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Krishna’s Form in Nature: Sacred Landscapes and the Govardhan Parvat in India

Runit Chhaya 1, David Jones 2 and Helen Meikle 3
1 Director, Grain Collective, 41 East 11th Street, 2nd Floor, New York, NY 10003, USA, info@graincollective.com
2 Director, Planning & Landscape Architecture Programs, Deakin University, Locked Bag 20001, Geelong 3220, Australia, david.jones@deakin.edu.au
3 Doctoral Candidate, Planning & Landscape Architecture Programs, Deakin University, Locked Bag 20001, Geelong 3220, Australia, david.jones@deakin.edu.au

ABSTRACT

Restoration, conservation and design in sacred place is an important part of our society. Every culture has sacred places that are popular places for pilgrimage. There are different reasons for a place being described as sacred. Most sacred places have incorporated Nature within their spiritual and cultural composition and narratives. Land, trees, plants, animals, mountains, rocks, water or an ecological juncture are several of the forms in which nature often manifests and is appropriated as sacred. It is important for landscape architects to understand sacred places as they directly affect the management and development of these natural environments.

This paper considers the writings and journeys of Krishna in India, and in particular the Govardhan Parvat region in northern India where Krishna undertook a pilgrimage and wrote a large portion of his environmental philosophical narratives and theology in the 14th century. The analysis offers an unique and different perspective on sacred landscape inspiration, deterioration pointing to the role and value landscape architecture many perform in landscape restoration and healing.

Key Words: Govardhan Parvat, Krishna, India, Sacred Landscapes

1. INTRODUCTION

The paper concerns sacred places of India. Since childhood both authors have visited several sacred places, where natural features are influential. Nature (i.e., river, mountain, tree, stone, plant etc.) at these places is the main object of worship. For example Varanasi, Haridwar and Rishikesh, established on the banks of Ganges celebrate the River itself as the object of
worship. These places have been respected and used for prayer for several centuries. Today they dot the map of India as the most popular and heavily visited places in India.

As much as these places possess religious value in the minds of people visiting them, today each one of these places is facing environmental deterioration. None today possess any of the physical and visual experiences that are mentioned in their mythological description. The symbols of ‘Purity’ are now dominated by overflowing sewers, undrinkable water, increasing epidemic, and are devoid of any serene natural environment. Due to the increase in the number of visitors, increasing population and religious zeal, sacred places are getting highly commercialised. Reluctant government authorities and haphazard developmental policies are further deteriorating these places.

There are innumerable sacred places that dot the map of India, where nature has influenced the structuring of the place. They are all symbol of cultural and natural heritage, but are now threatened by the deteriorating physical as well as social environment. Therefore, it is necessary to act immediately to conserve these important heritage sites of the country.

For this paper, we have selected the region of Braj, in northern India, as an exemplar to understand the role of Indian sacred sites where nature plays an important role in shaping the place and the society.

![Figure 1: India and the location of Braj](image)
‘Braj’ is a region of about 300sqkm and it expands across three political state borders. The region has a strong association with the mythological legend of Krishna in Hindu mythology. According to ancient Scripture Krishna himself visited various sites within the region of Braj and spent his early days in this region some 5000 years ago (Gupta, 1999:11). The Braj known today was actually established by the 14th century scholars. The scholars and people of the region then, physically manifested and identified the settings mentioned in the mythological accounts of the region. They associated almost every part of Braj with Krishna. Sites identified were not exact, but on the basis of similarity between the actual physical setting and the mythological description, they established several sites in the Braj region.

Today, there are more than 100 sacred sites within Braj, therefore to further narrow down the scope of study, a particular area within Braj was selected. The selected area has an existing hill, which in mythology is considered a physical manifestation of Krishna in nature. The region is an important ecological epic where according to myth, Krishna declared the hill as his natural form and prayed to the hill (Haberman, 1994:136). The myth further describes the hill as a nurturer of people, where the hill is covered with dense vegetation including flowering plants and fruit bearing trees. The hill and the area are known as Govardhan Parvat. The hill is a linear narrow ridge and covers a distance of about 22km. The 14th century scholars and the later rulers had established several forests and innumerable water tanks (kund) around the hill, creating an ecological paradise (Entwistle, 1994:3-134). The pilgrimage around hill was undertaken to appreciate the ecological arrangement.

But today, the hill is facing severe erosion and has barely any topsoil. The hill now is a barren outcrop of quartzite rock with hardly any vegetation. The forests have disappeared and there is hardly any native vegetation surviving in the region. Water tanks are in a degraded state with silted edges and contaminated water. The pilgrimage is still an important part of the region, but the motive behind it today is more of a superstitious belief. The region no longer possesses the aesthetic and visual experience of the environment created by the 14th century scholars based on Krishna’s environmental and design theory. Several attempts have been made by various government authorities, professionals and individuals to restore the environment of the region, but most of them have been unsuccessful or have led to further deterioration.

The story is similar with every sacred place in India, where nature plays a key role. Therefore, it becomes imperative for the professions dealing with the environmental design to get involved in recovering these sacred places, which are important to the heritage of India. There is a need to develop an understanding of these sacred places and an urgency to develop a design approach for the restoration and design these places.
2. SACRED PLACES

Sacred to us means that which is ‘Holy.’ We also have a set of emotions associated with this concept. The word sacred suggests and evokes a feeling of the transcendental and makes us aware of certain self-disciplinary actions. It forces us to maintain decorum and to respect the sanctity of any element to which the word is attached. Sacred is universal in nature as every human being has an element/event in his life that is sacred to them. It could be a relation, an object, a sign, a house where one is born, a natural object, space-time relation, place etc. Traditionally sacred has mostly been related to religion however, the phenomenon of the sacred occurs in every aspect of daily life. It is a set of emotions that evoke a sense of spirituality, sanctity and peace. Leading to transcendental bliss, it makes us feel at one with our own concept of the god.

According to Mircea Eliade (1959:11), a human becomes aware of the sacred because it manifests itself or shows itself. Once a human identifies with an element - say a stone reveals itself as sacred, its immediate reality is transmuted into a supernatural reality. The sacred tree, the sacred stone, then are not ordered as stone or tree but they are worshipped. A sacred stone remains a stone by itself but continues to participate in its surrounding cosmic milieu.

Sacredness is in the eye of the beholder and is therefore different for different individuals. For a human with the most pure state of mind or who has a religious experience, all nature can be seen as sacred. It seems our ancestors understood this phenomenon; sacredness to them was equivalent to power. Eliades (1959:12) further elaborates by saying that sacred is equivalent to reality and power; “sacred power means reality and at the same time enduringness and efficacy.”
With the understanding of *sacred*, one can now delve into the understanding of a *sacred place*. A space can become a *place* and some of these places are termed as *sacred places*. A space is not homogeneous. One experiences interruptions, breaks and some parts of a space are qualitatively different from others. It is this set of experiential differences in the quality and nature of the space that leads to the formation of various kind of places and one of them can be a *sacred place*.

