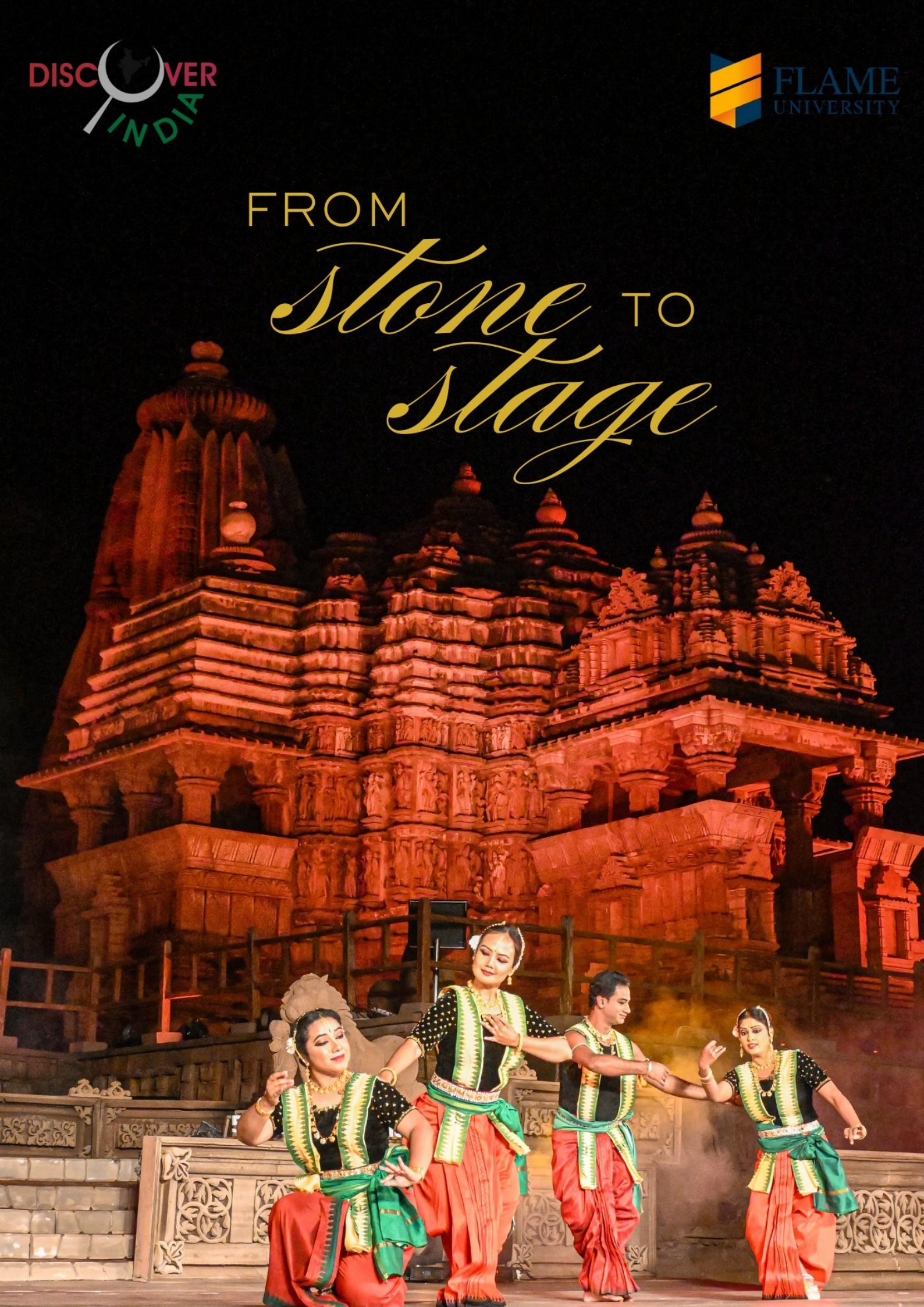
DISCOVER INDIA

FLAME UNIVERSITY

FROM *stone* TO *stage*



FROM STONE TO STAGE:

Assessing the cultural impact of the timeless temple of Khajuraho and it revered annual dance festival in the heart of Chhatarpur, Madhya Pradesh



DISCOVER INDIA PROGRAM

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CERTIFICATE

This is to certify that the work incorporated in this DIP report titled "**From Stone to Stage: Assessing the cultural impact of the timeless temple of Khajuraho and it revered annual dance festival in the heart of Chhatarpur, Madhya Pradesh** "submitted by the undersigned Research Team was carried out under my mentorship. Such material as has been obtained from other sources has been duly acknowledged.

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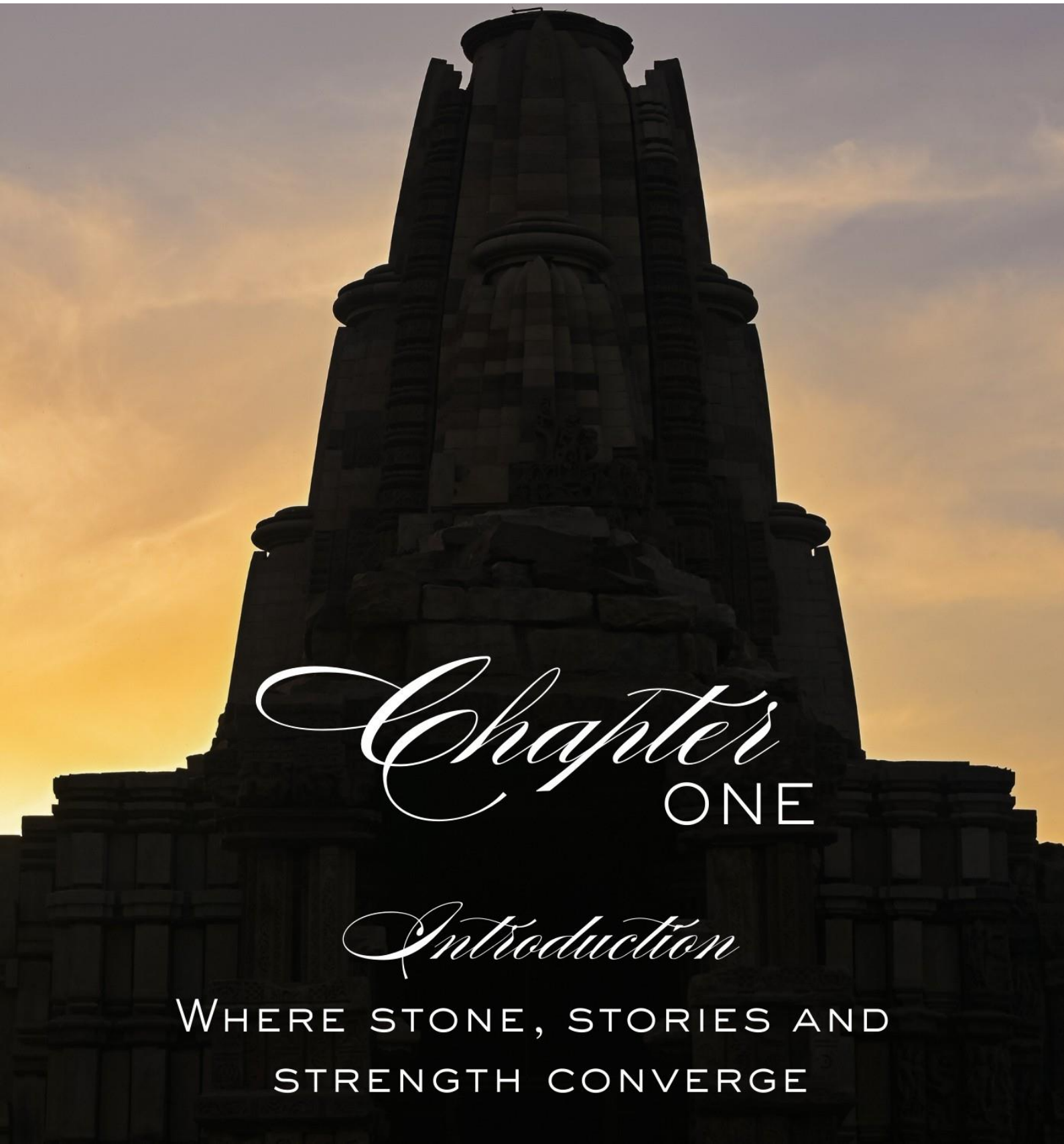
Abstract

This research report analyses symbolism and representation in Khajuraho's sculptures, focusing on the dual portrayal of women as erotic figures and figures of power and divinity to determine if they symbolized power, fertility, or objectification. It examines textual and archaeological evidence to assess the societal status of women in medieval India as reflected in temple iconography and compares Khajuraho's depictions with other contemporary temples (e.g., Konark, Hoysala) to identify regional variations in gender representation and investigates why pre-colonial Indian temples openly depicted female agency and sexuality, contrasting this with modern traditional and religious impositions (entry bans, dress codes, moral policing), and traces the evolution of temple practices from medieval openness to contemporary conservatism, identifying key socio-political turning points to assess if modern restrictions are rooted in ancient religious beliefs or later reinterpretations. The impact of British colonial policies (e.g., Victorian morality, obscenity laws) on the suppression or sanitization of erotic and warrior-themed temple art is evaluated. It investigates whether pre-colonial representations of women (e.g., yoginis, apsaras, devadasis) can serve as symbols of resistance in modern gender justice movements and determines if colonial and post-colonial interventions selectively erased certain forms of female representation from religious discourse. Further, it explores how historical temple art is invoked (or ignored) in contemporary debates on gender restrictions (e.g., Sabarimala, hijab bans, love jihad laws, temple entry bans), analyses the disconnect between India's pre-colonial gender fluidity and modern rigid interpretations of religious tradition, and assesses if present-day gender policing reflects a genuine continuation of tradition or a constructed narrative. Additionally, it aims to unveil the philosophical and cultural underpinnings of the architectural elements of the group of temples to gain a deeper understanding of the role of Vastu Shastra and the prevalent religions influencing the structures, as well as study the evolution of North-Indian temple architecture through the decades, with the goal of establishing an identity of the Khajuraho group of monuments detached from social stigma by mitigating common misconceptions. It also seeks to understand how the temples shaped local life and Khajuraho as the religious capital of the Chandela dynasty and analyse how the architectural elements and principles can be utilized in modern-day designs. Finally, the research examines the effects of seasonal tourism and the state government's tourism development projects, infrastructure, interstate connectivity, availability of transportation, and provision of wayside amenities on the overall development of the local economy and the tourist experience. It aims to understand how

Khajuraho is marketed as a tourist destination, specifically how marketing strategies and advertising campaigns affect the influx of tourists, and to examine the challenges of sustainably developing Khajuraho's economy and tourism after the COVID-19 pandemic.

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Chapter
ONE
Introduction
WHERE STONE, STORIES AND
STRENGTH CONVERGE

Chapter 1: Introduction

Where Stone, Stories and Strength Converge

1.1 Background of the Study

Step into the shadow of a towering shikhara, where the morning sun ignites carvings of dancing goddesses and meditating sages. Here, in these sacred spaces, ancient India didn't just worship - it lived, learned, and thrived. Temples were the beating heart of civilization, where the divine and earthly realms intertwined in stone and spirit.

Historically, temples have been the epicentre of life in ancient India. These structures were far more than mere places for religious worship- they were social, cultural and educational hubs and served as a bridge in incorporating spirituality into daily lives of the people. Thus, temples are an integral part of the country's heritage and a symbol of its rich legacy. They transcend time and space linking what *was* to what *is*.

The Khajuraho group of temples were one such complex that exemplified the multifaceted roles. Built by the Chandela dynasty, they are situated in the Chhatarpur district of Madhya Pradesh, India, and are known for their intricate architectural design, detailed sculptures and deep-rooted spiritual significance. Having been recognized by UNESCO as a world heritage site in 1986, they continue to be well-preserved and provide a key insight into the world of ancient India.

Brief History of City of Khajuraho and The Temple Complex

Kharjuravahaka, now known as Khajuraho, is the ancient city which is home to the Khajuraho group of monuments. Historical accounts note that this city was once the flourishing religious capital of the Chandela dynasty, attracting scholars and artisans from far and wide. The temples were commissioned by consecutive rulers of the dynasty with the differences in their architecture articulating the evolving art of temple architecture through the years. The group of monuments have seen their rise and fall synonymously with the Chandela dynasty. Built between 950 to 1050 C.E., the temples can be grouped into 2 main religions – Hinduism and Jainism. They are a testimony to the boom of art within the Chandela dynasty and the conducive environment built for the growth and development of temple architecture in Northern India.

After the death of the Chandela Dynasty, the historic temples were largely forgotten about until their rediscovery by a British colonial army officer, T.S. Burt, in 1838. While having diverted from his official route, he went down the trail guided by his palki-bearers who spoke of a historic group of temples.

After finding himself in the presence of the temples, he was awestruck by their intricate designs and architecture. This was a major point of cultural revival. Currently it is owned by the Government of India and is maintained and managed by the Archaeological Survey of India.

Once said to have over 85 temples in their abode, now merely 22 remain (disputable). And yet even though they have been reduced to a ghost of their former self, they still remain a beautiful example of the rich Indian architecture and how it evolved over the years. Adorned with Nagara style architecture, the temples are mainly built from sandstone.

Why Khajuraho?

With its identity circling around the erotic sculptures being misinterpreted as mere symbols of sensuality, the temples are often reduced to these carvings that constitute less than 10% of all engravings on its walls. In order to do justice to the hands that sculpted these monuments, it is necessary to dive into the philosophical and scientific significance behind the temple design. Employing Vastu Shastra in its architecture to establish cosmic balance and spatial harmony and arguably depicting significant Tantric influence, every gesture of the sculptures engraved carry a deeper meaning behind them. Circling around the principles of dharma, karma and moksha, they serve as a bridge between the divine and the ordinary. The Khajuraho temples have so much more to offer than just architecture. It is important to assess what impact these temples and their magnificent architecture hold over our society today and what makes them a topic for discussion in many disciplines.

Economical Lens

The contribution of the temple to India and it's economy is also undeniable. This study also examines the temples annual dance festival from an economical perspective.

Historically, Khajuraho' residents have mainly been marginal farmers. Even today, agriculture is a predominant economic activity in Khajuraho but tourism has become the primary source of income and employment for more than 20,000 people living in the village-town surrounding the temples. In fact, the cash economy from tourism caused in-migration in

the 1990s. And since its UNESCO World Heritage status in 1986, it has become a popular tourist destination in India.

Furthermore, the temples' reputation and events such as the annual Khajuraho Dance Festival, held in February, attract tourists from all over the globe. However, tourism is seasonal and as a result, many farmers farm during the off-season and join the tourism industry only during the peak season between October and March.

The influx of tourists prompted the private sector to establish presence in the village to satisfy its rising demands, thereby positively affecting its Khajuraho's industry and creating jobs for thousands of locals in several industries including supplementary services such as tour guides, local transport, etc. Local artisans benefitted from a boost in the souvenir and handicraft trade including hand-loomed fabrics, hand-embroidery, artefacts made up of brass, wood, silver and sandstone and trinkets.

1.2 Research Objectives

Temples and Society Structures

The temples of Khajuraho are renowned for their intricate architecture and carvings of erotic scenes, warrior women and divine feminine figures. The sculptures have been a topic for debate about women's status in medieval India since quite a while.

Symbolism and Representation in Khajuraho's Sculptures

- Analysing the dual portrayal of women in Khajuraho's temple art. Women are portrayed both as both erotic figures and figures of power and divinity. We aim to determine whether they symbolized power, fertility, or objectification.
- Examining textual and archaeological evidence to assess the societal status of women in medieval India as reflected in temple iconography.
- Comparing Khajuraho's depictions with other contemporary temples (e.g., Konark, Hoysala) to identify regional variations in gender representation.

Historical vs. Contemporary Gender Norms in Sacred Spaces

- Investigating why pre-colonial Indian temples openly depicted female agency and sexuality, while modern traditions and religions continue to put impositions (entry bans, dress codes, moral policing).
- Tracing the evolution of temple practices from medieval openness to contemporary conservatism, identifying key socio-political turning points.

- Assessing whether modern restrictions are rooted in ancient religious beliefs or later reinterpretations.

Impact of Colonialism and Other Cultures on Indian Society

- Evaluate how British colonial policies (e.g., Victorian morality, obscenity laws) led to the suppression or sanitization of erotic and warrior-themed temple art.
- Investigate whether pre-colonial representations of women (e.g., yoginis, apsaras, devadasis) can serve as symbols of resistance in modern gender justice movements.
- Determine whether colonial and post-colonial interventions selectively erased certain forms of female representation from religious discourse.

