

Paper

Documentation of Tangible and Intangible Heritage; Collective Social Responsibility

Abstract

In the recent past, while science and technology have brought many undiscovered frontiers into the domain of human knowledge, making life easier, they also on the other hand have accelerated the speed of time. Computer and media, the by-products of science, have brought the expanse of information and knowledge within the space of a screen to be accessed just with the tap of a finger. This has led to assimilation of diverse ideas, thus creating globalization of thought process, values and culture. At one level, this can be appreciated as having resulted in simultaneous evolution of societies that can claim global brotherhood and unity, yet at another level, this same aspect is endangering the concept of heritage and culture that sets one community, society and nation apart from another, in the process, annihilating the uniqueness of individual societal existence.

Now, more than ever, the need for documentation becomes imperative, requiring it to be dealt with an urgency in order to maintain the link between the historical lineages of past with that of future. In the field of scientific research, documentation is an integral part of its findings; however, sadly, the concept of documentation in the area of heritage and culture is affected by this lack of requisite essentiality and desire.

My paper is based on discerning and essential aspects of Documentation wherein I take the deviation and position the need of Documentation as a social responsibility, outside the code of Profession.

Overview

The undisputed importance of documentation lies in the imperative continuation of recorded history. Hence, its role is much more than the clinical interpretation of an

individualistic perception; conceived and perceived with a personal sagacity, maturity, exposure and understanding.

Documentation can be divided in two preferred categories –

Written Documentation – This form of documentation is more or less limited within the scholastic domain where the researcher, often, takes the aid of intellectual material available for the analysis. Most of the time, the written documentation leads to judgmental analysis that inadvertently reflects the personal biases and preference of the researcher.

While documenting contemporary situations, there can be a certain degree of complexity, as the time of the process of compilation of facts is limited, for the observer has to collect authentic information from the situation before the dilution and contamination of the facts begins to take place. Often because of this urgency, the written documentation acts just as recorded material to be analyzed later by the historians. It is in the later state of analysis that variation of opinions leads to difference of opinions resulting in deliberations, for a body of documentation that perhaps required no intellectual dissection.

Written documentation, acts as a deterrent in reaching out to those who are not very comfortable with the world of letters. However, for the purpose of future research and scholarly intervention, written documentation is of prime importance.

Visual Documentation – any visual aid that is used as a tool of engaging people with an idea that needed to be embedded in the public-psyche, becomes a document of its times. Right from the pre-historic Cave paintings, to the Buddhist Caves of Ajanta 2nd B.C. to nearly 6th A.D. , the Roman Equestrian statue of Marcus Aurelius c.161-180 CE, Early Christian and Byzantine Art, and to the art of subsequent periods, the purpose of these art forms might have been varying from their political, social to religious intent yet they have created documentation for the succeeding times, thus creating a linking thread of history.

This kind of documentation gives an instant visual clarification that can be later correlated with a researched database before reaching to any conclusion. Visual documentation can be captured in photographic form as an instant documentation, without

delving into any or much of research. Often Just a single picture opens a vast area of research.

For this paper, that I am presenting today, I take the support of the second option of Visual Documentation to impress upon my point of requisite urgency in documentation of the present times before much of heritage , both tangible and intangible, is lost, bringing us face to face to a new world with many missing links of the past.

As elsewhere in the world, India too has been witnessing a sharp societal change that can be accredited to exposure through travel, media and technology. The new improved infrastructure and financial investments by various business houses in India has brought a sudden financial prosperity that has become responsible for sudden changes in its society, values and belief. This change, at an alarming speed, is bringing-in an emergence of a new era that is replacing the old one and its external manifestation is clearly visible in the new architecture. This change is deeper than the external manifestation as it is the reflection of changing social, political and religious perspectives. This change requires immediate conscious documentation to maintain the link with the fast emerging future. I take the example of the city of Udaipur, in Rajasthan, India, to expound the changes in its tangible and intangible heritage and impress upon the urgency of documentation.

Udaipur-

Maharana Udai Singh II (1536-1572), laid the foundation of Udaipur in 1567, the new capital of Mewar after loosing the earlier capital of Chittor to the Mughals. It was on the prophetic advice of an ascetic whom Udai Singh II met during one of his hunting trips that he decided to build his new capital at the selected site. The lineage of the Sisodia clan that Udai Singh was a descendent of, is considered one of the oldest surviving dynasties of the world. According to the legend, the Sisodia clan has descended from the solar deity "Surya", the Sun, who was the issue of Lav, the older son of lord Rama.