A sacred place never presents itself to the mind in isolation. It is always integrated with the various other components that form a complex system. One often associates the value of sacredness with the elements of nature, e.g. plants, trees, stones, animal species, which flourish in the various seasons. Any of these elements, together with others surrounding them and with which they have an interdependence, form a sacred place. The constituents of sacred places are not just restricted to natural elements; they also evolve due to the legends associated with the place and/or the heroes who have lived on, roamed across and who may have embodied the very soil itself. The ceremonies that take place there from time to time and all the emotions aroused by the whole, form the parts of a sacred place.

According to the legend, the Moslem ascetic who founded El-Hemel at the end of 16th century stopped beside a spring for the night, and stuck his stick in the earth. Next day he tried to pull it out to go on his way but found that it had taken root and was shooting buds. He saw in this an indication of the will of God and made his dwelling in the spot. (Eliade, 1963:370)

“Come not nigh higher”, said the Lord to Moses, “put off the shoes from the feet; for the place where on thou standest is holy ground”. Hence the innumerable rites and prescriptions relative to entering the temple, of which we have plentiful evidences among the Semites and other Mediterranean peoples. (Eliade, 1963:371)

Sacred places often comprise either a natural feature like mountains, a river or a particular natural element like rocks, trees, etc. They can also be created by human intervention on a space to which sets of people have attached some value or they can be a human response to certain natural phenomena and features.

2.1.2 Types of Sacred Places

Humans never choose a sacred place. Instead, humans discover them. In other words, a sacred place in some way reveals itself. This discovery can be a direct identification of the
element or could be through traditional techniques originating out of and based upon a system of cosmologies or by recognising the human’s dependence on some things.

Primeval humans often used to discover these places by living in union with the land and in time understanding the nature of it. They identified the aspects of the land that were crucial for their existence. The principles of cosmology or some sign of nature often indicated these spots. One often finds a tree in a landscape, stones or unpredictable movements in nature, which, when recognised, may lead to formation of a place that would be termed as sacred. There is also often a consequential attachment and the place turns into a place for human settlement like a dwelling, a town or a city. Many important known sacred places of the world have been established around or over prominent and life-giving natural features. Benaras, in northern India, has been established on the banks of Ganges river up in the Himalayas, Gangotri and Yamunotri; which are the mouths of the rivers Ganga and Yamuna respectively, are among the known sacred places in the world. Similarly, many Aboriginal communities of Australia consider Uluru (Ayers Rock) as sacred. Mount Fuji and Lake Yamanaka, in Japan, are the potent sacred symbols of Japanese culture (Molynieux, 1995:23-71). The concept of ‘Makam’, in Israel revolves around and includes natural elements (Stein, 1990:123-131). Their entities are termed sacred. Thus they have been formally shaped and developed to perpetuate this notion of sacred place.

This does not mean that only natural features and phenomena and their identification lead to making a place sacred. In Eliades Sacred and the Profane (1959:370) Robertson Smith states, “all sanctuaries are consecrated by a theophany”. Eliade further extends this remark to all the dwellings of hermits or saints and to all human habitations (1963:370). All the places where saints lived, prayed and were buried are in turn sanctified and referred to as sacred. The birth places of legendary figures or heroes of history, places where important events have taken place; all these are referred as sacred in many cultures and hence command a high respect and are highly valued in those cultures. Even at the individual level, the house where one is born, a particular tree in the backyard, an ancestor’s house; all these maybe sacred to an individual and carry a greater meaning in that individual’s life.

2.1.3 The Making of a Sacred Place.

It is important to recognise that the making of a sacred place, and the type of development in a sacred place are dependent on the philosophical standpoint of that culture, civilization, group of people or the individual that see the place as sacred. These participants developed an understanding of sacredness, based on their philosophical viewpoint. This understanding can
be seen in their buildings, towns, cities as well as all their art forms. There are many instances where a sacred place is recreated – a copy of an archetype is made and duplicated. This can be an abstract reconstruction or symbolic representation of mountains, trees or a particular natural setting.

The primeval humans believed that the whole earth was sacred not because pious people chose to regard it as such, but because it was believed that the landscape was ruled by the spirits. These spirits were the creative power of the universe and manifested themselves in all the phenomena of nature, shaping fertility and the lives of animals and human. Rocks, trees, mountains, wells and springs were recognised as receptacles for spirit, displaying in season their various properties, fertile, therapeutic and oracular. For example in the Shinto beliefs of Japan, rocks, trees, rivers and other aspects of natural world have been deeply invested with spirit of life. For the Aboriginal people of Australia, the landscape has been drawn into a complex system of interconnecting social and religious beliefs informed by the idea of the Dreaming – the time beyond memory when ancestral beings roamed the land, forming its features (Molyneaux, 1995:6).

Consequently, this belief evoked a sense of respect for all the elements and the phenomena of nature. Primeval humans believed in staying within the laws of nature and wandered all over the earth’s surface and enjoyed the play and creations on earth of these spirits. For them the whole earth was a paradise where they could evoke and experience god anywhere and everywhere.

With the shift from a nomadic life-style to a settled life-style, our ancestors felt deprived by the experiences of nature which their ancestors enjoyed. Therefore they started replicating these sacred landscapes around themselves. They started demarcating the spaces, which were considered sacred, from, the other spaces that were then considered as profane. While previously, as discussed, it was believed every part of the earth was sacred as the spirits and the god inhabited it. Spaces that were demarcated as sacred places were consciously sanctified. Gods were invoked at proper orchestrated temporal points or phases by magic and rituals. The old deities, sun & moon, regulated the farmers’ years, while festivals and sacrifice sanctified the place. The sites of the tombs, temples, houses and all man-made features of the landscape were located in relation to the paths and centres of the earth. Human settlement led to the establishment of various cosmological theories and philosophies that in turn gave birth to various symbolic gestures. These symbolic gestures evolved out of philosophical beliefs regarding the creation of the world and the relative position of humans and gods. Within this philosophical understanding, sacred places were often established and seen as the junctions between the earth, heaven and the underworld. Many traditional societies describe these sacred
places as been the ‘centre of the world’ - from where the journey to the abode of gods is the shortest (Eliade, 1963:375). These philosophies were represented pictorially or in the spatial configuration of buildings, cities or towns that were considered sacred or were established to be sacred as they represented their idea of ‘world’ and the cosmos. Following the establishment of a sacred place, a set of myths, stories and rituals associated with the place often evolved to communicate messages, meanings and the importance of that place to people.

As noted previously the identification of a place as sacred can occur on an individual level or at the level of the whole culture. There are sacred places that evolved from the presence of a natural feature or that may have been accidentally created by humans. There are sacred places that evolved from legends or heroes of history, who would have been either living there, or may have performed an important act, or would have just visited these places. There are instances where a natural feature is linked to a legend and both these factors identify the place as sacred. There is a possibility that such a link is either created to convey the importance of the natural feature in that context, or that there were actual instances where the two were linked. In Northern India, the presence of a hill in the region is associated with Krishna, one of the legends in mythology. This is an example where it is difficult to determine which of the two features were of primary importance. On the other hand, Buddha is associated with the fig tree (Ficus religiosa). It is believed that he attained his enlightenment under a fig tree, which in India it is also known as the bodi tree. Therefore, the tree is often used as a symbolic representation of Buddha.