Modern Implications: The Weaponization of "Tradition"

- Explore how historical temple art is invoked (or ignored) in contemporary debates on gender restrictions (e.g., Sabarimala, hijab bans, love jihad laws, temple entry bans).
- Analyse the disconnect between India's medieval gender fluidity and modern rigid interpretations of religious tradition.
- Assess whether present-day gender policing reflects a genuine continuation of tradition or a constructed narrative.

Temple Architecture and Iconography

This study aims to unveil the philosophical and cultural underpinnings of the architectural elements of the group of temples. We intend to gain a deeper understanding of the role of Vastu Shastra and the prevalent religions influencing the structures as well as study the evolution of North-Indian temple architecture through the decades. Our goal is to establish an identity of the Khajuraho group of monuments detached from social stigma by mitigating common misconceptions. The research seeks to breathe life into the role of temples in the time of their prime importance by understanding how they shaped local life and shaped Khajuraho as the religious capital of the Chandela dynasty and analyse how the architectural elements and principles can be utilized in modern-day designs.

Tourism, Economy and The Dance Festival

To examine the effects of seasonal tourism and the state government's tourism development projects, infrastructure, interstate connectivity, availability of transportation and

provision of wayside amenities on the overall development of the local economy and the tourist experience.

To understand how Khajuraho is marketed as a tourist destination, specifically, how marketing strategies and advertising campaigns affect the influx of tourists in Khajuraho. To examine the challenges of sustainably developing Khajuraho' economy and tourism after the COVID-19 pandemic.

1.3 Research Questions

Temples and Society Structures

How have the representations of women in Indian temple art—from the erotic and warrior sculptures of Khajuraho to contemporary religious iconography—been interpreted, manipulated, and contested across history, and what implications does this have for modern gender politics, caste dynamics, and cultural identity?

The erotic sculptures of Khajuraho present a complex intersection of symbolism and power, raising questions about whether they signify female empowerment or cater to male fantasy. While goddesses like Durga and Kali were revered as fierce warriors, real women in historical societies faced restrictions, which reveals a paradox between spiritual and societal roles. Over time, Indian society transitioned from celebrating female sexuality, as seen in temple art, to policing it. We aim to examine the role of British colonisation, other reform movements and cultural invasions which reshaped gender norms in religious and social spaces.

Today, Khajuraho's sculptures are marketed as cultural heritage, yet women are often shamed for similar expressions of sexuality. Political movements, from Hindutva to feminism, exploit temple symbolism to push conflicting agendas, further complicating these narratives. Reclaiming temple art could challenge modern patriarchy, as seen in campaigns for women's entry into temples like Sabarimala. Additionally, caste and class intersect is seen in these representations, with systems like the Devadasi tradition clashing with upper-caste purity norms, highlighting that deeper social hierarchies are embedded in the art expressions of Khajuraho.

Temple Architecture and Iconography

How can contemporary architectural debates be influenced by the architectural principles of the Khajuraho group of temples and what consequent gaps exist in the modern interpretations of the ancient engravings and design philosophies?

The gaps in literature that led us to this research question were the lack of in-depth study into the various incorporations of the ancient sciences of Vastu Shastra and Shilpa Shastra into the foundations of the temples, lack of discussion of the identity of the temples past their erotic sculptures and insufficient scholarly discourse in regards to the influence of ancient Indian architecture on contemporary design principles. By addressing these gaps we aim to incorporate a holistic understanding of architectural continuity and evolution.

Tourism, Economy and The Dance Festival

How does tourism from Khajuraho's temples and annual dance festival affect the overall development of its economy and the tourist experience?

1.4 Rationale & Scope

Temples and Society Structures

The temples of Khajuraho, Konark, and other medieval Indian sites present a complex interplay of gender, spirituality, and power. Intricate carvings of eroticism, warrior women, and divine femininity can be seen here that challenge contemporary understandings of women's status in pre-colonial India and the evolution of societal norms and narratives of what the public calls "tradition". This study tries to understand the conflicting gender roles by understanding the shifting narratives from sacred expression of women in pre-colonial India to modern political weaponization.

At the heart of this inquiry lies a paradox: while Khajuraho's erotic sculptures seemingly celebrate female sexuality as integral to spirituality, the existence of patriarchal structures raises critical questions about whether these depictions show empowerment or male fantasy, further complicated by the juxtaposition of fierce goddesses with the historical curtailment of mortal women's freedoms. The research also investigates the broader historical shift from celebration to censorship, analysing how colonial aesthetics, reformist agendas, and socio-political changes redefined gender representation in sacred art, often obscuring India's earlier traditions. By exposing how historical narratives have been selectively manipulated to justify restrictive traditions, this research serves as a critical intervention in debates on cultural memory, allowing scholars and activists to reclaim India's earlier heritage and advocate for equitable reinterpretations of sacred space and symbolism.

Temple Architecture and Iconography

In an age where sustainability and heritage conservation is gaining great traction, revisiting and understanding ancient design sciences and principles and thereby incorporating

them in contemporary practices can provide valuable insights for urban planners and new-age architects. The research will incorporate a detailed analysis of historical accounts, philosophical relevance and cultural impact of the Khajuraho temples. We will be studying how the ancient Indian sciences of temple architecture brought these UNESCO monuments to life and examining conservation and preservation efforts undertaken to protect these testaments of India's rich cultural heritage.

Tourism, Economy and The Dance Festival

The erotic sculptures and intricate architecture of the temples and the traditional art and dance forms presented at the famous Khajuraho Dance Festival attract participants and tourists from all over India and the globe every year, enabling them to experience unique cultural practices from the region. The rationale of the study is to understand the challenges of sustainably developing the economy of a region through tourism while preserving its cultural heritage from the stakeholders' perspectives.

1.5 Implications of the Study

Temples and Society Structures

This research carries significant implications across multiple domains, including art history, gender studies, cultural heritage preservation, and contemporary societal discourse. By analysing the evolution of female representation in Indian temple art, the study gives insights that extend beyond academic circles to inform cultural policy, museum practices, and how the public understands tradition.

The study enriches the field of **Indian art history** by:

- Providing a comparable analysis of female iconography across major temple sites (Khajuraho, Konark, Hoysala), helping identify regional variations and stylistic developments.
- Offering a chronological framework to understand shifts in artistic depictions—from early medieval dynamism to later conservatism—without attributing them to any single ideological force.

The findings have meaningful implications for **gender studies** and **cultural anthropology**:

- By documenting the diverse roles of women in temple art (as warriors, deities, and ritual participants), the study challenges monolithic interpretations of "traditional" femininity.

- It highlights how historical representations were neither static nor uniform, encouraging more nuanced discussions about women's agency in pre-colonial India.
- The comparative approach reveals that regional traditions (e.g., Tantric, Bhakti, folk) often portrayed women differently than classical Brahmanical texts, complicating singular notions of "Indian tradition."

The study has practical implications for **heritage conservation** and **public exhibitions**:

- Museums and cultural sites could use this research to contextualize temple sculptures more accurately, moving beyond exoticized or sanitized narratives.
- It encourages ethical curation—acknowledging colonial interventions in art preservation while recentring indigenous perspectives.
- Tourism authorities might adopt more nuanced storytelling, presenting temple art as part of a living, evolving tradition rather than a frozen relic.

While the study avoids direct political commentary, its findings **indirectly contribute to modern discussions**:

- By showing that religious art has always been reinterpreted, it complicates claims of an unchanging "authentic" tradition.
- The historical evidence of regional diversity in gender representation could encourage more inclusive interpretations of cultural heritage.
- Policymakers and educators might use these insights to promote gender-sensitive heritage programs, ensuring women's histories are not erased from public memory.

Temple Architecture and Iconography

The findings of this study can have a multifaceted impact across various domains. From an architectural standpoint, an understanding of the ancient architectural principles can help inspire modern day architects and bring about heritage continuity while also accounting for consequent evolution. From a cultural point of view, it can help give us insights into ancient Indian society and how it has changed over time- how erotic sculptures might have not been a cultural shock in those days but visibly are today. This study will also highlight the need for conservation of historical monuments and underscore the importance of a balanced approach in preservation efforts without commercial exploitation.

Tourism, Economy and The Dance Festival

The challenges of developing Khajuraho as a rural heritage tourist destination in India can be analysed and compared with those of other competitive tourist destinations in India such as Rajasthan and Varanasi in order to effectively bridge the gap between the planning and implementation of government policies and projects related to tourism development. The findings of the study can inform the formulation of actionable government policies and projects, considering the stakeholders' perspectives and further research on creating new tourist destinations in India and maximising their economic potential, considering the effects of tourism on the local environment, responsible and sustainable tourism practices, and over-tourism.



Chapter TWO

Literature review

FROM SCULPTURES TO SCHOLARS

Chapter 2: Literature Review

2.1 Temple Architecture & Society Structures

Flourishing under the patronage of the Chandela princes, the twenty five surviving temples out of the legendary eighty five, tell a timeless story of India's rich culture.

The women of Khajuraho are more than stone figures—they embody a paradox, revered and objectified in the same breath. Through a feminist lens, they are not just celebrated icons but also subjects shaped by the gaze of possession and patriarchy. These depictions capture the tension between divinity and desire, beauty and confinement. Women are exalted as Shakti, yet bound by societal structures that define their power. Khajuraho's sculptures tell a story of both reverence and restraint. Here femininity is celebrated but also trapped within a complex narrative of devotion and domination.

The Dual Portrayal of Women in Khajuraho's Temple Art: Power, Fertility, or Objectification?

The temples of Khajuraho, built between the 9th and 12th centuries under the Chandela dynasty, present a fascinating contrast in their portrayal of women. They honour the feminine divine through warrior goddesses (yoginīs, dākinīs) and celestial nymphs (apsarās) while also featuring intricate erotic sculptures (maithuna). This duality has sparked debate: were these images celebrating female power and fertility, or did they reduce women to objects of male desire? The answer lies in the complex interplay of religion, politics, and social norms, revealing a world where the sacred and the sensual coexisted.

The yoginī and durgā sculptures embody fierce and independent female divinity. The Brahmayāmalatantra, a medieval Tantric text, describes yoginīs as supernatural beings granting spiritual and martial strength (Hatley, 2007). At Khajuraho, they are depicted with weapons in dynamic poses, reinforcing the idea that femininity was linked to both protection and transcendence (Dehejia, 1986).

Similarly, the elegantly carved apsarās, though sensual, are never passive. Their poised stances and ritual gestures symbolize prosperity and divine blessings (Desai, 1996). Rather than mere objects of beauty, they are seen as channels of cosmic energy (shakti).

Yet, the erotic sculptures complicate this perspective. Colonial scholars like James Fergusson dismissed them as "licentious," while later Indian nationalists reinterpreted them as symbols of spiritual union (Guha-Thakurta, 2004). Feminist perspectives vary some see these figures as reflections of Tantric traditions, where sexuality symbolized cosmic creation (Desai, 1975). Others, like Srinivasan (1984), note that their placement on temple exteriors suggests a lingering discomfort with female desire. The Devī Māhātmya, a key medieval text, praises goddesses as warriors but rarely as lovers, highlighting a tension between reverence and control (Bolon, 1992).

Ultimately, Khajuraho's sculptures blur the line between devotion and desire, leaving modern viewers to interpret their layered meanings.

Women's Societal Status in Medieval India: Insights from Temple Iconography

Temple art serves as a contested archive of gender norms, offering glimpses into women's lived realities. Inscriptions from Khajuraho and other sites from medieval India like Thanjavur reveal that elite women donated land and commissioned temples, indicating economic agency (Orr, 2000). The *Lakshmana Temple* inscription, for instance, records Queen Nohala's patronage, while *Devī Jagadambi's* prominence underscores worship of feminine divinity (Chattopadhyaya, 1998). Yet, such power was often circumscribed by caste and marital status. These sculptures and texts appear to celebrate female sexuality as an integral part of sacred life, suggesting a society where desire *(kama)* was not divorced from spirituality. Yet the same culture that carved these images continues to uphold patriarchal structures.

The *devadāsī* system, where women performed ritual dances (*nātya*), exemplifies this duality. While some *devadāsīs* wielded influence as temple administrators, colonial reforms later stigmatized them as "prostitutes" (Sathyamala, 2019). Sculptures of dancers at Khajuraho, their bodies frozen in *tribhaṅga* (triple-bend) postures, may commemorate their sacred roles—or aestheticize their labour (Kaimal, 1999). Similarly, domestic scenes (women applying makeup, cradling infants) could idealize fertility or subtly enforce patriarchal expectations (Talbot, 1995).

Regional variations in this perspective are important to take into account. Compared to Khajuraho's eroticism, Hoysala temples emphasize *queens* as political actors, while Odisha's *Konark* foregrounds childbirth iconography (Desai, 1996). Such differences suggest that women's status was neither monolithic nor static, but negotiated through local customs and power structures.

Khajuraho's art refuses singular interpretation. It's women are divine and human, powerful and eroticized, celebrated and confined all at once. This is a reflection of the medieval India where spirituality and sensuality, patriarchy and matrilineal traditions, coexisted in uneasy harmony.

To reduce these depictions to mere "fertility symbols" or "objectification" is to overlook their deliberate complexity. As Desai (1975) reminds us, temple art was never just decoration; it was theology in stone, a dialogue between earthly and eternal truths. For modern scholars, the challenge lies in listening and interpreting to what these stones struggle to say without imposing contemporary biases.

Sacred Spaces, Shifting Norms: Why India's Temples Transformed

The temples of Khajuraho and Konark, with their fearless depictions of feminine power and sensuality, stand in silent contrast to today's reality—where women face restrictions in many of these same sacred spaces. This paradox raises a profound question: **how did we move from a culture that carved goddesses and lovers into temple walls to one where women's entry, attire, and autonomy in religious sites are so fiercely debated?** The answer lies not in ancient scriptures, but in the collision of history, colonialism, and social reform. These historic event signify a story carved in stone, then rewritten by time.

A World Where the Divine Was Feminine

Pre-colonial temple art celebrated women in roles we might find startling today. At Khajuraho, warrior yoginīs stood guard beside amorous couples; in Tamil Nadu, inscriptions recorded women as temple patrons and landowners (Orr, 2000). In these depictions, the feminine was seen as a source of cosmic energy (*shakti*). The *Devī Māhātmya* (6th century CE) praised goddesses who slayed demons, while Tantric traditions venerated the body as a vessel of spiritual power (Dehejia, 1986). This wasn't "vulgarity"—it was theology in stone.

The Turning Point: Colonial Eyes on Sacred Art

The British arrival marked a seismic shift. Officials like James Fergusson dismissed erotic sculptures as "monstrous licentiousness" (Guha-Thakurta, 2004), while missionaries campaigned against "pagan" temple practices. By 1871, the colonial government passed obscenity laws, forcing temples to cover or remove "indecent" art. Simultaneously, *devadāsīs*. women who'd performed ritual dance for centuries, were recast as "prostitutes"

under moral reform campaigns (Sathyamala, 2019). **What was once divine became deviant, not by Hindu texts, but by Victorian standards.**

Reform or Regression? The Post-Colonial Paradox

Ironically, India's own 19th-century reform movements, seeking to counter colonial ridicule, doubled down on "respectability." The Arya Samaj and others promoted a sanitized Hinduism, stripping away Tantric and folk tradition narratives that honored female sexuality (Chakravarti, 2003). Post-independence, these ideas hardened into policy: Karnataka's *Devadasi Prohibition Act* (1982) banned rituals that had once empowered women as ritualists. Today, when temples bar menstruating women or enforce dress codes, they invoke "tradition"—**but whose tradition?** As scholar Kavita Singh (2000) notes, "The past we defend is often the past we've invented."

The Modern Dilemma: Heritage vs. Control

The same sculptures that tourists photograph as "cultural heritage" remain contentious in lived practice. Consider the irony: Konark's Sun Temple, adorned with erotic art, has no restrictions on visitors' clothing, while some living temples police women's skirts or age. This disconnect suggests that **modern restrictions stem less from ancient theology than from 19th-century social engineering**. This point is underscored by the fact that no major Hindu scripture mandates gender based entry bans (John, 2020).

From Celebration to Control: The Transformation of India's Temple Traditions

Beneath the towering shikaras of Khajuraho and the intricate carvings of Konark lies an untold story. The journey from medieval temples that celebrated life in all its forms to contemporary spaces where tradition often wears the garb of restriction. How did sacred sites that once thrived as centres of artistic freedom and feminine power become arenas of contested access? The answer unfolds across centuries, shaped by invasions, colonialism, and social reforms that collectively rewrote the rules of devotion and morality.

The Medieval Mosaic: Temples as Living Archives

In the 9th to 12th centuries, temples were more than places of worship, they were vibrant cultural canvases. The Chandela and Chola dynasties commissioned art that depicted women as warriors (yoginīs), scholars, and celestial beings, their sculptures adorning temple walls without apology (Dehejia, 1986). Inscriptions from this period reveal that women donated land, funded rituals, and even served as temple administrators (Orr, 2000). **This was**

not an era of repression but of participation, where the divine feminine was both feared and revered.