Today, Udaipur is a highly favoured city on the map of tourism of India. It has the right blend of living culture and traditions of Rajasthan and is situated amidst scenic hilly environs. For these reasons, it has also found favour even with the Hollywood and the

Bollywood cinema as a shooting locale. Octopussy of James Bond, Heat and Dust, The Jewel in the Crown, Eklavya, Nandini, Mera Gaon Mera Desh and many other films and serials have been shot in Udaipur.

With this background, I use the city of Udaipur as an example of the importance of visual documentation in my paper. The visuals used in the presentation of this paper, are by no means an attempt to promote tourism. They have been selected to show the living example of shift in culture and heritage in the daily life of the city, and the importance of its documentation in the form of visuals.

Udaipur is a city where tangible and intangible heritage co-exists. It is a living heritage that has been experiencing an onslaught of modernism. The traditional populace of the city is habituated to the touristic gaze and the clicking of cameras as is visible in the picture in which an old lady, seated in the window of her house, looks straight into the lens of the camera showing her familiarity to such attention (image 1).



1.

Photo courtesy ; Seema Bhalla

The distinctive and traditional “Haveli” architecture of the city imparts it a unique flavor, (images 2,3,4) where following old traditions is still a part of life. Even today, the families plant the sacred plant of “Tulsi” in the courtyard albeit the precarious open balcony might have replaced the open courtyard.



2.



3.



4.

Photos courtesy ; Seema Bhalla

Amidst the tradition, modernity is fast making its presence felt. The next picture reveals this fact by showing an old Haveli architecture that carries an advertisement of “Holy CCTV” on its outer sidewall (image 5). A collective advertisement of Tours and Travels, Rental properties, Bullet Motorcycle, Kinetic, Suzuki motorcycle and Scooty find their place on a single yellow board.



5.

Photo courtesy ; Seema Bhalla

Simultaneously the city is becoming “Modern” where for many inhabitants, the old is losing its charm and there is a rush to raze the old buildings to give way to so-called “modern architecture” (image 6). Apart from the personal aesthetics, these buildings are aimed to attract tourists, who are thought to prefer “modern architecture” (image 7).



6.



7.

Photos courtesy ; Seema Bhalla

So quick is the change that it is threatening to take over the tradition. A small shrine on the outer periphery of one of the ancient temples of the city, houses the sculpture of one of the “*Dikpalas*” or guardians of the direction (image 8). The exalted responsibility of the guard makes him into a demi-God, hence he too is worshipped. Accompanied by a sinuous plant and an animal, the “*Dikpala*”, the savior of the temple precinct, today stands threatened of his own existence amidst the onslaught of characters from the cyber world. The presence of a wilted marigold garland and a lit lamp are the only evidence of his importance on the wall. The “Mother India- Heaven of Handicraft” clearly ignores the presence of the “Dikpala” and points in the opposite direction towards the handicraft shop to allure the tourists. Even the traditional frame of the shrine has been encroached upon and is painted-over as continuation of the cyber world, leaving just the dark niche for the Dikpala, to call his own (image 8a).



8.



8a.

Photos courtesy ; Seema Bhalla

While tangible changes are becoming obviously visible, the intangible heritage of the city too is undergoing changes, which now are not as subtle either.

Taking the example of the famous festival of Gangaur, I further elucidate the importance of visual aid in documenting tangible and intangible heritage.

Gangaur -

The festival is celebrated with much reverence, all over Rajasthan, by women in the month of March-April. The women worship Goddess "***Gauri***", the consort of lord Shiva, asking her for marital bliss. The married women worship for the love, well-being and long life of their husbands and the unmarried girls seek the boon of a good husband. The festival is celebrated with great fervor. The women wear their bridal finery and carry the idol of the Goddess, also decorated in bridal finery, above their heads in a procession. This age-old traditional celebration has been receiving the blessings of the local Royalty in the past.

In Udaipur, traditionally, the Maharaja graces the occasion by his presence. Seated in the Gangaur-boat that is specially decorated for the occasion, the Maharaja goes past the "***Gangaur Ghat***" on the bank of Pichola Lake where all the women bring their idols and gather to celebrate the festival.