2.1.4 Religious based Sacred Places

Sacred places are often religious-based where the philosophy of a civilisation has caused its origin. There are other sacred places, which could be patriotic in nature or could be based on an individual’s emotional experiences.

Religious-based sites and places are sacred places that possess religious value. Myths, stories and rituals are the means by which the importance and meaning of a particular sacred place is conveyed to the masses. The other major phenomenon associated with sacred places of a religious nature is ‘pilgrimage’. Pilgrimage is a form of journey made to a sacred place, or around it, as part of a ritual. The place embodies a belief or possesses a spatial charisma that entices people be near the place from where a journey to the abode of god is shortest or follows a particular alignment. Concepts and types of pilgrimage will be further discussed in the next section of this chapter.
The vast expanse of the earth’s surface led humans, to establish a sense of orientation, a context to which they could relate and with which they could make a world of their own. This idea of ‘world’ was to be nearer to the abode of god, a link with the cosmos that would be divine and make them comfortable in the face of the overpowering nature. The establishments made could be a representation of a natural feature or any other form of nature and thus then would be developed into a sacred place and therefore a ‘centre of the world’ would be established.

We therefore have a sequence of religious concepts and cosmological images that are inseparably connected and form a system that may be called the “system of the world”, prevalent in the traditional societies:

a) a sacred place constitutes a break in homogeneity of space.

b) this break is symbolised by an opening by which passage from one cosmic region to another is made possible (from earth to heaven and vice versa).

c) communication with heaven is expressed by one or another of certain images, all of which refer to axis mundi; pillars, ladder trees, mountains etc.

d) around this cosmic axis lies the world, hence the axis is located “in the middle”, at the “naval of the earth”, which is the centre of the world. (Eliade, 1963:375).

With time and settlement of the human race, sacred places were artificially created by the means of conscious sanctification of the created place/object through rituals, myths and stories that were often based on the religious beliefs of a particular civilisation. Sacred places were often identified or established by the means of geomancy, cosmology, astrology etc and these were represented by symbolic gestures and forms, which were thus considered sacred.

It is important to consider the position of ‘sacred places’, as they are amongst the major spiritual centres of the world. Every civilisation has a series of sacred places that are worshipped and many people pay visits in the form of pilgrimage. In order to understand and develop a place with such strong meanings and values, it is therefore imperative to understand the rationale behind their existence, their constituents and their evolution in a space-time context.

3. KRISHNA AND THE ENVIRONMENT

Before we discuss Krishna as an environmentalist in detail, it is imperative to provide a brief introduction to Krishna and his philosophies.

In Hinduism there are three prime deities, Brahma, Vishnu and Shiva; the creator, the preserver and the destroyer of the Universe. Shiva and Vishnu have always been the more prominent deities that have attracted many followers forming many sects, while Brahma has always been in the background. Shiva is the supreme god of Shaivism, as Vishnu is of
Vaishnavism. It should be clearly understood that Shaivism and Vaishnavism are not basically opposite creeds, rather they represent different lines of religious thought. Shiva has not revealed himself in the form of avatars (incarnations) as Vishnu has, yet he is livingly present to his worshippers in various forms. Vishnu has always personified himself in some form and arrived on earth to help humans when they are in need. Vishnu exists outside the material realm as the creator and he exists within every being as the super soul. He also enters this world as an avatar, ‘one that descends itself’, to restore balance whenever his presence is needed. (Prime, 1997:36).

Whenever there is a decline of religion and rise of irreligion, I incarnate myself. To protect the good, to destroy the wicked and to re-establish principles, I appear in every age. (Bhagavad Gita 4.7-8)*

It is believed that Vishnu had ten incarnations, nine out of which have already appeared on the earth and the tenth is yet to come. The ten avatars of Vishnu are of particular interest as he has progressively taken a more developed form with each of his incarnations and its order has a meaning to convey. It is believed Vishnu incarnates in all species, from fish, tortoise & boar to half animal, half man and finally in human form. This particular sequence in a way also reflects the theory of evolution of living species; it parallels the evolution of life of human beings and the presence of every creation within humans. It also conveys that the all other living creatures have an important role to play in life of humans. They are not simply dumb beasts meant for satisfying human needs and appetites; they are living expressions of the spirits and of the presence of god.

Of these ten incarnations of Vishnu, one of the avatar’s is called Krishna. Since the Gupta period i.e. 2AD, there is evidence that Krishna is the most popular deity in the Indian traditions. Krishna seems to have been referred to and more commonly known as the charioteer and the preacher of Arjuna in the battlefield of Mahabharta*, where he preaches Bhagavad Geeta to his disciple Arjuna. In this instance Krishna is known as the King of Dwarka, a town in western India. But the most interesting and earthly quality of Krishna has been described in Srimad Bhagavat*. This tells of his childhood and his youthful days in the northern India region called Vraja.

Shrimad Bhagvat is an account written in 9 AD (Gupta, 1997). The text recounts the various teachings of Krishna and it has explicit explanations of Krishna’s life in Braj. It is considered the most authoritative account of Krishna’s life and teachings by the Vaishnavas and other Hindu cults.
It is in *Shrimad Bhagavat* that unlike the supreme incarnate Vishnu, the god is described as a more mundane human who is a simple forest cowherd, who splashes in the river, plays the bamboo flute and dances with his friends and peacocks in the natural forests (Prime, R., 1997:54). He is shown as a great lover of nature and therefore whoever is devoted to Krishna could never be callous towards the environment (Srivatsa, 1999).

Srivatsa Goswami, a Vaishnava scholar and devotee who has established his own study institute in the pilgrimage town of Vrindavan, has considered the role of Krishna to be the greatest chapter in environmental history. According to Srivatsji, the worth of Krishna and his life could be considered as the greatest chapter in environmental history. “Krishna performed religious worship by worshipping nature” (Srivatsa,pers.com. 1999). There are only two accounts where he himself performed the worship and both the occasions he worshipped nature. The first occasion was when he worshipped Govardhan Hill near Vrindavan. Srivatsaji claims that description of this event given in the *Srimad Bhagavatam* is the essence of Hindu philosophy.

*Krishna and Balram were coming home with the cows at the dusk. They saw all the elders gathered on the doorstep of their house arranging for a festival to worship Indra. They asked their father what was going on, but he replied, “this is not your business – you go inside and eat”.*

‘So Krishna went inside and told his mother that he would not eat anything. Eventually his father relented and called him back to explain what they were doing. He said, “We are people whose livelihood is based on agriculture. We trade in the produce of the lands and cows, both of which depend on rainwater. Indra is the lord of water. The rain clouds are his agents, so we have to pay him tax. Every year we arrange this festival”.

‘Then Krishna replied in a very unexpected way. He denounced the cowherd men’s act of religious worship. He said,

“All creatures are born by force of karma. By force of karma alone they die. By force of karma they experience pleasure and pain if there is any god who dispenses pleasure and pain, he only rewards or punishes us according to our actions. Therefore, don’t make a show of worshipping Indra, because by the law of karma you are in control of your destiny.’

‘Krishna spoke like this to shock his father and the cowherd men. He wanted to teach them that they were all responsible for their own actions. The law of karma is that
by our practical actions we create our future, good or bad. It was therefore more important to care for the hills and cows, and Krishna, than to worship Indra.’

