

**FOLKLORE OF BIHAR AND THE CULTURAL HERITAGE FESTIVAL
'VIKRAMSHILA MAHOTSAV' – AN OVERVIEW.**

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Folklore is the traditional heritage, tales, sayings, dances or art forms preserved amongst the people (Definition of Folklore in Webster Dictionary, <https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/folklore>). Folklore is expressive body of culture shared by a particular group of people and it encompasses the traditions common to that culture, sub-culture or group Folklore, (Folklore, <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Folklore>). These include oral traditions such as tales, proverbs and jokes. They include material culture, ranging from traditional building styles to handmade toys common to the group. Folklore also includes customary lore, the forms and rituals of celebrations. Each one of these, either singly or in combination, is considered a folklore artefact. Just as essential as the form, folklore also encompasses the transmission of these artefacts from one region to another or from one generation to the next. Hence, the academic study of folklore is called 'folkloristic'.

Festivals have become *ubiquitous* within tourism and it also acts as the marketing campaigns as they are a cultural mechanism for reputational gain or transformation of locale (Gibson et al. 2005. Music and Tourism: On the Road Again, Clevedon: Channel View). Festivals are cultural celebrations and have always occupied a special place in societies. Their celebratory roles, and the many cultural and social implications of ritual and festivity, have long attracted the interest of sociologists and anthropologists. Festivals always have a theme, and they have potentially very diverse programs and styles, all in pursuit of fostering a specific kind of experience.

Festival Studies can hence simplistically be defined as the study of festivals, but within the context of *event studies* as defined by author Getz (Getz 2005. 21), some elaboration is required. The core phenomenon is actually the festival experience and meanings attached to it. Bihar has a glorious past and rich cultural heritage. It consists of five cultural zones i.e., *Mithila, Magadh, Bhojpur, Aang* and *Bajjika*, on regional language basis. To preserve and develop the art and culture of Bihar in different zones, the Directorate of Cultural Affairs was constituted in 1986 (Officer Incharge of the Directorate of Cultural Affairs, Bihar, 2017).

Lord Buddha, Lord Mahavira, and Guru Govind Singh too came from the pious soil of Bihar, who pioneered for the universal fraternity and unity. It has been the land of Aryabhatta, Chanakya, Chitrugupta, Vidyapati and many other renowned personalities of our motherland, India. Some of the well known tourist destinations in

Bihar are Rajgirh, Nalanda, Bodh Gaya, Vikramshila, Patliputra, Vaishali, etc. with their past glory and present profess. Amongst them Bhagalpur occupies a prominent place. Known as the ‘*Silk City*’ of India, **Bhagalpur** is among the oldest cities in Bihar and is famous for housing the 1st lady doctor in South Asia, Kadambini. It derives its name from *Bhagduttapuram*, which if translated means as the ‘*City of Good Luck*’. Bhagalpur is one of the prime Buddhist destinations in India and is the home to large number of religious and historic tourist attractions.

Vikramshila Mahavihaar is situated in Antichak Village is a village near Kahalgaon Railway station of eastern railway, in Bhagalpur district of Bihar. Formerly, it was part of West Bengal. Antichak is known for tourism, due to the ancient seat of education- Vikramshila Mahavihar, an archaeological site. The ancient Vikramshila University was intended to complement the then existing world class universities at Nalanda and Takshila. This University lasted for four centuries before being destroyed during an attack by Bakhtiyar Khilji of the Delhi Sultanate.

The Chinese traveller Hieun Tsang has mentioned about this place in his writings. The excavated remains of the glorious past of Vikramshila is of high caliber and can hardly be found anywhere else in the world. It still attracts the scholars and learners like it used to attract in the ancient past. It hosts the **Vikramshila Mahotsav**, a festival in the month of February every year. This festival showcases a perfect fusion of folklore of Bihar and the modern music of the Bollywood. Tourists can go to nearby forest area for sightseeing and also for boating on the bank of river Ganges for exciting views and ofcourse this tops in the list of the places to visit in Bhagalpur.