The Fracturing of Tradition: Two Key Turning Points

1. **Islamic Rule (12th–18th centuries):** While temple destruction during invasions is well-documented, less known is how patronage shifted. As royal funding dwindled, temples became more insular, with rituals increasingly guarded rather than communal (Eaton, 2000). The erotic and the esoteric, once public, retreated to inner sanctums.

2. **Colonial Reinterpretation (19th century):** The British, steeped in Victorian morality, labelled temple art "obscene" and scrubbed it from public view. The 1871 *Obscenity Act* targeted not just erotic sculptures but the very philosophy that saw the body as sacred (Guha-Thakurta, 2004). Simultaneously, reformers like the Arya Samaj sought to "purify" Hinduism, disavowing Tantra and folk practices that honored women's autonomy (Sarkar, 2001).

Post-Colonial Paradox: The Invention of "Tradition"

Ironically, as India gained independence, its temples grew more restrictive. The *Devadasi Abolition Acts* (1947–1988) dismantled a 1,000-year-old system of ritual dance, recasting priestesses as social outcasts (Sathyamala, 2019). Meanwhile, archaeological "restoration" often meant whitewashing complex histories—Konark's Sun Temple was heralded as a national symbol, even as its fertility symbolism was downplayed (Singh, 2000).

The Modern Dilemma: Who Defines Sacred Space?

Today, debates over temple entry bans or dress codes reveal a deeper tension: **are we preserving tradition or perpetuating a colonial hangover?** Notably:

- Ancient texts like the *Agamas* prescribe no gender restrictions (Kaimal, 1999).
- Pre-colonial processions (like Kerala's *Theyyam*) still feature men embodying goddesses, a stark contrast to modern taboos (Tarabout, 2016).

Identified Research Gaps

The existing scholarship on Khajuraho's temple art reveals several critical gaps that warrant further investigation:

1. **Sacred vs. Secular Interpretations**
    - While some scholars argue that erotic sculptures reflect Tantric spirituality (Desai, 1975), others view them as decorative or socio-cultural expressions (Kaimal, 1999). A systematic theological analysis comparing these depictions with contemporaneous Tantric texts remains understudied.
2. **Agency vs. Objectification in Warrior Imagery**
    - The portrayal of yoginīs and armed goddesses raises questions about whether they mirror historical female autonomy or idealized masculinist power fantasies (Dehejia, 1986). Cross-referencing these representations with medieval inscriptions documenting women's roles could clarify this dichotomy.
3. **Colonial Epistemological Violence**
    - Current research inadequately traces how British obscenity laws (Guha-Thakurta, 2004) and subsequent nationalist responses collectively erased indigenous frameworks for understanding temple art. Archival studies of pre-colonial ritual manuals versus colonial-era guidebooks could reveal this epistemic rupture.
4. **Disconnect Between Archaeological Evidence and Modern Practice**
    - No comprehensive study correlates the archaeological record of women's temple access with contemporary restrictions. Material culture analysis of medieval footfall patterns versus modern entry policies could illuminate this paradox.
5. **Caste as a Missing Analytical Lens**
    - Most analyses treat "women" as a monolithic category, neglecting how devadāsī traditions (Sathyamala, 2019) or Shudra women's representations differed from elite portrayals. Intersectional studies are notably absent.

2.2 Vastu Shastra & Temple Architecture

Temples are considered to be a symbol of the cosmos itself in Hinduism. A group of texts governs its architecture and its underlying philosophical significance (Trivedi, 1989).

Shilpa (arts and crafts) Shastra (scripture): Ancient science and a set of texts that outline the rules and guidelines of building temples. This scripture provides the spiritual significance behind the structures and idols in temples. It outlines three main types of temple architecture- Nagara, Dravida and Vesara.

The Shilpa Shastra in accordance with Vastu Shastra (science of architecture) has played a huge role in the construction, layout and iconography of the Khajuraho group of temples. Built according to the Nagara style, the temples' main characteristics are:

1. Chambers: Embodying the characteristics of typical Nagara style temples, the Khajuraho temples are divided into several chambers which progress inwards to signify a devotee's journey from the external world to the spiritual world. The chambers may vary according to the size of the temple.

    - Jagati: The temples stand on a raised platform known as the Jagati which gives way to the sacred space for parikrama (circumambulation). This signifies the detachment from the secular world.

    - Ardhamandapa: The entrance porch of the temples supported by pillars and arches with sculptures of deities is known as the Ardhamandapa. It serves as the transitional space from the outer walls to the inner walls of the temple which may be interpreted as journey from the external world to sacred space.

    - Mandapa: A pillared hall used for rituals and prayers, the mandapa is characterized by intricate carvings of gods, apsaras and mythological scenes.

    - Mahamandapa: Characterized by high ceilings and magnificent pillars, the Mahamandapa is a grander version of mandapa and is used for ceremonies and discourses.

    - Antarala: The buffer zone that connects the Mahamandapa to the Garbhagriha, the Antarala is characterized by carved doorways,

- Garbhagriha: The sanctum sanctorum, the garbhagriha is the innermost, holiest chamber characterized by a small, dark space with the idol of the deity being worshipped (Meister, 1979).

2. Shikhara: Nagara style architecture is defined by a spire- the Shikhara. It rises from the garbhagriha and symbolizes Mount Meru- cosmic axis of the universe and a connection between the mortal and the divine.

3. Panchayatana layout: A key architectural element of the Khajuraho temples, this layout is followed meticulously. It consists of a central shrine surrounded by 4 subsidiary shrines. It signifies the interconnectedness and unity of the divine.

4. Significance of Vastu Shastra: Vastu Purusha Mandala- a cosmic geometrical marvel- is followed by the Khajuraho temples:

   - The temples are east-facing to ensure that the first sun rays fall on the main deity.
   - The temple structures are divided into symmetric grids to follow the cosmic order.
   - The height of the Shikhara follows the proportion of Vastu.
   - The temples themselves are arranged in symmetric patterns.

5. Sculptures: The temples of Khajuraho are adorned with magnificent sculptures with great philosophical meaning. On the basis of architectural work, they may be categorized as relief sculptures (flat) and round sculptures (three dimensional). On the basis of depiction, the sculptures can be classified into 3 broad categories:

   - Religious sculptures: Depicting mythologically significant devas, deities- Apsaras, Sundaris- and gods, these sculptures cover Hinduism- Brahma, Vishnu, Shiva, Parvati, Ganesha, Surya, and their various forms and incarnations, Jainism- Adinatha, Parshvanatha, Shantinatha, and other revered figures and Buddhism.
   - Secular sculptures: Portraying domestic scenes and emotions from everyday life.
   - Animal sculptures: Portraying both mythical- Vyalas, Sardulas- as well as real animals.

Prevalent folklore around sculptures:

- Legend of Chandela King: One fascinating story that surrounds the mystic existence of the sculptures of Khajuraho temples, especially the erotic ones, is that of Chandravarman, the Chedela King and the son of Moon God. Hemavati, a woman of great beauty, was seduced by the moon god. Her pregnancy soon followed and in order to save herself from the shame of being an unwed mother, she birthed Chandravarman in the forest. Chandrama, the moon god, upon hearing this news, blessed his son with the boon of becoming king. Upon ascending the throne, Chandravarman sanctioned the building of the temples in order to normalize the natural act of intercourse.

- Tantric background: Some hold the belief that the sculptures hold a Tantric influence behind them since Tantric Vidya considers sexuality to be the path for divine realization. The depiction of the union of Shiva and Shakti emphasizes balance, cosmic energy and a way to attain Moksha.

- Tackling Religious transformations: Some say that in those days, due to the boom of Jainism and Buddhism, people were renouncing worldly desires to live like monks. In order to tackle this, erotic sculptures were carved on the temple walls.

To make it easier to navigate the temples present in the complex, they have been divided into the western, eastern and southern subparts(*Khajuraho Temples Are More than Just Erotic; Here Are Some Interesting Facts | TimesTravel*, n.d.).

Western group of temples

1. Kandariya Mahadev Temple: The largest temple in the Khajuraho complex, this temple is dedicated to Lord Shiva. Kandariya (cave) symbolizes the mountain that was Shiva's abode- Mount Kailash.

2. Chausath Jogini Temple: One of the earliest temples in the complex, this temple is dedicated to the 64 yoginis (manifestations) of Goddess Shakti.

3. Devi Jagdamba Temple: This temple was initially dedicated to Lord Vishnu but later repurposed towards Goddess Parvati.

4. Chitragupta Temple: This temple is the only structure dedicated to worship the Sun God- Surya.

5. Vishwanath Temple: Another Shiva temple, this structure is well known for the Nandi pavilion with a sculpture of Nandi (Shiva's mount – a bull).

6. Laxmana Temple: This temple is dedicated towards worshiping the three-headed form of Vishnu.

Eastern group of temples

1. Brahma Temple: One of the oldest temples in the complex, this temple, opposed to its name, is dedicated towards Lord Vishnu. Unlike the other temples, it is made up of granite and sandstone. The four openings in the temple signify the four directions which symbolize Vishnu's role as the preserver of the universe.

2. Ghantai Temple: One of the few Jain temples, this temple is dedicated to the 16th Jain Tirthankara, Shantinatha.

3. Parsawanatha Jain Temple: Largest and most preserved Jain temple, this temple is dedicated to Lord Parsvanatha, the 23rd Tirthankara. Its special characteristic that differentiates it from the other temples is the presence of non-erotic themed sculptures.

Southern group of temples

1. Duladeo Temple: Dedicated to Lord Shiva, this temple is commonly referred to as "Kunwar Math" that translates to the Temple of the Bridegroom.

2. Jatkari Temple: Also known as the Chaturbhuj Temple, it is dedicated to Lord Vishnu and lacks any erotic sculptures.

We have gained a lot of information through secondary research but significant insights will only be achieved once we visit the temples. On the field, we aim to talk to local guides, tourists and historians. The knowledge that each individual possesses will give different perspectives into the architecture and the philosophical significance of the structures in the Khajuraho group of monuments.

Gaps

1. Different interpretations of the same sculptures and multiple folklores prevalent-

The multiple interpretations available online and the lack of scholarly debate around the same makes it difficult to understand valid iconography and the true underlying meanings behind various structures.

2. Tantric aspect-

If one would imagine a temple in today's day and age, erotic sculptures would be the last thing that would come to peoples' minds. Yet, ahead of its time, the Khajuraho group of monuments sport various erotic sculptures on their walls. This is a clear indication of the different thought processes, worldviews and cultures of people of that time.

Tantra has always celebrated sexuality and fertility and has seen them as a means of attaining spiritual liberation. It can be debated that Tantra along with Hinduism, Jainism and Buddhism has given fruit to these sculptures that have now become the very face of Khajuraho.

While talking about the religions associated with these temples, people may not even be aware of the strong influence of Tantric culture. And many research papers barely graze over the topic without delving much into it. This is erasing a huge part of its identity and a huge disservice to these UNESCO monuments.

3. Implications of Vastu Shastra in modern-day

Vastu Shastra has been employed while building the temples and it has a significant meaning behind it. Can such principles be employed in modern-day architecture to encourage overall sustainability and well-being?

2.3 Tourism & Economy of Khajuraho

Government's Tourism Development Initiatives and Projects

The state government established the Madhya Pradesh Tourism Board (MPTB) in 2017 to identify and develop tourist destinations and infrastructure in the state, promote sustainable tourism practices and market them using various advertising mixes for domestic and international tourists (Kour, 2023). Another organisation, the Madhya Pradesh State

Tourism Development Corporation (MPSTDC) was established to implement the planned tourism infrastructure development projects and marketing initiatives, promote regional product development and entrepreneurship to attract stakeholders, specifically, businesses from all over India (Kour, 2023).

Since the past few decades, the state government has changed its strategy, diversified and adopted policies to develop and market the different kinds of tourism in different regions of the state including adventure tourism, culture and heritage tourism, film tourism, natural and wildlife tourism, spirituality tourism and rural tourism. It has also established the Madhya Pradesh Ecotourism Development Board (MPEDB) for specifically developing ecotourism in the state while conserving wildlife, forests and rural livelihoods. Furthermore, MP Tourism's website includes all the information and resources tourists may need to plan their trips, from registered tour guides, travel agents, planned itineraries, accommodation options (hotels and homestays) to dedicated web-pages for each tourist destination and an extensive collection of blogs informing readers about the variety of tourist attractions, festivals, events and spots they can 'explore' and 'experience' at each tourist destination, all categorised according to the different kinds of tourism.

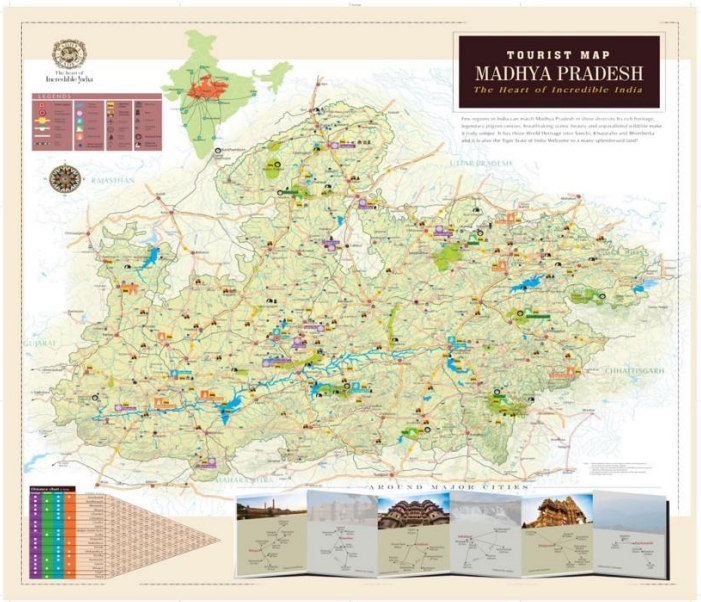


Figure 2.1 Tourist Map Source: MP Tourism

The state government has also introduced a series of projects under the **Responsible Tourism Mission** of "making better places for people to live and for them to visit", known as the RTM Projects (MP Tourism, n.d.). As part of the projects, the government partners with

locals in and around tourist destinations for developing their skills, enhancing them through certifications and helping them acquire new opportunities in tourism (MP Tourism, n.d.).

As part of its **Homestay Establishment Schemes and Rural Tourism Project**, the state government offers homeowners in both urban and rural areas the opportunity to register and accommodate domestic and international tourists and travelers in the extra rooms of their homes and generate steady income and employment opportunities in the local communities (MP Tourism, n.d.). Its Rural Tourism Project which has been initiated in 125 villages, divides the state into 6 cultural regions enabling travelers and tourists to form meaningful connections with local communities, learn about and experience their unique culture and heritage, customs and traditions, cuisine and lifestyle, arts and crafts and eco-friendly practices while minimizing their carbon footprints (MP Tourism, n.d.).

To develop the handicrafts industry in the state and support the local artisans, the MPTB and a Technical Support Organisation (TSO) have planned to provide training and assistance in market research, improving the design, production, packaging and marketing of their products and ensure fair prices through market linkages as part of the **Responsible Souvenir Project** (MP Tourism, n.d.). It is being implemented in and around the 125 villages selected for the Rural Tourism Project with a training centre being established in each village to provide handholding support and create employment opportunities locally (MP Tourism, n.d.). Each centre will have at least 3 art forms and approx. 30 products (MP Tourism, n.d.).

The MPTB has also launched **Project Humsafar** with the objectives of making tourism inclusive and ensuring easy accessibility for the specially-abled and elderly at tourist destinations through sensitization and capacity building, conducting awareness programs for government staff, increasing the proportion of accessible government buildings, transportation system accessibility and information and communication systems accessibility (MP Tourism, n.d.).

Recognizing the critical need for maintaining the cleanliness and environmental sustainability of tourist destinations, the MPTB launched **Project Clean Destinations** to improve sanitation, hygiene and cleanliness, promote sustainable waste management and involve the local community in environmental conservation through awareness campaigns, behavioral change programs and training sessions (MP Tourism, n.d.). The project's success is dependent on the active participation of local communities, administration, private partners (Coca-Cola India and NGO SAAHAS) and the visitors (MP Tourism, n.d.). It was initially

implemented in 30 villages surrounding the Panna National Park and was expanded to villages surrounding the Bandhavgarh Tiger Reserve in January 2025, with the Swachh Bharat Mission being integrated into the new phase (MP Tourism, n.d.).