Srivatsa explains:

‘This is the key to the environmental problem today. We depend on others – government agencies, the UN Environmental Fund, or some local civil government – to do something; we shift the responsibility to somebody else when all the time it is we who are responsible for our own predicament. Krishna spoke like this to destroy the ignorance of his own people saying, “Your environment is your concern, it is your duty”. In the words of the Srimad Bhagavatam:

My dear father, our home is not in the crisis or towns or villages. Being forest dwellers, we always live in the forest and among the hills. Therefore begin a festival to honor of the cows, the Brahmans and Govardhan Hill. (Srimad Bhagavatam, 10.24.24-25)

Srivatsji further expands the quotes:

‘Then Krishna went with them and worshipped the hill. In order to convince them he assumed a gigantic mystical form and merged himself with the hill, demanding, “Feed me more!” He asked for the worship to be given equally to the mountain, the cows and the Brahmans as well as himself.’

Of all the devotees, this Govardhana Hill is the best! O my Friends, this hill supplies Krishna and Balrama, along with their calves, cows and cowherd friends, with all kinds of necessities – water for drinking, very soft grass, caves, fruits, flowers and vegetables. In this way the hill offers respects to the lord. Being touched by the lotus feet of Krishna and Balrama. Govardhan Hill appears very jubilant.

(Srimad Bhagavatam, 10.21.18)

The above is a clear example of Krishna projecting the importance of a local hill in a region. He is explaining the importance of the hill and also asking the people of the region to respect the ecology of the area and the natural elements on which their survival and the economy of the region depend. In order to ensure respect and maintenance of the hill, he
himself appeared as the hill and convinced people to worship it by saying that they are worshiping him by worshipping the hill.

According to Srivatsa, the second instance when Krishna worshipped of nature was when he prayed to the sun:

‘Krishna’s son Sambha once got leprosy. Krishna advised that, rather than try to treat his disease themselves, they should get it treated by the sun god. This is the history of the famous sun temple at Konark in Orissa – where his son was treated. These are the two occasions when Krishna worshipped: one was a mountain, the other was the sun!

‘Elsewhere Krishna cleaned the river. He defeated the serpent Kaliya and purified the Yamuna River. He swallowed the forest fire to protect the forest. He looked after the cows. He spoke to the birds in their own language. Krishna was always protecting nature’.

Krishna praised the trees of Vrindavan:

Just look at these most fortunate trees of Vrindavan. They have dedicated their lives to the welfare of others. Individually they are tolerating all kinds of natural disturbances, such as hurricanes, torrents of rain, scorching heat and piercing cold, but they are careful to relieve our fatigue and give us shelter. My dear friends, I think they are glorified in this birth as trees. They are so careful to give shelters to others that they are like noble, highly elevated charitable men who never deny charity to one who approaches them. No one is denied shelter by these trees. They supply various kinds of facilities to human society, such as leaves, flowers, fruit, shade, roots, bark, flavor extracts and fuel. (Srimad Bhagavatam, 10.22.32-35)

It is important to note in the above discussion that the importance of a local ecological setup is projected with the help of a mythological god who is shown as a simple cowherd and who involves himself in mundane daily activities. The Vaishnavas teachings are completely based on environmental management and conservation and Krishna was used as an icon or figurehead to convey their teachings.

“Srivatsji’s explanation of Vaishnavism teaching contradicts the traditional western perception of Hinduism as a religion of fatalism” (Prime, R., 1997:57). According to Srivatsji, Krishna by his own example rejected ritualistic worship in favour of an earth-based practice of religion that recognises the sacred in the everyday relationship between human beings and their
environment. To live in harmony with any living being, to rejoice in the beauty of a natural life of simplicity, this was Krishna’s practice of religion.

Prof. Chhaya (pers. com, 1999) explains that according to Sanskrit etymology the word Krishna “means establishment of cosmological and environmental sciences”. Each of the letters of the word Krishna in Sanskrit language has a meaning, which collectively form the above definition.

Srivatsji (perscom, 1999) claims that Krishna’s chapter in the Indian tradition is the key to the understanding of cultural ecology. He concludes by saying, “The best way to teach environmental concern is through Krishna’s life. Krishna is the only savior of the environment – which is the sum total’.

**4. THE BRAJ**

The term ‘Braj’ does not refer to an area with clearly defined boundaries. It has also never been used as an official name for a political territory or an administrative division (Entwistle, 1987:1). Braj is a derivation of the Sanskrit word ‘Vraja’ which means ‘an enclosure or station or herdsmen’ as used in the older accounts of Krishna’s childhood. More commonly known as Braj, the modern priests describe it as ‘a place where cows roam’. This vernacular nomenclature endorses the use of ‘Braj’ as a landscape in which Krishna grazed his cattle and the spent his early childhood and youth. The Braj is instead a area possessing a collection of religious, cultural and physical or geographical components. The cultural and physical aspects of Braj are a product of the religious environment and beliefs attached to the place. These aspects create the cultural landscape, giving it an identity of its own and creating an identifiable region which is bound together by culture and rituals, rather than by any political boundaries (Gupta, 1997:20).

Thus the Braj is a region of cultural identity. The followers of Krishna consider the land of Braj as the ‘lila kshetra’ the playground of Lord Krishna. It is this profound association with Krishna that adds to the cultural dimension of this otherwise ordinary region. This association is manifested in almost every feature of the socio-cultural and physical environment of Braj. From daily rituals in temples to important festivals, this association with Krishna is universal and it goes beyond even the physical environment (Gupta, 1997: 10).

The cultural landscape of Braj has witnessed the superimposition of mythology over its expanse. The mythology promotes Krishna in almost every component of Braj’s cultural landscape, now making myth and reality inseparable. A study of Braj could demonstrate how
the local ecological conditions of a region, like topography, flora, fauna etc., were appropriated within the legend of Krishna. The myths, stories and rituals were created to convey this aptness.

Although many studies have considered the Krishna cult, there was no comprehensive account in English on Braj until the mid eighties. According to Entwistle (1987,XV), a major contribution was made by Frederick Salmon Growse (1837-93), who was District Magistrate at Mathura, from 1871-77. He had an antiquarian interest in local history and culture, was a keen amateur architect, and was responsible for unearthing, salvaging and preserving many fine examples of ancient local sculpture. Until fairly recently there were few Westerners who attempted to appreciate Krishna from the standpoint of a Hindu devotee. Growse, for example, allowed his Catholicism to colour his assessment of the ethics and behaviour of local devotees; others tended to discuss Krishna rather superficially in terms of classical mythology. For examples, authors like Joseph Tieffenthaler considered the songs and stories about Krishna to be indecent and deemed them more appropriate for 'ein muthwilliger Satyr oder Faun' (Entwistle, 1987:XVI). In recent decades several scholars have undertaken studies into specific aspects of the culture, history and social life of Braj. The Miracle Plays of Mathura by Norvin Hein (1972), provides a detailed account of the Rasa lila tradition, beginning with a general introduction to the district and its religious activity. John Stratton Hawley (1981) also paints a vivid picture of the atmosphere of Vrindaban in the first chapter of At Play with Krishna: Pilgrimage Dramas from Brindaban.