OBJECTIVES

According to Weaver and Opperman has defined tourism (David & Martin 2000, 458) as

sum of the phenomena and relationship arising from the interaction among tourists, business suppliers, host governments, host communities, origin governments, universities, community colleges and non-governmental organizations, in the process of attracting, transporting, hosting and managing these tourists and other visitors.

Based on this view the objectives of this study can be defined as to

- Find out the famous folklore of Bihar and its relation to Vikramshila Mahotsav.
- Establish the role of Vikramshila Mahotsav (Festival) in the destination Branding.
- Identify the social and cultural impacts of Vikramshila Mahotsav.

LITERATURE REVIEW

• Culture and Destination Identity:

De Bres and Davis determined that events held as part of the Rollin “Down the River festival led to positive self-identification for local communities. Derrett argued that community-based festivals in the New South Wales, Australia, demonstrate a community’s sense of community and place. Also, Elias-Vavotsis (2006) considered the effects of festivals on the cultural identity of spaces.

- **Social and Cultural Impacts:**

The second-largest category of impact is social and cultural impact and it was expected that based on the purview of the scholars it will seek more balance.

- **Building Events into Destination Branding:**

Jago et al (2003) in Australia studied how to build events into destination branding.

- **Festive Sociability:**

Costa (2002) described “festive sociability” at the Fire Festival in Valencia, Spain, as being central to the transmission of tradition. Matheson (2005) discussed festivals and sociability in the context of a Celtic Music Festival. Turner (1974) has probably had the greatest influence in a classical sense, whereas Graburn (1983) and others have looked at ritualistic behaviour in a tourism context, citing festivals as examples.

Two recent books authored by Long and Robinson (2004) and Picard and Robinson (2006) make explicit connections between tourism and the cultural dimensions of festivals. Hence comes this folkloristic and culture based festive study.

DATA COLLECTION

This study is based on a literature review which necessarily spans different disciplines and different types of events. However, literature was restricted to academic books, journals, newspapers and magazines. Library databases searched include the National Library – Kolkata, Archaeological survey of India Library – Chennai, Archaeological Survey of India Library – Patna, Indian Institute of Travel and Tourism Management Library – Noida, Institute of Hotel Management Library (Pusa) – New Delhi, Institute of Hotel Management Library – Chennai, British Council Library – Chennai, Theosophical Society of India Library – Chennai, Connemara Public library Library – Chennai, Mahabodhi Society Library – Bangalore, Mahabodhi Society Library – Kolkata, Bhagwan District Library – Bhagalpur, Central Library, University of Bhagalpur – Bhagalpur, Centenary Library – Chennai, University of Madras Library – Chennai, Loyola College Library – Chennai, Raja Muthiah Library – Chennai and many other libraries. Web based information have also been used at places to support the data. Digital library has also been referred for the very limited number of books, as a few were not available in the form of hard copy.

FOLKLORISTIC FINDINGS

Folklore is not taught in a formal school curriculum or studied in the fine arts. Instead these traditions are passed along informally from one individual to another either through verbal instruction or demonstration.

FOLK DANCES OF BIHAR:

JHIJHIAN DANCE

When there is a total drought and there is not even a single drop of water anywhere; the lands are cracked and parched, the sky is lifeless without clouds and the people are awaiting rains - this is the time when the village women pray to Lord Indra for rain.



There is a message of this most eminent folk dance of Bihar. It has an inherent melody in the words *Haali-Huli Barshun Inder Deveta*, when it is sung with conviction and devotion to the God. Through this, the Bhagalpuri women sing as well as dance to please the Lord of Rain with their deep devotion as it is believed that finally Lord Indra responds to their worship and even takes pain to pour heavy rain fall in their region.

JAT-JATIN DANCE



Jat-Jatin is the popular folk dance of North Bihar, especially in the Mithila and the Koshi region. It is generally performed by a pair of man and woman. Jat-Jatin is a folk dance of the emigrant husband accompanied by his spouse. Apart from poverty and sorrow, this dance reflects a rainbow of the sweet and tender quarrel as well as some complaints between husband and wife. The folk mocks to comfort the hurdles of life with a smile. The headlines of the lyrics generally is “Tikwa-jab-jab Maugailion re jatwa – Tikwa kahe na lawle re...”

