

Study of Influence of Cultural Values on the Shaping of a Cultural Landscape with Case of Alandi

Indrayani Joshi, Asmita Kale

Abstract—Landscape is a formal expression of the numerous relationships existing in a given period between the individual or a society and a topographically defined territory, the appearance of which is the result of the action, over time, of natural and human factors and of a combination of both. Study of the cultural values in landscape serves several different ends simultaneously and apart from its function of systematic description it provides for regional classification, affords insight into the role of man in geographic transformations and throws light upon certain aspects on cultural communities in themselves. Cultural landscapes fall in the category of landscapes which have been formed due to nature-human interaction and understanding of co-existence and co-dependence. These are shaped owing to the cultural value systems in the form of various practices and rituals.

Keywords: numerous relationships existing, topographically defined territory, regional classification, geographic transformations, Cultural landscapes, nature-human interaction.

I. INTRODUCTION

The term 'landscape', has a wide range of meaning in natural, cultural, ecological and social research from 'a picture of natural inland scenery' to 'a composition of man-made or man-modified spaces to serve as infrastructure or background for our collective existence'. Landscapes are 'symbolic environments' that people create to give meaning and definition to their physical environment. Study of the cultural values in landscape serves several different ends simultaneously and apart from its function of systematic description it provides for regional classification, affords insight into the role of man in geographic transformations and throws light upon certain aspects on cultural communities in themselves. The term cultural landscape as defined by UNESCO:

'Cultural landscape embraces a diversity of manifestations of the interaction between humankind and its natural environment. Cultural landscapes often reflect specific techniques of sustainable land-use, considering the characteristics and limits of the natural environment they are established in, and a specific spiritual relation to nature. Protection of cultural landscapes can contribute to modern techniques of sustainable land-use and can maintain or enhance natural values in the landscape. The continued existence of traditional forms of land-use supports biological diversity in many regions of the world.'

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The protection of traditional cultural landscapes is therefore helpful in maintaining biological diversity.'

There are three major categories of Cultural landscape:-

1. **Landscape designed and created intentionally by man** (landscape for aesthetic reason)
2. **Organically evolved landscape** (relict or fossil landscape and continuing landscape)
3. **Associative cultural landscape** (linked to cultural traditions)

(Source: <http://whc.unesco.org/en/culturallandscape>)

The paper aims at studying the cultural landscapes as form of man-made landscapes which are shaped owing to the cultural values of a society and has influenced the lives of the people with the case of Alandi town. This particular town is chosen as it forms a major part of an influential cultural value system shaping the regions of not only Maharashtra, but also the adjoining regions of Karnataka, Andhra Pradesh, and Gujarat. The paper puts forth a study of the influence of culture on the town of Alandi in particular.

II. CULTURAL ASPECTS OF ALANDI

Alandi has been an important religious destination for the Varkari sect and has been a seat of spirituality. Especially in context with Maharashtra's cultural and religious importance, Alandi has been a major destination with a large number of devotees of Vitthal Rakhumai visiting the town especially in the month of *Ashadha*.

2.1 Location

Alandi is situated on the Deccan Plateau, near the Sahyadri ranges. The Indrayani River flows through the town. These natural factors have provided a pleasant weather in the region throughout the year.

2.2 Cultural significance of the place

Marathi saints have named Alandi as 'Alankapuri'. Importance of this place is immortal as Shri Dnyaneshwar maharaj has taken Sanjeevan Samadhi in here. Alandi temple was built in 1570. Dnyaneshwar spent a few years of his life in this village Alandi, and inspired the whole city to worship Lord Panduranga. Dnyaneshwar wrote the Marathi translation of Bhagwad Gita called 'Dnyaneshwari', which is regarded as holy book. Pilgrims flock to Alandi to visit the temple and samadhi of Sant Dnyaneshwar. The 'Palakhi' festival in the month of 'Ashadh' is very popular and many devotees walk almost 150 kms. from Alandi to Pandharpur. From ancient times, the pilgrimage to Dehu and Alandi, alongwith the Vitthal-Rakhumai temple at Pandharpur, is considered to be the most pious religious tour (Teertha yatra) by people of Maharashtra. A walk to these destinations, popularly known

as 'Vari', is still an important part of the yearly ritual of many Maharashtrians, especially from rural Maharashtra.