Much of this literature is written from the perspective of a sentimental and emotional attachment to Krishna. Entwistle in Braj: Centre of Krishna Pilgrimage, (1987) provides the most authoritative account of the social, cultural, mythological and historical information of Braj. Entwistle remained impervious to theology and mysticisms while providing fairly neutral and unbiased account on Braj. His contribution to the study of Braj has been to examine all available primary sources in terms of texts relating to this landscape. By collating these sources he has produced a description of the pilgrimage circuit, presenting the itinerary in the form of a gazetteer. He has pruned away much of the whimsical or even fatuous detail given in many texts, retaining an occasional example in order to convey the flavour. Where his collated
sequence of places does not correspond to any particular pilgrimage itinerary, he has noted variations, diversions and omissions. His book could be considered a good foundation to understanding the various aspects of the region. This thesis has relied upon his factual information to inform this study, though it has been considered against other sources either written or oral.

David Habermans, Journey Through the Twelve Forests, (1994), is another account that has been able to convey the breadth of Braj culture and specifically pilgrimage aspects, and is used as a supportive text to Entwistle. Divay Gupta’s unpublished thesis (1997), is one of the first attempts to link Braj and its importance in Architecture and Landscape Architecture. He has been a major source of oral information in this thesis. Gupta’s written account is non-descriptive, and does not cover the depth of the subject, but talking to him reveals the greater depth of research, analysis and understanding he has pursued in Braj.

In the professional fields of architecture and landscape architecture, few academes profession have taken on a study of Braj. Nalini Thakur, Head of Department, Conservation at the School of Planning & Architecture (SPA), New Delhi and a practising Conservation Architect is involved with Braj but her concerns are more with the built heritage and its preservation. Mohd. Shaheer, Head of Landscape Architecture (SPA, New Delhi), is the only landscape architect involved with Braj. He and his students have carried out several studies in the region and have sought to document the actual physical conditions although their accuracy has been hampered due to lack of site plans and information. Prof. H D Chhaya, researcher, practising architect and an academician has been involved in Braj for many years, proposing an Educational Research Trust to promote and conserve the ‘Culture of Braj’. In the practice side of these professions, K T Ravindran, Head of Urban Design (SPA, New Delhi) has put forward various design proposals for specific sites but these are more localised solutions. K. B Jain, Architect and Head of Department, Urban Design (CEPT, Ahemdabad) has prepared a report for INTACH, a conservation society in India, but the approach has been more from a tourist perspective and is more concerned with the built heritage of the place.

Given the above, only Entwistle’s book can be considered as an authoritative account of the region.

3.2 Mythology of Braj
Braj is associated with the legend of Krishna. It is believed that 5000 years ago Krishna was born and spent his early youth in the region. Accordingly, the whole region of Braj is believed to have features and spaces either attributed to or associated with some aspect of
Krishna’s life. It is believed that Krishna relished and engaged with the natural beauty of the region and encouraged people to worship nature instead of gods (Srivatsa, 1999). The cultural landscape as a whole is “Invented and designed” to suit the legend of Krishna; sometimes even the legends are invented to suit the landscape (Gupta, 1997).

Orthodox Vaishnavas accept the notion that Krishna lived 5000 years ago and spent his initial years in Braj. The name Krishna appears in the Vedas that are considered the oldest texts in India. The oldest text giving us a continuous narrative of Krishna’s childhood is Harivamsa, a supplement to Mahabharata. Most scholars accept it as having been composed by 4th century (Entwistle, 1987:22). In the Mahabharata’s text, Krishna is a martial hero, in the Bhagavadgita he is rather solemn and aloof preacher, but in the Harivamsa he is more a playful figure as befits this rustic milieu in which he spent his childhood. A more concise narration of Krishna’s earlier years is given in the Vishnupurana probably composed some time between the 5th and 7th century.

The Bhagavatapurana, probably composed in the 9th or early 10th century, is accepted as the most authoritative account of Krishna’s life on earth. The Bhagavatapurana presents the adventures of Krishna as a divine play (lila) performed as a means of bestowing grace. It adapts these incidents which, in earlier sources, place Krishna in a rather dubious light, diminish his divinity, or are morally disconcerting. Rather than identified with Vishnu, or the transcendent Brahman, Krishna is clearly acknowledged in Bhagavatapurana as the Supreme Being of whom all other gods are partial manifestations. “Its many digressions explain the import of the story and the nature of devotion in terms of Vedanta theology and Sankhya ontology” (Entwistle, 1987:23-24). The Bhagavatapurana also makes use of terminology borrowed from poetics and lays stress on Krishna’s transcendent beauty and the devotional sentiment. The earlier texts appear to have been composed primarily to entertain the listeners but Bhagavatapurana was more concerned to edify them by portraying Krishna as a divine being who bestows salvation on those who adore him.

3.2.1 The Story of Krishna – A brief mythological outlook
All accounts of the early life of Krishna say that he was born in the city of Mathura. On the very night he was born, Krishna was smuggled out of Mathura and placed in the care of the herdsman Nanda. The scriptural sources include various environments in which Krishna grew up, but none refer to precise geographical locations as known today (Entwistle, 1987:27).

The Bhagavatapurana begins its narrative of the birth of Krishna with the earth, in the form of cow, seeking divine intervention in order to be relieved of demons and tyrants. Vishnu decides to be born as Krishna among the yadavs, the local tribe prevalent in Braj. Krishna’s
main task was to overthrow the wicked Kansa, who had deposed his father Ugrasena and usurped control of Mathura. When it was prophesied that Kansa would be slain by the eighth child born to Devaki, he imprisoned both her and Vasudeva and killed their first six children as soon as they were born. Vishnu, by means of his magic power, in the form of Yogamaya, caused Ananta to be conceived as the 7th child of Devaki, but had the embryo transferred to the womb of Rohini, a second wife of Vasudeva. Krishna was born in the form of the eighth child in prison, but Vishnu’s magic power caused the guards to fall asleep and Vasudeva’s fetters to be loosened, allowing him to escape with his son. Vasudeva took Krishna to Nanda’s encampment, a place now identified with the township of Gokul. Vasudeva exchanged Krishna for the apparently stillborn daughter of Nanda and returned with her to prison. On hearing that Devaki had given birth, Kansa went to her cell, seized the daughter and dashed her against a stone.

From there onwards his foster parents, Nanda and Yashodha raised Krishna. The story follows the life of Krishna’s childhood among the herdsmen in a rustic environment and describes various adventures and tales of Krishna’s life. These tales are not in chronological sequence but are more situational incidents in a haphazard order. Krishna’s image as a divine lover as he moved into his youth has become the most popular tale of his myth. In his early youth he journeyed to Mathura to kill Kansa and it is believed that he never returned to Braj. Krishna became the king of Mathura and later went to Dwarka as a king and martial hero. He appears as a preacher and a peacemaker in the epic of Mahabharata and preaches Arjuna about the philosophy of life that is written in the Bhagavatgita.