The MPTB launched the "**Safe Tourism Destination for Women in Madhya Pradesh**" Project to promote inclusive tourism by ensuring women's safety and enhancing both domestic and international female tourists' experiences through fearless and independent travel (MP Tourism, n.d.). It focuses on raising awareness about women's safety, stakeholder training and capacity building, conducting safety audits at tourist destinations, providing self-defence training to girls and women and increasing women's workforce participation through skill development and employment opportunities in tourism (MP Tourism, n.d.). The project will include 20 clusters and 50 destinations across Madhya Pradesh, aiming to train 40,000 women and girls in self-defence, provide skills to 10,000 women, and create job opportunities for 5,000 women in tourism (MP Tourism, n.d.). Strategic partnerships have been formed with UN Women for technical support and the State Police Department to ensure its successful implementation (MP Tourism, n.d.).

Although the state government has planned various tourism development projects in Madhya Pradesh since the 1980s, information, specifically, about the implementation and impact assessment of these projects is not available online or through other secondary sources. Furthermore, Khajuraho-specific data about tourism infrastructure development projects is also not available.

Marketing Khajuraho as a Tourist Destination

According to a case study conducted by Kour in 2023, finding a "unique selling proposition" for marketing Madhya Pradesh as a tourist destination was initially a "major challenge" compared to other competitive tourist hotspots in the country. Kour then describes in detail the various advertising campaigns launched in phases, from 2007 to 2017, by the Madhya Pradesh Tourism Board to position the state as a "True Family Entertainer with a variety of experiences for all" along with other substantial marketing initiatives, events, festivals and creative strategies such as "Heart of Incredible India" for promoting Madhya Pradesh as a multidimensional tourist destination (Kour, 2023). Kour ends with suggesting that, with changing times, the focus of the marketing initiatives should shift to promoting responsible tourism practices that can create job opportunities for communities while protecting the environment which involves supporting the local community through avenues

such as campsites, home stays and boutique hotels, enhancing green covers, etc (Kour, 2023).

Although the erotic sculptures at Khajuraho's temples account for only 10% of all the sculptures, they have become the identity of the temples, which does not align with MP Tourism's strategy of marketing Madhya Pradesh as a "family entertainment destination". Moreover, it appears that tourist hotspots such as Ujjain, Indore and Bhopal may be preferred to village-towns such as Khajuraho because they are more developed and have better quality infrastructure and facilities to support tourism, connectivity to and distance from major cities in India, availability of local transportation and amenities.



Figure 2.2 Products presented at stalls in the Khajuraho Dance Festival

Considering the ever-evolving consumer preferences, Khajuraho's inclusion in Madhya Pradesh tourism needs to be increased by **fuller utilisation of digital marketing** strategies, **contextual advertising** and social media platforms to target and attract the

maximum number of tourists specifically to Khajuraho. A research study conducted by Dutch publisher NPO has shown that displaying advertisements based on context, that is, advertisements connected to the content of the website that the user is visiting, has been surprisingly more economical than non-contextual targeting (Boerman et Smit, 2023). For instance, information about Khajuraho that is specifically available only on the MP Tourism and MPSTDC's official websites should also reach a wider audience by also being advertised on other relevant websites including popular tours and travels websites.

The COVID 19 Pandemic and Reliance on Tourism

During the COVID-19 pandemic, Khajuraho's economy suffered severely. Due to lockdowns and international travel restrictions, occupancy in hotels was non-existent and unemployment was widespread during what was supposed to be the peak season (Saxena, 2019; Dubey, 2020).The average annual occupancy in Khajuraho's hotels was only 35% to 40% approx. (Saxena, 2019; Dubey, 2020). Even today, its economy has been recovering rather slowly and the number of visitors does not seem to be improving, even to the pre-pandemic numbers. As observed, an economy cannot solely rely on a specific sector for its development because of its vulnerability to external shocks such as pandemics, natural disasters and geopolitical instability. Since diversified economies are more resilient during crises, Khajuraho's economy needs to diversify to sectors such as manufacturing and services. These secondary and tertiary sectors should become Khajuraho's primary source of income in order to maximise its economic potential and benefits for its stakeholders.

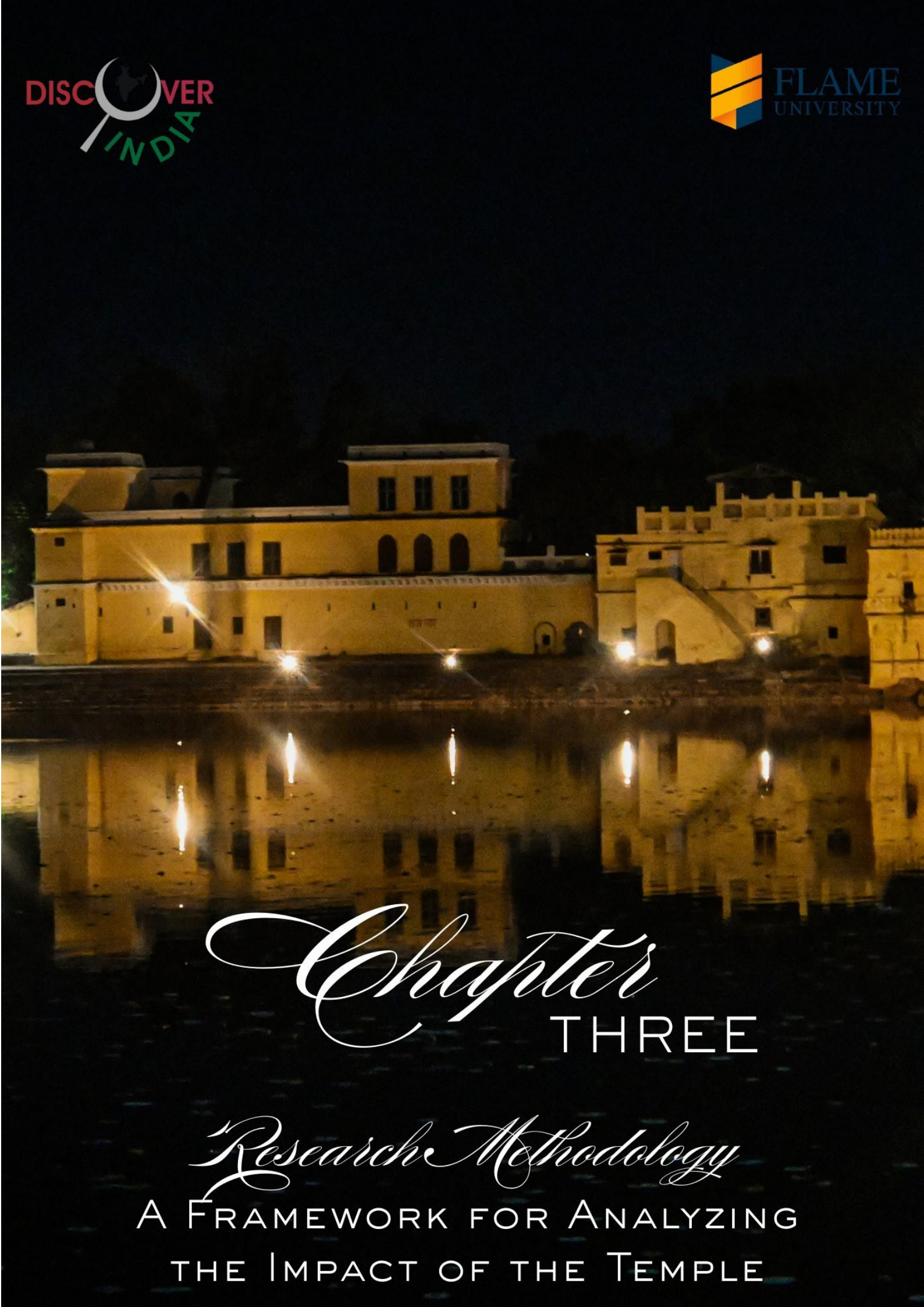
Challenges: Infrastructure, Connectivity and Amenities

In 2019, the local traders, tour guides, travel agents and surprisingly even foreign tourists went on a strike against the government, demanding better air, rail and road connectivity to Khajuraho and better infrastructure for tourism development (Choudhury, 2019; Pateriya, 2019).

Several academic studies and reports including Som et al. (2020) found that the stakeholders at Khajuraho need much better public and private infrastructure and facilities to be able to successfully host a prestigious global event such as the Khajuraho Dance Festival. The stakeholders were of the consensus that accessibility and connectivity through an international airport, flights and direct rail connectivity to major Indian cities, availability of local transportation and wayside amenities within Khajuraho need to be urgently improved in order to attract international and domestic visitors (Som et. al, 2020). They also observed an

increase in domestic visitors but a decline in European tourists, which they attributed to the lack of an international airport in Khajuraho. They also expressed concern about the quality of the dance festival because of a decline in the participation of top artists in recent years. Khajuraho's tour guides attribute the lack of visitors to the unsatisfactory maintenance of these sites. "They seem deserted. The roads are not good and local transportation is not available (Som et al., 2020)."

Som et al. (2020) suggest conducting an "Impact Assessment Study" and a "Carrying Capacity Study to determine the optimum level of development suitable for Khajuraho before the implementation of any development plan."



Chapter THREE

Research Methodology

A Framework for Analyzing the Impact of the Temple

Chapter 3: Methodology & On-Field Plan

3.1 Research Design

Temples and Society Structures

This feminist art historical study employs a mixed-methods approach to examine representations of women in Indian temple architecture, with particular focus on the Khajuraho temple complex. The research combines:

- Qualitative feminist analysis of sculptural representations
- Architectural documentation of gendered spatial arrangements
- Ethnographic engagement with contemporary stakeholders

The study adopts a critical feminist lens while maintaining scholarly objectivity, seeking to understand how female imagery functioned within its historical context rather than imposing modern frameworks. A constant comparative design will help us compare the historical v.s contemporary gender norms in sacred places.

Temple Architecture and Iconography

Our research design includes a healthy blend of information collected from both primary as well as secondary sources to understand in-depth the philosophical significance and cultural relevance of the architecture of the Khajuraho group of temples.

Tourism, Economy and The Dance Festival

The research design includes qualitative data from both primary and secondary sources for a comprehensive study of Khajuraho's tourism, economy and the annual dance festival. Multiple data collection methods (interviews, focus groups, questionnaire, literature review) were used to cross-verify and ensure that the collected information was credible and not influenced by any kind of methodological bias.

3.2 Data Collection Methods and On Field Plan

Temples and Society Structures

Primary Sources:

Sculptural Documentation:

- Systematic photographic survey of female figures
- Analysis of postures, attributes and relational depictions
- Ethnographic Research:
- Semi-structured interviews with:
- Local women's groups in the village
- Artisans and small business owners from other towns who have observed the culture of Khajuraho over the years
- Young women from the village

Secondary Sources:

- Feminist art historical scholarship
- Archaeological reports on temple construction phases
- Devadasi and women's ritual participation studies

Temple Architecture and Iconography

Primary Sources

Interviews: Qualitative data was gathered through semi-structured interviews with tour guides, historians, local scholars and domestic as well as foreign tourists.

Field Observations: Comprehensive tours of the temples were undertaken to document the unique architectural elements of the temples along with specific engravings with significant philosophical associations.

Secondary sources

Comprehensive literature review of pre-existing articles, peer-reviewed journals, research papers and books was conducted in order to analyse the body of text available on the UNESCO heritage site as well as identify potential gaps.

Data Analysis

Thematic analysis: The qualitative data collected from primary sources – interviews and field observations- and secondary sources were transcribed, compared and analysed to identify recurring themes as well as existent gaps and address the same. Major themes that

emerged were symbolism behind the intricate sculptures and carvings as well as the utility of the different sections of the temples, influence of Hindu, Jain and potentially Tantric philosophies on the architectural elements and conservation and preservation efforts along with modern interpretations of the temples.

Tourism, Economy and The Dance Festival

Qualitative data was collected from primary sources on the field through semi-structured interviews of tourists and stakeholders including travel agents, tour guides and operators at the temples, local business owners and sellers, hoteliers, government officials, artists, dancers, business owners and sellers participating in the annual dance festival.

Focus group discussions were organised with each set of stakeholders to understand their perspectives on the sufficiency of tourism development in Khajuraho.

Specific set of standardised questions related to the effects of tourism on local businesses and economy and efforts for improving tourism development infrastructure, connectivity, accessibility, amenities and marketing were created for each set of stakeholders including artists, dancers, business owners and sellers participating in the annual dance festival. The questionnaire was pilot-tested with a small group of participants before going on the field to refine the questionnaire and ensure clarity and relevance to the research.

Qualitative data was also collected from secondary sources through an extensive review of existing literature on Khajuraho's tourism, economy and the annual dance festival including peer-reviewed journals, academic research studies, government reports, policy documents and reliable news reports.

Sampling Technique

Purposive sampling was used to identify stakeholders, select interviewees and focus group participants. This approach allowed the inclusion of individuals with expertise and experience on Khajuraho's tourism, economy and the annual dance festival.

Data Analysis

The qualitative data collected from each interview and focus group discussion was transcribed to identify and understand each stakeholder's perspective on Khajuraho's tourism, economy and the annual dance festival. The participants' responses were summarised and categorised into themes including the effects of tourism on local businesses and economy and efforts for improving Khajuraho's tourism development infrastructure, connectivity,

accessibility and amenities to examine the gaps in existing literature and determine whether there have been any changes in the planning, implementation and impact assessment of tourism development projects after the protests of 2019 and the findings of the stakeholders' analysis' conducted by Som et al. in 2020.

3.3 Ethical Considerations

Temples and Society Structures

- Representation Ethics:
- The study will include women from multiple backgrounds to understand and listen to multiple voices
- Acknowledge feminist, historical and local perspectives at the same time also drawing a relevance with the original root of the sculptors
- The study will express limitations as we are not sure of access to all the cultural and historic data while at the same time everything cannot be interpreted as 100% truth from the oral answers.
- Community Engagement:
- The study will involve people from different variants such as people from Khajuraho, local artisans, mela contributors, government staffs, dancers, etc. This helps get a variety of perspectives about the same concern.
- The study will uphold cultural and ethical engagement of local custodians
- Sensitive Material Protocol:
- The interviewer must consider sensitivity while discussing about erotic and cultural representations.
- The interview will include a written or voice consent from the respondents
- At any point of the interview if the interviewee feels uncomfortable the interviewer must stop the interview immediately.
- The study will also consider anonymous responses due to erotic sensitivity in the topic

Informed Consent: All participants were informed about the purpose of the research and their right to withdraw anytime. Consent was obtained either through writing or documented through videos.

Data security: Documentation and interviews were only accessible to group members for research purposes.

Cultural sensitivity: All interpretations were made from an unbiased point of view with scholarly objectivity. Cultural traditions and practices were kept in mind while conducting the research with respect towards local beliefs.

Anonymity: In line with participants' wishes, their data was kept confidential. In order to protect privacy, data was anonymized where necessary.



Chapter FOUR

Carved in Contradiction

Chapter 4: Findings – Temple and Society Structures

4.1 Data Collected

The ethnographic data collected from Khajuraho's elderly women, young residents, priests, tour guides, and local shopkeepers suggests a dissonance between the temple's celebrated artistic heritage and contemporary gender norms. While the Chandela sculptures boldly depict women as warriors, apsaras, lovers, deities, symbols of power, modern practices reflect increasing restrictions on women's participation in ritual and public life. This study uncovers the generational divide in interpreting temple iconography, where older generations often view erotic and warrior imagery through a spiritual lens, younger respondents critically question its relevance to their lived realities. Simultaneously, the commodification of Khajuraho's art for tourism clashes with local conservative ideas and practices, exposing tensions between historical symbolism and present-day social values. These findings suggest that events like colonial moral reforms, post-independence revivalism, and globalisation, have completely influenced how the community interacts with this UNESCO World Heritage Site, often not clearly expressing the philosophical idea that all humans deserve equal rights.

A. Interviews with Elderly and Young Women

Sample Size: 15 women (40 +) 10 women (18- 35 years) (all lifelong residents of Khajuraho)

Key Responses:

On Temple Visits & Rituals:

The elderly women in Khajuraho have a very rigid perspective of viewing the temples and its art. All women have informed about participating in the rituals and pujas related to Maha Shivaratri which involve getting up early, preparing food as offerings for the temple, visiting the Shiv temple early in the morning etc. When asked about the roles of men and women, most women have reported to be the only ones involved in the preparation process while males are the ones performing the pujas. Not just during specific events, households, in general, have fixed roles which are consistent all throughout the village. It is not very often that one would find women of Khajuraho working. The ones that do usually take up jobs in their husband's business/ work to extend a helping hand and get those extra bucks. Men are the sole earners in the family. They have a limited role in household chores and as the caregivers of

their child however tasks involving going outside the house (e.g. grocery shopping) are mostly taken up by men. Most women have expressed peace with the defined gender roles in the village. They have grown up learning how to take care and nurture the household by fulfilling these specific nourishment and emotional needs in the family. Some women have expressed the emotional burden of their roles in the house but are often left with no choice or help. Others have grown accustomed to the tasks as a result of an early marriage.