Early 18th century, Festival of Gangaur, Udaipur

This event has been often painted as court records, by miniature painting artists. In the miniature painting, c. 1715-20, size 31x31, Maharana Sangram Singh is shown at the Gangaur Boat procession. The painting is in the collection of City Palace, Udaipur. It is not a mere record of an event but a document of its times. The Maharana with his ministers, nobles, musicians and attendants is seated on the higher platform of the boat that is specially designed for the occasion. With his gold nimbus, the Maharana is conspicuous thrice in continuous narration form (image 9).



9.



9a.

If we study this painting of early 18th century, there are many observations to be made. The uninterrupted lane leading to the bank of Pichola river is packed with populace of what seems to be not a very prosperous town (image 9a). A point to be kept in mind for future reference in this paper is the modest dwellings that are in and around the lane. The sole large off-white haveli on the left, too should be kept in mind for the later reference. The congregation of women, on the right is surrounding the single idol of Gauri (image 9b). Across the lake, the cityscape is sparse (image 9c). Also needs to be kept in mind is the period of this painting - c. 1715-1720, for its future reference in this paper.



9b.



9c.

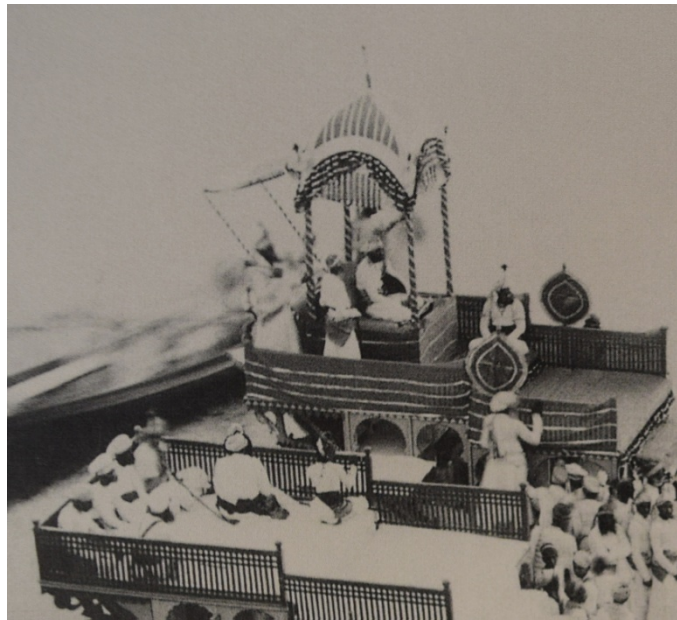
Early 20th century, Udaipur

A photograph of Maharana Fateh Singh on the royal barge, c. 1900, photographer: Herzog and Higgins (collection: India Office Library and Records, London), (image 10) shows the Maharana has taken his position under a canopied seat, atop the Gangaur boat (image 10a). There are other nobles and attendants accompanying him in the boat. On the bank of lake that is part of the palace residence of the Maharana, is a congregation of men who are there to attend to the ceremony of the departure of the barge towards the Gangaur Ghat. The entire scene is male dominant. The accompanying smaller boats are waiting to move once the main barge proceeds. The exalted position of the

Maharana and respect for the royalty is obvious from the comportment of all others on the boat and the bank.