Figures 2-4

3.2.2 The Evolution of Mythology within Braj.

It is accepted at the scholarly level and by historians, that the mythological Braj existed much before the physical Braj came into being (Gupta, 1997). The former represents Braj as a lotus signifying the body of Vishnu. The lotus was considered as a ‘meditative space’ of Krishna. It was not a physical entity, but was only a graphical representation of a spiritual space until the
15th century (Gupta, 1997). The development of Braj took place in southern India and with the compilation of Bhagvatpurana (9-10 AD). The Krishna legend was revived and much elaborated on in the new compilation. The only description that the mythology gave was of Yamuna flowing in the centre of Braj, with Gokul at its east and Vrindavan at its west. Mathura was the only settlement located at the centre along the river. The Govardhan Hill was in the middle of the region where the river flowed nearby. Other religious texts like Vayu Piurans, Narad Puran, and Mahatmayas came about following the Bhagvatpurana. These were written and compiled within Braj. These included descriptions of the physical places and features within Braj, as places associated with legend of Krishna. The mythical meditative Braj started taking a physical form in the region around Mathura and was known as Mathura Mandala or Braj Mandala.

The work of identifying the places of Krishna was completed and fully compiled by Narayan Bhatt in his book Bhakti Vilas (1552). Bhatt listed all places within Braj that had some association with Krishna and suggested rituals to perform. A sequential pilgrimage route to visit these places is now called the Ban Yatra – forest pilgrimage (Entwistle, 1987). Bhatt, therefore, contributed to physically defining Krishna’s Braj as well as providing the ‘path’ to experience it.
3.3.1 The Extent of Braj.

The Braj region spreads across three Indian states. This expanse includes the district of Mathura in Uttar Pradesh, the district of Bharatpur in Rajasthan and parts of the Faridabad district in Haryana. Two natural features define geographical Braj – the spur of the Aravallis Ranges to the west and River Yamuna to the east. These features more or less contain Braj. Though there is uncertainty about the extent of Braj.

Mythically, Braj is represented as a Mandala (diagram) and is called Mathura Mandala or the Braj Kshetra (region). In this representation Braj is a circular entity of 20 yojana (measuring unit for distance) with River Yamuna flowing north to south of its centre with Mathura City having
the central place. In reality Mathura City is more towards the south and the Yamuna flows more towards the east of the district. The area is somewhat circular with only Baldev (the south east corner) and Badri (the western point) projecting out of the circle. The physical extent of Braj is more defined by the pilgrimage which is generally about 300km. The extent of the pilgrimage circuit varies between different sects and accounts. Therefore it is impossible to formalise any line demarcating the Braj area on a map.

3.3.2 Components of Braj.

The region of Braj includes towns, villages, hills, forests and groves. Each one has its importance mythologically as well as historically. Mathura is considered to be the birthplace of lord Krishna. Vrindavan, Gokul, Govardhan, Deeg, Kaman, Barsana, Nandgaon, etc, are other important places. Kokilaban, Mahaban are few of the forests that are major components of Braj. According to Entwistle (1987:466) there are about 103 such destinations varying in importance. Each one is linked to Krishna and his activities in some way or the other, though the number of places varies in every sect.

3.3.3 Physical Features

the Braj region is located on the flat plains of the River Yamuna and Aravali ranges. The average altitude of the region is about 200m above sea level. The two main topographical features of the region are the River Yamuna to the east and the spur of Aravalis Ranges to the west. The southwest region is an isolated rocky outcrop called Govardhan Hill. The River Yamuna forms alluvial plains along its eastern and western banks. These fertile strips of land are susceptible to inundation during the rainy seasons. According to ancient texts, Braj was a beautiful and fertile land covered with woods that flourished because of heavy rainfall.

A rocky region with low hills extends from the north-western to the western part of the Braj. Some of these hills have considerable religious significance due to their association with Krishna. The hills, Giriraj or Govardhan Parvat, are in the town Govardhan. Nandeshwar or Rudragiri at Nandgaon and Brahmagiri at Barsana are other hills. The Rudragiri is a part of Nandgaon village, where Krishna’s foster father, Nand Gope, brought up Krishna. It is about 45m high and about half a kilometre in length. There is an important temple on top of Brahmagiri and a settlement on its slopes. Kamgiri is a small hillock at Kamvan. Although it falls within Rajasthan State, it forms a part of the Braj area. The small hill of Charan, about 9km northeast of Nandgaon, forms a part of the village Choti Baithan. Followers of Krishna believe that this hill has two foot impressions of Krishna.
3.3.4 The Landscape.

In the 14th to 15th century, when the cult of Krishna was emerging within Braj, pilgrims saw only Mathura, the River Yamuna and Govardhan Hill as the features associated with Krishna. But to an unsophisticated devotee, it was difficult to grasp anything but the literal expressions of the myth. This led to the transformation of Braj into a ‘Theme Park’ about the Krishna legend. In the 14th century it was more of a forest-land with very few settlements. Thus it was the natural heritage of the region that propagated the legend of Krishna. It was obvious for the 14th century scholars to have Krishna identified more with natural features, like hills and forests than with cities and settlements, as it was believed that the natural features were more permanent features than the man-made features. (Gupta, D, 1997)

At the same time, for religious sanctions changes were made within the Puranas in 14th century to incorporate the landscape of Braj. Thus Braj became the region with 12 main forests called Vans and 24 secondary forests called Upvans, and the third type were the groves called the Khandis. Later Khandis were divided like Jhari Khendi, Raksha etc, to include every possible forest or grove in Braj. Thus there were 137 forested areas, all associated with some incident of Krishna’s life. The placement of these forests or vans within Braj was more as a result of existing topographical or geographical features than adherence to the Puranas and other religious texts. An attempt was made to imprint the written text on the land and in the process, a few on site adjustments were made to suit the local conditions.

The local vegetation was also incorporated within the Krishna legend. Thus Kadamb (Anthocaphalus cadamb), which grew abundantly in the region and is among the hardiest trees in India, became the favorite of Krishna. Some unique trees like Dhak (Flame of Forest, Butea monosperma) acquired legends due to Krishna’s activities. In this instance he ate yogurt in the leaves of Dhak.

Nomenclature acquired clues to places mentioned in religious texts like Nandgaon, which is the gaon (village) of Nanda, the foster father of Krishna, to suit the mythology. The word Bhadravan, which in the religious texts is a Banyan forest near Govardhan, is today across the Yamuna River near Mat because of presence of some very old Banyan trees there.

Entwistle (1987:2) states that four hundred years ago the Mughal Emperor Akbar was able to go tiger hunting in the forests around Mathura. His son Jahangir, in his autobiography, records the shooting of troublesome tigers on two occasions.

The District Magistrate of Mathura in 1871-77, Frederick Salmon Growse (1874), in his District Gazetteer of Mathura, written a century ago, described the herds of deer as being ‘so numerous that the traveller will seldom go many miles in any direction along a bye road without
seeing a black-buck, followed by his harem, bound across the path’ (27). Fifty years earlier European traveller Emily Eden had written that between Kumher and Bharatpur ‘antelopes abound, there are hundreds of them to be seen at a time’ (Entwistle, 1987:3). It is believed that around mid 19th century, the region suffered from famine. Growse (1874:74) notes that this year was invariably cited as the date when land reclamation began on a large scale, following the opening of new roads, as famine relief work. Reclamation works were continued with the opening of the Agra canal for irrigation in 1874. Enwistle believes that the land reclamation process continued until 1962 with the beginning of Govardhan drain. (1987:3)

Today there are no luxuriant forests lining the banks of the Yamuna, no profusion of exotic flowers, and no breeze bearing the fragrance of sandalwood. The 20th century pilgrim finds a flat expanse of agricultural land that is dusty in the dry months and muddy and waterlogged during the rains. Elderly residents of Braj will confirm the rapid acceleration of land clearance and deforestation that has taken place since their childhood. There has been widespread impoverishment of the grazing land know as Rakhyya or Kadamb Khandi. The latter denotes an abundance of Kadamba trees but the only places where any kind of woodland exists today are the groves at Piyasoba, Kokilaban and Biharban.

