

# PROTECTING THE LEGACY OF UNBUILT HERITAGE – A CASE OF 84 KOS BRAJ PARIKRAMA

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## ABSTRACT

Parikrama is a religious ceremony which involves route of travel to many destinations including pilgrimages like temple or any structure of religious feelings. In previous times, parikrama was done by people to coagulate the religious sentiment and cultural views. There is noticeable change in the spirit of parikrama in India at present time, with the shifting inclinations and needs of the culture. The main purpose of this tour apart from religious views has further been extended value to other social principled and tourism characteristic which in turn is playing significant role in driving the economy and other dominant factors in progress of the city. Braj or Mathura is situated on the right bank of river Yamuna, has been recognized as the oldest living city after Varanasi (Kashi) and Rome in the world. The city has been combined in one of the 12 cities which have been recognized under HRIDAY to have strategic development due to its rich and assorted historical context which, in the fast development of the city, needs to be considered and analysed so that the exclusivity of the city is handled rationally as responsible designers. (HRIDAY rejuvenating the soul of India). The approach of the study is to develop a deep understanding parikrama route respecting the uniqueness of the city. Main objective of the study is to understand the importance of parikrama in the city with giving thought for solutions to the existing urban infrastructure, conserve the heritage and strengthen the local economy and social aspects of the city.

Key words: Brij, Heritage, Tourism, Economy, Parikrama, Culture, Ancient city.

## 1. IDENTIFICATION OF CASE STUDY – NEED OF THE STUDY

The aim is to identify the importance of brij parikrama circuit and get an understanding to the existing urban infrastructure, conserve the heritage and strengthen the economy and social facets of the city. The basic thought of paper is to get an overview of the area with its land-use pattern, to know the urban fabric, socio economic trend, culture, and learn examples to point out the issues and solutions. The study concerns are to help glorify the past, to retain the natural city fabric, observing present with embracing ancient city to a better tomorrow. Rather to strengthen the Parikrama which is an existing traditional practice , objectifying and resolving issues at various stages. The domestic merchandise is directly impacted by the tourism, which impact the economy solidifying the flow in primary secondary and tertiary sectors increasing the income and reducing export of the country, improvising the living standard of native people. The main focus of the learning is on the marking of brij parikrama route integrated all together to sustain the city gracefully with the passing time on the basis of heritage, religious belief, urban infrastructure, tourism, cultural values. The study, on the basis of literature study, analyses the potential of the city and binds them together to bring a solution. The compilation is on literature and case studies, the secondary sources identifies the circuit base, adapted to further analyse and conclude with a new understanding of the parikrama circuit, with respect to the conservation, urban infrastructure, religious, heritage and tourism.

## 2. INTRODUCTION

### 2.1. Regional setting

Braj, also known as Vraj, Vraja, Brij or Brijbhoomi, is a region in India on both sides of the Yamuna river and it spans across 1300 villages and 5000 km<sup>2</sup> in area. The region lies well within the golden triangle of Delhi-Jaipur-Agra. Some of the regions included in Brij are Gokul, Govardhan, and Vrindavan. Contrary to the popular belief that Braj is Mathura, Vrindavan and Govardhan alone, with its centre at Mathura-Vrindavan in Uttar Pradesh, also includes Palwal, hodal and Ballabgarh in Haryana, Bharatpur in Rajasthan and Morena in Madhya Pradesh. Braj region is connected to Radha and Krishna who according to scripture were born in Barsana and Mathura respectively. It is the main centre of Krishna circuit of Hindu pilgrimage.

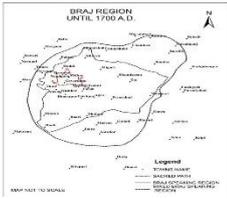
The residents or natives of Braj are called Brijwasi (or Brajwasi). Language(s) spoken: Braj bhasha or Brij bhasha, closely related to spoken Hindi with a soft accent. Brij is famous for its sweets.

Particularly visited during Janmastami (Krishna's birthday) in August/September and Holi in February/March. The area is overflowing with temples from countless ages and the stretch of the sacred Yamuna River is adorned with 25 ghats. From geo-morphological point of view, the region of Braj can be divided into three categories: the plains; the hilly area; the khadar area.



### 2.2. Area of Braj based on Purānas and traditions

Among all the Purānas in which Braj has been mentioned, the reference in Varāha Purāna is the most significant. The Mathurāmandala section of the Varāha Purāna solely deals with Braj mandala. A part of this text is famous as Mathurā Mahātmya. In it, the extent of Mathurā mandala has been told as 20 yojanas and at many places it has been repeated while telling the importance of various places in this territory (vimśatiryojanāntu māthuram nam mandalam| yatra tatra narah snāto mucyate sarvakilvisai|| 158.1). In the Vāyu Purāna, the extent of Mathurā mandala has been told as 40 yojanas, but this reference has not attained wider popularity as references of the Varāha Purāna have. One yojana roughly measures about 4 krośa (kos) or 7 miles (12 km) and hence the traditional extent of Braj is considered to be 84 krośas. A popular kimvadanti in Braj says (Mittal 1966: 5) - ita varahada uta sonahada sūrasena uta grāma| vraja caurāsī kosa mein mathurāmanÜdÜala dhāma||.