3. KAJARI DANCE

Kajari is a song of rainy season. The popular melodious tune of Kajari songs produce a sweet sensation in body and it this dance is performed right from the very beginning of the Shravan month with the rhythmic note of rain. The festive eve of the village begins with the dancing like peacock song of “Bhijat awe Dhaniya Ho Rama ...”



SOHAR-KHILOUNA DANCE

The foremost event in one’s life is ‘birth’. Generally, the birth of a child is celebrated all over the country with different traditional rituals. In Bihar, ladies always sings *Sohar* on the occasion of the birth ceremony of a child. They sometimes compare the child with Lord Rama, sometimes with Lord Krishna and so on. Sohar has its own distinctive dictions.



The ladies bless the baby while singing and acting through the tender words of Sohar like *Machiabai thalsasupuchelli* ...

HOLI DANCE / FAGUA DANCE



Holi is a well known festival of India. The first day of the Hindu Calendar, that is, *Pratham Chaitra Mass* is celebrated as the day of *Holi*. Being, the colourful festival, it conveys the message of religious integration. A typical style of *Dhamar* and singing takes place, in which the villagers form as groups with full of joy. They also dances to the beats of musical instruments like dholak, jhal-manjeera, etc.

JHUMERI DANCE



Jumari Dance of Bihar is similar to that of the *Garva* dance of the Gujrat State. Specially conceptualised for the married women, this Jumari dance is considered as the folk dance of the Mithilanchal of Bihar.

Jumari dance is performed after the month of Ashwin (September-

October) i.e., Kartik. During this period, the sky is crystal clear without any clouds and so the full moon spreads its' milky rays all over. Generally, maids in love go on dancing, singing to celebrate this turn of the season. The most amusing words of Jumeri that triggers throughout Bihar are – *Kartik Mas na Aakashey Badari ...*



HARVESTING DANCE



Basically, Bihar is an agriculture based State. In the harvesting season, both the male and female villagers do harvesting while dancing and singing in the field. Their happiness and joy symbolizes the cultivation of good crop. The popular melodious tune of the harvesting song is *Chal Dhani Khetwa mei gay...*

FOLK SONGS OF BIHAR

The music of Bihar is extremely rich and also, features a wide range of indigenous music forms especially in the folk form. Although classical music is widely practiced, it is the folk forms of Bihar music in which the ethos of the State are really represented. The folk forms of Bihar's music are as varied as the languages and the tribes inhabiting the region. Even though Magadhi, Maithili and Bhojpuri are the main linguistic groups, a wide range of regional dialects are also involved in rendering the songs.

Music for the sake of aesthetic pleasure alone was relatively unknown in Bihar. Most folk forms of Bihar's music are associated with one or the other kind of a social or cultural activity. These activities can range from social occasions of significance like the birth of a child to an occupational activity like the laborious sowing of the paddy seed during the height of the North Indian summer. If *sohar* and *sumangali* belong to the first category of Bihari music, then *ropnigeets* and *katnigeets* belong to the second category.

Distinct classical influences are sometimes felt in one or the other form of the folk music in Bihar like the Chaiti and the Kajri. These songs are much more devotional in nature. Music of Bihar is performed both by the professional singers as well as the members of the family who imbibe these songs through tradition. There

are also certain singing communities in Bihar who are like traveling minstrels. Kathaks, the singers in the Beer Kunwara tradition and the followers of Bhikhari Thakur fall within these categories.

Sohar is an extremely popular folk form. Like all forms of folk music in Bihar, this form is connected with a very significant event of social life - the birth of a child in the family. The folk songs of Bihar were seldom created for the sake of artistic expression by itself. Almost all folk forms have some kind of a social relevance connected to them. They also continue to be integrally connected to the lives of the people who participate in the performances along with those who arrange for them and listen to them. Bihar's *Sohar* is also popular in the neighboring State of Jharkhand where too they are sung much for the same purpose.

