while also capturing the moment to be relished as memorabilia. This reinvention of *Darshan* makes it relevant to the present but rapidly transforming times.

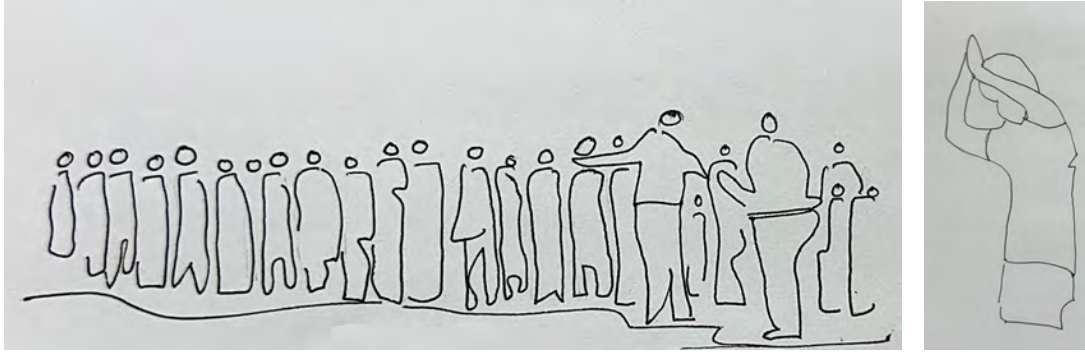


Fig.10 a & b: New-age *Darshan-eyyabs* granting *Darshan* to their fans. (Source: Redrawn by Author based on 'Ethical Fabrication' from a digital media publication).³⁶

6. CONCLUSION

The Paper has demonstrated that *Darshan* has indeed come a long way from being a sacred ritual to becoming a power assertion tool to entering cyberspace in keeping with Brown's contention that tradition is 'dynamic and ever-changing as culture and societal needs alter'.³⁷ Equally, *Darshan* is also highly 'reinterpretative' with the ability to mutate discursively with the demand of the times, while retaining its essence as a transactional act between two unequals.³⁸ Additionally, being centered on the ocular gives *Darshan* a degree of timelessness as the desire to 'See' and to be 'Seen' is a universal phenomenon that has an enormous currency in the current era of hypervisuality. This cements *Darshan's* relevance not only for the present but also for the future.

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²⁹ *Coronation Durbar Delhi 1911*, 1911, p.91.

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³⁵ Both print and electronic media cover these events. Further, the *Darshan-eyyabs*' own social media handles, operated by their personal public relations machinery, give it enormous publicity. The fact that these events also make it to the headlines in the national news speaks volumes of the power wielded by these new-age *Darshan-eyyab-Darshan-arthi* duo, as indeed one cannot do without the other.

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