



Performances by artists from across India

ETERNAL MEWAR: RETHINKING ONCE UPON A TIME

Fairy tales are an integral part of living intangible heritage, whether they are the Panchatantra stories or Aesop's Fables. The rapid changes on the historical cultural landscapes of India are phenomenal. Social transformations, economic developments, cultural engagements and environmental impacts are unprecedented. The resilience of Indian living heritage and its adaptations are tested to the maximum. Often erosions on the scale that are hard to manage and facilitate revitalisation, diminishing heritage elements, have become common. The goose that laid golden eggs is a forgotten tale. In this dire situation, old and new champions of cultural survival and democracy are leading and drawing on conventional and contemporary thinking.

It was more than three decades ago that Shriji Arvind Singh Mewar of Udaipur expressed his deep concern that the core elements of living heritage are fast disappearing that those essential ingredients of our sense of place are diminishing at a rate that they will not be replaceable. What is significant is his approach to address the situation. It is one that is based on the clear understanding that all cultures are living and dynamic; that human adaptability to changes has in-built resilience within social systems; and that unless we devise pathways to continue our cultural elements in new formations drawing on our ability and adaptability, we will witness homogenisation of the cultural systems of India caving in to the tsunami of globalising forces.

There are a range of festivals that dot the length and breadth of India, especially in the hope of capturing the burgeoning tourism markets and filling the coffers of states and territories augmenting local GDP. Most of them are focusing on recreational tourism that faces stiff international competition and few and far in between are safeguarding local heritage signatures and building experiences that would draw sustained visitation and enable intergenerational transmission at the local levels for continuity of cultural diversity of India. The UNWTO statistics clearly show that whether it is India, Korea or China domestic tourism has become the mainstay. Only Vietnam bucks the trend and continues to gain from a balance of both domestic and international visitation.

In this context one of the significant events on the Indian festival landscape was the 4th iteration of the biannual World Living Heritage Festival from October 17 to 20, 2018 in Udaipur. It was held under the auspices of the Maharana of Mewar Charitable Foundation (MMCF). Its main goal was to "explore the relationship between tangible and intangible heritage through inquiries into association of oral history, rites and rituals with historic spaces, be it temples, monuments, museums or public squares in the cities. This exploration will be both, reflective - incorporating keynote lectures and panel discussions, and experiential - using workshops, performances, and heritage walks as avenues."

An integral part of the festival was the international conference or think tank to scope and develop approaches to safeguarding living heritage. It contributed to the incremental and well researched community building approach to developing the festival. It was held in the Durbar Hall of the Fateh Prakash Palace Convention Centre. Delegates were welcomed by Shriji, Chairman and Managing Trustee, MMCF, with a passionate address on cultural and heritage diversity and the importance of safeguarding intangible heritage. Lakshyaraj Singh Mewar of Udaipur promised intergenerational continuity. Vrinda Raje Singh, the dynamic chief coordinator of the festival,

introduced the program.

Plenary sessions were addressed by academics, heritage professionals and practitioners of intangible heritage elements and conservation professionals. Some of the central themes were Approaches to Safeguarding Intangible Heritage, Rethinking Temples: Agama Shastra, Shilpa Shastra and everyday Indian experiences, Kahani, Parampara, aur Bhavishya: Oral traditions, their role and impact. Workshops were facilitated with the local artists and artisans in Lakshmi Chowk, Zenana Mahal of the City Palace, on living heritage documentation and safeguarding elements such as textile traditions. International, national and local experts deliberated on communities and public spaces in historic city cores. A round table discussion focussed on comparative perspectives with French interventions in Living Heritage and the National Estate of Chambord.

Performances were held on each day of the festival beginning with Morning Raga, a sunrise performance of semi-classical music, and ending with the evening concert featuring performances from all over India. Prabhati - 'The Morning Raga' everyday was conducted under the banyan tree in Gulab Bagh, Udaipur. Bhajans and light classical were presented by artists Sharma Bandhu, Ujjain and Prof Alankar Singh, Patiala. Evening concerts by the Lake Venue Fateh Sagar Pal, Fateh Sagar Lake, Udaipur, included dance performances by artists from the Mura School of Indian Classical Dance, Ahmedabad and the Kala Ashram College of Performing Arts, Udaipur. The final performance was a scintillating musical concert by the famed Nooran Sisters from Jalandhar.

Kriti Sangam: Confluence of crafts profiled heritage demonstrations in the Living Crafts Bazaar showcasing the best in Mewari and Indian arts and crafts. Experiential workshops were facilitated by storytellers, dancers, craftsmen, and musicians. Participants were able to interact with masters from different traditions. There was strategic facilitation to bridge the gap between the performers and participants adding value to heritage tourism. Heritage walks included temples within Udaipur's walled city, Lakeview trail from the terrace of the City Palace museum and a visit to Ahar, the heritage cremation precinct.

An exhibition on oral history traditions was presented at the City Palace Museum, Udaipur. The festival was passionate and ambitious in enabling conversations at various levels between carriers and transmitters of intangible heritage elements, professional experts, daily practitioners and policy makers. What is important is that the festival provided an intellectual impetus interrogating the 'commodification' and 'consumption' of heritage in contemporary India. In addition to diverse publics and visitor participation included scholars and students of architecture, urban planning, city development, heritage and various fields within the humanities and social sciences.

Shriji as the Chairman and Managing Trustee of MMCF, Udaipur, has been inspirational leading from the front. The House of Mewar is acknowledged as the world's oldest-serving dynasty since 734 AD. As the 76th custodian, Shriji ensures that Eternal Mewar is conceptualised to provide the vision for the 21st century relevant to the present and future generations. Eternal Mewar expresses, embodies and encompasses the core values, principles and the legacy of the House of Mewar. Fifty years on it has emerged as a unique heritage brand exemplifying hospitality, cultural preservation, philanthropy, education, sports and spirituality for global audiences.



PROF. DR. AMARESWAR GALLA

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Professor Dr. Amareswar Galla, an Indo Australian, was the opening keynote speaker at the 4th World Living Heritage Festival in Udaipur (www.eternalmewar.in)

HERITAGE MATTERS

Images: Maharana of Mewar Charitable Foundation & International Institute for the Inclusive Museum



Ashwa Poojan, on the 9th day of Navaratri, a time-honoured tradition of the House of Mewar, expressing gratitude to equinity, celebrated since the 16th century



Vrinda learns from Sikligars, traditional sword smiths of Rajasthan



Ahar, heritage of the cremation ground, a collective memory landscape since the second Rana of Mewar



Assembly of think tank delegates at Sabhagaar - Durbar Hall, Fateh Prakash Palace

NEXT WEEK

Heritage Matters will take you 'BEYOND BORDERS' where women explore, through leading edge theatre, inclusivity beyond the boundaries of nationality, religion, caste, colour, religion, gender, mind and body