Sumangali employs tunes that have come down through the ages. Instrumentation, when used at all, are of an extremely simple and traditional kind. The auspicious nature of these ritualistic songs that are sung soon after the marriage continues with the same vigour till date. The newly wed are blessed on their way to a new life through these songs. Being sung specifically by women as the marriage songs, they inherit great significance as they are often used to voice anxieties and dissents of women within a largely patriarchal society.

Ropnigeet of Bihar is another prominent folk song of the State. It is basically a work song sung in groups. *Ropnigeet* is associated with the activity of sowing paddy seeds, as it is more than a simple agricultural activity in Bihar. It is associated with hope, rejuvenation and the beginning of a new working season for the largely poor farmers of Bihar. The simple, humble and largely illiterate farmers spontaneously found this wonderful folk form to ease their labour through celebrating the harvesting occasion.

Katnigeet of Bihar is a typical folk music form that is associated with the harvesting of paddy in the State. It is a work song and is an integral part of Bihar's folk culture as rice itself is in the lives of the inhabitants of the Gangetic plains of Bihar. The poor rural people of Bihar have a tendency to commemorate every sphere of their activity with music and dance. These musical expressions provide entertainment on one hand and also help the agriculturists in facing the harsh realities of life. If *Ropnigeet* is sung to celebrate the sowing of paddy seeds in the middle of high summer, then *Katnigeet* celebrates the successful completion of that process. It is a noble folk form which exalts the new harvest that becomes a symbol of prosperity and plenty.

VIKRAMSHILA MAHOTSAV:

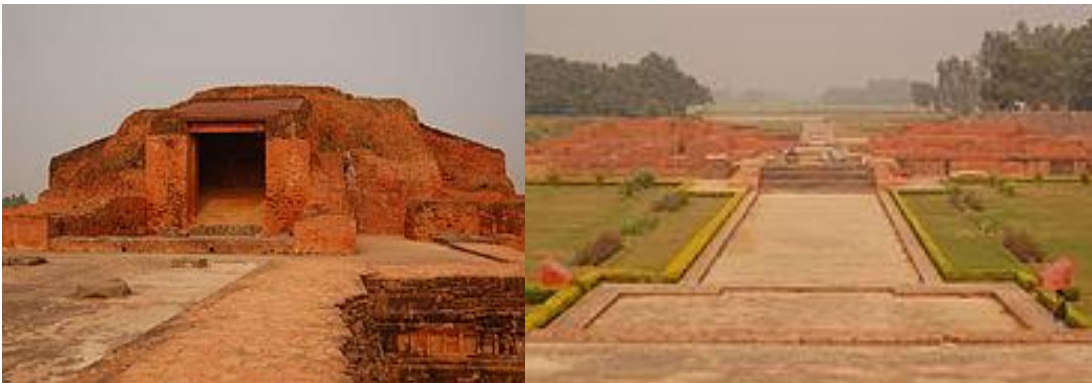
Meanings can be attached to the festival experience, at personal, social-group and cultural levels, as they must be viewed as the social constructs that vary from area to area and over time. While primitive celebrations might have sprung up organically in concert with agricultural and climatic cycles, modern festivals are also mostly created and managed with multiple goals, stakeholders and meanings attached to them. The core phenomenon of event studies (Stevenson and Waite 2011. 552) is the event experience and meanings attached to it. Festivals are celebrations, so by definition they have a theme. They also have a variety of meanings, from different perspectives, that make them complex planned phenomena.

Meanings exist at all the personal, social, cultural and economic levels. This experience itself is at once personal and social, with each form of festival (e.g. music,



arts, and heritage) embodying different experience potential (Light 1996. 183-90). Event designers are particularly interested in knowing how their manipulation of setting, program and various human interactions affect the audience and/or participants and whether or not the desired experiences and consequences are achieved. This requires knowledge of culture, the arts and the environmental psychology.