An occasional thicket or pond fringed with trees reminds one that this was once a lush forest or Vrindavan. Even though there is hardly a trace of his mythological environment, the presence of Krishna remains alive in the heart and minds of the people and his words are firmly imprinted on the land of Braj.

For human settlement, local topography was the determinant rather than myths. Settlements have been built on various mounds or on elevated ground due to the frequent flooding. A temple, at the highest point served as the focus around which the whole settlement grew. Apart from flooding during monsoons, there was a scarcity of water throughout the year. Thus a system of rainwater harvesting was devised using tanks and ponds in low-lying areas of the settlement. These ponds and tanks were protected by religious sanctions associated with Krishna and were included in the parikrama (the circumambulatory walk to perform pilgrimage), establishing their importance not only functionally but also symbolically. Thus oral traditions developed, like not using water from these tanks for cleaning and washing, and it was the responsibility of the user to keep these places clean and pure.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Years</th>
<th>Scholars &amp; religious Leader</th>
<th>Events in Braj</th>
<th>Pilgrimage and Building scenario</th>
<th>Texts written</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1420-1490</td>
<td>Nimbakcharya Madhavendra Puri</td>
<td>Shimathji discovered near Govardhan by Madhavendra Puri.</td>
<td>No account of pilgrimage.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Table 1. Vaishnava’s sects who were involved in Braj. (Haberman 1994, Entwistle, 1987, Gupta, 1997)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Date</th>
<th>Event</th>
<th>Notes</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1486-1549</td>
<td>Chatinaya and his disciples Gopal Bhatt Raghunath Das.</td>
<td>Formed Gaudiya Sampraday (sect). Visited all over Braj Established Radhakund and Shyamkund at Govardhan.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1530</td>
<td>Narayan Bhatt</td>
<td>Architect / Landscape Architect of Braj Pilgrimage Established rules for performing pilgrimage. Established all the forests within the region. Named pilgrimage of Braj as ‘Ban Yatra’ (journey through forest). Compiled book, 'Vraj Bhakti Vilas’ in 1552. It is a written account of all the developments made in the region as well as the rules for performing the pilgrimage.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1550</td>
<td>Vittainath</td>
<td>Formed new sect, Pushtrimarg. Performed and popularised pilgrimage in Braj.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

5. MANAGEMENT OF THE BRAJ TODAY

Braj is experienced and understood through its rituals and culture that are reflections of the mythology prevalent in that region. Braj is a unique cultural landscape that is the product of the beliefs and lifestyles of that region. It is a landscape that is not only to be seen but also to be read and experienced, and as part of it. The use of symbols and rituals in order to control the environment of Braj add value to that landscape. These continue to be used by the people in both their practical day-to-day life and their spiritual enactments. It could be said that Braj is an important learning region in the field of ecological conservation, preservation and enhancement. The ‘health’ of the land is not only preserved and conserved, but has also been enhanced and made richer by its association with Krishna. The scholars and sadhus (saints) of 1500 AD have been successful in not only making people understand the ecological merit and its importance, but also have managed to celebrate the very matrix of the environment through myth, stories, and rituals. The sacred and the physical Braj are inseparable. The landscape is an expression of cultural values; a cultural record written in the landscape within which social links and activities and designs make statements about former generations and the history of the place. It is a social-cultural and religious product, the value system of which promotes the wise use of natural resources in an attempt to achieve a greater quality of life.

Braj is a region where a mental landscape was transformed physically on the land. The love play of Krishna with his companions was conceived in a very sensuous and amorous landscape. The 1500 AD religious leaders were able to successfully transform this mental
landscape setting into reality by establishing the whole region as ‘designed forest’, where the stage was set, and in a way the legends of Krishna were recalled, and people were given the chance to participate in them. The purity of love was expressed as ultimate bliss and was conveyed in an equally pure environment. A pure environment was considered an essential requirement for one’s mind to enjoy pure love.

Although myths and ritual activities are loaded with devotion, the symbols used to express them are typically pastoral. The realms of Braj are dynamic and open a luxuriant and decorative landscape that offers possibilities for satisfying our instincts. This congenial and continually fresh environment, with its cool and shady bowers, fragrant blossoms, pools and riverbanks is conducive to aesthetic and emotional delectionation. It is as Rosenmeyer, in Entwistle’s book (1987:89) says of the classical “locus amoenus”, ‘a highly selective arrangement of stage properties’ determined by the pastoral demand for freedom and pleasure. The providence of nature is a reflection of the purity of its participants: nature readily yields its bounty to those who live in sympathy with her; its fruits do not have to be striven after as in real life. In the poetic landscape of Braj the trees and creepers are hung with precious stones; Krishna can sow pearls in a field and produce pearl bearing trees. Whatever the folk culture of Braj might once have been, what we have seen evolving over the past few hundred years is a tradition of ‘staged’ re-enactment of Krishna legends.

According to Entwistle:

*Braj is a spiritual landscape in which the devotee may seek refuge from the trammels of mundane life by entering a world of pure feeling (bhava). This emphasis on rarefied emotion is probably why the Braj pastoral is even further removed from empirical world than its European counterparts.* (1991:123),

Unfortunately, it is believed that over the last 50 years, we have lost such authentic values towards love and the environment. Braj has also been effected by this change and possesses little of the suggested romanticised landscapes where one can feel the divine love play of Krishna. Due to insensitive government policies, deforestation, and the general fall of land values has made the Braj landscape a dead, dry flat expanse of land mostly with agricultural fields. The region now suffers from many ecological disturbances. No more is there is a concern for water restoration and harvesting; the tanks once built for such purposes are now silted up and floods are now a common feature after monsoons. Topsoil has degraded and the variety of flora and fauna is diminishing. The irony is that even this in state the region is associated with Krishna. Now the local people say that due to the absence of Krishna and degrading values, the
landscape has become depressed and has lost interest in life. Entwistle (1991) states that the modern devotees and pilgrim to Braj regard the disappearance of the lush poetic landscape as a symptom of inevitable degeneration. According to Srivatsa,

*Krishna is the only protector of Braj and he is only responsible for its destruction.* (1999:pers.com.)

![Image of Prem Sarovar](image)

*Figure 3. Prem Sarovar, a typical setting in Braj. (Anand, 1994)*

The landscape of Braj can be recognised as an ethnographical landscape under the definition of cultural landscapes that has been recognised by the UNESCO as having World Heritage status (Gupta, 1997). According to Gupta, Braj could be part of the world heritage, as per the international norms, as it is a unique continuing landscape which retains an active social role in contemporary society and is also an associative cultural landscape because of its powerful religious and cultural associations. Also, according to Gupta (1997), within Braj there is a ‘Cultural Route’ in the form of ‘Braj yatra’. There are, in fact, several routes which satisfy one of the criteria required for a site to be considered as a World Heritage site.