2.3 Rituals

1. The most important festivals and events that are celebrated in Alandi are the 'Palakhi from Alandi to Pandharpur' in the month of Ashadha and the 'Annual Fair on Kartik Purnima'. These events are attended by thousands of devotees. The Palakhi, which is in the month of Ashadha, goes from Alandi to Pandharpur, almost 150 km of distance by walk. Thousands of devotees take part in this Palakhi. A large number of the Varkaris gather on the banks of the Indrayani River during this festival. The procession begins at 4 pm on that day and halts at Gandhiwada in Alandi. On the next day 6.00 am the procession moves towards Pune to begin its journey for Pandharpur.
2. During the Ashadhi Ekadashi festival times, almost all pilgrims take holy bath in the river.
3. The number of pilgrims during the 'vari' and timing is such that the four ghats constructed at present prove to be inadequate to cater to the needs of the pilgrims. The 'Darshan queue' also goes a long way and people have to stand in the open air under rains and sun in the queue.
4. People also perform last rites for the dead ones on the ghats. Ritual of immersing the ashes and bones of dead ones into the river and memorial services (shraaddha vidhi) also take place here. These rituals take place throughout the year. Even before the settlement was raised to its present importance any spot in Indrayani was considered good for parting with cremation remains.
5. Upstream of Indrayani river is used for drinking purpose by whole town and the water behind the temple where the pilgrims drink it as 'Tirth'



Pilgrims bathing in the Indrayani River

2.4 Architecture supporting the rituals

1. *Dnyaneshwar maharaj Samadhi mandir*: This is the most important place in Alandi. The Samadhi is worshiped by the varkaris. Within the temple complex there is a small temple of Sidheshwar. This temple is supposed to have existed even before the Samadhi. The temple complex as it exists today has been built mainly during the Maratha period.



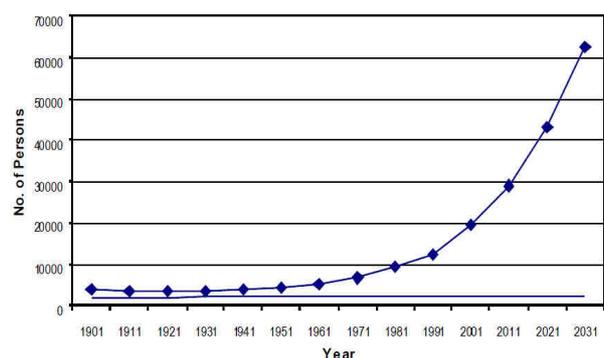
2. *Pundalik mandir*: This temple is on the ghats of River Indrayani. This temple is dedicated to Pundalik one of foremost believers in this sect.
3. *Ram Mandir*: This temple is near the Samadhi mandir. It was also built during the Maratha period.
4. *Bhairavnath mandir, bhint (the wall) and Maruti Mandir*: Bhairavnath temple is again dedicated to Lord Shiva. The origin of this temple is unknown. The bhint has some mythological reference to Sant Dnyaeswar. As per the myths, Sant Dnyaneshwar using his mystical powers made this masonry wall to fly along with his siblings. This place is equally important as the temple. The Maruti mandir is located near to above mentioned temples. All these temples come along the outer periphery of the gaathan.
5. *Dharamshala, Muths and Shikshan Sanstha*: These institutions also play an important role in the continuity in the traditions of the cult. The Dharamshalas provide accommodations for the varkari and these asr as per the community. The muths and shikshan sanstha play a role of propagaters of the cult. These institutional bodies teach the younger generation about the rich traditions. They teach the next generation about Abhangs and other literature works associated with varkari cult.

III. RELATION OF POPULATION OF ALANDI & FLOATING POPULATION

3.1 Town population

As per 2011 Census Alandi town has a population of 28,576 which increased from 11,011 in 2001. The total municipal area of Alandi is 6.84sq.km. The town is divided into 17 wards for the purpose of administration. The increase in the population since 1991 could be mainly due to the rise and expansion in the industrial and economic activities in and around Pune city.

Figure 1 Population growth in Alandi (Source: Alandi Concept Plan)



3.2 Floating population

The floating population in the town is attributable mainly to the large number of pilgrims visiting the town. On an average 12-15 lakh pilgrims visit Alandi annually. On normal days, about 10,000 to 12000 pilgrims visit Alandi daily. However, on Thursdays and weekends this figure goes to as high as 25,000. On the Ekadashi days (twice in a month) about 60,000 to 70,000 people visit Alandi. On the two annual events of Ashadhi and Kartiki Ekadashi, as many as 3 to 5 lakh pilgrims visit Alandi. Last one decade has seen significant increase in pilgrim flow to Alandi which may be attributed to the overall increase in religious tourism in the country and also to the increase in the population of the Pune and Mumbai metropolitan regions and hence the inflow of devotees from there.