Young adults do not specifically have a role in the rituals. However, an important aspect is that gender roles have been divided amongst people of the village since their teenage years. By the time they turn 18, most girls have already been married. If not, the girl child is often asked to assist the mothers with their roles while there more focus on making the boys independent and educated and skilful enough to earn.

On Erotic Sculptures:

Not entirely to our surprise, almost all elderly women of the village were seen being uncomfortable at the thought of the erotic sculptures. We found reluctance in answering questions, not giving consent to being recorded in any form, asking to skip the questions or simply just walking away. A very notable observation from these interviews has been that women were uncomfortable answering these questions in front of others or expressed the need to seek permission from their husbands to answer not only some specific questions but answering for the interview in general. Emotions of shame, guilt, shyness or disgust popped up in 80% of our interactions. Some women claim to have never visited the sites of the temple with these erotic sculptures while others say that they only go to the temple to pray and perform puja. A couple of women have acknowledged that these figures are an expression of art, and something each human being needs to have knowledge about; however there are very few who match their ideology. When asked about their views on erotic imagery being expressed just next to the deity, all of them agreed that this should not have been the case, even the ones who saw this as an expression of art.

Young women, especially college going girls, reported that they weren't allowed to visit the temples. Their families only visited temples on festive occasions or when they had visitors from outside Khajuraho at their homes. There is some openness in terms of talking about it. More people acknowledge that the depictions were scientific and spread awareness. Among them, about 9/10 people are convinced that these depictions were made just to please the foreign tourists that are seen as too keen on the representation of ideas and this form of expression of love and art.

On Women's Status:

These conversations and paradoxes about the dual portrayal of women lead us to questions that make the interviewees think critically about how a woman should be viewed in the society. Interestingly, the responses have left us questioning society even more. Women of the village have been progressing with their views on gender roles, girls' education, and marriages, so they say, but there is some dissonance with what they believe is true and how they act. All women with one or more girl child, have reported sending them to school for a formal education and highlighted the influence of government and government policies in spreading awareness about girl child education. However, 85% of women do not continue with their academic and professional life. While there is an increase in the number of people sending girls to school for education, the household responsibilities remain the same and ultimately lead to overburdening of women both emotionally and mentally resulting in a professional compromise.

Women express being treated with love and respect by their husbands and families and talk about the equal status of men and women while conceding to the patriarchal systems with practices like wearing a *pallu* (veil) over their head as a sign of respect for their in- laws and husband.

On Societal Impact:

Women of all demographics do not usually believe that the temple imagery has an impact on society or how women are viewed. They believe that even though parts of the temple with erotic imagery often have male visitors, that does not affect how they treat the women around them.



Figure 4.1 showing local woman wearing pallu

B. Priests, Temple Staff and Tour Guides (5 Interviews)

On Erotic Sculptures:

The priests and temple staff of Khajuraho offered varied interpretations of the temple's famed erotic sculptures. Some priests described them as "Tantric symbolism," explaining that they represent the sacred "union of Shiva and Shakti", a metaphor for cosmic harmony. Others dismissed them as "just decoration," arguing that medieval artists had the creative freedom to depict all facets of life, including sensuality. One priest remarked, "These carvings were never meant to shock; they were part of a holistic view of existence."

Tour guides noted that while foreign tourists often fixate on these sculptures, asking detailed questions, many Indian visitors either avoid them or react with nervous laughter. A senior guide shared, "Westerners see philosophy, but locals still carry colonial-era discomfort about public sexuality."

On Women's Roles:

All priests and temple staff unanimously affirmed that women cannot enter the temple during menstruation or touch deities during certain rituals. One priest clarified, "It's not in our scriptures, but it's tradition now." Younger temple attendants, however, admitted privately that these rules feel outdated. Once again the worship of goddesses yet restrictions on women continue to be seen growing under the same roof.

Tour guides observed that while women dominate roles like selling offerings or cleaning temples, they remain excluded from priestly duties. One tour guide observes women making garlands, selling flowers and offerings on the streets but never inside the temples.

On Social Impact:

Most priests (4 out of 5 interviewed) insisted that the temple's artistic depictions have no bearing on modern gender dynamics. "Sculptures are history, not reality," argued one. Yet, a younger priest countered, "If we proudly display warrior goddesses, shouldn't women today wield equal power?"

Tour guides highlighted the irony: "Foreigners assume Khajuraho is a liberal place because of its art, but the town operates like any conservative Hindu heartland," said a local guide. We observed that while the culture seemingly celebrated openness, the society hasn't caught up yet.

On Visitor Reactions

- Foreign Tourists: Fixate on erotic art (90% of questions, per guides), often interpreting it through Tantric or anthropological lenses.
- Indian Families: Either skip erotic panels or react with awkward humor. Do not allow children to be exposed to the information.
- Scholars & Pilgrims: Rarely ask about eroticism; focus on deities or architecture.

4.2 Analysis

The Medieval Vision: Celebrating Feminine Power and Sensuality

The temples of Khajuraho, built under the Chandela dynasty (9th–12th centuries), present a striking contrast to contemporary gender norms. Their sculptures unabashedly depict women as warriors (*yoginīs*), celestial nymphs (*apsarās*), and divine consorts, alongside erotic scenes that medieval worshippers likely viewed as sacred expressions of *kāma* (desire) within *dharma* (cosmic order) (Desai, 1975; Dehejia, 1986). Even the Konark Sun Temple (13th century) and the Hoysala temples (12th–14th centuries) depict women as deities, warriors, and powerful figures, reflecting their revered status in medieval Indian society. At Konark, sculptures of *Shakti* (divine feminine energy) and *apsaras* (celestial nymphs) highlight women's spiritual and artistic roles (Desai, 2019). Hoysala temples, such as those at Belur and Halebid, feature *Salabhanjikas* (sculpted female figures) and depictions of goddesses like Durga, symbolizing strength and divinity (Settar, 2020). With texts like *Devī Māhātmya,* which glorifies goddesses as destroyers of demons, and the boldness of artistic expression, we can say that femininity was associated with both spiritual and worldly power.

Yet, as our interviews reveal, modern Khajuraho struggles to reconcile this heritage with its conservative practices and thought patterns of people. While some elderly women acknowledge the sculptures as "art" (albeit with discomfort), younger women question why their society restricts female agency when the temples themselves are celebrating it. More educated individuals learn to critically examine the practices happening in their culture and homes. This dissonance underscores a critical question: **did medieval India harbor a more integrated view of gender than its descendants presume?**

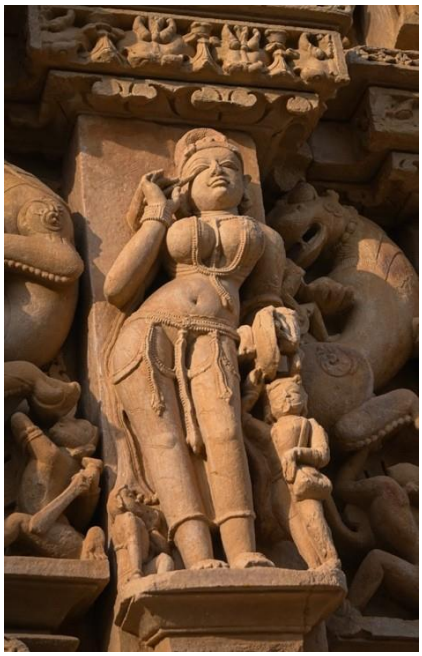


Figure 4.2 Showing woman as apsara.

Contemporary Realities: The Paradox of Progress and Patriarchy

Field data from Khajuraho's residents exposes a stark gap between symbolic representation of how the society and power dynamics are structured and lived experiences around them. While elderly women participate in rituals like Mahashivratri, their roles are limited to domestic preparations (e.g., cooking offerings), while men control temple ceremonies and perform pujas. Young women, though more educated than previous generations, face early marriages and disproportionate domestic burdens. 85% abandon their professions and careers post-wedding despite valuing education and expressing interest in working. Notably, even women who claim "equal status" and believe in equal treatment, themselves adhere to practices like veiling (*pallu*) for in-laws This reveals internalized patriarchy. As one college-going respondent noted, *"The temples show women as warriors, but our families treat us as fragile."* This aligns with Orr's (2000) findings on how temple women's (*devadāsīs*) historical ritual roles were erased by colonial and post-colonial reforms. The data suggests that **while Khajuraho's art immortalizes female power, its community has inherited a sanitized, patriarchal reinterpretation of tradition**.

Colonial Disruptions and the Invention of "Tradition"

The transformation from medieval openness to modern conservatism is inextricably linked to colonial interventions. British administrators, steeped in Victorian morality, labeled erotic sculptures "obscene" and censored them under the 1871 Obscenity Act (Guha-Thakurta, 2004). Simultaneously, missionaries and Hindu reform movements like the Arya

Samaj recast *devadāsīs* as "immoral," severing women's ties to temple economies (Sathyamala, 2019). Our interviews with priests confirm this legacy: while some people defend erotic art as "Tantric symbolism," others dismiss it as "decoration," reflecting discomfort rooted in the colonial-era. As one guide observed, *"Foreigners see philosophy, but locals still blush."* Another guide and scholar also elaborated on how historic events like Mughal invitations and Colonisation have deeply affected how we view the society and genders around us. He emphasised on the changes post these invitations and also highlighted how these societal shifts can be seen in other parts of the world that went through colonisation.

After India's independence, conservative ideas strengthened strict gender roles, promoting upper-caste (Brahmanical) ideals of purity. This overshadowed the more open and diverse representations of gender and sexuality seen in Khajuraho's temple art. **What we now call "tradition" often reflects 19th-century moral policing rather than medieval ethos**.

Reclaiming the Past: Art as a Mirror for Social Change

The sculptures of Khajuraho challenge us to reconsider the foundations of modern social norms. While priests dismiss temple art as mere history, the persistent censorship of erotic imagery and restrictions on menstruating women reveal some deep-rooted colonial and revivalist fears that still influence how we think today. Yet, amidst these constraints, a shift in awareness is emerging. More and more young women are starting to ask why the respect for warrior goddesses hasn't led to real empowerment in their own lives. As Chakravarti (2003) points out, breaking down patriarchal systems means we need to face how history is often twisted and used as a weapon. In this light, Khajuraho's unapologetic celebration of femininity becomes more than artistic expression; it serves as a quiet yet powerful act of resistance, offering a vision of a future where art and equality are not opposing forces but complementary ideals.

4.3 Conclusion

The contrast between Khajuraho's medieval artistic liberalism and modern conservative norms compels us to critically assess how "tradition" is invoked today. Tration is often not as a continuation of the past, but as a selectively curated construct shaped by socio-political forces. Contemporary practices such as **temple entry bans for menstruating women** and legislative measures like **love jihad laws** reveal a paradox: while they are justified as upholding "ancient" values, historical evidence from sites like Khajuraho suggests

that medieval India accommodated far more fluid interpretations of gender and interfaith dynamics.

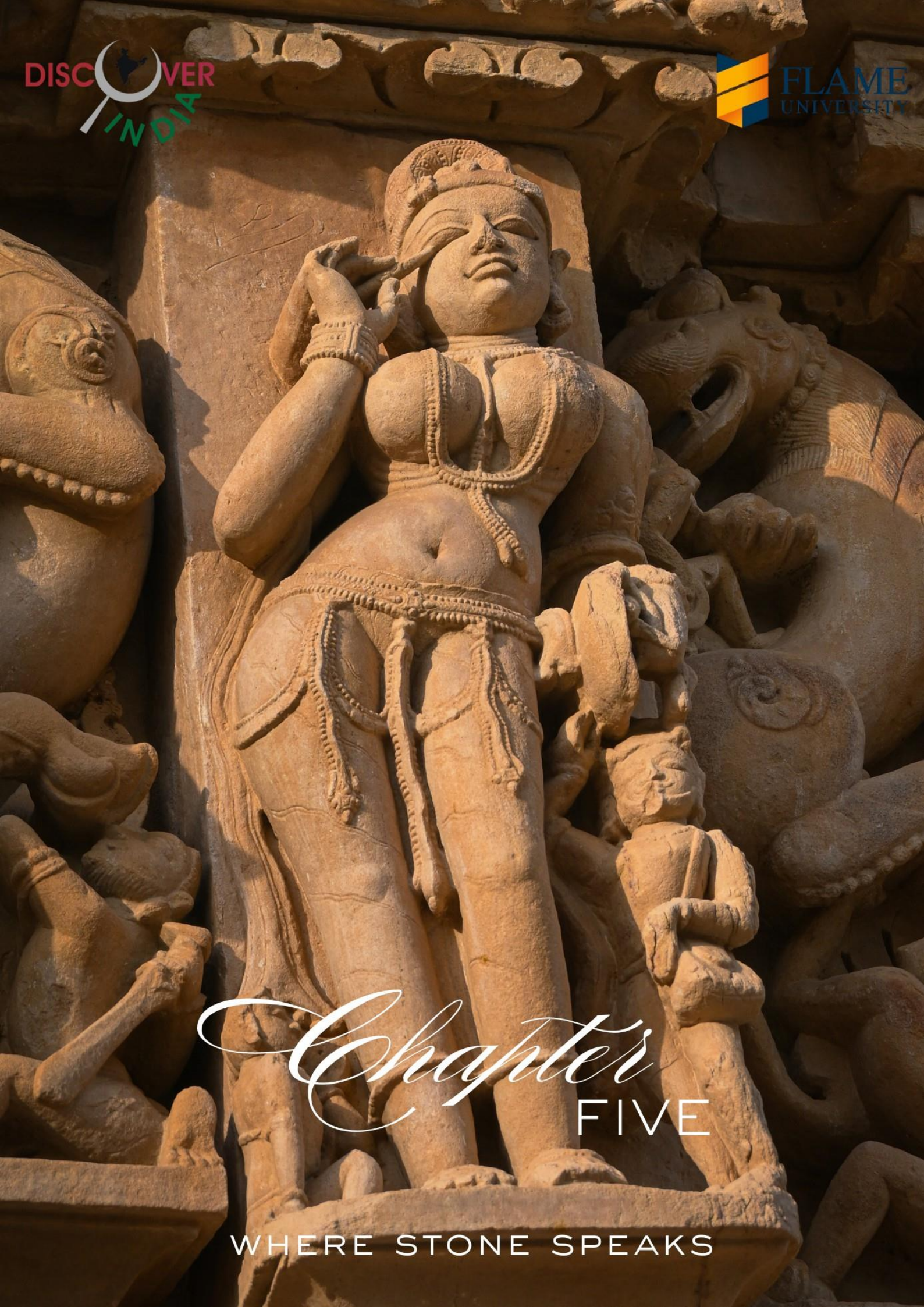
The erotic sculptures that were once celebrated as sacred expressions of *kāma* (desire) within *dharma*, are now either sanitized for tourism or used to reinforce moral policing. This narrative demonstrates how colonial-era prudery and identity politics post-independence have redefined cultural memory (Guha-Thakurta, 2004; Sathyamala, 2019). Similarly, the exclusion of women from sanctums, a practice absent in early medieval inscriptions reflects that it is not scriptural mandate but 19th-century reformist and colonial interventions that conflated purity with control (Orr, 2000).

These contradictions underscore how **political and social structures** like electoral rhetoric and institutionalized caste hierarchies, shape the modern perception of tradition. For instance, the hyper scrutiny of interfaith relationships under "love jihad" frameworks contrasts sharply with Khajuraho's syncretic influences. Likewise, the marginalization of *devadāsī* descendants that were once revered ritualists does expose how nuanced histories of women's temple authority was erased by patriarchal revivalism (Chakravarti, 2003). The pattern that emerges is: **When tradition is oversimplified and cut off from its rich history, it can be turned into a rigid tool to control people—rather than something that grows and changes with time.**

The challenge, then, is to disentangle **authentic cultural evolution** from **politicized reinvention**.

This calls us to examine and critically question what we do in the name of "tradition" today. While traditions are an asset to cultural unity and structure, we need to critically examine if they are actually pushing the betterment and harmony amongst cultures or do they reinforce hidden political and societal agendas.

Khajuraho's stones remind us that traditions were once dynamic, accommodating both the sensual and the sacred. Reclaiming this pluralism requires confronting not just colonial legacies but also the various power structures that privilege control over continuity. We must ask not *what* the past was, but *who* gets to define it today.



Chapter FIVE

WHERE STONE SPEAKS

Chapter 5 : Where Stone Speaks

5.1 Historical accounts of Khajuraho and the temples

The city's name stemmed from its large scorpion population and their consecutive reverence in the Tantric philosophy – Khajuraho (Kharjur – scorpio, Vahek- carrier). Scorpions were seen as a symbol of desire and consequent spiritual awakening. One of the earliest crucial records of the city can be seen in the travel accounts of the famous Moroccan traveller of the 14th century CE, Ibn Battuta. He described the temples as being within a pond and having had been mutilated by Muslims (indicative of Mughals). This is one of the possible reasoning behind the destruction of the temples and their deities- where once 85+ structures used to stand, today merely 20 remain. The intentional destruction of the deities led to the temples being declared as inactive. Today only the Matangeshwara temple of the western complex remains active (dedicated to Lord Shiva), being marked by a saffron flag atop its shikhara.