### 2.3. 12 major vanas as mentioned in Braja Vastu Varnana

1. Madhuvana, 2. Tālavana,
3. Kumudavana, 4. Bahulāvana,
5. Kāmavana, 6. Khādiravana,
7. Vrindāvana, 8. Bhadravana,
9. Bhāndīravana, 10. Belavana,
11. Lohavana, 12. Mahāvana.

### 2.4. Rivers and streams in Braj

Yamuna, Karban or Jhirna, patwaha, Sengar and Arind, Gambhiri and its tributary Khari Nadi, Agra Canal, Govardhan Drain and Manth Branch of Ganga Canal

### 2.5. Braj 84 kos Parikramā

The concept of Braj Parikramā seems to be related to the pan Indian concept of tīrthātana (religious tourism). The concept was developed to understand the pilgrim centers in a holistic manner. The Braj Parikramā is related to nature's worship as all the natural sources like groves, rivers, hills, lakes, ponds and even the dust of Braj (Braj-raj) are revered. This concept of worship of nature can be understood by the prevailing practice of Vallabhīya Pustimārgī sect who still call Braj Parikramā as Vanayātrā.



Braj Yatra circuit of pilgrimage was formally established by the 16th-century sadhus of vaishnava sampradaya with fixed routes, itinerary and rituals. The circuit covers are spread across 2500 km<sup>2</sup> area with 84 kos or 300 km long periphery extending 10 km to east and 50 km to north and west. Braj has two main

types of pilgrimage circuits, the traditional longer Braj Yatra encompassing the whole circuit, and the other shorter significantly modified contemporary point-to-point pilgrimage to visit the main sites at Mathura, Vrindavan, Gokul, Govardhan. The former, longer traditional pilgrimage route, also includes additional sacred sites Nandgaon and Barsana with travel on foot.

## 2.6. Identification of Parikrama Routes

Mathura parikrama: The parikrama covers 24 temples on the periphery of the old city; the distance covered is 18 km and is done on Akshay Naumi. Milestone and pavers are marked for the ease of the people. The parikrama starts and ends at Vishram ghat.



Antargriha Parikrama: The parikrama covers the 20 temples within the vicinity of old city, covering 3km with start and end point at Vishram ghat.



Braj Mandal Parikrama: Devotes experience 12 forests and 24 groves over time period of one month. This parikrama is done during “Bhadon” rainy month.

### 3. Existing Parikrama Circuit

The parikrama has religious context and covers all the spots which hold religious sentiments for the visitors from within Mathura and from nearby locations. The existing parikrama route caters the needs of the people in reference to need of the devotees. The parikrama route remains active in few months of the whole year, and draws dominantly local tourists and partially foreign tourists during 3 months of the year. The parikrama Circuit is not branded or marketed at global platform through government tourism portal. Infrastructure development along the parikrama circuit is not meeting the requirements of the visitors and people living along the area, in terms of services-Sewerage, Waste disposal, etc.

### 4. Inter-Relating the Tangible and Intangible Assets of Braj

Apart from the tangible built up masses of heritage structure distributed all along the city vicinity as per historic layering of the reigns that ruled the city, there lies intangible heritage that needs to be interwoven with the tangible heritage of the city to ensure the presentation of totality in context to culture lifestyle of the city. The overall uplift of built heritage and cultural heritage will do justice to the heart and soul of the city.



#### 4.1. The akhadas along ghatiya and tilas

The parikrama circuit will show case ghatiya encouraging the old built akhdas, encouraging the local sport, which will be a mere source of attraction as a spectator and as a participant of the interested visitors. This will attract and show case to the domestic and Foreign tourists the essence of Mathura. (Mathura Vrindavan Development Authority)

#### **4.2. The ethnic taste of brij bhumi Kulhad vala Dudh**

Despite globalization in tourism, the ethnic tastes of Mathura root back to the lord Krishna's birthplace where cows' milk are still considered of supreme quality. The same ethnic roots can be forecasted as the present and healthy future of the people of city, by providing pastures in the form of Gau Shala along the parikrama circuit as stoppages where people can voluntarily provide service and contribute to the cause and enjoy the best milk products of Brij. (Brijwasi Group)

#### **4.3. Parikrama circuit guided by pandas**

The Pandas (as per the local slang) in the traditional attire accompanying the visitor with introduction to the lifestyle and culture of the city. The guide (Panda) calling the tourists as "JAJMAAN" meaning guest will create a brand value for the visitors and interest in them towards the local language, ethics their lifestyle.