Table 1 Floating population (Source: Alandi Concept Plan)

Important Festivals	Months	No. of days	Devotees inflow
Ashadhi Palakhi Prasthan	July - Aug	2	3-5 Lakh
Kartiki Prasthan	Oct - Nov	5	3-5 Lakh
Monthly Ekadashi (12)		1	60 - 70 Thousand
Makar Sankrant (Mainly Lady Devotees)	Jan	1	50 - 60 Thousand
Gokul Ashtami, Adhik Purnima	Aug - Sept	1	15- 20 Thousand

IV. SIGNIFICANCE OF CULTURAL VALUES AND LANDSCAPE

1. All the rituals are based on the cultural value of abolition of caste system which emerged around 13th century and thus the 'varkari' sect came into being. The cultural values of varkari sect emphasise on the aspect of 'oneness' of the people. The values also signify that all are equal and nobody should be distinguished based on caste, economical status or occupation.

Owing to this philosophy all pilgrims gather on the banks of river Indrayani, take holy bath in the river and then go ahead.

- As a form of main ritual taking a holy bath in the river is very important. Only after taking bath the pilgrims can proceed for darshan to the Samadhi temple. Hence the river bank becomes the main congregation point for the pilgrims.
- Later the pilgrims proceed to the Samadhi temple for darshan. After the darshan in Samadhi temple, the pilgrims visit other temples within the town. Pilgrims take the pradakshina path for this.
- The last ritual is to take a full peripheral circumambulation or pradakshina around the town. In the entire process the river and its surrounding landscape including the architecture that supports the rituals play a very important role as they form steps defining the path.

2. Following the growth in the number of pilgrims and their ablution rites an area with a special well-like capacity was dug out near the temple of Pundlik and people from

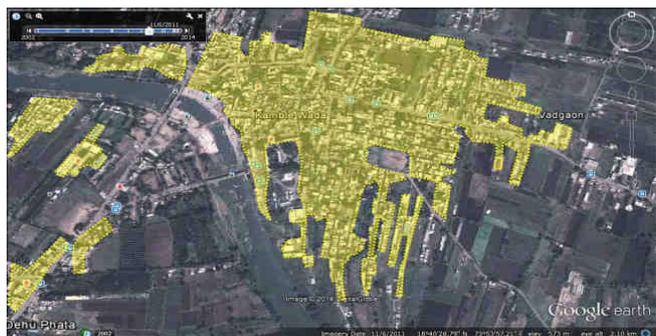
as far as Pune and other urban and rural places continue to travel Alandi to dispose of the ashes and bones in the waters. A particular sign on the river bank which was called the "footprint of Vishnu" (Vishnupad) was imitative of famous symbol of Gaya and, because of its ancestors worshipped legacy which attracts families to Alandi. The sign disappeared in 1980s or 1990s during renovation of ghats.

V. INFLUENCES ON THE LANDSCAPE

- Due to growth of population the agricultural lands are shrinking owing to the new constructions.
- To cater to the increased number of pilgrims the pradakshina path has been widened. As a result of that the adjacent landscape and land uses are getting disturbed.
- Earlier the ghats were only on one bank of the river and were very small in scale. But owing to the huge crowd of pilgrims during Ashadhi & Kartiki Ekadashi not only the scale but also number of ghats has increased. Also the ghats are constructed on both the banks resulting in change of landscape of the river bank.
- Due to the disposal of cremation remains and also defecation the water quality of river is deteriorating.



Alandi town: 29/9/2008



Alandi town: 6/11/2011



Alandi town 25/5/2014

(Source: <https://earth.google.com>)



Ghats on Indrayani river, 2014

(Source: <https://maps.google.co.in/>)



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GLOSSARY

Ashadhi Ekadashi: Eleventh day of the month of Ashadh in Hindu calendar

Ekadashi: Eleventh day of a month in the Hindu calendar

Darshan: An occasion of seeing a holy person or God or Samadhi

Kartiki Ekadashi: Eleventh day of the month of Kartik in Hindu calendar

Palkhi: Palanquin of a saint

Pradakshina path: Circumambulatory path

Shraaddha vidhi: Performance of last rites for a deceased person

Samadhi: Tomb of a holy person

Tirth: Holy water

Varkari: Devotee or pilgrim who is a part of Vari

Vari: Ritual of pilgrimage on foot to Pandharpur, done on Ashadhi and Kartiki ekadashi



Prof. Indrayani Joshi has done her B.Arch from Nagpur University and her masters M.Arch in Conservation from SPA, New Delhi and currently working as Associate Professor in D Y Patil School of Architecture, Pune. She has 14 years of professional as well as academic experience. She has worked on various conservation projects. She has published 1 research paper in Journal of Deccan Studies. Her current research interest is in 'Conservation of Cultural Landscapes' and 'listing of unlisted heritage in the vicinity'.