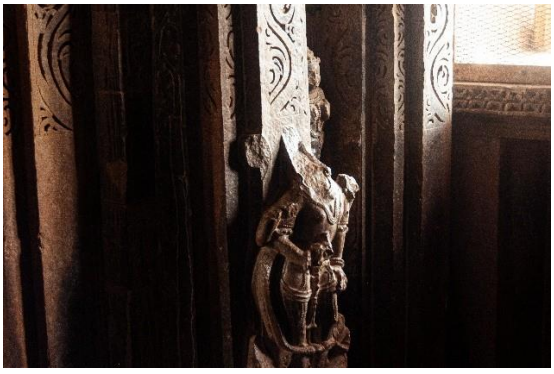


Figure 5.1 Desecrated carvings and sculptures.

The temples built by the Chandela dynasty used to sit within a lake and travelling between temples was done via boats and alike mediums. Commissioned by different rulers, the temples show the progressive evolution of not only temple architecture but also the gradual shift in accepted religions. In the earlier stages, Tantric philosophy was widely prevalent which then changed into Hinduism wherein the previous offerings of beings and blood was replaced by fruits, flowers and alike offerings. The Chausath Yogini temple- influenced by Tantrism- shows the earlier periods which then evolved into temples being dedicated to Lord Vishnu and Lord Shiva (Hindu deities) and then temples being dedicated to Jain Tirthankaras in later stages.

Khajuraho was later rediscovered in 19th century by T.S. Burt bringing them back into historical, cultural and academic focus. The entire temple complex of Khajuraho has been

divided into 3 groups- western, eastern and southern- for easier management based on their proximity and relative positions.

5.2 Temple structure

These temples are considered the epitome of Nagara style architecture being adorned with shikharas, built on jagatis, and following a basic division comprising of the mandapa, antarala and the garbhagriha. Each one of these structures are built with significant philosophical significance behind them. The shikharas- towering spires adorning the temple tops above the sanctum sanctorum- serve as link between the heaven and the earth signifying Mount Meru (abode to gods and goddesses) and the ascension of the soul towards enlightenment.

The jagati (derived from jagat meaning world)- raised platform on which the temple(mandir- can be broken down to Mann ke Andar meaning within the mind) is built- serves to differentiate the outer world from the sacred space and provides a physical transition by lifting devotees above material existence.

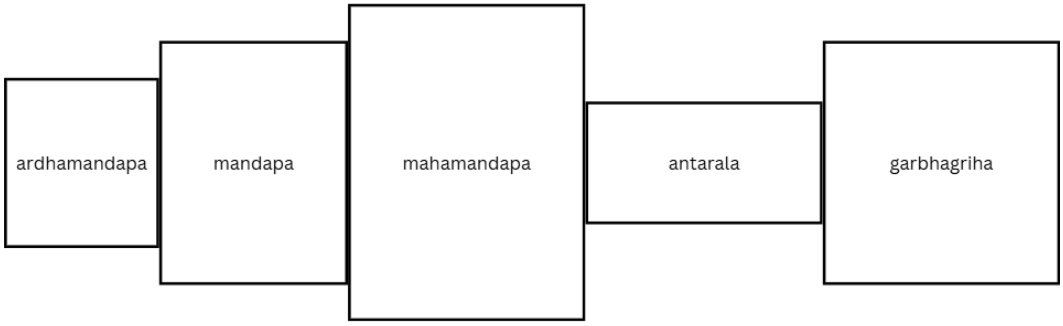


Figure 5.2 Chambers of Nagara style temples

The actual temple is divided into certain compartments. The mandapa (in complex structures divided into the ardhamandapa, mandapa and mahamandapa) served as the assembly hall where discussions and exchange of knowledge took place thereby symbolizing the importance of knowledge on the path of spiritual enlightenment. The mandapa gave way to the antarala which served as a passageway connecting the mandapa to the garbhagriha. It signified as a transition from community worship to personal reflection in the presence of the divine. The garbhagriha- sanctum sanctorum- was situated in the heart of the temple. It housed the sculpture of the deities. The most striking difference between this chamber and the rest was the darkness and

serenity that adorned it. The chamber philosophically signifies inner spiritual enlightenment detached from all worldly expectations and attachments.

The physical journey of the devotees from the moment they ascend the jagati to the moment they enter the garbhagriha signifies the symbolic progression from worldly attachments to inner peace and spiritual awakening.



Figure 5.3 The archway is adorned with sculptures of crocodiles and water-like carvings known as Makartoda which signifies river Ganga. The intentional placing of it at the entry itself was to ensure that each person walks under the pious river and cleanse themselves of all worldly desires and physical as well as spiritual impurities before entering the sacred space.

There are also certain deities holding up the archway which is considered to be a sign that the temples will hold up longer. The ceilings of the different chambers see a gradual ascension in line with the spiritual journey. They are adorned with different engravings. Some are carved to mimic the lotus flower- considered holy in Hinduism symbolizing purity, some are engraved with mandalas symbolizing the universe and the circle of life. Thus, even the ceilings reflect the artistic and spiritual depth of the architecture of ancient India.

Almost all temples are built of sandstone with big rocks of the stone being carved and assembled into these elaborate structures in hues of buff, yellow and brown. Different parts were assembled without the use of mortar but through interlocking joints as well as gravity-based locking techniques. The blocks were carved before being assembled with either the mortise-tenon method or the tongue and groove method.

There are primarily two kinds of temples- sandhara and niradhana. The former contains a parikrama path (circumambulatory passage around the sanctum sanctorum) inside while the latter does not.

5.3 Carvings

The temples are dotted with elaborate carvings and sculptures that are arranged in horizontal bands that complement the vertical structures.



Figure 5.4 Horizontal bands of carvings along the vertical temple.

These sculptures can be divided into 5 categories: nature motifs (leaves and flowers), animals, gods and goddesses (depicted with multiple hands), apsaras (dancing girls) and Kamasutra figures (mithunas and maithunas).

1. **Nature motifs:** Carvings of flowers and leaves placed mainly on the pillars and ceilings symbolized fertility, growth and prosperity.
2. **Animals:** Mythical creatures like Vyalas and Makaras adorn the temple walls symbolizing various aspects of human desires as well as protective forces. Animals like lions and elephants are also etched onto the temple walls representing strength and wisdom. Turtles are associated with river Yamuna (considered pious in Hinduism) and are associated with the Kurma Avatar of Lord Vishnu symbolising protection, longevity and stability. On the other hand, Crocodiles are associated with the river Ganga symbolizing transformation and protection.



Figure 5.5 Vyala: a mythical animal believed to represent victory over human desires

3. **Divine figures:** Sculptures of deities like Vishnu, Ganesha, Lakshmi are carved all over the temples. The presence of more than two hands is their signature appearance symbolizing their cosmic presence. The shank (conch), pushp (lotus), gadha (mace) and chakra (discus) help by the different hands of the deity make it easy to identify the sculpture as one of Vishnu's.
4. **Apsaras:** Various figures of celestial dancers decorate the temple walls. They can be seen doing a variety of everyday tasks from combing their hair to adjusting their anklets. Drawing from Natyashastra, a treatise on theatre and dance (encompassing all art), the apsaras are shown in complex gestures and movements.
5. **Kamasutra figures:** The sculptures that grab everyone's attention are those of the maithunas- erotic imagery signifying fertility and cosmic balance- and mithunas- romantic couples engaging in courtship. It is believed that they signify the Tantric influence on the temples with the inclusion of the depiction of Shiva and Shakti.

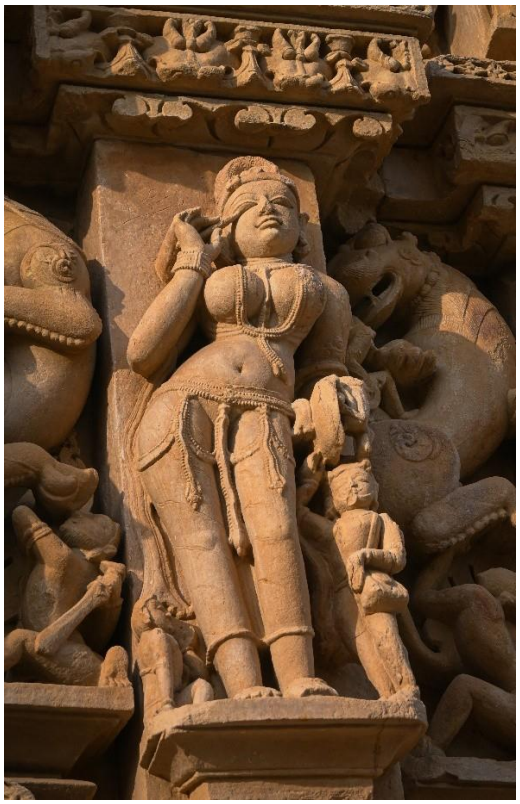


Figure 5.6 In certain temples a clear financial distinction can be seen in the size of the sculptures with carvings of upper financial status being much bigger in size and fully adorned with jewellery than their lower status counterparts.

Princes were depicted riding elephants whereas common men were shown atop horses. The marker for married women in the sculptures was the presence of sindoor in their hairline (no such differentiator in men). The evolution of the sculptures is quite evident and show how the beauty standards evolved in ancient India. Carvings of the 10th century are seen as having a broader and more voluptuous body while the 11th century ones are noticed to be comparatively slimmer and taller.

5.4 Western group

Field observations: The western group of temples are the most well preserved out of the three groups with prominent temple clusters falling within it. Beautified with gardens, housing a cafeteria as well as being nested beside a lake, this group not only retains the essence of the long-standing heritage but also offers a picturesque spot accompanied by serenity and calmness making it the prime tourist destination in the city.

1. Lakshmana temple

Named after the Chandela king who commissioned it and built between 930-95 CE, the temple is the epitome of the *panchayatana* structure- 5 temples arranged in a square grid on a platform- and often referred to as the perfect sandhara temple. In this grid, the Vishnu temple stands in the middle with the Ganesha, Surya, Shiva and Shakti temples situated in its four corners arranged symmetrically – thereby making it a Vishnu panchayatana and emphasizing his role as the preserver of the universe.

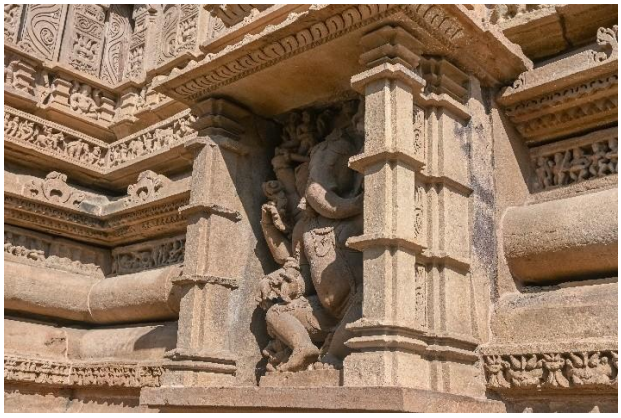


Figure 5.7 The first carving on the temple is of Lord Ganesha who, in Hinduism, is the first God to be prayed to or invoked during any religious ceremonies as he is believed to be the remover of obstacles.

The base of the temple is dotted with carvings of elephants depicting war scenes, processions of horsemen and royalty. These scenes are known to depict the military prowess of Kalinjer, capital of the Chandela empire. As we move upwards, following the common pattern, the sculptures are arranged in horizontal bands depicting scenes from daily lives, erotica as well as divine imagery.



Figure 5.8 This is one of the most famous sculptures in the Khajuraho temple complex. Carved onto the Lakshmana temple, this carving signifies a scorpion on the thigh of an apsara. Scorpions- known as Khajur in Hindi- are believed to be the sign of desire. It is believed that it represents the Tantric influence on the temples by showing that there exists a deep link between physical connections and spiritual awakening.

The temple consists of 5 chambers- ardhamandapa (the threshold or the entrance porch leading people into the sacred space), mandapa (the pillared hall used for religious congregations), mahamandapa (larger extension of mandapa), anatarala and the garbhagriha. The garbhagriha houses the sculpture of Vaikuntha Vishnu idol (brought from Tibet). The three headed form of Lord Vishnu consists of his human face, boar face (Varaha form) and the lion face (Narasimha form) symbolizing his role as the preserver of the universe, saviour of the earth and destroyer of evil respectively.

Overall, the Lakshmana temple is an integral part of the western group of temples showcasing the prime of Nagara architecture style.

2. Kandariya Mahadeva temple



Figure 5.9 Kandariya Mahadev Temple.

Built in 1025 CE, finished by King Vidyadhara, this temple stands as the tallest, largest and most ornate temple in North India exuding the essence of Nagara style architecture. The word Kandariya is derived from the term Kandar meaning cave-like and Mahadev is one of the many names of Lord Shiva. The spires (highest is 30 metres) are built to resemble Mount Kailash, considered as the axis of the universe and the heavenly abode of the god that the temple is dedicated to.

Built atop a granite foundation, the sandstone temple is covered with more than 900 engravings. A unique feature is the presence of sculptures of various forms of Shiva- Nataraja (Lord of Dance- signifying the cosmic dance of creation, preservation and destruction), Mahayogi (great ascetic- signifying transformation) and Ardhanarishvara (half male, half female form depicting the union of Shiva and Shakti i.e. masculine and feminine energies – symbolizing unity

The temple is covered with protective carvings like the Makartoda at the entrance of the ardhamandapa and the ashtadikpalas – 8 Hindu deities holding up the temple and guarding the eight directions offering divine protection.



Figure 5.10 Ashtadikpalas.

Following along the lines of Lakshmana temple, it consists of a parikrama path- making it sandhara- and 5 chambers for worship housing a shiva linga in its Garbha griha. Shivalinga, in Hindu religion, is known to signify the omnipotent form of Lord Shiva, depicting the union of masculine and feminine energies reminding us of the universal principles of creation and dissolution. The structure of this idol can be broken down into three parts- Brahma-Pitha (bottom-most, four sided thus representing Brahma), Vishnu-Pitha (middle, eight-faced signifying Vishnu) and Shiva-Pitha (top-most, circular, signifying Shiva). Thus, the Kandariya Mahadev temple is deeper than what is seen by the eye with a philosophical significance existing within each small carving of this structure.

3. Chausath Yogini Temple

The only temple out of the Khajuraho group of temples made solely out of granite, the origins of this structure can be traced back to rule of the Pratiharas during late 900 CE. Believed to be in line with Tantric philosophy, the temple is dedicated to 64 (chausath)

yoginis- tantric goddesses- associated with the Shakti (divine feminine energy) part of the philosophy. These yoginis are manifestation of Goddess Kali ruling over different aspects of creation. They were worshipped to revoke cosmic balance. Only 35 yogini sculptures remain to this day with some of them relocated to the Khajuraho museums and others for restoration.

It has an open-air rectangular plan instead of the signature Nagara style architecture with domes and temple spires. Oriented in a south-west direction, it is built from coarse granite blocks and the shrines follow a boxy, curvilinear structure.

It is currently undergoing a thorough restoration process with original blocks being numbered and conserved. Despite its current state, it remains a crucial structure for understanding evolution of religious practices and evolution of temple architecture in ancient India.

Apart from these temples, the Chitragupta temple dedicated to Surya (the Sun God), Vishwanath temple dedicatea to Lord Shiva (famous for the sculpture of Nandi nested in its sanctum sanctorum), Matangeshwara temple- the only active temple out of the Khajuraho group of monuments- dedicate to Lord Shiva, Varaha temple, Parvati temple. Nandi temple and Devi Jagdambi temple are situated within the western complex of the Khajuraho group of monuments.

5.5 Eastern and Southern group

Field observation: As compared to the western complex, the eastern and southern group of temples were relatively scattered and not collectively within a gated environment which seems to dissuade tourists from spending much time there. Conservation efforts were prevalent there yet they did not seem to preserve the essence of the temples.

Southern Group

1. **Dulhadev temple**

Similar in architecture to the Kandariya Mahadev temple, this structure was built in early 12th century CE. It is dedicated to Lord Shiva in his bridegroom form, hence the name Dulha(groom)dev. It is often visited by devotees seeking marital bliss. It is considered to be a sahasralinga since the Shiva linga housed within its garbhagriha is carved with 999 shiva lingams on its surface and it is believed that walking the parikrama path of this one structure will grant the devotee blessings of a thousand lingams. The carvings on the temple display

how society had evolved during those days. While in constructions of earlier time periods there was no mention of patriarchy, the first carving depicting violence against women can be seen on the walls of this temple. The restoration procedure on this temple is visually not in line with the existing architecture as the newer additions lack the depth and detailing of the original Chandela-era craftsmanship.