#### **4.4. Braj Folk Songs by Local Singers**

Preserving and showcasing the dying art of the culture under globalization along the parikrama circuit along with the display of Religious and Heritage built masses will enrich the ethnic culture of the city. This in turn will empower local job opportunities and give maximum exposure to the tourists doing justice to their expectations from the visit.

#### **4.5. Light shows along the Built-up Heritage Masses**

The development of the parikrama circuiting encouraging self-sufficient public open spaces with blend of high technology will develop an interactive way of communicating the history and bring the heritage of the city to be showcased in a glorified manner.

#### **4.6. Sustainable approach towards the Development of Parikrama Circuit**

The city must be able to deal with the dead and live load in context to infrastructure transportation and services where minimum or zero energy consumption, strengthening of public transport should be done to ensure the survival and flourishing of the city in a positive manner.

#### **4.7. Sustainable Riverfront Development Approach**

Being one of the major river-based settlement, the city showcases ghats and is vulnerable to further usage and exploitation by man use, which needs to be addressed with increase in the expected tourist fall every year.



#### 4.8. Universal Approach Towards Parikrama Circuit Development

The city will have visitors of all age, for which the city should be prepared to welcome all genre and especially abled global tourists which will not only look forward to be a visitor but also contribute to the economy and society of the city.

#### 5. ANALYSIS ON IDENTIFIED PARIKRAMA ROUTES

We began this article with the purpose of exploring various dimensions of the aesthetics of religious travel using the pilgrimage landscape of Braj. The active parikrama route is primarily of religious nature which attracts more domestic tourism. The parikrama circuit fails to cover the diverse heritage of Brij which if inculcated with proper marketing strategy and tour plans will attract foreign tourists. The increase in footfall of foreign tourists will boost the value of the sacred place in context to intangible values of the place accompanied with heritage structures. Furthermore, economy of the people serving tourists (also primary, secondary and tertiary sectors) will develop economy and further help develop infrastructure of the city. The challenge will be on carrying capacity of the city and on the infrastructure, which should be planned as per the expected projection of visitors (floating) population.



The need to consider parikrama as a source of binding the assets of city to be showcased to the world at globally will lend a look into the lifestyle of people of the area, improve living conditions of the zone and develop the society with job opportunities. The enlargement of the scope of parikrama circuit will help cater larger population and create opportunities at multi-level for the growth of the city. The riverfront development along the Vishram Ghat and creating awareness among the habitants and visitors for sustainable approach will provide better living conditions for the people. Pilgrimage settings may have elements of natural beauty, connecting these elements with legends, stories, meanings, and rituals that heighten their aesthetic value. Deciphering these interpretations is a must for the better appreciation of pilgrimage landscapes.

## 6. CONCLUSION

The inclusive approach of establishing the circuit with built heritage within the extended parikrama circuit along with functional intangible assets of brij bhumi will allow the whole route to flourish and survive with the coming generations with inevitable acceptable changes. The Parikrama circuit will act as a spine to the development of Mathura and nearby areas, significant contributor to GDP of India through tourism. (HRIDAY rejuvenating the soul of India) As Mathura is one out of the 12 cities selected by HRIDAY for further development to strengthen of the city focusing on heritage. Brij holds the diversity of heritage (both tangible and intangible) and religious beliefs which together when blended through parikrama circuit shall have a positive impact on the urban development and society.

While most foot-pilgrimages of the past aided in developing sensitivities to appreciate and absorb landscapes by providing enough time and space, same cannot be said of contemporary religious travel that uses cars as the mode of travel, and an 'origin-destination' trip as the route. This change in the mode and method of travel also signifies a shift in the patterns of religiosity and religious behaviour. The aspirations and demands of religious tourism, to a large extent, drive the packaging of a pilgrimage landscape. In this situation, one might be tempted to condemn such endeavours as compromising the site's sanctity following the conventional discourse of consumerism and commoditisation. Because they fulfil the contemporary needs of religious experience, it is necessary to consider such landscapes and contemporary pilgrimages (where route and body become road and car) as challenges for understanding the aesthetics associated with emerging forms of religious tourism.

This will preserve the essence of urban and rural region with the coming generations and acknowledge the changing times and technology. Mathura which consist of a major part of Brij being third oldest city after Varanasi and Rome, deserves upliftment of its heart and soul which can not only sustain the carrying capacity but also live through the times setting an example for the coming generations instead of getting the real essence of cultural heritage of Brij Bhumi forgotten by the people as visitors and dwellers. The side by side development of tangible and intangible aspects of the heritage of the city interwoven with parikrama circuit will give a resultant society, the society which is able to flourish embracing its culture while being adoptive to the changing trends for the betterment of society.

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