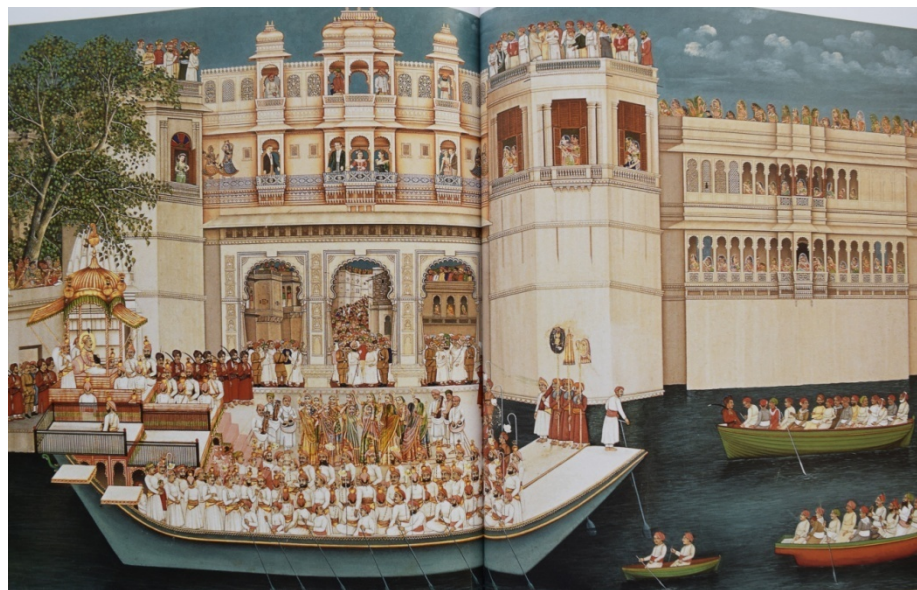


10.



10a.

A miniature painting titled, “Maharana Bhupal Singh celebrating the Gangaur festival”, c. 1935, in the collection of City Palace Museum Udaipur (image11), comes across as documentation of remarkable change that has taken place in architecture, society and political situation, in a span of nearly 220 years if we compare it with the earlier miniature painting of c. 1710-15. The Maharana is seated in the Gangaur boat that is embarking on the Gangaur bank. A huge haveli comes between the lane and the Gangaur ghat. The way to reach the ghat now is through the arched entrance above which is the second floor of the building that is called “Bogore Ki Haveli”. Amarchand Badwa, who was the Prime Minister of Mewar from 1751 to 1778, built the Haveli. His tenure lasted through the reigns of Maharana Pratap Singh II, Raj Singh II, and Hamir Singh. The temple on the left in the premises of which, women in the earlier painting were dancing has a wall behind it, now including it in the area of Bagore Ki Haveli. The upper storey of the Haveli has Jharokhas or balconied rooms, from where the celebration is being watched by the British who, at the time , were ruling India. The male and female segregation is very clear. On the roof of the two side wings are the male spectators and on the right side of the haveli, are the female spectators. The wall on the left side of the second floor has the



11.

painting of a dark complexioned musician and a lighter complexioned dancer who has an admirer in the form of a doe who is fondly watching the dancer(image 11a). I would bring back your attention to this wall painting just in a while. The view of the street at the back

has the off-white haveli seen in the earlier painting but now instead of the modest rural dwellings, have cropped up impressive havelis all along the street, evidence of economic prosperity. The arched entrance is blocked for public entry by the presence of royal guards and the Gangaur ghat is left uncluttered for the benefit of the Maharana (image 11b). The women worshippers are out of the view, perhaps behind the wall of the temple on the left.



11a .



11b.

FESTIVAL OF GANGAUR

22 MARCH

2015

I take you to the most recent visual documentation of the festival of Gangaur in Udaipur. Much has changed in the last 80 years. The festive spectacle at Gangaur Ghat looks spectacular when seen from the lake. The congregation of women with the idols on their head fills up every inch of space of the ghat (image 12).



12.

Photo courtesy ; Seema Bhalla

The idols have taken a different symbolism. The festival of Gangaur, initially, as seen in the miniature painting of c. 1710-15, was associated with the worship of only Gauri but now her husband Shiva accompanies her (image 13).



13.



14.

Photos courtesy ; Seema Bhalla

The younger unmarried girls, too participate in the festival, carrying their own groom even if the groom is the plastic baby doll dressed like a groom(image 14).

The procession of different groups, communities and committees reach the ghat with much fanfare, traversing the same street that was seen in the earlier two miniature paintings. What used to be a religious festival where women carried the idols over their heads with much reverence, has acquired a theatrical approach. Different groups vie for attention by adding interesting and nouvelle ideas and props to their procession. There is a sense of gimmickry in the procession (images 15,16,17,18).



15.



16.



17.



18.

Photos courtesy ; Seema Bhalla

The traditional society of Udaipur, has always maintained segregation between the men and women. The latter were supposed to be subservient and demure. Women of

all ages were supposed to follow a certain code of conduct according to their age. The Gangaur festivity is reflective of the societal change where an old woman dressed in all her bridal finery dares to go against the grain of purdah, and looks boldly into the camera lens gesturing in a Bollywood dance sequence (image 19).



19.



20.