2. **Chatarbhuj Temple**

The only temple lacking erotic sculptures, it was built during the early 12th century CE. It is dedicated to Lord Vishnu and houses a four armed 9-feet tall statue of lord Vishnu with a mace, lotus, discus and conch in each hand in its Garbhagriha. It exhibits a comparatively simpler architectural style that displays its focus on spiritual devotion over all else.

Eastern group

The eastern temple complex houses the only Jain temples of the entire group of monuments that are believed to be built between late 9th century CE to early 12th century CE. Adinatha temple- dedicated to the 1st Tirthankara (revered teachers of Jainiam), Parsvanatha temple – dedicated to the 23rd Tirthankara and Shantinatha temple – dedicated to the 16th Tirthankara are situated within a common complex. The Hindu temples situated in this complex are the Vishwanath temple, Vaman temple and Javari temple.

5.6 Vastu Shastra and its modern time implications

The temples are built according to the guidelines outlined by the Vastu Shastra- an ancient Sanskrit text on architectural principles and consecutive spatial arrangement. The temple entrances always face eastwards to ensure that when the sun rises, its first rays fall directly on the deity. The same done for modern day homes ensures that the spaces receive maximum sunlight and which not only increases personal energy levels but also uplifts the environment as a whole. The use of techniques like interlocking joints instead of the use of mortar was employed in the building of the temples. The same if used in today's buildings can help come up with innovative ideas for earthquake resistant structures as well as decrease the use of raw materials thereby increasing sustainability.



Figure 5.11 Granite blocks held together by precise stone-cutting and interlocking methods.

The temples are built according to the Vastu Purusha Mandala (foundational grid). Arranged geometrically, the structures align with spatial harmony and symbolize cosmic balance. This principle can be used in city planning to ensure efficient flow of traffic and maximize development by increasing quality of life. Cities like Chandigarh in India have utilized the same and are reaping the consecutive benefits.

Thus, modern-day architects can adopt the principles of Vastu Shastra to ensure living spaces that exude positive energy, maximize efficiency, increase overall energy levels and encourage harmonious living.

5.7 Interviews and findings

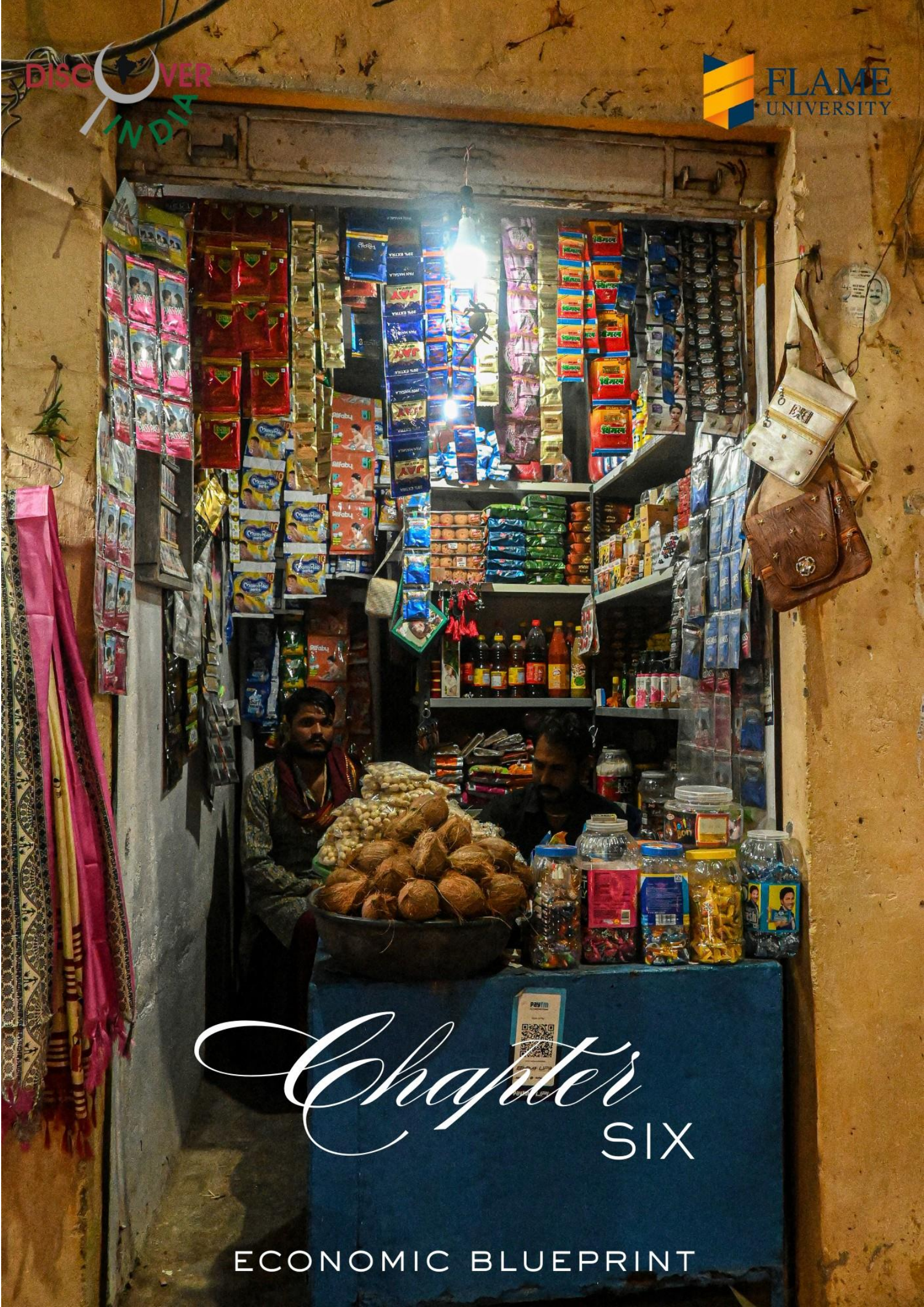
- We interviewed a set of foreign tourists as well as domestic tourists to know whether there exists a gap between why the two visit Khajuraho. It was found that foreign tourists mainly visited the city since it was included in the travel package offered by their travel agents and did not inherently know much about the place. Whereas Indian tourists did seem to have somewhat of cultural understanding of the significance of the temples as well as them being intrigued by the presence of erotic sculptures on the walls of places of worship. This highlights how foreign tourists tend to view Khajuraho as a bucket list destination whereas domestic tourists have a connection along religious lines with the temples.
- We found a gap in information being spread by local tour guides as well. Upon asking them about the history of how Khajuraho was named, some said that it was because of the presence of date palm (Khajur) trees at the entrance of the city – historically no facts to support this claim. Whereas a few claimed that it was due to the influence of

Tantric traditions that revered scorpions and saw them as a sign of awakening of kundalini energy (associated with spiritual enlightenment).

- The erotic sculptures also had different interpretations by different people. Upon showing a particular picture to 10 different tourists, none of the respondents were successful in establishing a deeper meaning behind the carving with all of them focusing on the superficial aspect reflecting the societal taboos of today. Upon being asked about why did they think such sculptures were carved onto religious walls, some hypothesized that it was to impart sex education to people in those days through visual aid. Whereas according to a reliable source, we were able to establish that such sculptures reflected the Tantric influence on society in those days and that it had nothing to do with the previous explanation.

5.8 Conclusion

Even though at first glance these temples might seem to be architectural marvels with unconventional placement of erotic sculptures on its walls, once looked at with fresh perspectives, every inch of these structures tells a story and align with its philosophical principles. Its architectural principles aligning with Vastu Shastra can be applied to modern-world builds to better sustainability and enhance overall quality of life. Every temple recites stories about its times in terms of history, religion, culture and society. The iconography educates us about the fine art of inter-weaving spirituality with everyday life. Thus, the Khajuraho temples serve as timeless examples of fusion of fusion of religion, philosophies, art and consequent ever-evolving interpretations.


DISCOVER INDIA
FLAME UNIVERSITY
Chapter
SIX
ECONOMIC BLUEPRINT

Chapter 6: Economic Blueprint

6.1 Effects of tourism on local economy

Local businesses selling sarees and handicrafts in Khajuraho since the past 10 to 12 years disclosed that their sales revenue increases by 15-20% approximately from temple tourism during the peak season and from setting up a stall at the dance festival. They attributed the increase in sales to a surge in the number of both domestic and foreign tourists during the festival.



Figure 6.1 Local seller demonstrating the working of the handloom machine

When asked about tourist footfall in Khajuraho during the festival over the years, the festival participants said that they had observed an increase in the number of tourists over the last few years. In fact, they added that there were fewer tourists in 2025. They attributed the decline to the increasing number of festivals and museums in other competitive tourist destinations such as Bhopal and Prayagraj.

6.2 The Khajuraho Dance Festival

The local businesses that participated in the dance festival said that the festival participants were not required to pay for a spot at the festival. Two women from Chandesara, Ujjain who have been coming to Khajuraho and setting up a stall at the festival to sell their paintings and decorations since 1994, added that the festival supports participants by paying them about ₹2,000-₹3,000 per day per head for setting up the stall, food and accommodation for the duration of the festival, irrespective of whether they are able to sell their products or not and it does not charge them for their earnings from the festival, so all of it is entirely theirs to spend. They also said that the festival and its participating artists are marketed through various media such as radio, newspapers, leaflets and word-of-mouth and mentioned that applicants are paid about ₹2,000-₹3,000 for demonstrating their work before participating. Furthermore, they also revealed that Khajuraho's Aadivart Tribal and Folk Art Museum invites artists to demonstrate their work and pays them about ₹700-₹1,000 each time. In 30 years, these women have successfully involved their family members (especially the women) in their business, sent their grandchildren to colleges, encouraged the inclusion of women in business and received support for the same from their family and community members.

6.3 Challenges

When asked about the challenges of developing tourism in Khajuraho, stakeholders including local businesses, tour guides and travel agents who were born and spent most of their lives in Khajuraho, revealed that the number of foreign tourists in Khajuraho has declined over the last few years and has not recovered even to the pre-pandemic numbers. They added that although the number of Indian tourists increases during the Dance Festival, Khajuraho becomes a 'deserted town' after it ends.

They attributed the decline to lack of connectivity and logistical coordination and preparedness between the travel and tourism industry. They claimed that after the bankruptcy of airlines such as Kingfisher and Jet Airways, Khajuraho was completely removed from foreign tourists' itineraries. They added that airlines such as Indigo and Spicejet offer flights connecting Delhi and Khajuraho via Varanasi only during the peak season from October to March and not throughout the year because of high costs and lack of passengers. Furthemore, their tickets are priced relatively higher when compared to other competitive tourist destinations in India and abroad and thus, more expensive for foreign tourists with strict

budgets. Moreover, there is no direct connectivity between Khajuraho and major Indian cities such as Mumbai and Kolkata, only rail connectivity via Bhopal.

They reiterated that Khajuraho requires direct rail connectivity to and from Varanasi and an international airport in order to attract and increase the number of foreign tourists in Khajuraho and minimise local businesses' losses and unemployment during the off-season from April to September.

However, tour guides also said that there was not much to do after developing temple tourism in Khajuraho and that the state government was aware of the challenges of developing tourism in Khajuraho. They added that the ASI has been doing a 'good job' of preserving and maintaining the temples and that there is a substantial budget allocated for the same, including the sustainable beautification of temples' surroundings. They revealed that the railways had recently started a Vande Bharat service from Delhi to Khajuraho and services linking cities such as Agra and Jhansi with Khajuraho. A highway connecting Khajuraho to Jhansi was also completed post-covid and reduced the travel time to 3 hours. A convention centre with brilliant facilities, namely the Maharaja Chhatrasal Convention Centre was added to cater to business needs of hosting meetings and conferences. It hosted the first-ever G20 Culture Working Group (CWG) meeting in 2023.

6.4 Suggestions

Locals called-for **connectivity** to and within Khajuraho, **public-private partnerships** and **investment in quality infrastructure** (e.g. roads, airports, water and sewer lines, and telecommunications) for developing Khajuraho as a successful (economically beneficial and sustainable) tourist destination. Some tour guides suggested developing different kinds of tourism such as adventure tourism, ecotourism or sports tourism and linking them to temple tourism, so that tourists have incentives to remain in Khajuraho for more than one or two nights. They also said that the ASI should allocate funds for the beautification of the Eastern and Southern Group of Temples' surroundings.

6.5 Conclusion

Tourism from Khajuraho's temples and the annual dance festival significantly affects the overall development of its economy and the tourist experience between October and March as its local businesses, sellers, tour guides, travel agents and festival participants are dependent on the resultant increase in sales for their livelihoods. However, Khajuraho has been deterred by a post-covid decline in the number of foreign tourists between April and September, attributable to challenges including a lack of connectivity to and within Khajuraho, inadequate infrastructure and insufficient marketing strategies. Along with addressing the aforementioned challenges, stakeholders suggested extending the effects of temple tourism to other stunning sites in its vicinity. Ultimately, Khajuraho's success as a tourist destination will be determined by its ability to satisfy visitors' expectations, increase demand and compete with other reputed tourist destinations in India such as Rajasthan or Varanasi.



Appendices

Appendices

1. Participant Information Sheet

My name is Nikita Chaana I am a student at FLAME University in Pune, Maharashtra. As part of the University's Discover India Program, a group of us are doing a project on From Stone to Stage: A Cultural Experience through the Temples of Khajuraho and its Revered Annual Dance Festival in the Heart of Chattarpur, Madhya Pradesh and we would like to ask you some questions about the same. The questions will take between 30 to 45 minutes to complete. Your participation in this survey is voluntary and confidential. We will not record your name or any personal information you share with us without your approval. Responses from everyone who participates in our study will be used to compile a report and make a documentary, as deliverables of this program, and we will not share your responses with anyone outside of the research team.

You do not have to answer questions you do not want to and can stop answering questions at any time. There are no risks to you sharing your experiences with us, your input will significantly contribute to enhancing our understanding of Khajuraho temples' architecture, their idea of power and female position as well as its economic impact and implications.

Do you have any questions about the study or would you like further information? Would you be interested in answering our questions?

For any further queries, feel free to contact me at nikita.chaana@flame.edu.in

<PIS in the local language>

!ितभागी जानकारी प-

मेरा नाम िनिकता चाणा है और म5 पुणे, महारा78 9:त ;ेम यूिनविस@टी मB छा-ा Dँ। यूिनविस@टी के िडHवर इंिडया !ोLाम के तहत, हम कुछ छा- एक पNरयोजना पर काम@ कर रहे ह5 िजसका शीष@क है: "पQर से मंच तक: खजुराहो के मंिदरों और इसके !ितिात वाष@क नृV महोWव के माXम से एक सांHृ ितक अनुभव"

इस संदभ@ मB, हम आपसे कुछ ![पूछना चाहBगे। इन ![ोंं का उ]र देने मB लगभग 30 से 45 िमनट का समय लगेगा। इस सव_ण मB आपकी भागीदारी aै9bक और गोपनीय रहेगी। आपकी अनुमित के

िबना, हम आपका नाम या कोई भी e9fगत जानकारी Nरकॉड@ नहीं करBगे।

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Khajuraho Temples: Tradition, Gender, and Society

(Structured Interview Guide for Locals, Priests, and Visitors)

Section 1: Personal Connection to Khajuraho Temples

1. How often do you visit the Khajuraho temples? What is the primary purpose of your visits (worship, tourism, cultural interest)?
2. Describe any rituals or festivals (e.g., Mahashivratri) you've participated in here. What roles do men and women typically play in these events?

Section 2: Depictions of Women in Temple Art

3. The temples show women as warriors (yoginis), goddesses (Devi), and in romantic scenes. How do you interpret these portrayals?
    - Do you see them as symbolic, spiritual, or artistic expressions?
4. The erotic sculptures at Khajuraho are world-famous. How do you feel about their presence alongside deities in a sacred space?
    - Should they be understood as sacred, cultural, or something else?
5. In your opinion, do these sculptures reflect women's status in the past, or are they idealized fantasies?

Section 3: Gender Roles in Temple and Society

6. Do you think the temple's architecture and art influence how women are perceived in Khajuraho today?
    - For example, does seeing warrior women in carvings affect local attitudes toward women's strength?
7. In your experience:
    - Have women's roles in temple rituals changed over time? (E.g., more or fewer female priests, attendants?)
    - Do women have equal access to all temple spaces today?
8. Some women cover their heads (pallu) or faces near the sanctum. Why do you think this practice exists? Is it tied to tradition, respect, or something else?

Section 4: Tradition and Social Change

9. From what you've heard or observed, did women have more freedom in Khajuraho's society in the past (e.g., Chandela era) compared to now? What makes you say that?
10. Some traditions evolve over time. Are there any practices in the temple or community that you think should be reconsidered for today's world?
    - For example, should women have greater roles in rituals? Should certain sculptures be reinterpreted?
11. The Khajuraho temples are a UNESCO World Heritage Site. Do you think their global fame has affected local gender norms—positively or negatively?