It is then our task to decipher this landscape properly, so that we can protect and add to it without destroying its autonomy and authenticity.
### Sacred Sites at Govardhan. (Source, Toomey, 1994)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Type of Site</th>
<th>Description</th>
<th>Location</th>
<th>Worshipped by</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>I. Lila-Sthal</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(Places associated with Krishna lila)</td>
<td>Place where annakut was offered, Place where Krishna slew the bull Arishtha</td>
<td>Anyor Govardhan, Shyamkund</td>
<td>Pushtimarg, Folk tradition</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Place of dan-lila</td>
<td>Dig-Mathura road as it passes over Govardhan hill</td>
<td>All traditions</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Site of midday lila of Radha and Krishna</td>
<td>Radhakund</td>
<td>Gaudiyas</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Place where Indra performed abhiseha of Lord Krishna</td>
<td>Govind Kund</td>
<td>All traditions</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Site of maharas-lila</td>
<td>Candasarовар</td>
<td>Pushtimarg</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Place where Krishna grazed cattle and where he fashioned cups (donas) made of leaves, so that he and his companions could eat curds.</td>
<td>Shyam Dhak</td>
<td>Pushtimarg</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Place where Shrinathji played Holi</td>
<td>Gulal Kund, on the road leading from Jatipura to Gantholi</td>
<td>Pushtimarg</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Site of Shrinathji’s and Svaminjii’s marriage ceremony</td>
<td>Gantholi</td>
<td>Pushtimarg</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>II. Natural Objects</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(a) Govardhan hill</td>
<td>Krishna’s ’own true form’ (svarup) in nature</td>
<td>Govardhan</td>
<td>All traditions</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Mukhavind</td>
<td>Manasi Ganga, Jatipura</td>
<td>Folk tradition, Pushtimarg</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Giriraj ji ki jibhya</td>
<td>Radhakund</td>
<td>Folk tradition</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Govardhan stones bearing impressions of Krishna’s lila</td>
<td>stones with imprints of Krishna’s hands, flute, curd dish, and so on, including a stone that, when struck, echoes with the sound of his flute</td>
<td>all around the hill</td>
<td>All traditions</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dandauti shila</td>
<td>A stone in Jatipura in front of which pilgrims are expected to prostrate, to absolve themselves from any sin acquired by climbing on the hill</td>
<td>Jatipura</td>
<td>Pushtimarg</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(b) Bodies of water</td>
<td>Manasi Ganga</td>
<td>Govardhan</td>
<td>All traditions</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Radha- and Shyamkund</td>
<td>Radhakund</td>
<td>All traditions</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Narad Kund</td>
<td>On the parikrama road between Govardhan and Radhakund</td>
<td>All traditions</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Kusum Sarovar</td>
<td>Near Govardhan</td>
<td>All traditions</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Candasarовар</td>
<td>Near Parasoli</td>
<td>Pushtimarg</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Govind Kund</td>
<td>Near Anyor</td>
<td>All traditions</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
### Major Temple and Shrines

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Temple/Monument</th>
<th>Location</th>
<th>Belief Tradition</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Mukut Mukharavind temple</td>
<td>Manasi Ganga</td>
<td>Folk Tradition</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dan Ghati temple</td>
<td>Dig-Mathura road, Govardhan</td>
<td>Folk Tradition</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Daniray temple</td>
<td>Dig-Mathura road, Govardhan</td>
<td>Pushptimarg</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Handevji temple</td>
<td>Govardhan</td>
<td>All Traditions</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Manasa Devi temple</td>
<td>Govardhan</td>
<td>Folk Traditions</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cakreshwar temple</td>
<td>Govardhan</td>
<td>All Traditions</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lakshminarayan temple</td>
<td>Govardhan</td>
<td>Shrivaishnava Sampraday</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Raghunathdas Gosvami Samadhi</td>
<td>Radhakund</td>
<td>Gaudiyas</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Shrinathji haveli</td>
<td>Jatipura</td>
<td>Pushptimarg</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Shrigokulmathji haveli</td>
<td>Jatipura</td>
<td>Pushptimarg</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Shrimathurathji haveli</td>
<td>Jatipura</td>
<td>Pushptimarg</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Shrimadmanohanji haveli</td>
<td>Jatipura</td>
<td>Pushptimarg</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Giriraj ji ka mukharavind</td>
<td>Jatipura</td>
<td>Pushptimarg</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dhunki Dauji</td>
<td>opposite Surabhikund</td>
<td>Pushptimarg</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Punchari kau lautha</td>
<td>Punchari</td>
<td>Folk Tradition</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sudarshanji temple</td>
<td>Nimgaon</td>
<td>Nimbank Sampraday</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### Places of Sectarian Interest

#### (a) Samadhi

- Memorials containing ashes or relics of Gaudiya saints, such as Raghunathdas, Krishnadas, Brahmachari, Krishna das Kaviraj
- Memorials of Vallabha's gosvami descendants

- Radhakund | Gaudiyas
- Jatipura | Pushptimarg

#### (b) Bhajan Kutir

- Small huts where Gaudiya saints engaged in solitary bhajan and chanting of Krishna's name

- Radhakund, Govardhan, Govind Kund | Gaudiyas
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>(c) Baitthak</th>
<th>‘Resting spots’ where Caitanya, Jahnavi, Madhavendra Puri, Jiv Gosvami, and other saints are believed to have sat and preached, meditated, or composed some devotional work</th>
<th>Radhakund</th>
<th>Gaudiyas</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>‘Resting spots’ of Vallabha, Viththalnath, and other prominent gosvamis</td>
<td>Jatipura, Candrasarvar, Parasoli, Anyor, Govind Kund, Govardhan, Radhakund</td>
<td></td>
<td>Pushtrilag</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>‘Resting spot’ of Hit Harivamsh</td>
<td>Radhakund</td>
<td>Radhavallabh Sampraday</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>(d) Villages associated with Ashtachap poets</td>
<td>Residences of Surdas, Kumbhandas, Parmanandadas, Citswami, Govindswhami, Caturbhujdas, Krishnadas, and Nandadas</td>
<td>Candrasarvar, Jamnauta, Surabhiund, Rudrakund, Bilchuban, Manasi Ganga</td>
<td>Pushtrilag</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(e) Sites associated with Shrinathji icon</td>
<td>Saddu Pande's house</td>
<td>Anyor</td>
<td>Pushtrilag</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Place where Shrinathji was first manifest to Vallabhacarya</td>
<td>mukharavind at Jatipura</td>
<td></td>
<td>Pushtrilag</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Site of original Shrinathji haveli</td>
<td>Atop the hill at Jatipura</td>
<td></td>
<td>Pushtrilag</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Temporary hiding place of Shrinathji during the ‘Turkish’ invasion</td>
<td>Tod ka Gano, a thicket near Gantholi</td>
<td></td>
<td>Pushtrilag</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>