Photos courtesy ; Seema Bhalla

Another group in procession expresses “*womanpower*”, where the procession is led by a young girl impersonating as “Mother India” and some of the women of the group walk holding swords (image 20). The concerns of society come forth in the form of social messages in yet another procession (image 21).



21.

Photo courtesy ; Seema Bhalla

A festival that has had a religious reverence to it has become like a carnival in 22 March 2015, where theatrical performance takes over the religious fervor.

The local administration collaborates to declare the Gangaur festival as “Mewar Festival” and puts up the posters to lure the tourists (image 22). At the ghat, the women conduct the rituals associated with Gangaur. The view across the lake has changed drastically since the miniature painting of c. 1710-15 when there was only one haveli and some modest dwellings. Today the other side is lined with hotel buildings having mixed architecture. Some are modern and some pseudo-traditional (image 23).



22.



23.

Photos courtesy ; Seema Bhalla

At the ghat, there is a confluence of Gangaur statues and it seems as if there exist two parallel worlds, an astral world and a mortal one. With the backdrop of “Bagore Ki Haveli”, the bridal idols are visible at a higher plane, creating a world of their own as if oblivious of the earthly world below them (images 24,25,26).



24.



25.



26.

Photos courtesy ; Seema Bhalla

The painting on the wall of Bagore Ki Haveli that was seen in the miniature painting of 1935 is still there but it has been repainted sometime back (image 27). The musician has become darker, more like the complexion of Krishna. The doe has changed her loyalty and is now admiring the musician instead of the dancer. The pose of the dancer has changed and she has found another large deer to her side that is watching her (image 27a).



27.



27a.

Photos courtesy ; Seema Bhalla

Outside in the street, the architectural façades are changing. The off-white haveli visible through the arches of the ghat in the earlier miniature paintings of c. 1710-15 and c. 1935, has disappeared. Instead, the silhouette of the buildings has taken an entirely different contour and has been converted into a hotel (image 28). Closer to the Bagore Ki Haveli, in the street is the German Café housed in a building that has its ground floor in the traditional style of architecture but the floor above is in modern architecture (image 29).



28.



29.

Photos courtesy ; Seema Bhalla

In the evening, the Gangaur boat does not start from the palace anymore but is now organized by the “Lake Palace Hotel” that is presently the property of Taj Group of Hotels (image 30, 31). The accompanying boats are arranged by the department of Tourism, with a pilot boat that maneuvers the movement of Gangaur boat and the boats having live dance performance on them.



30



31

Photos courtesy ; Seema Bhalla

Unlike the past, the Maharana does not participate in the ceremony. The boat is made to look like the one in the olden times and an actor, dressed like the Maharana, replaces him (image 32).



32.

Photo courtesy ; Seema Bhalla

By sunset, the women conclude all the rituals (image 33). The idols are taken back home and the cultural programmes organized by the departments of tourism and culture take over the activity at the ghat.



33.

Photo courtesy ; Seema Bhalla

Conclusion –

Undoubtedly, there is a need to take up Documentation as a serious profession where the scientific methods of documentation should be included in every subject that is related with the field.

However, having said that, the need of the hour is to bring the awareness of documentation within the public domain and should be taken as Social responsibility. The local dwellers should be made aware of the value of heritage that they have inherited, it is imperative both from the touristic point of view as well as having a sense of pride in their tangible and intangible heritage. The importance of documentation if imparted at the school level can bring in remarkable results in creating a strong database of cultural heritage. With the advanced technology of mobile cameras that is available with most of the people, visual documentation becomes easier.

The availability of visual aids in terms of miniature paintings and photographs, have made it possible to document various changes from c. 1710-15 till 2015. These changes have been visible both in tangible as well as intangible heritage specific to the city of Udaipur. Since the available material is visual, it has been easy to observe the changing society. There may be a possibility of some fragmented written documentation in some form but it needs to be collated and undertaken with a research oriented scholarly perspective.

Impressing upon the importance of visual documentation, personally, at a personal level, I stand committed to my conviction and continue to create a visual documentation of tangible and intangible cultural heritage.

I conclude my paper with what, not long back, His Holiness the 14th ***Dalai Lama*** said,

“Because past environmental destruction was the result of ignorance , we can easily forgive it. Today, we are better informed. Therefore, it’s essential that we make an ethical examination of what we have inherited, what we are responsible for, and what we will pass on to coming generations. Ours is clearly a pivotal generation”.

Seema Bhalla

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Images:

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