The Vikramashila site is the place for Vikramashila Mahotsav, which is held annually during the month of February. The local authorities are organising cultural events at the excavated site every year since 2007. Renowned cultural artistes including folk singers and folk dancers are annually invited to perform in this festival. Bollywood singers are also invited to attract the youth of the area towards this Mahotsav and destination promotion. Government and private stalls are put up on the premises of the Vikramshila University during the Mahotsav. The organising committee of the *Mahotsav* also brings out a booklet almost every year on the importance of this area.



The Archaeological Survey of India organises a photography exhibition during the *Mahotsav* at this site. These programmes always boosts the morale of the local masses, who were always afraid of the issue of the neglect of the Vikramshila ruins. Artistes from areas in and around the place as well as from outside takes part in the festival and showcase their skills. Besides, a number of seminars too are held during the event (Gautam 2012). Vikramshila Mahotsav can be viewed without any entrance fee which is conducted in an open field covered with tents, adjacent to the Vikramshila Mahavihaar. However, those people who are interested in seeing the ancient excavated ruins of Mahavihaar need to pay an entrance fee. Citizens of India and visitors of SAARC (Bangladesh, Nepal, Bhutan, Sri Lanka, Pakistan,

Maldives and Afghanistan) and BIMSTEC Countries (Bangladesh, Nepal, Bhutan, Sri Lanka, Thailand and Myanmar) has to pay rupees 5 per head. Whereas for the foreign tourists, the entry fee is US \$ 2 which if converted to Indian currency is Rs. 100/- per head. However, children up to 15 years of age, are exempted from the entree is fee.



(Field Study to the Vikramshila Mahotsav, 18 March 2019)

UPSHOTS OF THE VIKRAMSHILA FESTIVAL

Viewed from numerous perspectives ranging from personal to societal and from local, regional, national and international levels the Vikramshila festival has multifarious impacts.

Personal Impact – Effects of festival attendance at the personal level are increasingly being explored (Boo and Busser 2006. 223-37). This is one of the most important and potentially exciting lines of the participants and spectators really enjoying this Mahotsav, which is evident from the increase in the number of tourist visiting the event year after year.

Destination Branding – Vikramshila Mahotsav is being employed as a tool in destination image-making (Long and Robinson 2004.), re-positioning strategies and branding. Vikramshila Mahotsav is that event of the destination, which attracts maximum number of tourists and so it is also being used as a tool in branding the destination.

Social Cohesion and Sociability – As used by Turner, social cohesion and sociability refers to intense feelings of belonging and sharing among equals in pilgrimage or festival experiences. So, the local people are always seen very excited in Bhagalpur to organize the *Vikramshila Mahotsav* event and they also come forward to extend all possible support to make this event happen as well as become a grand success.

MOTIVATIONS:

This category involves exploration of why people attend festivals, and how they make their choices and decisions (Backman et al. 1995. 15-24). Most of the people who visited this place is motivated by the cultural and folklore of the Mahotsav. Societies and cultures that transcend individual experiences. To fully understand and create knowledge about festivals it is also necessary to consider who produces them and why, how they are planned and managed, why people attend (or do not), their outcomes on multiple levels, and the dynamic forces shaping individual festivals and festival populations.

THE REVIEW

Most of the folk dances of Bihar are religious in nature, in which, Gods and Goddesses are invoked through dance, performed to the rhythm of folk songs. The district administration of Bhagalpur has been conducting Vikramshila Mahotsav since 2007 and it has an impeccable confluence in which tourism, socio-cultural development and marketing the destination are inherent. It should also be stressed that Vikramshila Mahotsav is increasingly been used for other policy purposes, including helping others to achieve social and cultural goals, which places them as instruments of social marketers. Vikramshila has of late started receiving foreign tourists even as they face several problems because of the lack of basic infrastructure like link roads.

PROPOSITION

As the government has not attached Vikramshila to the popular Buddhist circuit, there is not enough and proper information about Vikramshila in the Government tourism centres itself like New Delhi, Calcutta, Patna and Gaya. Hence, the need of the day is to create an awareness about the destination.

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