Section 5: Critical Reflection

12. If you could redesign one tradition or practice in Khajuraho's temples today, what would it be and why?
13. The temples celebrate both feminine divinity and sensuality. Do you think modern society embraces this duality, or rejects one aspect?

2. Consent Form

I have read the Participant Information Sheet/the Participant Information Sheet has been read to me, and I understand the study and the risks and benefits of this study. I have had the opportunity to ask questions, and my questions have been answered. I give my voluntary, informed consent to participate in this study.

- To be interviewed – **<name of relevant person>**
- To be audio-recorded - **<name of relevant person>**
- To be video-recorded - **<name of relevant person>**
- To use the recorded information in the DIP report & documentary - **<name of relevant person>**

Participant Name:
Signature, and Date
OR
Researcher Name,
Signature, and Date
(as evidence that the participant gave voluntary, informed consent verbally)

<Consent Form in Local Language>

सहमित प-

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▫ वीिडयो Nरकॉिडzग केिलए सहमित – <name of relevant person>

▫ डीआईपी Nरपोट@ और डॉkूमBट8ी मB Nरकॉड@ की गई जानकारी केउपयोग की सहमित – <name of relevant person>

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3. Interview Questionnaire

DIP Interview Questionnaire

Economy

1. What are some of the major development projects implemented by the government for improving Khajuraho's tourism infrastructure in the last 5 years? How far have they progressed? What about conducting their impact assessment?

2. According to several sources, accessibility and connectivity through an international airport, flights and direct rail connectivity to major Indian cities, availability of local transportation and wayside amenities within Khajuraho need to be urgently improved in order to attract international and domestic visitors. Could you comment on these perspectives? In your expert opinion, do you think that the initiatives at present are doing the needful?

3. What are the various marketing strategies and initiatives adopted by the MPTB, MPSTDC and other private organisations to increase MP's tourist footfall and how does it affect Khajuraho?

4. How was Khajuraho specifically marketed in the different phases of MPSTDC's marketing campaign "the Heart of Incredible India"?

5. Do you have any suggestions or recommendations on how Khajuraho should be marketed as a tourist destination in order to attract the maximum number of tourists and investment in the region? How can it be distinguished from other competitive destinations in India?

6. Is the budget allocated by the ASI sufficient for the preservation and maintenance of the group of monuments?

The Dance Festival

The following questions are about the Dance Festival, including but not limited to Khajuraho's economy.

Festival organisers and experts

1. How did the dance festival begin? Was it someone specific who came up with the idea of the festival? What was its purpose when it was founded and do you think that it has been achieved?

2. What are the marketing strategies and initiatives adopted to promote the Dance Festival, and how effective are they in attracting tourists?

3. How is the festival waste managed? Do you think that the support you receive by the local government, if any, is sufficient to dispose of the waste sustainably?

4. How does the festival benefit to the development of the local community and the overall tourism economy of Khajuraho and is it substantial?

Artists and dancers

1. What are the dance forms performed at the festival? How do the dance forms and the overall festival demonstrate and preserve the rich Indian cultural diversity and heritage?

2. Could you explain if and how you interpret and include the themes of Khajuraho temples in their performances at the Dance Festival?

3. How does participating in the Khajuraho Dance Festival affect your career as an artist/dancer?

4. How many times have you performed at the dance festival and what brings you back?

5. Does it open up more opportunities for performances or collaborations? If yes, could you share an experience which has helped you grow professionally and sustain your artistry?

6. Has there been a decline in visitors attending the dance festival in recent years or has the numbers increased?

7. Are there specific cultural or governmental programs that provide economic support for artists and dancers performing at festivals and events such as the Khajuraho Dance Festival?

8. How does the festival balance preservation of cultural heritage and diversity with commercial interests, and do you think it's possible to maintain artistic integrity while being part of a large-scale event?

Local sellers and community

1. How does the festival affect your businesses? Do you observe a difference in sales during the festival? How significant is it?

2. How much do you earn (approximately) during the festival? Is it more than your revenue from sales near the temples during the peak season?

3. What approach or strategy do you use to promote your products, attract potential buyers or increase your sales during the festival? Do you use different or specific sales strategies to attract specific types of potential customers?

4. How does the festival support the local community and the overall tourism economy of Khajuraho and is it substantial?

Questionnaire

Section 1: Perceptions of Gender and Power

1. Do you think women in your village today have the same freedom and respect as the women shown in the temple sculptures? Why or why not?
2. What are some roles women in your community take up? How does that compare to what you think women's roles were in ancient times, as seen in the temples?
3. In your opinion, do the sculptures of goddesses and powerful women in the temples reflect how women should be treated today?
4. Do you feel women in Khajuraho today are allowed to make important decisions for their family or community, like the women in ancient stories or the temples?

Section 2: Attitudes Toward Female Representation

5. The temple sculptures show women in many forms—goddesses, dancers, caretakers, etc. Do you think these images influence how people in the village think about women?

6. How do people in your family or community feel about the images of women on the temples? Do they see them as a sign of respect, or do they see them differently?

7. Some of the sculptures show women in roles of strength, while others show women in more traditional roles. Which of these do you feel matches the way women are treated here today?

Section 3: Cultural Evolution and Morality

8. Do you think the culture of the village today is different from the culture that existed when the temples were built? If so, how has the treatment of women changed?

9. Some people say that the temple sculptures represent an ancient, more open society. Do you feel that the village is open to such ideas today, or has it become more conservative?

10. How do people in the village react to tourists or visitors who talk about the sculptures? Do you think they agree with what the temples represent?

Section 4: Modernization and Gender Equality

11. With more visitors coming to Khajuraho, do you think modern ideas about women's rights are changing the way women are treated here?

12. In the past, women were often shown as equal partners in life through the sculptures. Do you think the same is true for women and men in Khajuraho village today?

13. Do you think young women today have more opportunities for education and work compared to older generations? How does this change affect their role in society?

Section 5: Traditional Values vs. Progressive Views

14. Some people say that the temples reflect a more progressive or liberal way of life. Do you think that the village prefers to keep traditional ways of living or is open to new ideas, especially about women's roles?

15. Do you think women in your village feel comfortable expressing their opinions in public, or is there still some hesitation? How does this compare to the powerful women depicted in the temples?

16. How do people in your community balance the respect for ancient traditions seen in the temples with the ideas of equality or progress that come from outside the village?

Section 6: Religious and Social Influence

17. Do you think the way women are shown in the temples affects the way people in the village think about religion today?

18. Are there any practices or customs in the village that come from ancient times? How do these affect the way women live and work today?

19. Do you feel there is a connection between the way women are treated in religious stories or traditions and how they are treated in everyday life?

Section 7: Women's Leadership and Identity

20. Are there any women in your community who are leaders? Do you think this is connected to how women were shown as powerful figures in the temples?

21. How do people here view women who try to take on leadership roles or challenge traditional gender roles? Do they find inspiration from the temples or see it differently?

22. Do you think the idea of women being independent and strong, as shown in the sculptures, is something that young women here aspire to, or are they expected to follow traditional roles?

Questionnaire on Khajuraho Temple Architecture and Iconography

1. Introduce yourself, ask for their introduction as well as qualifications.
2. Ask them about their background in temple architecture and iconography.
3. What is the basic structural plan followed by temples in India and does it differ regionally and culturally (north and south)?
4. How are the Khajuraho set of temples, which are a UNESCO world heritage site, different from other temple complexes in India.
5. It is a well-known fact that the Chandela Dynasty is responsible for creating this architectural marvel. Could you please elaborate on how the rise and fall of this dynasty as well as the culture and prominent religions back then had an impact on the temple complex and its importance?
6. Could you describe how the iconography on the temples are an insight into the values and traditions of ancient times?
7. There has been a strong link between this monument and Tantric practices. How would you say this link has influenced the sculptures and carvings of the Khajuraho monuments?
8. Is there any basic structural plan that all of the temples falling under the Khajuraho temple complex follow. If so, how can we see them evolve?
9. What were the major construction techniques utilized to create these monuments?
10. The temples are filled with carvings. Especially erotic art which the temples are famous for. Yet these erotic sculptures merely cover 10% of the temple architecture. Would you say that the image that it has garnered today (eroticism) has watered down its essence?
11. Could you enlist some sculptures that are either of personal interest or are needed to be seen and understood to do justice to the temples and the symbolism behind them?
12. Are there any fascinating stories or lesser-known facts about the Khajuraho Group of monuments?
13. What advice would you give to people trying to know more about the fascinating Khajuraho temples?

Glossary

Temple and Society Structures

1. Religious & Ritual Practices

- **Yoginī Cult**: A Tantric tradition centered around female deities (yoginīs), often associated with temples and esoteric rituals (Dehejia, 1986; Hatley, 2007).
- **Theyyam**: A ritualistic dance form from Kerala, blending worship, performance, and ancestral veneration (Tarabout, 2016).
- **Devadasi**: Historically, temple women dedicated to deities; later stigmatized under colonial rule as "sacred prostitution" (Sathyamala, 2019; Orr, 2000).
- **Lajjā Gaurī**: A goddess depicted in Indian art with fertility symbolism, often in a lotus-headed form (Bolon, 1992).

2. Art & Architecture

- **Khajuraho Temples**: Medieval Hindu and Jain temples renowned for erotic sculptures and Nagara-style architecture (Desai, 1975, 1996; Jain, 1990).
- **Hoysala Temples**: Karnataka temples (11th–14th c.) noted for intricate star-shaped platforms and narrative reliefs (Settar, 2020).
- **Portraiture in South India**: Challenges in identifying royal or divine figures in Chola-era sculptures (Kaimal, 1999).

3. Colonial & Post-Colonial Studies

- **Temple Desecration**: Destruction or repurposing of temples by pre-modern rulers, debated in historiography (Eaton, 2000).
- **Monument Preservation**: The role of colonial and post-colonial institutions in shaping art histories (Guha-Thakurta, 2004).
- **Gendering Caste**: Intersectional analysis of caste oppression through feminist frameworks (Chakravarti, 2003).

4. Tourism & Cultural Economy

- **Destination Branding**: Marketing strategies for tourism (e.g., Madhya Pradesh as "Heart of Incredible India") (Kour, 2023).
- **Khajuraho Dance Festival**: Annual event to promote cultural tourism; stakeholders critique infrastructure gaps (Som et al., 2020).

- **Tourism Decline**: COVID-19's impact on Khajuraho's economy (Dubey, 2020; Saxena, 2019).

5. Identity & Representation

- **Hindu-Muslim Identities**: Pre-colonial fluidities vs. colonial rigidities (Talbot, 1995; Chattopadhyaya, 1998).
- **Hindu Nationalism**: Ideologies linking gender, religion, and nationhood (Sarkar, 2001).
- **Sexuality & Caste**: State regulation of marginalized sexualities (John, 2020).

6. Methodological Terms

- **Socio-Cultural Study**: Interdisciplinary analysis of art/architecture in context (e.g., Desai, 1975).
- **Feminist Lens**: Critical approach to caste, gender, and power (Chakravarti, 2003; John, 2020).

Architecture and Iconography

1. Architectural Texts & Principles

- **Shilpa Shastra**: Ancient scriptures governing temple architecture, detailing construction rules, iconography, and spiritual symbolism. Classifies temples into **Nagara**, **Dravida**, and **Vesara** styles.
- **Vastu Shastra**: The "science of architecture" guiding temple layout, alignment, and proportions (e.g., **Vastu Purusha Mandala**).
- **Nagara Style**: North Indian temple architecture characterized by **shikhara** (spire), **panchayatana**layout, and progressive chambers.

2. Temple Structural Components

- **Jagati**: Raised platform for **parikrama** (circumambulation), symbolizing detachment from the secular world.
- **Ardhamandapa**: Entrance porch with deity sculptures, marking transition into sacred space.
- **Mandapa/Mahamandapa**: Pillared halls for rituals; the latter is grander with high ceilings.
- **Antarala**: Vestibule connecting **Mahamandapa** to **Garbhagriha**.

- **Garbhagriha**: Innermost sanctum housing the deity's idol, representing cosmic darkness and divinity.
- **Shikhara**: Spire symbolizing **Mount Meru** (cosmic axis), rising above the **Garbhagriha**.
- **Panchayatana Layout**: Central shrine flanked by four subsidiary shrines, signifying divine unity.

3. Sculptural Themes & Symbolism

- **Religious Sculptures**: Depictions of Hindu deities (Shiva, Vishnu, Devi), Jain Tirthankaras, and Buddhist figures.
- **Secular Sculptures**: Scenes of daily life, emotions, and domestic activities.
- **Erotic Sculptures**: Interpreted as:
    - **Tantric influence**: Union of Shiva-Shakti as a path to **moksha**.
    - **Chandela Legend**: King Chandravarman's attempt to normalize sexuality (linked to moon god's boon).
    - **Counter to Asceticism**: Response to Jain/Buddhist renunciation of worldly desires.

4. Key Temples in Khajuraho Complex

Western Group:

- **Kandariya Mahadev**: Largest temple, dedicated to Shiva (symbolizes Mount Kailash).
- **Chausath Yogini**: Earliest temple for 64 manifestations of Goddess Shakti.
- **Vishwanath Temple**: Features a Nandi pavilion (Shiva's bull).

Eastern Group:

- **Brahma Temple**: Dedicated to Vishnu; granite/sandstone structure with four directional openings.
- **Parsvanatha Temple**: Largest Jain temple, devoid of erotic sculptures.

Southern Group:

- **Duladeo Temple**: Shiva temple nicknamed "Kunwar Math" (Bridegroom's Temple).

5. Philosophical & Cultural Concepts

- **Mount Meru**: Cosmic mountain represented by the **shikhara**, linking earthly and divine realms.
- **Tantra**: Esoteric practices viewing sexuality as a spiritual tool.

- **Parikrama**: Ritual circumambulation around the temple, symbolizing devotional journey.

6. Field Research Goals

- **Local Perspectives**: Insights from guides, historians, and tourists on architectural intent and cultural narratives.
- **Primary Validation**: Ground-truthing secondary sources through on-site observation.

Tourism, Economy and The Dance Festival

1. Government Initiatives & Organizations

- **Madhya Pradesh Tourism Board (MPTB)**: Established in 2017 to develop destinations, promote sustainable tourism, and market the state (Kour, 2023).
- **MP State Tourism Development Corporation (MPSTDC)**: Implements infrastructure projects and regional entrepreneurship programs (Kour, 2023).
- **MP Ecotourism Development Board (MPEDB)**: Focuses on ecotourism while conserving wildlife and rural livelihoods.
- **Responsible Tourism Mission (RTM)**: Aims to create "better places to live and visit" through community partnerships (MP Tourism, n.d.).

2. Tourism Development Projects

- **Homestay Scheme**: Allows homeowners to host tourists, generating local income (MP Tourism, n.d.).
- **Rural Tourism Project**: Covers 125 villages, promoting cultural exchange and eco-friendly practices (MP Tourism, n.d.).
- **Responsible Souvenir Project**: Supports artisans with training, design, and market linkages (MP Tourism, n.d.).
- **Project Humsafar**: Ensures accessibility for the elderly and specially-abled at tourist sites (MP Tourism, n.d.).
- **Project Clean Destinations**: Improves sanitation and waste management (e.g., Panna National Park) (MP Tourism, n.d.).
- **Safe Tourism for Women**: Enhances safety through audits, self-defense training, and employment (MP Tourism, n.d.).

3. Marketing Strategies

- **Unique Selling Proposition (USP)**: Madhya Pradesh’s branding as the *"Heart of Incredible India"*(Kour, 2023).

- **Contextual Advertising**: Targeted ads based on website content (e.g., promoting Khajuraho on travel sites) (Boerman & Smit, 2023).
- **Digital Marketing**: Leveraging social media to attract tourists to Khajuraho.

4. Challenges & Criticisms

- **Over-Reliance on Tourism**: Khajuraho's economy suffered during COVID-19 due to travel restrictions (Dubey, 2020; Saxena, 2019).
- **Infrastructure Gaps**: Poor air/rail connectivity, lack of local transport, and inadequate amenities (Som et al., 2020).
- **Decline in International Tourists**: Attributed to the absence of an international airport (Som et al., 2020).
- **Erotic Sculptures as Identity**: Conflicts with MP's "family-friendly" branding (Kour, 2023).

5. Key Stakeholder Concerns

- **Carrying Capacity Study**: Suggested to assess sustainable tourism levels before development (Som et al., 2020).
- **Impact Assessment**: Needed to evaluate project effectiveness (Som et al., 2020).

6. Economic Diversification

- **Secondary/Tertiary Sectors**: Proposed shift to manufacturing/services to reduce reliance on tourism (Dubey, 2020).

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